

Staffordshire
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title: visual
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Staffordshire University Module Title: Visual Communication Module Code: GRAPH40087 Semioticians claim that successful and effective visual communication is said to produce a “unity in meaning”. Explain what this means and relate it to the process of ‘problem solving’ or finding a ‘visual solution’. By Matthew Hill Date: 14.

12. 17 Word Count: 949 words Tutor: Lucas Swann In this essay, I am going to explain how successful and ineffective visual communication can produce a unity in meaning and how it relates to the process of finding a visual solution. In order to answer the question I must first look at the basic foundations of semiotics and what different types of sign exist.

There are two parts of signs originally depicted, the signifier which is the form of the sign, and then the signified which is the thing that is being represented by the signifier. The viewer needs to be able to link the two parts in order for it to be a successful sign and this linkage is what Charles Sanders Peirce described as the third part of signage. However, the main point of the sign is the first two as a sign cannot exist without them; the third is only how it is perceived. As Steven Bradley, a designer and author, writes “Signs can take many forms.

They can be words, numbers, sounds, photographs, paintings, and road signs among and more” (Bradley, 2016) this shows that from a brief analysis of the types of signs that exist you can conclude that there are many different types of visual communication, some more effective than others but I will discuss that further into the essay. Despite the many existing types they can still all be placed into three distinct categories, these being icons, indexes, and

symbols. To briefly summarise them; an icon is a direct visual resemblance, for example, a photograph, of the signified item, an index is casually linked, for example, a fingerprint to represent a human, and finally a symbol has no visual connection to the signifier only a cultural agreement to its meaning, for example, a dove to represent peace.

Out of the three, the icon is the most effective as it is the literal resemblance of the signifier and therefore will produce a greater unity in meaning across different than the others as little to no cultural learning needs to take place to understand the idea. A unity in meaning is the same understanding of something across different groups and cultures, for example, a red traffic light meaning stop. This is a perfect example of a successful piece of visual communication as it has provided a visual solution for the problem of needing a sign to represent a halt in the movement of traffic. As John Storey wrote “Semiotics makes us aware that the cultural values with which we make sense of the world are a tissue of conventions that have been handed down from generation to generation by the members of the culture of which we are a part” (Storey, 1996) this explains that our acquired understanding of language is developed from our community and accumulated family knowledge, therefore, we are only able to interpret what we already know in terms of language and would be unable to recognise signs with foreign concepts. This, therefore, highlights the critical importance of a successful sign being able to convey a unity in meaning to get across its message to the audience.

Visual problem solving is finding the right language to communicate with an audience, in terms of semiotics this would be something that applies to all <https://assignbuster.com/staffordshire-university-module-title-visual-communication-module/>

the different groups that would need to be catered for so would need to have a unity in meaning throughout the entire audience to be successful. A sign must therefore not only have a cultured understanding but a basic human instinct to really get across its message. Following natural cultured instincts such as red for danger means that there is no communication barrier for the sign and the viewer which is vital for the sign to be effective. As a language is a system of signs it means that sign must be compatible to fit with the viewer's language which again will derive from the cultured instincts.

Saussure wrote about the "role of signs as part of social life" (Saussure, 1916) which shows how pivotal sign communication is to the viewer and reinforces the point of how critical it is for the sign to fit with the viewer's language. In addition to this, Saussure is communicating his consideration of how the cultured understand from the viewer's social life impacts their understanding of signs, for example how an inside joke is only understood by people in the group it was created in, the same works for signs, a person could associate a certain sign with a meaning purely based on their social influences and those very influences are able to change the meaning of a sign. Reverting back to the question, a sign is again successful if it can fit in with the instinctual understandings of signs that the viewer has in order for the sign's perceived meaning not to be susceptible to change.

Overall it is clear that for a sign to be successful it absolutely must fit in with the cultured understanding of the viewer and reflect a meaning that can be understood across different cultures and groups so that the interpretation of the sign is a shared meaning. If the shared meaning is achieved then the sign can solve the problem that it was intended for as a means of communication or

a visual solution. While the theory of semiotics has only been around in its modern form for around one hundred years, its thought process can be seen throughout time in the form of cave paintings and other visual ideas intended to tell stories or simply have a single meaning. This is why we are able to understand those signs despite the cultural and age differences, purely down to the cultural understandings that have been passed down from generation to generation. Bibliography Bradley, Steven (2016): Icon, Index, and Symbol — Three Categories of Signs Storey, John (Ed.

) (1996): What is Cultural Studies? London: Arnold
Saussure, Ferdinand de (1916/1974): Course in General Linguistics (trans. Wade Baskin). London: Fontana/Collins