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Programme of Study: BA Graphic Design

Module: ADAD4018 Ways of Thinking

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Tasks:

Task One: Semiotic Analysis = 503 words

Task Two: Manifesto = 487 words

Task Three: Practice-based writing = words

Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics encompasses how humans as a society interpret the world around them through images and text. In his essay *The World of Wrestling*, Barthes states that to the public at large “What matters is not what it thinks but what it sees.” (Barthes, 1972, p.13), relating to the idea that images fuel our perceptions far beyond the way we actively acknowledge. This is further reinforced through advertisements, which strive to subconsciously appeal to their audience to push their agenda. “The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe” (Berger, 2008, p.5) and such, by manipulating what we believe, companies are able to directly alter our perspectives. They do so through clever use of the aspects of semiotics.



Fig.1: Life is easier on iPhone, Apple advertising campaign, 2017

The relationship between a ‘signifier’ and a signified’ originated from Ferdinand de Saussure in his efforts to better understand the subtle nature of linguistics. In the advertisement for the iPhone, the signifier could be, for example, the blue background. At face value it is a gradient blue background, but with the insight of Saussure’s teachings one might infer otherwise. The blue signifies a calming feeling, as blue has held associations with loyalty, calmness and serenity. This in combination with the anchorage text displayed above the phone, creates a cohesive sign that ‘life is easier on iPhone’. Albeit subtle and mostly unrecognisable to the consumer, it strongly reinforces the message Apple is trying put across.

Another signifier is the anchorage text itself, simply laid out in the middle of the image, paralleling the phone. The Hierarchy of text automatically draws the eye to the statement, which is memorable and easy to read. The use of the word 'life' also implies that those who use an iPhone simply lead better lifestyles by default, because they own an Apple product over any other brand.

The image of the phone itself is perhaps the most significant part of the whole advertisement as it is the embodiment of the aforementioned 'easier'. The lit-up screen lends itself to the subheading 'And that starts as soon as you turn it on', suggesting that achieving a serene lifestyle is as simple as turning on the device. Furthermore, it appears almost as if the displayed text is a projection from the screen, which is mostly tilted away from the viewer. This signifies Apple using premeditated concepts, such as the dominance of Apple products in the populous, to further the idea of comfort and knowing, as the consumer does not need to be concerned about a massive change in GUI but can gain a better phone with the same, trusted aspects of what they love.

In conclusion, this simple advertisement, upon further dissection, displays implicit references to ease of use and life, subliminally suggesting that the Apple user experience is far superior in comparison. That message is achieved through the use of semiotics in the chosen layout and colours of the advertisement, designed to passively encourage the viewers to switch to the 'better' option if they're not a customer yet.

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Figure 1: *Life is easier on iPhone*, Apple advertising campaign, 2017, Accessed: <https://www.theapplepost.com/2018/04/23/apple-shares-two-new-lifes-easier-on-iphone-ads/> (Accessed: 1/11/ 2021)

Manifesto

1. Taking breaks is important
2. Making mistakes should not be ostracised
3. Overly sophisticated language is completely unnecessary in an academic setting
4. Achieving perfection from the get-go is nigh impossible and shouldn't be the standard people hold themselves to as it will only lead to burnout and disappointment
5. You never stop learning or developing your skills
6. Comparing your work to some one else's is not a constrictive means of evaluating the quality of said work and is mostly detrimental to the creative efforts
7. Staying in your comfort zone will not allow any opportunities for growth
8. Constructive Criticism and being able to reflect on your work is instrumental in a creative field

2. Making mistakes should not be ostracized

From a young age we are taught that making mistakes is inherently wrong and a habit we should do our best to eliminate. Mistakes are shamed and lead many individuals to fear the all-encompassing void that exists outside of their comfort zone. In the Annual Review of Psychology (2017), Janet Metcalfe writes that 'error tolerance encourages students' active, exploratory, generative engagement', pointing out the wrongs in the age-old assumption that making a mistake is one of the worst things one can do in an academic setting. Though it is aimed primarily at younger students the message is equally as accurate when referring to any other aspect of learning. As a society we're overly cautious when it comes to our approach to mistakes. It hinders progress and discourages exploration of alternative ideas. Instead, Mistakes should be seen as stepping stones for

accomplishment and a positive force for improvement. (Swartz, R. 1976). Only in acknowledging that will we be able to progress.

3.Overly sophisticated language is completely unnecessary in an academic setting

In his book 'Style: an anti-textbook', Lanham introduces the idea of how prose is diluted and distorted by academic papers in an effort to flatter those who happen to be able to understand it. He speaks of Mystification for professional purposes and how it overly elaborates on things that could be explained in a much simpler manner and with many fewer words. Academic language poses a serious obstacle for language minority students and students from families of low socioeconomic status. The unnecessary embellishments and complex grammatical constructions make the content more difficult to understand than it rightfully should be by disrupting reading comprehension. (Snow, C 2010, p.450) There are few things more discouraging towards research and learning than not being able to understand the language the content it is written in. And more frustratingly, theoretically being able to understand the language at the level of a native speaker and still being evaded by the seemingly 'concise' ideas written out in scientific journals and texts held in high regard by the general public.

7.Staying in your comfort zone will not allow any opportunities for growth

Creative thinking and problem solving are both an integral part of the process of design. Often, both are hindered by individuals refusing to step out of their metaphorical comfort zone. Exploration is an extremely important part developing ideas and without a variety of influences and styles, can fall short of its true purpose. It entirely too easy to find something we're comfortable in and never challenge ourselves to learn new things because the tried-and-true methods simply feel more

comfortable. Without innovation, a design can become stale and detached, and perhaps worst of all uninteresting. Relying on one skillset and never straying into the unknown is unsustainable as eventually it is bound to become monotonous and repetitive. Even thinking 'outside of the box' becomes impossible when one refuses to relinquish the perspective that is most comfortable to them. There are only so many angles you can explore while rooted in one stationary place.

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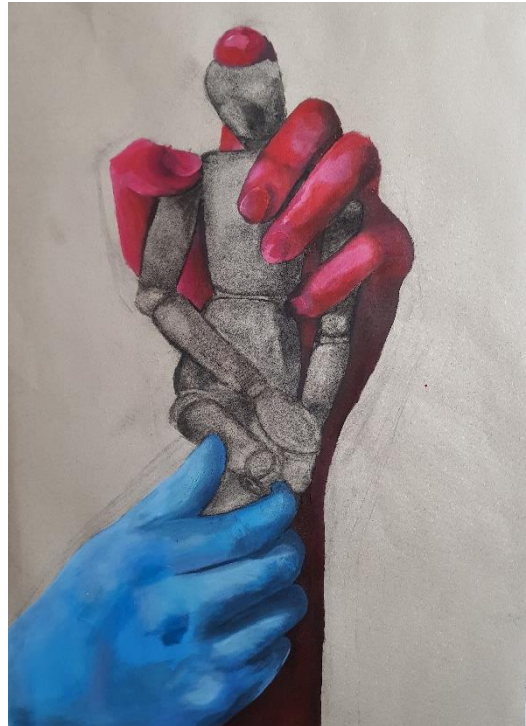
Practice-based Writing

500 words (roughly 125 words per part)

- introduction (what it is)
- description (why is it the way that it is? Why does it exist?)
- interpretation (how can it be explained? What does it represent? The intentions. The steps)
- conclusion (what I learnt? What would I do differently? What it means to me today?)

The piece I chose to reflect upon is rather

straightforward in what it attempts to represent. It is nothing more than what can be seen on the paper-two



hands cradling a wooden artist's mannequin. The background is devoid of any further detail so the eye cannot be distracted from the focal point of the piece. The aim was the simplification of the complex system of emotions, in a way that makes it easier to understand at first glance. 'The internal experience of emotions is highly personal' (Plutchik, 2001 p.344) and so it is only natural that people view things differently, through the prism of their own emotions. My goal in creating this piece was bringing the inner monologue into the outside world by providing a symbolic representation that is both simple and clear regardless of the audience, yet still open to personal interpretation. I painted it as part of my A-level art coursework, as one of four final pieces responding to the theme of 'exploring the use of colour and form in the portrayal of emotion'. The contrast of the bright acrylic paint of the hands and the charcoal greyscale of the figure were meant to highlight the elaborate the differences in how we perceive emotions represented by both colour and shape. 'Colour is clearly central to everyday life' (Sheringham, 2017 p.199) and I sought to exploit that idea in particular in my piece. We first associate the colours and then take in the form as a whole. Even if the viewer spares the painting a single glance, I wanted the message to be easily understandable.

Both aspects of the piece gave me an opportunity to reflect on how I perceive my own emotions and the emotions of those around me contrasted with how others may see them. For example, while I might be inclined to associate the blue hand with sadness and the red with love and warmth, to another person they might signify serenity and anger. Neither interpretation is wrong. We as humans are endlessly complex and such we 'experience several emotions... at the same time' (Plutchik, 2001 p.344) and not just a single one. That is where I struggled conceptually at the beginning of the process and even throughout. It was challenging to simplify the concept of the human psyche into a piece that could speak to everyone on an equal level, yet I feel I've managed to achieve it at least partially. It taught me to better understand how to deal with emotions in everyday life.

If I were to have another go at fulfilling the brief, I'd certainly explore a wider range of techniques as I feel the physical execution of the piece itself could have been better if I wasn't under the constraint of time due to the deadline. I'd change minor cosmetic aspects of the piece, such as the harsher outlines visible behind the hands where I was still learning to realistically capture the form of the hands. However, I wouldn't change anything else because I feel it otherwise accurately portrays the message I was aiming for.

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