

Chosen Essay Title: If viewers make meaning, discuss the factors that shape meaning making reference to the creation of works (i.e. artist, authorship, intended meaning), situation (i.e. curation, historical period of work) and consumption (i.e. historical period viewed, context, audience).

When an artist creates an image or a piece of art, they always have an intended meaning for that particular image but very often when the viewers look at it, it is interpreted differently. The meaning of an image or piece of art can be determined by a number of different factors. In order to discuss this subject, I will analyse different pieces of research to find out about the different factors and how exactly they influence a person to look at an image the way they do. Some of the factors that can determine the meaning of an image to an individual are social class, gender, age, culture, religion, morality, period of time the piece of art was looked at by the viewer. These factors also determine the artists meaning and view of their piece of art. 'With each civilization, we form a society, a group of people with individual characteristics, philosophies and cultures within which all sorts of ideas, thoughts and opinions are always brought to challenge and evaluation'.

The first factor I am going to research into and discuss is social class. This is because it is one of the main factors that can determine how a person interprets an image or a piece of art. An upper class artist would create a piece of work and they would encode it with an intended meaning for that particular image. Their view and meaning might be the same for another upper class person who is viewing and interpreting the work but the meaning and view of the image the artist creates may be different to a lower class person who is viewing and interpreting the piece of work. This may be due to the fact that the different social classes did not view and enjoy the same type of art and images. Upper class people were seen as the wealthy and well educated people that enjoyed looking at and studying portraits and historic paintings and images where as lower class people did not look at that type of art and they class comics as a piece of art therefore lower class art was considered commercial entertainment resulting in the upper class and lower class having different views on art.

After discussing two different groups of people that are the opposite (upper and lower class people), I am now going to discuss another two different groups of people that are the opposite, men and women, because men and women think differently and have different views about art therefore gender is another factor that can determine the way a person looks at an image or piece of art. When men look at an image or piece of art they tend to look at an image and focus on the big picture where as when women look at the image, they take in all the details of that image rather than just looking at the image as a whole. Research shows that when people are judging an image, men only use the right half of their brain where as women use both sides of their brain and this is because women think more about the details of what they are seeing. "We know for sure that there are differences between the male and female brain" (Professor Friedemann Pulvermuller, an expert in brain studies at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit.) One of the reasons why men and women may look at images differently is because millions of years ago it was the men that went hunting and they had to be able to co-ordinate so they could track animals whilst on the move therefore men can perform better than women in navigation tasks but women are more aware than men of the objects around them so these factors could of influenced how different genders see an image or piece of art.

Age can be another factor that can determine the meaning of an image. If there is a historic piece of art, older people will understand the image more and interpret a more relevant meaning of the

image as they have more experience in life than younger people and will know more about historic periods. Another reason age can determine the meaning of an image in different aged people is that different ages prefer different colours and this can influence their taste and interpretation of an image or a piece of art. For example, children use red to express anger and yellow for a happy desire to communicate but as they get older, their preference in colours starts to get a lot softer and calmer.

Next I am going to discuss culture and why different cultures see images and pieces of art differently to other cultures. Different cultures also have their own ideas about art and what they would class as a piece of art and what they wouldn't therefore culture is another factor that determines how individuals see an image. The colours used in a certain image or piece of art can determine the meaning of an image in their particular culture as different colours have different meanings within a culture. For example, the colour red has different meanings depending on the culture the person is in. In South Africa red is the meaning of mourning but in china the meaning for red is happiness and in Europe red means danger. Another colour example is yellow. In Europe the meaning of yellow is happiness but in Egypt the colour yellow means mourning and in Japan in means courage. Therefore an image that uses a lot of one colour could have totally different meanings to people that are from different cultures.

People from different religions interpret images and pieces of art differently to other religions based on their own religious beliefs. For example, in the Christian religion and in churches there are a lot of images of Jesus on the cross but people from other religions may look at these images and think differently about them and either think it is cruel having images of a man nailed to a cross or they could think that Jesus was a weak person therefore he was picked on and ended up nailed to a cross. Also Christians sometimes try to create an image of what God would look like and people in that religion would know that and have the same meaning but then if someone from the Islamic religion was to look at it, they would not interpret the intended meaning as in their religion they do not attempt to draw what Allah would look like.

Another factor that determines the meaning of an image is morality. Different people have different morals and these morals are what will influence the meaning of an image to that certain person. For example some people think that erotic art is morally wrong and they think that these sort of images and painting can't and shouldn't be classed of pieces of art and should be classed as pornography, whereas other people think that an image can be both pornographic and a work of art because of their artistic purposes, the qualities they have and also the context in which they are presented in. Another example of art that some people find morally wrong is cruelty and brutality. Francisco Goya created a series of prints named the 'Disasters of War' and some people will think that they shouldn't be classes as pieces of art because the images contain horror, brutality, and torture etc. But on the other hand, other people will think they are great pieces of art and they see the images as a visual protest against violence in 1808.

The meaning of an image or the way people see a piece of art can change over a period of time. For example, a painting of a scene during a war would have a meaning to people but would be different if the painting was viewed in a different country during another war.

Although many people think these factors change the meaning of the image for different people, there are some people that think that images and pieces of art are an absolute value and it doesn't matter who looks at them because everybody will have the same view of the particular image or piece of art. This is called the objectivist view of art. Immanuel Kant, an eighteenth century philosopher, believed that beauty could be found in an image or piece of art and that it was universal rather than it being specific to a particular culture. "To find something beautiful we must respond to it as it presents itself, without reasoning or analysis".

I have looked at and researched into the different factors that some people think can determine how an individual interprets an image and I have also looked at and researched into how some people think that the meaning of the image is within the images or piece of art itself and the meaning of it will not change and will be the same for everyone that views it. After looking at all the research and different people's point of views, I agree with the people that think that the meaning of an image or a piece of art changes for different people determined by their personal background. The two factors I found the most interesting were gender and culture. It was interesting to research into how different genders interpret art and to find out why they view and interpret art in the way that they do, such as finding out that the way different genders interpret images could be related to how people used their brains many years ago when hunting. I found the culture factor interesting because I found out what different colours mean to people in different cultures and how this influenced the meaning of an image. Another factor that I researched was social class and how it can influence how people see images and pieces of art. This factor, in my opinion, used to be relevant and important many years ago because there was such a big difference between upper class and lower class people but I feel that social class is not as important now as it used to be therefore I don't think this factor is any longer relevant and I don't think it would influence people on how they see an image or a piece art like it used to do.

After researching into the view that some people have, which is that the meaning of an image or a piece of art is within itself and it has the same meaning to everyone and the meaning isn't determined by an individual background, I feel that this can't happen because I genuinely think that it is the person's personal background that determines/ influences the meaning of an image therefore I don't agree with this view, but that doesn't mean that this view is wrong, because it is just an opinion, and we all have our own ideas, thoughts and opinions as an individual.

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