

Written Response

Unit 2: Positions Through Iterating

Line of Inquiry

Through the iterative process of making, I began to examine the position of authoritative control held by a designer over narrative construction and its relationship to viewer interpretation.

I explored this subject using methods such as manipulation, captioning, repetition and sequencing to re-form imagery extracted from unedited documentary footage.

Formally, the project took shape as a collection of iterative printed publications. The publications consist of multiple versions of a singular narrative made up of images and captions that vary in levels of clarity and accuracy. The publications sit alongside a *graphic key*, which maps out the sequence of images and their corresponding captions.

How might my work embody the subjective nature of engaging with difficult information? How do we make sense of information? What is the relationship between maker's intent and viewer's interpretation? What is the relationship between image, text, sequence and meaning? Can these relationships be challenged?

This project is an inquiry into how we *shape* and *see* things. It aims to deal with concepts of the construction of 'truth' and perception. It is an emphasis on the labor involved in making meaning and subsequently the labor involved in interpretation and sense-making.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Haraway, D. (1988) 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.' *Feminist Studies*, 14(3). pp. 575–599

Donna Haraway (1988) suggests that knowledge is created by those with unique subjective positions. Therefore such situated knowledge can potentially be incomplete, inaccurate, manipulated and unreliable. She highlights that the interpretation of such positioned knowledge subsequently depends on a viewer's subjective position (ibid.).

This informed my decision to explore the complex the relationship between maker, viewer and meaning. My iterations consider how one's perspective or understanding of a given material is shaped and reshaped based on specific, possibly unreliable, information. I did so by abandoning the pursuit of an objective singular narrative within my iterative process. I then began to explore the potentials of subjective, unreliable narration and the impact this has on interpretation. I am interested in the continuous nature of the process of sense-making; how taking time to engage with a multiplicity of narratives can build on, stretch, confuse and challenge prior understanding.

2. Rock, M. ([1996] [2009] 2013) 'Designer As Author' and 'Fuck Content.' *Multiple Signatures: On Designers, Authors, Readers and Users*. New York: Rizzoli. pp. 45–56, 91–95

Both 'Fuck Content' and 'Designer As Author' by Michael Rock (2013) have enhanced and challenged my understanding of the role of a designer as an authoritative voice.

In 'Fuck Content,' Rock (ibid.) argues that the shaping of content has as profound of an impact on meaning and interpretation as the content itself. In this project I am in pursuit of reshaping stills extracted from raw documentary footage to create multiple versions of a singular narrative. I do this through layering in original interpretive text that corresponds to manipulated stills from the footage, which is then compiled into a categorised collection of sequenced publications. This project originates new content (captions) and manipulates existing content (manipulated still images that are translated into a publication) to create new meaning.

In addition to this, in 'Designer As Author,' Rock (ibid.) remarks that by placing the focus on the designer's voice, their 'presence becomes a limiting factor, containing and categorising the work' and its interpretations. While this project can be seen purely as an exercise in taking control, as designer as author, of meaning through form, sequencing, manipulation and reliable/unreliable captioning; the created meanings are intended to be viewed and (mis)interpreted in numerous ways. The unreliable captions and images within the iterative exploration leaves room for multiplicity in viewer interpretations independent from, yet not entirely uninfluenced, by authoritative intent.

3. Ross, L. (2014) *Language in the Visual Arts: The Interplay of Text and Imagery*. Jefferson: Macfarland.

Leslie Ross (2014) examines the many ways in which we *read* images, text and their relationship with one another. She remarks that often images and words work together in assisting a viewer 'with identifying the figures and subjects' within an image however, the composition of image and text can also be used to 'puzzle' a viewer (ibid., p. 43).

In my work, I wanted to scrutinise our instinctive faith in the convention of combining image and text to *assist* in understanding. The captions I have written vary in degree of clarity, accuracy and interpretive usefulness; as the images in my iterations decrease in clarity, their textual counterparts increase in the ability to aid in sense-making. This process lead to narratives constructed using images and text in sequences that are 'deliberately contradictory and quite purposefully cryptic or enigmatic,' (ibid., p. 69). The purpose of this ambiguity is to engage the viewer deeply in the slow, laborious process of decoding, discovering and (mis)understanding meaning from an image.

4. Sontag, S. (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Sontag (2003) probes into the intentions of an author and the perceptions of a viewer in the context of imagery that relates to politics, war and suffering. The text calls for deeper consideration of the way an image and its subjects are framed and contextualised. Through this inquiry she highlights the need for viewers to recognise context and author's intent, along with the importance of being cognisant of the potentially contradictory interpretations that different viewers may have (ibid.).

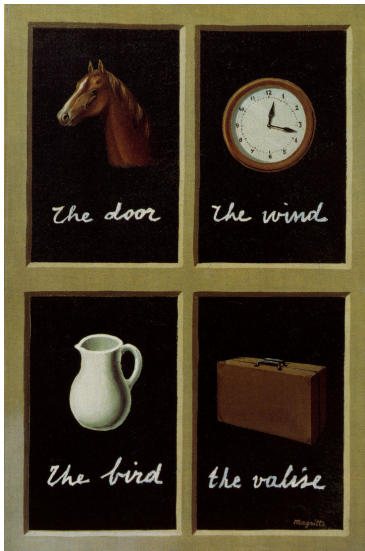
While Sontag makes these suggestions with regards to political imagery; *considered interpretation* is a practice that can (and perhaps should) be applied to all kinds of complex subject matter. In my work, the obscured imagery and formal construction of the narrative sequence deliberately and purposefully forces a viewer to spend time understanding the material they are engaging with; to encourage the practice of slow viewing and *considered interpretation*.

5. *The Girl Chewing Gum*. (1976) Directed by John Smith. [Film]

'In *The Girl Chewing Gum*' an authoritative voice over seems to be directing the events occurring in a busy street (Smith, 1976); this apparent directorial voice seems to be in control of the people, cars and moving objects on screen. As the director's commands get more specific and absurd, we realise that the voice over is a preemptive description rather than a controlled direction of the subjects in the film.

It isn't the subjects of the film being controlled, but rather the viewer's perception of what is being shown. The film deepens my understanding of *designer as director as author*; it is the ability to control perception and influence the interpretation of content. Here the manipulation of content - content that perhaps the author had no real control over; such as found raw documentary footage in my case - becomes the content. In my work, I similarly aim to draw attention to the narrative control that words impose on the way we make sense of visual material. I do this by misleading the viewer with an interplay of reliable and unreliable narrative captions and image sequences.





6. Margitte, R. (1935). *La Clef des Songes*. [Oil on Canvas]. Available at: <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/180/2390> [Accessed: 5th May 2022].

Rene Magritte is known for puzzling pairings of objects and words in his paintings. In this particular piece, *La Clef des Songes* (1935), three out of the four object-text pairings are 'incorrect'. However, the 'valise' is paired correctly to represent the painted object.

In my work I wanted to incorporate this interplay of accuracy and inaccuracy; it further emphasises the disjointed nature of the 'incorrect' pairings. Or perhaps, the meanings of incorrect and correct can be questioned in itself. It can be a useful tool to evoke confusion among viewers, it asks the viewer to question what is being presented and represented to them. It leaves room for interpretation, and accepts misinterpretation. It balances the role of maker, viewer and subject in the process of making meaning.