Ferdinand De Saussure, along with Charles Sander Pierce introduced semiotics in the early 1900’s. Pierce proposed that there are three different distinguishing types of understanding of a sign. An ‘icon’, ‘index’ and a ‘symbol’. Whether a sign is in one category or more is dependent upon its relationship with the sign itself known as the reference and its projected meaning.

Saussure proposed that there was no inherent relationship between that which carries the meaning, known as the ‘signifier’, usually with a word or symbol. And the actual meaning, which is carried by the ‘signified’. For example the word ‘car’ is not actually a car, in terms of the objet or machine. The meaning of the word ‘car’ could be carried by any letters or words that the linguistic community has chosen the word car to represent it. It just happens to be that the linguistic community has chosen a word car to represent car in our language i.e. English. With this basic understanding of semiotics one can start to understand the signs around us.
In an earlier project in second year I photographed flags in locations that they would not normally be seen, such as a Cornish flag on a Southampton street, held aloft by an anonymous Cornish person. The weakness of this project was that viewers had already identified with the flag, and had already gathered their own meaning, rather than the unusual juxtaposition of the symbolic meaning of the actual location, individual and identity of the flag. Saussure categorized these individual groups as separate identities the ‘linguists’, ‘linguistic community’ and ‘language’, Saussure suggest the relationship between language and thought are inseparable I am particularly interested in this relationship. Many cultures have different ways of thinking a Japanese person will think differently to an American person. The text language gives the viewer thoughts and those thoughts are different per individual depending upon how the individual has associated words with meaning, with objects. So by picking words that have multiple meanings and viewpoints of those
meaning one can access memories. Therefore I can give people a visual reaction through their thoughts whether that be memory or association. An example of an image that I have experimented with is the word ‘winter’. Some viewers will associate ‘winter’ with Christmas presents, lights, candles, religious festival and the general consumerism of Christmas, whereas others will think of snow, travel disruption and bad weather. Saussure understood and justified these thoughts as the product of variation in the individual meaning of the word ‘Winter’ through the association of the linguistic community. Saussure explains that if we can work out the preconditions for one to develop these connections then one can better understand their meaning in society. This would be a great help to advertising as well as communicating.
Dr Jason J Campbell explains Saussure study of language through critical Philology by focusing on a particular example of language and how linguists are being selective such as Neogrammarians. Neogrammarians tried to identify the laws of the development of language and its creation. Campbell points out the flaws in their ideology for example Neogrammarians understanding of language by ignoring other languages such as Asia to the theory, which is two focused upon European languages. Campbell explains that linguists are too selective with their subject matter. If a linguist is focus on speech language you lose the entire structure of language, which informs that individual process such as speech language. For example you cannot have speech, without thought or language. So by focusing upon speech you exclude thought. This is the same and reflected with in the Neogrammarians. If the linguistic community focuses upon a theory of the collective or group to deconstruct language it will miss out upon the individual details and examples. However if to understand language and thoughts means focusing on individual language such as Neogrammarians you lose perspective of the whole. This contradiction contaminates the science of language. Through Philology we can see the problem with studying language is the means of measurement. For example scientists observe the world around them self and propose theories which are tested and measurable in response. This is in direct contrast with linguist, philosopher or psychologist because it is impossible to test thought and language with any measurable response. So therefore linguist, philosopher or psychologist Have only theories and ideas and these are sometimes wrong and this has consequences. An example of
this is in psychology prior to the 1970s it was viewed. That if someone was a homosexual this was viewed as a mental illness, rather than sexual orientation. Because of this relationship with science linguists have adapted their model, one of these areas of interest is the biological response of sound on people in condition such as a car crash, trees falling or a baby crying. But there is a fundamental difference between the linguists and scientists. Linguists are interested in meaning, particularly within language to try and work out language and meaning, to see if access of meaning is through language.

Because of this communication is our greatest way of understanding the world through speech language. Lock suggested that linguists could analyze meaning in terms of self through the relationship between the word, which I say, such as ‘cat’, will then become the object of the linguist or self. This will become more updated due to my conditioning and social behavior. My ‘adoption’ of the word ‘cat’, is analyzed in the greater language and the linguistic community. The linguist could also do a physical analysis of the sound itself ‘cat’. As well as a conceptual analysis of the object of a ‘cat’, and talk about the physical elements, such as fore legs and a tail. As well as an astrological study about the formation of the word. Showing the development of the word and its evolution from its Latin Version and previous variations. However we know through Saussure that sound is completely arbitrary. As an individual does not create language it is the linguistic community that creates language. Nevertheless the individual can affect the meaning associated with a particular sound that will in turn challenge the linguistic community.
As a severely dyslexic person text has always excluded me from its ‘inner circle’. I therefore fundamentally dislike text as a language form, however I am also curious to explore that which I do not understand.

Initially in my project I found it difficult to think of what I wanted to say using text. I did some initial research test where I wrote on the pavement, and walls. But this was unsuccessful, mainly because I didn’t know what to write, and typically I kept spelling it wrongly, which meant that people’s impression were skewed towards the misspelling and not the idea of the text itself. This example shows some of this tests research where, I wrote on the wall. The idea was to make the viewers think to themselves whether it was true or false. However because I miss-spelt ‘bricks’ it was seen as funny, similarly to David Shrigley or street art. But whose work although sometimes amusing, has a serious meaningful comment, if not anything, the fact of its existence. At this point it was very early on in my development as a project I was mainly being influenced by Shrigley at the time. I knew I didn't want to imitate his style, as it's very specialized. But it did open the door to other artists and gave me ideas for my project.
Learning from this experience I decided to get other people who can spell properly to write down anything that they wanted to say, to sort of give them a voice. I made strict rules that I had to adhere to, so that I did not place any concept or language into people’s subconscious. I was determined to do it this way because people are going to look at this text so therefore people should have an influence over what is being said. Why should I decide what can and can’t be written, when I cannot engage in the written language myself. This comment about society originated from my everyday experience. We see signs on billboards and TV adverts telling us things. This was a chance to tell us something about ourselves, and to almost try to rebuild, or rebel against society’s use of language, consequently the linguistic community could reflect on itself from a different viewpoint.
I started to collect comments from the public, it was important to me to have a large sample size to understand what people are thinking. I made sure that the people I asked were a representative sample across age, gender and socio economic spectrum. Then I paid careful attention on finding comment’s I felt were appropriate, I collected well over 70 of these comments. I had it in mind to photograph these comments, which are all in marker pen on A3 paper in various situations. This was unsuccessful as the paper was so bright and often the writing was so small or unreadable, it just didn’t work. I also thought about experimenting with photographing the people holding their comments, like Gillian Wearing this didn’t appeal to me as it was just too cliché, and any anonymity was lost.

I then experimented with Photoshop, artificially putting text within an image, but I was unhappy with this as it looked like an advert. For example in the image below. We read about a hazardous chemical being placed into the water supply. I photographed a glass of water as the image but I thought it was too obvious, and didn’t communicate. I also considered taking photos that could be created as a response to the text, which would be a representation of the text. But through semiotics we understand, that symbolic meaning of a single word has many meanings associated to an individual person such as an ‘icon’, ‘index’ and a ‘symbol’, so therefore a glass of water is far too specific.
Don't add Fluorosilicic acid to the water supply
David shrigley
Bibliography

Images


Videos


Book


E-Journals


