

601 – Constrained Psyche

Contemporaneous - (existing or occurring in the same period of time)

By Bethany Thomas

“Everything in my work links back to control. Control of how you are perceived and to what extent you have control over an eventuality,” (Thomas, 2018). Last year I worked to strip my practice back to the base notions to consider my work from a different angle. I want to research how our creativity is constrained through individual and cultural context. By considering the zeitgeist of the times I hope to see how the art of past eras has been constricted and use this to theorise how the art of the future could be determined (this is my thesis concept and informs my practice). I am hoping to illustrate this repression to an audience, presenting how choice is removed due to the constriction of thought. This is demonstrated in the novel 1984 by George Orwell using the language Newspeak. Newspeak is a language of restricted grammar and vocabulary which limits the autonomy of thought, “How could you have a slogan like ‘Freedom is Slavery’ when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact, there will be no thought, as we understand it now.” (Orwell, 1949).

I am a research lead artist and began my current train of thought with Vladimir Propp. Propp studied Russian folk-law and tried to identify their elemental plots, “He...identified 31 ‘narratemes’ (narrative units) that comprised the structure of many of the stories,” (Changingminds.org, n.d.). I then read ‘The Seven Basic Plots’ by Christopher Booker. “How small a quantity of real fiction there is in the world; and that the same images, with... little variation, have served all the authors who have ever written,” (Boswell quoted in Booker, 2004, p8). This basic plot concept seems to occur because humans have commonality in experience and thus aspire to and value the same ideals. “Adolf Bastian put forward the theory that the human mind seems to be so constituted that it naturally works in certain forms,” (Booker, 2004, p11). If all literature has the same base concepts, and this is due to humans having the same fundamental base then is this also true for art?

I’ll study the constraints of the human condition and how this pertains to our notion of creativity and the concept of original ideas. To progress my practice, I have interviewed psychologists: Duncan Moss and Sue Denham, and have questioned artist Martin Brooks. I have an array of books for wider reading (see appendix).

I want to apply these ideas to create a visible constraint for the observer either by placing them in a controlled environment or by making them aware of the outside control they face, and as in my previous works, have the viewer confront the realisation that they are not “the captain of their soul” (Henley, 1888). I want to try constraining the viewers mindset and/or producing an app that binds the viewer to a path. A different route is given to various people? I do not want my practice to become about segregation, prejudice or politics. My practice will focus only on the constraints of the mind.

The work Psalms (Rodney, 1997) inspired me. An automatable wheelchair is constrained to a generated path giving it, from an outside perspective, free movement. The path appears random, but there is a controlled pattern. There should be an element of programming in my work this year. I will study uncertainty psychology.

I am interested in changing the viewers mindset to my own. In this I am both constraining and opening their mind. Perhaps this will allow the viewer and the artist to gain an understanding of each other. Mark Farid has a similar notion in his ongoing work ‘Seeing I’ where “For 24-hours a day, for 28-days... Farid will wear a virtual reality headset, experiencing life through” another, (Farid, 2018). “The point is to discover how adaptable the brain is to another physical body – and whether our self comes from inherent personality or cultural identity,” (The Guardian quoted in Farid, 2018).

Last year I taught myself the basics of animation, I want to continue with this and develop my film making abilities and move further into the digital world by investigating uses of apps and the internet in an art context. I am using digital techniques as I believe to make art accessible and relevant to the times it has to somewhat evolve to match the times. I will research Tommy Stockels work and other artists who incorporate digital aspects in their works.

This contextual framework will influence my decisions throughout this module with an aim to devise a workable art piece and concept by January 2019. My main goal for this module is to create a foundation of research and work to support my practice in 602.

Word Count: 792

Reference List

- Booker, C. (2004). The seven basic plots of literature. New York: Continuum.
- Changingminds.org. (n.d.). Propp's Morphology of the Folk Tale. [online] Available at: <http://changingminds.org/disciplines/storytelling/plots/propp/propp.htm> [Accessed 2 Oct. 2018].
- Henley, W. (1888). Book of Verses. England: Book of Verses.
- Orwell, G. (1949). 1984.
- Farid, M. (2018). Seeing I. [online] Seeing-i.co.uk. Available at: <http://www.seeing-i.co.uk/> [Accessed 5 Oct. 2018].
- Rodney, D. (1997). Psalms. [Autonomous Wheelchair] Plymouth: The Council House.
- Thomas, B. (2018) Evaluation 507

Appendix

Reading List

Have Read/Attended/Watched	Will Read/Attend/Watch
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts of Resistance - (Play) • Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study – Paisley Livingston • Art Narrative and Childhood (AUTHOR) • Art Talk On Jack Hogan - (Lecture) • Context and Narrative – Maria Short • Control – My Exhibition • Death ad the Maiden – (DVD) • Effervescent Half/Life – Exhibition • Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment – William James • Greyson Perry Rites of Passage – (TV) • Henri Poincare: The Unlikely Link Between Einstein and Picasso – Arther Miller • I Am My Family – Rafall Goldchain • Interview with Duncan Moss • Interview with Martin Brooks • Interview with Sue Denham 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Invitation to Social Construction – Kenneth J. Gergen • Artist Talks for Course etc • Obedience To Authority: Current Perspectives on the Milgram Paradigm – Thomas Blass • Phenomenology of Perception – M. Merleau Ponty • The Hero with a Thousand Faces – Joseph Campbell • Oulipo – Group of Constrained Writers etc

- Is Bad Art for Bad People – (DVD)
- Karst: I Am My Own Primal Parent – (Exhibition)
- Karst: The Infinite Guide – (Exhibition)
- Making Memory Matter – Lisa Saltman
- Participation – Claire Bishop
- Pioneers in Art and Science: Art Poetry and Partial Physics – (DVD)
- Plymouth Art Weekender
- Power – Keith Dowding
- Reflections: Mathematical Creation – Henri Poincare
- Rhythm – Viad Petre Glaveanu
- Tate Modern – (Art Gallery)
- The Atlantic Project
- The Order Of Time – Carlo Rovelli
- The Origins of Creativity – Edward O. Wilson
- The Origins Of Form In Art – Herbert Read
- The Politics Of Uncertainty – Peter Marris
- The Runaway Species – Anthony Brandt and David Eagleman
- The Seven Basic Plots – Christopher Booker
- The Stanford Prison Experiment – (Documentary)
- The Stanford Prison Experiment – (Film)
- Tim Marlow On Turbine Hall – (DVD)