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Three key words:

- Trust
- Perseverance
- Vulnerability

In this essay I will be writing about my chosen words of trust, perseverance and vulnerability. I chose to explore these as they embody what it is to be a designer. Through my essay I will be researching the connection between these to conclude on a final question for my level 6 project. In this essay I will be using the key thinkers of Joe Lycett, Eleanor Roosevelt, Chris Debrubeis and Frank Rudy Cooper. Alongside this, I will be using the artists David Carson, Marcel Duchamp, Hannah Hoch and Marina Abramovic.

When thinking of the word trust, there are multiple conceptions of understanding. Firstly, there is trust in things such as faith or politics, but I also believe there to be a different kind of trust within relationships whether that be romantic or platonic. This trust is able to be formed blindly or researched. I do not think one to be superior to the other, but I believe that both should be used at contrasting times. The oxford dictionary defines trust as a “firm belief in the reliability, truth, or strength... of a person or thing.” (The

oxford paperback dictionary, 1994, p.862) This is key word is linked to graphic design through its ability to gain trust from your audience in what you are presenting to them, this is the avenue I will investigate.

This theory is shown in the comedian Joe Lycett's statement from one of his stand-up shows, he told the story of asking his niece "what do you think art is" (Lycett, 2024) while painting a mural in his office. The 11-year-old responded with "it's trust...if you trust something is good, then it is" (Lycett, 2024). I have chosen to feature this statement, as when questioning whether my work was good enough, I found clarity in the fact that if I believe my work is good then it is. In working in the creative industry, this mentality is imperative to claim, as art can be very subjective, meaning that taking only one person's opinion can often not give you a correct understanding of the worth found within your work. To second this, I chose to investigate the artist, David Carson.



Fig 1: unknown, David Carson, 2024

His work as can be seen above intrigued me as the description given of this designer is "Self-taught ... grid-free, and unafraid to speak his mind." (Gosling, 2019). This relates to trust as he trusts himself to produce

work that reflects him as an individual. In being self-taught, I believe him to be original in thought and yet, he obtained a massive influence on graphic design. This can be seen in the quote “Carson's work made designers realize that editorial layouts didn't have to stick to the rules.” (Gosling, 2019). Although having no training in this field he has established himself as one of the most influential people in this industry. In Carson being able to gain people's trust in his theories and practices, it has encouraged me to believe that success in this field is through originality. In his work I enjoy his sense of freedom or ‘trust’, as there is a visible sense of vulnerability as it feels like his art is a form of speech for his thoughts. The art piece above particularly grabbed my attention as it feels like a call to action, through its harsh black lines and the preciseness of the collage pieces. These intense ‘scribble-like’ patterns encourage you to see this as a brainstorm of notes for himself to reflect on. From this research I have been able to understand that to have a presence in this industry, you must have faith in yourself and your ideas, as people will only believe you as much as you believe yourself.

Perserverance is a quality that I have been reaching for throughout my life. I feel that especially in my years at university thus far, I have been aspiring to persevere through more challenges than ever before. In my understanding, perseverance is about knowing where your current limits are and trying to attain or surpass them. This word could fall under the word ‘despite’ for multiple issues. Despite gender, disability or mental health you continue to attempt success. The oxford dictionary defines perseverance as to “continue steadfastly, especially in something that is difficult or tedious” (The oxford paperback dictionary, 1994, p.597). This description ties in with my own ideals of this word, as it insinuates this word is about the determination you filter into a goal. However, it does not touch upon the idea of doing something ‘despite’ of something, you could argue this would fall under the ‘something that is difficult’ description, but to battle societal norms is not something you continue through but something you do despite of. Eleanor Roosevelt, the first lady to the 32nd president of the United States, who was considered

“one of the world’s most widely admired and powerful women” (*Eleanor Roosevelt*, 2024) of her time states that

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'” (Roosevelt, 1960, p.29).

This quote implies that perseverance is earned through firstly going through trauma to gain this quality. This differs from my theory as it suggests that perseverance is something to be gained not learnt.

For this key word I wanted to investigate the Dada movement, as it is the epitome of perseverance embodied by the idea of war against war. This movement began in Switzerland, Zürich as a reaction to the 1st World War, born through avant-garde styled movements such as Futurism, Expressionism and Cubism. The art born from this included performance art, photography, sculpture and collage; through this art it was often noted that there was a theme of mockery for society. The dada artists relied heavily on the use of ‘readymades’, these were “everyday objects that could be bought and presented as art with little manipulation by the artist” (*Dada movement overview and key ideas*, 2012). This further proves the idea that art can be formed through perseverance over equipment or circumstance. The first artist I am investigating is the French painter, Marcel Duchamp.

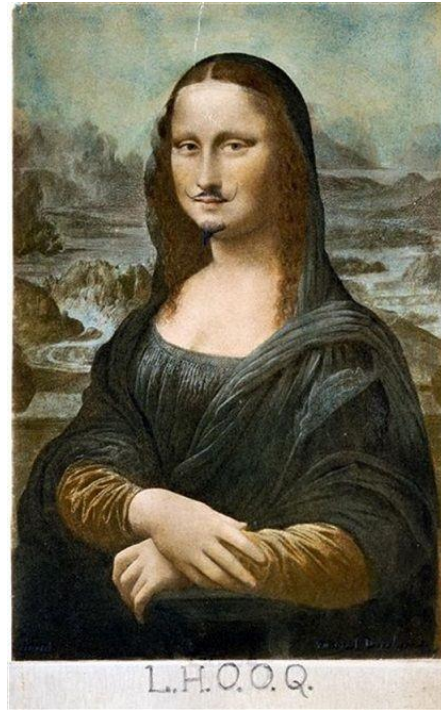


Fig 2: L.H.O.O.Q 'Elle a chaud au cul'-'she has a hot ass', Marcel Duchamp, 1919

I chose this piece as it perfectly portrays my key word in showing how humor can be used as a tool through treacherous times. This piece of art features a post card of the famous portrait of the Mona Lisa painted in 1517. This piece of art was controversial, as the Mona Lisa had only just been returned to its original place in the Louvre, after being stolen in 1911. In having its theft heightening the publicity of this already famous painting, Duchamp's piece successfully accomplished the main ideas of Dada, in commenting on political and societal issues. For this piece titled 'L.H.O.O.Q.' translated in English to 'she has a hot ass', Duchamp challenged the idea of originality within art while offending the masses, creating the perfect publicity for the Dada movement. It is described that this piece "with masculine attributes, ... alludes to Leonardo's purported homosexuality and gestures at the androgynous nature of creativity". (Duchamp, Appropriation Transmedia Field Guide, no date) The use of conflicting gender stereotypes was very prevalent in the Dada movement; to illustrate this I investigated the work of Hannah Höch.

Höch was most known for her “political collages and photomontages” (MoMA, no date- 1A) which is an artform she helped pioneer. To create these, Höch used a collection of images and text from the current media of the time. The use of these pieces was to “critique popular culture, the failings of the Weimar Republic, and the socially constructed roles of women”(MoMA, no date-1A). This artist became affiliated with the Berlin Dada movement in 1917, after meeting artist Raoul Hausmann who was a part of a group formed to critique “German culture and society following World War I” (MoMA, no date- 1A). Höch’s and her female colleagues would become heavily scrutinized by her male colleagues by being looked upon as “charming and gifted amateurs, denying... any real professional status” (Hannah Höch in Edouard Roditi, 1959). This furthered the need to create pieces such as ‘An Indian Dancer’ as featured below.



Fig 3, Indian Dancer, Hannah Höch, 1930

This artwork portrays a comical version of the ‘New woman’ suggested to be present in Weimar's Germany at the time. This supposedly new woman had been given the right to vote in 1919 and, “frequented bars and nightclubs wearing relaxed, masculine clothes and sporting short bobbed hair.”

(New Women in the Weimar Republic, no date) This creation suggested that women had now become a man's equal, however, this piece stated how societal stereotypes remained in the mass public. Within this piece, Höch used a photograph of the actress Maria Falconetti, this highlighted the sense of perseverance in her work as Falconetti had starred as Joan in the film, 'The passion of Joan of Arc' in 1928. In this silent film, Joan perseveres through the threat of torture to stand proudly for her beliefs. Moreover, in the collage it features "wooden dance mask from Cameroon"(MoMA, no date-1B). These 'Goma masks', known for their "elongated cylindrical forms" (Google Arts & Culture no date) were known to represent "the spirit of an ancestor... any member of the tribe who wore it was believed to have been possessed by the ancestor" (Goma mask, no date). This ties in with the ideals of societal standards, as it shows how ancestral traits could follow on through family members along with the expectations placed on genders through the generations. In the collage, Facloncetti is shown with a headdress made of kitchen cutlery, hinting to the domesticity expectation that was continued to be placed upon women, showing that nothing in fact had changed. From this key word, I analyzed that perseverance can not only be shown through work ethic or emotion but through circumstance. In Höch's words, "there are no limits to the materials available for pictorial collages—above all they can be found...even in waste products" (Ades and Herrmann, 2014). Thus, proving the idea of perseverance through everything is about how much you want something to happen rather than if you are told it can.

In using the term vulnerability, it can often be understood in a positive or negative way. Vulnerability can often be misinterpreted as weakness especially in terms of gender. When a person is physically vulnerable it is interpreted as someone who is incapable of defending themselves, when a person is emotionally vulnerable it suggests that there are issues of codependency or a mental illness. However, vulnerability in a positive light can lead to deep understanding of yourself and others, creating a sense of safety and enlightenment. In terms of gender, it could be said that women are more vulnerable than men, as it is noted that men are usually stronger than women. This theory is compromised by the

person it is aimed to, if we swap the idea of a woman for a body building female, the odds of this statement being true become increasingly smaller. I am interested in the idea of using vulnerability as an advantage in your artwork to have a deeper connection to the artwork and your audience. As Chris Derubeis the 'father of the conceptual movement' stated, "All art should inspire and evoke emotion.... Art should be something you can actually feel" (Derubeisfineart, no date), I believe that in allowing vulnerability to be present in art, you create a piece that people will want to engage with. The oxford dictionary defines vulnerability as "unprotected, exposed to danger or attack" (The oxford paperback dictionary, 1994, p.900). This contradicts my idea of this word as I view this with more positive connotations, although I understand that to be vulnerable is to put yourself in a critical position, without being vulnerable we would never truly understand anyone. Martha Fineman a American theorist and philosopher believes that "that all human beings are vulnerable and prone to dependency" (Kohn, N.A., 2014), this insinuates that vulnerability is something we are forced into being and that in doing so we gain codependency values. Furthered on from this Frank Rudy Cooper, a professor at William S. Boyd School of Law's theory of this, is that "we are all born defenseless, become feeble" (Cooper, F.R., 2015), stating that over time we become ever more frail and defenseless. These two theories coincide in the belief that vulnerability is not something we choose to be, but rather something we are destined to become. Although I understand and to some extent agree, there are still instances where we choose to be vulnerable when we do not have to be. To evidence this I have chosen to investigate 'Rhythm Zero' by Marina Abramovic.



Fig 4, Rhythm zero, Marina Abramovic, 1974

Rhythm zero was an experiment into the boundaries in the capabilities of the human body. In this experiment she stated “I am the object. During this period, I take full responsibility” (Graf, 2022). The six-hour experiment consisted of Abramovic allowing the audience to use the 72 items laid out on a table, in any way they saw fit bound for pain or pleasure while she was unable to move or speak. In the first three hours, her clothes were cut off, in the next 3 hours her neck was cut with a knife to drink her blood. During this time, she was also sexually assaulted multiple times and carried around half naked. Her analysis of this situation was “the experience I drew from this work was that in your own performances you can go very far, but if you leave decisions to the public, you can be killed” (Dezeuze, 2009, p.132), this experiment clearly shows the danger associated with being vulnerable. An interesting note on this experiment was the reaction from the audience members. It is stated that “when a loaded gun was thrust to Marina’s head and her own finger was being worked around the trigger, a fight broke out between the audience factions” (Graf, 2022). This shows that when assigning herself to be vulnerable some people chose to use this against her while others saw fit to protect her, this follows on from Derubeis’ statement by provoking a reaction from the audience. This project presented moral implications to those involved and for those who did nothing, there was a clear balance of people

protecting and hurting her, but for those who did nothing chose to not help a vulnerable person. This art piece has allowed me to understand the full implications of being physically vulnerable, and how sometimes this comes with risks meaning you should always be cautious of who you are vulnerable with.

In this project, I explored how my key words have been conceptualized through art. In doing so I have been able to understand the distinguishability between these phrases. Trust is conceptualized through the idea of faith, to have a firm belief that something or someone is truthful. Perseverance is about the continuation of faith when things get tough, meaning that there is a flow of determination in that you must first have trust in something, to persevere through it. However, vulnerability is about being unprotected providing the link to weakness, this contrasts to the idea of the belief system. A link can be formed between trust and vulnerability, as to show vulnerability you must have a certain level of trust built, while persevering through any barricades between yourself and others. This idea can be seen through the personality shown in the artworks, in which each brings its own story telling device. Differences can be seen in the reactions to the artwork, all the work shown indicates a positive or negative insight has been built. In this essay I found myself being most intrigued by the work of Hannah Höch, in her ability to present current societal issues in a simplistic and artistic way, I was able to visualize the problem. This leads me to think that for my Level 6 independent project, I could create a series of photomontages to display the issues I feel are important to inform people about.

How can we effectively use photomontage as a story telling technique in graphic design?

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