



Open
College
of the Arts

Formative feedback

Student name	Thomas Pal	Student number	520377
Course/Unit	Context and Narrative	Assignment number	Four
Type of tutorial	Written		

Overall Comments

Well done Thomas - getting a first draft down is always the biggest step. I appreciate that you write with a high degree of uncertainty and limited experience of academic writing.

Below my feedback is focused on content, but there are some issues around argument, structure and grammar so I would also contact OCA – Learner Support [learnersupport@oca.ac.uk] - for guidance on the conventions of academic writing. This is a good point in the course to develop your knowledge of essay writing as it does makes further demands as you progress.

Assignment 4 Assessment Potential

I understand your aim is to go for the Photography/Creative Arts Degree and that you plan to submit your work for assessment at the end of this course. From the work you have shown in this assignment, providing you commit yourself to the course, I believe you have the potential to pass at assessment. In order to meet all the assessment criteria, there are certain areas you will need to focus on, which I will outline in my feedback.*

Feedback on Assignment

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Quality of Outcome, Demonstration of Creativity

First of all you have now decided on the general direction of the writing and you've made a choice about your image and its context. This is great. Essays, like making practical work, are arrived at by thinking about it from the point of view of the reader and by iterative improvement.

The central feature of my feedback is that you have yet to develop any real point of focus for the argument or investigation. Because of this lack of a conceptual anchor you digress and include wider ranging facets that spring from your consideration of the image and its context.

An observation that I've repeatedly made over many years is the issue of whether an essay (with such a limited word count) should be broad, but sacrifice depth, or whether it should be tightly focused and have capacity to achieve depth.

As it stands your essay fails to declare its main focus and then you include short, but wide-ranging issues that the picture provokes for you. With this approach you are unlikely to reach a deeper level of analysis and research. The essay needs to be a vehicle to demonstrate your skill at constructing a stand-alone argument and investigation. I often ask students to identify just one single question that the essay then goes on to examine. What would this be for you?

The work would benefit from having a title that signals the content and key argument/s being made. You could also produce for yourself a breakdown or plan so that you can see immediately the structure and the sequencing of the various paragraphs. Keep asking yourself whether any particular paragraph is a digression from the central question, or whether it's essential and adds value.

I suggest that you print out the essay and write directly onto the paper beside each paragraph a few words to say what is actually being said. In this way you might see the essay and the picture in the way that a reader would. During this process evaluate the balance between descriptive and analytical writing.

The interesting thing about the tv program was the different languages that the presenters use. DK talks from a deep understanding of the imagery and the architecture from the point of view of a passionate archaeological historian. McCullin talks very differently about the aesthetic and atmospheric perception of the place. Bailey even describes the beauty of the destruction. They both agree on the tragic beauty and the defiance of history but if it were to be rebuilt, McCullin's images would not have value, for this much more technical and precise imagery would be needed. This issue of the contradiction of beauty and conflict comes through much of McCullin's work over his lifetime – how we can appreciate the picture on a gallery wall of coffee table book of war and death, but through the filter of a 'beautiful' picture.

If you check through the current draft there are only a couple of short points where you critically analyse the image in question. This needs to be central, but don't spend time talking about technique. You mention Bailey's use of a yellow filter to darken the sky which is true but shift the conversation to how a darker sky might alter the emotional effect of the picture for the viewer.

At the end I like that you mention your own experiences of war and destruction - I would position this as a forward or part of your intro/rationale not as the conclusion. As both a soldier and as an image-maker you are trying to make sense of this site and its history through McCullin's images.

The paragraph that starts 'During the 2011 uprising IS began to target' as part of your introduction.

Coursework

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Demonstration of Creativity

Although you did engage well with the coursework it would be good to see how this new knowledge filtered through to the essay. Have a look at the influential books by John Berger - *Ways of Seeing* and *About Looking*. Although now dated they still offer a good set of tools for looking at and analysing photos - prompted by your writing on Arbus.

Try to use the coursework to improve your confidence to write in a continuous and academic style rather than use mainly bullet points. This can allow you to investigate and grow your position through referencing and citing the writing of other experts.

Research and Learning Log

Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis

As you do talk about a sense of comparison (so does the program) between pre-IS cultural destruction and post-IS cultural destruction this could (if you choose) be at the heart of the writing. If you had access to two similar images of Palmyra that Bailey took this can connect to the methods and practices of Rephotography – I’ve given a couple of links below to help you get an understanding of that approach. Basically it involves the shooting of the same place but at two different points in time to invite comparisons and document change. It can be used to explore social, economic and physical change. I’m sure if you start to research this you will build your understanding of it and the theories that surround it.

Two other photographers that have relevance are Simon Norfolk and Joel Sternfeld. In different ways these photographers – Norfolk through war and Sternfeld through urban violence – could help to build your appreciation of the visual strategies that can be adopted to communicate a strong anti-violence message.

A final reference is Val Williams’s book below. She writes well about the shift of war photography by women from reportage to a broader cultural space. It is important for you to expand your knowledge of conflict and the image so that you can appreciate the position of Bailey’s images.

The work that you did to get your ideas flowing for the essay was good and helped you to see across the range of McCullin’s work.

Suggested reading/viewing Context

<http://sk.sagepub.com/reference/sage-hdbk-visual-research-methods/n7.xml> speak to your librarian about access codes etc.

<http://www.markklettphotography.com/rephotographic-survey-project>

Mark Klett, (1984), *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project*, University of New Mexico Press

Joel Sternfeld, (1996), *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam*, Chronicle Books

Simon Norfolk, (2002), *Afghanistan*, Dewi Lewis Publishing

Simon Norfolk, (2005), *Bleed*, Dewi Lewis Publishing

Val Williams, (1995), *Warworks: Women, Photography and the Iconography of War*, Virago Press Ltd

Strengths	Areas for development
You took the important step of starting and have written a decent draft	Contact [learnersupport@oca.ac.uk] for guidance of formal academic writing
Your writing is generally clear	Once decided maintain your focus on your particular

	argument/ investigation/hypothesis
You demonstrate passionate investment in this work	Keep a good critical distance and don't let the emotional impact of this ideological conflict impact too much

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Next assignment due	TBC