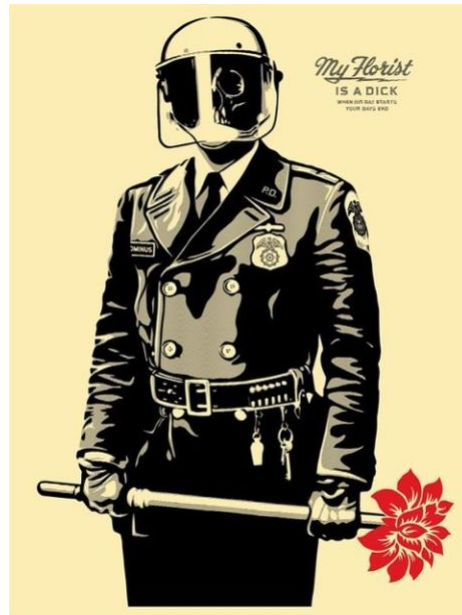




MY FLORIST IS A DICK

June 23, 2015

RESEARCH IN CONTEXT ADAD5003

How can semiotic analysis be used to critically evaluate the work of two creative practitioners from your discipline area? Begin by deconstructing the social and political aspects of their work, and compare and contrast the intended purpose and constructed messages in your analysis. Conclude by discussing whether this mode of analysis is useful to practitioners.

A report in which I will curate an essay exploring how designs display politics in their visuals art.

Katy Montague | BA Graphic Design | Timi O'Neill | 1801630

Words: 3288

Thesis Statement

Design has an impact on our lives. Designers need to provide a message within their work. Their aim is to provide a solution or view on a certain issue or in some cases provide a topic of conversation. In this case, the designers look at social issues, political issues and find a way to provide their view and opinion. Politics are important in our day to day lives and designers are finding ways to show that. Throughout our era we have been able to depict images and see how the curator signifies and has signified political and social aspects. Are symbols and colours in their pieces a way in which we can unravel the hidden meaning and message in which they are trying to get through to us? We can begin to understand which problems and issues are being raised within, being either social or political. Does their perception affect the way in which we view politics? How Is this reflected in art?

Politics in art has always been a subject matter in which is reflected upon. Political graphic design allows us to take a stand and reflect current situations happening around the world in our current era and historical eras. Politics is a subject of conflict and I feel we are able to also provide an overview and, in some cases, people use it to provide a bias and sway people to vote in what they believe in or also persuade people to go for an opposition of their choice. We can begin to give pieces a semiotic analysis and uncover the hidden meaning to them.

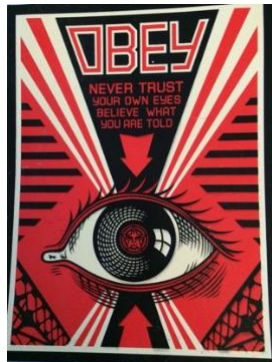
The journal, *“Five Ways of Seeing the Relationship Between Art and Politics — In a Time of Trump”* shows that the way politics are perceived in art and also provide topic of conversation for many (Medium, 2019). Many articles and news pages look at how we are being treated and how society and how politics determine power, *“In Britain today there is little counter-narrative to the ‘me first’, humans-as-commodity culture we appear to be sliding inexorably towards. Here, fairness isn’t used as a tool to judge politics or policymakers – and it is determined by those with power, as opposed to those without.”* (Dannydorling.org, 2019).

I started looking at movements in which designers used politics and came across one strong one being *‘Hope to Nope: Graphics and Politics 2008-18’*. This movement looks at *“catastrophic shifts in global politics, economy and the environment”* and displays designers work in a grouped for in which could be portrayed as an exhibition (Design Museum, 2019). The exhibition is said to include beer mats and badges to flags, posters and placards, with plenty of new media and technology. I decided to choose two of the designers to do a semiotic analysis. One being Shepard Fairey and the other Marwan Shahin. These artists pieces are very similar in the sense of style. However, when it comes to meaning we are able to see the differences in meaning and symbolisation of the imagery and we can look at Paradigmatic relations.

Politics in design – Shepard Fairey

How Shepard Fairey depicts and symbolises our political social world.

The first political designer I will be looking at is Shepard Fairey. Shepard Fairey's work is said to provide viewers with the ideology of politics and society. You can see this by the way semiotics are used. We are shown this by symbols, colours and text. We can see a strong sense of how Fairey has used many connotations within his work to justify the meaning.



Eye, 2009

I feel this image signifies the idea of being watched by society. We look at eyes in pieces of art and symbols as being one of the most known symbols in many cultures. The eye is said to be an indication of good, evil, protection, wisdom, knowledge, secrecy and mystery (Handley, 2019). However, by looking at this piece we can see how it would be attributed towards evil. I feel we always look at the eye as an iconic sign, and has many meanings! Looking at the journal: meaning and morality: a semiotic approach to evil eye accusations In a Greek village. We can see how it could further symbolise the meaning of *is shown to*

articulate concepts of fate and character with the criteria for inclusion in the village society – within a Greek village (HERZFELD, 1981). The colours mainly used are red and black. Red is said to represent and reflect the idea of fire and blood and is also connected with the theme of war and anger. Colours can be associated with a form of semiotics, *“If we consider colour as a sign, we are including all the aspects, because a sign is not a previously defined thing, but a consequence of various factors and of the context in which it is taken as such. Colour may function as a sign for a physical phenomenon, for a physiological mechanism, or for a psychological association”.* Whereas, black is said to reflect *“Black is a mysterious colour that is typically associated with the unknown or the negative” (Bourn, 2019).*

In my opinion to me black reflects depression and darkness, it also gives a sense of mystery and it can be a very harsh and meaningful shade to use. This piece was curated in the medium of screen-print.

We can look at the *“The way social media is shaping our politics is truly terrifying”* in which looks at *“social networks can distort decision making and produce undemocratic outcomes” (telegraph, 2019).* This article gives an insight into what I am focusing on and provides a psychological way of being able to perceive the pieces and how symbols have an effect within the work.

This style of graphic design reminds me of photomontage which *was first said to be used as a technique by the Dadaists.* This era was a crucial time in history as it was around the time of 1915.



Peace Guard 2, Version 2

The next piece I will be analysing is *Peace Guard 2, Version 2, 2018* by Shepard Fairey. Just by looking at this piece you can start to see what the symbols represent. The message behind it is said to be *communicating his anti-war stance and dedication to be fighting for peace (Seditionart.com, 2019). which I believe is a strong topic within today's society*. Again, the colours are familiar to those of the previous analysed piece. I feel this image is so powerful and you can see that straight away. The idea of the person holding the gun could represent we are always aware that guns are a form of violence and we have been able to depict that from a young age. The denotation of the rose could be in general just a flower. In my opinion the flower coming out of the gun shows us that it's a sense to end peace and I feel peace is a symbol strongly represented by flowers, the connotation of flowers in some cases also provide a sense of femininity. Personally, I feel this image provides me with a cold sensation due to the colours and way it has been depicted in a distressed print making way. We can see the

meaning in a semiotic way. The way semiotics is used provides us with an analysis of a still image in which helps us to investigate the workings of an artist, image and demonstrate a *point*. *The journal I looked at gives an overview (Bauer, 2010)*. For example, we use semiotic analysis to break down images and work out what certain aspects of the message trying to be conveyed is. In this instant it is used to depict the meaning of “Make peace not war”. Semiotics are said to help influence and help us break down the meaning of some pieces of work by the symbolisms meanings.

Politics in design – Marwan Shahin

Why is politics a problem in our society?

The second designer I looked at was Marwan Shahin.

Marwan Shahin is also a politically based design. I also discovered Marwan Shahin from the movement ‘*Hope to Nope: Graphics and Politics 2008-18*’.



Born to ride

The next image I found is *'Born to Ride'*. This piece does not have an explanation, although I found a website in which displayed many examples of rules in which females in the Arab World have to follow, from dress codes, women had to wear Burqa's covering the entire body and face with a mesh screen over the eyes. They must wear black loose garments and a headscarf. It is said to show modesty (www.dw.com), 2019) *Which could be a theme within this piece as the person is seen to wearing a burqa.* However, I believe it is associated with *Islam*. We can look at images and reflect on examples of what Arab women are wearing, such as Hijabs, Burqas and other items. Also, we can look at the restrictions they have in today's society. I feel this piece is very dark and reminds me of war of the worlds which also has a view of being attacked which I believe people who follow Islam are due to issues surrounding Isis, Although, this is not the case. behind the piece. I feel the motorcycle is to represent the woman gaining freedom and being able to follow her own set of rules and is feeling free. The air crafts could signify the idea of *Airplanes symbolize parts of your journey through life (Klein and Klein, 2019).* We can also begin to look at the colours in which are being used are very similar to those of Shepard Fairey's work. The main colours used again are red and black and we have looked at these and said that they strongly give off the idea of being more drawn to danger, fear and passion. We can also see how danger and fear is represented throughout the piece. However, in this instance we are introduced with the colour gold in which is said to idea of *the colour gold has different connotations in different parts of the world, across various cultures, religions*

(Olesen, 2019). Breaking down the image we can really see colour really does set the mood and provides us with a semiotic analysis to show how society may have been perceived within this piece was produced in/looks back upon. To summarise, I feel this piece again shows a woman taking freedom into her own hands and taking off on a motorbike and taking power. Which the colours represent.



The Third Eye Pasha

The next piece by Marwan was the piece called “*The Third Eye Pasha*”. As you can see this image clearly represents the impression of Nazi Germany! You can also see this by giving the piece a semiotic analysis. You being to notice object an element’s such as the uniform. which is an iconic symbol in which represents the figure of Hitler. We can also see how there is a third eye being represented within the piece, this is said to show the idea of

“...the gateway to higher consciousness. It may alternately symbolize a state of enlightenment.” (Token Rock, 2019). To link this piece to political and social

aspects of our world we can look at the book, *West Germany* (RLE.) Not only does design look good but it also conveys a message. Looking at the book we begin to understand the ways in which politics have a huge effect on society and it covers each subject matter related. We are able to analyse when politics began to make a strong appearance after the Third Reich, and people began to become politically active after May 1945, countries were able to determine policy and also occupy power! (*Childs and Johnson, 2014*). I believe the messages given out by a piece of design are a way we begin to perceive in the early stages of our life, Perception is said to be key to interpreting and understanding and I feel like this is why we have a lot of designers using politics within design. It is said that our brain naturally decides decisions based on frequency with things we have experienced in past times and something we've seen and perceived before! This is why we are said to perceive images and art (*Zalla, 2019*). Looking at the book we can begin to understand how art makes us feel, "We are convinced that whatever people report in their encounters with art is an important dimension of human existence." (*Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990*) We can begin to see how it makes us feel and if it makes us feel positive then it can also make us feel a contrast and negative, and I feel as if political art gives us a negative and cautious feeling.

We are able to understand the impact it does have upon us. Furthermore, by looking at the news article, 'Why are we obsessed with the Nazis?

'(<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/06/why-obsessed-nazis-third-reich>, 2019) We are able to see how the period of time in which Hitler tried to rein

and the lasting impact it has had upon our generation and how we have come to have the negative view on Nazis. I feel this piece overall reflects the message of - The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (book).



The 2 Vth

The final piece I will be looking at is Marwan Shahin, The 2Vth.

This piece again uses the colours red, black, gold and white in which we said was overall to represent idea of being more drawn to danger, fear, passion. We can begin to see imagery appearing in his work in which we are familiar with and recognise from somewhere. The journal *“SYMBOLISM, ITS MEANING AND EFFECT: THE UNIVERSAL ALGEBRA OF CULTURE”*, explains how *recognition works and how symbols affect that and looks at the theory of symbols, “In light of the naturalistic response to Lockean scepticism he seeks to foster, Whitehead claims that we need a theory of symbol that focuses on sense-perception and, more precisely, on the universality of the presentation/representation dialectic.”*

And also reflects upon the historical side of a symbol, *“Broadly speaking, a symbol has always been a lieutenant: etymologically, it stands or holds for something/someone else (“in lieu of”),⁷ it is a conventional sign of some object, idea or process. In Greek, ‘symbolo’n means token or watchword. (SYMBOLISM, ITS MEANING AND EFFECT: THE UNIVERSAL ALGEBRA OF CULTURE, 2019)*

We are aware the mask is that of anonymous who are a political and social group in which are about within our current days. I feel like they wanted to touch upon this subject as it relevant and current within this generation and it is something people look at in an authority’s way. Anonymous is a decentralized international hacktivist group that is widely known, *“On Christmas, just after the Stratfor hack, Sabu and I happened to be logged into the same channel on IRC, the chatting protocol that serves as the medium through which most Anonymous members planned large-scale operations. I asked the AntiSec members if they were worried about a law enforcement response to Stratfor. Sabu shot back: **we’re used to that heat, we survived the first rounds of the raids**” (Norton, 2019)* this quote from the article shows us in a brief statement, what anonymous are and we can begin to think of how this can affect our generation and why people would be for and against it. I feel the designer wanted to touch upon this subject matter as it is something which is ongoing.

Conclusion – How is our social and political ways perceived within design.

To conclude we are able to look at both designers and see how they are trying to make a similar impact on our generation by looking at historical and current events in which will and/or have had a lasting effect on how we act and are able to form views to our current day. We can also now begin to understand how symbols and semiotics have a lasting effect on what we see and begin to familiarise ourselves with to allow us to create the message before we ever read into it. I would say that Shepard Fairey's work is more typographically involved and bold handmade/printed theme which looks in a way like a piece of history, which I do believe the pieces will be looked upon in the future in order to enable us to see how our political society was within this current century. And although they are very similar in style we can see how they are both portraying different messages in their own ways. Moreover, we can see how Marwan's pieces have more structure and no typographical elements and all we have to go off is the symbolism, colours and imagery in which we are provided with. I believe that after looking at the journal Visual communication's potential in design activism and design for social change. *"According to designer and researcher Jorge Frascara, the aim of visual communication is to change attitude and thus behaviour in its audience (2006, p. 31) and not about the production of functional artefacts that are able to physically address a given problem."* (Bichler and Beier, 2016) and how the impact design can have on our daily lives we can understand why these designers would like to make us aware of the situations in which were

wrong of going wrong and we can really understand the warnings/danger side by the semiotic analysis of colours provided by the artists which are very similar. However, Marwan adds in the colour gold in which could represent cultures, religions. I found this by looking at www.color-meanings.com, the colour gold meaning. According to, the journal Colour and psychological functioning: a review of theoretical and empirical work, *“Some responses to colour stimuli are presumed to be solely due to the repeated pairing of colour and particular concepts, messages, and experiences. Others, however, are presumed to represent a biologically engrained predisposition that is reinforced and shaped by social learning.”* (Elliot, 2015) This allows us to understand the way in which colours have a psychological effect on you, *“Thus, for example, red may not only increase attractiveness evaluations when viewed on the face, but also when viewed on a shirt or dress. As implied by the name of the theory, the physical and psychological context in which colour is perceived is thought to influence its meaning and, accordingly, responses to it.”* (Elliot, 2015)

After reviewing this piece of writing we can see the ways in which colours are perceived on a day to day basis. Colours and images make you feel a certain way or feel a set of emotions that come with them. Overall, in my opinion these artists pieces have provided me with feelings. Especially Peace Guard 2 by Fairey. This piece made me feel something in which no other pieces have before and it made me feel cold. The colours and the imagery just made me feel as if something was wrong and caused me to feel a slight bit of anxiety, The article “The Distancing-Embracing model of the enjoyment of negative emotions in art

reception” gives us a brief explanation of how this works (1) compositional interplays of positive and negative feelings are hypothesized to render art processing richer in emotional variation and less prone to induce boredom than types of pleasure that involve exclusively positive feelings; (2) concomitant mixed emotions are hypothesized to serve as bipolar mediators for incorporating negative emotions into positive enjoyment (Menninghaus et al., 2017) the feeling in which we can feel from looking at pieces of art and how we read them. I believe semiotic analysis was a successful way I order to analyse these two practitioners.

Bibliography

Design Museum. (2019). Hope to Nope: Graphics and Politics 2008-18. [online] Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/hope-to-nope-graphics-and-politics-2008-18> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

HERZFELD, M. (1981). meaning and morality: a semiotic approach to evil eye accusations in a Greek village. American Ethnologist, 8(3), p.562.

Bourn, J. (2019). Meaning of the Colour Black |. [online] Bourn Creative. Available at: <https://www.bourncreative.com/meaning-of-the-color-black/> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

Bauer, M. (2010). *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound*. 1st ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publ.

Seditionart.com. (2019). *Peace Guard by Shepard Fairey*. [online] Available at: https://www.seditionart.com/shepard_fairey/peace_guard [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

DE QUETTEVILLE, H. (2019). *The way social media is shaping our politics is truly terrifying*. telegraph. [online] Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/09/18/way-social-networks-shape-politics-truly-terrifying/> [Accessed 27 Nov. 2019].

(www.dw.com), D. (2019). *Women's rights in the Islamic world* | DW | 27.09.2017. [online] DW.COM. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/womens-rights-in-the-islamic-world/a-40714427> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

Klein, S. and Klein, S. (2019). *Airplane Dream Symbol*. [online] Dream Stop. Available at: <http://dreamstop.com/airplane-dream-symbol/> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

Olesen, J. (2019). *Gold Colour Meaning - The Colour Gold*. [online] Color-Meanings.com. Available at: <https://www.color-meanings.com/gold-color-meaning-the-color-gold/> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

Token Rock. (2019). *Third Eye - A Thorough Explanation*. [online] Available at: <https://www.tokenrock.com/explain-third-eye-83.html> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

Childs, D. and Johnson, J. (2014). *West Germany (RLE)*. Florence: Taylor and Francis, p.15.

Zalla, M. (2019). *Five fundamentals of great design: Perception | Thinking | Landor*. [online] Landor. Available at: <https://landor.com/thinking/five-fundamentals-of-great-design-perception> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

Token Rock. (2019). *Third Eye - A Thorough Explanation*. [online] Available at: <https://www.tokenrock.com/explain-third-eye-83.html> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

SYMBOLISM, ITS MEANING AND EFFECT: THE UNIVERSAL ALGEBRA OF CULTURE. (2019). 12th ed. [eBook] p.354. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/25636919/_Symbolism_Its_Meaning_and_Effect_The_Universal_Algebra_of_Culture_2016_ [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

Norton, Q. (2019). *How Anonymous Picks Targets, Launches Attacks, and Takes Powerful Organizations Down*. [online] Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2012/07/ff-anonymous/#> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

Elliot, A. (2015). *Colour and psychological functioning: a review of theoretical and empirical work. Frontiers in Psychology*, [online] 6. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4383146/> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2019].

Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T. and Koelsch, S. (2017). *The Distancing-Embracing model of the enjoyment of negative emotions in art reception. Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 40.

Bichler, K. and Beier, S. (2016). *Graphic Design for the Real World? Visual Communication's Potential in Design Activism and Design for Social Change. Artifact*, 3(4), p.11.