

Portfolio of Writing

Student Name: Grace Ghroum

P Number: 1900302

Programme of Study: Illustration

Module: M4X01560

Tasks in the order I received them:

Task One: Reflection (Jon's task) = 514 words

Task Two: Semiotic Analysis (Ryan's task) = 525 words

Task Three: Manifesto (Julia's task) = 505 words

Task One: Reflection (Jon's task)

A reflection on using colour theory to create mood and tone in watercolour painting, with reference to Kolb's reflective learning cycle.

During one of my first modules, 'Media and Techniques,' I took part in a colour theory workshop in which I explored the different shades and tones of colour through Itten's 12-point colour star, but also a brief exploration into the meaning of certain colours. Colours are utilised by artists not only to complete the scene but also to produce meaning and emotion, as Gage wrote in 'Colour and meaning; art, science and symbolism,' colour is 'the subjective element in a visual experience, and the objective, quantifiable stimuli which produce that experience' (1999: 11).

The idea that colours had meaning behind them and certain colours could produce specific emotions or reactions (Ursuțiu, Samoilă, Drăgulin, Anca Constantin, 2017: 910-918) had interested me as it is part of the visual language that we decipher to gain an understanding of an image. Ferdinand Saussure wrote that 'Speech has both an individual and a social side, and we cannot conceive of one without the other' (1916: 9) and I believe that the same can be said for colour in its function as both a practical and a symbolic tool in art thus it and its effects should be understood in order for one to produce an image with layered meaning.

The next step of reflective learning, according to Kolb (D.A. Kolb, 1984), is 'abstract conceptualism' which refers to further research and learning. This was achieved through reading about colour theory and psychology, (Gage, 1999), for example 'yellow is thought of as warm, because it is associated with the sun' (A. Wierzbicka: 23) but also could be viewed as relating to illness and need of caution (J.L Morton, 2019). Whereas blue, according to the

Lüscher test is ‘concentric, passive, sensitive, perceptive, unifying’ (Gage, 1999: 32). This is further supported by Charles Féré’s experiments with chromotherapy, studying the effects on the body and mind when surrounded by different colours and light, as he ‘found that red light had the most stimulating effect and violet had the most calming’ (Gage, 1999: 31).

In order to consolidate this learning experience and complete the final part of Kolb’s reflective cycle (1984): Active Experimentation, I decided to create two watercolour paintings that featured the same image- a small house surrounded by trees, featuring a path to the house, and clouds in the sky. The image as a plain line drawing with no colour was entirely neutral in tone. It suggested neither warmth nor fear, safety nor danger, it was an image without meaning. However, the first example was painted using soft greens and blues to evoke the aesthetic of a summer day, it utilised the ‘calming’ nature of blue tones (Gage, 1999:31) and warm yellow to create a cosy, warm and safe atmosphere surrounding the little house. The second experimental painting was completed in darker yellows and greys to evoke an unsettling, desolate mood as explained by J.L Morton (2019).

I feel as though through following Kolb’s reflective cycle, I have gained the knowledge and understanding needed to produce meaningful illustrations through the use of colour and its meaning in both art and psychology.

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Task 2: Semiotic Analysis (Ryan's task)

It could be argued that semiotics and the ability to interpret the meaning from an image- with the rise of 'influencer culture' (Day, 2019) promoting 'a false sense of what everyone else is doing' (Wagstaff, 2019), and 'fake news' (Carson, 2018)- has never been more

important as we aim towards the truth. This second task will conduct a semiotic analysis of the film Joker (Todd Phillips, 2019) with reference to semiotic principles and theories, as well as colour meaning in psychology.

Ferdinand Saussure wrote that ‘Speech has both an individual and a social side, and we cannot conceive of one without the other’ (1916: 9). We are automatically taught language and the signified meaning e.g. what the symbols are trying to convey. For example, from a young age we know that a tick (✓) means right, whereas a cross (X) means wrong. Our ability to accept the symbolic meaning, as opposed to the literal, makes reference to humanities inherent need to ‘fit in’ and accept the ‘Spectacle’ (Debord, 1967) as Debord writes ‘reality emerges within the spectacle’ (1967: 11).

October 2019 saw the release of the film ‘Joker’ (Todd Phillips) focusing on the iconic DC Comics villain, ‘Joker’ utilises colour and lighting to signify additional meaning. The cinematographer, Lawrence Sher can be seen as following Valerio Adami’s observation that “colour is the instrument for reading drawing” (Gage, 1999:7). Sher does this through the use of a limited colour palette of blue, yellow, red and green.



Cinematographers use ‘certain colours to create depth, separation and mood,’ (Sher, 2019) and this is evident in *Joker* (2019). For example, the beginning of the film was shot primarily in twilight in order for there to be a soft blue tone, Sher suggests that this was for aesthetic purposes and to contrast the fluorescent lighting used to suggest the era of the late 70s (Vanity Fair, 2019). However, the colour blue also follows the lead character in his outfits, set design and lighting. This implies to the viewer the melancholy tone of the film as well as the characters attitude towards life. Furthermore, according to the Lüscher Test, blue is ‘passive’ (Gage, 1999:32) and ‘perceptive’ suggesting the character, like many of the viewers, sees what is wrong with the world but doesn’t do anything to change it, making reference to Huxley’s fear of passivity from society as written about in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (Postman, 1984). This is further connoted by Sher as the film progresses and the character becomes more active, he is seen less in blue light and more in bright yellow light which ‘is thought of as warm and comforting’ (Wierzbicka, 1999: 23), as well as covering himself in red through his outfit, which the Lüscher test sees as “offensive, active and aggressive” (Gage 1999).

Sher is known to put extreme thought into the lighting and colour choices which suggests a meaning beyond the literal, as if he himself is aware of the metaphorical meaning his choices connote. Semiotic analysis can be used to deconstruct any image in order to get some semblance of the truth, especially when extended care has been put into making those choices.

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Task 3: Manifesto (Julia's task)

1. I will conduct research to create meaningful illustrations.
2. Art is beauty, but beauty is not necessarily art.
3. Not all art is good, and that's okay
4. There is meaning in every creative choice and we must investigate it to understand an image's complete truth
5. There is a moral choice in everything.
6. Willingness to practice is more virtuous than perfection.
7. I will never create anything for bigots.
8. I will strive to be as sustainable as possible.

Key words and images

Key word: Beauty

2. Art is beauty, but beauty is not necessarily art.

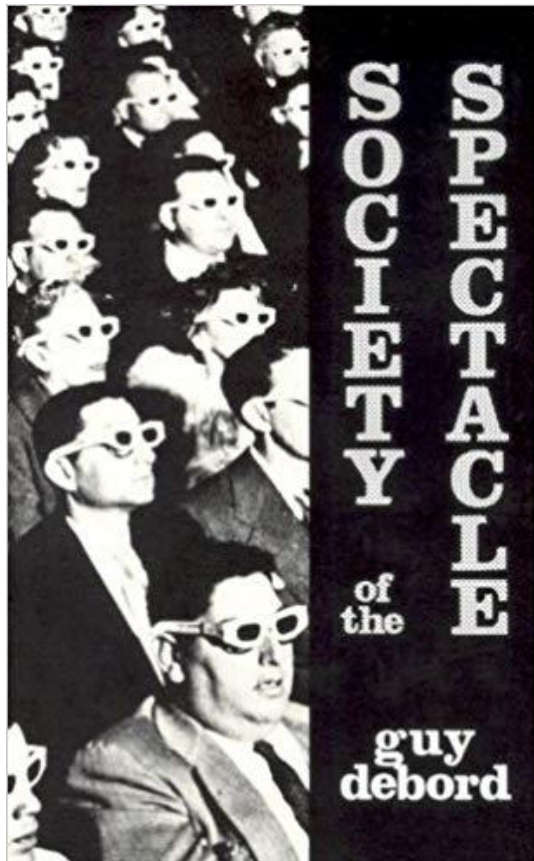


Fountain, Duchamp (1917)

The Oxford English Dictionary partly defines art as ‘...works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power,’ and in a society that “is so visual right now, and it’s only getting more visual,” (Smith, 2019), it could be argued that beauty is the modern driving force behind art. However, the Dada art movement would suggest that we must move away from vanity, and beauty for the sake of beauty which has become so apparent in the rise of “influencer culture” (Day, 2019). For example, the Dadaist’s believed that ‘A work of art should not be beauty in itself, for beauty is dead,’ (Tzara, 1918) which is perhaps best expressed through Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Fountain’ (1917). It is merely a urinal, signed ‘R. Mutt,’ placed on a pedestal. Duchamp’s ‘Fountain’ is considered as ‘an icon of twentieth-century art’ (Mundy, 2015) even though a urinal is not normally associated with art, Duchamp knew that the Society of Independent Artists would have to accept and display the piece, according to their guidelines, thereby forcing society as a whole to view it as art, and whilst not considered traditionally beautiful, subverts expectations of what art should be therefore drawing attention to the beauty of the concept behind the art.

Key word: Meaning

4. There is meaning in every creative choice and we must investigate it to understand an image's complete truth.

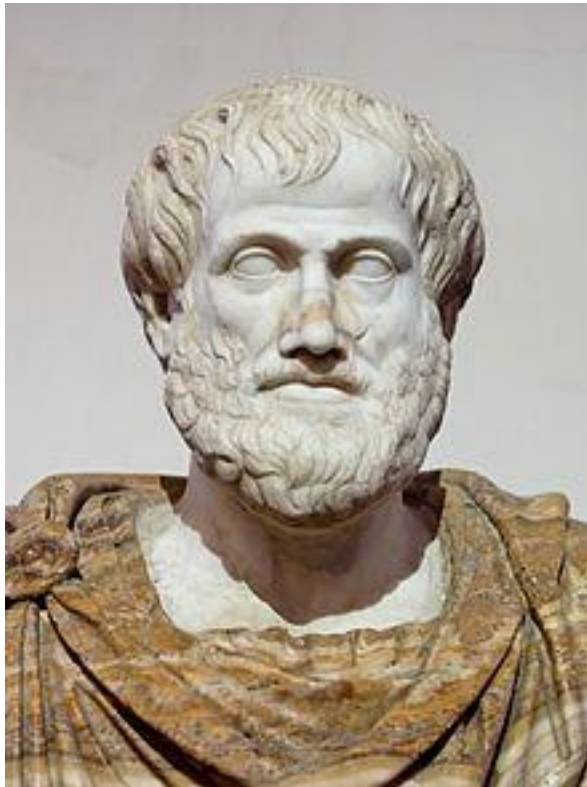


Society of the spectacle, Guy Debord, 1967

Saussure wrote that 'speech has both an individual and a social side, and we cannot conceive of one without the other,' (1916: 9) suggesting that language and images function through denoted and connoted meaning which the consumers decipher in order to grasp the full meaning of something. If someone only took the literal meaning of something then there would only be half the story, half the reality akin to something such as the

shadows in Plato's allegory of The Cave. But it should be noted that the signified meaning, the deeper and metaphorical understanding of something is brought about through the creative choices of its producers. If one believes that "Everything one looks at is false," (Tzara, 1918) then reality is made through what people perceive as meaning, as Debord wrote 'reality, emerges within the spectacle' (1967:11).

Key word: Practice



Roman copy in marble of a Greek bronze bust of Aristotle by Lysippos, c. 330 BC

In many normative ethical arguments, morality is seen as absolutist and the product of something beyond humanity, e.g. God. However, Aristotle believed that 'Excellence then is not an act but a habit' (Aristotle, Ross, Brown, 2009) as 'we are what we repeatedly do' (2009). This moral theory states that people aren't just good or evil but can instead become better through dedicated practice of arete/ virtue in which they strive to achieve the

‘golden mean’ between two vices. For example, Aristotle views courage as a virtuous golden mean between the vices of cowardice (deficiency of courage) and rashness (excess of courage) (2009). Aristotle then, sets the norm of human behaviour as always working towards ‘eudaimonia’/ supreme happiness through the practice of achieving the golden mean. As a result, it could be suggested that the pursuit of perfection is not what someone should strive towards, but instead they should focus on practicing to be virtuous, in order for them to become good.

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