

Wordspree Viaduct: Spanning with bridges or words

Susan Clayton
Université Paris Diderot, France

Abstract

Paintings containing bridges come readily to mind; some are cultural icons - for instance the sunny landscape by Georges Braque, "Le viaduc de l'Estaque" or the bleak, diagrammatic portrait, "The Scream", by Edward Munch. The fact that such paintings have become imprinted on our visual registers is an indication of the marks bridges make. Whether it is perched above human habitations, as in Braque's painting, or recedes into the background, as in Munch's, the graphic nature of a bridge gives the image noticeable structure. In this paper I intend to show how bridge-like constructions, encode a dimension to a painting. They serve as a symbol of spanning. In a similar way language enables us "to get something across" to others – thus bridging a cognitive gap. The individual crosses over from a state of insularity, caused by non-expression, to a more dynamic state, that of potential interconnectedness. Furthermore, the steady flow of neologising in English, as well as other languages, experienced nowadays, illustrates how language is constantly updating the bridges of communication. Sometimes a neologism can become omnipresent in record time; Brexit is an example.

I will start my paper by looking at several paintings, rated cultural icons, which contain bridges – the two already mentioned, also a few others. Subsequently I will turn to the bridge-like quality of language, and the issue of "getting across to others" through using words. In this second part I will rely on a painting of my own, entitled, "Wordspree Viaduct", or "Le viaduc des mots en fête" which was exhibited in May 2016 at the botanic garden in Tours, France.

The socio-cultural process of neologising surges when societies go through periods of major change; a point which I will consider in the third part by taking a look at recent coinings, not least one which has become omnipresent both in the media and people's conversations, namely Brexit. The word is interesting both because of its compound feature – uniting two components, - but also the function of "exiting". When exiting one quits a bounded construction, and, or a stage, with its comings and goings. Whether stepping off the elevated structure of a stage or finding a passage out of a circumscribed space one avails oneself of a passage that spans a boundary.