Portfolio of Writing

Joseff Lloyd Williams

1907538

(BA Hons) Graphic Design

M4X01560

Tutor: Martin Bush

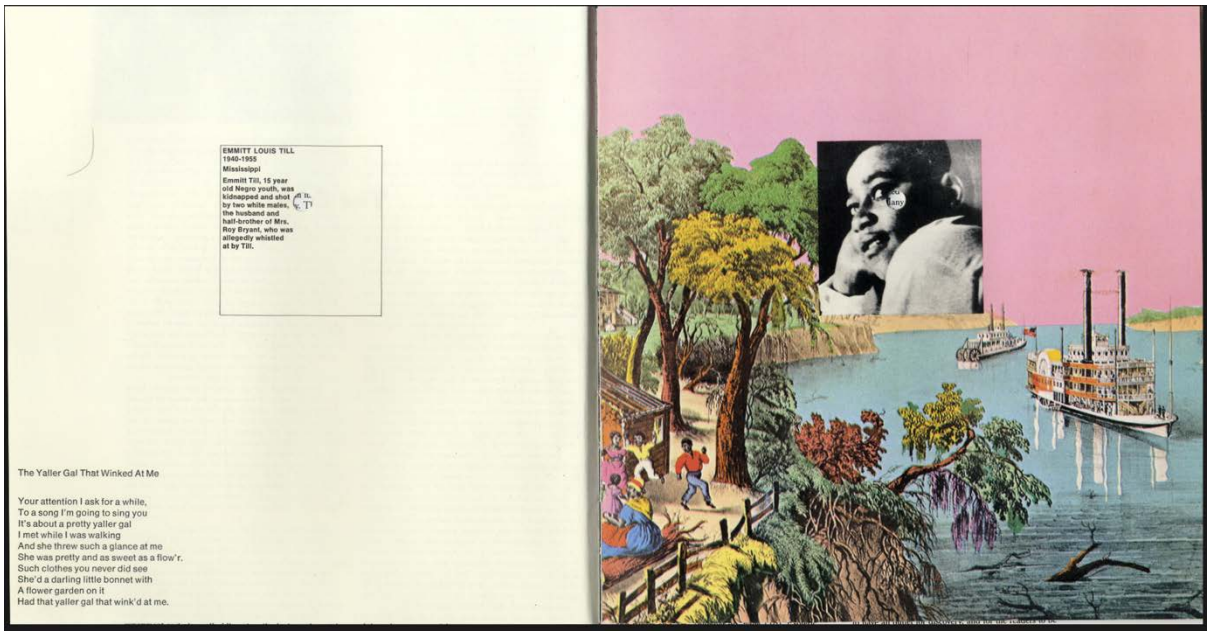
Tasks in the order I received them:

Task One: Reflection (Jon's task) = 542 words

Task Two: Semiotic Analysis (Ryan's task) = 534 words

Task Three: Manifesto (Julia's task) = 535 words

Task One: Reflection (Jon's task)

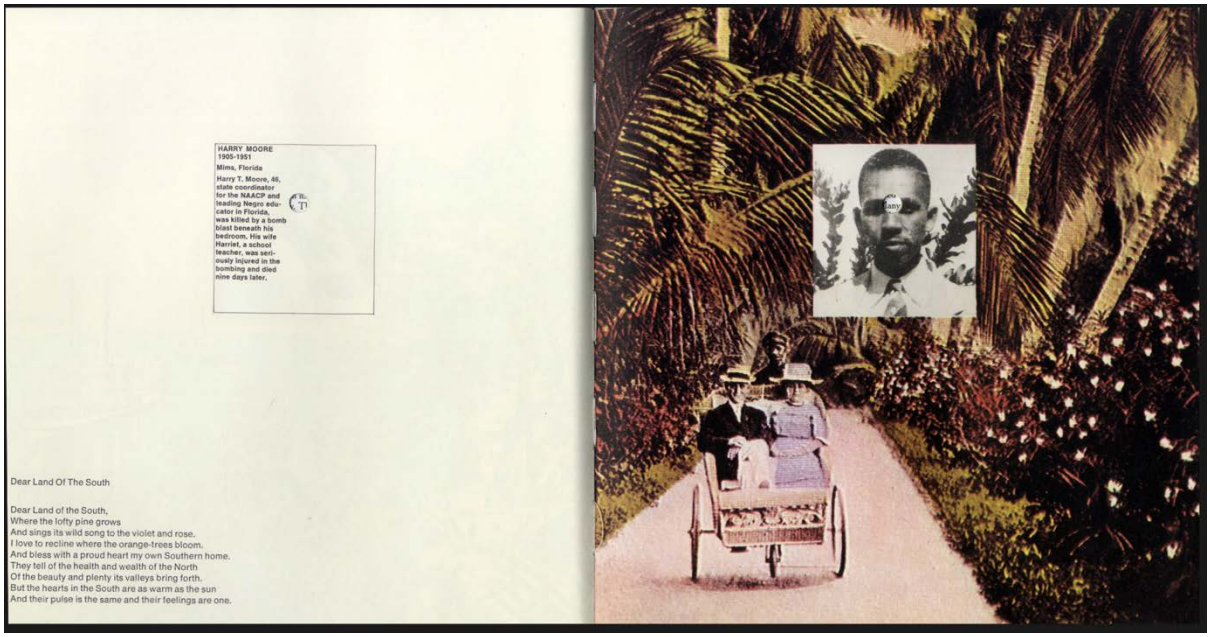


EMMITT LOUIS TILL
1940-1955
Mississipoi

Emmitt Till, 15 year old Negro youth, was kidnapped and shot to death by two white males, the husband and half-brother of Mrs. Roy Bryant, who was allegedly whistled at by Till.

The Yaller Gal That Winked At Me

Your attention I ask for a while,
To a song I'm going to sing you
It's about a pretty yaller gal
I met while I was walking
And she threw such a glance at me
She was pretty and as sweet as a flow'r.
Such clothes you never did see
She'd a darling little bonnet with
A flower garden on it
Had that yaller gal that wink'd at me.

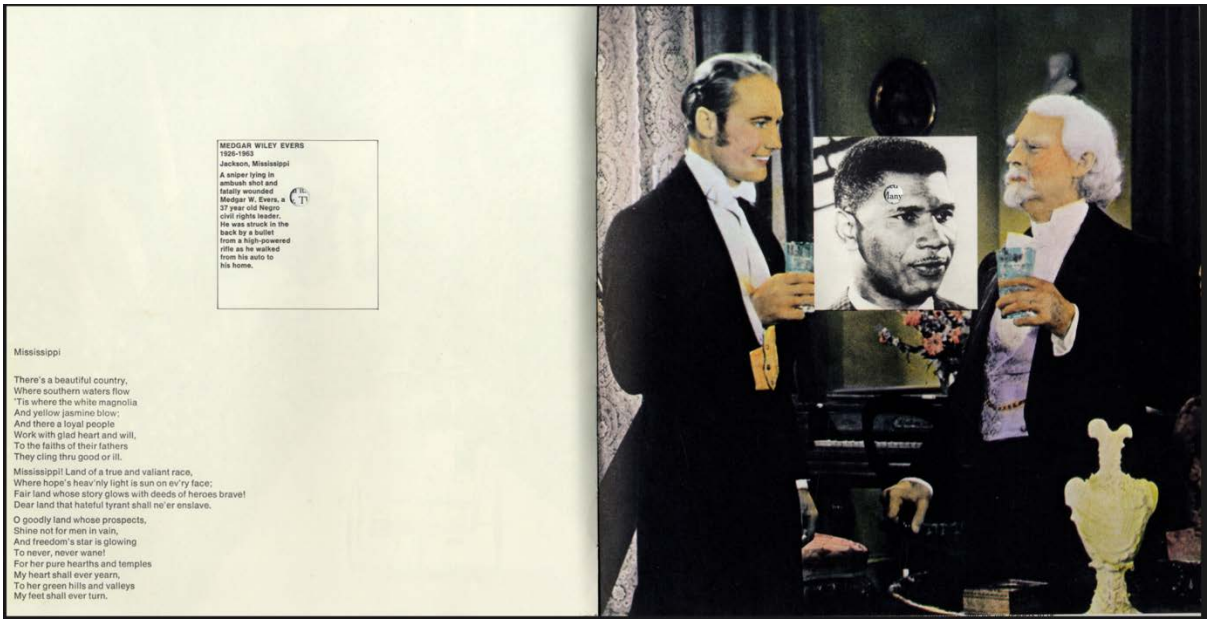


HARRY MOORE
1905-1951
Mims, Florida

Harry T. Moore, 46, state coordinator for the NAACP and leading Negro educator in Florida, was killed by a bomb blast beneath his bedroom. His wife Harriet, a school teacher, was seriously injured in the bombing and died nine days later.

Dear Land Of The South

Dear Land of the South,
Where the lofty pine grows
And sings its wild song to the violet and rose.
I love to recline where the orange-trees bloom.
And bless with a proud heart my own Southern home.
They tell of the health and wealth of the North
Of the beauty and plenty its valleys bring forth.
But the hearts in the South are as warm as the sun
And their pulse is the same and their feelings are one.



MEDGAR WILEY EVERS
1926-1963
Jackson, Mississippi

A sniper lying in ambush shot and fatally wounded Medgar W. Evers, a 37 year old Negro civil rights leader. He was struck in the back by a bullet from a high-powered rifle as he walked from his auto to his home.

Mississippi

There's a beautiful country,
Where southern waters flow
'Tis where the white magnolia
And yellow jasmine blow;
And there a loyal people
Work with glad heart and will,
To the faiths of their fathers
They cling thru good or ill.

Mississippi! Land of a true and valiant race,
Where hope's heav'nly light is sun on ev'ry face;
Fair land whose story glows with deeds of heroes brave!
Dear land that hateful tyrant shall ne'er enslave.

O goodly land whose prospects,
Shine not for men in vain,
And freedom's star is glowing
To never, never wane!
For her pure hearths and temples
My heart shall ever yearn,
To her green hills and valleys
My feet shall ever turn.

Excerpts taken from "The South" (1969) by Seymour Chwast

Professor David Boud states that during any process, reflection is vital in leading to "new understandings and appreciations" of an experience (1985, p. 19). In the reflection process, we are able to deconstruct an experience to recognise influence, action and affect. In this task, we will look at the reflection process in regards to "*The South*" (1969) by Seymour Chwast of Push Pin Studios. *The South* was an issue of the Push Pin Graphic that took a political stance against racism in the Southern states of America during the Civil Rights Movement. Sociologist Jack Mezirow explains that we need to create our own interpretation of an experience "rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others" (1997, p. 5). Experiences, once interpreted, can often precede some form of action. Whilst Chwast himself did not directly experience racism in the South, he experienced living in a prejudice society and interpreted it as being unjust. In an interview, Chwast stated, "I was seeing how difficult it was to get us away from segregation … I wanted to do something to help show that," (Hall, 2017). It was Chwast's reflection that influenced him to create *The South*.

In his book, "The Reflective Practitioner" (1983), philosopher Donald Schön introduces the concepts of "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action." The former describes the process whereby a practitioner reflects as they act. The design process of *The South* would have involved reflection-*in*-action, as Chwast was consciously aware of his purpose so made intentional design choices. He juxtaposes vibrant, idyllic Southern imagery with black-and-white photographs of martyrs from the Civil Rights Movement. He includes evocative poetry, and hole punches through martyrs' faces, representing their murders in a striking metaphor. These are conscious actions made from reflection.

Reflection-*on*-action, however, involves reflecting in retrospect of an action. It is possible that Chwast will have participated in reflection-*on*-action through making design changes before publication, however, this is only supposition.

Once we have considered influence and action, it is important to consider the affect of our actions. *The South*'s impact in politics was fairly limited. It took at least another decade of protest and federal intervention before discrimination in the Southern voting system ended (Heller, 2000). However, *The South* has been described as one of the most "trenchant graphic design commentaries" during a time of already heightened political activism (Heller, n.d.). Whilst *The South* may not have had huge impact in politics, as part of a wider body of work it did have large influence in design. Push Pin became highly influential in graphic design and advertising for their unique style and content during a time when Swiss Modernism was the predominant approach. (Heller, 2000).

Their eclectic style brought a lot of change in popular visual design (Messina, 1969) and by the mid-1970s had "become part of the mainstream" (Heller, 2004, p. 105). This suggests the reflection cycle continued. As other artists experienced Chwast's work, they were influenced, and went to action. I have been inspired by Chwast's ability to give social commentary in

such a beautifully creative way on *The South*, and I am now in the early stages of planning a digital design about my concerns regarding Artificial Intelligence's impact in society.

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PUSH PIN

③ AFFECT → Style changes.

AFFECT → Not much politically.

② ACTION → REFLECTION IN ACTION

ACTION → DESIGN CHOICES.

① INFLUENCE → CIVIL RIGHTS.

INFLUENCE → RACISM.

REFLECTION

REFLECTION ON ACTION.

(Retrospective)

↓

REFLECTION IN ACTION

(Reflecting whilst doing something | knowing + doing).

⇒ Thinks about what they are doing as they do it. → Chwast will have done this at various points.

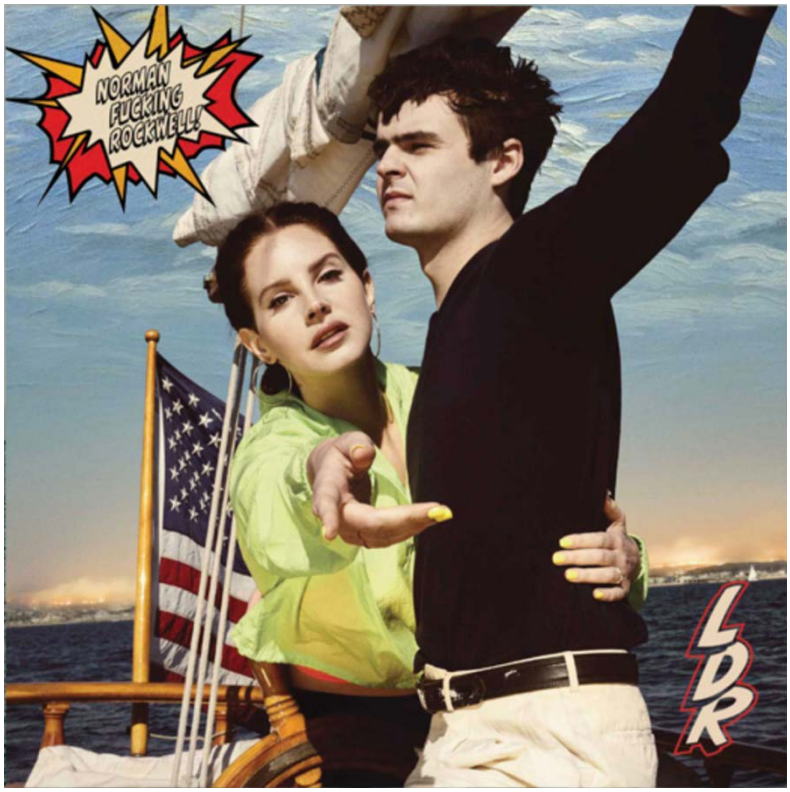
↓

(Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper, 2001).

Task Two: Semiotic Analysis (Ryan's task)

In the study of semiotics, signs, symbols and their use or interpretation are analysed. Signs are all around us, including words, images, and gestures. When an audience reads a sign, they apply a signified meaning to it. Theorist, Roland Barthes, explains that texts are "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds," and that the audience can "gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one" (1974, p. 5). This is because the context of the viewer determines how a sign is interpreted. A sign's meaning is subjective, and the power of interpretation lies with the audience. John Berger explains in his book "Ways of Seeing," (1972, p. 8): "The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe."

In this task, we will be decoding the cover artwork for "*Norman Fucking Rockwell*," [*NFR*] an album by Lana Del Rey released on 30st August 2019.



Album artwork for "Norman Fucking Rockwell" (2019) by Lana Del Rey

Upon observing any image, we begin exploring meaning before receiving any explanation for what we see (Berger, 1972, p. 7). Therefore, text often anchors an image to achieve a more fixed meaning. Barthes states that, "At the level of the literal message, the text replies … to the question: *what is it?*" (1977, p. 39). We can see the significance of anchorage text through its lack on *NFR*. With her name initialised, the connotations of "LDR" relies solely on the viewer's familiarity with Del Rey's appearance. Unfamiliar viewers create their own conclusions of who she is.

Gender contributes significantly to a person's signified meaning. Berger suggests that men are seen for what they can do, and women for what can or cannot be done to them (1972, p. 46). Del Rey challenges this through an outstretched hand and direct gaze to the audience, confronting them with what she can do for them rather than what can be done to her. The danger connoted through the flames behind places Del Rey, onboard her boat, as the saviour in this narrative.

Intertextuality is the reference to another text to create signified meaning (Kristeva, 1986, p. 36), and uses the codes and connotations associated with that text to evoke an emotional response from the audience. *NFR* relies heavily on intertextuality. For example, the title and comic book style typography references the American artist, Norman Rockwell. If the audience is unfamiliar with this intertextual reference, they will create their own signified meaning of those words. Intertextuality from a broad range of eras is used, connoting chaos or dystopia. For example, audiences could be led to a bygone era through the appearance of 1950s Hollywood actor, Jack Nicholson's grandson (Silver, 2019) and the reference to the Kennedy's famous yacht photoshoots (GQ, 2011). However, the Californian fires and Del Rey's neon green attire (Choir, 2019; Adhav, 2019) plant us firmly in the present day. A

viewer deconstructing the denoted signs and creating meaning may be confused by these juxtaposing intertextual references.

This process of deconstruction in semiotic analysis can be done for any text, and in doing so challenges signified meanings that an audience applies to the text.

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SIGNS / SYMBOLS
- Images.
- Songs.
- hand gestures.
- signs on roads.
- Colour.

↓

SIGNIFIERS.

↓

SIGNIFIED

ALL AFFECTED BY CONTEXTS.
eg. how audience experience life determines how its perceived.

We come to our own conclusions / make our own narrative before we are given info.

Does gender play a part in this?

LANA DEL REY.
"NFR"

MALE / FEMALE GAZE?
The gender will affect viewing?
Is she heroic or lwing?. A siren or sailor?

Stands in for something

SIGN	SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
	"NFR" "LDR"	The album title + artist.
FLAMES	FIRE	Danger / Disaster.
	BOAT	Escape?. Safety.

Thing or idea being evoked

SEMIOTICS

Narrative

Disaster.
- FIRE
- BOAT.
  - RAFT OF MEDUSA?

Dystopia.
- CLASH of ERAS (confusing)
  - NEON GREEN.
  - KENNEDY YACHT.
  - 1950s / 60s.

INTERTEXTUALITY
- DUKE NICHOLSON
- COMIC BOOK.
- NORMAN ROCKWELL

Gender
- Berger idea of what can / cannot be done.
- Power / Action.

Task Three: Manifesto (Julia's task)

1. **I will work hard for originality in an era of constant content.**
2. **My work may be knowingly mindless or overtly meaningful. Either way, brilliant art has intention.**
3. **I want to be recognised for being profoundly inspiring or disastrously bleak. In between is mediocre.**
4. **I will work against my internal leaning towards mustard yellow.**
5. **Anything that appears contrived or shallow must be done so knowingly and ironically, otherwise it risks being disingenuous.**
6. **I value the unconventional over the ordinary. Unless the ordinary is beautifully simplistic. I contradict myself all the time.**
7. **Art can bring light and hope in a way that's still grounded in reality.**
8. **I will compromise my preferences for cash. A graphic designer needs to eat.**

Keyword: Intentionality

My work may be knowingly mindless or overtly meaningful. Either way, brilliant art has intention.

A still from Julia Ducournau's "Raw," 2016

Great pleasure can be had from discovering the aesthetic intentions behind an artist's choices. It is the reason we interview practitioners about their work. Theorist Roland Barthes suggests that acknowledging the artist "imposes a limit on that text" and "closes the writing" for further interpretation (1977, p. 147). Whilst this may be true to a degree, I believe the recognition of the author and their intent also enables the audience to experience their work in a more empathetic and, at times, vicarious way. Sharing your intention can inspire understanding in an audience to "find creative ways to see patterns of change," (Conrad, 2016).

Knowing and communicating our intentions also demonstrates the awareness of the power we have as practitioners. We know that we have power to manipulate emotion in our audiences. Julia Ducournau, as highlighted by Alex Godfrey, demonstrates this power when talking about her film, "Raw," which features cannibalism. Ducournau states, "I wanted the audience to feel like a monster… We are all monsters, really" (Godfrey, 2017).

Keyword: Authenticity

I will work hard for originality and authenticity in an era of constant content.

Manet, E. (1882), *Flowers in a Crystal Vase*

In the digital age, we are constantly subjected to artistic inspiration. It can therefore be difficult to create art that cannot be traced back to another's work. Whilst it has always been possible to trace sources of inspiration, we are exposed to art far more now than in previous eras, where we were required to visit galleries to be inspired. To create something that is uniquely ours we must free ourselves from the constraints of convention and tradition (Taylor, 1987, p. 420). It has been said that modernist painter Édouard Manet achieved this by forgetting "everything that he had studied in the museums," until he "retained nothing more than an individual intelligence" (Taylor, 1987, p.420). This is perhaps the difference between an original artist of authenticity and a person who is merely taught how to copy. An academic painter changes themselves to fit the work, whilst an artist deems this as dishonest self-manipulation (Salas and Krauss, 2007, p. 34).

Keyword: Disingenuous

Anything that appears contrived or shallow must be done so knowingly and ironically, otherwise it risks being disingenuous.

Andy Warhol's "Marilyn Monroe" (1967)

I believe art that is manufactured for profit will not feel truthful. Its sole purpose is to be marketable for consumer culture, and will therefore rarely push artistic or socio-political boundaries, as an attempt to remain palatable for mass consumption.

Some practitioners comment on consumer culture through defiant mockery, like Banksy's *Dismaland*. Others express homage to the mainstream by appropriating it and pushing its boundaries, such as Andy Warhol and PC Music. Warhol allegedly once said, "Art should be meaningful in the most shallow way," (King, 2014). If an artist is to remain integrous whilst conforming to mainstream consumer culture, they must be consciously aware of their compromise and embrace it as an artistic choice. Self-awareness is at the core of an artist's ingenuity.

Charli XCX is a musician and affiliate of PC Music - a "polarizing" collection of artists known for their brash appropriation of commercialism (Zoladz, 2015). She states:

"If you're gonna [sic] sell out, you have to really commit […] go the full way, not, like, try and hide it […] stick that brand all over your body and wear it" (Aitchison, 2016).

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MANIFESTO

WHAT DO I VALUE?

- AUTHENTICITY.
- EXTREMES.
- HUMOUR.
- ORIGINALITY.
  - IRONY.
    - WARHOL
    - CHARLI XCX.
- UNCONVENTIONAL.
  - KNOWING "WHY??" AN ARTIST DOES SOMETHING.
  - (INTENTIONALITY).

INTENTIONALITY

- LEARNING ARTISTS CHOICES.
  - enhances meaning + adds depth.
- SHOWS the ARTIST has INTELLIGENCE in their choices. → POWER.
  - → Is this always necessary?
  - They know what they're doing.
- HEARING AUTHOR'S VOICE.
  - interviews.

AUTHENTICITY

- Increasing risk of plagiarism, subconsciously. (well, of course I was inspired by "___")
  - Pinterest/instagram.
- You have to ignore the world's efforts.
- Develop our own unique style.
- Difference between people with a genuine artistic flair + distinct style vs "copycats."

IRONY

- If its just for money, its selling out.
  - Disingenuous!
- Mimicking or appropriating pop culture in an intelligent way.
- ANDY WARHOL commentary on pop.
- PC Music pushing extremes.
- It takes self awareness and almost cheeky humour.
  - Charli XCX interview about brands.

They are choices — NOT COMPROMISING VALUES FOR SUCCESS OR CASH.