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Ways of Thinking – Portfolio of Writing

Tasks in the order I received them:

Task One – Semiotic Analysis – 540 words

Task Two – Manifesto Writing – 496 words

Task Three – Practice-based Writing – 550 words

Task One: Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics is the study of how we interpret signs and symbols through a shared understanding. Charles Sanders Pierce and Ferdinand de Saussure both came up with systems to break down and explore the meanings of signs. Pierce defines “a sign as anything which is so determined by something else” (Atkin, 2008). He then describes signs as indexical, iconic or symbolic. Saussure looks at a sign as being made up of the signifier and the signified. This piece will analyse three components of the book cover *Girl, Woman, Other* using semiotic ideas.

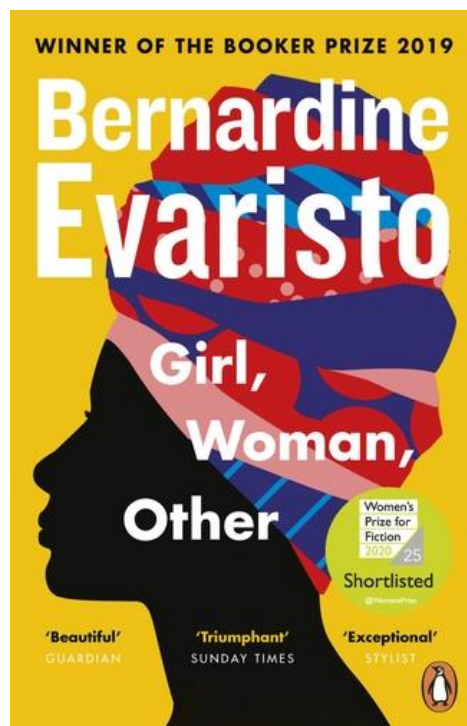


Figure 1, *Girl, Woman, Other* - book cover design, Karan Singh, 2020

The image of the woman would be classified as an icon when looked at against Pierce's theory as it is a clear and recognisable representation of the side profile of a female. The defined shape of the lips and the inclusion of her eyelashes draws on features which are commonly used when depicting femininity.

Although having the face as a silhouette removes details which would give a greater understanding of who she is, one can use how she carries herself and is depicted on the cover to inform some inference to how she sees herself. John Berger (1972) states “a woman’s presence expresses her own attitude to herself” (p. 5). The woman appears to have a strong sense of belief in who she is as a person through her looking straight ahead to create a sharp angle between her chin and neck. This creates a striking image that stands out. Making the image take up most of the cover space further suggests that she is happy with who she is and will give herself room for this (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006).

Colours can be used as a visual representation of feelings and themes that otherwise might be difficult to show. In western culture yellow is used as a symbol of happiness and warmth. This can be seen in the works of many artists who use the colour during positive points in their life and favoured cooler tones, like blues, at times when they were less happy. Notably ‘the baking late summer of 1888 was the happiest of Vincent van Gogh’s life’ (Clair, 2018, p.78). This is when he painted ‘Sunflowers’ and used yellow as the dominant colour in many of his paintings. The yellow of this cover has a warm hue which suggests that the story could be exploring moments of happiness in the lives of the characters.

The dominant text in this design is the author’s name. Using Saussure’s definition of a sign, the letters here make up the persons’ name (the signifier) and in combination of being placed on the front of the book cover we can tell that they are the author (the signified). The name being the largest size of text suggests that the author is well known and their name is

a selling point. This significance is further implied by the text above, which tells us that the author is prize winning.

This semiotic analysis has given the opportunity to explore possible layers of meaning and cultural references that can be interpreted from the different components. The ideas were informed by the context of it being a book cover design. The close analysis led to new understanding that wasn't obvious when looked at initially.

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List of Figures

Figure 1: *Girl, Woman, Other*. Book cover design, Karan Singh (2020) Available at:
<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/311140/girl-woman-other-by-evaristo-bernardine/9780241984994> (Accessed: 6 November 2023)

Task Two: Manifesto Writing

1. Build skills in non-digital image making methods and an awareness of their effects and characteristics to make informed design choices.
2. All art is subjective. Everyone is allowed to have their own opinion as to what they like and dislike when it comes to art.
3. It is important to consider your impact on the environment when creating designs.
4. Celebrate the accidental. Mistakes happen; sometimes for the better.
5. Exposure to art first hand is a more enriching experience than simply looking at reproductions of it.
6. Develop an awareness of past and present graphic design as this can inform current design practices.
7. Take inspiration from everything around, it may not be relevant in the present but could inform work in the future.
8. Do not just limit yourself to one style or technique early on, give yourself time to learn and play to figure out which is best for you, whilst also being open to new ideas.

Manifest Point 1 –

Taking a design from a digital piece or a sketch and producing it through handmade methods can elevate the piece by introducing a new level of detail that a solely digital piece is unable to achieve. For *Catalogue for Fourth Estate* (1997), “Vince Frost uses letterpress as one way of bringing a tactile quality to his work. ‘It has a look of personality and an aura about it that

computers cannot simulate', he says" (Odling-Smee, 2002, p. 55). However, this does not mean that the design processes should be limited to one technology or the other – "integrating old and new methods of production has led to some intriguing and innovative work [...] the potential for new ideas is enormous" (Odling-Smee, 2002, p. 43).

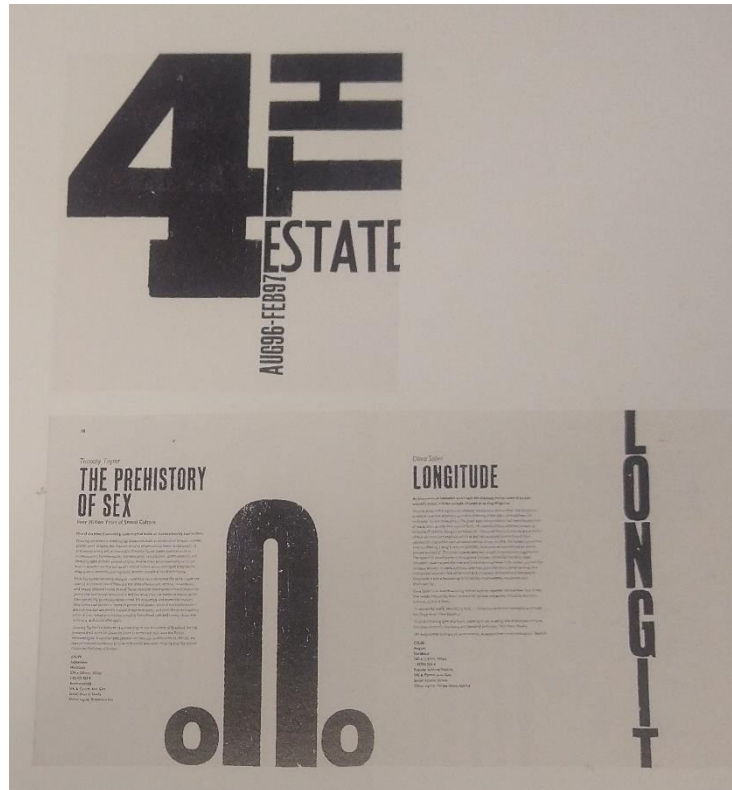


Figure 1, Catalogue for Fourth Estate, Vince Frost, 1997

To know which method is best to use to achieve this, one needs to understand the visual characteristics and physical qualities of how each one looks and works. As David Hockney (2016) states that "every medium has its particular strengths" (p.145). Having an awareness of this means one can make informed decisions as to which process is suited to create the design.

Manifesto Point 5 –

Experiencing art and design first hand, whether at an exhibition or on the street, provides the opportunity for interaction with the physicality of a piece in context – this elevates the encounter in ways that cannot be achieved through looking at a reproduction of the piece. As Lance Esplund (2018) says “Engaging with art is a full-body experience: one in which color, form, space, weight, rhythm, timbre, and structure are felt as much as they are seen” (p.24).



Figure 2, dock, Phyllida Barlow, 2014

A photo of a sculpture is unable to convey the experience of walking around it in person and the ideas this provokes. For Phyllida Barlow “the largeness of sculpture has the possibility to make one engage beyond just the object itself and into other realms of experience.” (Hauser & Wirth 2023).

The ‘viewer’ makes choices of what to focus on, from small details in the markmaking to how the piece works in its surrounding environment which informs their interpretation of it.

Manifesto Point 4 –

Making a mistake often seems like a problem when it happens, which can be frustrating. However, with processing time and being open to the idea that the unplanned can lead in new directions that produce better and more interesting outcomes, the mistake or accident becomes a positive.



Figure 3, Mountain Nymph, Julia Margaret Cameron, 1866

For the 19th century photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, “a mistake became an active rebellion against the status quo” (Ruggeri, 2016). Contemporary critics picked up on the “technical flaws” (The Victoria & Albert Museum, 1972, p.43) in her work. However, she turned them into an opportunity to create her own distinctive artistic photographic style, unlike anyone else’s at the time.

As Richard Holman (2022) said “it’s not whether we find success but how we cope with failure that will define us in the end” (p. 33). However much the problem initially seemed a setback, without mistakes and experiencing failure one is unable to learn and move forward.

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List of Figures

Figure 1: *Catalogue for the Fourth Estate, Vince Frost, 1997*. Photo from p.55 of Odling-Smee, A. (2002) *The New Handmade Graphics: Beyond Digital Design*

Figure 2: *dock, Phyllida Barlow, 2014*. Accessed: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/tate-britain-commission-2014-phyllida-barlow> (Accessed on 19 December 2023)

Figure 3: *Mountain Nymph, Julia Margaret Cameron, 1866*. Accessed: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160112-when-mistakes-make-the-art> (Accessed on 19 December 2023)

Task Three: Practice-based Writing

Through considering a multimedia typographical piece, I will explore the role of reflection during the creative process and how reflection after completion can inform understanding and influence working practice. The project started by selecting a quote from *Mass Communication* by Alan Hancock (1968). I then chose to explore the ideas it conveyed graphically.



Figure 1, multimedia typographical experiment, Bronwyn Eccleson, 2022

David Carson is known for not following the ‘traditional rules’ of layout and design as he believes this “has a way of neutralising things, the work becomes less personal” (Creative Review, 1994). Researching his work for this project influenced me. Whilst my outcome does not echo Carson’s visual style, his outlook allowed me to be more experimental in my layout and font choices. Reflecting now, I think that there is more personality in my design because of this.

With this piece I started with the intention of working digitally for the whole project. But after creating my first idea in Adobe Photoshop and assessing it, I felt that the digital format

did not convey the ideas presented in the quote. I decided to make a physical version using screen printing which I hoped would benefit from the imperfections and uniqueness of this hand printed method and which I could not create digitally. I think the reasoning behind the greater visual interest in the screen printed outcome over the purely digital comes as “generally, people are attracted to rough edges, natural fibres and mistakes they can see” (Odling-Smee, 2002, p. 6). The textured nature of the hand printed surface from different amounts of paint in different areas, has a greater appeal than the solid, flat type in the digital design.

In the moment, it can feel like “ideas emerge in all kinds of different ways, often by chance” (Myerson, 1996, p.15). However, looking back on the piece “what appears to be a spontaneous thought may well have been a long time cooking in the unconscious” (Fletcher, 2001, p. 31). An example of this was my decision to use coloured tissue paper shapes to create a background which I could print the text over. The idea for including this design element occurred to me, although I was not entirely sure where it came from. Reflecting now, I remember that I had previously experimented with printing on top of collaged scraps of tissue paper and liked the effect.

I now realise that reflection and subsequent decision making at each stage is an integral part of my design process, enabling me to take things further and create stronger outcomes. Through this written exploration I have become more aware of the ways I work and how things I have encountered or experimented with previously influence choices I make. I draw

on these ideas and skills at different points to inform my creative work, even though the origin of the inspiration might only occur to me later through reflection.

As a result of these reflections, I would like to build on Carson's approach to questioning the conventional in my work as this concept gives me permission to be freer in my creative practice and more open to alternatives.

I believe it is important to both constantly broaden my frame of reference as well as more actively consider where my ideas come from, as these practices could take projects in new and unexpected directions.

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List of Figures

Figure 1: *multimedia typographical experiment*, Bronwyn Eccleson, 2022