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The previous issue of *Image & Text* was dedicated to thematic concerns with the liminal in South African visual culture. This issue is again an open issue that features current research. In keeping with the wider ambit of the journal as a visual culture publication, the six articles reflect a diversity of disciplines or fields, and embrace a historical dimension as well as focussing on current topics. The first two articles focus expressly on the South African domain; the next two articles deal mainly with the aesthetics and ethics of visual information and the manner in which information is visualised and framed. The last two articles turn their attention to the moving image, and particularly thematic discussions of the grotesque and vampiric imagery in cinema. Although the articles appear divergent, they have many commonalities, one of which is the interrogation of the status of the visual image in terms of its ability to enchant, fascinate, edify, persuade, disgust, urge reflection, or call to action.

The first article, by Wendy Gers, is entitled "Re-presentations" of Southern San rock art on Drostdy ware pottery from the 1950s." Gers adds to the growing body of writings about South African material and visual culture, while at the same time contributing to a much-needed local design history. She demonstrates how parietal imagery by the so-called San people has fascinated (South African) travellers, writers, artists and craftspeople during at least the last hundred years. She uses as case study the Drostdy *Bushman* wares pottery produced in Grahamstown during the 1950s. She points out that some of the iconography can be traced back to transcriptions of Helen Tongue’s illustrations from 1909, but also shows how the imagery was adapted to the market. Gers ends by suggesting that the white, middle-class ‘paintresses’ of the pottery were responding in subtle ways to the looming political and social realities of South Africa in the 1950s.

The next article, by Andrew Hennlich, is entitled ‘Treating the body of witness: medical understanding in William Kentridge’s *History of the Main Complaint*. In this article, Hennlich focuses on Kentridge’s almost six-minute long film, *History of the Main Complaint* (1996), which is the sixth film in his series *9 Drawings for Projection*. The series features the Johannesburg property developer Soho Eckstein. Hennlich shows that the film can be interpreted as a disquisition on memory: ‘memory in *History of the Main Complaint* uses the process of medical diagnosis as a metaphor to explore the narration of apartheid history in the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] as an inherently ambiguous process …’ (p 31). Hennlich demonstrates how medical imagery such as the X-ray aligns with Kentridge’s thematics of erasure and trace, acting as witnesses to memory and forgetting in the post-apartheid state.

Duncan Reyburn’s contribution, ‘Chesterton’s ontology and the ethics of speculation’, focuses on how the post-Victorian cultural commentator Chesterton’s writings may help to unpack visual texts. Reyburn examines Chesterton’s so-called ‘ethics of speculation’ in terms of what the former identifies as three ‘interlinking considerations: the riddle, the answer and the romance of being’ (p. 50). In this article, Reyburn is particularly interested in the ethical implications pertaining to visual interpretation, and takes as a point of departure a famous photograph dating from the early part of the South African War, *A few dead British soldiers in the aftermath of the Battle of Spioenkop, 24 January 1900*. 

**EDITORIAL**

Jeanne van Eeden
Reyburn demonstrates that Chesterton’s ethics of speculation is imbricated in self-discovery and self-revelation, and that meaning is attendant upon the way in which we look.

The next article, Anneli Bowie’s ‘Aesthetics versus functionality: challenging dichotomies in information visualisation’, also looks at the rhetorics of the visual image, and specifically at communication design. Bowie presents an overview of the long debate concerning the primacy of either aesthetics or functionality and pleads for a strategy that does not privilege either of these. She examines the relationship between information visualisation and “info-aesthetics”, and argues that design aesthetics is intimately connected with functionality and the process of effective (and aesthetic) visual communication. Bowie takes the ethical position that communication design should not just be effective, but ought to operate on a level of meaning and significance that enhances the human condition. Accordingly, design aesthetics is ‘neither superficial nor functionless … [and] subjective expression is part of ethical and effective information visualisation practice’ (p. 76).

In ‘Postmodernising the lady vampire: melancholy, isolation, and the female bloodsucker’, Jessica Hughes turns to the cinematic image and presents a discourse on the current representation of the vampire. Hughes demonstrates that the familiar iconography of the vampire, dating from late nineteenth literature and early twentieth century films, has been disrupted in a number of recent films. To demonstrate how cinema demystifies the figure of the vampire and invokes a metaphorical view of vampirism as an ‘illness’ or addiction, Hughes examines the so-called postmodern vampire in three films: *The Addiction* (Ferrara 1995), *Let the Right One In* (Alfredson 2008) and *Trouble Every Day* (Denis 2001). Hughes shows that as the traditional exotic and erotic connotations of the supernatural female vampire are elided, a new reading of vampirism as alienation is foregrounded, making the vampire a figure in need of sympathy.

The last article also deals mainly with cinematic examples. Annie van den Oever writes on ‘The prominence of grotesque figures in visual culture today. Rethinking the ontological status of the (moving) image from the perspective of the grotesque’. Van den Oever is interested in the human fascination with the aesthetics of the grotesque that seems to manifest in certain transitional cultural periods. She links this to cinematic devices such as the ‘monstrous’ powers of the close-up shot that offered viewers new ways of seeing the familiar; her theoretical underpinnings include the essays on film by Eisenstein and Shklovsky. Van den Oever compares the birth of the close-up with the birth of the grotesque and locates one of the key moments of the latter in the Italian Renaissance artist Giovanni’s grotesque figures in the Vatican Logge. She argues cogently that new pictorial and optical technologies are subject to the process of habituation, whereby ‘the once new technology becomes an everyday medium’ (p. 114).

In addition to the research articles, this issue ends with a number of shorter contributions: a book review, an exhibition review and two conference reports. The book review deals with a new book on the history of South African brands and branding and the exhibition review comprises a view of the 54th Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition, Venice, Italy, 2011. The first conference report gives an overview of the annual South African Communication Association (SACOMM) conference in 2011 and the second reports on the inaugural congress of the International Design Alliance (IDA) in Taipei in 2011.

In keeping with the editorial policy of *Image & Text*, this issue features contributions by established researchers as well as younger voices. Our dedication to growing scholarship in South Africa demands that we take seriously our mandate to pass on the research imperative to a younger generation of scholars.
South African commercial and production pottery is a highly neglected field of research. In this article I focus on reproductions of San rock paintings on domestic crockery produced by Grahamstown Pottery’s Drostdy Ware in the 1950s. At first glance, Drostdy’s Bushman wares appear to resemble clichéd copies of Helen Tongue’s (1909) reproductions. It is argued that Drostdy’s Bushman wares offer a partial reflection into the complex, evolving and frequently contradictory public sentiment of the 1950s regarding the provenance of San rock art; its raison d’etre; its public profile in the media, literature, popular fiction, scientific literature, the arts, festivals and exhibitions. This article contends that Drostdy’s Bushman wares both espoused and contested contemporary realities. The interstitial agency of Drostdy’s Bushman wares was asserted via the triangulation of textual markings on their bases; iconography and design; and compounded by their relative quantitative “weight”. These wares challenge the political neutrality or complicity of much contemporary South African art and craft production.

Key terms:
San art, Grahamstown Pottery, Drostdy Ware, Bushman rock painting, interstitial agency

In the 1950s, various South African ceramic studios and factories, including the Cullinan Refractory’s Linnware, Drostdy Ware, Boksburg East Potteries, National Ceramic Industries, Globe Potteries, the Kalahari Studio, the Bosh Studio, Zaalberg Potterij and Crescent Potteries manufactured ceramic wares that were decorated with images derived from reproductions of Southern San rock paintings. These re-presentations cannot be isolated from the socio-political and historical context, as well as the complex network of contemporary cultural conventions of white South Africans in the early years of the apartheid regime. These cultural conventions, which were at times contradictory, are reflected in the depictions of San parietal art by the paintresses of Drostdy Ware.

This article locates the activities of the Drostdy paintresses with a broader investigation of the understanding and appreciation of Southern San rock painting in early twentieth century South Africa. A brief historical overview of perceptions of the San in terms of western revisionist scholarship, including the debate concerning the origins of San Art, c.1900-1950 will introduce the subject. This will be followed by a brief analysis of the transcription of Southern San parietal art by pioneer researchers (c.1900-1950). Thus accuracy of these transcriptions of Southern San parietal art by pioneer researchers will be considered before invoking some local festivals and exhibitions which displayed Bushmen
people and Southern San parietal art (1936-1952). Prior to a brief historical introduction to the Drostdy Ware division of Grahamstown Pottery, the appropriation of Southern San motifs by early twentieth-century (white) South African artists will be examined.

This article focuses on contextualising and analysing these wares within their historical, cultural and political milieu. In addition to scholarly reference texts, the author has drawn on an archival database of historical newspaper clippings on San parietal art in the holdings of the Iziko SA National Gallery Library in Cape Town, and conducted a series of interviews with some of the few remaining Drostdy ware paintresses and management staff. Ideological, ethical and philosophical debates concerning identity politics and cross-cultural borrowing and appropriation, while pertinent, are beyond the scope of this essay.

**Brief historical overview**

The art, language, mythology and material cultures of Southern San people (who were, and are still referred to as the Bushmen by key researchers) have been a source of interest since it was first recorded in 1779 by Robert J Gordon. The San have been publicly exhibited as a source of sexual fascination (Abrahams 1996; 1998; Morris 1996; Gordon 1988), systematically exterminated (Landau 1996) and eloquently admired for their supposedly superior aesthetic abilities by artists such as Walter Battiss (1939; 1948; 1958), and more recently by Pippa Skotnes (Groenewald 2008). Their art was extensively copied, researched and displayed in a variety of exhibitions and festivals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Witz 1993; Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996). Ethnographic writing (Glenn 1996:41-51), visual images (Arnold 1997:23-30; Huntley 1992:58; Godby 1996:115-126; Landau 1996:129-143; Buntman 1998; 1996a & b), attitudes (Lewis-Williams 1996:306-314; Wilmsen 1996:185-189) and actions, such as the collection of trophy skulls for museum and private collections (Farini 1886; Penn 1996:81-91; Guenther 1996:225-238; Morris 1996:67-79), attest to an ensemble of pejorative and racist views of the San.

The western perception of the Bushmen, like other indigenous Southern African groups, has not remained static over time, and, no doubt, will continue to evolve. The adoption of Southern San motifs by studio ceramists in the early 1950s arguably reflected a contemporary surge of interest in the Bushmen and in San parietal art. In the 1950s, numerous role-players engaged in the construction and manipulation of largely derisive narratives regarding the San people and their art. These role-players included the newly elected Nationalist Government of the Union of South Africa; the press; writers of popular fiction (Maughan-Brown 1983); novelists and a host of travel writers. These role-players proffered a wide variety of messages concerning the San, some of which were contradictory. For example, reference texts on San parietal art in the 1950s and 1960s, which were poorly researched, relatively cheap and widely disseminated, essentially operated within a liberal salvage paradigm (Lewis-Williams 1996:308-312). These texts often reproduced pejorative views of the Bushmen and trivialised their art (Lewis-Williams 1996:308-312). Similarly, many travel writers and authors, like Laurens van der Post, while ultimately disempowering, were often well-intentioned (Ouzman 2012). Conversely, the Nationalist government used the San as a convenient “target” for liberal imaginings of a golden past that allowed the government to ignore and deny the history of black South Africans (Ouzman 2012). This liberal romanticism was used to extend the ongoing politically disempowerment and disenfranchisement of the San and other indigenous people and salve imperial and colonial consciences (Ouzman 2012).
The debate concerning the provenance and raison d’être of San rock paintings, c.1900-1950

The debate concerning the origins of San rock paintings needs to be viewed within a greater framework of early Southern African research into indigenous material culture, ruins and monuments. In the period under consideration, various early researchers fraudulently postulated that the ruins at Great Zimbabwe were made by the ancient Sabaeans of South Arabia and their Phoenician ancestors or the Queen of Sheba, among other exotic candidates (Smith 1977). In South Africa, Bleek and Lloyd realised the religious and symbolic importance of Bushman rock art in the 1870s, but this insight was lost for almost 100 years. Populist evolutionist interpretations prevailed in the early twentieth century and the categorisation of forms led to South African rock art – especially geometric engravings – being interpreted as the idle doodlings of a primitive people (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004) or caricatures (Bahn 1998:62-63). Some Europeans considered art beyond the scope of the San, and alternative provenances were attributed to visiting Caucasians and other exotic foreigners. For example, from the 1930s to the 1950s, Arabians or Phoenicians were believed to have authored the bulk of Bushman rock-art – with the White Lady of the Brandberg (South West Africa/Namibia), so named by Breuil in 1917, being the most (in)famous example of proposed Mediterranean origins (Bahn 1998:62-63).

Early researchers investigating the raison d’être of San art proposed hunting magic, art-for-art’s sake and aesthetic approaches. However, these hypotheses were all found wanting. In the 1970s and 1980s, researchers including Janette Deacon, David Lewis-Williams and Patricia Vinnicombe re-discovered the Bleek and Lloyd archive at the University of Cape Town. The now commonly-accepted revisionist theory is that much, if not most, of Bushman rock art relates to the shamanistic and symbolic experiences of the Bushmen (Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1989).

The transcription of Southern San parietal art by pioneer researchers, c.1900-1950

Publications containing reproductions of San parietal art were produced from the late nineteenth century by researchers including M Bartels (1896), GA Farini (1886), G Fritsch (1872), E Holub, (1882) and A Hübner (1871). Other important students of San art were Thomas Baines (1849), Conolly Orpen (1876) and his brother Joseph Millard Orpen (Ouzman 2010:8-11). George William Stow (1822-1882) was one of the earliest and most significant researchers of Southern San parietal paintings. However, his mid-nineteenth century copies of San parietal art went unappreciated by the public for many generations, his research being posthumously published by Dorothea Bleek in 1930 (Stow 1930). In 1874, Wilhelm HI Bleek (1827-1975), the pioneer researcher of San oral history, religion and language, applauded Stow’s copies of San parietal art, claiming that:

A collection of faithful copies of Bushman paintings is … only second in importance to a collection of their folklore in their own language (cited in University of the Witwatersrand, Rock Art Unit 1998:4).

In the early twentieth century, local and international interest in Southern San parietal art grew steadily with the publication of numerous monographs on the subject. Early monographs on San art included Helen Tongue (1909), Otto Moszeik (1910), Reenen J van Reenen (1920), Neville Jones (1926; 1949), Miles C Burkitt (1928), H Obermaier and H Kuhn (1930), Dorothea F Bleek...
Some South African festivals and exhibitions which displayed Bushmen people and Southern San parietal art, 1936-1952

The Bushmen people have been exhibited in Europe since 1810, when Sarah ‘Saartjie’ Bartman (ca.1790-1815) was taken to England and France. In the 1940s and 1950s, Percival Kirby, a Scottish musicologist based in South Africa, wrote a series of critical articles on Bartman. His research was appropriated and popularised in contemporary poetry, theatre, and visual arts which ‘powerfully depicted the terrible display of the Hottentot Venus in Europe as the moniker of everything wrong with Western civilisation: Enlightenment science, racism, the abuse and exploitation of women, the travesties of colonialism, and the exoticisation of non-Western peoples – the so-called Other’ (Crais & Scully 2008:3). Despite Kirby’s writings, popular festivals, exhibitions and touring troupes of ‘wild Bushmen’ were displayed during this period in Europe and the United States of America (Dubow 1995:24). Many of these events have received scholarly attention in recent years (Morris 1996; Gordon 1997).

It is alleged that South African artists, curators and art historians were apathetic towards San art and that few exhibitions of it were undertaken in South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s (Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1994:318). It is further claimed that exhibitions of San art were ‘almost all arranged or instigated’ by Walter Battiss (Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1994:318). However, my research indicates that there were indeed various significant exhibitions during this period. A list of festivals and exhibitions in South Africa from the late-1930s to the mid-1950s, which were likely to have shaped the perceptions of local artists, including Drostdy’s paintresses, is included in Table 1.
The chronological outline that follows gives, where available, contextual information:

1936 Empire Exhibition, Milner Park, Johannesburg, and also Cape Town. A Bushman camp was displayed at these exhibitions (Morris 1996:68).

1948 ‘Prehistoric Art in Southern Africa’, South African Association of the Arts, Cape Town. The exhibition was held in conjunction with the South African Archaeological Society (Johannesburg Art Gallery 1988:62, 139). The exhibition included Breuil’s ‘original copies’ of the ‘White Lady’ Cave in the Brandberg, South West Africa (City to see cave of rock paintings 1948).

1949 Bushman rock paintings and engravings, Atrium, South African National Gallery, Cape Town. In his opening address, John Paris, the Gallery Director declared ‘… pre-historic Bushman paintings and engravings are of immense importance in the history of art. They are something which only South Africa can give [to] the world’ (Bushman art for National Gallery? 1949). The installation of rock art in the National Gallery signified a radical shift in their meaning, from exotic ‘Old Master’ status to that of the ‘Modern Master’. The exhibition of San parietal paintings and engravings replaced a display of plaster casts of Greek busts. The removal of the Greek busts was perceived as scandalous by certain visitors, and was vigorously debated in the local press (Montreal 1949; Bushman art for National Gallery? 1949). The furor was most certainly also linked to the implicit challenge posed by Paris, in his firm denial of the ‘exotic foreigner’ hypothesis for the provenance of San rock art.

1952 The Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival, Cape Town. ‘Live wild’ Bushmen viewed by 165 000 Festival spectators (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:259). They were labelled ‘the world’s most primitive people’ and commodified to an audience eager to experience this exotic spectacle. The Bushmen were trapped in a ‘primordial timelessness and perpetual primitiveness, [which resulted in the] casting [of] doubt over their humanity’ (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:259). The festival was an attempt by the Nationalist Government to appropriate public interest in the ‘other’ and to forge English and Afrikaner unity through the notion of progress (Rassool & Witz 1993; Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:255-269; van der Watt 1996:41-44). Gordon argued that the festival ‘was an exercise in classification and, as a “classifying house”, it became an institution of knowledge and technology of power’ (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:261). It formed part of an emergent larger project that aimed to ‘… package, market and distribute evolutionary racism on a hitherto unimagined scale’ (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:265).

Table 1. South African festivals and exhibitions of the Busmen and their art, from the late-1930s to the mid-1950s.
The appropriation of Southern San motifs by early twentieth century South African artists

From the early 1920s, various prominent white South African artists, crafters and interior decorators displayed an interest in San parietal art, including Jacob H Pierneef (1886-1957) and Erich Mayer (1876-1960). In the late 1920s or early 1930s, the artists Terence McCaw (1913-1978) and Walter Battiss used ‘Bushman’ motifs on textiles (Duffey 2006a:41; Schoonraad 1985:41). The application of San motifs onto textiles continued in the 1930s in the carpets and weavings of the Lady Clarendon Spinning and Weaving School, coordinated by Marga J Mayer-Gutter.

In the 1930s, Battiss explored San parietal motifs, producing and exhibiting wood-cuts, lino-cuts and wood-engravings that resembled petroglyphs (Schoonraad 1985:43; Duffey 2006a). In the 1940s and 1950s, the oeuvres of artists including Reginald Turvey (1883-1968), Otto Klar, Coert Steynberg and his spouse Betsie Steynberg reflected an interest in San parietal art (Berman 1996:458, Heymans 1997; Lichtenberg 1998). The Anglo-Oriental studio potter, Chaim (known as Hym or Hyme) Rabinowitz (1920-2009) co-authored Rock paintings in the South-West Cape (Johnson, Sieff & Rabinowitz 1959). Rabinowitz, however, never incorporated direct references of San rock paintings, as he believed they were depictions of San spiritual life (Rabinowitz 2011).

In the early 1950s, numerous artists – both amateur and professional – engaged with representations of San Art. For example, the Cape Town artist, Ivor Roberts, copied San parietal paintings onto slate (Stonemason artist 1953; Brokensha 1957). Roberts argued that as the slate onto which he painted was quarried near the caves from which he derived his imagery, his images were ‘even more authentic’ (Brokensha 1957). Similarly, the artists Jan Buys and Albert Newall were commissioned to paint what was ‘believed to be the biggest single mural in South Africa’ (Marais 1953). They decorated a restaurant, The Bushman Cellar, Johannesburg, with ‘weird vivacious figures [that] cavort and leap across the underground walls’ (Brokensha 1957). A large mural of San parietal art was painted on the terrace wall of Donald Pilcher’s luxury home in Linden, Johannesburg (Holme & Frost 1955:53). Similarly, a mural that depicted Bushmen hunting was painted on the outside walls of the Creel’s Kenridge home, Cape Town (Griffin 1958).

During this period, the South African Tourist Corporation, SAA (South African Airways) and SAR&H (South African Railways and Harbours) marketed South Africa via the use of images of “tribal exoticism”, including Bushman motifs. In the 1950s, the incorporation of motifs from San parietal art into various aspects of material culture was not limited to South Africa. For example, in the United States of America, Laverne International produced and sold fabrics sporting San motifs. Their Fun to Run range depicted Bushman figures being chased by airborne arrows (Horn 1985:117).

This populist translation of San parietal art into both public and private spheres appears to indicate that it had become a prominent theme in the constantly shifting constellation of domestic decoration trends. If we draw parallels with economic anthropology, San parietal art became a form of social currency. Furthermore, its value is not merely derived from its abstract value in a system of exchange, but also from its distinctive properties associated with either an exotic, foreign Caucasian predecessor, or the nearly extinct, infantine yellow people.
Historical overview of Grahamstown Pottery, Drostdy Ware

Grahamstown Pottery was established by Professor Frederick William Armstrong (1875-1969) and his wife Ruth Beatrice Armstrong in 1922. In 1948, Norman Steele-Gray purchased the company and established two ranges – Drostdy Ware and Cookery Nook Kitchenware. Drostdy Ware primarily produced decorative and fancy wares including decorative masks, chargers, vases, promotional and commemorative wares, “native” figurines, tiles, ornaments and hand decorated crockery. Cookery Nook Kitchenware manufactured inexpensive monochrome functional “oven-to-table” crockery including coffee and early morning tea sets, soup and hors-d’oeuvres sets, mugs and jugs (Gers 2000:38-47; Gers 1998; Nilant 1963:44-45).

Drostdy Ware embraced numerous different decoration techniques including chalk pastels, hand painted motifs, sgraffito and hand coloured-transfers. The pottery is marked with various different markings. Senior staff included France Marot, the Chief Designer and Hester Locke, the Superintendent of the Art Department. Over the years, Drostdy employed numerous white women as paintresses, including Kay Cope-Christy, Jane Krone, Margaret Scott, Leila P Simpson (1931-1959) and Annette Southey (Gers 2000:38-47; Gers 1998). Financial insolvency resulted in the acquisition of Grahamstown Potteries by Continental China, which operated the company between 1968 and 1985 (Gers 1998).

Representations of Southern San parietal art on Drostdy Ware’s Bushman range: quantitative analysis

It is worth briefly reflecting on the quantitative significance of Drostdy’s Bushman wares. As a domestic commodity, these wares were produced in relatively large quantities. It may thus be argued that they had a more significant or broader impact than a single “original” art work, as produced, for example, by Klar, Pierneef, Mayer or Battiss, even if the Bushman wares were not viewed as a reified art object in the 1950s.

Qualitative analysis – Iconography

In contrast with some other contemporary ceramic studios, including Zaalberg Potterij and National Ceramics Industries, the designers and paintresses of Drostdy Ware strove for ‘high quality, accurate and authentic-looking’ reproductions of San parietal art (Marot & 1998; Steele-Gray 1998; Locke 1996). Drostdy staff claim that in order to maximise “authenticity” the paintresses and designers used reference books as the source for their images (Marot & 1998; Steele-Gray 1998; Locke 1996). Helen Tongue’s seminal text of 1909, entitled Bushman paintings, has been traced as the source for almost all the images of San parietal art that were reproduced on Drostdy Ware’s Bushman range. It is interesting to note that designers of Linnware and the Kalahari Studio also used Tongue’s monograph as a reference source for many of their images of San parietal paintings.

In some instances, the Drostdy paintresses accurately transcribed Tongue’s imagery, in other instances they
edited, simplified and re-arranged images and aspects of Tongue’s images to fit various ceramic forms such as a palette, triangle and circle or a goblet-platter set. For example, the image on Figure 1 is derived from Tongue’s plate 16, image number 26. Tongue’s “original” image depicts five eland and one hartebeest, while Drostdy’s image only depicts two eland. Drostdy’s palette-shaped platter could have accommodated the entire image, but the designer has elected to exclude the other animals; economic reasons or compositional considerations are likely motives. A third possible reason for the exclusion of two eland and one hartebeest from Drostdy’s image may be their insufficiently conventional or “elegant” profiles. In Tongue’s “original” image the head of the largest eland is turned away from the spectator, while another eland looks across its body and the hartebeest appears to be jumping. Ironically, it is precisely this ‘freedom from the limitation to delineation in profile which characterizes for the most part the drawings of [San] peoples ...’ which Balfour praises and regards as ‘civilized’ and sophisticated (Tongue 1909:9). Tongue’s “original” image contained a nervous energy, derived from the various anxious poses of the animals, that is entirely lacking from the Drostdy reproduction.

In Figure 1, the Drostdy studio has rotated the image of the two eland, so that one of the eland (which is grazing in the foreground) appears to be standing on a plane parallel to the ground of the spectator. The branches on which the eland are chewing are exaggerated in the Drostdy reproduction. This modification promotes an impression of natural abundance, which may be viewed as an attempt to convey an idyllic image of abundance, tranquility and harmony in the animal kingdom that was falsely attributed to San parietal art.

The elands’ tails are extended horizontally in Figure 1, while in Tongue’s “original” image the tails of the eland were prostrate. This modification by Drostdy’s paintresses was probably a compositional device aimed at balancing the composition in the absence of other elements from Tongue’s “original” image. Tongue’s image of the seated eland included the joints of the forequarters and hindquarters of the animal. The Drostdy Ware version has edited the articulations of the seated eland’s limbs. This editing may also have been undertaken as a time-saving device.

Some of Drostdy’s Bushman images appear to be invented, or partly invented. For example, Figure 2 appears be a re-working of Stow’s “blue ostriches” with some additional human figures (Ouzman 2012). However, originality was not the aim of these wares. The intention of the Drostdy paintresses and designers was stated on relatively lengthy hand-written labels on the underside of many of their wares, which claimed that the item was a ‘Hand painted reproduction’ of ‘Bushman Rock
Painting’ (Figure 1). In addition, the markings on most of these articles include the initials of the paintress. Drostdy’s consumers were thus encouraged to read the reconstructed images of San parietal art as copies of an “authentic” San tradition as well as reified, original, artistic craft objects. Alternatively, I believe the ceramics may have been “original” in that no other ceramic companies were producing full dinner services with such relatively “authentic” Bushman images.

The Bushman wares produced by the Drostdy studio are characterised by the extensive emphasis on eland images (Figures 1, 4 (plates 1, 2, 3)). This is very likely the result of Tongue’s repetition of eland imagery. The eland also has a prominent status as the largest member of the antelope family and is central to San cosmology, being one manifestation of the trickster-deity, /Kaggen, and one of a finite set of repositories for supernatural potency (Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1989:13, 36).

The image of an ostrich and hunter in Figure 3 is also derived from Stow’s controversial ‘blue ostriches,’ which is almost certainly a fraudulent copy of Moffat’s drawing (Dowson, Tobias & Lewis-Williams 1994). While Stow’s motivation is unknown, there are enough minor details that caution against applying today’s standard of what was “fraudulent” to Stow who may, for example, have made up the copy as a parlour game (Ouzman 2012). While the Kalahari Studio produced various wares depicting multicoloured ostriches and similar colourful images derived from the sketch of the ‘blue ostriches,’ the paintresses of Drostdy Ware remained prudent of polemic concerning polychrome fantasies in parietal art that raged in the press in the late 1940s.

Drostdy’s Bushman wares, in general, reflected the earthy tones associated with the mineral pigments and other natural material used historically in parietal art. It is, however, noted that there are some “blue” rock.
Figure 4: Drostdy Ware. Group of plates decorated with images derived from illustrations of San parietal art.


Second plate. 210mm x 240mm x 20mm. Pale yellow, transparent glaze on base. Impressed stamp, ‘Drostdy’. Black glaze markings, ‘Hand Painted Reproduction, G. de B. Bushman Rock Painting.’ Black glaze stamp, ‘Drostdy Ware in Suid-Afrika vervaardig’. This plate is derived from an illustrations of rock art from Burley listed, illustrated in Tongue (Ouzman 2012).

Third plate. 300mm x 280mm x 45mm. Pale yellow, transparent glaze on base. Impressed stamp, ‘Drostdy’. Black glaze markings, ‘Bushman Rock Painting. Hand Painted Reproduction, MP. Drostdy Ware Made in South Africa’.


Fifth plate. 167mm x 163mm x 20mm. Pale yellow, transparent glaze on base. Black glaze markings, ‘Hand Painted Reproduction G.B. Bushman Rock Painting. Drostdy Ware. Made in South Africa. E.’ Collection Tatham Art Gallery (Accession Numbers: First plate. 2365/06; second plate 2367/06, third plate 2370/06, fourth plate 2369/06, fifth plate 2366/06).
paintings; these were probably originally white or black and have discoloured via an unknown chemical reaction or an organic colonisation (Ouzman 2012).

While the Drostdy paintresses refrained from engaging in this debate concerning polychrome parietal art, their wares reflect other popular misconceptions about San art. A sample of Drostdy’s Bushman wares was surveyed and the results indicate that 73 per cent of Drostdy’s Bushman wares represented hunting imagery (Gers 2000:205). This highlights concerns regarding the proliferation of ideologically charged hunting scenes in popular culture. Dowson (1996:318) argues that images of hunting scenes were not the most abundant genre produced by the Bushmen. Yet, as pioneer researchers perceived San parietal art to be concerned with hunting and illustration, they predominantly reproduced copies of rock art that reinforced their beliefs. Owing to the legacy of these pioneer researchers, reproductions of San motifs in South African material culture predominantly depicted hunting scenes. This constant repetition of hunting scenes by craftspeople reinforced ‘popular and racist misconceptions about rock art and the societies within which it was produced’ and essentially reflected ‘male dominance in western society’ (Dowson 1996:319).

**Qualitative analysis – formal design**

Drostdy Ware’s Bushman range can be viewed as reflective of international trends regarding living and eating habits of the 1950s, which were in a state of flux. The public required greater flexibility with regard to tableware. The custom of buying large elaborate sets was disappearing, to be replaced by the practice of starting with basic articles and adding additional items over time. This trend was particularly evident among young couples with limited financial means (Hill 1993:101, 102). Certainly, the variety of hand-painted images on Drostdy’s Bushman range supported this mix and match sensibility, and allowed the staggered purchase of crockery.

Drostdy’s Bushman wares occupy an ambivalent place in the continuum between utility and decorative (art) ceramics. The images were often executed on palette, kidney or other asymmetrical “free form” shapes (Figures 1-4) that were characteristic of international trends in ceramic dinnerware designs of the 1950s, notably the Contemporary Style.29 Like Drostdy’s African series that depicted indigenous flora, people, landscapes and fauna, their Bushman wares were hand-labelled on their versos. However, unlike most of the initial wares, the Bushman wares did not have any hanging devices on their basal foot-rings. Drostdy’s Bushman wares were clearly intended to be utility items. However, the shapes, sizes and depths of the triangular plates and platters,30 the palette-shaped plates31 and the small bowls known as “curry” bowls32 deviate from “standard” contemporary South African dinner services, and are often impractical for dining purposes, frequently being either too large, small or shallow.

Why did the paintresses create this artistic dinner service whose non-standard forms (Figures 1-4) defy what appear to be normative conventions? Drostdy Bushman wares cannot merely be limited to an analysis of the translocation of international forms (i.e., the Contemporary Style) and hybridised local iconographic concerns. Indeed, they present an interesting triangulation of iconography, form and markings (signifiers). The exaggerated dimensions of the crockery is subversive as it forced most diners to have multiple servings (in the case of a too small bowl), or face a partially empty plate (in the case of the large dinner plates).33 These Bushman wares thus propose a radical way of inviting (or forcing) the consumer to contemplate their dining
habits – on both a quantitative level, as well as on an intellectual level. Notions of the consumption of “others” cannot be ignored when one is forced to look at an oversized plate containing a serving of food which is “lost” in a scene of San parietal art, or when one is forced to have multiple servings because bowls are too small. It may be argued that this crockery challenged aspects of the diner’s compliance with regard to the consumption of an imagined community and aspects of their culture, even if the imagery reproduced reinforced disempowering stereotypes. The capacity of the diner to have multiple servings highlighted the status of the diner as well-fed member of the middle and upper classes, whose means facilitated the purchase of a fashionable, hand-decorated dinner service.

Drostdy’s Bushman wares thus represent a curiously fluid group of wares that are associated with the anxiety that accompanied contemporary debates regarding the contested provenance and raison d’être of San art. The question of provenance raises issues such as whether it is easier to “use” rock art if it was believed to be made by politically inconsequential “San” or by supposedly “advanced” exotic people like Caucasians, Phoenicians or Arabians. Furthermore, the status of San parietal art was in transition, shifting from exotic “Old Master” status to that of the “Modern Master”. These hybrid wares provide an interstitial agency that deploys the fractured culture from which they emerge to question “versions of historic memory … that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside …’ (Bhabha 1996:58). This outside of the inside could be seen as operating on three levels. On a local political level, the interstitial agency gave a voice to San history and questions of their invisibility in the political arena, and to notions of consumption of their rock paintings by western society. On another level, they articulate international political concerns, and should be viewed as being located in the broader contemporary socio-political milieu. They may be argued to correspond to desires to valorise and market South Africa’s natural and cultural heritage in the face of the nation’s imminent withdrawal from the Commonwealth. Finally, this agency operates on the level of the art/craft debate. Drostdy’s Bushman wares are not merely utilitarian objects, or popular, banal reproduction; their subversive agency transforms that which is “outside of the inside” of craft. In other words, via their interstitial agency, these commodities migrate in terms of their classification from domestic crockery to critical craft or perhaps contemporary art.

**Conclusion**

Since the earliest European colonial settlement in Southern Africa, “westerners” have responded to the Bushmen and their art in a variety of contradictory manners, ranging from curiosity and admiration to revulsion. Public opinion was influenced and determined by contemporary popular culture, art, literature, quasi-scientific research and reproductions of San parietal art from the first half of the twentieth century. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the newly elected Nationalist Government of the Union of South Africa, the press, travel writers, crafters, interior decorators and artists engaged in complex, and at times contradictory, appropriation of imagery derived from Southern San parietal art.

In the 1950s, the status ascribed to San parietal art was in a state of flux that made it both vulnerable and attractive. I propose that the Drostdy paintresses of the 1950s represent a “cusp” generation – as white middle-class, educated and employed women they signify a small subset of a nation in the making, poised at a specific crossroad. This historic juncture facilitated a moment of reflection, a chance to metaphorically look
backward and forward. The paintresses were a part of a generation trying to make sense of the devastation wrought by the First and Second World Wars and facing the increasingly severe implementation of apartheid. While San parietal art offered formal Modernist possibilities in terms of its neo-modern iconography, it also offered the possibility of an extended reflection on San rock art and culture. Memory, history and memorialisation is the counter-project of evasion, forgetting and aporia. However, in the 1950s, with respect to San genocide and the contested reception of San parietal art, when all existing knowledge is at best second-hand, biased and misleading, how does one remember? Wakankar (2008:300), in her discussion of recovering the prehistory of the Indian Dalit caste (a subaltern group, like the San) asks:

What then does it mean to restore disappearance to itself, as though one were counter-signing a ghostly signature, placing parentheses around a blank space?

The question of placing a parenthesis around a decimated people and an apparently extinct art form is, I believe, central in this period. I argue that one of the best ways to remember or memorialise or restore a disappearance is via art. To me, the Drostdy Bushman wares may be seen to represent this act of remembrance and historical restoration. The transcription of a hybridised form of San parietal art by the Drostdy paintresses is an acknowledgement of local history, and a reiteration of the “non-absence” of this community in the greater social project that was being engineered by the apartheid authorities. Ironically, it is also an acknowledgement of the power to appropriate the imagery of a conquered people.

In an attempt to understand public sentiment of the 1950s as reflected in these reproductions of San parietal art on Drostdy Ware pottery, I would thus like to suggest a move from value judgments of accuracy and “authenticity”, and rather view these representations of San parietal art as both a source of interstitial agency and a reflection on Meontology, the history of an absence.30 With regard to notions of Meontology, as noted previously, the San were absent from the debate regarding the provenance of their art, which was raging in contemporary cultural history in the 1950s. The Drostdy paintresses refrained from reproductions of images that were used to argue Mediterranean or other exotic origins for San rock painting. In addition, their insistence on using elaborate hand-written inscription on bases to indicate that the ceramic item displayed a ‘Bushman rock painting’ and a ‘Hand painted Reproduction’, confirms this engaged ideological stance.

In conclusion, the Drostdy paintresses espoused and contested contemporary realities of the 1950s in South Africa, when the San and their art were riddled with contradictions. The San represented an Arcadian yet modern civilisation. San rock painting was in a state of flux – a Meontological no-man’s land, yet slowly moving out of what was a scientific and literary “heart of darkness”. The interstitial agency of Drostdy’s Bushman wares, obtained via the triangulation of iconography, forms and textual markings, and compounded by their quantitative “weight” may be viewed as a challenge to the political neutrality or complicity of much contemporary art and craft production in South Africa in the 1950s.

Acknowledgements

Some the primary research for this essay, notably the review of an archival database of newspaper clippings on San parietal art in the holdings of the Iziko SA National Gallery Library, and a series of interviews with some of the few remaining potters, was undertaken for my Master’s thesis (Gers 2000). The analysis
and conclusion presented in this essay are new. I gratefully acknowledge the kind assistance of Dr Sven Ouzman, Curator of Pre-Colonial Archaeology, Social History Department, Iziko South African Museum, whose detailed critique enabled me to extend and refine this essay. I also acknowledge the contributions of two anonymous reviewers.

Notes

1 The term “re-presentations” has been consciously used to highlight the fact that many of the images recorded on the ceramic wares under investigation bear scant resemblance to their original sources. Furthermore, while I refer to Bushman paintings as “images”, I note that in an emic understanding, the “images” were produced by and accompanied with thoughts, words and perhaps and rituals, many which are irretrievable. In addition, it seems very likely that San paintings were considered independent entities; actual beings that were called forth from within and beyond the rock wall (Ouzman 2012).

2 The terms “Southern San”, “San” and “Bushman” are used interchangeably, and are not intended pejoratively. The terms describe hunter-gatherers whose engraved and painted images occur on rocks and in rock shelters throughout Southern Africa.

3 The term paintress is used historically to denote female decorators in industrial and production potteries. While appearing sexist to contemporary generations, it is still the term preferred by those who worked in the industry.

4 For example, the western perception of the Khoisan underwent a gradual transformation from the eighteenth century to the late twentieth century. They metamorphosed’ from ‘brutal savages’ to a neo-Rousseauian ‘harmless people’ (Dubow 1995:24).

5 Novelists included William Golding (Morton 2010: 196).

6 Travel writers included Laurens van der Post (Barnard 1996), PJ Schoeman, Jan J van der Post (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:261–262), Thomas V Bulpin and Lawrence G Green.

7 Reenen J Van Reenen was a close friend of both Pierneef and Battiss, and shared their common passion for San parietal art (Duffey 2006b).

8 Rosenthal and Goodwin (1953) published George Stow’s forty-eight remaining completed drawings that were not published in the 1930 volume.

9 Frobenius studied African culture and the rock art of the Atlas, the Fezzan and Southern Africa. He published over 60 books on various related subjects.

10 From 1810 to 1815 the “Hottentot Venus” was shown in human circuses and freak shows to display her perceived extraordinary steatopygia and elongated labia (Abrahams 1996; 1998; Fausto-Sterling 1995; Gordon 1998; Gould 1985; Morris 1996; Qureshi 2004; Strother 1999; Willis 2010).

11 The most significant study in this regard is Gordon’s (1997) review of the Denver Expedition, an American-sponsored photographic project of the San which is characterised by colonial paternalism.

12 Pierneef studied and copied San parietal art and designed tapestries based on these images in approximately the 1920s (Duffey 2002; Berman 1996: 365). Pierneef’s earliest mural commission of 1922, which involved the painting of eight panels of the assembly hall of Ficksburg Hoërskool, was based on George Stow’s copies of San parietal art (Coetzee 1991:3; Duffey 2002).

13 Mayer rallied for an indigenous aesthetic based on the integration of indigenous African and “Bushman” designs and forms to pottery made at the Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein (Basson 2003; Hillebrand 1966).

14 The Lady Clarendon Spinning and Weaving School
was established as a project by a group of women who had the welfare of the growing number of unemployment of white women at heart. Founder members were Lady Clarendon, Mrs C Parker, M Posthumus, C van Warmeloo, L Solomon and I Hoogenhout (Anon 1937; Basson 2003; Eastern Province Society of the Arts and Crafts 1938). These hand-spun and hand-woven items were widely toured and displayed in galleries and arts associations, for example the Natal Society of the Arts, Durban in 1937 (Anon 1937) and the Eastern Province Society the Fine Arts, Port Elizabeth in 1938 (Eastern Province Society of the Arts and Crafts 1938).

According to Anneke Lichtenberg (1998), a former researcher at the Ditsong National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria, Betsie Steynberg was particularly interested in Bushman art. Steynberg studied ceramics at the Johannesburg Technical College in the 1940s. Upon graduation she produced ceramic wares that were decorated with motifs derived from San parietal art. Three of these ceramic items are in the collection of the Ditsong Cultural History Museum (Lichtenberg 1998).

According to his widow Jenifer Rabinowitz (2100), for reasons of ease of pronunciation, most South Africans knew Rabinowitz as Hyme or Hyme. For further information on Rabinowitz, consult Cruise (1992:46) and Fransen (1982:339).

Jenifer Rabinowitz (2011) claimed ‘what occupied his soul, was investing those sacred aspects [of San parietal art] into his work, every facet of what that entailed – how he dealt with his environment, his staff, his clay, his glazes, his throwing, his decorations, abstract and integral. There wasn’t anything which wasn’t sacred to him, including the very ether in which he worked – [Hym] didn’t allow it to be corrupted by anything artificial … he surrounded himself with indigenous flora, including the very fan aloe – plicatalus, which was sacred to the bushman, that was his very incorporation of everything which those sacred San spaces and markings meant to him.’

I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this information.

Grahamstown Pottery’s largest corporate customers were the various independent Southern African beer breweries for whom they produced promotional wares such as tankards, jugs and ashtrays. Other promotional wares included a series of small plates entitled Landmarks of Grahamstown Series. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Drostdy produced ashtrays and bowls depicting landmark modern buildings in Port Elizabeth (Gers 2000:38-47; Gers 1998).

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Drostdy Ware produced commemorative wares for various state and private institutions including Kruger National Park, Delta Motors, Potchefstroom University, the Ichthyology Department of Rhodes University and the German Settlers Centenary Committee (1858-1958).

Grahamstown Pottery manufactured decorative tiles bearing motifs derived from San parietal art, native studies, indigenous flora and African wildlife. Most of these tiles were commercial blanks manufactured by Pilkington (Gers 2000:38-47; Gers 1998).

These markings include: ‘Grahamstown Drostdy Ware’ ‘Grahamstown Pottery, RSA,’ ‘Vervaardig in Suid-Afrika, Drosty Ware, Grahamstown Pottery Limited, Made in South Africa,’ ‘Drostdy Accessories, Co. [Pty.] Ltd. Grahamstown South Africa’ and ‘Drostdy Ware, Made in South Africa. Grahamstown Pottery Ltd.’ Different methods were used to apply the name including an (impressed) stamp, raised cast markings, transfers, hand written text in glaze, incised into the base (sgraffito), via stickers and customised adhesive tape. On some wares, combinations of different marking methods were applied.

The concept of “authenticity” is extremely problematic, particularly when writing about representation of indigenous people. ‘The ideal of “authenticity”
has been proven like so many others, [to be] relative and context bound’ (Fee 1989:245). Notions of authenticity are interrogated by numerous authors in respect of African art (Griffiths 1995:237-245; Jules-Rosette 1984; Kasfir 2007; Kasfir 1994).

24 I gratefully acknowledge the kind assistance of the staff of the Rock Art Unit, Department of Archaeology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. After viewing numerous slides, they suggested Helen Tongue (1909) as the possible source of the imagery (Smith et al. 1997). Further research has confirmed that their suggestion was correct.

25 Two Linnware plates with images derived from Helen Tongue were viewed in the collection of the Roodepoort Museum, Gauteng. Both of these plates are impressed with the Linnware logo and signed ‘Thelma van Schalkwyk, 1952’. There are also magnificent examples in the ceramics collection of the Ditsong National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria and at Sunlawns, the home of the Cullinans in Irene.

26 Initials of unidentified paintresses included L.M.S.; G. de B. and M.P.

27 It is interesting to note the repetition of eland imagery in other cultural sectors, for example in the designs by Erich Mayer that were used for carpets and weavings by the Lady Clarendon Spinning and Weaving School.

28 For example, in 1947 it was claimed that a San parietal painting depicting four blue gazelle and one brown gazelle was discovered in the Devil’s Peak Estate in Cape Town (Rock paintings found on Devil’s Peak. 1947). It is interesting to note that after the Devil’s Peak Estate discovery, Burland (1947) prophetically speculated that blue came ‘from the white men’ and these works should be ‘carefully check[ed]’.

29 The 1950s are recognised as a period of innovative design in the decorative, industrial and applied arts in the United States of America, England, and Europe. International design trends in the applied arts during the 1950s are frequently referred to as ‘Organic Modernism’, ‘the New Look’, ‘Scandinavian Style’ or the ‘Contemporary Style’ (Dormer 1993:29; Hannah 1986:77; Hopkins 1963:4; Jackson 1991:7). These terms are often used interchangeably.

30 A triangular-shaped plate measures 280 x 210 x 42 mm, this being quite large for a standard dinner plate, and too small for a standard serving plate. Furthermore, the triangular plates and platters and the palette-shaped plates are too shallow to allow for comfortable dining.

31 A palette-shaped plate measures 245 x 210 x 25 mm, this plate being impractical because of its shape which has a void which has a void near its centre. Furthermore, it is somewhat flat and lacks a pronounced rim.

32 The bowls are smaller than an average desert or cereal bowl, measuring 150 x 115 x 45 mm.

33 See Figure 4, where the central dinner plate measures 300 x 280 x 45 mm.

34 As evidenced by public controversy surrounding the 1949 installation of Bushman rock paintings and engravings in the South African National Gallery, Cape Town, listed in Table 1. For further information, see Gers (2000:124-128).

35 Rather the more contemporary focus on “nothingness”, the term Meontology is used to refer to the opposite of being, existence or reality as such, as well as categories of being.

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Abstract

William Kentridge’s *History of the Main Complaint* (1996) renders its main character, the industrialist Soho Eckstein, in a comatose state as doctors labour to diagnose him. This article reads Kentridge’s use of CT Scans and X-rays in the film as a metaphor for the diagnosis of apartheid narrated through South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Using Barry Saunders’s (2008) reading of the ambiguity in radiological diagnosis, this essay argues that the diagnostic tools in *History of the Main Complaint* locate a similar state of ambiguity in the TRC. Throughout the film several red X’s are marked upon the surface of these diagnostic images, denoting spaces of uncertainty, leading the viewer to flashbacks whose narratives of guilt and complicity are uncertain. To read through these ambiguities undermines what Mark Sanders (2007) termed the ‘quasi-legal’ domain of the TRC while uncovering narratives of apartheid that fall outside of the TRC’s scope. Like the X-ray’s stark black and white format, which serves as a legal document of bodily harm, the TRC encodes a juridical and singular narrative of the TRC. Instead these ambiguities narrate spaces outside of the main complaint that in themselves may be more illuminating of the legacies of apartheid in South Africa.

Key terms: William Kentridge, CT scan, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, ambiguity, apartheid, X-Rays

Introduction

South African artist and filmmaker William Kentridge’s animated film, *History of the Main Complaint* (1996), opens as its main character, Soho Eckstein, lies in a hospital bed attached to a respirator and cardiogram machine. Soho’s comatose state in the hospital is set
against the backdrop of South Africa’s constitutionally mandated Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Rendered in his trademark animation style of drawing, photographing, erasing and redrawing on a single sheet of paper, Kentridge leaves a palimpsest on the paper’s surface. In doing so, Kentridge’s animations preserve traces of the film’s history on the image’s surface. History of the Main Complaint further evokes questions of memory in post-apartheid South Africa through the process of Soho’s diagnosis in the hospital. Throughout the film, X-Rays, cardiograms, CT and MRI scans are used to look inside Soho’s body. The images revealed from these tests feature red marks indicative of the diagnostic process in radiological rooms. These markers lead to flashbacks in Soho’s memory where he recalls scenes of violence witnessed while driving his car. However, History of the Main Complaint reveals a sense of ambiguity in these flashbacks relating to Soho’s injuries, and to how he is constructed as witness, victim, perpetrator, or a combination of these positions.

History of the Main Complaint is the sixth film in Kentridge’s series 9 Drawings for Projection. In this series of animated films, Kentridge uses the Johannesburg property developer Soho Eckstein and his wife, who takes a lover, the idealist dreamer Felix Teitlebaum. After Felix in Exile (1994), Felix disappears from the narrative, as Mrs Eckstein eventually returns to her husband. The remaining films focus on the divides between private and public life in Soho’s empire and the personal divides between Soho and Mrs Eckstein. Using these three characters, 9 Drawings for Projection explores questions of indifference, alienation, guilt and memory in both the personal lives of the Ecksteins and in South Africans as apartheid came to an end and a post-apartheid state was established.

I argue that Kentridge’s exploration of memory in History of the Main Complaint uses the process of medical diagnosis as a metaphor to explore the narration of apartheid history in the TRC as an inherently ambiguous process despite its juridical desire for truth. Both the TRC and radiology employ a relationship between expert, witness, and testimony to narrate histories of the patient’s malady or the history of apartheid. To examine the metaphors of diagnosis, I turn to emergency room Dr Barry Saunders’ (2008) anthropological analysis of slide rooms of radiology departments. Saunders (2008: 8, 15, 199) investigates the process of reading CT scans as an image, insisting on the centrality of vision in the practice of diagnosis. He reveals that the radiologist’s analysis is termed a process of testimony, which links the evidentiary processes of the TRC with the diagnostic tools of radiology. Saunders’ work resurrects the centrality of narrative in the clinical and evidentiary process of diagnosis, revealing that vision and testimony are part of the process of cutting up and seeing the body in a slide room.

Mark Sanders (2007: 4-5) reads the discourse of the TRC in a similar way; locating ambiguity as a constituent feature of its narrative. Sanders (2007: 17) argues that despite the TRC’s openness to narrative accounts by participants, they were ultimately subjected to forensic criteria to determine truth or falsity and relevance to the scope of investigation, leaving the TRC with a ‘quasi-legal’ structure.

The TRC was established as part of the interim constitution of South Africa (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998: 48). The Commission’s goals were to establish a historical narrative of apartheid violence and its causes, granting amnesty to offenders, attempting to locate victims, and to prepare a report to the president of South Africa on gross violations of human rights committed from 1960 to 1994 (TRC 1998: 55-57). The TRC (1998: 55) committee describes their mandate as:
establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights... [and] facilitating the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective.

The statement clearly establishes the desire of the report to narrate through the genre of history. Furthermore, the notion of amnesty highlights the judicial decisions engaged with by the Commission, emphasising the legal structure in Sanders' analysis. In his examination of amnesty, Jacques Derrida (2001:42-43) locates an aporia in the divide between chairperson Desmond Tutu’s Christianised language of forgiveness and the ‘judicial logic of amnesty’. In this divide, it is revealed that the TRC often rests on the narratives, authority and practices of a courtroom.

Sanders’ (2007:5-6) emphasis on forensic truth reveals an inherent difficulty in the TRC’s outlook: it often depends on the literary for witnesses to narrate their experiences. Forensic truth, at work in both radiology departments uncovering lesions and fractures lying beneath the surface of the body, and in the sessions of the TRC, engenders a series of ambiguities. The judicial order is often brought into contradiction with the literary narratives given as testimony. History of the Main Complaint, whose title suggests a case history of the patient providing symptoms and medical history that acts as a testimony by giving an account of one’s self, brings these two systems of forensic truth together in the film. Each is a narrative structure reliant on testimony, and an expert in the form of a doctor or the Commission’s report to constitute an official history of the malady, be it medical or, in the case of South Africa, apartheid.

Sanders’ (2007:24) literary reading of the TRC argues that the official report’s genre is history. Hayden White (1987:48) has argued that narrative is necessary to constitute a historical text; it is dependent on the same rhetorical tropes such as irony and metaphor that constitute the form of fiction. In doing so, the legal narratives rely upon literary forms to constitute their history. It is here that ambiguity, defined by William Empson (1956:5-6) as indecision regarding what one means, a plurality of meanings, or that a statement may connote several meanings, becomes important for this reading of the TRC. Like any other literary form, the ambiguities in forensic testimony or radiological practice create several meanings, opening the field of testimony to a number of different narrative experiences. Often ambiguity in the medical image requires invasive surgery for more investigation. The TRC read as literary form (as opposed to the juridical) works through ambiguity to denote places where more needs to be said and where more than one conclusion can be drawn. It opens the text to a multiplicity of readings, resisting the finality and objectivity that forensic truth attempts to constitute.

By examining the inherent ambiguities of diagnosis in the radiology room, my reading of History of the Main Complaint uses Soho’s diagnosis as a metaphor to explore the ambiguities inherent in the forensic truths of the TRC’s report. The markers used in the radiology department, and marked upon Soho’s body in the film, denote uncertainty on the CT scan, which reveal problems that necessitate further investigation. This process reveals the ambiguity at work in the TRC; it is unable to give a complete diagnosis of apartheid. Some narrative aspects cannot be addressed in a judicial forum; to locate the uncertainty of diagnosis highlights the place of these domains in the narrative of apartheid. I will begin by situating Kentridge’s use of these devices in the scope of 9 Drawings for Projection and contextualise the film’s relationship to the TRC. I will then reveal the process of testimony and ambiguity in reading the
CT scan, contrasting it with the objectivity of the X-ray. My conclusion will then examine the implications this relationship between the TRC and diagnosis has in Kentridge’s project, using ambiguity as a critical narrative.

The film

In the previous film in this series, Felix in Exile (1994), Kentridge located the body as a part of the landscape of Johannesburg’s industrial ruins. Several scenes of individuals lying dead in slurries and blasted pits dominate the imagery of the film; tying together political violence and industrial degradation in one terrain. In History of the Main Complaint and the following film, WEIGHING … and WANTING (1998), Kentridge shifts the focus. Instead of the landscape being a repository of memory, these films locate the landscape inside the body. The body itself becomes a landscape, holding memories that need to be decoded. Kentridge has drawn landscape scenes inside Soho’s brain scans and its imagery is evoked in the flashbacks Soho experiences in History of the Main Complaint as he drives out of Johannesburg into the countryside. Throughout 9 Drawings for Projection, memory and landscape are linked through the evocation of geological metaphors, whereas Mine (1991) investigates Soho’s relationship to the mines he owns on the outskirts of Johannesburg and Felix in Exile centres around representations of the landscape as a site of violence and industry.

In WEIGHING … and WANTING these geological referents emerge in CT slices of the brain, cutting through the brain the same way that a geological sample would cut through a rock.1 Geological metaphors are also invoked through Kentridge’s description of the challenges of narrating apartheid memories as a ‘rock’, arguing that the weight apartheid represents often obfuscates effective ways of representing it, engaging with its legacies, and the place within one’s life or artistic production (Kentridge 1998:74-75). To represent apartheid (or any looming socio-political issue for that matter) in a grand narrative leaves the response feeling inadequate. When apartheid is narrated in this way, Kentridge (1998: 76) argues that ‘the rock always wins’. Kentridge (1998: 76) prefers aesthetic responses to apartheid: ‘that have their origin outside a particular object may often be more illuminating in their oblique light than the full searchlights of the project that stares straight at this object.’ That is to say, in the smallness of certain narratives, their specificity can illuminate the structures of a whole system, such as apartheid, rather than the overwhelming nature that a blunt and totalised narrative may represent.

As Kentridge reveals in the epigraph, these geological metaphors are strongly linked to bodily representations. Internal images of one’s body, both medically revealed in X-rays and CT scans, and psychically represented in the emotions of guilt, loss, and pain become alien and difficult to decode or understand. To witness and comprehend images of Mars based on their resemblance to South Africa’s Karoo desert becomes an easier task than knowing the functions of one’s liver from a CT scan or decoding memories of violence and pain in the post-apartheid era. Comparable to the difficulty patients may have in understanding images of their body, the rock of apartheid as Kentridge puts it is suggestive of a sense of impenetrability.

History of the Main Complaint begins as the curtains surrounding Soho’s hospital bed are pulled back to reveal him lying in bed still dressed in his trademark pinstripe suit. The film’s title is revealed on a monitor next to Soho’s bed and the hiss of a respirator is audible. As the doctors labour to diagnose Soho, they begin probing him with stethoscopes. The doctors appear like multiple versions of Soho, suggesting their interchangeability. During the course of Soho’s examinations, there
are cuts between the examination and images from a CT scan or X-ray. These devices, in their representations of Soho’s body, reveal several red markers denoting points of trauma upon his body. Trauma here is used in its strict medical sense, evoking a wound or bodily injury; these markers then denote points of injury on Soho’s body (Caruth 1996:3).

As these markers are inscribed, the film cuts to a series of flashbacks from Soho’s perspective, as the viewer looks on with him. These flashbacks show Soho driving out of Johannesburg into the city’s townships and industrial ruin. Art historian Jill Bennett (2004:75-76) pays close attention to Soho’s car ride, reminding us he is ‘at the wheel’, navigating through both time and space as he moves through South Africa’s landscape.

The vehicle references both the picturesque and rural spaces that the car moves through, while reinforcing the divisions between public and private, evocative of concerns over security in post-apartheid South Africa. The car is a place that can be secured and armed with an alarm, yet this security is ruptured as scenes of violence break down this divide in the film (Bennett 2004:75-76).

The first flashback shows Soho leaving the city on a long straight highway, as it cuts to an image of a telephone revealed in a cardiogram monitor. This is followed by an X-ray of Soho’s torso where a stamp removes the red markers on the screen, and then a typewriter whose action obscures the stamping from view. A cardiogram follows this image as a ham and a scrotum are

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**Figure 1:** William Kentridge, Drawing for History of the Main Complaint, 1996, reproduced courtesy of William Kentridge
attached to electrical leads and energy surges through them. In this montage, the Sunday roast is confronted with a different system where the body is reduced to a piece of meat, recalling police torture tactics under apartheid. The image within the larger context of the film is suggestive of a divide between public and private in both social networks and in the body.

The second driving sequence features Soho driving down a long road, again leaving the city. As he gazes into the rear-view mirror, he witnesses two men kicking and beating a third. Kentridge’s animation cuts between these scenes of assault and a CT scan of a head where the violence is denoted with red crosses at the points where the body is struck (Figure 1). Soho proceeds to drive past the scene of the assault, finding the red crosses on the windscreen of his car. He turns on the wiper blades, erasing the crosses, though imperfectly from the windscreen (Figure 2). Soho is then shown lying in bed before the film cuts back to his drive. In the final flashback, his car strikes a person running in front of it, prompting the scene’s images to be seen through the shattered shards of the windscreen. These final two images of violence derive from experiences in Kentridge’s own childhood. He witnessed a man being beaten and was the passenger in a car that struck and killed another person (Kentridge, Rinder, Rosenthal & Silverman 2009). The film ends as Soho awakens with a sudden jolt in his hospital bed, as the shattered fragments (their shattering is implied when the windscreen of the car is broken) coalesce back into coherent images and they reveal Soho’s office equipment. The curtains then open around Soho’s hospital bed, revealing him seated at a desk as the clatter of typing and phones ringing is heard; he has returned to a state of ‘business as usual’.

Figure 2: William Kentridge, History of the Main Complaint, 35mm film transferred to video, 5:50 min., reproduced courtesy of William Kentridge.
CT scans and the ambiguity of testimony

As I argued at the onset of this essay, Kentridge’s invocation of medical technologies and the ambiguity inherent in what they see becomes a metaphor for witness and memory. One of Soho’s X-rays in *History of the Main Complaint* gives a clear depiction of the relation between body and memory pursued in the film. The image of Soho’s torso (Figure 3), depicts the ribs and spinal cord, and situates a typewriter over the pelvis. The image of a typewriter emerges frequently in Soho’s empire alongside other office equipment that references his history as a property developer in Johannesburg. The typewriter both connotes an image of his work as a property developer, and its placement in his X-ray suggests that it is perhaps part of his malady. In their juxtaposition, the place of business and apartheid emerges into this discussion of the TRC; Dan Cameron (1999:70) has argued that the collapse of Soho’s empire may have brought about his ‘calamity’. However, even here, the implication of guilt is not made explicit.

The typewriter also documents, recording histories and providing a transcript; it even bears resemblance to a stenotype machine evoking a legal domain through its imagery. The typewriter is an apparatus like the X-ray machine or CT scan, a system of representation and communication. Both the typewriter and diagnostic tools narrate portions of Soho’s history and memories. Within this scene, the typewriter’s hammers move forward striking the surface behind them, presumably marking characters upon the X-ray. However, the erasure traces present on the surface of the image obscure any clarity of its process; as it narrates, the production of its testimony cannot be seen. The uncer-
tainty here is further underpinned by the lack of any clear signs of injury, such as broken bones, underneath the red markers.

JM Coetzee’s (1999:86) reading of History of the Main Complaint situates the red markers as places of exploration recalling their use as surveying markers in Felix in Exile. Likewise, Saunders (2008:76) demonstrates their importance in diagnosis in radiology departments, explaining: ‘It is used in spine studies (CT and MRI) to number vertebrae. In addition to level, size, and density, the wax pencil marks suspicious areas, findings to be discussed with the attending [physician], lesions to be recalled at the time of dictation.’ Saunders (2009:76) continues his discussion by revealing that the wax pencil which makes these red marks on the CT scan, denote areas of suspicion; places where an expert needs to be contacted for further interpretation. Within the brain scans from History of the Main Complaint, several red markers are placed on the skull, marking points of injury or trauma. These markers also appear upon the body of the man whose assault Soho witnessed. The red markers, as Saunders’ reading of the functions of the CT suite indicate, reveal a psychological wound that needs to be decoded or taken apart by the team of doctors residing around Soho’s bed.

The red markers located here, as in the entire film, locate areas of concern but do not disclose a methodology for reparation; rather they call for an expert to perform a diagnosis. The marker also performs an act of reading and interpretation, much as the TRC does by locating specific individual histories where testimony is necessary. The reading of the CT scan and its marking calls attention to specific areas, it standardises the body (numbering vertebrae) and denotes spaces which the expert must be called upon to explain or speak about. The red markers on Soho’s X-rays and CT scans demarcate instances mapped upon his body that demand the expert’s interpretation. These red markers in Kentridge’s films become places of trauma, places where the doctor’s attention should be orientated, but they are also unsure; the viewer does not see their source or origin.

In History of the Main Complaint the red markers are rendered on the surface of the image before Soho’s flashbacks, suggesting that these scenes relate to the ambiguities in the medical image. While the markers of these traumas can be seen, their main complaint is complicated, as Soho is both the witness to an assault and injured in the car crash. Furthermore, it is only diagnosis, not treatment, that is represented in the films; Soho’s recovery is absent. In the incompleteness of diagnosis, the red markers and more widely medical diagnostic tools become metaphors to explore the TRC’s attempt to narrate historical “truth”, expressed through a forensic legal domain. As I previously asserted through Sanders (2007:17) literary analysis of the TRC, witnesses’ testimony was subject to verification or falsification. What one claimed to have seen, what they saw, or even did not see is at the core of the narrative and legal structures of the TRC report as a historical archive of apartheid.

Because of this centrality of vision in producing narratives of memory, the CT scanner seems an appropriate metaphor to explore these claims; in fact the narration of the report is referred to as a process of testimony (Sanders 2008:207). The practice of radiology functions like a courtroom with regard to this evidentiary process: ‘Evidence is introduced, testimony given, judgements formed’ (Sanders 2008:207). The radiological department, like the TRC hearings, functions in a quasi-legal domain. In fact, a radiological relative to the CT scan, the X-ray is a legal document. Physician and historian Barron H Lerner (1992:392) states the emergence of radiography as an autonomous discourse of medicine arose partially because of the need for interpreting
X-rays in malpractice suits. In the TRC a domain of introducing evidence and testimony also exists: witnesses provide a narrative through testimony, judgement is passed on amnesty, and decisions are made on whose applications would be heard and what evidence is relevant to the hearings. The report even invokes a legal precedent in its structure, rejecting the Nuremberg trials as a model (TRC 1998:5).

However, the images produced by the CT scanner often unveil spaces of uncertainty; the radiologist must call upon a specialist for further interpretation (Sanders 2008:16-17, 20-31). The uncertainty within the CT scan as a visual record, often in contradiction to the presumed conditions of positivist evidence and fact that radiography represents in popular discourse (Sanders 2008:5, 308), is at the core of Kentridge’s work. This uncertainty is most explicit through Kentridge’s use of optical devices that are often employed to engender a sense of ambiguity in narrating history. I have shown elsewhere (Hennlich 2011:52, 61) that the camera becomes an ironic device in *Ubu Tells the Truth* (1999). In *Ubu*, the camera depicts Dirk Coetzee’s testimony to the TRC; its functions in representing this testimony show the camera documenting the destruction of evidence while creating a record of this erasure. In doing so, the camera in *Ubu* represents both the action of witnessing and its impossibility.

More notable is Kentridge’s frequent reference to the stereoscope. Kentridge has produced a number of stereoscopic cards, but the use of the stereoscope is most explicit in his film Stereoscope (1999). In *Stereoscope*, Kentridge uses its instability as a metaphor for the divides between public and private Soho experiences in his life. Jonathan Crary’s (1990:122) study of nineteenth-century optical devices and their relation to modernity, reveals that the stereoscope functioned by merging the viewer’s perception of two separate worlds into one plane to produce a three-dimensional effect. However, this device was highly unstable and some stereoscopic cards were unable to produce the intended effect (Crary 1990:124). The stereoscope becomes a way of exploring how one reconciles different events into one world in Kentridge’s project. For Crary (1990:8, 24), the stereoscope marks the collapse of a model of vision associated with the camera obscura as a rational disembodied form of knowledge, and constituting a model of embodied vision. The CT scanner is an unstable optical device in the field of medical vision. Its use in *History of the Main Complaint* suggests through its ambiguity an opening up of the narrative to new meanings; it undermines a verifiable reading engendered by judicial authority.

**The deathly space of the X-ray**

As the red crosses referred to previously are uncovered, they reveal three flashbacks of Soho driving through the countryside. These spaces seem to be uncovered as the red inscriptions are made on the CT scans and X-rays. While the CT scan seems to refer to Soho’s time in the hospital, the X-ray becomes linked with driving. The car is Soho’s primary method of encountering the landscape of South Africa in *History of the Main Complaint*, reflecting a similar inside/outside model between the country and the body. In the three driving sequences the car becomes a link between landscape (exterior) and the mental traumas of Soho (interior), just as the CT scan reveals a separation between surface and what exists below it (Kentridge 1999:143).

The car and the X-ray become further linked because of their relationship to death through the accident. The accident is like the X-ray; it destroys the separation of outside from inside. Jean Baudrillard (2005:71) remarks that the car’s imagined space is death because
of the imagined inevitability of an accident, something also suggested by the X-ray, which is used to diagnose and treat in the event of a car crash. Fredric Jameson’s (1991:9) explication of postmodern culture turns to Andy Warhol’s Diamond Dust Shoes as representative of postmodernism, stating that they represent ‘glacé X-ray elegance’. Jameson's reading argues that the X-ray as a formal feature of Warhol's work signifies deathly space as much as his imagery in the death and disaster works. Warhol’s silk screens have the qualities of an X-ray because they do not plunge into the depths of content. Rather its deathly structure remains on the surface; it is precisely Jameson’s (1991:10) ‘waning of affect’ that they represent. This metaphor of surface, not being able to plunge into content, begins to suggest the problems one faces with “the rock” of apartheid as Kentridge discusses it; in its looming force the rock resists a critical language to respond to it effectively, rather numbing one with its totality. As the X-ray is surface, so too is the rock, one cannot get to the bottom of it.

The car and X-ray overlap as deadly spaces, but it is in their exchange that they reveal scenes of death and violence in Soho’s flashbacks. As Soho witnesses the assault, the red X’s are marked upon his X-ray. The violence experienced in the car continues, as the markers are placed on the victim’s scans, the victim and Soho’s scans merge. During this sequence, the red markers are left on his windscreen as he eventually strikes a man crossing the road. Soon thereafter, the shattered scenes of his flashback return to whole images and Soho awakes. Presumably, the violence denotes the deathly space of the car, overlapping with the X-ray’s own deathly domain. Not only is it the task of the doctors, who probe into Soho’s body with their stethoscope snouts to mark the points of inquiry upon the X-ray, it also the task of witnessing as Soho looks out of the car that led to these red marker’s inscription.

The violation of boundaries between public and private is at work in the X-ray’s function as an image of death, which highlights the car and X-ray as spaces that embody a similar discourse. Lisa Cartwright (1995) emphasises the fascination over the X-ray in popular culture and in particular its status as an image of mortality. In two passages describing this process, Cartwright (1995:113,121) describes the X-ray as an image of brutality and violence, stripping the system bare, leaving only a black and white image as a remnant. Cartwright (1995:113,121) argues: ‘Rather, light becomes a brutal force that physically penetrates its object, stripping away its concealing surface to lay its structure bare,’ and later ‘the X-ray signifies the ultimate violation of the boundaries that define the subjectivity and identity, exposing the private interior to the gaze of medicine and the public at large.’ The X-ray not only strips open systems, like the TRC attempts to do through its hearings to document a history, Cartwright argues the reading of an X-ray, like the Commission’s hearings, also becomes a public affair. The X-ray subjects the body of the patient to the gaze of the doctors laden with the authority engendered by their expert ability to read such an image. Again, the notion of forensic truth raised by Sanders seems pertinent. Testimony, delivered in a public setting, subject (in the case of perpetrators) to the juridical power of cross-examination, is ultimately judged, as Derrida (2001:43) argues, to be deserving of such a legal distinction or not.

The X-ray does serve as a document of legal truth; Lerner (1992:392) reveals that radiography as an autonomous practice became necessary because of the need for interpreting X-rays for malpractice suits. Representing a discourse of accuracy and cohesion, the X-ray was developed to represent concrete proof of a fracture, so much so that doctors stopped using physical examinations to perform diagnosis (Lerner 1992:388). In this way, the X-ray is called upon in the judgement of
harm done to a body and who was responsible for that damage. The development of the X-ray provides a quickly reproducible and purportedly accurate way of imaging and understanding the body. The X-ray in this way becomes ironic; as it documents the act of injury, it flags its own signification of a system of violence and death.

Kentridge also sees medical imaging technology representing a certain sense of violence. Figuring the synthesis between nature and the medical image, Kentridge (2004:127) states: 'The naturalistic rendering of certain oblique slices through the head become distorted, grotesque, evocations of a head – they are used, fragmented in the violent petit mal towards the end of the film.' The image itself works in a rhetoric of violence; it slices open the body, distorts its perceptions and in its technical rendering can even alienate the patient when confronted with CT scans or X-rays (Saunders 2008:27). In History of the Main Complaint, it is not just the scenes Soho witnesses that are violent, but also the examination probes into the body, the stethoscopes moving in impossible ways through the body for the doctors to witness his interior through both sound and the images on the screen.

Roland Barthes' famous study of photography, Camera Lucida (1981), creates a division between studium and punctum. Barthes (1981:26-28) describes studium as a kind of ‘education,’ a knowing of the maker’s intentions that drives most photographs. This is contrasted with something more visceral and personal he describes as punctum: an ‘accident’, an unexpected detail of the image that arouses an individual when looking at it a ‘sting, speck, cut, little hole’ (Barthes:26-28). In this analysis, Barthes (1981:14-15) sees photography as having a deathly quality to it. The X-ray in its verifiable evidence, a discourse to be studied objectively, seems to belong to the domain of studium. It is possible through looking to understand what is going on in the X-ray, to locate fractures, for instance. However, Saunders (2008: 36) remarks that CT slices hold the potential of punctum; the discovery of something buried inside the body, an undiscovered lesion can prick both the radiologist and the patient. It is both a wound, holding resonances of medical traumas and an accident as something unintentional and unexpected, reminding us of Soho’s car accident in History of the Main Complaint. In the CT room, the location of lesions, tumours or other spaces of ambiguity may produce this sense of punctum, according to Saunders (2008:36). Its own ambiguity may open the potential for unexpected readings of the scan.

In History of the Main Complaint, the process of diagnosis reveals the ambiguity inherent within its functions. We know that Soho has been in a car crash, but the extent of his physical traumas and their relationship to the scenes he has witnessed are unclear. During the examination performed in his hospital bed, the doctor locates office equipment lying beneath the skin’s surface by probing inside Soho’s body with a stethoscope (Figure 4). Kentridge then cuts to a scene where an X-ray shows the doctor’s stethoscope snake through the spinal cord, and the next doctor plunges through the breast and ribcage to find the heart; Soho’s faint breath is barely heard above the sound track. These stethoscope snouts bore through the body like a mine’s drill leaving metal discs inside Soho’s body. They recall the coffee plunger that Soho uses to drill from his bed to the mines in Mine; both devices are able to move impossibly across spatial thresholds.

The doctors’ probing reveals a paper punch and telephone that transmit sonic impulses through the stethoscope’s hose. The paper punch and telephone have an origin in the earlier films as Soho engages with his empire in both the Johannesburg skyline and the mining pits around the city. Michael Godby (1998:108) argues that the tools on Soho’s desk not only assert the economic
Figure 4: William Kentridge, *History of the Main Complaint* (stills of examination and X-ray), 35mm film transferred to video, 5:50 min., reproduced courtesy of William Kentridge
power of his empire, but also symbolise ‘the power to absorb or deny the violence on which it is based.’ In *History of the Main Complaint*, these tools become ways of marking traumas inside the body, for example the typewriter is able to mark the red X’s upon Soho’s X-ray, and the rubber stamp which appears later erases them as it passes across them. In doing so, the office tools demonstrate a trauma inside his body while also obfuscating and erasing them from the field of view.

While we know Soho is in the hospital from the car crash, the documentation and the erasure within Soho’s X-rays reveal an uncertainty about what lies beneath the skin. It is unclear what lies dormant beneath his exterior, leaving Soho unaware of the damage they are causing until it becomes necessary for a doctor to diagnose, revealing what resides within the flesh, rooting out the cause of the ‘main complaint’.

Locating a main complaint was performed in the TRC through the production of the official report. The desire of the report was to not only give victims and their families the opportunity to give testimony (a case history of sorts), but also to establish an official history whose power is codified by law through the process of forensic evidence that attempts to prove or disprove. However, the uncertainty uncovered in testimony and in the process of diagnosis shown in *History of the Main Complaint*, uncovers ambiguities and spaces that the TRC is unable to address.

At times, as Derrida’s (2001:43-44) mention of a woman reminding the Commission they do not have the authority to grant forgiveness for her, there is a divide between the Commission’s goals and what the witness provides. This process creates a body in a legal and authoritative (evoking both evidence and the state) sense that may be at odds with what the witness feels or tries to communicate. In her Foucauldian analysis, Cartwright (1995) develops a convincing case that the body is segmented and dissected in medicine’s quest for objective truth, left for an expert to make sense of the abstractions that persist. Cartwright’s focus on the microscope and the X-ray becomes particularly interesting for reading Kentridge’s project. Through this process, she develops an increasing divorce between a conceptualisation of the body and its sensory functions. This divide between the body and the subject’s understanding of it becomes a way to understand the divide between Soho’s memories and the way they become mapped on the diagnostic tools in the film. It also becomes a way of understanding these breakdowns in memories and the outcomes that the TRC wishes to grant.

Cartwright’s (1995:82) analysis of the body reveals that it is understood through institutional techniques and technological tools such as the microscope. Microscopy, utilised in fields such as pathology and haematology, segments the body, reading it through small fragments that are through the microscope blown up, stained, illuminated through a monocular gaze (Cartwright 1995:83). In this process of reading the pathology, vitality or sexuality of the sample all traces of corporeality are removed as the sample on the slide becomes a trace of that subject (Cartwright 1995:83). In the development of the microscope, an emphasis was placed on calibrating the object to the eye to produce a standardised set of results. This meant adjusting the microscope so that no matter what the imperfections or variances in the viewer’s eye, a universal result could be obtained when looking at test slides (Cartwright 1995:84-85). This universalised and objective sight, recalls a similar practice in the filmed and forensic discourse of the TRC where a specific mandate of what qualified as necessitating amnesty and who would be allowed to testify was outlined by the Commission’s approach.
The TRC (1998:64-65) defined very specifically who would be allowed to testify and apply for amnesty, limiting ‘gross violations’ to specific acts defined as ‘killing, torture, abduction, and severe ill treatment.’ The TRC was left with an enormous interpretive task concerning what actions actually consisted gross violations of human rights and who would be able to testify in front of the panel. Subsequently a narrative structure edited for effect, representation, and incorporating those most famous and serious violations emerges, leaving gaps in the narratives and histories of apartheid violence. Like the microscope, the TRC seeks to normalise and universalise the narrative of apartheid violence. What was filmed and transmitted to the nation projected a notion of guilt and victim that had well defined and outlined parameters, rejecting claims for amnesty and victim testimony that fell outside of it as aberrant. The ultimate goal of the medical diagnostic tools as visual technologies is to gain visual authority, knowledge and power over the subject examined. This activity is precisely what happens in naming and diagnosing, both in the TRC’s amnesty hearings, and as Saunders (2008:34) reminds us, within radiological departments in the hospital.

While Kentridge’s work does not feature the microscope, the same principles represented by the microscope as a metaphor for the TRC are applicable. We look on with Soho as he drives through the countryside, seeing him gaze back through the rear-view mirror. This looking back becomes both a metaphor for history, looking to the past and moving forward; in Soho’s case, driving further into the landscape and leaving those things he witnessed in the past. Yet the mirror is another visual device enabling a perception of the past; these images stay with Soho reflected into his car as he moves forward, while the image of Soho’s eye’s looking back creates a cinematic device where it appears that we are looking on with Soho.

As Soho witnesses the scene of assault in the rear-view mirror, the film cuts to an X-ray, where red markers are mapped upon the victim’s body, locating the points of impact on the skull from the attack. The relationships of these markers produce a sense of continuity between the two worlds (the attack and Soho’s comatose state), suggesting that the trauma suffered of the attack victim may also be the source of Soho’s traumas in his X-rays and other scans. This marking of the body, born out of expert medical knowledge, attempts to produce stable and universal narratives to be constructed despite the distortions necessary to produce the medical result; likewise, the TRC relies on a juridical structure mapped atop the narrative features of testimony in the TRC.

Conclusion: ambiguity as critical practice

Kentridge’s films suggest a degree of indeterminacy within the data it transmits to the doctors. It reveals the instability of radiology (despite its veneer of scientific accuracy). Saunders (2008:90-1) writes:

The radiological gaze is not always confident: it is expectant, searching, somewhat anxious, reassured by friends (the normal, the nameable), alert to confusions between findings and artifacts. Though films on the viewbox are thoroughly reified as specimen objects, now and again something ‘catches the eye’ of the radiologist.

What Saunders exposes about the radiological gaze, is precisely what Kentridge engages with in each of his projects: the impossibility of objective vision, of providing a complete and knowable diagnosis of giving a whole ‘history of the main complaint’. This imperfect and incomplete history is a defining trait of Kentridge’s work. Imperfection, he argues, resists gigantic and totalising mistakes (Kentridge & Breidbach 2006:97). The
probing and searching, finding spaces of uncertainty brings one back to Kentridge’s statement about the rock of apartheid discussed at the beginning of this article. To recognise uncertainty rather than pursuing a condition of completeness may be more illuminating about apartheid’s legacies and its impact on South Africa’s present than the TRC was capable of addressing. While this does not invalidate the necessary work of the TRC, it does suggest that a critical language can help to illuminate problems within its domain.

I have attempted to show that throughout History of the Main Complaint Soho’s role in the trauma is difficult to diagnose; it is unclear whether he is victim or perpetrator. Soho witnesses the attack while driving through the countryside (we witness alongside him through a montage of Soho’s eyes in the rear-view mirror, and a sonogram-like image of the attack itself) and later Soho’s car strikes another individual. While these two images are violent, the narrative is difficult to decode. Is Soho participating in the attacks or is he a witness, and if he is a witness, what degree of guilt can we assign to him? Or, what degree of guilt or remorse does Soho find inside himself? JM Coetzee (1999:93) argues that at the end of the film no truth emerges from these explorations; what they do is firmly in the realm of ambiguity; multiple meanings and narratives emerge. The ambiguity in the political motivations and outcomes of these moments of violence within History of the Main Complaint suggests difficulty in assessing what comes under the rubric of the TRC’s domain and what falls outside of it.

Jacqueline Rose (2003:216-18, 222), in her study of apathy and accountability in the TRC, details the amnesty application of an Indian woman filed on the grounds she had not done enough. This application was turned down because it did not disclose an identifiable offence to which to grant amnesty (Rose 2003:217). Rose’s study of apathy reveals a place where people fall outside of the scope of the TRC; it reveals a space of guilt that is unable to be narrated in its domain. More tellingly, it raises the question of accountability: who is responsible for apartheid? For Rose’s (2003:222) reading what is important is the question of Western accountability. The ambiguities Rose sees between the relationship between truth and justice cast a wide net on who and what should be held accountable for apartheid. While I in no way mean to suggest that certain actors are not directly culpable for human rights abuses, what this reading does is cast a wider net of accountability based on questions of apathy, corporate profits, and being a passive witness, amongst a host of other issues that open new narrative pathways to narrate apartheid’s legacy. This application’s claim for amnesty on the grounds of apathy reveals places where Kentridge’s film and the ambiguity it employs becomes a critical narrative for exploring the TRC. Reading the CT scan’s uncertainty leaves a space for a new testimony or narrative to be constructed that functions outside of the TRC’s need for forensic truth. Rose (2003:218) argues that apathy’s own ambiguities would make it impossible to give a full disclosure; it does not have a fixed temporality or specific intentionality that would be needed to fit into the TRC’s domain.

In History of the Main Complaint, Soho’s car keeps going after witnessing the assault, as his windscreen is shattered, its fragments reunite into a single image. Yet, the red markers are still marked on his body. The rubber stamp tried to erase them (Figure 5), as does Soho when activating his wiper blades to remove these markers on his windscreen. Yet through Kentridge’s erasure process in his animations, traces, which function like scars remain on the surface of the image. What was originally rendered cannot fully be effaced from the surface or historical narrative. They become afterimages, images that persist in the viewer’s field of
Figure 5: William Kentridge, *History of the Main Complaint*, 35mm film transferred to video, 5:50 min., reproduced courtesy of William Kentridge.
vision after the exposure to that image ceases (Crary 1993:98).

Like Kentridge’s animation, the TRC has an afterimage despite attempts at trying to place apartheid in the past as a means of moving South Africa forward. Constructing the field of vision, seeing and subsequently witnessing through the afterimage not only acknowledges the ambiguities in history through its uniquely physical and therefore embodied production, but also preserves a historical trace. This historical narrative suggests that the history of the present cannot shed the past, contrary to the suggestion by TRC chair Desmond Tutu (quoted in Krog 1998:42): ‘We should be deeply humbled by what we’ve heard, but we’ve got to finish quickly and really turn our backs on this awful past and say: “Life is for living.”’ In fact the Commission’s focus of amnesty suggests in and of itself a condition of forgetting. The Oxford Dictionary of Law (‘amnesty’ 2006) defines amnesty as: ‘an act erasing from legal memory some aspect of criminal conduct by an offender. It is most frequently granted to groups of people in respect of political offences and is wider than a pardon, which merely relieves an offender of punishment.’

The forensic and legal domain of the TRC engenders a condition of forgetting, to produce an official archive of apartheid, to grant amnesty, to move forward even through Tutu’s rhetoric suggests that it can be left in the past (Derrida 2002:80). However, in Kentridge’s treatment of the medical field, and through his turn towards aesthetics, this condition of forgetting, those narratives that are uncertain, can be illuminated. History of the Main Complaint, through the language of ambiguity, speaks to a situation where multiple outcomes and narratives are possible. Empson’s ambiguity becomes a critical space for the narration of both apartheid and for a critical language to suggest shortcomings of the TRC’s focus.

The impossibility of forgetting, suggested by the palimpsest of Kentridge’s working method, is similar to Freud’s analysis of the mystic writing pad, a toy made of a celluloid sheet and a wax slate that can be erased after writing on it as a metaphor for the mind. The impressions left on the wax slate persist as traces much like the erasure traces on Kentridge’s surface, making it a useful comparison between the two. Furthermore, the fact that Freud turns towards the metaphor of toys, much like optical toys such as the stereoscope, and the number of puppets used in Kentridge’s theatrical work, reveals another terrain upon which their explorations of memory merge. Freud (1961:230) argues that memory, like the mystic writing pad, functions on two levels: one the infinitely erasable surface that receives external stimuli, and a deeper level like the wax base that saves all the memories but is only able to be revealed in certain lights. When Kentridge speaks of the rock it is the oblique strategies he refers to that can illuminate different aspects of apartheid, shining a critical eye on its narration as historical event. Through the ambiguity in the relationship between Soho’s psychic and physical injuries and their diagnosis, they uncover places where uncertainty emerges, even for the expert.

Soho’s body reveals the difficulty in the processes of memory; the images and markers that point to the scenes he witnessed reside internally, and yet are difficult to recall. The afterimages suggest that the issues apartheid raises will still be with the nation long after the end of the TRC. The notions of forgetting represented in Tutu’s claims to leave apartheid in the past and the legal practice of amnesty feel impossible. Rather,
reading these spaces of ambiguity make it possible to speak on issues such as a wider space of account- ability that reaches outside of the legal domains of the TRC. The persistence of the erasure traces on the screen retains a residue of the past while turning to the rock of apartheid, but considers how they impact the present. At the end of the film Soho awakens but returns to his world of industry; he may have considered his guilt, his role in witnessing these attacks, but at the end, he is seated at a desk with the tools of his empire that were buried beneath him. He has returned to business as usual.

To consider the imperfect erasures, traces of the past persisting in Soho’s empire, is to consider how apartheid politics have not completely been left in the past. Reading in this temporal ambiguity suggests a number of outcomes, not only those spaces of narrating apartheid history where the TRC seems incomplete, but of Soho’s present to consider its impact on the post-apartheid nation. Soho’s position at the end of the film compels us to turn towards what Grant Farred (2004: 593) sees as a condition of ‘after the thrill is gone’, the political situation of the post-apartheid state. To consider how the struggle of inequity persists in the present is to consider how ‘the new South African nomos is not sufficiently distinct from its predecessor’ (Farred 2004:595). Through the ambiguity of the film, the role of office equipment that evokes Soho’s empire and the authority that comes with it, and the dual temporality of past and present in Soho’s diagnosis represent an opportunity to consider how the post-apartheid state carries with it the traces of the apartheid system. Kentridge’s film not only provides a critique of the outcomes of the TRC, but also suggests, that these traumas of the past, though partly erased through amnesty, remain like the indentations on Freud’s toy; their residue has built up on the surface.

Freud’s mystic writing pad perhaps provides a better model for South Africa; its traces and ambiguities at work in History of the Main Complaint give a critical history not only of the TRC’s attempt to diagnose apartheid, but also to consider how apartheid history is mapped upon the present.

Notes

1 Barry Saunders (2008:40-44) points out that there is a strong methodological connection between sectional representation in geology and biology. Both discourses use sectional imaging to provide a more realistic representation that ultimately distorts the image through the use of cutting, slicing, and invasive technologies.

2 Ivan Vladislavic (2006:173) discusses security measures in homes as a frontier boundary, placing security concerns into a long narrative of borders in Johannesburg. Home security spirals into ever larger and more intense measures of protection; he describes these security systems as a constituent part of the architecture of Johannesburg’s suburbs.

References


Abstract

This article considers the ontology of the British journalist GK Chesterton with respect to its implications for the interpretation of visual texts, referred to here as the *ethics of speculation*. This exploration takes place under the assumption that Chesterton’s ontology, as that which relates to understanding the meaning of things, and his ethics, as that which examines the uses and abuses of things, have a dialogical connection. While Chesterton is not formally considered a philosopher, art historian or visual theorist, it is proposed that his ideas as a post-Victorian cultural commentator remain relevant to visual theory today. Unfortunately, Chesterton does not explicate his ontology systematically; this paper suggests that it may be considered in the light of three interlinking considerations: the riddle, the answer and the romance of being. It is in contemplating the interrelationship between these three considerations of being that specific ethical implications concerning visual interpretation become evident. In order to unpack the finer points of this ethics of speculation, reference is made to a single photograph taken during the South African War, *A few dead British soldiers in the aftermath of the Battle of Spionkop*, 24 January 1900.

Key terms: Chesterton, GK; Chesterton’s ontology; dramatology; ethics of speculation; visual hermeneutics; visual interpretation

But don’t let the eye rest. Why should the eye be so lazy? Let us exercise the eye until it learns to see the startling facts that run across the landscape as plain as a painted face. Let us be ocular athletes

Introduction

In this article, I outline a portion of the ontology of the British journalist GK Chesterton (1874-1936) in order to highlight some of the ethical implications of his ontology for what he calls ‘speculation’ (Chesterton 1986:249, 308). Chesterton’s use of the word *speculation* refers to the fact that that one does not merely observe with one’s eyes, but also understands what is seen through various processes of the mind (Jay 1993:29). Speculation is therefore not merely the means by which an encoded image is decoded, but also a larger process by which the reader fits in with the tonality of the image and considers the consequences of the image for his own being in the world. In short, it is concerned as much with self-discovery and self-revelation as it is with uncovering meaning.

It is my contention that while Chesterton is not formally considered a philosopher, art historian or visual theorist, his ideas as a post-Victorian cultural commentator are still relevant to visual theory today. The following discussion is rooted in the assumption that in Chesterton’s
work, ontology, as discourse concerning what is, is deeply connected to ethics, as discourse concerning what ought to be. For Chesterton (1994:17; 2002:98, 100), ontology and ethics operate in dialogue, and a discussion about the one automatically implies a discussion about the other. Put differently, the meaning of things is, in his mind, directly related to doctrines concerning the uses and abuses of things (Chesterton 1994:19).

Chesterton’s ontology may be called an ‘ontology of peace’ rather than an ‘ontology of violence’ in that it is rooted in a philosophy of reconciliation and connection that operates in the presence and affirmation of difference (Chesterton 1986:238; 1993:84; Hart 2003:36). Additionally, he figures reality as a drama, and therefore implies that being itself has a dramatic structure (Chesterton 1986:282; 1994:129; Milbank 2009:10-11). This in turn suggests that (visual) hermeneutics is a collaborative, dramatic activity, since the meaning of being is never isolated from other beings. In fact, this dramaturgical hermeneutics or dramatology rests on the idea that meaning is present in the totality of the drama of being and is therefore something understood within the drama and not just from outside. Accordingly, Chesterton (1986a:362; 1993:9) suggests on more than one occasion that if one wants to see clearly it is necessary to be both inside and outside the text that is being interpreted.

Unfortunately, Chesterton does not explicate his ontology systematically. However, I would say that the dramatic structure of being in his ontology may be

**Figure 1:** A few dead British soldiers in the aftermath of the Battle of Spioenkop, 24 January 1900, Photographer unknown (Battle of Spioenkop [s.a.])
understood in terms of three considerations, namely the riddle, the answer and the romance of being. It is in contemplating the interrelationship between these three considerations of being that certain ethical implications regarding speculation become evident. In order to unpack the finer points of this ethics of speculation, reference is made to a single photograph taken during the South African War, A few dead British soldiers in the aftermath of the Battle of Spioenkop, 24 January 1900, hereafter referred to simply as A few dead (Figure 1). This photograph has been selected because it depicts something of the consequences of a situation that Chesterton, a pro-Boer, vehemently disapproved of, even while insisting upon his British patriotism (Chesterton 1986:272; Oddie 2008:210). Nevertheless, the following reading of this image must be taken as conjectural, since it is rooted in my own subjective application of Chesterton’s ideas.

Being as a riddle

To begin with, Chesterton finds that being is first and foremost a riddle. Being remains a slippery subject in that the presence or absence of things is not the result of any kind of obvious, logical inevitability. Chesterton’s vision of the world is rooted in a kind of awe at the surprising existence of anything. He argues that to assume the givenness of anything is to miss the fact that everything is just as likely to have never existed and is therefore always eclipsed by the possibility of its own nonexistence (Chesterton 1986:267). This recalls Gottfried Leibniz’s (1646-1716) (1989:639) famous question of why there is something rather than nothing. But Chesterton’s (1986:254; 1993:39) view is contrary to Leibniz’s, since he suggests that the mere presence of anything does not automatically assume its necessity. Necessity is not the mother of all invention, but some hidden and generous mystery. This indicates that being is fundamentally a disruptive concern – a revelation that cannot be assumed or expected despite its conspicuousness (Chesterton 1952:155; 1986:268).

Accordingly, if the drama of being is a riddle, then its very nature cannot be bound to any kind of perfect, Platonic, theoretical consistency or predictability. Thus, Chesterton (1986:249-250) is particularly critical of any mindset that proposes turning various laws in nature into absolutes because he is aware of the way that the language of apparently pure objectivity, particularly in the sciences, is a means for dulling the senses to the marvel of perception. Conceptual frameworks of any kind ought to be there to serve speculation rather than be served by speculation.

To Chesterton even the obvious is not obvious. Therefore, he writes: ‘As the reader’s eye strays, with hearty relief, from these pages, it probably alights on something, a bed-post or a lamp-post, a window blind or a wall. It is a thousand to one that the reader is looking at something that he has never seen: that is, never realised’ (Chesterton 2007:v). It is precisely the ‘lazy eye’ (Chesterton 2007:v) – the eye that is adamant on merely seeing rather than engaging in conscious, considered speculation – that prevents one from understanding both what one is looking at and one’s own hermeneutic prejudices; for familiarity breeds unfamiliarity, fatigue and even, as the old adage goes, contempt (Chesterton 1993:14-15). This intimates that fatigue as over-familiarity is a kind of contempt because it robs the perceiver of his appreciation of what is being perceived. In reminding his reader of this, Chesterton is foreshadowing the psychological phenomenon of habituation, where repeated stimulation results in a diminished response (Madigan & Thomson 2005:15), and is therefore proposing that one ought to develop a deeper awareness of the unfamiliar in the familiar (Chesterton 1986:264). This awareness may be considered the first component of an ethics of speculation.
Arguably, it is by stressing the inexplicable, miraculous nature of being that Chesterton is asking his readers to move beyond thinking of seeing as merely observing to the possibility that seeing itself is a dramatic moment in which meaning is both discovered and created. Speculation, then, is not so much about encountering only what is there as it is about encountering what may not have been there and what should be there. It is also about re-encountering the self that sees. It is an imaginative act of considering the familiar as other and the ‘settled’ as ‘strange’ (Chesterton 2005:53). Put differently, ethical speculation may be an act of defamiliarisation. It advocates ‘unlearning’ and recovering one’s ‘ignorance’ in order to encounter the world and the image anew (Chesterton 2008a:40, 41). The nature of this defamiliarisation is illustrated by Chesterton’s (2005:162) recounting of an incident during which a friend asks him where he is planning to spend his holiday. His response is to say that he is going to “Battersea”, which happens to be the name of the very place that he is already in. He then explains the following:

I cannot see any Battersea here [by staying here in Battersea]; I cannot see any London or any England. I cannot see that door. I cannot see that chair: because a cloud of sleep and custom has come across my eyes. The only way to get back to them is to go everywhere else; and that is the real object of travel and the real pleasure of holidays. Do you suppose that I go to France in order to see France? Do you suppose that I go to Germany in order to see Germany? I shall enjoy them both; but it is not them I am seeking. I am seeking Battersea. The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land (Chesterton 2005:163).

By juxtaposing the anaphoric ‘I cannot see’ with that which is obviously visible, Chesterton is automatically suggesting a difference between seeing and perceiving and between observation and speculation. However, his process is not estrangement for the sake of estrangement alone, but estrangement for the sake of welcome. His defamiliarisation affirms difference only to stress the value of participation. It is only in difference – not the persistent negation of arrival, but rather the persistent acknowledgement of the necessity of separateness – that the hospitality of speculation gains ground. After all, it is only the separate other that can be appreciated or loved (Chesterton 1986:337). It is only in division that reconciliation, so central to Chesterton’s view of the world, becomes possible. By being enveloped in a ‘cloud of sleep and custom’, the perceived world becomes stale and unwelcoming, and what was once present comes to embody absence. Nonetheless, in moving beyond familiarity into the territory of defamiliarisation, one is able to know the generosity of the ordinary once again. Speculation, for Chesterton (1993:14; 2005:162), is therefore an issue of empathy. By being estranged from the visual object, one is able to empathise, as an outsider, with the strangeness of the commonplace (Chesterton 1957:148). By implication, it is only when one can come to terms with the alterity of the text that the text can be read for all it is worth.

Speculation is therefore a movement or a drama that is constantly in a process of renewal, return and revolution. It is not an act of pure conservatism, which leaves things alone to be open to a ‘torrent of change’ and degradation (Chesterton 1986:320). It is a process, so to speak, of repainting a white surface with white paint year after year so that it does not fall into the ruin and decay of absent-mindedness (Chesterton 1986:320). Chesterton is always concerned with living mindfully and deliberately. His ethics, therefore, revolves around constant reform, and relies on persistently asking questions regarding one’s ideals and the practical ways in which such ideals may be carried out (Chesterton 1986:253).
Accordingly, one appreciates the riddle of being in order to recover a sense of apprehending the (visual) world afresh; in doing this, speculation becomes a symbolic expression of gratitude: that is, of not taking things for granted or simply as given. Indeed, the principle of gratitude is at the root of Chesterton’s (1986: 258) ethics. It is in gratitude that one sees the opportunity, the surprise and the adventure of encountering what is there (Chesterton 1986:258). In gratitude, the image is interpreted, not as a corpse to be dissected, but as a living, breathing expression that can speak directly or indirectly to the human condition. Gratitude denounces sentimentalist, optimistic or pessimistic interpretive lenses by insisting on the complexity of meaning. Arguably, to avoid complexity is to promote the very fatigue of familiarity that Chesterton opposes.

The principle of gratitude, then, while being perhaps easier to apply neatly to apprehending the rhetoric of ordinary, everyday objects, is still useful when dealing with an image such as *A few dead* (Figure 1).

As a piece of journalistic history, this black and white photograph primarily serves a descriptive function: it shows six unnamed, dead British soldiers, sprawled out on a grassy piece of land under a clear sky. It tells very little if anything of the ‘bungling and confusion’ or shoddy leadership that resulted in the British army’s defeat that left around 300 dead, 1,000 wounded and 200 captured (Knight 1997:34). However, very simply, it does portray something of a tragedy, and one may rightly ask how Chesterton’s principle of gratitude may be applicable to such an image of disaster. Chesterton (1986:267) insists that when one sees anyone fall, one should first remember that the fall is preceded by an existence that may never have been. It is in remembering, or re-membering, that one puts together what has been fragmented in order to realise that the weight of any cataclysmic loss is felt with horror precisely because it is a stark reminder of what one was given.

It is dreadful that life has been squandered only because life is precious. The calamities of war or death are so deeply felt only because of what is deemed valuable. Even when one recognises something as being wrong or undesirable, one can at least be grateful for the ability to notice what is wrong or undesirable. In this, therefore, the ontology of the image automatically calls into question the ethics of what the image represents.

In the face of the riddle of being and the death of any human being, one is compelled to acknowledge that questions always outnumber answers and that understanding is an exception rather than the rule. Questions remain that concern life, the nature of human beings and even the possibility of transcendence. Speculation, then, becomes a humble, even mystical act of recognising that one ‘can understand everything by the help of what [one] does not understand’ (Chesterton 1986:231). Even something like a clear insight is shrouded in enigmas and hunches. In the light of this realisation, the possibility of understanding and interpreting an image in any absolute or comprehensive way becomes unrealistic. However, this is not to say that Chesterton is guilty of radical indecision, but rather that he simply allows interpretation to operate in a tension between understanding and non-understanding, thus avoiding both absolutism and absolute relativism. In the end, the kind of truth that the image reveals to the viewer is not only a correspondence of thought and thing in an algebraic sense, but correspondence in the sense that being operates in fellowship with other beings, always overlapping, intertwining, moving apart and reconvening.

By avoiding the fact that being is a riddle, one may slip into believing that only one correct interpretation of a visual text is in fact possible. But the sovereignty of a single viewpoint is precisely what Chesterton problematises. This is especially evident in the case of his
critique of British imperialism. In Chesterton’s (1994:66) view, jingoism of any kind, whether personal, as in the case of reading an image, or political, as in the case of an empire that is always trying to expand, is highly bothersome in that it is an ‘illusion of comfort’. It is an illusion, in other words, of false security rooted in a sense of ideological superiority. In fact, the Battle of Spioenkop and the photograph of *A few dead* speak of this very same idea. British arrogance resulted in a devastating loss. I would suggest that the ‘illusion of comfort’ ties in with the ‘cloud of sleep and custom’ mentioned above: it roots epistemological and interpretive understanding in the absence of attention and thus the divorcing of mind (theory) and matter (praxis), as well as separation of the self from the drama. It enforces a hermeneutic prejudice built on a hegemonic state of unquestioning unawareness that limits and restricts imagination.

Accordingly, the image of *A few dead* cannot be dealt with merely as a static, one-dimensional image. Instead, it is a gateway to a creative engagement with an entire scenario. Inasmuch as the image is descriptive of a particular situation at a single moment in a time far removed from our own, it is also loaded with mystery. No record remains of who these men are, what their stories, worldviews and beliefs were, or even what their attitudes towards the war may have been. Consequently, the reader is left, in gathering clues and fragments gleaned from the rest of the drama, to piece together what remains of the mystery. The act of speculation cannot therefore be merely a problem to be solved but is a story to be entered into. Moreover, it is not a single event offered in an instant as if interpretation were only an automatic response, but is the culmination of a series of actions and thoughts; it is, as I have already stressed, a drama in its own right. This article may be an example of such a culmination of actions and thoughts: it appears as a product or a whole that may be read in a single sitting, but it is the result of more actions, discussions and processes than can be named or even explained, and even in its own being is not absolutely complete, but is part of a much larger conversation.

For Chesterton, being is a quest concerned with discovery and rediscovery. If mystery underpins all of life, then understanding cannot be worn out and cannot run dry. In keeping with Chesterton’s reasoning, the fatigue of familiarity is an illusion perpetuated by a refusal to engage imaginatively with the world that is there (Chesterton 1993:14). Consequently, one cannot explain mystery away merely by citing or insisting upon simplistic plausibility. It is the very riddle of being that produces awe or perhaps bewilderment at the presence of anything. It is the very condition of the drama of being that is required before the reader can open himself up to the possibility of an answer.

**Being as an answer**

This brings me to the second consideration of Chesterton’s ontology, namely the fact that inasmuch as being is a riddle, it is also a kind of answer. Being is both mysterious and revelatory in character. The riddle or question of being is given validity by the presence of things, even while the presence of things does not necessarily solve the riddle of their being (Chesterton 2006:150). The primary underlying assumption of this component of my reading of Chesterton’s ontology is that the drama of being, and thus of his dramatology, is not merely a construct even while construction, especially through language, is present. This particular consideration, as a means by which being may be understood, is bound to two further distinctions, namely that beings are separate and yet interconnected. Regarding this, Chesterton affirms the difference between objective and subjective realities, but not in the simplistic
sense that pure objectification is considered possible or even desirable. Chesterton’s use of the word objectivity considers the act of apprehension as a complex event that in no way divorces the objective from the subjective. Chesterton does not view being as self-sufficient or self-existent, but as a web of interconnected meanings.

Chesterton (2002:158) argues that being, in the sense of existence, is ‘secondary’ in that it is an effect, the product of an inexplicable process of nature and supernature. Moreover, he suggests that being is ‘dependant’ in that it is bound to the being of other beings (Chesterton 2002:158). Finally, he claims that it is precisely in ‘looking at being’ that one is able to consider the relationship between the separateness and the interconnectedness of being. After all, one is only able to reflect on the drama of being in relation to one’s own perceptions of the drama (Chesterton 2002:137). In this, Chesterton seems to be intimating that the division between the perceiving mind and perceived matter is not that clear cut. Reality and one’s recognition of the reality are ‘two agencies at work’ and their meeting may be taken as ‘a kind of marriage’ (Chesterton 2002:169). The two become one. As a result, even the act of ‘looking at’ something is an act of ‘looking with’ or ‘looking from within’. A similar idea is reflected in William Desmond’s (1995: 468) contention that one’s interpretation of “truth” is a ‘community of mind and being’ rather than the simplistic collaboration of distinct, univocal essences.

Chesterton (2002:168) considers the dichotomy of subjectivism and objectivism and arrives at the conclusion that subjectivism forces the imagination inwards and objectivism, outwards, causing a split between the subject and the object of his contemplation. To transcend this dichotomy, Chesterton (2002:169) suggests that in contemplating an object, the mind does not merely think about the object as if it were a self-sustaining entity, but in a sense the mind ‘actually becomes the object’; it becomes the object but does not create the object. In other words, the object is an object; it can and does exist outside the mind, or in the absence of the mind. And therefore it enlarges the mind of which it becomes a part. The mind conquers a new province like an emperor; but only because the mind has answered the bell like a servant. The mind has opened doors and windows, because it is the natural activity of which is inside the house to find out what is outside the house. If the mind is sufficient to itself, it is insufficient for itself. For this feeding upon fact is itself; as an organ it has an object which is objective; this eating of the strange strong meat of reality.

Chesterton uses the terms objective and subjective in such a way that fracturing mind from matter is avoided. In this, the human mind is not merely a receptive tabula rasa that is ‘wholly servile’ to its environment, nor is it entirely ‘creative in the sense that it paints pictures on the windows and then mistakes them for a landscape outside’ (Chesterton 2002:139). This is to say that while the reaction of a person to an image, say, of A few dead may be uniquely subjective in that it may differ from the reaction of another person, the image remains, objectively, still a photograph of six dead men on a piece of land. If we take the source of the image to be truthful, the objective reality of the image cannot be read, for example, to be a picture of a few lazy clowns, snoozing on a hot summer’s afternoon. Chesterton’s reasoning emphasises the fact that being is simultaneously separate and interconnected, implying that the production of meaning is just as reliant on the dramatic horizon of the image as it is on the dramatological context of the one who is looking at it. It is precisely this tension between the separateness and interconnectedness of being, and thus of meaning, that gives rise to a particular problem related to the ethics of speculation. It is to this problem that I now turn.
Chesterton’s ontology suggests that in apprehending the visual object, the viewer becomes intertwined in the drama of the image just as much as the image becomes intertwined in the drama of the reader. In this meeting of reader and image, language strains to explain the complexity of what seems at first to be a simple interaction. It is not just a transaction between an image and an audience, but a dramatic overlapping of two entire worlds of meaning. This implies that the viewer becomes an active participant in an image simply by looking at it. If a person is handed a photograph like that of A few dead without warning, he or she may be appalled or possibly unsurprised at all that it may signify but just by looking at the image, he or she is already implicated in its drama. The reader is tainted by the image in beholding it, guilty of the “crime” of witnessing the horror in the image even before contemplating what the image may mean. This intimates that by participating in the meaning of the image, the reader becomes a part of a larger problem, namely the problem of collective guilt. He or she becomes, in other words, a member of the race that is capable of this kind of horror rather than just a passive onlooker.

By insisting upon the impossible split between the subjective and the objective, the reader can assume distance from the image and thus a false sense of moral innocence. This would presuppose that speculation concerns only the reader’s conscious thoughts and opinions on the ethics of the image apart from unconscious prejudices. Moreover, the split between the subjective and the objective assumes that it is possible for the reader to be wholly creative or wholly servile to the meaning of the text. Thus, meaning may be mistaken as something either totally constructed or absolutely obvious. Additionally, this split of the subjective from the objective affirms the positivist bias that one’s historically affected consciousness can be separated from the meaning of what one sees. This would then allow the reader to pronounce his or her views on the ethics of the image as if he or she were absent from the production of meaning. Moreover, in treating the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity as a dichotomy, the reader shrugs off responsibility for the meaning decoded in the act of seeing. But Chesterton treats speculation as a paradox, meaning that there is a tension between the subjective and the objective that needs to be kept, even while the line between them remains invisible and indiscernible. This tension suggests that speculation both liberates the reader from and subjugates him or her to the text. Again, in Chesterton’s terms, the reader is both outside and inside what is being perceived. Therefore, the critical or moral high ground over the interpretation or the ethics of the image cannot be claimed insofar as other interpretations exist that remain true to the text’s objectivity.

In Chesterton’s (1944:178) view, and in keeping with the idea of collective guilt singled out above, moral guilt is not merely a matter of material details. Consequently, while acknowledging degrees of responsibility, ethics is not simply concerned with pointing fingers at a culprit but with moral culpability that stretches beyond the domain of individuals into the drama of the collective. To use an example, ethical judgments are not simply about accusing a man of lying or committing murder, but of acknowledging that the potential for committing such crimes is found in every human being. This is why Chesterton (2000:33) argues that judicial systems focus on punishing crimes and not just people. A terrible crime, after all, may be committed even by someone who may generally be considered “good” and good can be done even by someone who is generally considered “bad” (Chesterton 2000:34). The ethics of speculation, therefore, ought to acknowledge specificity, and thus culpability, in the distinctness of the reading subject and the visual text. But it also needs to acknowledge collective responsibility in that
the act of seeing bridges the distance between the drama of the one who reads and the drama of what is read.

This ethics is perhaps difficult to relate to an image such as *A few dead* since this particular image may appear to be fairly tame when compared to some of the more vivid images of human suffering in both visual fiction and in contemporary journalism. One may be haunted or distressed by the image, but hypothetically it may still be possible to view the image as being commonplace and tame. However, such a stoic view would simply be another example of the fatigue of familiarity. Arguably, one’s apparent distance and objectivity would be the result of disposing of the tension between the subjective and the objective reality of this drama of interpretation. Unexpectedly, however, desensitisation is not the result of objective speculation, but of an overly subjective speculation; the viewer looks, but does not see since over-familiarity, and thus oversubjectivity has rendered him or her complacent. This, ironically, is the real violence of images: they can be so consistently violent in their insistence upon difference as to leave other images to appear serene and unthreatening. To use an analogy, they cry wolf so loudly and incessantly as to render the audience deaf to genuine distress. To counter such complacency, Chesterton (2008a:103) suggests that partiality and bias, whether accurate or not in their pronouncements, may be more of a sign of mental activity than impartiality, which he equates with indifference. Partiality requires persistently revisiting and checking one’s original assumptions in order to ascertain their relevance to what is currently being perceived. Self-acknowledged bias is therefore vital to Chesterton and to any Chestertonian reading of a (visual) text.

Perhaps Chesterton seeks to disrupt perception precisely because it is in complacency that the line between what is right and wrong becomes irrelevant. His writings constantly promote a movement, as in the example of his travels to Battersea above, away and back. His philosophy supports a constant return or anamnesis, not for the sake of remaining objective, but rather for the purpose of ensuring that speculation remains personal. It is in the personality of things as we perceive them that they attain their significance (Chesterton 1993:104). This is to say that inasmuch as speculation does not happen apart from a community, it is still vital that the individual consider his or her own relationship with what is being perceived. Thus, the cure for impartial seeing lies in recovering one’s personal connection to it. This again requires an act of the imagination: one needs to imagine what it may have been like to live inside the drama, not only to figure out the mechanics of the battle, but also, perhaps more importantly, to understand what it may have been like to have been involved in the drama that produced this image. The point is not simply to be able to list the order of events, but to be able to offer honest opinions on what such events say regarding our humanity.

Chesterton’s ethics specifically opposes any scientific language that renders everything abstract and impersonal since such language enforces the illusion that reality is experienced impersonally (Chesterton 1993:104). In this, he suggests that ethics is not concerned primarily with rules or laws, but with mysteries bound to one’s entire rational and aesthetic experience of the world. In other words, it is evil that renders everything impersonal, whereas for Chesterton, the good is always personal; it is in the romance of being discussed in conclusion that the recovery of this personal good becomes the central impetus behind the ethics of speculation.
Conclusion: Being as a romance

In considering being as a riddle, speculation is bound to the idea that the mysterious underpins what is manifest. The primary ethical response to this mystery is that of gratitude. Then, in considering the answer of being, speculation is bound to a paradoxical tension between the objective and the subjective that is always present, even when the reader is unaware of it. The ethical response to this answer of being is one of humility, which seeks to participate in this paradoxical tension while remaining aware of the personal and communal implications of the production of meaning. Finally, the riddle and the answer of being operate in an amicable tug of war that may be termed the romance of being. The romance of being is that innate desire in human beings for a sense of home or belonging in the company of what is being perceived. Chesterton (1993:9) writes that there are ‘two ways of getting home; and one of them is to stay there. The other is to walk around the whole world till we come back to the same place’. This mirrors his introduction to his spiritual autobiography Orthodoxy:

I have often had a fancy for writing a romance about an English yachtsman who slightly miscalculated his course and discovered England under the impression that it was a new island in the South Seas. I always find, however, that I am either too busy or too lazy to write this fine work, so I may as well give it away for the purposes of philosophical illustration. There will probably be a general impression that the man who landed (armed to the teeth and talking by signs) to plant the British flag on that barbaric temple which turned out to be the Pavilion at Brighton, felt rather a fool. I am not here concerned to deny that he looked a fool. But if you imagine that he felt a fool, or at any rate that the sense of folly was his sole or his dominant emotion, then you have not studied with sufficient delicacy the rich romantic nature of the hero of this tale. His mistake was really a most enviable mistake; and he knew it, if he was the man I take him for. What could be more delightful than to have in the same few minutes all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with all the humane security of coming home again? What could be better than to have all the fun of discovering South Africa without the disgusting necessity of landing there? What could be more glorious than to brace one’s self up to discover New South Wales and then realize, with a gush of happy tears, that it was really old South Wales (Chesterton 1986:211-212).

Chesterton (1986:212), whose thinking here reflects his journey away from Battersea for the sake of getting to Battersea, then suggests that this parable captures for him the main problem for philosophers – a problem that I believe is particular to visual culture theorists as well: ‘How can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it? ... [H]ow can this world give us at once the fascination of a strange town and the comfort and honour of being our own town?’ What Chesterton (1993:83) is looking for is a unity unlike that of ‘modern industrial monotony and herding, which is rather congestion than communion’. He is aiming for the affirmation of difference in community without a totalisation or excess of difference (Chesterton 1993:83). He is looking for the boundaries of a playground – a sense of order ‘to give room for good things to run wild’ (Chesterton 1986:300).

For Chesterton, this romance as a preoccupation with coming home to the good involves constantly realigning oneself with the riddle of being in order to apprehend the answer. One steps into the unknown, perhaps to search for New South Wales, in order to discover the
known. Ultimately, it is precisely that which is hidden that allows one to perceive what is seen (Chesterton 1986:231). In other words, clear speculation is made possible because aspects of objective reality are concealed. This principle may even be found, for example, in the basic theory of colour: orange, for instance, is perceived as orange because a whole range of other colours in the spectrum of light – red, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet – have been absorbed and withheld (Bleicher 2005:6). Indeed, the human eye is capable of seeing only a small fraction of available frequencies of light. Therefore, just as staring into the sun produces blindness because too much light is seen, so being that is all answer and no riddle produces a kind of conceptual blindness: one sees too much and thus ceases to see. In excess, perception is reduced to nothing.

Therefore, when the reader encounters any image, he or she ought to begin with a deep awareness that what is seen is made possible – not only physiologically, but also conceptually – by what is unseen. What is evident is directly reliant upon what is mysterious. What is visible in an image such as *A few dead* is made possible because a great deal of visual and historical information, especially concerning the rest of the drama of the Battle of Spioenkop, is out of sight. To understand the image and to see properly what may appear at first to be obvious, one needs to align oneself with that hidden drama. This same principle may be applied to the ethics of speculation. For Chesterton (1986:268), goodness as a response to the given is primarily disclosed by means of restraint. Goodness is made manifest by whatever is held back. The corollary of this, of course, is that what is understood as unethical is that which is not restrained or that which gives way to excess, for excess dulls both gratitude and humility (Chesterton 1986:261). The good, like the sun, cannot be seen, but is a light that allows one to see (Chesterton 2007:12). Thus, one may argue that the final piece of Chesterton’s ethics of speculation is the call to the reader to align himself with the good that is so often concealed.

Chesterton (2008a:19) observes that ‘when we really worship anything, we love not only its clearness but its obscurity. We exult in its very invisibility’. In this, he stresses the importance of the inner life of the individual. Even when one perceives excesses and wrongdoing, as in the image of *A few dead*, which records the consequences of human ignorance, cruelty or pride, one’s concern for what is good can still remain intact. In the end, therefore, Chesterton (1986:310) is an idealist. He argues that ideals are required if anything is to be improved. He suggests that ‘a thing must be loved before it is lovable’ and that we must be clear about the kind of picture that we, as readers of the world, want to create in order to hope for any kind of reform (Chesterton 1986:253):

*We need not debate about the mere words of evolution or progress: personally I prefer to call it reform. For reform implies form. It implies trying to shape the world in a particular image; to make it something that we already see in our minds. Evolution is a metaphor for a mere automatic unrolling. Progress is a metaphor from merely walking along a road – very likely the wrong road. But reform is a metaphor for reasonable and determined men: it means that we see a certain thing out of shape and we mean to put it into shape. And we know what shape (Chesterton 1986:310).*

Chesterton’s parable of the English yachtsman captures the essence of the romance of being in that it suggests that one needs, in a sense, to constantly lose what one
possesses in order to reclaim it as a gift. Additionally, one needs to continue to move away from and return to the text in order to ask questions relating to how the drama of its being relates to one’s own drama: questions relating to what is concealed or revealed, what restraints or excesses are evident that speak to the heart of the human condition, what in the image contributes to one’s desire to feel at home both in the riddle and the answer of being, and, finally, questions relating to how this act of speculation may contribute towards the good, not only in one’s understanding, but also in one’s utterances and actions. It is in such questions that one may recharge one’s awareness of the art of speculation and thus become what Chesterton (2007:vi) calls an ‘ocular athlete’. Chesterton (2008b:13) observes, ‘If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it a thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time’. I believe this remark points to the heart of Chesterton’s views on speculation, namely that by considering the way that one sees, one is nudged to take another look in the hope that what is too easily overlooked, especially that which is ‘mentally invisible’, may be properly noticed as if for the first time (Chesterton 2003:107).

References


Note

1 The word dramatology is a neologism that serves two primary purposes in this article. In the first place it highlights the fact that Chesterton’s hermeneutics is rooted in a dramatic understanding of the nature of being. Then, in the second place, it stresses the fact that Chesterton’s hermeneutics is in no way connected to the hermeneutical tradition of Continental Philosophers like Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and should therefore, in my view, be treated as a separate discourse.


Abstract

Information visualisation is an increasingly prominent practice focused on making large amounts of data more accessible through visual media. Furthermore, an increased interest in the aesthetic value of visualisations is evident in the emergence of a sub-category of visualisation known as "information aesthetics", where visualisation is used in more artistic and experimental ways, with a strong focus on visual appeal. This aesthetic quality of certain information visualisations has attracted considerable debate and some traditional practitioners are concerned that "aesthetics" may detract from the functional or analytical goals of visualisation artifacts. This perceived divide between aesthetics and functionality may, however, result from two common misconceptions about "aesthetics" within design discourse. Firstly, "aesthetics" is often understood as an afterthought, or the superficial visual appeal considered after all other design decisions have been made. Secondly, "aesthetics" is often distrusted, with "decoration" seen as a sign of subjective interference with otherwise objective or neutral information transfer. This article explores various perspectives on the relationship between design aesthetics and functionality, proposing ways in which they may be more closely connected, specifically within an information visualisation context.

Key terms:
Communication design; design aesthetics; design functionality; information aesthetics; information design; information visualisation.

Introduction

The amount of data we interact with has increased exponentially in the last few years, and in an attempt to make information more accessible and understandable, an increased focus is being placed on the practice of designing information. Information visualisation is one such design practice, where large data sets are presented visually in order to reveal patterns and larger contextual insights. Information visualisation is traditionally approached from disciplines such as human-computer interaction and software engineering, but the democratisation of this field, through the accessibility of data and easy-to-use software, has led to designers embracing it as a valuable platform to create communicative and compelling visual artifacts. According to Andrew vande Moere (2008:473), information visualisation is moving away from its ‘traditional, expert and computer graphics background’ and is becoming a broader social communication tool.

Furthermore, a sub-category of information visualisation called “information aesthetics” has recently emerged, applying visualisation techniques in more artistic and experimental ways, with a strong focus...
on visual appeal. However, this “new wave” of visualisation practice has led to considerable debate within the visualisation community. An *Information visualisation manifesto* published online by Manual Lima (2009a) and the comments that resulted from it show that there are differing opinions regarding the aesthetics of information visualisation. Some argue that aesthetic information visualisation should be seen as separate from traditional visualisation, since ‘flamboyant experiments’ could potentially harm the reputation of the practice as an analytical tool:

... many people passionate about information visualisation ... share a sense of saturation over a growing number of frivolous projects. The criticism is slightly different from person to person, but it usually goes along these lines: “It’s just visualisation for the sake of visualisation”; “It’s just eye-candy”; “They all look the same” (Lima 2009a).

Principles outlined in Lima’s (2009a) information visualisation manifesto include: ‘do not glorify aesthetics’ and ‘avoid gratuitous visualisations’. Lima’s (2009b) basic argument is thus that aesthetics is being emphasised at the expense of functionality, and that this could have detrimental consequences on the reputation of the field of information visualisation. Lima (2009b) argues that ‘the fallacy of information visualisation being a conveyor of “pretty pictures” is drastically threatening the field, by undermining its goals and expectations’.

“Aesthetics”, from this perspective, is seen as surface decoration and as a distraction from analytical visualisation goals. Various oppositional responses by theorists and practitioners such as Vande Moere, Stefaner and Crnokrak followed the manifesto, arguing that Lima’s attitude towards the aesthetic is deprecating. Stefaner (in Lima 2009a) defends the work of certain visualisers such as Jonathan Harris, Ben Fry and Martin Wattenberg, who may be seen as “glorifying” aesthetics, but argues that their works have added significant value to information visualisation practice.

According to Andrea Lau and Vande Moere (2007:89), “information aesthetics” can be analysed from either ‘an information visualisation perspective, in terms of functionality and effectiveness’ or from ‘visualisation art, in terms of artistic influence and meaningfulness’.

These two purposes of visualisations are often placed in contrast with one another, with functionality valued higher than aesthetic quality or vice versa, depending on the particular approach. Lau and Vande Moere (2007:87) argue that current information visualisation practice focuses predominantly on effectiveness and functional considerations, while often neglecting the positive influence of aesthetics on task-oriented measures. The influential information visualiser Ben Fry (2004:11) also contends that the aesthetic principles of visual design should no longer be treated as superficial or less important in information visualisation, but rather be embraced as a necessary aid for improving the understandability and accessibility of information communication. However, owing to the subjective nature of aesthetic experience and the difficulty in defining the “aesthetic” qualities of visualisations, measuring the influence of aesthetics on functional communication outcomes is particularly challenging.

The perceived separation and tension between aesthetics and functionality is not a new topic in design discourse. Theorists such as William Morris and John Ruskin emphasised the importance of beauty in design during the mid-nineteenth century, specifically in relation to architecture, interior and product design,
and how these products influence the meaning of daily living. Some graphic designers, such as Paul Rand, have also emphasised the importance of the study of aesthetics in order to understand ‘the language of art’ (Rand 2011:[s.p.]), but others from more “scientific” fields of information design and information visualisation argue that “aesthetics” should not be overemphasised. Theorists such as Jorge Frascara (1988:25) believe that communication is of utmost importance and that the ‘aesthetic quality of a design does not determine its overall quality’. Even though Frascara maintains that aesthetics is an important aspect of design, it is clear he wishes to shift the focus from the “visual aesthetic” towards measuring communication success, thus separating “aesthetics” from “functionality”. As a result of practitioners aiming to assert themselves as concerned with communication, and not with “pretty pictures”, this relationship between aesthetics and functionality remains a neglected topic specifically within information design discourse.

Anna-Lena Carlsson (2010:452) points out that even though aesthetics is seen as a significant aspect of information design, it is still perceived as separate from the meaning or message and usually as merely “decorative”. Furthermore, in the tradition of Adolf Loos’ *Ornament and crime*,7 aesthetics is often distrusted, with decoration being perceived as inappropriate to more serious design practice. In the tradition of Adolf Loos in an information visualisation context, “aesthetics” is often seen as a sign of subjective interference with otherwise objective or neutral information transfer.8 This divide between aesthetics and functionality may, however, be a result of the particularly narrow understanding of the concept of aesthetics within design discourse. In order to challenge this narrow view of aesthetics as superficial and functionless, a greater focus needs to be placed on understanding the communicative value of aesthetic qualities.

Aesthetics is an integral aspect of design practice, and arguably more closely linked to “functionality” than contemporary debate suggests. Specifically in an information design context, where communication is the goal, aesthetic experience plays a major role in how messages are received and internalised. In an information visualisation context, Crnokrak (in Lima 2009a) explains that aesthetics is of vital importance to the overall communication value when stating that:

good looking – beautiful aesthetics – is likely an underlying function of communicative value – but one that runs so deep within our cognition that we do not have the vocabulary/understanding as of yet to objectively characterise. A well-trained, intuitively aware, designer knows how to engineer desire – that combination of visual elements that lead the viewer into a sequential experience of emotive graphic value ... an effective “purely aesthetic” experience is one that the majority of people can agree imparts some emotional value that draws their attention.

The aim of this article is not to devise a new definition of the term “aesthetics”, but rather to highlight the current debates and concerns regarding the concept of “aesthetics” within the domain of information visualisation. Furthermore, a new perspective on the interconnected nature of aesthetics and functionality within an information design and visualisation context is proposed and the potential value of the aesthetic quality of visualisations is briefly considered.

**From information visualisation to “info-aesthetics”**

Information visualisation can be broadly defined as the ‘mapping between discrete data and a visual representation’ (Manovich 2010). Information is visualised...
in a variety of forms such as diagrams, graphs, charts and maps, as well as increasingly innovative methods, and is seen in various research fields and industries. Information visualisation is currently studied predominantly from software engineering and information technology perspectives, with a strong focus on statistics and programming.2 “Information visualisation” may, however, be seen as a broader discipline that includes static and hand-drawn artifacts presenting information through visual media, and has for centuries not depended on the use of computer technology.

According to Card, Mackinlay and Schneiderman (1999:1), the use of visualisation as external cognitive aid serves two basic purposes: firstly, to ‘create or discover the idea in itself’ and secondly, to communicate an idea. Researchers may, for instance, make use of visualisation techniques in order to help them make sense of data, by identifying patterns and seeing relationships in the data.4 This serves to create or discover concepts that were previously unknown or only hypothesised. The other purpose is then to communicate these findings to others, in order to demonstrate the patterns and provide evidence of certain conclusions. Visualisations can thus be particularly powerful communicative and persuasive tools. According to Peter Hall (2008:123), some visualisations seem to ‘have a profound effect on society, changing the course of government policy, scientific research, funding and public opinion’.

The second purpose of visualisation, the communication of information through the visual, is the domain of information designers.5 New software tools such as Adobe Flash and Processing6 have enabled designers and artists, who tend to place a greater emphasis on aesthetic factors, to create visualisations without having been extensively trained in programming or visual analytics (Viégas & Wattenberg 2007:184). As a result of this accessibility, Hall (2008:122) explains how information is currently being aestheticised ‘to the point that it has become difficult to sort function from creative expression’. Viégas and Wattenberg describe how their work sometimes ‘ends up being art, sometimes science, and sometimes design’ and that they are not influenced by different “labels” (in Aldhous 2011:44). To Viégas and Wattenberg, visualisation is simply a ‘broad and expressive medium’ used to reveal interesting patterns in a variety of contexts (in Aldhous 2011:44).

Various theorists from the field of information visualisation have started to focus on the aesthetic nature of visualisation practice. One of the most seminal authors on information visualisation and aesthetics is Edward Tufte7 (1983; 1997; 2006), who is described as a pioneer in ‘how communication can be both beautiful and useful’ (Horn 1999:20). The influential new media theorist, Lev Manovich (2001; 2010), coined the term info-aesthetic to refer to contemporary information artifacts that exhibit aesthetic qualities.

Both Tufte and Manovich provide rich and extensive histories of the practice of visualisation with ample examples, but do not offer comprehensive reasons for their aesthetic evaluations. An increasing number of examples of aesthetic visualisations can also be found in contemporary publications and online.8 The following screenshot from infosthetics.com (Figure 1) shows some examples of visualisations considered as “aesthetic”.

Various authors and practitioners such as Peter Crnokrak (in Lima 2009a), Ben Fry (2004; 2007), Peter Hall (2008), Greg Judelman (2004), Moritz Stefaner (in Lima 2009a) and Viégas and Wattenberg (2007) support a greater
awareness for aesthetics and have described the importance of aesthetics in visualisation practice.\textsuperscript{13} Theorists such as Lau and Vande Moere (2007) venture further and try to uncover the aesthetic characteristics within visualisations and show a particular interest in the observed separation and tension between aesthetics and functionality. They do so, however, from a very pragmatic perspective, considering aesthetics as “artistic intent” and therefore the audience’s aesthetic experience of visualisations has remained largely unexplored.

The majority of aesthetics research focuses on the non-functional or emotional appeal of objects and not on the functionality and communication value of design as contributing factors to an aesthetic experience (Folkmann 2010:40). Neither does design research focus on how aesthetically pleasing artefacts may enhance functionality. As explained previously, it is not within the scope of this paper to define the concept of “aesthetics”, but potential reasons why “aesthetics” is considered as separate from functional concerns is explored in the following section.

**Design aesthetics as separate from functionality**

“Aesthetics” is a concept traditionally explored within philosophy and the fine arts, and despite centuries of exploration, remains difficult to define. Artworks (visual, literary or musical) typically receive aesthetic attention, but also natural objects such as scenery or the human body (Quinton 2000:12). “Art” and “beauty” are notions relevant to the study of “aesthetics”, but should not be seen as synonymous. The German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten first used the term “aesthetics” in 1750 when referring to the Greek ‘aesthetic, meaning (depending on context) sensation, perception, or feeling’ (Scruton 2007:233). It is useful to consider the original meaning of the term “aesthetic”, merely as sensory perception, insofar as it does not refer specifically to “beauty” or “art”, even though these have been the common meanings for more than two hundred years (Mandoki 2007:45).
Design objects may therefore also be regarded as aesthetic, but they are often situated in an uncertain space, being neither as “aesthetic” nor meaningful as artworks, nor as “functional” as artefacts created by engineers or practitioners in the sciences. Richard Buchanan (1985:16) explains how design is traditionally seen as a ‘minor art concerned with decoration’, and thus not in the same “special” class as artworks. It is possible that the term “aesthetics” thus takes on a different meaning in a design context than in the fine arts.

Furthermore, there is a distinct shortage of literature on aesthetics specific to design, when compared to the fine arts, although there is an increased interest in filling this gap by contemporary authors such as Anna-Lena Carlsson (2010), Alain Findeli (1994), Mads Folkmann (2010), Sven Hansson (2005) and Paul Hekkert (2006). All of these authors call for a more in depth understanding of aesthetics, arguing that there is functional and communicative value in aesthetic experience. Folkmann (2010:40), for instance, explains how aesthetics is a vital aspect of design that has often been neglected in research, and argues that a new approach which considers the more complex relationship between object and subject (user or viewer of the object) is needed. Findeli (1994) and Carlsson (2010) consider the traditional functional/aesthetic divide from different perspectives. Hansson (2005) and Hekkert (2006) focus on aesthetics as related to the functional use of products.

Carlsson (2010:451) argues that the notion of aesthetics as separate from functionality is a dominant view that has persisted throughout history, and is based on two perceived qualities of the aesthetic: ‘aesthetic qualities are located in the form (in a separation of form and content/function), which makes the aesthetic experience disinterested, i.e. detached from subjective interests or desires’. These two perceptions are now explored in more detail. In common terms, from an engineering or technical design perspective, “aesthetics” is often understood as the surface qualities of artefacts. Using the example of architecture, “aesthetics” in this sense might refer to “styling” unrelated to the function of the building. Roger Scruton (2007:240), for instance, defines the aesthetic as the ‘choices remaining when utility is satisfied’, with these choices relating mainly to the surface appearance of the object. In an information visualisation context, similar perceptions towards aesthetic qualities are common.

Carlsson (2010:452) further contends that seeing the aesthetic as separate from functional concerns has its roots in Kant’s theories on aesthetic experience as “disinterested”. Kant’s concept of “disinterestedness” refers to a ‘lack of interest in the practical uses of the aesthetic object’ (Goldman 2005:263). Goldman (2005:263) explains that to be “disinterested” means to ‘attend to the object as an object of contemplation only, to its phenomenal properties simply for the sake of perceiving them’. There is thus a certain detachment from subjective needs and interests which relates to the common notion that ‘art should be valued for itself, not for external purposes’ (Carlsson 2010:451). Carlsson (2010:452) explains how Kant’s concept of “disinterest” has largely led to aesthetics being restricted to formal qualities or “embellishment” that if removed, would leave the underlying message intact.

An example of the aesthetic as unconnected to “practical affairs” can be seen when Nelson Goodman refers to different interpretations of the same line: the one functioning as a profits chart and the other symbolising a mountain (in Shusterman 2006:220). Goodman describes the mountain drawing as aesthetic, while referring to the other as a mere chart even when he is writing about the very same image. It is thus clear that charts are not typically seen as aesthetic objects.
in the same way as line drawings of mountains. From this perspective, utilitarian objects cannot be aesthetic because they are too focussed on functional dimensions.

Design practice, as situated in a functional context, is highly concerned with pragmatic “everyday” concerns such as the needs and wants of the consumer, as well as the interests of the client and manufacturer (Folkmann 2010:41). Design is thus not pursued ‘for its own sake’ but is instead situated around the ‘complex negotiation between “problem formulation” and “solution generation”’, often directly linked to patterns of consumption (Folkmann 2010:41). The view of functional objects as incapable of being aesthetic and aesthetic objects being less functional is philosophically problematic. Gordon Graham (2005:170) highlights the issue of form versus function and explains that in architecture the form cannot easily be separated from its function. He explains how both functional considerations, such as structure and purpose, and formal (appearance) considerations are important in the value of a building (Graham 2005:170). Here ideas on expression come into play and Graham (2005:179) explains how concepts such as grandeur and elegance are often expressed through the formal aspects of architecture. In architecture, the “aesthetic” expressions are thus not be seen as separate from the building’s function, but rather as intrinsically linked to it. Graham (2005:181) thus contends that the sustained rivalry between functionalism and formalism in architecture is to a large extent built upon a “false dichotomy”. Just as the relationship between form and function are more interconnected in architecture, it may be argued that the same applies to information design products such as information visualisations.

**Design aesthetics as interconnected with functionality**

There are various ways in which the aesthetic quality of design artifacts may be considered more closely connected with functional dimensions. Hansson (2005) proposes a theory of ‘aesthetic duality’, where design objects can be aesthetically appraised both for their functional quality as well as other non-functional qualities. Hansson (2005) explains that functional objects ‘can be aesthetically appraised both under descriptions that refer to these practical functions and under descriptions not doing so’. A chair may thus, for instance, be appraised as aesthetic because of what it looks like, but also potentially for how comfortable it is to sit on. Aesthetic judgements related to practical function are thus typically directly linked to satisfaction of use (Hansson 2005).

It is possible to argue that design artefacts cannot be considered aesthetic if they are poorly designed in an instrumental sense. Hansson (2005) uses an example of a mathematician who finds a proof “beautiful”. If, however, the mathematician discovers that the proof is incorrect or flawed, he might reconsider his aesthetic sentiments (Hansson 2005). Hansson (2005) thus defends a ‘contributory thesis’ which states that ‘satisfaction of functional requirements in most cases contributes positively to aesthetic value’. He explains how two objects that appear very similar (similar in terms of their visual aesthetic), may perform functions with different levels of efficiency (Hansson 2005). Arguably, the object that performs its function in a more satisfying manner would be considered more aesthetic. It is thus possible to argue that satisfaction in terms of performance may increase the aesthetic value of artefacts.
Another theorist who considers aesthetics from a design perspective is Paul Hekkert (2006). Hekkert (2006) investigates how design aesthetics relates to the pleasurable use of objects and identifies what he believes are universal principles for creating appealing design. Hekkert (2006:169) argues that ‘maximum effect for minimal means’ is an overarching aesthetic principle based on evolutionary theory. Accordingly, a ‘theory, a chess move, building, or any other solution or design is considered beautiful or pleasing when a great effect is attained with only a minimum of means’ (Hekkert 2006:169). Hekkert thus explains how humans are wired to experience pleasure when a task is performed in an efficient way.

Functionality as a concept is thus much broader than mere utilitarian concerns. Patrick Jordan (2002:13) explains how once basic functionality is achieved, users develop the additional need for pleasurable experiences. According to Jordan (2002:9), people are wired to seek pleasure, and design artefacts are a major source of pleasure in people’s lives. He explains that humans have created both decorative and functional artefacts throughout history in order to increase their quality of life (Jordan 2002:9). Users potentially find pleasure in objects that are not merely tools, but also meaningful objects that they can relate to (Jordan 2002:14). Jordan (2002:15) uses the example of recycled products, where pleasure is obtained from the product’s alignment with personal values of care for the environment.

Findeli (1994:52) explains how artefacts are traditionally perceived from the user’s perspective, between two different “poles” (Figure 2, left diagram). On the one side, objects are instrumental or utilitarian and on the other end objects are valued for their ‘symbolic, ritual or sumptuary qualities’ (Findeli 1994:52). Findeli explains how most design objects people interact with on a daily basis would be situated closer to the “instrumental” pole, while art objects are closer to the “symbolic” pole. However, Findeli (1994:53) explains that it is ‘practically difficult, if not impossible’ to clearly separate these two functions of artefacts. Findeli (1994:62) argues that the ‘functionalist bias arising from rationalism’ should be re-examined in order to extend the usefulness of objects, which includes their symbolic value.

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**Figure 2:** Findeli’s model of artefacts, showing the ‘instrumental/symbolic polarity: from an excluding opposition (left) toward the space of artefacts (right)’ (Findeli 1994:53).
Findeli (1994:52) thus proposes a new model of artefacts, where instrumental and symbolic qualities are mapped out in a space where both qualities may be present in varying degrees, as can be seen in the diagram on the right. Findeli’s (1994:52) second diagram shows that artefacts can be both instrumental and symbolic simultaneously. Traditional roles of production can be mapped out on the model, with artists situated closer to the “symbolic” end, and engineers closer to the “instrumental” end. The designer’s role is arguably situated between that of the artist and the engineer, taking into consideration both art and technology (Findeli 1994:54). Findeli (1994:52) explains how designers have to a large extent tried to reconcile these ‘two poles that the Western mind stubbornly continues to oppose to one another’. According to Findeli (1994:53), it is a designer’s job to ‘confer a symbolic and/or instrumental value upon an object, to avoid the trap of banality or uselessness, to make the object safe and aesthetic’.

Findeli (1994:53) explains how in order for a design product to be meaningful ‘the product of its utilitarian value and symbolic value must be greater than a certain limit, the “threshold of significance”’. The following interpretation (Figure 3), based on another diagram by Findeli (1994:54), illustrates the relationship between the different productive arts and shows how aesthetic value in a design context may be dependent on instrumental or utilitarian efficiency.

Findeli (1994:62) makes a valuable contribution to understanding design purpose when arguing that we need to ‘reach beyond the materialistic and mechanistic definition of “function” and of “functionalism” to extend it to the symbolic realm’. In other words, something may be useful for reasons beyond being instrumental or utilitarian. Aesthetics and function cannot easily be separated, since some objects serve an ‘aesthetic function’ (Hansson 2005). It is possible to build on Findeli’s model in order to understand aesthetics in an information design and visualisation context. In the traditional sense, “aesthetics” is understood as closer to the “symbolic” side of the map, but it may be possible to argue that aesthetics in design is related to both “symbolic” and “instrumental” values. Particularly in a communication design context, “symbolic” and “instrumental” values are often closely connected. Folkmann (2010:40) explains how ‘aesthetics touches upon one of the most vital matters of how design functions as a means of communication’. Buchanan (1985:4) also explains that the concept of communication is central to all design practice, and specifically in a field like information visualisation, the communicative function is of great importance.

Stroud (2008) investigates John Dewey’s theories specifically in a communication context in order to ask how communication can be aesthetic. Dewey’s theory of ‘art as experience’ rests on the notion that aesthetic experience occurs when there is an interaction between the creator and object, as well as between audience and object (Stroud 2008:159). As part of this aesthetic interaction, there also needs to be a specific mindfulness of the
medium, or “expression” (Stroud 2008:161). The focus needs to be on the expression, which can be considered a means to an end rather than only an end in itself (Stroud 2008:161). In other words, being attentive to the means of expression (the paint on a canvas or the words in a poem) and not only on the “ends” (the scene depicted or message conveyed) is vital to having a heightened aesthetic experience. According to Dewey (1934:40), thoughtless or insensitive practice or procedures (below Findeli’s ‘threshold of significance’) are the real “enemies” of aesthetic experience.

Stroud (2008:166) uses an example of a conversation at a supermarket register, arguing that it could be either ‘habitual and mechanical’ or ‘more akin to an integrated, consummatory situation in which each part has value’. Something as mundane as a conversation in a supermarket could thus potentially be profoundly aesthetic, depending on the subject’s orientation towards the situation. According to Stroud (2008:171), the “key” to aesthetic experience is thus the ‘orientation of the individual toward the activity or process (including that of creating or receiving expressive objects) he or she is experiencing’. Stroud (2008:167) calls this kind of attention or orientation towards an object or situation ‘Deweyan mindfulness’.

This kind of ‘Deweyan mindfulness’ is, however, not at the forefront of the traditional information visualisation agenda, where objectivity and neutrality are the main aims. Albert Borgmann (1995:15) explains how the superficial understanding of aesthetics in design may be attributed to an overemphasis on user “disburdenment”, or in other words, an approach that enables people to perform tasks that make life easier in such a way that is not distracting:

Engineering devises the ingenious underlying structures that disburden us from the demands of exertion and the exercise of skills and leave us with the opaque and glamorous commodities that we enjoy in consumption. Aesthetic design inevitably is confined to smoothing the interfaces and stylising the surfaces of technological devices. Aesthetic design becomes shallow, not because it is aesthetic, but because it has become superficial. It has been divorced from the powerful shaping of the material culture.

As part of “disburdening” users, the medium or interface is thus smoothed to become as invisible as possible. In other words, the medium should never draw attention to itself or distract users from the task at hand. This sounds similar to debates encountered in the visualisation community, where more traditional practitioners believe that the medium should merely present the data in the most objective and neutral manner.

Stroud (2008:167,168) explains how, in order for communication to achieve the status of aesthetic experience, the subject’s attention should be on the materials and means, as well as the ends, and emphasises that aesthetic communication is ‘both a means to future states of affairs and an immediately valuable, felt instantiation of harmony and coordination with others’. This is in opposition to Kant’s theories of “disinterest”, which requires an experience to be removed from practical affairs in order to be aesthetic. Goldman (2005:265) explains how Kant’s theory of “disinterestedness” does not take into account the heightened aesthetic experiences that are often gained from aesthetic artefacts that also perform an instrumental function, such as, for instance, attending a service in a cathedral. Aesthetic experience thus takes into account both the functional outcome as well as the “medium” through which the outcome is achieved. According to Folkmann (2010:49), ‘aesthetics in design is a matter of how design relates to meaning’. The focus here is on the interaction between object and meaning, and not so much on
the physical content itself. The viewer becomes more aware of the “means” as a subjective expression and becomes involved in decoding or uncovering meaning, which remains central to the aesthetic experience.

Gianfranco Zaccai (1995:9) argues that aesthetics in design should be seen as ‘related to our ability to see a congruence among our intellectual expectations of an object’s functional characteristics, our emotional need to feel that ethical and social values are met, and finally, our physical need for sensory stimulation’. In examining the aesthetic qualities of design objects, it thus becomes important to not only consider the formal visual (surface) qualities of the artefact, but also the way in which it functions. Aesthetics in design is more closely linked to functionality, especially when a broader definition of functionality is adopted, which includes both “symbolic” and “instrumental” value. It is also important to consider the different kinds of pleasure that people gain from interactions with products, and how this relates to aesthetic experiences. Not only is it important for design objects to perform functions satisfactorily, but they also need to cater to deeper needs for meaningful interactions. Furthermore, it is possible to argue that a ‘Deweyan mindfulness’ or heightened awareness of the immediate value of design interaction or communication process may lead to more engaging and memorable experiences, which in turn may positively impact the functional communication goal.

“The idea of “neutral” information or communication is, however, problematic, even if some presentations “pretend” to be objective.” It may even be considered ethically problematic to aim at presenting information as objective or neutral since it carries the promise of objectivity without being able to fulfil that promise. It is important to accept that the visualisation designer ‘shapes an experience, or view, of the data with a particular aim in mind’ (Van Heerden 2008:6). The intent influences the manner in which the designer embarks upon presenting the information, and the aims may be as diverse as ‘to clarify, confuse, inspire, redress, and connect’ (Van Heerden 2008:6).

Furthermore, it is possible to argue that information visualisations created with the traditional, “neutral” approach to data presentation, become sterile and hinder critical engagement or reflection. Borgmann (1995:15) explains that an overemphasis on functionality and “disburdenment” may lead to artefacts that are less engaging and therefore less meaningful. The seminal information architect and theorist, Richard Wurman (2001:32), argues that absolute accuracy of data in itself does not necessarily lead to understanding, which may be considered the ultimate aim of all information. In order to stimulate understanding, other factors like retaining interest and making information memorable and meaningful become more important than the “objectivity” of data.

Sally McLaughlin (2009:303) explains that information designers often aim to present information as neutral,
but by trying to remove human experience from the information presented, these artefacts become dehumanised. McLaughlin (2009:303) uses an example of graphs representing ‘people being killed in conflicts, or dying of famine, subsequently showing up as mere statistics’. These products often perpetuate an idea that information is objective and neutral, but this does not stimulate engagement and as a result the information is not internalised, remembered or reflected upon. McLaughlin (2009:314) believes that ambiguity in artefacts may be a significant contributor to encouraging reflection, and aesthetic visualisations often employ ambiguity as a strategic tool in encouraging engagement and soliciting reflection. It is under these circumstances that the information may influence perceptions through more meaningful engagement.

The following example of a pie chart, as part of a campaign by the Red Cross in Portugal (Figure 4), is not very effective in terms of a functional data display. The key shows that red indicates ‘children helped by the Red Cross this year’ and the exact same red shows ‘children NOT helped by the Red Cross this year. This chart thus does not fulfil its most basic purpose to indicate percentage values.

It is only after reading the caption, ‘It’s in your hands’ that the visualisation starts to make sense. The chart is thus designed in a deliberately ambiguous way and understanding is dependent on the tagline that accompanies it. The visualisation initially confuses the audience in order to elicit deeper engagement. This in turn leads to an emotional response on interpretation, which is the main aim of the campaign. The Red Cross campaign invites the audience to consider the values of the message and the audience may choose to either accept or reject these values. By presenting the outcome of the chart as open-ended and dependent on the audience’s contributions, the message becomes an emotionally charged call to action.

**Conclusion**

DiSalvo (2002:76) argues that ‘the obscene proliferation of information in our daily lives’ has placed us in a ‘crisis of meaning’ where the opportunities of meaningful interaction with information, and the potential knowledge it may lead to, are often ignored. Even though a mass of information is readily available at our fingertips, it is not interacted with in a meaningful manner and, arguably, neither fully understood nor internalised. Designers have an important part to play in the creation of more meaningful experiences but, as McLaughlin (2009:303) points out, we first need to ask how we can ‘revitalise information’ so that it matters to people. DiSalvo (2002:77) suggests that in order to revitalise information,

... we must begin to approach interfaces not as tools, but rather as a medium in and of themselves. A medium differentiates itself from a
tool in that the product of a medium reveals the essence of medium in its execution. The interface designed for the emergence of knowledge must be reflective of both its content as of itself. As a place of interaction, the interface becomes a place where the potential for the creation of knowledge exists. As a place of knowledge, this is where we find meaning and create experiences which are memorable.

The design theorist Frascara (2002:39) suggests that the focus of design should shift from mere functionality or ‘design that makes life easier’ towards ‘design that works to make life better’. This includes designing for ‘sensual and intellectual enjoyment, the promotion of mature feelings, ability to reach high degrees of consciousness about our lives and our actions, and cultural sensitivity to build civilisation and relate constructively to others; all those things that make us specifically human’ (Frascara 2002:39). Frascara (2002:39) thus sees design as a vehicle not only for increasing efficiency, but also for reflecting on the human condition, which could ultimately lead to greater meaning and significance in people’s lives. In order to reach this greater level of meaning and significance, the design focus needs to shift from “disburdening” users towards products that are more ‘conducive to engagement’ (Borgmann 1995:18).

Engaging experiences with information cannot occur when the ultimate goal of communication is to make the medium “invisible”. Borgmann (1995:16) urges designers to provoke and reward engagement by focusing on the aesthetics of design. In this context it becomes important to recognise design aesthetics as neither superficial nor functionless, and to accept that subjective expression is part of ethical and effective information visualisation practice.

Notes
1 This paper is part of a larger study completed for a Masters degree in Information Design, titled An exploration of the conceptual relationship between design aesthetics and Aristotelian rhetoric in information visualisation, submitted at the Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria, 2011.
2 Information visualisation, concerned with the organisation and presentation of information, is for the purpose of this study situated as a specialist practice within the broader discipline of information design.
3 This refers to a comment by Moritz Stefaner (in Lima 2009a), where he describes himself as part of a second wave of information visualisation practice.
4 Authors such as Cawthon and Vande Moere (2007) have attempted to measure the influence of aesthetics on task-oriented measures, but in general these types of studies are uncommon, hypothetical and inconclusive.
5 Adolf Loos’ essay Ornament and crime (1908) famously condemns the decoration of artifacts as superfluous and degenerate (Coles 2005:22).
6 This notion of neutral information presentation is challenged throughout this paper, since all data is sampled, filtered and manipulated into carefully constructed visualisations, aimed at conveying certain messages.
7 Authors such as Stuart Card, Jock Mackinlay and Ben Schneiderman (1999), Juan Dürsteler (2002; 2007), Ben Fry (2004; 2007), Jarke van Wijk (2005) and Colin Ware (2000) approach information visualisation from disciplines such as human-computer interaction and software engineering.
8 Van Wijk (2005:79) explains that visualisation allows
viewers to obtain insight into data sets in an ‘efficient and effective way, thanks to the unique capabilities of the human visual system, which enables us to detect interesting features and patterns in a short time’.

9 Shedroff (1994:1) states that information design ‘addresses the organisation and presentation of data: its transformation into valuable, meaningful information’.

10 Processing is an open source visualisation application, available for download at www.processing.org.

11 Tufte is ‘one of the great pioneers that studied the relationship between aesthetics and information design’ with concepts such as ‘data-to-ink ratio’ and ‘chart-junk’ that stand as ‘signposts in the skilful and graceful use of visual language’ (Horn 1999:20).

12 Some of these sources include the books Data flow (Klanten et al 2008), Information is beautiful (McCandless 2009) and Beautiful visualisation (Steele & Iliinsky 2010), as well as the websites Visual complexity (managed by Manuel Lima) and Infosthetics (managed by Andrew Vande Moere).

13 Many of these practitioners also made their approaches to aesthetic visualisation known through responses to blog posts by Lima (2009a; 2009b), as mentioned previously.

14 The well-known phrase “form follows function”, coined by American architect Louis Sullivan in the late nineteenth century, promoted the idea that a building should be constructed according to its use and that unnecessary decoration should be avoided (Graham 2005:174).

15 This is in reference to Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs” which argues that humans strive to fulfil “higher needs” such as educational or spiritual growth once “lower” needs such as food and shelter have been fulfilled.

16 Jordan (2002:14) identifies various types of pleasure that people experience in their interactions with design products: ‘physio-pleasure’ (related to physical interaction such as touch), ‘socio-pleasure’ (derived from the social significance of objects), ‘psycho-pleasure’ (such as the pleasure in accomplishing a difficult task) and ‘ideo-pleasure’ (derived from more complex and abstract reflection).

17 Stuart Walker (1995:15) also investigates this connection between aesthetics and ethics, specifically from an environmental sustainability perspective.

18 Shusterman (1997:33) explains that Dewey’s goal was to ‘break the stifling hold of what he called “the museum conception of art”, which compartmentalises the aesthetic from real life’.

19 Hall (2008:130) explains that data cannot be neutral as it is collected, processed and presented for specific purposes.

20 McLaughlin (2009:311) argues that Western metaphysics prescribes that ‘feelings and moods are put aside so as to allow the world to show up for us “objectively”, without being coloured by emotion’.

21 Robin Kinross (1985) investigates the ‘rhetoric of neutrality’ that is often employed in order to make artifacts appear objective and therefore more credible.

References


Abstract

This article focuses on three films that facilitate a demystification of the vampire by resisting the mythological pretext, and often even the horror or romance conventions, of earlier vampire films. While the films in question – The Addiction (Ferrara 1995), Let The Right One In (Alfredson 2008) and Trouble Every Day (Denis 2001) – are undeniably aware of preconceived notions of the vampire, they are more preoccupied with the psychological implications of vampirism as an illness than making reference to any of their precursors. Their emphasis on the burden of vampirism takes away from the conventional vampire advantages such as sex appeal and special powers.

While most recent work on the vampire film has focused on direct comparisons between contemporary films, this grouping of specific postmodern examples considers which traits recurrently stray from the conventions. Thus, the focus is not on the fact that each of the films in question depict protagonists that drink blood and have a propensity to kill, but on the way they exclude aspects such as the mythical background story and the erotically mysterious vampire in order to present a more realistic figure, burdened by the weight of his or her intense desire for blood.

Key terms:
Vampire, film, female, isolation, melancholy, postmodern

Introduction

There has recently been a representation of cinematic vampires that are devoid of (or, at the very least, lacking) supernatural, overly sentimental, and romanticised characteristics. Abel Ferrara’s The Addiction (1995), Tomas Alfredson’s Let The Right One In (2008), and Claire Denis’ Trouble Every Day (2001) are part of this trend, which is the focus of this article. The academics, children, and newly weds of these films are characterisations of vampires that differ from earlier depictions in their representation as the result of diseases or medical experiments rather than mythical associations. These characters are the icons of a postmodern portrayal of the vampire proposed by this paper. I have chosen to group these films together as a means of differentiating them from the many other contemporary vampire films which, while still focusing on the core conventions of vampire narratives, present the vampire as a highly sexualised character, complementary to recurring genres of romance, suspense, horror, and comedy. Equally noteworthy is the shift in the protagonist viewpoint: while films following the original Dracula narrative tend to align the spectator’s gaze with the male vampire, objectifying the beautiful female victim or Dracula’s erotic female “children,” a handful of recent postmodern vampire films instead offer the perspective of the female
protagonist. Before analysing these characters more closely, it is necessary to outline the key concepts framing the study of these postmodern female vampires, including a brief look at how they are defined in relation to their precursors and the evolution of the vampire film.

Defining the postmodern vampire

The purpose of this article is to show that a female, postmodern vampire has emerged out of the current vampire craze. The films I have grouped together are more critical and self-reflexive, offering representations of the vampire that are simultaneously aware of and uninterested in previous incarnations of the vampire figure. Although they represent a shift away from conventional vampire portrayals, they do rely heavily on the influence of previously established conventions of the vampire, stemming from century-old British literature such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872). The century following these films saw countless reinventions of the vampire myth onscreen, occurring across several genres and in various countries. Films featuring vampires show them as both protagonists and antagonists, in horrifying, romantic, and even comedic lights. Recently, however, cinematic vampire representations have split into two different streams, one remaining relatively true to the traditional narrative, and the other offering an interpretation of the vampire as a less mystical figure. The films in this latter strand have certain common characteristics, despite distinctly different stylistic and narrative traits, which I find to be defining features of the postmodern vampire film. Still drawing inspiration from myths about those who survive on human blood, the postmodern vampire film tends to show a less sexualised depiction of the vampiric attack, especially in cases where the vampire does not prey on its victims with the intention to “turn” them. Both frustration and shame are attached to the resulting acts of these characters after they have been infected, unlike the vampire figures of other contemporary films that remain true to the traditional narrative.

One of the most important features separating postmodern representations of the vampire from other characterisations is the ambiguity in the films’ messages. In its shift from the classic allegories of plague, sexuality, and addiction, the postmodern vampire film distinguishes itself from the traditional vampire narrative and other representations of current societal fears. Fredric Jameson’s (1992) influential essay, “Reification and utopia in mass culture,” reinforces the futility of trying to apply a single metaphor or theory to a body of work. Using Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975) as an example, Jameson argues that the desire to impose some sort of symbolism on the shark distracts us from its real purpose, which is to lay the foundation for facing several different social and class conflicts connecting the primary characters of the film. Without declaring any interpretation of the shark erroneous, Jameson instead proposes that its presence forces us to focus too much on its metaphors and ultimately overlook the greater purpose of the film. He notes, ‘as a symbolic vehicle, then, the shark must be understood in terms of its essentially polysemous function rather than any particular content attributable to it by this or that spectator’ (Jameson 1992:35). Jameson’s postmodern perspective insists that there is not one single message being presented, but a multitude, open for interpretation. The postmodern film, then, similarly denies the possibility of one overarching moral but, rather, offers a narrative saturated with ambiguity and inconclusiveness.

As is the case with Jameson’s reading of *Jaws*’ cinematic shark, the cinematic vampire should not be read
exclusively as a metaphor for HIV/AIDS, addiction, sexuality, or any other individual concern. Instead of focusing on a specific representation, the postmodern vampire serves as a pretext for the consideration of various issues, with more specific physical and psychological hesitations tending to come at the forefront, rather than the greater societal concerns of earlier depictions. The multiplicity of this revised narrative suggests that the vampire’s purpose is not to symbolise a simple message, but to act as the connection between many. As Andrew Schopp (1997:232) points out: ‘the vampire has become more than simply an archetype of some static cultural desire and fear; it now constitutes a mirror that reflects shifting cultural desires and fears’.

The Addiction, for example, offers a renewed interpretation of the vampire narrative because Kathleen, as the vampire figure, brings together issues of collectivity, addiction, and existential crisis through its extensive philosophical musings. Instead of adapting the traits of the established vampire characters from the typical genres (horror, romance), postmodern vampires often exhibit similar qualities to characters from less conventional (sub)genres, such as The Addiction as a philosophical art film. Other alternative subgenres incorporating the vampire narrative include kung fu (Mr. Vampire [Lau 1985]), blaxploitation (Ganja and Hess [Gunn 1973], Blacula [Crain 1972]), erotic (lesbian) films (Vampyros Lesbos [Franco 1971], Daughters of Darkness [Kumel 1971]), and science-fiction/anime (Vampire Hunter D [Ashida 1985]).

One of the most significant changes during this evolution is the shift from portrayals of the vampire as a villain to the vampire as a sympathetic creature. Though readings of early vampire narratives interpret the monstrous images of the undead consuming the living to represent societal fear of the Black Death, the vampire now stands for countless concerns including addiction, social alienation, and sexuality. On the contrary, films like The Addiction (Ferrara 1995), Let the Right One In (Alfredson 2009) and Trouble Every Day (Denis 2001), though still aware of these conventions, use the supernatural less as a spectacle and focus more closely on their female bloodsuckers as sympathetic, yet not overly sentimental, characters. In doing so, these films reveal de-romanticised, de-mystified vampires who demonstrate signs of vampirism as an illness, the result of an unfortunate, and often unexplained, circumstance. This female postmodern vampire is neither exotic nor envied, proud nor pitied, bringing to the forefront issues of alienation, which ultimately provoke sympathy for the vampire through their onscreen depictions of melancholy and isolation. A brief consideration of the postmodern precursor – the romantic, mysterious/mythical vampire – sets up the subsequent analysis of how these sympathetic vampires offer a new perspective on the vampire narrative. This is predominantly seen through the reinterpretation of the female vampire protagonist as either a non-sexual being (Kathleen in The Addiction, Eli in Let The Right One In) or a means of reversing the depiction of onscreen sex, so that the female perspective offers a unique focus on the naked male body (Coré in Trouble Every Day).

From exotic to sympathetic

According to Frank Lafond (2008:154) in The cinema of Tod Browning, in contrast to FW Murnau’s early vampire film, Nosferatu (1922), which ‘insists upon the vampire’s physical abjection,’ Tod Browning’s Dracula (1931) aims to present the vampire figure as ‘an irresistible seducer’. This shift, in just over a decade between the two films, marked a new portrayal of the bloodsucking creature that would be carried on for the century to come. Since the release of Browning’s film in 1931, the vampire figure has evolved into something significantly more sexual than Murnau’s Count Orlok.
(Max Schreck). In addition to Bela Lugosi’s Eastern European accent, unfamiliar to American audiences, his character is presented in Browning’s film as an attractive aristocrat who manages to appeal to both men and women. The exoticised vampire is even more prominent in films that follow, as both male and female vampires fill the role of the sexual seducer. Tim Kane (2006: 43-44) notes: ‘The erotic [vampire] film cycle began May 8, 1957, with the American release of *Horror of Dracula,*’ followed by films such as *Sex and the Vampire* (1970), *Lust for a Vampire* (1970), and *Lesbian Vampires* (1970), all of which portrayed victims welcoming, rather than fearing, the vampire’s bite. In the 1980s, gender and sexuality began to be presented in a new light within the vampire film. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Kuzui, 1992) focuses on a dominating female teenager (Kristy Swanson) who is resistant to any appeal the vampire may have, eventually taking pride in her task as the designated slayer. Despite their variations on the initial portrayal of Dracula as an unsightly figure, both *Buffy* and Tod Browning’s *Dracula* remain consistent in their familiar depiction of the main characters studying the traditions of the vampire in order to learn how to deal with them (Waller 1986:8).

This aspect only exists, however, when the film focuses solely on the vampire hunters. Films such as *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher 1987), and *Blade* (Norrington 1998) instead portray vampires who maintain a certain sense of pride in their diversity. For example, in *Metamorphoses of the vampire in literature and film*, Erik Butler (2012:182) suggests the hazing of new members entering *The Lost Boys’* teenage gang of vampires is much like that of a college fraternity, emphasising the bonding rather than isolating experience of vampirism. Other films, straying from the classic *Dracula* narrative, are forced to convey the vampire conventions in diverse ways, as the focus shifts exclusively to the perspective of the vampires themselves in films such as *Interview with the Vampire* (Jordan 1994).

This shift initiated a new portrayal of vampires as sympathetic creatures; *Interview With the Vampire* was one of the first vampire films to offer viewers a perspective of events within the narrative that invites sympathy through understanding, ultimately eliminating the representation of the vampire as the exoticised grotesque. Furthermore, although it follows many of the same vampire conventions as Stoker’s novel, Jordan’s film puts a greater emphasis on familial relations, portraying both the hardships and the intense bonding of its vampire protagonists. Although Lestat (Tom Cruise) and Louis (Brad Pitt) are portrayed as seductive to several women within the film, a significant perspective of the two older vampires comes from Claudia (Kirsten Dunst), an ageless child vampire who views these men as family rather than sexually alluring.

More recently, however, the *Twilight* franchise has once again returned the perspective to the human being, but still offers a sympathetic portrayal of the family bond in a group of ‘good’ vampires. Both films ultimately emphasise the persistence of the nuclear family. Furthermore, rather than trying to eliminate vampires for the greater good of society, as Buffy (Sarah Michelle Geller) does, *Twilight*’s protagonist, Bella (Kirsten Stewart), takes more interest in personal endeavours, openly expressing her romantic interest in the ‘vegetarian’ vampire Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson) early in the film. *Twilight* focuses on the romantic exchanges between Bella and Edward and the supernatural powers of both good and bad vampires, marking a significant shift from the early days of *Nosferatu* and *Dracula* when the vampire only represented evil, as associated with its depictions of lust, libido, and sexual energy.

Despite their remarkable differences, each of these films can be further contrasted with a small group of vampire films released over the past two decades in which vampire clichés (particularly this focus on good
versus evil) are replaced by depictions of melancholy and isolation to concentrate on sympathetic female vampires, exhibiting little or no supernatural power.

In *The Addiction*, *Let the Right One In*, and *Trouble Every Day*, sympathy for the vampire can be partially attributed to the fact that all three films depict female protagonists in their struggle with social alienation. While female vampires have been portrayed since the early days of vampire literature in stories such as *Carmilla*, it is rare to find a female vampire protagonist not depicted (and exoticised) as a lesbian, predominantly as part of the ‘erotic’ cycle outlined above. Nonetheless, the sympathetic vampire dates back to nineteenth century literature; as Andrea Weiss (1992:87) points out in *Vampires and violets*, Carmilla ‘is characterised sympathetically in that she acts out of compulsion rather than malice’. She observes, however, that what is used from the original story in filmic adaptations such as *The Vampire Lovers* (Baker, 1970) is not the sympathetic portrayal, but merely the lesbianism, ‘reworked into a male pornographic fantasy’ (Weiss 1992:87).

In this sense, while the three films in question may draw their sympathetic females from Le Fanu’s text, in each case she has been considerably reconstructed as a normalised, heterosexual vampire. While the postmodern female vampire is much like her predecessor in her ‘threat of violence as well as of sexuality’ (Weiss 1992:93), she is no longer depicted as the one taking pleasure in her violent/sexual acts, instead demonstrating melancholia as a result of the isolating nature of her disease and position within society. *The Addiction* is perhaps the most explicit of the three in questioning the position of its female protagonist, as she contemplates the nature of her existence throughout the film.

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**The Addiction and the philosophical vampire**

Opening with a slideshow of stills from Vietnam and the My Lai Massacre in 1968, *The Addiction* reflects on a number of historical events through the eyes of philosophy PhD candidate Kathleen, who is taking a course on morality at New York University (NYU). The film takes place on and around the NYU campus and Kathleen’s story of addiction is frequently intercut with images of the bustling streets of New York City, as well as still photographs of tragic events like My Lai and the Holocaust. Although the term vampire is never actually used within the film, what follows is a series of events that would be easily recognised by most viewers as the transformation into vampirism: Kathleen is pulled into an alleyway by a mysterious woman in black, bitten on the neck and left with an aggressive-looking wound that an unconcerned police officer dismisses as the result of an everyday street attack. When Kathleen returns to the hospital after vomiting blood at school, the doctor insists she is merely suffering from some kind of ‘chronic anemia.’

The film continues as Kathleen makes various attempts to satisfy her thirst for blood, her victims ranging from random strangers on the street to her professor (Paul Caulderon) and her friend, Jean (Edie Falco). Kathleen’s addiction initially distracts her from her academic pursuit, but she eventually finds herself enlightened after meeting Peina (Christopher Walken), who forces her to resist the temptations of feeding, allowing her to sink deep into withdrawal. Inspired, like many writers before her, by the different stages of addiction, Kathleen completes her dissertation and holds a party to celebrate her successful defense. While all of her victims seem to have disappeared following her attacks throughout the film, they, strangers and friends alike, suddenly return at this celebration as Kathleen’s
“children” to participate in a violent orgy-like blood-bath of an attack where all the vampires drain those guests who are deemed less “enlightened.”

While the film’s portrayal of the vampire’s transformation and resulting desire for blood is reflective of its numerous predecessors, several aspects of The Addiction challenge the conventions of the vampire film, including the philosophical outlook on the characters’ symptoms and behaviour. However, perhaps the most significant variation on these conventions is its layered approach to the allegories being presented; straying from the tradition of depicting the vampire as a metaphor for a single societal fear (the plague, HIV/AIDS, etc.), The Addiction deals with several issues simultaneously. Referring to the film as a ‘historical synthesis,’ Nicole Brenez (2007:8-9, emphasis in original) suggests that the principle of vampirism can be seen to represent ‘capitalism as catastrophe,’ a collective of different possibilities that may be interpreted uniquely to each viewer. Not only do the images of Vietnam and the Holocaust haunt us into aligning the source of these catastrophes with the horrors of poverty as a result of American imperialism, there is also an overt connection between vampirism and drug addiction, as well as HIV/AIDS and other contagious diseases, all of which are absorbed by Kathleen in her attempt to prove that ‘the only story is the story of evil’ (Brenez 2007:23).

In this search to understand the evil inherent in her society, Kathleen kills her victims without sympathy or regret, insisting they have brought this suffering upon themselves by being a member of a corrupt society, unable to mark themselves as individuals by saying no with confidence and walking away. Kathleen’s opposition to the sheep-like behaviour of the masses is set up prior to Casanova’s attack, during her frustrated discussion with Jean at the beginning of the film, when they debate whether or not it was fair to implicate one man in the raping and murdering of hundreds of Vietnamese women and children, simply because he was the only one in the group whom they could prove guilty. Kathleen is set up as a sympathetic character precisely for this reason: rather than emphasising her thirst for blood, The Addiction instead focuses on Kathleen’s search for knowledge.
In place of the standard initial fright following the vampiric attack, Kathleen is more preoccupied with getting an answer. Denied this privilege by the officer who claims it was a random street attack, Kathleen returns home frustrated and dazed, no longer able to focus on her academic pursuits. A scene shortly after Kathleen’s attack shows her absent from class at NYU, appearing only at the end, with sunglasses on, to speak to her professor. Despite his friendly tone and inviting atmosphere, Kathleen responds with one-word answers, suggesting the difficulty she is having with adjusting to her illness. However, despite the sympathy we feel for Kathleen’s struggle, particularly when she is forced into withdrawal, the outcome of the film is to show how the illness ultimately provides her with a new sense of control over her own knowledge, finding the answers she has been searching for in the effects of her addiction. Prior to becoming a vampire, Kathleen is presented as an active PhD student, openly expressing her opinions and questioning what she is taught. However, it is not until she experiences the isolation resulting from her addiction that she finds herself enlightened.

The Addiction’s avoidance of the term vampire makes the references to societal concerns (such as drug addiction) more overt because it does not conceal these anxieties under the guise of a mythical figure. Besides Peina’s claims of ‘eternity’ and being ‘nothing,’ the film’s ambiguous title is used more loosely to open up the interpretation of what exactly the protagonist is addicted to. The withdrawal sequence in the final third of the film emphasises the relationship between isolation and having sympathy for the vampire. This sequence is most obvious in its connection between Kathleen’s addiction to blood and the film’s reference to drug addiction. Peina, claiming he is ‘almost human’ because of his ability to defecate, amongst other ‘normal’ things that Kathleen is unable to do, such as drinking tea or sleeping at night, forces Kathleen into withdrawal to help alleviate her cravings. Her initial reaction is to try to kill herself, cutting her wrists with a file, but Peina calmly explains that this will not have any effect on her: ‘You can’t kill what’s dead. Eternity’s a long time. Get used to it.’ Escaping from Peina’s apartment while he is out, Kathleen stumbles along the streets, begging for help, looking for a ‘fix,’ as Peina so aptly describes it. The result of Kathleen’s isolation is not overcoming her addiction, but obtaining a new understanding of what it means to be addicted. Finding enlightenment in her new control over her addiction, she observes, ‘existence is the search for relief from our habit, and our habit is the only relief we can find.’ Rather than focusing on the physical effects of the film’s vampiric attacks, the outcome of the protagonist’s transformation is to encourage a more qualified understanding of the nature of issues like addiction.6

The film’s portrayal of addiction also calls attention to the emotion-numbing effects of over-dependency on both legal and illegal substances, which foregrounds the isolation of the film and works against the romantic aspect predominant in many of the classical vampire narratives. Although Kathleen’s professor appears to be interested in her romantically, her preoccupation with dissecting both the words and actions of the people she interacts with leaves her seeming cold-hearted and sexually uninterested. Although her initial reaction to her attack is fear, followed by anger, as she begins to adjust to her new lifestyle, she seems to lose her sense of emotion altogether, speaking in a deep, monotone voice to strangers and friends alike. Even when she tries to use sex appeal to attract victims to prey on, she is not romantic – instead, she bluntly invites them to her house, or even into a nearby alleyway and immediately attacks them without so much as a kiss. The only scene that offers a longer introduction to an attack is when her professor walks her to her flat and she
convinces him to come inside. There is a brief glimpse of romantic potential (implied earlier by the special interest the professor has shown in her), but Kathleen quickly exits to the kitchen and returns with materials to prepare some heroin. This emphasises the film’s ultimate metaphor: ‘Dependency is a marvelous thing. It does more for the soul than any formulation of doctoral material. Indulge me.’ Here, Kathleen’s addiction to blood is blurred with the film’s reference to drug addiction in her preparation to inject the heroin into her professor’s arm, followed by a cut to him lying lifeless on her bed, two lines on his arm, marked ‘IN’ and ‘OUT.’ This shot aligns the two addictions by implying the injection of heroin simultaneously with the extraction of blood. The Addiction’s minimal plot and character development is highlighted here with the disappearance of the professor following Kathleen’s attack, only to be seen again without explanation at Kathleen’s thesis defense, after nearly thirty minutes of the film have passed. Allowing the audience to connect each scene on their own, transitions become less important than the depiction of Kathleen’s different stages of addiction.

Let The Right One In and the sexless child vampire

A similar pace is set in Let The Right One In, which also employs long shots and extended takes without filling in all the detail: the camera lingers on depictions of winter in Stockholm and the bonding of young Oskar (Kare Hedebrant) and his vampire neighbour Eli (Lina Leandersson), often with little or no dialogue. The film begins with an establishing shot of a snowy night, and then introduces Oskar in his room, fighting off imaginary bullies. People are seen moving in next door and, after the introduction of other secondary characters such as Oskar’s teacher and classmates, he meets Eli on the climber outside their building. Despite her odd appearance and lack of clothing in the bitter cold, Oskar asks few questions and they become intrigued with each other through a mutual interest in the Rubik’s Cube.
Oskar is set up as an outcast at school, bullied aggressively by a group of boys, though the depiction of his growing relationship with Eli throughout the film is aligned with his eventual attempt to defend himself. The support he finds in Eli is depicted as entirely separate from her portrayal as a vampire – he does not recognise her as one until much later in the film. Meanwhile, the town they live in experiences a series of murders, as Hakan (Per Ragnar), Eli’s parental figure, hunts down victims to drain their blood for her. As Eli and Oskar grow closer, they begin to bond over their mutual reliance on violence (Eli for food, Oskar for self-defense). Still, the bullying continues and eventually Eli comes to rescue him.

This final mass killing sequence is set up in direct opposition to the traditional vampire film, which mainly focuses on bloodsucking-induced violence and supernatural powers. Instead, Eli’s attack is presented relatively discreetly as a defense killing, rather than a feeding: the camera remains focused on Oskar being held underwater instead of showing the attack directly. This functions as a significant departure from the action sequences of other contemporary vampire films, which highlight the special effects and violence of the vampiric attack. While the sound establishes the perspective of Oskar – the empty hollowness heard underwater – the image depicts only the audience’s perspective, watching the young boy close to drowning, eyes closed and breath held, unaware of anything besides his impending death. The first sign of something happening above ground comes with a fully clothed leg swinging through the water in front of Oskar, but still he unknowingly focuses on holding his breath. The feet appear to be dragging through the pool, suddenly disappear, and then a decapitated head sinks to the bottom. Suddenly the hand holding Oskar down goes limp and begins to sink, only to reveal the bloody stump where it has been severed from the body. Finally, a much smaller hand grabs hold of Oskar and pulls him out of the water. Shifting to his perspective, we see an out-of-focus shot of Eli’s blood-splattered face, which clears as Oskar’s eyes open further and he realises she has saved him. A long shot of the boys lying in pieces on the pool deck confirms both Oskar’s and the audience’s suspicions that Eli has finally relieved Oskar of the bullies.

Although this powerful attack (along with other scenes where she moves through space in a non-human way) suggests that Eli has the capability to move faster and with more force than most human beings of her size and apparent age, her powers are ‘more a matter of stretching the laws of physics than of breaking them,’ as Kevin Jackson (2009:42) argues. The film does not dwell on these powers, implying they are a mere side effect of her illness. In this respect, Let The Right One In is less about where Eli comes from or how she became a vampire than her growing bond with Oskar. When he asks Eli if she is a vampire, she responds: ‘I live off blood, yes,’ but never actually gives herself this label. Similarly, when he asks if she is dead, she replies: ‘No. Can you tell?’ She explains that she is twelve, but has been twelve for a long time, and then, as if this new information has failed to change anything, Oskar continues to explore Eli’s apartment, observing her treasures. The film demystifies the vampire by refusing to set her up with a mythical background; Eli lacks the traditional goal of converting humans or spreading her disease. Instead, her struggle to survive is just as much a cause for sympathy as the young love that buds between Eli and Oskar, despite their obvious differences. In many ways, the audience’s sympathy
is provoked by the film’s preference for showing reaction over action.

This stylistic inclination is defined by the film’s long takes, which are accompanied by little dialogue, separating it from the classical Hollywood style. In the first scene portraying Oskar in the courtyard outside his apartment, nearly two minutes pass – he pulls out his knife, begins attacking a tree, encounters Eli for the first time, and is informed they cannot be friends – before the camera cuts to a reaction shot of Oskar watching Eli walk away, already intrigued by his new neighbour. In many scenes like this, long shots are also external shots, depicting the cold and snowy Swedish winter. When Hakan goes into the forest to find a victim for Eli to feed from, a stationary camera sits at a distance, watching him through the trees, waiting for someone to pass. The take lasts for nearly a minute before cutting to a moving camera, following Hakan and a now limp body through the woods, and then sitting still again, watching him drain the blood.8

These stylistic differences from the traditional vampire film shift the emphasis on the often-ruthless power of the vampire to feelings of melancholy and isolation associated with vampiric tendencies.

The portrayals of melancholy in Let The Right One In are connected to the relentless Swedish winters, as depicted in the scene briefly described above. The effect of these harsh conditions ultimately makes the humans’ behaviour in the film seem much worse than the vampire’s. While Eli’s melancholia is related to starvation and her inability to live as a normal child, the citizens of this suburban Stockholm community have a less defined reason for their cruelty.

Scenes of Oskar and Eli bonding are contrasted with scenes of Oskar being bullied at school to highlight the more sympathetic nature of the vampire. Similarly, the pompousness of the group of adults meeting at the local bar makes the subsequent death of their friend less grievous to the audience. While her first victim, Jocke, appears naïve when he is attacked walking home from the bar, we are urged to feel more sympathy for the vampire, as she begins to sob after feeding on him, than his mourning friends, who seem to portray the same harshness as the wintery setting. Sympathy is also invoked by the use of camera angles in the film, which often reflect the changing relationships between characters.

Oskar and Eli’s increasing intimacy is depicted by the camera’s gradual movement toward the pair, peaking in a scene consisting almost entirely of close ups on their faces in Oskar’s bed upon agreeing to ‘go steady.’ Closing with a close up on their hands clasped together, the scene cuts to a medium long exterior shot of the apartment complex covered in snow, then moves back into Oskar’s bedroom with a close up on a note Eli has left for him. This shift marks their growing distance from the melancholy of the Swedish winter and the brutality of the bullying that occurs in its midst as they begin to rely solely on each other. The following scene, a school field trip to an outdoor ice rink is dominated by long shots as the children play, and it is only when Oskar begins to defend himself that the shots become closer, marking his new motivation to stand up to the bullies, drawn from his budding relationship with Eli. The changing camera angles mark the characters’ shifts from the isolated melancholy of their lives before meeting, to the new life they begin upon boarding the train and leaving Stockholm. While this ending does not promise a happier future for the two characters, as it is implied that Oskar will assume the role of the deceased Hakan, it does suggest a departure from the true villains – the humans – of the film.
Trouble Every Day and the inexplicit vampire

Extended takes are also used in Trouble Every Day to highlight the film’s theme of isolation, particularly because they are accompanied by minimal dialogue. The opening scene of the film introduces Coré (Beatrice Dalle) as she attracts the attention of a passing truck. Although no details are shown or told (instead, a moving handheld camera shows a fifteen-second take of the skyline as the sun sets), a cut to a man riding up on a motorcycle and discovering Coré in a field, seemingly unharmed yet covered in blood, hints that she has preyed on the truck driver. Shortly after, Coré and the man (Leo [Alex Descas]) are shown at home together, implying some kind of romantic attachment. Leo is developed as a sympathetic figure, devoted to caring for Coré, though neither their relationship nor the reason for Coré’s behaviour is explained in detail. Two other primary characters are introduced soon after: an American couple on a plane to Paris for their honey-moon. Shane (Vincent Gallo) and June (Tricia Vessey) both initially fulfill the typical expectations of newly weds – both excited and nervous – but the former also appears to have some anxiety, defining him as an uneasy character early in the film, though at first there are only vague suggestions that he is suffering from some kind of unknown illness. Upon arrival in Paris, Shane begins searching for someone, though even his new bride seems unaware of his intentions. The lives of the two couples collide at this point, when it becomes (somewhat) clear that Shane is in fact looking for Leo. A series of brief flashbacks suggest the two men worked together years before on some kind of medical experiment. It is implied that Coré was also involved – though there are still no details as to what exactly happened, Shane appears
anxious to find her after being told she is ill. When he arrives at her flat, their assertive embrace suggests a romantic history (also hinted at earlier by Shane’s unconvincing denial of a past affair), but, soon after, Coré sets fire to her flat and Shane strangles her, leaving her to be consumed by the flames. Following this inexplicable encounter, Shane returns to the hotel and feeds on their housekeeper. The film ends back in the hotel room, where June returns to find Shane in the shower and waits hesitantly for him to come out. When Shane retreats, he tells his wife he is feeling good, but wants to go home, and their subsequent embrace suggests the potential for a happy ending. However, in the final moments, the camera switches to the perspective of June as we see a drop of blood roll down the shower door and her reaction shot, wide-eyed, still embracing her husband, leaves much uncertainty at the film’s close.

This vagueness is heightened by the number of questions left unanswered at the end of the film (I am hesitant to call it the ‘resolution,’ as very little is actually resolved here). In the end, the characters in the film end up being more of a mystery than the illness itself. Once it is implied that the disease is the result of a medical experiment, the audience is still left wondering about the goals of both the individual characters and the initial experiment. Shane’s behaviour, perhaps the strangest of all of them, is unexplained for most of the film and the end continues in its elusiveness as he never actually finds Leo – only the implication that there is no cure for his illness. It is equally unclear why Coré was involved in the experiment and whether she has any goals beyond killing and consuming as a result – her single line in the film reveals that she simply wants to die. Leo seems to want to protect Coré, but at the same time appears disgusted by her, and June appears to be simultaneously in love with Shane and ready to give up on him. Perhaps the most ambiguous character is the housekeeper who is mainly portrayed as separate from the other characters, yet, in many scenes, is given her own perspective. In the end, her only defined purpose is as a victim for Shane. The lack of clarity regarding these characters’ goals ultimately prevents the viewer from relating to any of them as the protagonist, a direct opposition to the traditional vampire narrative, which focuses closely on goal driven characters, typically including the vampire figure. Yet, even though these characters are emotionally detached from our perspective, sympathy is still invoked through the vague implications that they are humans who are “suffering” and cannot exert control over what afflicts them, rather than the supernatural creatures that typically exhibit the same aggressive tendencies.

Ambiguity separates Trouble Every Day from The Addiction and Let The Right One In as well as the traditional vampire film because it never actually establishes itself as one. In his article “Textures of terror: Claire Denis’ Trouble Every Day,” Douglas Morrey (2004) points out that even though the term vampire is never used in the film, there are still plenty of discreet references to the conventions of the vampire film: the ring of blood around Coré’s mouth; the camera lingering around the chambermaid’s neck from Shane’s point of view; what looks like the mark of a bite on June’s upper arm; Shane’s sensitivity to the bright light in the lab; Coré opening her coat like bat wings as she absorbs the night air; and, finally, Coré being consumed by flames near the end of the film. These reflections of conventional notions of vampirism are presented as the side effects of an illness and focus more on the medical aspect than trying to set up the predetermined con-
ventions that traditional vampire films tend to follow. Furthermore, Morrey (2004) suggests that Trouble is able to resist the all-consuming theoretical discourse of the horror/vampire film by not ‘allowing itself to be claimed by the genre with its full iconographic and ideological implications. The film, as it were, references a tradition of vampire cinema, but without ever quite “coming out” as a vampire movie.’

The characters in Trouble Every Day are also removed from the traditional characters of the vampire narrative because of their lack of romantic qualities. Any scenes that might be considered romantic are highly contradictory: passionate sex scenes that are far more frightening than erotic are contrasted with couples who appear to be in love, yet physically lack the passion they attempt to express. Neither of these two cases is typical of the romanticised vampire film, which portrays love stemming from the exoticness of the vampire. Instead, these couples exhibit the surface qualities of people in love – kissing and sweet talk between newlyweds Shane and June on the plane, and Leo’s protection of Coré despite her aggressive behaviour – yet seem ultimately unable to follow through with the expectations of ‘real’ romance – honesty, passion, trust. The film’s two most gruesome scenes, however, are also important indicators of the theme of isolation running throughout Trouble Every Day. Both Coré and Shane’s extra-marital sexual encounters and subsequent killings highlight the reasons for their inability to experience romance in their relationships. Both Coré’s encounter with the neighbourhood boy and Shane’s with the hotel housekeeper mark the film’s notably few gory scenes considering its resemblance to the horror genre in many other ways.

Coré’s encounter with the neighborhood boy starts out erotic as they begin to kiss through the wooden

barrier that keeps her inside, and the boy struggles to break through into her room. Once he succeeds, the camera cuts to a close up on a bare stomach, not immediately distinguishable because it is so close up and detached from the rest of the body. As Lisa Downing (2007:56) notes, ‘in the controversial erotic-horror pastiche Trouble Every Day (2001), the human body is subjected to a radical making-unfamiliar’. The camera slowly moves along the naked body until male chest hair and nipples become recognisable, and then cuts to the boy’s face, revealing a relaxed pleasure as he lies in Coré’s bed. Remaining close, the camera follows her hands slowly moving along his body and then pulls back to reveal their lower halves connecting, before briefly cutting to the boy’s friend waiting downstairs for him. Coré’s touch becomes more aggressive as she moves up to kiss him and the camera seems to focus more specifically on his extended neck, which she begins to nip at. While this appears playful at first, the scene quickly shifts from erotic to gruesome as extra-diegetic music cues to speed up the pace, and she pins down his arms, preparing to attack. The first sign of his displeasure comes in his moans, which have turned from those of pleasure to pain, followed by his cringing face as Coré grabs his head and takes complete control. Finally, his soft moans become intense screams of terror and agony, begging her to stop, as blood begins to run down his face.

After cutting back, a final time, to his friend downstairs, ultimately deciding not to investigate the cries, the camera returns to Coré, continuing to devour the boy’s face and, later, poking at the holes she has created in his body. Morrey (2004) reads this as a rare depiction of ‘a male body, reconfigured as open and accessible’. This scene is paralleled soon after by a similar attack made by Shane back at his hotel, though
Coré’s encounter, and subsequent bloody artwork on the canvas of their white wall is much more extensive.

After he has found Coré and discovers he is not alone in his intense craving for blood, Shane appears to be inspired to satisfy his own thirst and follows the housekeeper down to the basement of the hotel, where she is changing, to seduce her. Like the earlier scene with Coré and the neighbour, the encounter begins consensual, with the victim appearing to expect little more than a random sexual rendezvous. This time, however, the scene is filmed further back, revealing the couple groping each other from a medium shot and following them down to the floor at the same distance. The switch from erotic to terrifying happens much more quickly here, with Coré’s gentle touching being replaced by Shane’s frantic removal of the girl’s underwear and aggressive movements on top of her, pinning her down. It is obvious much sooner that the victim is uncomfortable as she struggles and shouts, trying to free herself from his attack. The differences between these two scenes suggest that Coré’s much earlier awareness of her illness makes her a more sympathetic vampire, while Shane, just coming to terms with his urges, comes across as more of a culprit. Whereas Coré preys on the boy’s face and chest, Shane indulges immediately in the housekeeper’s female parts, emphasising many more sexual implications to his perversion.

While sexuality remains fairly explicit throughout Trouble Every Day, the lack of romance in the scenes I have analysed emphasises the dominating sense of isolation and melancholy resulting from the vampire-like illness the characters suffer from. Despite the challenge to relate to their hidden or non-existent goals, Denis presents Shane and, even more so, Coré, because of her progressed state, as sympathetic vampires by focusing on their struggles to comprehend and deal with their diseases. By reading their bloodsucking tendencies as the result of a medical experiment, rather than of mythical origin, viewers are more inclined to attempt to understand the nature of the symptoms being presented.

**Conclusion**

Moving away from the romantic aspect of the vampire as a supernatural being, each of these three films – The Addiction, Let The Right One In, and Trouble Every Day – de-mystify those who crave human blood so their actions are seen more as the side effects of their illness. As a result, these characters draw attention not because of their special powers, but because of their struggle to understand the nature of their disease. Sympathy is thus invoked by suggestions of melancholy and isolation through both narrative and stylistic techniques. In The Addiction, Kathleen’s melancholy is caused by her frustration at being unable to understand the nature of her addiction. Feelings of isolation in particular are highlighted by the film’s black and white appearance, emphasising the shadows created around Kathleen’s situation. Similarly, Let The Right One In’s style, depicting the Stockholm winter’s short hours of sunlight, underscores the film’s melancholic attitude toward the cruelty of human beings, both adults and children, making the designated monster of the film seem significantly less monstrous than its secondary, human, characters. Finally, Trouble Every Day offers extended, virtually silent, shots of its characters in the film’s Parisian setting, all of them appearing lost amongst its disconnected images of isolation owing to the lethal illness of two primary characters.
In each of these situations, sympathy is called for by the vampires’ roles as protagonists, allowing viewers to witness their respective struggles to come to terms with the nature of the illnesses being portrayed.

Notes

1. In *Dread: How fear and fantasy have fueled epidemics from the Black Death to avian flu*, Philip Alcabes (2009:2) notes: ‘at almost the same time as Murnau was filming the plague-carrying vampire rising out of a rat-infested ship’s hold to spread disease, public-health authorities were using scientific knowledge to curtail real plague epidemics in Paris and Los Angeles.’

2. While *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was released two years prior to *Interview*, it was not until the second season of the television series (Whedon 1997-2003) that the vampire Angel (David Boreanaz) was introduced as a sympathetic figure.

3. Candace Benefiel references Anne Rice’s biographer who reveals that writing *Interview with the Vampire* was Rice’s way of dealing with the loss of her daughter to leukemia. Benefiel (2004:266) suggests that her near-breakdown is represented by a character in the novel – ‘an insane Parisian dollmaker who yearns obsessively for her own dead daughter’.


5. Peina refers to writer William S Burroughs whose work was greatly influenced by heroin addiction: ‘Have you read *Naked Lunch*? Burroughs perfectly describes what it’s like to go without a fix.’

6. When the film was released in 1995, heroin addiction had already been at been a prevalent concern in the United States for several years. For example, in 1971, four years before the end of the Vietnam War, statistics show that 10-15 per cent please of American servicemen were addicted to heroin (Heroin Statistics). When the film was released more than twenty years later, the number of users was still rising: a survey looking at what American drug users were spending on their addictions between 1988 and 2000 showed that somewhere between $10 and $23 billion was spent on heroin during the 1990s alone, and in 1995 there were an estimated 428,000 occasional and 923,000 chronic heroine users in the United States (Drug Availability). Likewise, the HIV/AIDS crisis, first recognised in the early 1980s, continued to be a prominent concern by the mid-1990s when the film was released.

7. There is also the implication that he was her former lover before he grew old, suggesting that he is what Oskar will eventually become.

8. This next take is more than a minute long, which can be compared to the final attack scene in *Twilight* – heavy on close up shots, each take lasts no more than ten seconds. While the effect of *Twilight*’s quick reaction shots is to show the viewer exactly how each character is feeling, the long takes and long shots in *Let The Right One In* allow the viewer to be a simple observer, watching the scene unfold without giving away the answers.

9. Philippe Met’s (2003) article “Looking for trouble: The dialectics of lack and excess” notes some of the film’s ‘obligatory horror genre motifs—an unexplained curse, bestial or monstrous behaviour, scientific hubris, brain dissection, a chainsaw …’.
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From a merely statistic point of view, the grotesque is one of the leading forms of mass art today [...] the grotesque seems omnipresent. Thus it appears timely to address it theoretically.'
-- Noël Carroll (2003)

ABSTRACT

In this article, I argue that the new – as opposed to habitualised – optical and digital technologies as used in the cinema today have a strong perceptual impact on individuals by creating all sorts of visual distortions that cause a profound deautomatisation of perception and a destabilisation of the ontological status of the image. An uncanny disruption of the perceptual process, a destabilisation of the cognitive routines, a sudden sensitivity to the medium and an instant emotional response are at the heart of these disruptive viewing experiences. I argue that these effects are reinforced by the presence of “grotesques” and “monsters” which are so prominent in visual culture today.

Key terms:
Viewing experience, art experience, medium-sensitive experience, grotesque experience, perceptual process, cognitive routines, (de)automatisation, (de)stabilisation, (de)naturalisation, (de)sensitisation, attractions, embodied cognitions.

Introduction

In his reflection on the dominance of the grotesque in mass art today, Noël Carroll (2003) recalls growing up in the United States in the 1950s and early 1960s with a constant craving for the monstrous, yet in the cinema of those days he scarcely found any hybrids, deformed creatures, weird beings of gargantuesque proportions, aliens, or monsters. But the times have changed, as he ironically writes, and now ‘the grotesque seems omnipresent’ (Carroll 2003:293-294).

Carroll’s approach to the grotesque is interesting in many ways. He analyses Matt Groening’s Homer Simpson, Tim Burton’s Edward Scissorhands, the self portraits by Cindy Sherman, the brachiosaur in Steven Spielberg’s Jurassic Park (1993) and other “grotesques” (see Figures 1–4). He argues that these grotesque figures are structurally similar in so far as they all fuse and subvert distinct biological and ontological categories (Carroll 2003:296). Disproportion (of parts), fusion, formlessness, and gigantism are the most frequent recurring ways of realising this structural principle, according to Carroll.
In other words, though these images are utterly different in terms of their formal features, they are structurally similar in that they all subvert our categorical thinking. As such, they may well trigger an immediate and strong emotional response, ‘namely, horror, comic amusement, and awe’ (Carroll 2003:298). Interestingly, Carroll (2003:298) also argues that these emotional responses have striking family relations with each other and with the core structure of the grotesque. Pivotal is the subversion of ‘our categorical expectations concerning the natural and ontological order’ (Carroll 2003:298). Indeed, to this type of subversion, which touches upon the fundamentals of human knowledge, viewers respond strongly: the categories of our understanding suddenly and momentarily fail, as Wolfgang Kayser (1957/2004) already argued in his seminal work on the grotesque in the late 1950s.

Carroll’s argument that the grotesque is a dominant format in mass culture today is new and thought-provoking. His further insights, which are in line with standard research on the grotesque, are convincing, for example, the mixing of categories and the prominence of biological hybridity; the failing of the categories of understanding; the strong emotional impact. Particularly enriching is Carroll’s analysis where he deepens the already existing knowledge in the field with his analysis of the cognitive disorientation and the affective states elicited by the grotesque. Carroll’s explanation for the current prominence of the grotesque in mainstream culture, however, is far less satisfying, as I will argue below. He sees a relation between the present ‘quickly accelerating entertainment industry’ with the demand for an endless variety of new and fantastic grotesque beings, which are triggering sudden and strong emotions (Carroll 2003:309-310). Yet, he overlooks the current period in history as a medium-oriented one, with medium-sensitive viewers who are temporarily sensitised to the medium by the new optical and digital techniques they are not yet familiar with.

More specifically, he overlooks the perceptual experience of these new techniques as a paradigmatic experience of the grotesque. In other words, the experience of the grotesque, as I will argue below, is not merely or exclusively a perceptual experience of grotesque (fused, hybrid, monstrous) beings; it is, more fundamentally,
an experience of the distorting powers of the new technologies themselves effectively “working” on the percipients in the perceptual process and destabilising their notion of images, representations, beings and meanings. Note that new optical techniques almost inevitably distort, fuse, enlarge and/or deform the seen in some way, and thus typically subvert our biological and ontological categories and destabilise our cognitive routines. Widely discussed examples are computer-generated imagery (CGI) and other digital techniques: the enormously enlarged IMAX cinema’s wide screens and, arguably, the “new” 3D techniques, all technological novelties introduced in the cinema since the late 1980s.5

My central claim is that contemporary cinema technologies challenge the film viewer perceptually in that they bring the ontological status of the images into question. (Is it an image? If so: does it represent something? If so: what does it represent?) My second claim is that new technologies (as opposed to the old technologies which viewers use in an habitual or “automatised” way) create a disorienting and disruptive perceptual experience, which basically has the structure of the grotesque experience, in so far as both involve the perceptual experience of the destabilising effects of the (optical or pictorial) techniques which fuse, enlarge, distort, and deform the seen.6 My third claim is that the effects are only temporary and that the effects of destabilisation disappear once “habituation” or “automatisation” sets in. This also implies that the image will (re)gain its ontological status as image / representation once the viewing process becomes habitual and automatised. It also means that viewers will lose their sensitivity to the medium in the end and that, as a result, they will basically overlook the techniques working in the perceptual process: they may altogether stop taking note of the ontological difference between a tree in nature and one on a canvas, photo, TV, IPhone, laptop or IMAX wide screen.

To create some insight in the impact of new technologies and the perceptual processes they trigger, two historical examples of the introduction of a new technology are presented in the next two sections: 1) the “birth” of the close-up and 2) the “birth” of the grotesque. I will link the findings of these two sections together with the idea of the dominance of the grotesque in contemporary culture in the closing section.

The “birth” of the close-up

The close-up has become so normal, natural, and familiar, after more than a century of film, that we now have tremendous difficulties understanding the initial impact of the close-up on early audiences. We tend to forget that a close-up on a film screen creates a distortion of the natural proportions and, as such, is a disturbance to our perceptual-cognitive system. Regardless of the ways the “alien” powers of the close-up become domesticated and are put to use over time, all enlargements are in fact disproportionate;7 they are “attractions” (in the sense of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein) for this very reason: they may easily create ‘emotional shocks in the spectator’ (Eisenstein 1969:30). Interestingly, they were presented as such to the spectators of early cinema. A famous example is provided by The Warwick Trading Company’s catalogue for April 1901, proudly announcing Grandma’s Reading Glass (1900), in ‘which objects are shown in abnormal size on the screen when projected.’ The company proudly states that this is to show objects and beings ‘in their enormously enlarged form. The big print on the newspaper, the visible working of the mechanism of the watch, the fluttering of the canary in the cage, the blinking of grandma’s eye, and the inquisitive look of the kitten, is most amusing to behold. The novelty of the subject is sure to please every audience’ (Routt, emphasis added). Clearly, ‘enormously enlarged’ things were considered “attractions” in 1901,
and as such ‘most amusing’. Grandma’s eye projected on the screen must have been enlarged about a hundred times and isolated, on the screen, moving about on its own as a fish in a bowl, the eye suddenly becomes an “alien” or “fantastic” object (Figure 5).8

I suppose the eye may have “amused” its audiences in much the same way as watching an elephant in the zoo may amuse us, since its size and forms are “fantastic” and almost beyond the real. Note that this new “attraction” was promoted to demonstrate the “monstrous” powers of the close-up (Eisenstein), as well as to “monstrate” (Gaudreault 2006) the marvelous technical novelty of enlargement in the cinema at the same time. This close-up has been marketed as a first demonstration of enlargement, and a quite remarkable one. Warwick expected the audiences to have a strong response simply to the enlargement, and rightly so. Theoretically speaking, distortions of natural proportions tend to have a disorienting effect on spectators almost instantly, and even more so when a creature is turned into something abnormally large or gigantic. Such a gargantuesque being suddenly falls outside known biological categories; for example, a gigantic cockroach is not a cockroach, but a monster (Eisenstein). Note that by enlarging it, the ontological status of the being is changed, as is the spectators’ relation to the gigantic “cockroach” or “eye”. Distortions of natural proportions almost automatically turn an otherwise normal creature into a (horrific or amusing) “monster”. Thus the close-up basically feeds on the spectacular powers of the freshly enlarged, distorted and disproportional, and the technique itself may easily produce ‘emotional shocks in the spectator’ (Eisenstein 1969: 30).9 The close-up is ultimately a technique which feeds on the powers of the grotesque experience; that is to say, until habituation sets in and the differences in size between natural being and represented image no longer destabilise the audience.

Interestingly, in the so-called phase of the transformation of the cinema (between about 1907 and 1915 in the USA), critics in The Moving Picture World and other journals started to utter objections to the close-up (see Bowser 1990:97-98; Routt). Disregarding the context of close-ups as amusing “attractions” and regarding them within the new context of narrative cinema, viewers became critical of the distortions of

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**Figure 5**: Stills from *Grandma’s Reading Glass*, directed by George Albert Smith, 1900, 1 min 20 secs. Source: www.terramedia.co.uk/brighton/brighton_films_reading_glass.htm
the proportions of the seen. Within the new context, one can easily find objections to the “monstrous,” the “absurd,” and the “grotesque” powers of the close-up by the dozens (see Bowser 1990:97-98; Routt). William Routt discusses one of these (anonymous) critics who, in 1909, complained of “the total lack of uniformity in a film which contained medium, long and extra-long shots (no real close-ups at all).” This writer objected to the fact that “in an hour’s entertainment of a moving picture theatre, the visitor sees an infinite variation in the apparent sizes of things as shown by the moving picture” and called the ‘disproportion’ simply ‘absurd’ (Routt, emphasis in original). In a 1911 article from The Moving Picture World, a critic complains about the fact that ‘figures closer than the nine foot line, where the top of the head is at the top of the screen and the feet are at the bottom, assume unnecessarily large and, therefore, grotesque proportions’ (Routt, emphasis in original).10

These rejections form interesting material for Film and Media Studies, because they quite adequately and precisely indicate the need for the new institute, “cinema,” to radically reject or appropriate the “alien” powers of the new technique in the name of the new narrative cinema coming into being in the USA from 1910s onward (Gaudreault 2006:98). Inevitably, the “grotesque” and “distorting” powers of enlargements were among the ones to be rejected.11 Interestingly, these objections to the “grotesque” in the cinema sound surprisingly similar to the famous antique and Renaissance rejections of the grotesque, by Vitruvius and Ruskin respectively,12 in so far as that all these objections are typically uttered in defence of the representational powers of art. Basically, they are a rejection of that which does not represent or “mean anything.” This second phase of the institutionalisation of the cinema – the phase of transformation of the cinema, as Eileen Bowser (1990:97-98) calls it – marks a truly innovative interval in time, in the perception of the new institute itself: it initiated narrative cinema and rejected the technical powers it did not need. From an artistic and avant-garde point of view, however, the true moment of innovation is the “birth” of the new medium itself and the glorious moment of “monstration” of the new technology as a celebration of its “monstrous” powers. Whatever one’s perspective, it must be noted that new traditions in representation are not born in the medium-specific first phase of the “birth” of the new techniques – a festive moment of monstration and celebration of its “monstrous” or grotesque powers13 – but rather from it, in the successive, second phase of rejection of these “alien” and “primitive” qualities (Gaudreault 2006: 88, 99).14 Both need our attention as two distinctively different phases in cinema’s history.

In the history of cinema, the objections to the “attractions” of early cinema clearly indicate the need to reduce and control the spectacular powers of film for a narrative cinema being established in the USA. They indicate the shift away from an early phase in cinema, primarily engaging its spectators in the “primitive” pleasures of looking, to a more “sophisticated” narrative cinema which represents the world and primarily gratifies the sense for meaning. It was inevitable that the new institute would reject most of early cinema’s monstrous powers. That the close-up survived the process is in itself a sign that these powers could be put to use in (classical) narrative cinema: they create ‘visual pleasure,’ as Laura Mulvey has argued.16 It shows that the monstrous powers of cinema are neither incidental nor exclusive for film attractions in early film: the very attraction of film as a visual medium is based on these powers; film simply feeds on them. Film is basically a ‘hypnotic monster’, as Pier Paolo Pasolini (1974:73) wrote. One may indeed argue, as he did, that cinema is in fact not very well suited to tell stories at all. If it were to do so, it would have to lose much of its ‘original,
dream-like, barbaric, disorderly, aggressive and visionary power’ (Pasolini 1974:73). It would be a mistake to assume that these qualities are of marginal importance now. The spectacular is not a marginal concern for the cinema ever, it seems to me. The “alien” quality of early cinema, which traditional film historians tend to overlook, as Gaudreault (2006:99) states, is ‘a properly irreducible alien quality.’

In terms of writing cinema’s “proper” history, it is important to include both the radical rejections of early cinema’s “alien” qualities in the process of institutionalisation of narrative cinema as well as the fierce opposition to its rejection, which is a rich tradition in itself. Symptomatic for this (avant-garde) tradition are the many attempts to reinvent and reinvest silent cinema’s “poetic”, “evocative,” “spectacular,” “non-narrative” powers in the cinema of the 1920s, and later. Examples one may contemplate are the essays on the “photogenicity” (photogénie) of cinema by Louis Delluc, a term adopted by Boris Eichenbaum, in Poetika Kino, in the 1920s. One may also think of Delluc’s pupil, Jean Epstein, who wrote a passionate essay on the close-up as ‘the soul of the cinema’ in 1921, defending its “magnifying” powers. However, the most obvious example of all may be Eisenstein’s essays on the montage of (film) “attractions,” from the early 1920s. These were written after the first medium-specific phase of cinema in pre-revolutionary Russia. While firmly rejecting the young narrative cinema of the USA, Eisenstein analysed and defended the “monstrous” or grotesque powers of cinema, thus grounding a new “historical-materialist” cinema in the USSR. These powers were domesticated and put to use in Eisenstein’s own new cinema, in a precise, constructivist form, as mathematically calculated “attractions.” Eisenstein’s (1969:30) own films served one purpose only, as he wrote: to force upon his audiences his post-revolutionary ‘ideological conclusion.’

It seems that one can learn several things from this historical example. Generally speaking, it confirms that the “birth” of the close-up as the “birth” of deautomatised cinema audiences, thus creating distinctly disruptive moments in cinema’s history, as well as intervals of medium sensitivity, with a heightened awareness of the medium. Indeed, this points to abrupt shifts in cinema’s history, as well as some more gradual ones. As Laura Mulvey (2006:52) argues, ‘[f]ilm historians have pointed out, quite correctly, that the cinema and its prehistory are too deeply imbricated ideologically and technologically, for an abrupt “birth of the cinema” to be conceptually valid. But from the perspective of the uncanny, the arrival of celluloid moving pictures constitutes a decisive moment.’ It seems to me that the introduction, marketing and dissemination of the first close-ups as a technical novelty well worth seeing, may indeed indicate that a technique was needed only four years after the “birth” of cinema to counteract the (predictable) first signs of habituation to the novelty of the moving pictures. Moreover, the “birth” of the close-up seems to signal that the phase of celebration of and experimentation with new techniques was in full swing. The close-up was thus framed and advertised as an extraordinary thing – and it was in part received accordingly – receiving either positive and affirmative or negative responses.

The “birth” of the close-up did not go unnoticed, as reviews have testified. Unsurprisingly, the rejections of the powers of the close-up to make the seen look “abnormal,” “disproportionate,” and “absurd” seem to coincide well with the rise of the institution of cinema, as well as its endeavors to create a narrative cinema to represent story worlds. In its early years, the institution of cinema predictably needed (1) rejection (of the close-up’s “grotesqueness”), (2) habituation to the medium, (3) appropriation of the powers of the new techniques, and (4) institutionalisation of its own
production and dissemination practices to establish a firm and stable relation with its audiences. In the end, all of these factors would help to establish the more or less stable ontological status of the moving image needed by cinema to represent the world in its narratives. Further research is needed to augment our knowledge of the process that helped to shape the medium in its first and second phase, taking particular note of the distinctive roles the de-automatisation of new techniques played, the viewers’ rejections, the viewers’ habituation, the appropriation of the institute, and the avant-garde celebration of the ways in which new techniques could transform the seen and have an impact on perception.

The “birth” of the grotesque

Several transitional periods in European culture seem to be marked by a distinct and sudden interest in the aesthetics of the grotesque. In fact, the history of the grotesque (as described in seminal studies by Kayser (1957/2004), Bakhtin (1968), Harpham (2006), and others) provides a real treasure trove for insights into the transitional, medium-sensitive viewing experiences of the new that we currently often experience. For this very reason, I would like to go back to yet another famous transitional moment in European history, moving from the pre-modern to the modern era: the (Italian) Renaissance. Its early years are marked by the discovery and excavation of the Domus Aurea or the Golden Palace, built by Nero around 64 AD, not in Rome but on Rome, as Tacitus commented.19 It was thought that Nero had burnt down the very heart of Rome to build his disproportionate palace and revenge came within half a decade. The Palace was destroyed and Titus built his now famous Baths on top of the ruins. Across the street, where Nero’s little pond used to be, the Colosseum was erected to satisfy and enchant the people of Rome. The Golden Palace seemed not to have left a trace. It was only in about 1480 that painters discovered many hundreds of marvelous little drawings of hybrids on the ceilings and the walls of what was once Nero’s Palace, yet what they then thought to be a “grotto.” Hence, these fascinating little figures were called groteschi or grotto-esques.20 Again and again, painters descended into the grottos with torches through holes in the ceiling to marvel at what they saw – Raphael among them21 –and they may have felt they could suddenly see the antique Roman’s mind via a hole in the skull, as the novelist Ian McEwan (2005) would later write. In On the grotesque, Geoffrey Harpham (2006:27) writes: ‘Of all the recoveries of classical Rome made by the Renaissance, this [the Domus Aurea] was to be the most exciting, influential, and confusing.’ Inspired by the site, the Renaissance painters made their imitations or grotto-esques, and it took only a few decades for the new style to become popular and spread all over Italy (Udine, Florence, Venice), France, Spain, and the Low Countries. Most renowned are the ones made by the ‘master of the grotesque’, Giovanni da Udine in the Vatican Logge. For many years now, I have visited Rome with a group of Masters students to study these grotesques to deepen our knowledge of these still stunningly attractive grotesques. Being guests of the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome,22 we get permission to visit the private and silent paradise of the Vatican Logge. For many years now, I have visited Rome with a group of Masters students to study these grotesques to deepen our knowledge of these still stunningly attractive grotesques. Being guests of the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome,22 we get permission to visit the private and silent paradise of the Vatican Logge. What we see in the Logge is, as we tend to exclaim euphorically, absolutely amazing, astonishing, awe-inspiring – an “attraction” indeed, as descriptions from the early Renaissance onwards have testified.23 Having had this fantastic experience myself, I am keen on descriptions of it by others, who often describe similar sensations in surprisingly similar words. I consciously use the word “attraction” here, firstly, because it is this very term which is constantly and spontaneously used by art historians to describe their experience of
seeing these grotesques; secondly, because the term “attractions” was introduced to the field of film by Eisenstein (1969:30), as noted above, to describe a system of triggering ‘emotional shocks in the spectator,’ and, thirdly, because that specific use of the term has gained conceptual relevance in Film and Media Studies in a longer process of trying to get to grips with early cinema’s “special appeal” on its spectators. It is that “special appeal” of grotesque “attractions” I am interested in.

The Vatican Logge as a garden of amazement

The art historian George L Hersey (1993:227-228) almost euphorically describes the Vatican Logge as a ‘painted garden of amazement’ where ‘temples sprout from blossoms and gods from flowers,’ a garden ‘full of charm’ and ‘unforeseen attractions’:

One’s first impression, walking into the Logge, is of bewildering richness. … Thus as Bernice Davidson writes, the visitor is: “dazzled by the galaxy of images represented in the stucco cameos studding every pier and pilaster the length of the Logge. It may be a long time before one realizes that on each pilaster surface there are four such reliefs”.

Note that both Hersey and Davidson, whom is quoted by Hersey, describe their reactions to the capricious images on the walls (Figures 6, 7). They do not describe their reactions on the imagery on the ceiling, which contains the biblical story of creation from the very beginning till the end of the history of the world. There is obviously a narrative thread in the story of creation, which comes with a well-known iconography: we see Adam and Eve, the snake, God’s Paradise, and so on. As opposed to this, Giovanni’s grotteschi, of which one finds dozens on both walls and pillars, offer no story at all and their status in relation to each other and to the story of creation, as well as their meaning overall, is uncertain. One may, even today, easily feel “bewildered” or “dazzled,” as Hersey writes, looking everywhere in the search for order and meaning. Thus, one takes in dozens of surprising and outrageous figures. These grotesque ornaments, both in the Vatican Logge as those in the Golden Palace, present all sorts of hybrids and fusion figures, deformed, disproportional and “fantastic” beings in a true proliferation of forms. Davidson, though a trained art historian, testifies that the imagery on the walls in the Vatican Logge is indeed so overwhelming that it ‘may be a long time before one realizes that on each pilaster surface there are four … reliefs’ (Hersey 1993:227-228), whereas Hersey (1993:227-228) tries to convince himself that ‘the dazzle of this apparent disorder can eventually be resolved. Doing so is part of the fun.’ Nevertheless, one has to leave some habitual viewing practices behind, because, as Hersey (1993:227-228, emphasis added) states:

choices are simply optional ways of “doing” this painted garden of amazement … Perhaps the only mistake is to think that only a single message lurks behind the riot of possibilities. … Losing one’s way, discovering unforeseen attractions, entertaining vain hopes, and a final release – these are some of the pleasures to be had.

The Vatican Logge seems created to stimulate wander and wonder. To do so and enjoy the experience, one has to let go of the thought that only a single message lurks behind the riot of possibilities. Interestingly, both Hersey and Davidson tend to understate the confusion (“dazzle”) which comes with the acknowledged “dis-order.” They do not explicitly reflect on it. Yet is not an amount of confusion and disorientation at the heart of this viewing experience? It seems to me that the Renaissance artists may have painted grotesques in the Vatican Logge to evoke in their spectators the very experience
Figures 6 and 7: The frog/man and detail from the Vatican Logge. Images by the author
they themselves may have had in the grotto-esque Golden Palace, that place which ‘inspired the imagination as it resisted comprehension, and in fact for decades no visitor knew exactly what he was looking at,’ according to Harpham (2006:27).

The double appeal of spectacular attractions

Crucial to the viewing experience is that the grotesque figures in the Vatican Logge have a double appeal to the spectators: one of looking and one of understanding.

To put it differently: there is a perceptual appeal as well as a cognitive appeal. These two impulses seem to be kept in a balance. As for the perceptual appeal: one may well enjoy the Vatican Logge, as Hersey (1993:227-228) writes, as an ‘abundant, complex, and joyous testament to their [Raphael and his team] collective talents.’ They present a ‘display of virtuosity and skill’, created for the ‘delight on the part of those who see it’, made ‘for delight rather than necessity’, to ‘flatter the habits of sense through the delight of the eyes and the ears’ with ‘extraneous marvels of art’, providing ‘attractions of artistic novelty and license’, as David Summers (2003:22) writes of the antique grotesques which were imitated by the Renaissance artists.30 No doubt, they strongly appealed to the Renaissance artists who themselves provided the novelty to their spectators for them to look and indulge in the seen, and to wander in the Vatican Logge and wonder.

The impulse to understand these grotesques figures, to grab their meaning, is obviously an impulse which is kept at a low level, as if put to sleep, by the very fact that these figures or beings are part of an ornamental pattern and seem to be made for decorative purposes only. In Harpham’s (2006:34, emphasis in original) words: \textit{In them the eye is continually soothed by the balance and proportion of the figures, and continually reassured that nothing means or coheres, nothing signifies. All is lively and symmetrical, with figures alternating in subtle rhythms from architectural to human to animal to foliate forms. For all the animation and activity on the pilasters, there is almost no narrative interest at all: the figures give the impression that their postures and attitudes express nothing, but merely fill the available space, the space left by the other figures.}

Soothing the spectators with ornamental patterns, the impulses to see and understand seem to be balanced. However, the balance is not stable and it may well collapse in the process of viewing. In fact, there are two basic problems: a perceptual impulse to be immersed and the cognitive impulse to understand and know. As to the first: the grotesques in the Vatican Logge have an extraordinary strong perceptual appeal on spectators. One reason for this is that these grotesque ornaments are not positioned in the margins and out of focus, as are the antique ones. Giovanni’s grotesque figures in the Vatican Logge are positioned centrally on the walls. The antique ones presented themselves as tiny and marginal “parerga,”31 which were hard to find and easily overlooked, and possibly never meant to really be seen, as they were hidden in corners and humble household corridors or behind wooden window panels, high on the ceiling,32 or only a few centimetres from the floor. One is inevitably face to face with Giovanni’s Renaissance grotesques, however, as they are prominently positioned on the walls of the Vatican Logge.

One of the new perceptual experiences when one does focus on the grotesques – and one will at some point, given their central position on the walls – is that one feels overwhelmed by the abundance of forms and shapes. The multitude of visual details brings one to
the verge of a dazzle, much the same as in a Federico Fellini film, when the screen is filled from top to bottom with visual details and simultaneous actions. One is perceptually fully indulged. Once drawn in, a cognitive problem easily arises from the fact that one is somehow uncertain of what it all means, and where one is supposed to look exactly, and to what purpose. Do these ornamental grotesques, provided in decorative patterns, really not signify or symbolise anything? This question becomes imperative within the context of this new type of images: what is their ontological status? Are they ornamental? Or are they representations? And if they are representations: what on earth do they represent? The answers to all these questions are far from obvious – which is perhaps just another way to say the new techniques of the “grotto-esque” used by the school of Raphael destabilise the ontological status of the image.

As we have seen, grotesque figures are rarely so prominent or demanding, or so irregular, that questions like these are imperative, yet one cannot really escape the problem in the Vatican Logge, as one cannot escape being face to face with them. Note what happens when one stops wandering for a moment and starts asking questions about this and starts focusing on a single figure. A wall full of grotesque figures may evoke perceptual pleasure and delight, owing to the symmetries and colours, whereas one grotesque figure, singled out as it were and focused on, may easily pose a cognitive problem in a more urgent way.

If we take the hybrid frog as an example, a grotesque figure from the Vatican Logge chosen at random (Figure 6): one sees a typical hybrid or fusion figure (human/plant, human/animal), with the head of a man, the legs of a frog and the wings of a butterfly – yet these wings look a bit like the leaves of a plant, and, typically, the hat-like or crown-like plateau on the head of the figure serves for yet another two grotesque figures to rest on. The torso of the frogman is painted with an impressive amount of anatomical precision (a feature unknown to the antiques and new for the times), yet the legs are not. From a distance, his legs may seem similar, but on closer scrutiny his left leg seems to end in a claw with a long sharp nail, whereas his right leg ends in what looks like a clubfoot. Seeing all this, one is aware, however, that some of these details may not mean anything: perhaps they are there merely accidentally or, perhaps, they are there for reasons of symmetry and decoration only.

Indeed, one becomes uncertain of the status of the things one sees. All these tiny (yet funny!) irregularities (which turn the decorative symmetries in pseudo symmetries): are they all meant to represent something? What then about the fat on his hips, which makes him look a tiny bit obese? What to think of that dark “liquid” leaving his body in a stream? Is it meant to be there, and is it meant to be seen, or is it there only by coincidence? Is it dripping paint? Has it always been there or is it a sign of damage or wear? Again: what is this? What is the ontological status of the image? And what is the ontological status of that frog/man? Interestingly, art historians of the period tend to paper over these questions and seem not to like to address the problem head-on. An expert of the grotesque, Harpham, does, however, address some pivotal questions these strange figures trigger. He rightly indicates, to my experience, that there is a ‘struggle for primacy’ of the two impulses, the one to look (at the ornament) and the other to search for meaning in the seen (as in representational art) (Harpham 1982:48-49). Another question is: how must we understand that Renaissance spectators referred to these grotesques figures as “monsters” from our retrospective perspective? Does their use of the term “monster” indicate that they too felt the balance between seeing it as an ornament and seeing it
as a representation that was instable and in fact on the verge of collapsing? That if the frog/man was not an ornament, then inevitably it was a (fantastic) monster?

The attraction of the “monstrous”

Giovanni’s frog/man looks quite unlike Boris Karloff playing Frankenstein’s monster. One may nevertheless argue that Giovanni and Frankenstein (and Mary Shelley) created beings that stand outside nature. These creators all made distorted and disproportioned fusion-figures. Dr Frankenstein made his monster from various parts of dead bodies; Giovanni mixed (body) parts from various biological species. Fusion-figures like these, in which biological features are mixed and distorted, pose a cognitive problem, not only to a pre-modern or Renaissance spectator, but also to a modern mind, since they disturb and confuse our basic biological and ontological categories and schemes. This basic cognitive disturbance, as well as an amount of perceptual disorientation and uncertainty about the ontological status of the imagery, is the very power the aesthetic of the grotesque feeds on. And precisely because these grotesque figures are biological and ontological “anomalies” (in Carroll’s words), they disorient us and it is as such that they have a specific aesthetic appeal on spectators. We may well call this the attraction of the “monstrous.” Note that there is disorientation on two levels: regarding the status of the image, and regarding the status of the being. Note also that “monstrous” is the Renaissance synonym for the grotesque. As the word indicates, the appeal is disturbing and quite different from the calmer sort of appeal of both ornaments, gratifying our sense for order, and classical beauty, gratifying our sense for proportion, order, harmony, and symmetry. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the cognitive disruption signaled here is basically a negative one; instead, it seems the type of disturbance described as a pivotal part of the experience of the grotesque (by Kayser) as well as the sublime (by Kant): when the categories of our understanding suddenly and momentarily fail, viewers may very well be fully immersed in a free flow of the imagination. Indeed, the unnatural and the disproportionate have their own appeal.

Cognitive effects of distortions and disproportions

Both Harpham and Carroll indicate that not only the fusion of categories but also the distortions and disproportions of the figures play a crucial role in triggering the overwhelming effect these figures have on spectators. They approach this problem from two different perspectives:

1) the proportion (or disproportion) of the figures in relation to each other;
2) their proportion (or disproportion) in relation to nature.

As Harpham indicates, when speaking of the balance and proportion of the figures, the proportionate, in the first sense, is provided in the Vatican Logge in abundance as all the grotesque figures on the wall have the same size – about half an arm – and follow the same ornamental pattern. This pleases the eye, as symmetry and repetition do; regularities appeal to our sense of order. Irregularities, however, play on our sense of meaning and they trigger the impulse to start a search for it. In the Vatican Logge, there is an abundance of irregularities, yet it may take some time before we are aware of them, since the regularities of the ornamental patterns so strongly stimulate and gratify the ‘more primitive demand for a sense for order’, as EH Gombrich (1979:160-162) argues in The sense of order. Most likely, therefore, the irregular
and unnatural proportions of a single figure will first escape the attention of the spectators and may then suddenly surprise them and strike them as strange.\footnote{33}

An example of this is the frog/man, since this figure typically provides striking distortions of the natural proportions, for example, of leaves (too big), the head of the man (too small), the legs of the frog (too big for a frog, too short and thin for a man). Moreover, the frogman is missing his arms. This is the type of disproportion and distortion Carroll singles out as features that subvert our categorical expectations concerning the natural and ontological order in them, apart from or on top of mixing biological categories. The distortion of the natural proportions of men, frogs, and leaves, in this fusion, poses a cognitive problem in its own right (as an Escher image, in some ways): otherwise strikingly regular ornamental patterns provide a mixture of what is logically and ontologically incompatible and impossible. What could possibly have been the function of the cognitive disorientation created in this way?

Were they human figures, representing something? They capitalised on the uncertainty for as long as possible. It seems to me that the uncertainty about the ontological status of the seen attracts us and draws us in even deeper, much the same as in love relations, when all we see is something to us, and means something to us, and we go from discovery to discovery, and nothing is stable (or dull). When we take the world in through our senses, the sensual is never far away and once attracted and drawn in, the attractions may really “work” on us. In this part of the process, everything ‘means a lot’ to us.

As we have seen, the artists in the Vatican Logge kept their spectators in the perceptual process for as long as possible. Thus, spectators are kept on the verge of seeing “it” as decoration only and they are kept on the verge of a system which may collapse at any moment. The minute an “ornamental figure”, only meant to perceptually satisfy, ‘to please the eye,’ nevertheless triggers a more or less distinct quest for meaning, the “ornament” starts to function as a medium: one does not look at “it” but into “it” or even through “it”, to see the world it envisions, and the dots on the wall are turned into a means mediating meanings.\footnote{35} This is a decisive moment in its (the medium’s) history, as its cultural impact is crucially changed by it.

The experience of the moment of change is disturbing, and even stupefying. One is speechless as one is suddenly fully uncertain of what it is one sees. The categories of our understanding fail, as Kayser stated in his conclusions: this is indeed a destabilising experience. Since the new techniques have not yet established a stable relation to the spectators, to them the seen will easily seem to present something not from this world. For the early modern spectators, not yet used to a novelty in the arts like this – ornaments with figures in them, and anatomically correct painting, and hybrids
like the frog/man – this “grotesque monster” must have seemed a sign from above or a miracle. As the frog/man is a creature which does not exist in nature, yet it stands in front of them, it is inevitably a monster in that specific sense of the word: *monstrum*, in Latin, means sign, or *portent*, as well as *monster* (or monstrosity); the word is etymologically connected with the Latin *monstro*, meaning to *demonstrate* (or *show*), as in the term “monstration.” The frog/man is a *monster* in all these senses of the word: a fantastic creature as well as a sign, shown to them by an assumed higher power. Most likely, therefore, these grotesque “monsters” were meant to inspire awe in their Renaissance spectators, since who else would be capable of putting such awesome creatures in front of them but God? It seems not unimportant, when one is presenting one’s work to the pope, and is paid by him, to also create a good moment of “monstration” of one’s technical novelties. Is it therefore not highly likely that Raphael and his school tried with this technique to inspire awe for God’s creation and for their own creation in one go? The moment of stupor comes with a sudden spur of the imagination. In part it is best understood, perhaps, as the speechless moment of the sublime, described by Kant in the *Critique of Judgement*.

An era for the aesthetics of the grotesque to bloom

Though rejected for decades, today the grotesquely distorted reappears as the visual medium’s *most distinct feature*. This means that the early and the late modern era, as well as both ends of cinema’s young history, are marked by the grotesque. Interestingly, both phases may be referred to as a ‘medium-specific period in film history’ – the term was coined by Yuri Tsivian (1994:217). Today, the ‘grotesque seems omnipresent,’ according to Carroll (2003:309-310). This is certainly an interesting observation. However, Carroll’s (2003:309-310) explanation that this is because ‘the entertainment industry’ has ‘grown so dramatically’ and *needs* the grotesque now as ‘a ready source of intense emotion and novelty,’ is not very satisfying. It leaves the crucial point unquestioned: what is the relation of the prominence of the grotesque with this specific phase in (film and media) history? This is typically a medium-specific phase, marked by confrontational experiences of new (optical, audio-visual, and digital) techniques, noticed by ‘medium-sensitive spectators,’ who are ‘not yet deadened’ to the novelties of the new techniques (Tsivian 1994:216-217). This therefore implies two things:

1) a confrontation with the monstrous powers of the new medium in its phase of monstration
2) a confrontation with the instable ontological status of the seen

Ad 1): Instead of seeing the world in its *unmediated* or *natural* form, many people have shifted to seeing it in its *mediated* and *unnatural* form most of the time. This implies seeing it in a distorted, disproportionate, fused, spectacular or monstrous form. Furthermore, since new optical and digital techniques created radically new spectacular formats at least every single decade for the last 50 years, it also means that people see the world in radically new *distorted* ways every so many years (the zoom-in is the digital camera’s favourite function). Touch screens have spread the visual even further. The multitude of media implies a constant re-reproduction of imagery. This in itself may have a profound impact on viewers.

Ad 2) If anything, it means that the ontological status of the image is now widely and profoundly destabilised (and questioned), perhaps in more radical ways than we have ever seen before in history. The tradition of representation itself may in fact be called destabilised (and questioned) by these confrontational experiences
of “new media”. Hybrids and monsters as well as category problems are centre stage (for the time being) and our categories of understanding may easily fail when we are face to face with them. This does indeed seem like a perfect time for the aesthetics of the grotesque to bloom.

### Closing remarks

Three things are highly remarkable in light of the above. The first is that an era full of new technical devices, as the current one is – an era which we may expect to destabilise our perceptual experiences – coincides well with the prominence of grotesque figures in visual culture today. Indeed, grotesques, hybrids and monsters are prominent and dominant in mass culture (cinema, television) and also in galleries nowadays, as Carroll rightly argues. Part of the shift into this world of biological and ontological anomalies – gaining prominence in visual culture since the 1980s, it seems (Carroll 2003:309-310) – can be seen as a reinforcement by artists of the initial experience of destabilisation and disorientation created by the initial and incidental distorting effects of the new optical and digital technological novelties being introduced to the field. Part of it can be seen as a further celebration of and experimentation with these technologies and the way they transform and reinforce the perceptual experience by gallery artists and mainstream filmmakers alike (for example, see the “gallery art” of Cindy Sherman, or Marlene Dumas).

The second remarkable thing is that Carroll, though quite sensitive to and aware of the presence of the grotesque in current culture nevertheless overlooks the very connection between new technologies and the grotesque under discussion here. And he leaves the ontological status of the images fully unquestioned. How is this possible? This question brings me to the third remarkable phenomenon with regard to the grotesque and new technologies: both – the initial disturbing effects of new technologies as well as the initial medium-sensitive experience of images as “distorted,” “unnatural” or “grotesque” – fall prey to the process of habituation to the technology, and to the images. When we get used to them, the audience’s sensitivity to the initially felt “strangeness” (“newness”) simply disappears, and for this very reason the initially strong effects of the new (strange) may nevertheless be very easily overlooked after a while (and be fully overlooked in retrospect).

The situation seems to be like this: (1) initially new optical (and pictorial) technologies may easily stupefy and disturb us and in the midst of this moment of de-habituation (or deautomatisation) we become sensitised to the medium, yet we do not properly understand its workings, effects and impact initially; (2) after a while, getting used to the technology, in the process of habituation, the once new technology becomes an everyday medium (for example, television) and we are made to look “through it” and not “at it” and on top of this we are made to overlook its specific technological make-up and perceptual impact. In other words, it is quite difficult to find the right point (in time) and the right angle (in research) to study technology’s “proper impact”. Symptomatic for Carroll’s retrospective perspective is that he speaks of grotesque beings instead of images of grotesque beings, clearly habitually overlooking the technologies / media processing the imagery. I would argue, however, that a precise analysis of the different phases in the process of de-habituation to technologies, both historically and perceptual-cognitively, is needed to write cinema’s and art’s “proper history”. Moreover, I would like to argue that this type of research may well benefit from the study of the grotesque: because the (well-studied) experience of the grotesque
provides a model for the analysis of these (understudied) medium-sensitive experiences of the “strange,” the “disproportionate,” or the “unnatural,” for which the grotesque experience seems emblematic.

Notes

1 This article on grotesques figures in visual culture today and their relation to the current destabilisation of the ontological status of the moving image draws on lectures and papers on the topic presented to staff and students from the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria in October 2011. I am sincerely grateful for the invitation to lecture on the topic and for the input of staff and students in the debate and I would like to thank two persons in particular: Amanda du Preez and Jeanne van Eeden, for their kind invitation and their inspiring presence. Part of the article draws on my yearly study visits to Rome with my own Masters students, also described in an earlier paper presented at the Udine Film Conference in March 2009 and published as: ‘Monstration and the monstrous. The grotesque in the Very Beginning and at the Very End’ (van der Oever 2010a).

2 There is a considerable consensus on this in the field of study of the grotesque and Kayser (1957/2004) may, once again, be considered the first to have noted and carefully described the recurrent use of these particular strategies or techniques.

3 Kayser’s Das Groteske. Seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung (1957/2004) is considered the first highly valuable academic study of the grotesque, even by one of his most radical opponents (for example, Mikhail Bakhtin), as it researched the history of the word, the concept and the art works (Wortgeschichte, Begriffsgeschichte, and Sachgeschichte) and declared the grotesque an aesthetic category in itself in the conclusions. Kayser created consensus in the field with regard to his major points and his study was followed by a series of studies in the German language area by Leo Spitzer, Otto Best, Christian Thomsen, and others. There is a further series of studies worth mentioning; a revelation is Mikhail Bakhtin’s, Rabelais and his world (1968); a treasure trove of brilliant insights is provided by Geoffrey Harpham’s On the grotesque. Strategies of contradiction in art and literature (2006); a helpful introduction into the grotesque and its psychological impact is provided by Philip Thomson’s The grotesque (1972).

4 The terms “medium sensitive” and “medium aware” were initially used by Yuri Tsivian (and Tom Gunning) for the responses of viewers to the first movie screenings and the ways in which they responded to the materiality of the medium and the technical novelty itself more deeply than to the content of the movie. See the conclusions of Tsivian (1994) and Gunning (1994). For a further elaboration on the term, see Van den Oever (2010b). The problem of medium sensitivity is also discussed in Van den Oever (2011).

5 Distinct moments in the history of technology were created by the introduction of 3D, first in the 1930s in the field of science, reanimated in (mainstream) cinema today in which the technology is meant to create a sensation of novelty and the “new,” as the marketing of Avatar once again indicated; it did not always fully succeed, however, as the Internet debates on 3D have elaborately analysed and argued. CGI is a technology presented to audiences by Jurassic Park in striking and successful ways: it may indeed be argued to have triggered a thrill and “awe” among audiences, as Carroll (2003: 306-307) also argued, though he exclusively focused on the grotesque figure of the brachiosaur as an “awesome” monster, and overlooked the
disorienting and thrilling effects of the technological innovation itself that made the “awesome” monster possible. For an elusive reflection on the impact of new and renewed old technologies and their “uncanny” potential to destabilise viewers and in particular to re-animate the sense of instability of all mimetic representation, see Gunning (2003).

6 Note that I do not create a distinction between the effects purposefully created by artist or incidentally by techniques – since the difference does not express itself in the perceptual process. Note also that the twin terms of automatisation and deautomatisation were conceptualised by Viktor Shklovsky (1965) against the background of the ‘general laws of perception’, as he called them. Interestingly, he did so within this very context of the “birth” of the cinema and the “birth” of the avant-gardes of the turn of the century. In Ostrannenie (Van den Oever 2010b), we argue that this context was important for his theorising and that in fact Shklovsky was made to theorise on the problem of “techniques” that “de-automatise” the perceptual process by early cinema’s and the avant-garde’s strong perceptual impact; he most famously did so in his ‘Art as Technique’ (1917). Deautomatisation, as he explained, means that new techniques that disrupt the automatic routines of perception by ‘making [the seen] strange’ notably slow down, complicate and deepen the perceptual process. Secondly, it means that new techniques typically trigger a sensitivity to the techniques involved in the process, as well as a so-called “art” experience, which, according to Shklovsky (1965), is a prolonged experience of things ‘as they are perceived and not as they are known’. Note also that Shklovsky used the word priom and that technique is but one of its translations; device is another one. By taking the 1910s as a medium-specific interval in history into consideration, we can see that Shklovsky did not merely write a modernist manifesto but basically created the conceptual space to analyse the perceptual impact of new technologies and (artistic) techniques, which is not only relevant for art studies, but also for cinema, television, and media studies today. Since I approach the problem from a perceptual perspective, I will use the words technology and techniques as synonyms here. For our contextualisation of Shklovsky, see Ostrannenie (Van den Oever 2010b).

7 “Disproportionate” here means: huge in terms of the proportions of beings in nature as well as huge / disproportionate in relation to the other body parts shown in the film in medium and long shots. Both forms were indeed noted by contemporary viewers, taking note of the ‘abnormal size’ of the ‘enormously enlarged form[s]’ (see below). The obvious awareness of the distortion in viewers is theoretically interesting as the historically evident confrontational experience seems to confirm the presence of the so-called embodied cognitions of natural size and scale (see Garbarini & Adenzato 2004).

8 For a screening of this little film, in particular to sense the “strangeness” effects added to this close-up’s enlargement by the eye’s movements, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-LVb3TXAs

9 As Eisenstein’s mentor, Meyerhold may well have shown him the way to the strong and immediate (shock) effects gained by inducing the unnatural or monstrous on an audience. Meyerhold himself tended to stay away from “realism” in the theatre. Rather than natural movements, he favoured mixed and unnatural, “biomechanic,” and grotesquely enlarged movements in what Symons (1973) refers to as Meyerhold’s Theatre of the Grotesque. Interestingly, when Eisenstein wrote his now famous
essays on the “Montage of attractions,” (s.a. / 1923) and the “Montage of Film Attractions” (s.a. / 1925), he did not reflect on the specifically disturbing (shock) effects of the close-up in terms of the “unnatural,” “disproportionate,” or “shocking”. He nevertheless planned close-ups to obviously trigger strong emotional shock effects from very early on; for examples, see the close-up at the end of his The Strike (s.a.) as described by himself in his “Montage of Film Attractions” (s.a.:39 / 1925) as follows: ‘Close-up. Filling the whole screen. The dead bull’s eye. Final title’. Most of the emotional shocks Eisenstein describes are typically caused or triggered by so-called category problems. Going against the categories, schemes, and proportions of the natural or biological proves to be a strong way to create shock effects in an audience. By and large, Eisenstein’s “Montage of (film) attractions” (s.a. / 1924) may be understood as a politics or a poetics of the cinema. Whereas classical aesthetics “follows nature” and strongly rejects the unnatural, in Eisenstein’ montages the deformed, distorted, rearranged, and “dis-membered” will come centre stage, as “attractions,” to have an impact on his spectators. See David Summers (2003:22, 24) on classical aesthetics ‘following nature’ and rejecting the ‘unnatural.’

10 Routt interprets objections like these in terms of a “grievance” which is ‘surely based upon an upset in the writer’s expectation of how story space should appear on the screen; not upon the field of vision one is liable to employ in everyday life, but upon a filmic convention, a narrative place, established within fourteen years of the Lumière Brothers’ showings at the Grand Café.’ Routt (emphasis added) also speaks of ‘adjectives so hysterically employed by those who deplored variations in camera distance in narrative films …’. In terms of their perceptual impact, it is of course not only interesting to see that the ‘adjectives [are] so hysterically employed’ but also that the words used – for example, absurd, abnormal, disproportionate, unnatural, and grotesque – are used in a strikingly negative way, expressing an impulse to reject in this phase of reception. Note, however, that these same terms are used in either a descriptive or in a positive and affirmative way in the phase in which the perceptual experience is sought and reflected upon from an aesthetic perspective.

11 Pierre Sorlin (1998:120) argues that ‘filmmakers who are not as willing to impress us as Dreyer or mainly try to neutralise the close-up.’ Indeed, the institution of narrative cinema, which initially tended to reject the close-up, did appropriate the technique but continued to refuse its routine deployment. Such ‘neutralisation’ occurred mainly through editing practices such as shot-reverse-shot, which succeeded in attributing a clear function to close-ups, preventing their isolation and autonomous, menacing powers. The close-ups came to be used sparingly in cinematic practices. They provided emotional emphasis, brief moments of shocking impact or, quoting Laura Mulvey (1975:6-18), exquisite moments of ‘erotic contemplation.’ The close-up is often simply too strong, too monstrous, too repulsive, and it needed to be rejected by the industry. As Sorlin (1998:119) points out, ‘[h]owever strange it may sound, close-ups are still rarely used in films.’ Even in DW Griffith’s Birth of a Nation (1915) – a film notorious for its use of the close-up – Sorlin (1998:119) counts only 26 close-ups in a total of 1600 shots.

12 These antique and Renaissance rejections by Vitruvius and Ruskin are often cited and discussed in studies of the grotesque, for example, by Kayser (2004), Summers (2003), and Harpham (2006), whose discussions are highly interesting and whom
I will follow here. Ruskin digresses in his study of the Renaissance Grotesque in Venice to attack Giovanni’s work in the Vatican Logge. Though Ruskin clearly admires the ‘care, skill and science, applied to … the drawing of the figures’ as ‘intense, admirable, and accurate,’ he strongly rejects the fact that Giovanni’s skills serve no purpose, to his taste; Giovanni ‘ought to have produced a grand and serious work, not a tissue of nonsense. If we can draw the human head perfectly, and are masters of its expression and its beauty, we have no business to cut it off, and hang it up by the hair at the end of a garland. If we can draw the human body in the perfection of its grace and movement, we have no business to take away its limbs, and terminate it with a bunch of leaves’ (Ruskin in Harpham 2006:35).

Illuminating is also Harpham’s (2006) discussion of Vitruvius’ antique attack in De Architectura (ca. 27 BC) on grotesque designs like the ones in the Domus Aurea. Vitruvius: ‘On the stucco are monsters rather than definite representations taken from definite things. Instead of columns there rise up stalks; instead of gables, striped panels with curled leaves and volutes. Candelabra uphold pictured shrines and above the summits of these, clusters of thin stalks rise from their roots in tendrils with little figures seated upon them at random. Again, slender stalks with heads of men and animals attached to half the body. Such things neither are, nor can be, nor have been. On these lines the new fashions compel bad judges to condemn good craftsmanship for dullness. For how can a reed actually sustain a roof, or a candelabra the ornaments of a gable, or a soft and slender stalk a seated statue, or how can flowers and half-statues rise alternatively from roots and stalks? Yet when people view these falsehoods, they approve rather than condemn’ (Vitruvius in Harpham 2006:30). Harpham argues that we may be grateful for rejections of the grotesque like this one, ‘for Vitruvius’ misapplication of the canons of representation to ornament … has proved enormously useful. EH Gombrich (1979) has demonstrated that all the labels learned by undergraduates tracking the progress of art – Classic, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Mannerist, Baroque, Rococo, Neo-Classical, and Romantic – are easily reducible to two terms, Classical and Non-classical.’ As one may add: representational tradition rests on the “Classical,” whereas the transitions and innovations of representational tradition come from the “Non-classical,” and Non-canonical. In Harpham’s (2006: 30-31) words: ‘… the style Vitruvius attacked, which had no descriptive name and violated all categories, has provided the means of distinguishing all our major stylistic categories and so has contributed crucially to the study of art history as it is generally conceived.’

See Kayser (2004:197-203) for a more elaborate statement on the appearance of grotesque art in times of transition. Interestingly, Kayser was the first to note in his study of 1957 that the grotesque is appreciated only in transitional periods in culture, such as the Renaissance, Romanticism, and the twentieth century avant-gardes, to be rejected (and referred to quite negatively) in other periods in time. Kayser does not refer to these transitional periods as being “medium-specific” periods in time, but I definitely would suggest this within the field of cinema and media studies, as it may stimulate research of what seems a close relation between the introduction (“birth”) of new optical media to culture in their monstrous phase; their disruptive impact on culture in so-called transitional intervals in history; and the innovation of representational tradition from

14 Gaudreault emphasised the quite radical rejection of the earlier phase by the new institute “cinema” fiercely, and rightly so, but it must be added that though the “alien” was rejected, it was also domesticated and put to use in part. A good example is of course provided by the close-up: rejected in part, but certainly not entirely.

15 See Gombrich (1979) on the non-representational, or “ornamental” powers, which appeal primarily to the more “primitive” impulse to look, as Gombrich put it. Note that Gaudreault (2006:88,99) also favours the word “primitive” for early cinema or the “cinema of attractions.”

16 See Laura Mulvey’s famous words on “visual pleasure” in her well-known Visual pleasure and narrative cinema, first published in Screen in 1975. The history of the close-up, which still has to be written, may in itself show that the close-up has been a safe haven for the monstrous in the cinema over time.

17 Interestingly, many film makers have kept well in touch with early cinema’s first phase, and symptomatic for the defense of the spectacular powers of cinema are both an amount of opposition to narrative cinema, as we see in Pasolini’s reflection on the “lyrical” and “subjective” in film, but also in Fellini’s work; he pays one of the finest tributes to it in the opening sequence of E la nave va (1983). One may think of Chaplin too, and all the others filmmakers who created a safe haven for these powers in the genre of the “comic.” One may even name directors from the heyday of classical narrative cinema, for example, Billy Wilder, who paid his slightly ambiguous tribute to “silent cinema” in his classic, Sunset Boulevard. Jean Epstein’s famous essay on the close-up as ‘the soul of the cinema’ was published under the title “Grossissement,” in Bonjour Paris in 1921, and was translated in October as “Magnification” in 1977. For all information and the text in English translation, see: http://books.google.nl/books/jean.epstein.magnification.

18 See also ‘Conversation with Laura Mulvey’ in Van den Oever (2010:185-204).

19 The story of the Domus Aurea is told by many historians, including Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius. More recent studies are available from Giuseppe Lugli, HP L’Orange and Axel Boëthius. For an extensive inventory and reconstructions by Ponce, see Nicole Dacos (1969) and for an interesting analysis, see Harpham (2006).

20 Several sources confirm this history of the place and the word; for example, see Nicole Dacos (1969) and Harpham (2006). The first study of the history of the word was, however, Kayser’s book (1957).

21 Among the artists always mentioned in this perspective were: Filippino Lippi, Pinturicchio, Perugino, Signorelli, and Ghirlandaio.

22 I would like to thank the staff of the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR) for their hospitality and generosity in sharing their knowledge with us. I would also like to thank our PhD on the grotesque, Iwona Gucs, and the Masters students who joined me on visits to the Vatican Loggia for their contributions to our debates.

23 See descriptions of the Loggia by David Hersey, Bernice Davidson, Geoffrey Harpham, and David Summers later in this article.

24 See Strauven (2006:11-27). Gunning and Gaudreault, inspired by Jacques Aumont’s work on Eisenstein, initiated this type of research on early cinema under the name of a “cinema of attractions,” conceptualising several new terms for Film Studies, for example, “attractions”, “monstration”, and an “aesthetic of astonishment” among them. For an overview, see Eisenstein’s The cinema of attractions reloaded.
George Hersey refers to words by Vitruvius here, describing *antique* grotesques; see below.

These grotesques by Giovanni da Udine are clearly imitations of hybrid figures in the *Domus Aurea* by “Fabullus”, yet closer scrutiny learns that the Renaissance grotesques are relatively more “human” and less *purely decorative*, more “substantial” than the antique ones they imitated. For example, there is substantially more flesh on the bones, and, typical for the Renaissance, the torso and other parts of the body are more or less anatomically correct, a feature the antique grotesque figures lack.

Note that Summers describes (responses to) the antique grotesques from the so-called Third Roman Style, slightly older than the ones in the *Domus Aurea*.

In art history, these grotesques are often referred to as *parerga* (see Summers 2003:22). The Greek *paraergon*, means *outside one’s (main) work* (see also the German term *Beiwerkchen*, meaning the same). These terms express that the work done is considered of marginal importance, whatever its qualities, and were *literally* placed in the margins of *figural* or *representational* art. One of the truly great experiences when one does look at them, even study them, is the mastery and overwhelming joy in visual abundance that went into them.

Interestingly, the tiny grotesque figures made in the *Domus Aurea* by Fabullus (who was not considered an important artist) were mostly hidden like this, for example, on high ceilings, yet when the Renaissance painters entered the “grotto” *from* above and lay on the debris to study them and copy them, they must have been very close and they must have had them well in *focus* most of the time, which indeed adds to the confusion / attraction of the experience.

It is in a confrontation with grotesque figures like these that the categories with which we normally orientate on the world suddenly crash and give up, as Wolfgang Kayser (1957/2004) argued in his standard work on the grotesque. In his words: *Zur Struktur des Grotesken gehört, das die Kategorien unserer Weltorientierung versagen*. This is, he stated, specific for the aesthetic category of the grotesque. There has been a striking consensus on Kayser’s cardinal point ever since. Noël Carroll (2003:296-297) argued that something indeed only counts as an instance of the grotesque if it is ‘a being that violates our standing or common biological and ontological concepts and norms. That is, the grotesque subverts our categorical expectations concerning the natural and ontological order. Fusion, disproportion, formlessness, and gigantism are the most frequently recurring ways of realising this structural principle’. It must be added that from the context in his article it is (more or less) obvious that Carroll is not discussing beings here (such as a sheep with two heads) but images of beings or representations of them, if you will.

Note that uncertainty and disorientation is created in modern or postmodern cartoonesque grotesque figures too, in much the same way: by confronting spectators with roughness and sketchiness in some areas of the image and an abundance of precision and detail in other areas, creating the uncertainty and ontological instability described here.

For an interesting discussion of the problem, see Harpham (2006:47).

Kayser (2004:198) stresses the suddenness or *Plötzlichkeit* in his analysis over and over again as an important element in the effect of the grotesque: *Esistunsere Welt, die sich [plötzlich] verwandelt hat. Die Plötzlichkeit gehört wesentlich zum Grotesken*
It is our world, which has changed. The suddenness of it really belongs to the grotesque.

The Loggia artists did use the technique of anatomical precision, whereas Fabullus and other painters of the grotesque in antiquity did not. It may be one of the crucial inventions the masters of the Renaissance came up with in the Loggia: to add the human to their grotesque figures and thus deeply disturb the purely ornamental function of these figures – but I will have to leave this question unaddressed here.

A further philosophical and psychological discussion of the divides between looking/understanding and esse/essential would be needed to clarify the ways in which the experience of the grotesque needs a representation and needs assumptions about the represented creature for the disruptive perceptual experience to develop.

Moments of monstration, in which new optical techniques are shown to spectators, almost inevitably feed on feelings of the seen to be “monstrous” in all these meanings of the word.

Evidently, an analysis of the disruptive experience within the context of the literature on the sublime would also be productive and relevant; I certainly think of Herder within this specific context too, as he included the qualities of the beautiful (harmony, order, proportion, and so on) in his reflection on the sublime. An exploration from the perspective of the sublime would certainly bring new different aspects of the artefacts and the perceptual experience to light than an analysis from the perspective of the grotesque.

References


Some years ago, Affinity Publishing’s Ken Wilshere-Preston,1 while researching material for the South African Brand Museum project,2 discovered that the Companies and Intellectual Properties Registration Office (CIPRO)3 holds a rich archive of original and trademark registration forms dating back to 1877. Wilshere-Preston realised that an official record of South Africa’s branding history existed, and he and a team of researchers embarked on a journey to document these treasures in a volume comprising 304 pages.

This is a book, that seemingly and confusingly has two titles: History of Brands & Branding reflected on the cover, designed by the stalwart of South African designer Roy Clucas, and From Groot Constantia to Google: 1685 to 2000. The latter is apparently the actual title as displayed on the spine, cover (as a subtitle), and title page. The title’s contradiction is a relevant reflection of the long-standing divide that marks the often-confusing histories and discourses of the advertising, design and marketing industries in South Africa. These three critically interdependent disciplines have converged and diverged, and diverged and converged over time, and this book reflects that colourful history which remains in constant flux.

From Groot Constantia to Google: 1685 to 2000 is a fascinating and massive book that provides an insightful narrative of South Africa’s social, economic and political history, and consumer culture spanning more than three centuries. It provides a backdrop to the stories of international and many of the country’s most recognised brands, both old and new. These include centuries old wine estates and KWV; Mrs Ball’s Chutney; I&J; Mars; Cecil John Rhodes’ first ice-making business in Kimberley; Snowflake Flour; Anchor Yeast; Maizena; Cerebos table salt; All Gold; KOO; Fatti’s & Moni’s; Black Cat Peanut Butter; Bovril; Five Roses; Oros; Coca-cola; Energade; Castle Lager; Zam-Buk; Sunlight and Lifebuoy soaps; Bradlows; Woolworths; Pick n Pay; Eveready; Firestone; Standard Bank; Old Mutual; Nedbank; ABSA; The Cape Argus; Juta and Company; PPC; PG; AECI; SABC; M-Net; DStv and a large number of others.

The book includes more than 1,000 illustrations, including advertisements, brand registration documents, industrial/commercial products, packaging, consumer culture and unique moments in history, many of which that have never been published before. Unfortunately, the image quality of some of the illustrations is not consistent with current publishing standards, yet, this can be excused, considering that much of the source material came from digital archives.
Figure 1: Cover of *From Groot Constantia to Google: 1685 to 2010*. Image courtesy of the publishers.

Figure 2: Page from *From Groot Constantia to Google: 1685 to 2010* featuring Groot Constantia which is believed to be one of the oldest documented brands in South Africa. Image scanned from the book.

Figure 3: The book includes more than 1,000 illustrations, ranging from advertisements, brand registration documents, industrial and products and packaging. Images courtesy of the publishers.
The first section of the book (pages 12-280) provides a fascinating chronology of Brand and History narratives spanning from 1652 to 2010, followed by nine feature articles that cover a diversity of geographic histories, selective industry sectors, and trademark and advertising history.

The second section of the book deals with Advertising (pages 232-237) and features essays by three of South Africa’s foremost brand experts, John Faquhar, Tony Koenderman and Nkwenkwe Nkomo. The third section deals with Branding (pages 236-113) and includes essays by experts Andy Rice, Adelle Wapnick, Joseph Benson, Jeremy Sampson and John Faquhar.

The fourth section deals with Brand Heritage profiles (pages 114-140) that provide 36 insightful case studies of some of the most revered South African brands. The fifth and sixth sections of the book contain articles dealing with Intellectual Property and related case studies (pages 267-281), while the final section of the book provides four valuable reflections of Corporate Heritage profiles (pages 226-303) related to the same topic.

This is a book that will be read and studied by marketers, advertising, design and branding practitioners, industry scholars, academics and students for years to come as it provides the most comprehensive anthology of South African marketing, branding, advertising and design history published to date. Over and above that, the book also has all of the characteristics of a great coffee table book for any corporate office since the entries are brief, to the point and easy to read.
Publisher: Affinity Advertising & Publishing CC
Published: 2011
ISBN 978-0-9814199-4-7
Price: From Groot Constantia to Google: 1685 – 2010 is available in selective South African bookstores and can also be ordered directly from the publisher for R365 including VAT and local postage.

Notes

1 Ken Wilshere-Preston is also the publisher of The Encyclopaedia of Brands & Branding in South Africa series, established in 1992.

2 Wilshere-Preston has been the long-time force behind the idea to establish a South African Brand Museum that would collect, house and exhibit a collection of South Africa’s branding history. To date, he and his supporters have not yet been successful in securing sustainable sponsorship for the physical museum, but have succeeded in establishing the beginnings of a virtual museum that resides at http://brandmuseum.co.za

3 On 1 May 2011 the New Companies Act (Act 71 of 2008) came into effect, whereby The Department of Trade and Industry restructured the Companies and Intellectual Property Registration Office (CIPRO) and the Office of Companies and Intellectual Property Enforcement (OCIPE). The two institutions have merged and is now known as the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC).
ILLUMInations, the title of the 54th Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition, sparks a number of associations relating to art production and contemporary politics. As a whole, the word implies a kind of spiritual or intellectual enlightenment, which is reinforced through the accentuation of the first part of the word. The notion of light is a classical theme in art, commencing with the Illuminated manuscripts produced by monks during the twelfth century – an attempt to illuminate the masses by bringing them Christianity – to the philosophical interpretation of light during the Age of Enlightenment – the surge of scientific discovery and reason that ultimately fuelled later inventions such as the light bulb. The Modern period was ushered in through the development of photography – a means of inscribing a fragment of reality onto paper with light – which, in turn, rendered naturalistic representation obsolete and prompted artistic experiments with light as it became the subject of numerous Impressionist canvases.

This expression of light within art historical contexts is most evident in Urs Fischer’s installation, Untitled (2011). The seemingly unrelated life-size candle sculptures (which remained lit throughout the entirety of the exhibition) slowly disintegrate as they burn up from the inside out. The installation comprises three sculptures, including a replica of the Baroque artist Giovanni Bologna’s marble sculpture, The Rape of the Sabine Women (1583), flanked by a portrait of the artist Rudolf Stingel (Fischer’s friend) and Fischer’s own studio chair (Stokes 2011:178). The referencing of candles and, by implication, the dramatic play on shadow and light echoes notions of momento mori and, as the pieces gradually melt away into formless, uncontrolled streams of wax, only to congeal again, the installation hovers between life and death, light and dark. The transience of the artwork, coupled with religious connotations of the materials, constitutes an ephemeral reflection on human life. In much the same sense the art historical references suggest contemplation of originality and authenticity akin to the notion of Walter Benjamin’s aura.

The accent on the suffix, nations, conjures up contemporary political associations of globalisation, identity and heritage. This is not only expected when contemplating an exhibition of this nature, but also reinforced
by the national pavilions showcasing collective artistic endeavours of numerous countries. The French Pavilion, entitled *Chance*, showcases an installation by Christian Boltanski which offers the viewer an opportunity to become part of the artwork and, through active participation, becomes an illuminated subject. The Neoclassical-styled building is sharply contrasted by the gleaming scaffolding that forms a maze through which the audience is guided and prompts questions relating to popular culture and human behaviour within this given paradigm. The large mechanical structure, entitled *Wheel of Fortune* (2011) (Figure 1), transports reels of paper emblazoned with hundreds of newborn faces that randomly stops from time to time. The haphazardly selected portrait is illuminated on an oversized screen and accompanied by an alarm signalling fate’s choice. The mechanised structure is supported by two digital clocks entitled *Last News from Humans* (2011) (Figure 2), which counts the world’s population: the deaths are displayed in red, juxtaposed by the figure (vastly more than the death toll) of those born on the day, in green. In addition to this, *Be New* (2011) consists of a number of blocks projected on a screen rapidly succeeding fragments of both infant and elderly faces. The interactive piece challenges viewers to click a button at the exact moment when a face is in its complete state (Martin 2011:357). Boltanski’s construction leaves the viewer with a sense of belonging to a global nation, but he also highlights the role of the individual within these socio-political structures.

The visible division of the word, by implication, also implies perceptions of boundaries, divisions and binaries – a double meaning reinforced by the notion that...
when one particular subject is literally under the spotlight, the remainder falls in the dark. Constructs are further enhanced by the unexpected inclusion of a number of paintings by the Baroque artist, Tintoretto, amidst a collection of works claiming their contemporaneity through the reputation of the Venice Biennale as a progressive showcase of current artistic practice. Tintoretto is known for his masterful depiction of light and the citation of his paintings by a number of artists on the exhibition certainly sets up an interesting dialogue between current and historical artistic expression (Curiger 2011:49).

Nicholas Hlobo’s larger than life mythological creature entitled *limpundulu Zonke Ziyandilandela (All the Lighting Birds are after Me)* (2011) presents the audience with a richly crafted layering of various texts, including a piece by Tintoretto. The theatrical piece combines fragments of rubber tyre, ribbon, lace and found objects affixed in the shape of a bird hanging from the roof, accompanied by a recording of the artist singing to the backtrack of a thunderstorm. The superimposition of duality is immediate: male and female, black and white, myth and reality. The piece quotes *The Creation of the Animals* (1550–1553), one of the Tintoretto pieces included on exhibition that illustrates the Old Testament tale of creation. Hlobo presents the *limpundulu* vampire bird as known in Xhosa mythology and explains that folk tale suggests that upon the appearance of the bird an individual is confronted with his or her own mortality, owing to the terror it induces (Sharpe 2011:206). Given the context of Hlobo’s oeuvre, the vampire bird functions as a conglomerate of the many myths sustained within a post-apartheid South

Figure 2: Christian Boltanski, *Wheel of Fortune* (2011). Installation, French Pavilion Venice Biennale 2011. Photograph by the author
Africa ranging from racial and sexual identity to the HIV/AIDS crisis and ethnic politics. Relying on the Kantian notion of the sublime, the vampire bird renders subjects illuminated as meaning is revealed between the crevices of rational thought and cultural beliefs.

Although the emphasis on borders and contradiction appear ill-suited to an exhibition of this nature – in fact, many past exhibitions have been criticised for exactly this reason – it becomes evident through the “lack” of curatorship and open-ended interpretation of the theme throughout the exhibition that meaning is instead located between these constructs rather than through it. The title suggests an ephemeral and transient notion of elucidation juxtaposed by the real world of socio-political dimensions. It could be understood, then, that meaning, which is simultaneously individuated and global, past and present, light and shadow and real and virtual, is drifting between constructs not unlike the geographical location upon which the exhibition itself is installed. Bice Curiger (2011:43), the Director of the 54th Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition, underscores this notion of hybridity when she explains that ILLUMInations does not seek to promote a singular perspective, but instead sheds light on the ‘plurality of current perspectives’.

Voted as the best artwork on the Venice Biennale Exhibition, winning a Golden Lion, Christian Marclay’s The Clock (2010) captures the simultaneity of the past and present. This 24-hour video collage weaves a myriad of filmic quotations referencing specific time (Herbert 2011:225). Each fragment of time in Marclay’s piece corresponds with the real time and thus creates a liminal space where viewers are enmeshed in both the present and the past. Apart from the technical excellence of this piece, The Clock managed to level the space-time continuum of the entire exhibition by presenting audiences with a slice of nostalgia combined with the sophistication expected of a post-millennium period.

The works on display are most certainly rooted in a deeply philosophical and contemplative mode intended to provoke dialogue between artists, viewers and nations. Given our contemporary condition of virtual worlds and simulated lives, this exhibition unquestionably serves our humanist notions and engenders thoughts about our (dis)embodied selves. It is furthermore suggested, through the numerous references made to art history that perhaps the lightness of being human lies, in fact, in the illumination produced through artistic expression.

Notes

1 Urs Fischer was born in Zurich, Switzerland in 1973 and currently lives and works in New York, USA.
2 Christian Boltanski was born in Paris, France in 1944 and currently lives and works in Malakoff, France.
3 Nicholas Hlobo was born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1975 and currently lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa.
4 Immanuel Kant in The Critique of Judgment (2007: 72-83) defines the differentiates between the notion of the sublime and that of beauty by suggesting that the former relies not only on that which is appealing, but also accompanied by the terrifying and the great – a ‘negative pleasure’.
5 It is important to note that Curiger is referred to as the director of the exhibition instead of the curator, which furthermore strengthens the “lack” of selection and premeditated statements promoted by the pieces and instead propagates the notion of multiple
viewpoints, untainted by curatorial intentions of an individual.

Christian Marclay was born in San Rafael, USA in 1955 and currently lives and works in London, Great Britain and New York, USA.

References


More than 170 delegates from throughout South Africa, as well as various delegates and speakers from abroad, attended the annual South African Communication Association (SACOMM) conference. The conference was hosted by the Department of Communication Science of the University of South Africa (Unisa) and took place from 29 August to 1 September 2011 at the Stone Cradle Conference Venue, situated close to the Rietvlei Nature Reserve in Pretoria.

A new addition to the annual conference repertoire was a pre-conference day which comprised two parallel colloquia. The first colloquium, Towards an African Theory of Communications, grappled with complex questions surrounding the Africanisation of the communications discipline. The second, Media, Democracy and Transformation, dealt particularly with contemporary issues in the South African media landscape – most notably the proposed Media Appeals Tribunal and the Protection of Information Bill. To add richness to the discussion, papers were delivered by academic scholars, industry leaders and civil society representatives.

The main conference consisted of two keynote addresses, various research papers categorised within the different interest group streams (communication in general, corporate communication, film studies, and media studies and journalism), and the odd academic and industry workshop. Overall, more than 120 research papers were delivered, 19 of which were presented by emerging scholars across the different interest group streams.

The first keynote address was delivered by Prof Anton Harber, Caxton Professor of Journalism at Wits University and Business Day columnist. Harber’s address focused on two issues, namely how reliable and exclusive private media is when compared to public and even community media; and how the residents of Diepsloot specifically have been failed in terms of the delivery of information by the public broadcaster (the SABC), as well as by the community sector. This address echoed the theme of the conference pithily, whilst juxtaposing it with the changing media landscape in South Africa: the threat of possible restrictive legislation in terms of media and academic freedom in the near future.

The second keynote address was delivered by Prof Pieter Fourie, the previous Chair (1987-2004) of and a Professor in the Department of Communication Science
at Unisa. Fourie’s address mainly challenged scholars to rethink and return to theoretical foundations in their teaching and research. He made a strong plea for scholars to return to phenomenological communication research, specifically with the four constructs of signification, dialogue, rhetoric and representation in mind. Fourie also contended that the lack of phenomenological theory and research is one of the primary reasons why communication science is still not regarded as highly as it should be as an academic discipline.

In addition to all the research papers delivered, there were also the traditional SACOMM book launches. The first book launch took place during the informal cocktail dinner and showcased authors Prof Keyan Tomaselli and Dr Colin Chasi’s title, namely Development and Public Health Communication (Pearson Publishers). The second book launch, sponsored by Juta Publishers, took place during lunch on the second day of the main conference. The author, Prof Nathalie Hyde-Clarke, introduced the title Communication and Media Ethics in South Africa to the audience.

In terms of the Management Committee of SACOMM, Julie Reid was elected as the Vice-President of SACOMM for 2012-2013 and Dr Michelle Tager is to take over as President of SACOMM for 2012-2013 from Prof Lynnette Fourie.

Looking to 2012, the SACOMM Conference will be paired up with the 2012 International Association Media and Communications Research (IAMCR) conference, to be held in Durban in July 2012. The theme of the conference is South-North Conversations and it is expected that more than 1,000 delegates from around the world will attend. It will be the first time that the IAMCR conference will be held in sub-Saharan Africa and it is thus a feather in the cap for SACOMM and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the organisations that made the successful bid to host this prestigious event.

- For a complete list of speakers and presentation titles, please go to: http://www.sacomm.org.za/docs/SACOMM_Programme_FINAL.pdf.
- Speakers’ research paper abstracts can also be viewed at: http://www.sacomm.org.za/docs/SACOMM_Abstracts.pdf.
The multidisciplinary design sector has evolved dynamically over the past decade and one of the most critical results has been the formal formation of the International Design Alliance (IDA) in 2005. The IDA is a strategic venture between international organisations representing design. The alliance was created by two founding partners – the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (Icsid) and the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (Icograda). In 2008, the IDA added the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI) to the alliance as the third partner. The alliance is based on the desire of its partners to ‘do together what they cannot do alone’, concentrating on opportunities arising from multidisciplinary collaboration (Icograda 2011a).

One such opportunity that materialised as a multidisciplinary collaboration was the inaugural IDA Congress, which took place in Taipei, Taiwan, from 24 to 26 October 2011. The event saw industry leaders and delegates from 21 countries come together for the three-day event. Almost all of the speakers and delegates participating in the inaugural IDA Congress were in agreement that, despite rapid changes, the sector cannot sustain its current trajectory. They also agreed that the sector is not responding proactively enough when it comes to urgent issues such as climate change, fluxes in international and regional socio-economics, continued geopolitical conflicts, rapid and unpredictable technological development, and the constant ebb and flow of talent mobility, among many other factors. However, no other factor was highlighted more than the increased need for introducing more humanism into design thinking, processes and products.

Considering the union of the three professional bodies, the aim of the 2011 IDA Congress was to bring together the unified voice of designers from various disciplines and from around the world in a themed framework to advance the vision and mission of the IDA by engaging with government leaders (commerce, trade, culture), NGOs, businesses, science and technology, education and the social sciences. This intention was supported by Mark Breitenberg, President of the International...
Council of Societies of Industrial Design (Icsid), who, during the Congress opening, stated that the goal of the congress was ‘to provide a forum that engages designers and leaders from other sectors, with a shared belief that design can offer new insights about our most pressing global issues, in order to create a world that is balanced, sustainable and inclusive.’ By means of the congress, the IDA also aimed to provide an engaging and educational experience for the memberships of the IDA partners and to promote interaction among the memberships, and to position the IDA as the global voice of design and an enabler of innovation.

As the event was held in Taipei, it was interesting to note how the Taiwan Design Center was supported by partners such as The Taiwan Design Alliance and the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Apart from the government’s recognition in promotional material for the congress, their support was clearly evident when President Ma Ying-jeou met with a group of prominent foreign designers on 25 October (Figure 1), and by the attendance of the country’s Vice President, Vincent Siew, during the opening ceremony of the Congress (Figure 2). According to Siew, the government has been trying to help local businesses to build a better international image as design industry leaders. Moreover, in light of Cape Town’s bid for the 2014 World Design Capital, it was promising to see some South African support by people such as the Executive Mayor of Cape Town, Patricia de Lille.

The theme of the congress, Design at the Edges, was aptly named in view of the following sub-themes:

- the edge between the design practices and other fields having a stake in design, including science, technology, government, business and non-governmental humanitarian organisations;
- communication and interior architecture/design – what do they share and have in common, and what sets them apart;
- “cutting edge” work and ideas in design and in other fields: radically new, controversial, experimental, pushing the boundaries of the discipline (IDA Congress 2011).
In keeping with the overarching theme, five topics, namely Economic Development (business), the Internet (technology), Biotechnology (health and the environment), Urbanism (humanity and society) and International Migration (civil society) were covered in keynote addresses by an international panel of speakers. In addition to the five keynote presentations, delegates had the opportunity to sit in on breakaway sessions which included Design Salons, Design Practice sessions, Design Education forums and Design Explorations. The topics covered in the overwhelming number of sessions provided delegates with varied points of view and new opportunities. The five themes also had a global relevance, traversed all design disciplines and were essentially indicative of the widening domain of design and the resulting changes in contemporary design practice.

On day one of the Congress, the first keynote speech on economic development by Esko Aho – a former Prime Minister of Finland and current Executive Vice President, Corporate Relations and Responsibility at Nokia – was delivered via video conferencing and epitomised the theme of the Congress to some extent in that it illustrated design at the cutting edge of technology and communication (Figure 3). On the one hand, the medium of communication supported Aho’s message that despite technology being indispensable, designers are catalysts and key players who facilitate the communication. On the other hand, Aho shunned the paying delegates and loyal Nokia customers by not attending in person as he opted to rather participate in a Nokia meeting. Unfortunately, despite the aim to discuss national innovation systems and creative economies from a governmental and business perspective, Aho focused more on Nokia’s business tactics and its brand as a global power rather than addressing the core theme of economic development. Despite the poor choice of presentation for an opening keynote address, the engaging and informative panel discussion that followed proved to be worthwhile.

The panel discussion was chaired by the eloquent Kohei Nishiyama from Japan and the panel members included Emily Campbell (Director of Design, RSA), Valerie Jacobs (Vice President, LPK Trends), Nila Leiserowitz (MD, Gensler) and facilitator Kohei Nishiyama (Chairman, CUUSOO.com). Image courtesy of Taiwan Design Centre
intelligent commentators on this panel. Campbell re-
iterated the fact that we live in an ever more complex
and diverse society and hence we need to consider the
topic of design as resourcefulness and self-reliance\(^2\)
within an economic context. In particular, she urged the
audience to think more critically about reduction and the
endless possibilities of co-design in addressing social
and public aspects of their lives. According to Campbell,
people should be encouraged ‘to go into the world not
only as a consumer but as a designer, that is, as someone
who has some sense of their ability to change what is
around them.’ Notwithstanding the fact that Campbell
addressed these issues from a British context, her com-
ments resonated with the multi-national audience.

Day two of the IDA Congress focused on the topics of
the Internet and Biotechnology. Barry Lam, often de-
scribed as a maverick among Taiwanese businessmen,
lead the first keynote session. Born and raised in Hong
Kong, Lam moved to Taiwan to attend university; sub-
sequently, in 1998, he founded and is currently the chair-
man of Quanta Computer (Design at the edges 2011).
Lam’s keynote presentation focused on connectivity
advancements, its impacts on Generation C and the
thinking behind the ‘era of disruption.’ During the
panel discussion, which was facilitated by Chin-Tay Shih,
Lam was joined by Bill Seaman, Eric Schuldenfrei, and
Ruth Soenius (Figure 5).

The most compelling theme and presentations at the
IDA Congress dealt with Biotechnology. The enigmatic
Indian environmental activist, Dr Vandana Shiva, pre-
sented this keynote address, which proved to be a pop-
ular favourite and more importantly, very thought-
provoking. Overall, this topic addressed ‘The Green
Revolution and Genetic Engineering: A Design for Hun-
ger and Ecological Disruption’. Shiva looked at how we
grow our food is an issue of how we design agriculture
including the landscape, plants and animals. She stated
that the Green Revolution and Genetic Engineering are
based on designing agriculture on the principles of
monoculture on toxic chemicals and re-engineering
plants with toxic genes. These have consequences for
food security and the environment. Among the conse-
quences are the deepening of the hunger crisis and the
impoverishment of ecosystems. Soil pollution, water
pollution and genetic pollution are inevitable out-
comes of a toxic design of farming (Design at the edges
2011). Shiva affirmed that ‘We can design food and
agriculture systems differently. This is what we do in
Navdanya [an organisation that she established]. Our
design is based on biodiversity. It is based on co-creation
and co-production with nature. The ecological design
increases food output while decreasing ecological costs’
(Lange 2011). The main focus in this session was on how
technology has brought a generic alteration of our
food supply and hence, there was an urgent appeal for
people, designers specifically, to consider the ways in
which we use technology.

Figure 5: Panel discussion on the Internet. From
left to right are Bill Seaman [Professor, Art
History and Visual Studies, Duke University],
Eric Schuldenfrei [Co-founder, eskyiu Ltd.], Ruth
Soenius [Director, User Experience, Siemens],
Barry Lam [Charman and CEO, Quanta
Computers Inc] and facilitator Chin-Tay Shih
[Chairman, Institute for Information Industry].

Image courtesy of Taiwan Design Centre
During the panel discussion, Vandana Shiva was joined by Anthony Dunn, Susan Szenasy, Cory Kid, who all contributed actively to one of the most thought-provoking discussions at the congress (Figure 6).

The third keynote address focused on Urbanism, which is topical at present, bearing in mind that ‘by 2050 over 80% of the world’s population will live in cities’ (Design at the edges 2011). The challenge for designers then is to thoughtfully weave together strategies for transportation, climate change, housing and public space so that cities can be economically successful, beautiful and socially cohesive. Peter Bishop, director of Allies & Morrison Urban Practitioners, in his keynote presentation, explored examples where cities are beginning to tackle these issues creatively and define an approach to urbanism that could set the conditions for successful urban growth in the challenging 21st century. Owing to his background and work experience, Bishop referred to London’s approach to hosting the Olympics in 2012. He also discussed the rebranding of the Royal Docks area as an example of urban strategy and planning. The discussion of Urbanism and the contemporary challenges of city design was discussed further when Bishop was joined by Marco Steinberg, Michael Murphy and Fred Gelli during the panel discussion (Figure 7).

The concluding session of the IDA focussed on the topic of International Migration. The keynote presenter for this session was Bob Elton from Canada, who is a member of the World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on the Skills Gap, which deals with issues around talent mobility and immigration. He presented a case study of migration specifically in Canada to contextualise the topic. The idea behind introducing this topic was highly relevant, but it was not presented in the context of the design ecology. The Canadian case study was vague and biased and led to anyone coming from a developing country feeling quite dispossessed because critical issues such as brain-drain and the complexities of migrating were not addressed. Elton’s stance was purely based...
on the benefits gained by the recipient country and some minor observations related to Othering. The panel discussion on International Migration was facilitated by Mervyn Kurlansky (Principle, MKD) and consisted of Elton, David Fisher (Director, Seymorepowell Product Design), Juan Carlos Baumgartner (MD, Space) and Calro Ratti (Director, MIT SENSEable City).

For the South African delegates the third day of the congress proved to be very memorable for another reason: the announcement that Cape Town was selected as the winner for the World Design Capital in 2014 (Figure 8).

Overall, the inaugural IDA Congress with its multi-disciplinary offering was an interesting experiment. It was definitely very different from any design event in recent years as it packaged topical issues under new themes and from new perspectives and despite the content not being completely new, important issues such as sustainability and the ethical responsibility of designers were highlighted once again in a meaningful way.³

Many die-hard design circuit conference delegates wondered how the new format for an Icograda/Icsid/IFA joint congress would pan out. Ultimately, most of it worked surprisingly well. There were very few show-and-tell presentations, the introduction of speakers from disciplines that are traditionally considered to be ‘outside of the design ecology’ were well-received and the overall level of discussion definitely contributed to the development of design discourse. However, Communication Design metaphorically drew ‘the short straw’ amongst the overwhelming dominance of other disciplines, particularly Industrial Design and Architecture.

With regard to the host city, the evening activities that were planned as part of the Congress definitely made it more exciting and lent it a cultural flair. October also marked Taiwan’s centennial and as a result the Congress, together with the Taipei World Design Expo, were considered as major events on the local calendar. Certainly, the organisers capitalised on the opportunity to promote Taiwan tourism. All in all, the congress was extremely well managed and organised and at the end of it most delegates probably felt that Taipei, as a
host, went to great heights and stood as tall as its famous Taipei 101 skyscraper.

Notes

1 At its 24th General Assembly that formed part of the extended Design at the Edges programme in Taipei, the International Council of Graphic Design Associations ratified a motion to change the organisation’s official name to the “International Council of Communication Design”. ‘Past President Russell Kennedy described the new name as honouring the Council’s history by retaining “Icograda” as its primary identifier, while embracing the emerging fields and expanded media practice of communication design (Icograda 2011b [O]) .

2 Design as resourcefulness and self-reliance is the guiding strategy that directs all of the activities of the Royal Society of for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce’s (RSA). According to Campbell:

The RSA’s central mission is to foster good citizenship by closing the gap between our everyday behaviour and the future to which we aspire. To close this gap, contemporary society needs to be more resourceful: its citizens more engaged, self-reliant and collective in their striving. Yet a combination of professionalisation, bureaucracy and consumerism threatens to reduce our resources of common competence and as citizens we often appear to be less resourceful than ever. At the same time our consumption has diminished the earth’s resources and we now have fewer resources of energy and natural material at our disposal.

Design & Society [one of the RSA’s key projects] argues that design will be fundamental to closing the gap between our behaviour and our aspirations because of the particular resourcefulness that designers represent. Ready to improvise and prototype, brave in the face of disorder and complexity, holistic and people-centred in their approach to defining problems, designers have a vital role to play today in making society itself more resourceful (Campbell 2009).

3 A selection of video clips from the congress can be viewed at:

References

Accessed 29 December 2011.


Accessed 22 December 2011.


Image & Text has been published annually since 1992 (primarily as a journal for design) and was accredited by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training in 1997. Since 2011, it has been repositioned as a multi- and interdisciplinary journal that orbits around the nexus of visual culture. The aim of the journal is to draw perspectives from a broad field of interests and subjects: visual anthropology, material culture, visual arts, design culture, visualising sciences and technologies, art history, philosophy, fashion, media and film studies, architecture, literary studies, tourism studies, new media and cyber theory, and so forth. The grounding provided by visual culture studies as a comparative and enabling premise for all these approaches, subjects, interests, fields and theories is located in the global South, not only geographically but also critically.

The editors invite papers that address or intersect with the visual from any of the fields mentioned above. One of the aims is to showcase new and young academic voices, as well as more established voices.

- Authors may wish to discuss the scope or applicability of their articles prior to submission and are encouraged to contact the Editor in this regard.
- All manuscripts received are first read by members of the editorial committee, who may recommend changes before submitting the manuscript for peer review, or reject manuscripts outright that are deemed inappropriate or not up to standard.
- Manuscripts are sent for refereeing to at least two subject specialists in a double blind refereeing process. The referees are chosen from other tertiary institutions or fields of expertise as appropriate. The comments and recommendations of the referees are conveyed to authors as necessary, and they may re-submit manuscripts once changes, if necessary, have been effected. If articles are rejected by both referees, authors are not encouraged to re-submit. Authors may provide the names of one or more potential referees for consideration by the editorial board but this does not guarantee that they will be used. All authors are subject to the same rigorous review process.
- Only material deemed to be of a suitably high standard is published.
- Articles may be submitted in English or in Afrikaans.

Contributors should please ensure that their submissions satisfy the following editorial requirements:

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Jeanne van Eeden has been teaching art history and visual culture in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria since 1990 and became Professor and Head of the Department in 2008. She obtained a DPhil in Communication from the University of South Africa on the South African theme park, The Lost City, in 1999. She is the co-editor of the book *South African visual culture* (2005) and has contributed chapters to British, German, American and South African books and is a National Research Foundation rated researcher. She was assistant editor of *Image & Text* from 1992 to 2011 and also serves on the editorial board of the South African academic journal *de Arte*. She has published on topics related to gender, post-colonialism and cultural representation; entertainment landscapes; South African tourism images; and social spatialisation in South African visual culture.

Amanda du Preez (Assistant Editor)

Amanda du Preez is Associate Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria, where she teaches Visual Culture Studies. She obtained a DPhil in English from the University of South Africa on the topic of cyberfeminism and embodiment in 2003. She has co-edited *South African visual culture* (2005), is the editor of *Taking a hard look: gender and visual culture* (2009) and has authored *Gendered bodies and new technologies* in 2009. She is the assistant editor of the South African academic journal *de Arte*. She serves on the Advisory Board of the Institute for Gender and Women’s Studies (UP) and serves on the Governing Board of the International Association for Visual Culture. She has published widely on topics mainly pertaining to gender, embodiment and the sublime.

Fatima Cassim

Fatima Cassim holds a Masters degree in Information Design and she currently heads the Information Design division at the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria. She teaches both practical and theoretical Information Design related subjects at undergraduate level and also provides research supervision to postgraduate students. In addition, she serves as an adjudicator on a number of national and international design competitions and awards schemes. Fatima’s research focuses on the culture of design in the current creative economy and the strategic role of design within this changing environment. In particular, she is interested in the nature and application of design thinking and the possible impact it may have on design education. When she is not being an academic, she tries to exercise creative muscle by running around the globe.

Benita de Robillard

Benita de Robillard is a lecturer in the Wits School of Arts, Johannesburg. She teaches courses informed by interdisciplinary critical and cultural theories, which think about...
the complex and ramified relationships between bodies, technologies and diverse aesthetic modalities. She supervises postgraduate work focused on bodies, cultures and sexualities, which is rooted in interdisciplinary and queer ways of thinking. Her current research project explores some of the nomadic meshings of sexualities, socialities and politics in the post-apartheid milieu. These explorations are located within an emerging critical system constituted through the intersections of feminist, queer and cripqueer theories with critical animal studies and somatechnics.

Ashraf Jamal
Ashraf Jamal teaches film studies at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and has taught at the universities of the Eastern Mediterranean, Malaya, Stellenbosch, Natal, Rhodes and Cape Town. He studied in the UK, Canada, USA, and South Africa. Jamal combines world literature and cinema, media studies and visual culture, ethnography, and the performing arts under the rubric of cultural and postcolonial studies. Jamal is the co-author of Art in South Africa: the future present (David Philip 1997) and the author of Predicaments of culture in South Africa (Unisa-Brill 2005). His literary-critical study Littorally speaking is forthcoming with Rodopi (2012). He is also author of a novel, Love themes for the wilderness (Random House-Kwela 1997), a novella, A million years ago in the nineties (Brevitas 2003), and a collection of short fiction, The shades (Brevitas 2002), winner of the Sanlam Prize for the title story.

Mugendi M’Rithaa
Mugendi M’Rithaa is an industrial designer, educator and researcher who presently lectures at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. He holds postgraduate qualifications in Industrial Design, Higher Education, and Universal Design. He is passionate about various expressions of socially (responsive and) responsible design, including Participatory Design; Universal Design; and Design for Sustainability. He has a special interest in design for development on the African continent and is associated with a number of international networks focusing on design within industrially developing/majority world contexts. He is currently serving a second term on the executive board of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design.

Rory du Plessis
Rory du Plessis is a full-time lecturer in Visual Culture Studies at the Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria. He completed his BA (Visual Studies) (cum laude), BA (Hons) Visual Studies (cum laude) and MPhil (Philosophy and Ethics of Mental Health) (cum laude) at the University of Pretoria. Previously, he has worked as the National Co-ordinator for the Southern African Sexual Health Association (SASHA) as well as a researcher at the Institute for Womens and Gender Studies, University of Pretoria. His research interests pertain to the representation of sexuality in South African popular media as well as the history and philosophy of mental illness.
Rory Bester

Rory Bester teaches art history at the University of the Witwatersrand and is also a critic (Mail & Guardian, Camera Austria, Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art), curator and documentary filmmaker. Bester’s catalogue essays on contemporary artists have been commissioned by BildMuseet (Umeå), Christies (London), DaimlerChrysler (Berlin), Documenta XI (Kassel), Johannes burg Art Gallery (Johannesburg), Museum Villa Stuck (Munich), National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), Recontres d’Arles (Arles), South African National Gallery (Cape Town), SMAC Gallery (Stellenbosch), Steven son Gallery (Cape Town), Studio Museum Harlem (New York) and White Box (New York). He edited Figure/ Ground: reflections on the South African Reserve Bank Art Collection (2007) and Ephraim Ngatane: a setting apart (2009). He has curated and co-curated exhibitions such as: Democracy’s Images: Photography and Visual Art after Apartheid (Bildmuseet and international tour), Kwere Kwere / Journeys into Strangeness (Castle of Good Hope and international tour), The Field’s Edge: Agency, Body and the African Lens (University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum), and prospect / Johannesburg (Gammel Holtegard).

Deirdre Byrne

Deirdre Byrne is a Professor of English Studies in the Department of English at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. Her research interests are gender, feminist literary theory and criticism, and speculative fiction (science fiction, fantasy and any creative use of the usual conventions of realistic narrative). Recently she has worked on the liminal status of national and cultural identities.

Elfriede Dreyer

Born in Pretoria, Elfriede Dreyer was educated in South Africa and the Netherlands. She is Associate Professor of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria and is the owner and curator of Fried Contemporary Art Gallery & Studio in Pretoria. In diversified way as a visual arts theorist, curator, writer and artist, she is engaged with utopia/dystopia discourses, technologisation and African modernities. In 2001 she received the D Litt et Phil in Art History from the University of South Africa with a thesis entitled Dystopia and artifice in late twentieth-century visual culture. Recent curatorial projects include Designs of self, Designs of nature, Designs of living and Designs of time (2011), History (2011), Dystopia (2008 - 2010), Bodies in transition (2010), Cities in transition (2010), Games people play (2010), Collateral (2010), Little deaths (2007) and Reconciliation (2005).

Steven Dubin

Steven Dubin is Professor of Arts Administration and Research Affiliate of the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University in New York. He is the author of Bureaucratizing the Muse (1987); Arresting Images (1992, cited as a Notable Book of the Year by The New York Times); Displays of power: memory and amnesia
in the American museum (1999); and Mounting Queen Victoria: curating social change (2009). Professor Dubin’s awards include the Fulbright-Hays Research Fellowship to South Africa, Fulbright Senior Specialist award to Iceland, Chancellor’s Award/Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities, The Lady Davis Visiting Professorship at Hebrew University (Jerusalem), and writing residencies at Bellagio (Italy), The Ragdale Foundation (Illinois), and The Ucross Foundation (Wyoming). He has written and lectured widely on censorship, controversial art, museums, and popular culture, and is a frequent contributor to publications such as Art in America and Art South Africa. He has been working and travelling throughout Southern Africa for the past eleven years.

Paul Duncum

Paul Duncum is Professor of Art Education, School of Art and Design, University of Illinois, Champaign Urbana, USA. A former graphic designer and art and design high school teacher, he obtained his doctorate from The Flinders University of South Australia and taught at several Australian universities prior to his present position. He is widely published in art education journals in the areas of his research and teaching, which include children’s drawings, images of children, popular culture, visual culture and art education. His work is principally informed by Cultural Studies. He is a life member of Art Education, Australia and a member of the Council for Policy Studies in Art Education. He is the editor of the 2006 NAEA publication Visual culture in the art class: case studies, and a leading advocate of the visual culture movement within art education.

Pieter Fourie

Pieter J Fourie is a professor in Communication Science at the University of South Africa. He is the author of a number of books on media studies, the editor of the accredited journal Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research, a former president of the South African Communication Association, and a National Research Foundation rated researcher. He serves on a number of national and international editorial boards and scientific committees. He has published various accredited research articles, contributions to books, and conference papers on topics ranging from media semiotics and pictorial communication to normative media theory and philosophy, media and society, and the political economy of the media. He was awarded the South African Academy of Science and Arts' Stals Prize for his contribution to the development of Communication Science in South Africa.

Ian Glenn

Ian Glenn is Professor of Media Studies and Director of the Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town. After studies in English at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal and York in England, he did an MA and PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, with a dissertation on mystical experience in the poetry of TS Eliot and Wallace Stevens. He joined UCT as a lecturer in English and was head of English before moving to the new Centre for Film and Media Studies. He has published widely on African and South African literature and on South African media. He has a particular interest in the French traveller and ornithologist Francois Le Vaillant and his multi-media portrayals of his travels. He is currently working on a French edition of Le Vaillant and on curating an international exhibition on Le Vaillant.
**Amy Kirschke**

Amy Kirschke is a Professor of Art History at University of North Carolina Wilmington, where she specialises in modern art, the art of the African Diaspora and African contemporary art. Her current research includes West African contemporary art, in particular the African biennial and the art of Ghana. Kirschke is the author of *Aaron Douglas: art, race and the Harlem Renaissance* (1995, University Press of Mississippi) and *Art in crisis: WEB Du Bois and the art of African American identity and memory* (2007, Indiana University Press) which was awarded the 2007 SECAC Award for Excellence in Scholarly Research and Publication. She has contributed chapters to books in the field of African American art/Harlem Renaissance, including *Temples for tomorrow, African diasporas in the old and new worlds*, Cary Wintz's *Harlem speaks*, *The souls of black folk one hundred years later* and *Women of color: taking their rightful place in leadership* (2009.) She is editing a volume on Women Artists of the Harlem Renaissance, (University Press of Mississippi, 2012) and a volume on the 100th Anniversary of *The Crisis* Magazine (University of Missouri Press, 2012).

**Annette Kuhn**

Annette Kuhn is Senior Professio-nal Fellow in Film Studies at Queen Mary University of London and a longstanding co-editor of the journal *Screen*. She has published widely in the areas of cultural theory, visual culture, film history and cultural memory, with authored books including *Family secrets: acts of memory and imagination* (1995 and 2002); *An everyday magic: cinema and cultural memory* (2002); *Ratcatcher* (2008); and (with Guy Westwell) *The Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies* (2012).

**Jacques Lange**

Jacques Lange is partner and creative director at Bluprint Design, publisher and editor of *DESIGN>>* and www.designmagazine.co, and part-time lecturer in Information Design and Visual Communication at the University of Pretoria. Throughout his career Jacques has actively engaged in design practice, profession management, education, research, design promotion, policy advocacy and design journalism. His professional output has earned him many industry awards and his work has been featured in numerous international publications and exhibitions. He is an experienced industry juror, widely published author and speaker on design issues internationally. He is a past president of the International Council of Communication Design (icograda, 2007-2009), founding co-chair of the International Design Alliance (IDA, 2005-2007), and advisor to various governmental institutions and NGOs. His research interests include the creative economy, talent mobility and creative diaspora, design policy, profession management, and contemporary design from lesser-known regions. Jacques is also one of the founders of *Image & Text*.

**Jenni Lauwrens**

Jenni Lauwrens teaches in the Visual Studies division in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria. She teaches from first year to Masters level students in the subjects, art history, visual communication, research methodologies and key texts in visual culture. Jenni has published in local and international publications on the relationship between visual culture studies and art history. Her research interests include the aims and protocols of visual culture studies and art history, art education, art historiography, spectatorship, embodiment, phenomenology, neuro-art history, neuro-aesthetics and
practices of seeing. She is currently working on a PhD on
the historical and theoretical implications of the viewer's
particular forms of embodiment.

**Victor Margolin**

Victor Margolin is Professor Emeritus of Design History at the University of Illinois, Chicago. He is a founding editor and now co-editor of the academic design journal *Design Issues*. Professor Margolin has published widely on diverse design topics and lectured at conferences, universities, and art schools in many parts of the world. Books that he has written, edited, or co-edited include *Propaganda: the art of persuasion, WW II, The struggle for utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1936*, *Design discourse, Discovering design, The idea of design, The politics of the artificial: essays on design and design studies*, and *Culture is everywhere: the Museum of Corn-temporary Art*. He is currently working on a world history of design.

**Nicholas Mirzoeff**

Nicholas Mirzoeff is a Professor of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University, New York. After more than a decade of writing about and teaching visual culture, most recently at SUNY Stonybrook, Mirzoeff decided to join the Department of Art and Art Professions in order to create a cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary visual culture program. The new program in visual culture also signals the primacy of the visual image, he believes, which affects our lives to a greater and greater extent each day. Mirzoeff’s recent book, *Watching Babylon: The war in Iraq and global visual culture*, enlarges upon this intriguing notion. His first book, *Silent poetry: deafness, sign and visual culture in modern France*, was about sign language and its relationship to painting. Mirzoeff is also the author of *An introduction to visual culture*.

**Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie**

Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie (PhD Northwestern University) is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of California Santa Barbara and a specialist in classical, modern and contemporary African and African Diaspora Art history and visual cultures. He is the author of *Ben Enwonwu: the making of an African modernist* (University of Rochester Press, 2008: winner of the 2009 Herskovits Prize of the African Studies Association), and *Making history: African collectors and the canon of African art* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2011). Ogbechie was the 2010 Getty Consortium Professor and Fellow of the Getty Research Institute and a 2007 TEDGlobal Fellow. He is the director of Aachron Knowledge Systems, and founder and editor of *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*. Ogbechie also serves as a curator and consultant to many major international museums on the subject of African and contemporary art. His research is widely published and he has presented lectures at major universities and museums in the USA, Europe, Africa and Asia. (Photograph by Rod Rolle)

**Georges Pfruender**

Georges Pfruender is a Swiss national who has spent a significant amount of time living abroad in Africa, Asia, America and the Middle East. He received his Master of Fine Arts from San Francisco Art Institute in 1991. While continuing to produce his own body of work, for the past decade he had also been Director of the Fine Arts University Ecole Cantonale d’Art du Valais, Switzerland, President of the Swiss National Board of Art and
Design. Vice President of the Swiss UNESCO Commission, and since 2009, Head of the School of Arts at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As artist and researcher he has participated in conferences, panels and residency programs in Europe, USA, South Africa, Venezuela, and Taiwan, and is presently involved in projects engaging artists in migrant communities of the inner city of Johannesburg. At the Wits School of Arts he has been responsible for the coordination of arts programs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (MFA, PhD) concerning the disciplines of music, drama, fine arts, film and TV, digital arts and cultural theories.

Annette Pritchard
Annette Pritchard is Professor of Critical Tourism Studies and Director of the Welsh Centre for Tourism Research at Cardiff Metropolitan University. Annette has a long-standing interest in the relationships between places, representations and identities and she has published 15 books and over 40 papers on these connectivities. Much of her work is driven by a commitment to transformative research and she is one of the originators of the hopeful tourism agenda and co-chair of the biannual Critical Tourism Studies Conference Series. Annette was formerly Convenor of the Leisure Studies editorial board and her current editorial responsibilities include serving as joint Research Notes Editor of the Annals of Tourism Research. She is also an advisory board member of the Copenhagen Business School’s Creative Industries Research Centre and a regular invited speaker at events and conferences.

Marian Sauthoff
Prof Marian Sauthoff is currently Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg. Prior to this, she was the head of the Department of Visual Arts and also chaired the School of Arts at the University of Pretoria. She completed her master’s (cum laude) and doctoral degrees through the University of Pretoria. Prof Sauthoff is the founding editor of the accredited journal Image & Text: A Journal for Design, which she edited from 1992 to 2010. She has also served on the editorial board and as guest editor of a number of international journals. She has published extensively in her field of expertise and regularly acts as a peer referee for articles and conference papers. She has served as a member of advisory boards to industry and government and as an adjudicator for national and international design awards. Her career includes design consultancy and a period as a senior researcher at the Chamber of Mines.

Annie van de Oever
Annie van den Oever is Extraordinary Professor for Film and Visual Media at the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State, South Africa. She is also director of the Film Archive and director of the Master in Film Studies at the Department of Arts, Culture and Media, Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen, The Netherlands. She is an editor of several academic journals and book series in her field, among them: board member of Film and Media, Amsterdam University Press (since 2003); series editor of The key debates: mutations and appropriations in European film studies, with Ian Christie (Birkbeck College, London), and Dominique Chateau (Paris I, Sorbonne Panthéon); chief editor of the new educational books series for Film and Media studies (since 2011), and Editor-in-Chief of the European Journal for Media Studies NECSus (since 2011). Her last two books are Ostrannenie and Sensitizing the viewers, both published at Amsterdam University Press.