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# EDITORIAL

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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*.

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 54<sup>th</sup> 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.