

“Ways of Thinking”

MArts Photography in the Arts

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1901159

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Task One

“Observational Writing”, Ryan Moule

[Semiotic Analysis]

Word Count: 499

Task Two

“Manifesto Writing”, Julia Lockheart

[What do I believe in?]

Word Count: 506

Task Three

“Reflective Writing”, Jon Pugh

[Do you know what you think?]

Word Count: 471

Task One

Observational Writing

As we've grown as a society it seems we've started to create media texts that rely less on literal depictions and more on inference to convey messages to our audiences. This shift could be attributed to many things, including changes in the way people read into texts or differences in culture between generations. Whatever the cause though, we as artists and as audiences have a lot more to read into for every text we consume, especially when human interpretations and 'fabricated truths' (Zwart, 2019) often supersede genuine facts in reporting and journalism.

I am of the opinion that our society's current model of distributing ideas is very fragile, and only really works under the 'Encoding/Decoding' (Hall, 1973) principles that establish a complex dynamic between an audience and the creator of a given text, which while very robust and widely applicable do produce wildly different interpretations due to the wide variety of cultures present in our modern world.

It is through such dynamics that our current concepts of semiotics were born, and it is evident that they must be very effective or else we would not be using them to this day. Often it is even without conscious effort that we follow along with these principles and are able to passively decode messages in texts.



For instance, in this advertising material for Christian Dior's *Sauvage* fragrance we can immediately identify a fairly specific target audience from a single element of the image. It is obvious that the product is aimed at the type of man who believes himself to be 'the handsome rogue', with his loose – but not ill – fitting shirt with the top buttons undone and sleeves turned upwards. This in conjunction with cleanly shaped facial hair and a jaw that could cut through steel gives the audience an immediate idea that if they are to go out and buy this fancy product they too can be as beautiful and attractive as Johnny Depp. The advert makes no effort to express what the product actually smells like, but rather aims to give an idea of what a typical consumer of the product is supposed to look like, definitely reaching at implications of beauty stemming from use of the product. In this particular case the brand's logo does take quite a prideful place in the image, thanks to the premium that a desirable brand name commands on the price of a product, however this is often not the case. In some modern advertising campaigns, a brand's logo almost takes a back seat to allow the delivery of a message within the material to take precedence. This tactic is often employed to encourage audiences to associate this positive message that the brand is pushing with the brand itself, thereby improving the brand's public perception. These interactions are the essence of modern business, with meaning being buried deep into texts for audiences to dig out. The longer they dig, the more time they spend looking at your material rather than someone else's.

Bibliography

Hall, S. (1979) Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse. *Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham*. (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/1to8and11to24and38to48/SOP07.pdf>)

Zwart, H. (2019) Fabricated Truths and the Pathos of Proximity: What Would be a Nietzschean Philosophy of Contemporary Technoscience? *Foundation Science* 24, p.457 Available online September 2019 (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10699-019-09599-3>)

Task Two

Manifesto Writing

1. Originality is dead. To chase it is a fool's errand.
2. Photography is exclusively derivative.
3. To neglect alternate perspectives is to disrespect the experiences of other individuals.
4. One should not ignore their urges to create in forms other than their primary craft.
5. Making mistakes is an important part of being human. Learning from those mistakes is an important part of growing as an individual.
6. Destruction is a valid form of creation.
7. To never take breaks from strenuous tasks is a disservice to yourself. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.'
8. To stay silent is to aid oppression.

“Destruction is a valid form of creation.”

I believe that by destroying something that already exists one does not just break that object, but rather transforms it into something not necessarily new, but certainly different. This transformation is quite unlimited, and the results are defined only by the extent of the imagination behind it. One of my favourite examples of destruction being used within art is Jeff Wall's “Destroyed Room” (1978) photograph.



This image leaves many questions to be answered, like the basic how and why of the room's destroyed state, thereby giving new life to otherwise potentially mundane everyday objects as important components in an artistic composition without making them unrecognisable as their former self. I think this is an important balance to strike when combining destruction with artistic expression.

“Originality is dead”

I want to be very clear that this is not necessarily a bad thing. After all, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. All this really means is that given current ideas and the mass of history in our wake it takes a truly unique mind to have any sort of totally original, impactful things to do and say. Human endeavours in the modern age are often skewed away from the creative and more in the scientific – not to say that the two are mutually exclusive – thanks to the nature of humanity’s current plight of astronomical climate change and all the disastrous effects that come with it. As well as this skew, the young people in control of the current internet-based paradigm find a lot more mileage in rehashing the same things over and over than in creating new and original ideas, hence the recent influx of increasingly frequent viral trends skyrocketing in popularity and, just as quickly, fading into obscurity only to be replaced by another of its kind. What this essentially means is that creative people see the merit in ideas and don’t hesitate to put their own spin on it. All this in itself isn’t a new idea, dozens of creatives throughout history have had that same attitude.

“Photography is exclusively derivative”

By its very nature photography can only be derivative. By this I mean that it can only capture what already exists, be it physical objects or performances by people, willing or unwilling. Of course, a photographer can carefully set the scene and choreograph models in the perfect way to create their vision, but this is no different to any conventional performance art except for it's express purpose is to be photographed.

In terms of physical objects such as architecture, you are essentially capturing the presence of something that was already oh so carefully designed and built perfectly to spec. This is a subject that has already had such time and effort put into it and can be beautiful because of that. A photographer can certainly choose how they want to go about capturing this subject but can't exactly change it in any great way.

Photography could not exist without pre-existing subjects to manipulate into an artist's vision.

Task Three

Reflective Writing



Mimic, Jeff Wall 1982

“Mimic” tells a story of rejection. It’s a staged recreation of an incident of racism that Wall witnessed on the streets of Vancouver and tells of the white man’s rejection of his fellow man for the mere reason that his skin tone is not the same. It tells of the white man’s supposed lover rejecting the man for his bigotry, with visible disgust in her expression and having fallen out of step with the man. The Asian gentleman’s lack of any noteworthy response is a rejection of the white man’s advances, not willing to give an excuse for him to take it further than he already had. It almost feels as though Wall has perfectly depicted the entire human race and its behaviour around discrimination and bigotry using only these three actors. People can either face discrimination, perpetuate discrimination or be disgusted by discrimination. This is of course very general, and the dynamics have somewhat changed since the 80’s but the overall structure still stands.

This work stood out to me as it was a kind of commentary on discrimination that I don't remember really seeing previously. More often such social commentaries are fairly basic in how they treat the issue, pointing out that it's bad and explaining why. This work is somewhat unique in that it's a recreation of an event actually witnessed by the artist which immediately generates a deeper connection than most other similar pieces have. The format of this recreation took its street photography-esque style on from Wall wanting to experiment in the style of street photography practised by some of his peers, such as Robert Frank.

To me this work represents in a single image the entire struggle of racial integration in the relatively young Americas, having only been formed in the way we know them today a few hundred years ago, the countries have still somewhat yet to mature and still struggle with such things to this day. Discrimination has always been rife within these lands and this work I feel is a perfect encapsulation of some of the struggles faced by the kind of society that exists solely through the systematic destruction of what came before it and near constant infighting.

This work has offered a new outlook on life by its very existence. It almost urges me to make similar commentaries on issues faced in my locale. Just as Wall recreated a scene he witnessed on the street; I could do the same for the things that I'm witnessing every time I glance at any news source. It's increasingly important in our confusing and deceitful world for artists to recognise that they have a voice, and they should use it to the best of their ability. After all, to willingly remain silent when recognising these issues is to sacrifice some of your humanity.