VISUAL ARTS

Why art matters

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EDITORIAL

Sarah Cunningham, Intellect

The visual arts are necessary to push boundaries, encourage new ways of thinking, to celebrate or lament the human condition.

WE ARE OFTEN asked ‘how does Intellect continue to publish so many new books and journals?’ My answer is that Intellect is lucky enough to publish in subject areas where the range of academic enquiry continues to enrich and grow, providing us with vibrant and exciting ideas and an energetic community. Many different forms and aspects of the visual arts are represented in our portfolio – animation, fashion, photography, documentary, art education – but the list is by no means exhaustive and there is still plenty of scope for growth.

However, growth in the arts is threatened by the current climate of austerity: now more than ever there is a need to define and assert why art matters. As eloquently argued by the contributors to this magazine, the myriad reasons why art matters are vast and multifaceted. The visual arts are necessary to push boundaries, encourage new ways of thinking, to celebrate or lament the human condition. The impact of the visual arts is not just demonstrable in the industries that they feed and support, but also in the classrooms, communities and cultures within which they are inextricably meshed.

At Intellect we are constantly inspired by our community of authors, editors, reviewers and readers and their commitment to demonstrate why art matters.

ARTICLE

THE POINT OF ART

Jonathan Day, Author, *Robert Frank's 'The Americans': The Art of Documentary Photography*

THE POINT OF art? What kind of question is that? While our best philosophers are pointing out the powerful *difference* in our interpretations of the same bits of culture (language, art, etc.), isn't it puerile, if not idiotic, to think we can establish the point of anything?

Shall we see?

There are conflicting voices everywhere. I wonder whether we might look sideways a little and sneak up on this many-sided mystery, holding all its activity still for the slightest of moments and thereby finding some harmony in the cymbal-clashing din?

I'm not going to start at the beginning. We live in the 'modern world', or maybe it's 'super-modern' or 'postmodern' or something like that. So let's start with a modernist. Karl Marx, the famous socialist thinker, saw the basics of human life, the really important stuff, as air, water, food and shelter. These are the foundations of our lives, our 'economic necessities'. Everything else – religion, art, music and philosophy – is a 'superstructure' balanced precariously on top. If you're struggling to accept this, try comparing the wealth of most artists to the wealth of most bankers. OK then, but surely a cathedral, or Mozart's *Requiem*, or Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* has to be more than just froth bubbling on the surface of trade? The old wisdom, after all, says that 'man cannot live on bread alone'. I think the old wisdom is talking about love not art: the sea gypsies of Sana, for example, carry no paintings or sculptures in their tiny, crowded boats. Marx doesn't leave it there, though. After all, gypsies famously sing. People deprived of any economic power, or advantage, create achingly beautiful appeals for something better. They sing up another world: a place where every tear is wiped from their eyes and their holy of holies cries 'vengeance is mine' at their oppressors. Marx sees these creations as the 'cry of the oppressed creature': a necessary reflection of and reaction to an out-of-joint world. He further argues that when freedom comes and oppression is lifted, religion and 'art', along with all other 'opiates', will be needed no more.

So, does this bring us nearer to an understanding? I think Friedrich Nietzsche can help move us on. He too describes art as a kind of 'cry'. Like Marx, Nietzsche sees culture as schizophrenic, bifurcated, but not, this time, because of economics. He sees instead a world filled with blood and filth, red in tooth and claw. He takes the name of Dionysius, the Asian/Greek god of wine, wildness and debauchery, and applies it here. This 'Dionysian' world is too much for us humans to bear, he argues. We need an escape, somewhere to run to. He sees things like God, poetry, music or romantic love as pretty illusions, sandy holes in which to hide from the carnage. He names this world of confections after Apollo, the Greek god of poetry. For Nietzsche we are still creatures of oppression, but this time oppressed by the unbearable brutality of our world. Art is our frantic attempt to bury our heads and forget.

Well I think we are getting somewhere, but these are dark imaginings, aren't they? What about the lovely paintings on our walls at home, harmony in form and tint? Surely someone is arguing for art as simply something beautiful and life enhancing? Guillame Apollinaire is my favourite. He was friend and mage to Picasso and the Paris school of painters. He believed that artists are people who can 'recognize the symbols without which humanity's divine view of the universe collapses with dizzying speed'. Along with Marx and Nietzsche, he sees art as a kind of visionary weaving: as recognizing and representing moments that help us comprehend our mysteries. He lifts these visionary representations to the level of the divine.

So much of the art of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, though, has signally nothing to do with the divine. We have broken beds filled with condoms, a self portrait made of blood, rotting meat eaten by flies, which then die, and a man hung by his feet bleeding over the stage from his own slit wrists. Is there divinity there? Really? Before we become completely mired, I think the philosopher Georg Hegel can help us with this apparent contradiction. He argued that in many cultures, art and religion are effectively the same thing. So the cave paintings of Lascaux in France, the temples at Khajuraho in India or the Hebridean Book of Kells cannot be picked into separate parts that represent 'religion' and 'art'. Once religion and art become separated, as in our society, with the former being the proper concern of theologians and philosophers, he thinks that art loses its social power and significance. Charles Saatchi evidences this loss wonderfully: in his 'Sensations' exhibition, the only thing linking the various works on display was their notoriety. The nature and purpose of art at that time had become so uncertain, so contested, that the only sure way to recognize something as art was to see a tabloid newspaper headline asking IS THIS ART? Questioning its nature ironically secured it as such.

> Art, essentially, had eaten itself.

How did this happen? How did painting and sculpture become so divorced from social purpose? The flag went up, I suspect, with the early twentieth-century French artist Marcel Duchamp. When he placed an off-the-shelf toilet bowl, signed with a fictitious artist's name, in a gallery, he made concrete the notion of art as the action of an 'artist'. His intention may have been ironic, but he nonetheless reinforced the post–Renaissance European elevation of 'artists' from anonymous craftsmen into celebrities: if a person is an 'artist' (and therefore somehow different and special) then whatever they do is necessarily 'art'. The ready acceptance which followed the fêting of Duchamp's joke led, inevitably, to galleries filled not just with brilliance and wonder, but with the mundane and pointless, curated by people overly concerned with image, position and fashion; in short, people deeply afraid of not 'getting it' (even when there was nothing to 'get'). Ever more strident cries went up, everyone shouting 'art is over here'. People outside of this nepotistic world could only look on, confused and bewildered. By sophisticating it to the point of incomprehension, these contesting voices wove an impenetrable wall around 'art', so that tabloids became, for many people, the arbiters and labellers. Art, essentially, had eaten itself.

Ironically, though not surprisingly, this melee has resulted in a retrenchment, as interest in art as a series of socially mediated practices has grown. An audience tired of headlines, of art as PR, of hollow pretentiousness and blood, seems more and more attracted to demonstrations of craft skill and dexterity, in areas traditionally recognized as characterizing the 'artist'. Galleries in my own town are filled with drawing, painting, textiles and ceramics, mostly adorned with figuration. In a way, this is the final divorce, moving art from the centre of our world, as the carrier of dreams and aspirations, to more or less pretty demonstrations of the mastery of media, trading the recognition of the 'divine' symbol for the role of decoration.

So is that it? Well let's finish with one last voice. The painter Piet Mondrian created some very famous highly-abstracted works. Mondrian significantly predicted that film, television and photography would replace painting in the popular imagination. If you need proof of this, compare the numbers of people passing through the doors of the galleries with the numbers passing through cinema box-offices, or subscribing to satellite broadcasting. He believed that as people turned away from one they would turn to the others.

I wrote my book *Robert Frank's 'The Americans': The Art of Documentary Photography* about a Swiss photographer working in America in the 1950s. Frank's work contains brilliant and seminal photographs that embody exactly what Mondrian was talking about. Taken together, his images are perhaps the finest description and analysis I've ever seen of America, the dominant culture of the world in to which I was born. Frank's book helped me understand myself, by coming to an understanding of the world that made me. His art is resolutely located in the discussion of belief and meaning, honestly recording and examining what he saw. Now perhaps more than at any time since it was published, we need his book. It is a mirror, reflecting vision and wisdom back at us from our generation's formative days. 'Those who ignore the past are doomed to repeat its mistakes', the old wisdom says. In these dangerous and difficult days, we have need of works that help us understand who we are, where we come from and where we are going. Some might argue that this has always been the point of art.

READ ON...

Jonathan Day | Birmingham City University
Author: *Robert Frank's 'The Americans': The Art of Documentary Photography*, ISBN 9781841503158

ARTICLE

CREATIVE ACTIVITY IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

Elif Ayiter, Editor, *Metaverse Creativity*

IN HIS BOOK *Exodus to the Virtual World,* economist Edward Castranova predicts a migration, of considerable proportions, from the physical realm to three dimensional, online synthetic worlds within the next few decades. The anticipated outcome would be a demographic landslide of significant enough socio-economic impact to constitute a need for compelling changes in political, social, cultural and economic strategies, not only in the virtual but also in the physical realm (Castranova 2007).

As opposed to a discrete, one way migration, as would be the case in population shifts in the physical world, the anticipated migration would be of a continuous nature, with migrants switching back and forth between the physical and the synthetic world. If, during this ebb and flow of time allocation, more and more hours of activity become appropriated by the virtual world then the physical world would suffer the consequences, primarily through the loss of revenue generated by the consumption of (physical) goods. However, of equal impact would be the loss of interest and attention in (physical) sociocultural occurrences, events and policy. By looking at the current health indicators of virtual economies (the earnings of which can readily be translated into physical currencies such as the US Dollar) Castranova predicts that if a sufficiently large number of players migrate to virtual pastures then the consequences for physical economies, and by extension socio-political structures, will be powerful enough to instigate fundamental changes in (physical) public policies as well as a re-examination/re-definition of (physical) sociocultural mechanisms all over the globe. Furthermore, Castranova sees this as a more than likely occurrence when viewed within the economic theory of human time use, the allocation of attention and the attractiveness of virtual worlds within its context, as well as the growth in the gaming industry coupled with the emergence of ubiquitous technologies.

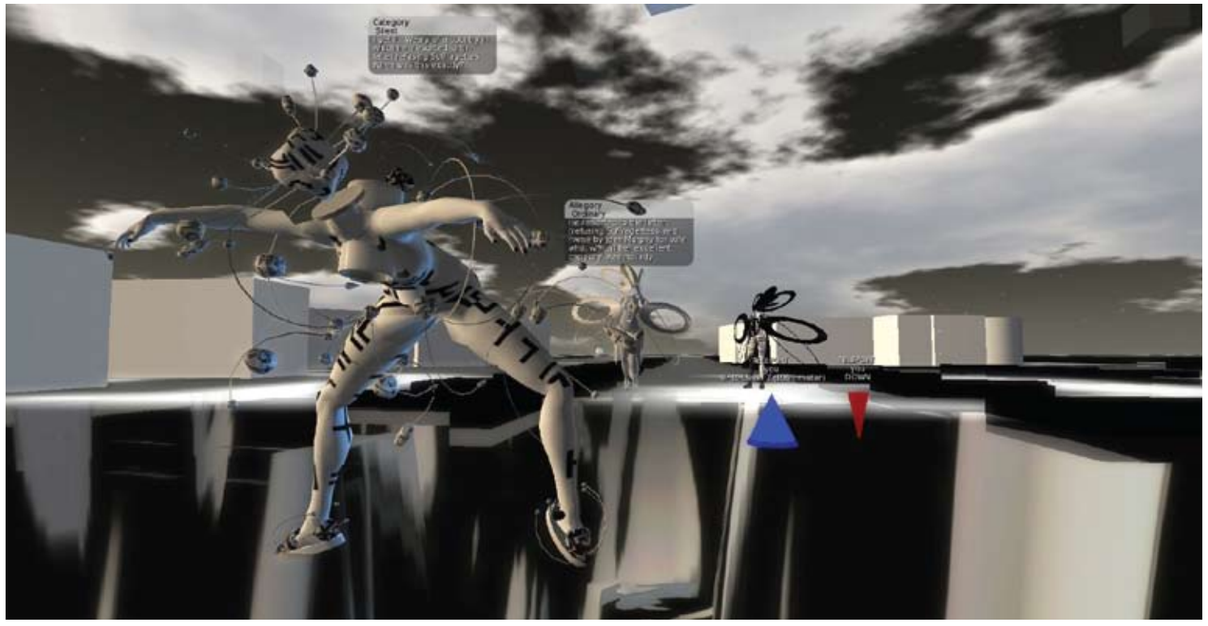
Since creative practices are inextricably intertwined with the sociocultural milieu within which they flourish, it would follow that vast change, not only in terms of the actual creative output itself, but especially and more importantly in terms of the contextual premises within which this creative output is generated, should also be expected.

Malcolm McCullough approaches the process of virtual creativity through an examination of the virtual medium itself and the ensuing requirements of craftsmanship that this medium brings to bear upon the creative processes involved in the realization of virtual artefacts. According to McCullough, individuated human craftsmanship – a term largely overlooked by modernist art and design movements – is being, once again, brought very much to the fore by the practitioners of digital creativity. While the assembly line of mechanized industry predicates that the developer/conceiver of the design object is inevitably removed from the actual phase of its production; artists, by and large, seem to have embraced this distinction too. However, today the affordance definition of the digital medium – with its pronounced ease of instigating playful improvisations and its ability to produce many variations and iterations of a single artefact – allows for a flexibility of output that is once again attracting virtual content creators to the very process of production itself (McCullough 1996). When McCullough's observations are coupled with Castranova's description of the mechanisms of virtual economies then we end up facing a mode of creativity that harks back to the days before the Industrial Revolution; the creator of the artefact is not only the craftsperson thereof but also the merchant of his or her own output.

For McCullough improvisation plays an intrinsic part in this process, and where improvisation is concerned computational endeavour has a distinct advantage over its counterpart in the analogue realm. This advantage is embedded into the very material difference between the two: the digital environment handles 'bits' as opposed to material atoms. While atoms can only be manipulated to a certain degree before 'material' starts breaking down, 'bits' can be processed, reversed and manipulated infinitely with no loss. Computational creativity thus becomes an activity that can also be described as play with a perpetually evolving object that can endlessly be improvised upon. Although writing at a time predating the advent of a fully operational metaverse such as Second Life®, which centres on user-created content, McCullough is nonetheless aware – through observing precursors of the genre such as SimCity – of the implications that these 'builder worlds' have upon all digital creativity. He notes that 'the popularity of these simulations without explicit winning conditions may reflect a constituency that also sustains a playful attitude in productive computing' (McCullough 1996).

At the beginning of *Exodus to the Virtual World* Castranova alerts his reader to the fact that the book is of a speculative nature. However, after this opening statement he continues on to list the scientific instruments by which he is constructing his model. Given the solidity of his assessment tools, as well as his academic expertise in economics and public policy, it would not be too imprudent to regard his predictions as *informed* deliberations. Even if his cogitations only bear partial fruit, humankind may find itself living in a vastly altered world, or indeed in multiple worlds: the 'synthetic' one and 'real' one simultaneously.

We may find ourselves in a social milieu where the bulk of recreational time, if not indeed work hours, are spent in fantastical, frivolous, playful and fun activity; we may find ourselves in a space in which economic demand and supply are shaped by parameters that are currently being forged in online synthetic virtual worlds. Returning full circle to the days of the pre-Industrial Revolution, designers and artists may find themselves not only conceiving but also crafting and merchandizing their own creative output, and the intrinsic descriptors, function and usage of that output may be vastly different to those of the present day.



Both images: © *La Plissure du Texte 2*, Second Life®, 2010. Artists: Roy Ascott, Elif Ayiter, Max Moswitzer, Selavy Oh.

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EXCERPT FROM:

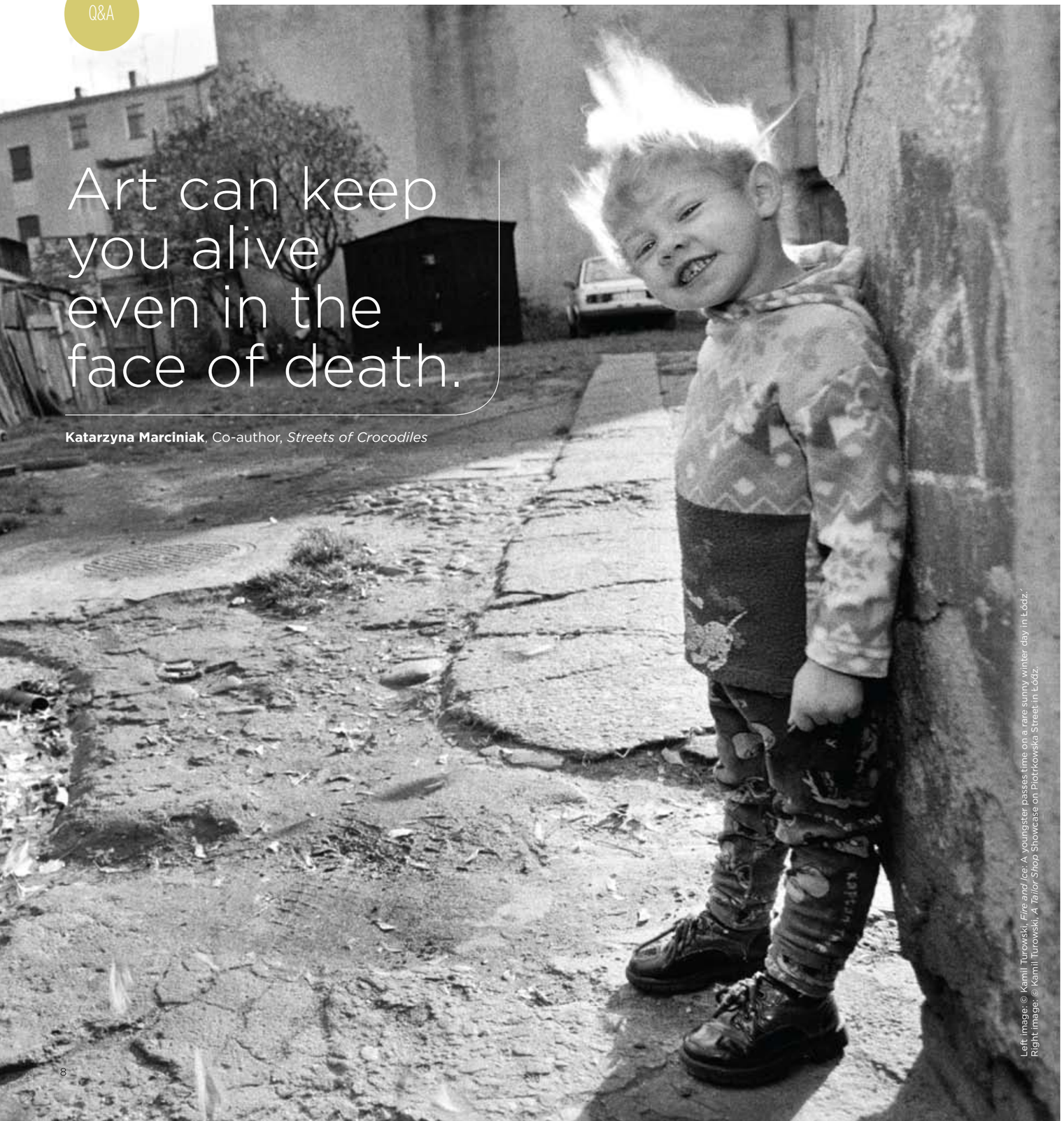
Metaplasticity in Virtual Worlds: Aesthetics and Semantics Concepts, edited by G. Mura (IGI-Global Publishing, 2010).

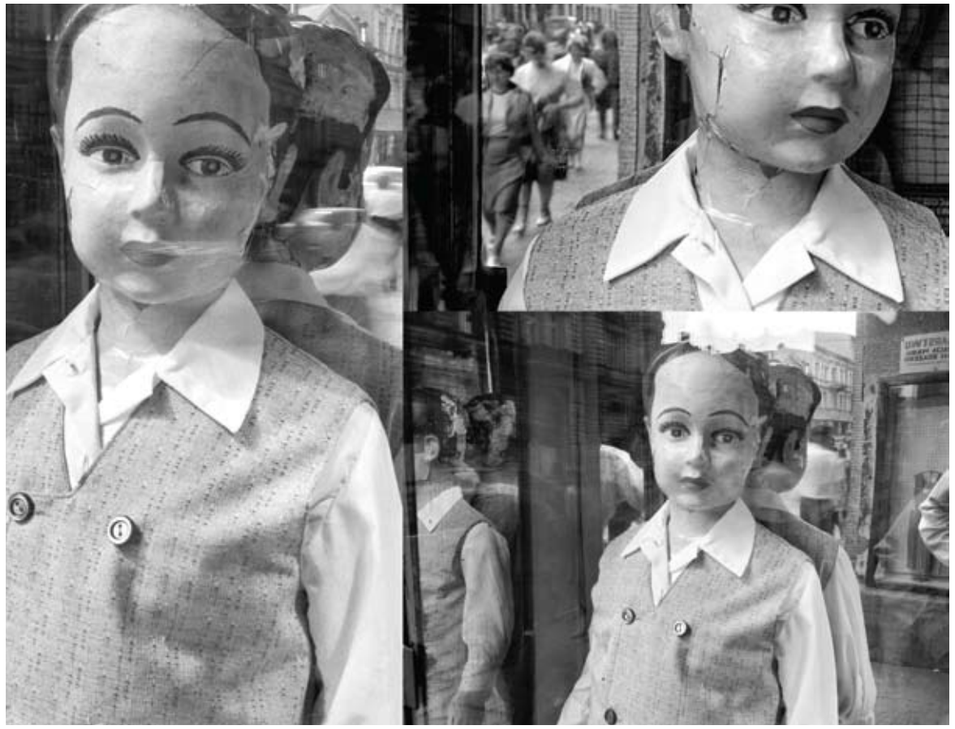
READ ON...

Elif Ayiter | Sabanci University
Editor: *Metaverse Creativity*, ISSN 20403550

Art can keep you alive even in the face of death.

Katarzyna Marciniak, Co-author, *Streets of Crocodiles*





Left image: © Kamil Turowski, *Fire and Ice:* A youngster passes time on a rare sunny winter day in Łódź.
Right image: © Kamil Turowski, *A Tailor Shop* Showcase on Piotrkowska Street in Łódź.

A PHOTOGRAPHIC STILL – a microscopic click of time – can move you and stay with you like a haunting. It invites you to contemplate the power of perception. It directs you outward, revealing a slice of the world, a face, a reflection in the mirror, a courtyard washed in shadows; and it directs you inward, compelling you to think about other faces you suddenly remember, or places you have left behind. Playing with your imagination, it can produce a visceral response, a bodily stirring, by touching a nerve you did not even know you had and disclosing something new about your nature as a visual being.

People use art in all kinds of ways: to hinder or help revolutions; to incite or resist social prejudice; to highlight or condone an injustice; to conceal or unmask social anxieties; or simply to get an aesthetic high. As a viewer, you decipher the way that art makes you feel: you trace those feelings and the evocations they offer. Art can provoke, inspire, or disturb; it can open your eyes to worlds other than your own, or, as happened in the case of those who managed to draw while imprisoned at Auschwitz, it can keep you alive even in the face of death.

READ ON...

Katarzyna Marciniak | Ohio University
Co-author (with Kamil Turowski): *Streets of Crocodiles*, ISBN 9781841503653

ARTICLE

FASHION AND ART: CRITICAL CROSSOVERS

Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, Editor, *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*

> Great artists since Baudelaire were in conspiracy with fashion.
>
> (Theodor W. Adorno in Doswald 2006)

WHEN WE LOOK back on the twentieth century, a time when the relationship between art and fashion flourished in a way that it had never done before, we begin to notice that to call fashion 'art's inferior and frivolous other' is far too glib, never mind inaccurate and unfair. For, since the beginning of the twentieth century, fashion has played a central part in popularizing art. This is not necessarily meant solely in the sense of debasing art for popular appeal, but rather more with disseminating artistic motifs amongst social groups who have had little contact with 'high' art or who feel uncomfortable about dealing with it. Yves Saint Laurent's Mondrian dress is a case in point: it turned a relatively specialized artist into something of a household name. And it seems history has repeated itself: at the MTV Awards, on 12 September 2010, the stripper-turned pop star Lady Gaga accepted the award for Video of the Year wearing a meat dress accessorized with a meat hat. The meat dress had already been 'done' by the Canadian visual artist Jana Sterbak in 1987, but this was a slightly more camped-up, risqué design. Known for her gaucherie, Lady Gaga had orchestrated a media storm. Curiously in the worldwide press that followed, no mention was made of Sterbak; that the pop star had come to this of her own accord is conceivable, but was the message the same? Somewhat: it was apparently a protest against the United States armed forces' 'Don't ask, don't tell' policy. Four former-servicemen and women who had been expelled from the armed services for being gay and lesbian accompanied Gaga to the awards. A strong supporter of gay rights, Gaga suggested that her dress had been part of that statement. Was it therefore a work of art? Where is the 'original' work of art positioned within all of this? These are questions to ponder, but what is certain is that the orientation of its appeal had gone from academic to mass.

In the twentieth century fashion became a central concern of many artists, who understood the provocative power of clothing in creating an identity and establishing their work as a global 'brand'. Theo van Doesburg, leader of the De Stijl movement, wore a black suit and white socks and tie to represent the negative of everyday dress. Dadaist Jean Arp created elaborate costumes as a form of oppositional dress, and Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys informed and set fashion trends: Warhol with his white wig and glasses and Beuys with his fishing jacket and hat. 'The look was as important as the art itself' (Müller 2000). As much as artists were attracted to sartorial codes of fashionability, designers styled themselves as artistic savants in an attempt to be elevated into the realm of fine art: couturier Charles Worth's self-stylization mimicked that of Dutch painter Rembrandt, often appearing with a similar black skullcap, and John Galliano is often described as the 'Dali of fashion' in his pose and choice of clothing.

Returning to Sterbak, her 'cured flank steak dress' is also an example of art meeting fashion, inasmuch as fashion and dress are to be worn, and, more typically, art is not. In this piece Sterbak used fashion and dress as a vehicle to communicate issues of the body and

Right image: © Solve Sundsbø / Art + Commerce.

the feminine. The audience and the critic are challenged to confront competing definitions by asking: is the dress art, or conceptual fashion? Similarly Sterbak's *Magic Shoes* (1992), a pair of high heels tethered to chains, summons a response about women's lives and the culture of victimhood. Fashion then begins to share a similar language with art, for the creation of the 'dress' and the 'shoes' exist not only within the domain of artistic production, but within a sartorial discourse that renders art as an 'embodied' and performative practice. Fashion, writes Joanne Entwistle, 'is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies. It is the body that fashion speaks to and it is the body that must be dressed in almost all social encounters' (Entwistle 2000). Whilst Entwistle's focus is on fashion, rather than art, 'dress in everyday life cannot be separated from the living breathing body that it adorns' (Entwistle 2000). Art within this context signifies a breakdown of its traditional role in high culture and begins to circulate within a series of meanings about consumption, popular culture and the everyday.

And like mass fashion, with its dependence on the renewal of styles, but unlike art, the Sterbak's meat dress is perishable, prone to the depredations of time. Ironically, Sterbak's work is now exhibited in a ghastly dried state poised on a headless fashion mannequin. If we had to tip it, we have to say that its status as art is preserved. But seeing it, we are nonetheless made aware of the prejudices between the two different practices and of how these differences are inseparable from the differences between social modalities as they refer to class, gender, and consumption, as well as the much wider notion of temporality: the values that inhere in things deemed permanent and in those deemed ephemeral.

When fashion is placed within the context of the space of the museum and the art gallery, its value as a commercially driven, mass-market product transitions from 'consumable merchandise' to 'art installation'. In one quick swoop, fashion's fast-paced commercial role ceases and it realigns itself within a new value system: it becomes a rarefied commodity to be collected. Whether an Armani *privé* evening gown, or a Damien Hirst installation, the boundaries between high and popular culture now begin to fray, as 'fashion seeks to attach itself to the value system of art, so art seeks to remove the stigma of such associations'. A partnership is produced and fashion ceases to be art's other, instead it begins to vie for equal status.

The question, *is* fashion art, leads to an argument, or complaint, whose weakness lies in not addressing the systems of art and fashion themselves. For over a century the debates have focused on the art object and the fashion item without looking at the consensual, linguistic frameworks that allow one to be art and the other to be fashion. To say glibly that one is embodied and the other isn't is only half the argument, and to counter-argue that art can sometimes be worn doesn't settle much. For art and fashion are defined by, or inhabit if you will, undeniably different systems, and it is these systems that define them as respective discourses. In other words, fashion and art occupy different modalities of presentation and reception; they have different uses and they are subject to different responses within both monetary and desiring economies. Thus the differences are less in the objects of fashion and art, since both are aesthetic creations for which judgment is always subjective, and more in *the places* of exchange – social, economic, linguistic – that they occupy.

Since Marcel Duchamp, what the history of art has taught us is that art cannot exist without the elaborate protocols that register for the viewer that the experience of it is different, indeed something special. The so-called 'Duchampian revolution' divests the art object of inherent meaning and turns it into a cultural artefact whose status is conferred according to a delicate web of signs and agreements; from there we must even agree on the relative specificity of art to culture, class and race, without whose consent, ratification, or veneration, the art experience is diminished if not annulled.

What fashion studies have taught us is that fashion is a very specific phenomenon of the West and of modernity – to keep things sane and even, 'modernity' can be read here in the Hegelian sense of an aesthetic phenomenon in existence since the Middle Ages, in which, again in a Hegelian sense, humans began to have a stronger sense of individual consciousness and agency. Fashion, as a discourse, a system and an area of study, even when it contains notions of dress, costume and clothes, is therefore a discrete historical entity. This is much the same as the idea of art as an activity by individuals or specialized groups who produce aesthetic objects or experiences of critical difference to everyday life and the status quo. Both emanate from a social configuration of class, capital and communication that begins in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, a period that saw a shift away from rigid strictures of religion and governance to that of self-ownership, mobility and the ability to exert change. Like money itself, fashion and art are symbolic agents, but their levels of transaction are different – and this is true no matter how many garments are displayed in a museum context. For we must ask – above and beyond the different (albeit uneven and overlapping) areas of exchange and consensus in which fashion and art operate – does fashion really want to be art? And does art really need fashion?

Does fashion really want to be art? And does art really need fashion?

How would it benefit the 'systems'? Fashion uses art in its rhetoric, it derives a countless array of its idioms and expressions from art (for example 'concept' and 'installation'), and vies for the esteem and social prominence that is afforded to the arts and high culture – architecture, music, theatre and art – but this, we would aver, is part of fashion's nature, namely to maintain a perverse and agonistic relationship to art. Like the very nature of desire itself, once that desire is assuaged it is quelled.

Fashion, then, might desire to become art, but 'knows' that to do so might lead to its ruin, like garments on display that are too valuable to be worn. Important work has emerged within the field of fashion studies establishing the importance of approaching the dressed body as a 'fleshy,' 'situated bodily practice' (Entwistle 2001). Such work has advanced theoretical engagement in this area and provided secure ground from which to extend exploration of the embodiment and disembodiment of dress within a museum context. The separation – some use the word 'sublation', the clumsy translation of the Hegelian 'Aufhebung' – of art from everyday discourse is essential (here is no place to begin to discuss art's art-life agonism nor the way that this separation calls for the (Hegelian) 'end of art' thesis), but fashion needs to be embroiled in everyday discourse. And herein lies the cardinal difference between fashion and art: their relationship to time, or Time. Quentin Bell eloquently sums up this distinction, while also highlighting what Gilles Lipovetsky called the 'highly problematic institution' of fashion:

> And yet 'fashion', because it implies change and mutability, suggests something frivolous and inconsiderable. A judgment based upon fashion is felt to be less reputable than one based upon those eternal values, those enduring truths which, as we like to suppose, we can all recognize and in the light of which we can relegate fashionable opinions to their proper and inferior place. 'It is fashionable to maintain…' – such a beginning allows us to anticipate that the speaker will soon refer to something more permanent than fashion. A fashionable artist is certainly one who will abide our judgment. Such assumptions may be, in fact certainly are, true; nothing is so mortal as fashion, *no flower carries within it more plainly the seeds of its own destruction*; the only trouble is that when we seek eternal verities against which we can measure the shortcomings of fashion they may be rather hard to find. But if in condemning fashion we imply that it is the produce of a lightweight emotion and one that can easily be disregarded then we may fall into a very grave error.
>
> (Lipovetsky 1987: 4, emphasis added)

The evanescence of fashion versus the lastingness of art is the real sticking point. Even fashion classics

are mendacious, as they are merely armatures that are edition-ed and updated, so long as they have an identifiable 'core', such as Levi's 501 denim jeans. But this is an extreme. Bell offers a sobering corrective. Veblen and others speak of a higher spiritual need as the source of fashion, which is also the source of art. It may be so that art may intellectually and spiritually reflect that need, but fashion can temporarily satisfy it, and with fashion it can be more easily identified; people literally wear it on their sleeve.

Before we go any further, it is necessary to gloss art and fashion according to the philosophical framework of the concept of style. No other word or concept is as critical to the overlap. It is also what defines both as systems within the western ethos. For the birth of fashion as a discrete idea beyond the expedients of mere clothing or dress is coterminous with a philosophical self-consciousness of appearance. To have style is to possess a differentiating and assumedly enviable abstract, that is, impalpable quality. Yet for something to be stylized is to be rigid and fake to the point of repellent because of its lack of naturalness. And somewhere between these two coordinates lies the complex and wonderful paradox of the truth of appearance within art and fashion: style is a superadded, rare, desired quantity that is not natural, but which assists in something's coming-to-appearance. We wear clothes, cover ourselves with an outer skin of codes and creations in order for us to be seen how we truly are.

Equally, art is impossible without a style. There is no such thing as a styleless work of art. It is the carapace of representation: the distortion, the modulation that makes something noticeable, makes it truer, more identifiable, and richer and more compelling than prosaic things in the everyday world. Both art and fashion as we know them are brought together with the development of the idea of history. The history of art begins with the history of style. This history is also brought to bear upon the history of styles within fashion. Since the 1980s art history has undergone numerous crises and revisions: postmodernity, visual culture, new media and now the dubious catch all 'contemporary'. Such shifts and crises were motivated by an evident change in the way art was being produced and theorized. The canon of art history attributed to Gombrich – that borrowed its trajectory and reasoning heavily from Hegel's *Aesthetics* – and popularized by the New York critic Greenberg, sees art as a procession of styles, each belonging to a set of beliefs, motivations and cultural concerns. Postmodernity recognizes that art, as a dialectical progression, is either false or no longer relevant. The pattern of art (echoing Toynbee's theories of the rise and fall of civilizations), of progenitors, apogee and decline, is no longer tenable because there is no longer a concept of regnant style. Beliefs and interests have never been so disparate. Hence the 'contemporary' as we know it in art is a phenomenon of complex multifariousness. The same, indeed, can be said of contemporary fashion.

Meanwhile there is always something left hanging out there, the tantalizing ineffability of 'having style'. This retains the exceptional, if mythic, quality of existing outside of time. Great art is expected to transcend the lineaments of its historically-circumscribed style, to speak to other generations in various ways; while for someone to have style is to have a *Je ne sais quoi* that is irreducible to the material elements worn on the body. Neither then, can be bought, programmed, predicted or, alas, exactly defined.

At this point we might say that art and fashion chose yet another mask to penetrate its truth. Hence the chamber of mirrors of difference and repetition that is contemporary art and contemporary fashion. Fashion itself continues to be tarred by the brush of commercialism, and when the word 'fashionable' is used in art circles it has a pointedly pejorative edge. But it is also true that the diffusion of dominance that art is experiencing in the wake of globalization – under the rather equivocal rubric of 'The Contemporary' (as it is used in art circles) – has meant that the waves of preference, exposure and interest have come, increasingly, to resemble the modalities of the way the fashion-of-one-day seeks to differentiate itself from what came before it, while also having enough space for continuity. In this climate, what fashion has over art is what Adorno, with dismissive irony, called the 'jargon of authenticity'. With fashion, authenticity comes in two forms: a creditable link to its maker, and a set of links in the history of progression, or waves of a particular tendency, look, or style. With art, authenticity carries much more gravitas and has overtones of humanity's search for truth. This quest is not to be decried, but we would not decry it in a different way with regard to fashion either. And in the absence of the standard units of measure, in the face of the 'legitimation crises' that marked postmodernism, we are faced with a relativism where the measure of quality is an uneven mixture of consensus and conviction. To us, these circumstances are compelling: the idea of the fashion system has as much to say about art, especially contemporary art, as it does of itself.

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READ ON...

Vicki Karaminas | University of Technology, Sydney
Editor: *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, ISSN: 20455852
Author: *Street Style: Shanghai*, ISBN 9781841505381

Adam Geczy | Sydney College of The Arts, Sydney University

ARTICLE

WHY WE MAKE ART

Richard Hickman, Author, *Why We Make Art & Why it is Taught*

Image: © Richard Hickman.

I WOULD SUGGEST that everyone, that is all human beings, have an innate capacity and desire for making art. However, because of art's conceptual slipperiness and the fact that it is so dependant upon culture, such a suggestion needs qualifying by taking a very broad definition of what is meant by making art. Amongst the people I have talked with about their creative endeavours are many who do not consider themselves to be artists, but exhibit all of the tendencies that artists often display: a passionate desire to create something that looks good and feels right – something that has particular significance, whether it be a birthday cake, a garden, or a hairstyle. In such activities, intuition, expression, skill and a consideration of aesthetic form – all attributes of artistic activity – are considered important. What everyone needs is the opportunity to create and, when the occasion calls for it, to create something of aesthetic significance: that is, something that has meaning for the person who created it.

The term that I prefer then is 'creating aesthetic significance'. 'Creating' because of that word's association with creativity and inventiveness, concepts that have a particular resonance when talking about human development. 'Aesthetic' because we are concerned here with the senses. 'Significance' because this is associated with meaning and 'signs' that are highly expressive and invite attention. I am not aware of any culture in the history of humankind that does not create aesthetic significance. If an individual person has not demonstrated the ability or desire to create something of aesthetic significance that is because of lack of opportunity. The urge to create aesthetic significance is facilitated through art, and where there are no opportunities to engage in art-making activities that urge is manifested in other – not always positive – ways.

READ ON...

Richard Hickman | University of Cambridge
Author: *Why We Make Art & Why it is Taught*, ISBN 9781841503783 and *Critical Studies in Art & Design Education,* ISBN 9781841502052

ARTICLE

WHO CARES ABOUT COMICS?

M. Thomas Inge, Associate Editor, *Studies in Comics*

COMICS OCCUPY LESS and less space in newspapers in the United States these days, and even when they have a page or two of their own, each strip is so reduced in size that old timers have to squint to read them. Why don't we give them more respect? These features occupy a few seconds of our time, but when done well they can put a smile on our faces for the day, and may be something to stick on the refrigerator door for others to enjoy. We should treasure comics.

For as long as we have been recording our history, people have been telling stories and jokes through the combination of words and pictures, and most nations have had a tradition of sequential or narrative art and caricature. It was not until little more than a hundred years ago that American cartoonists began to produce their own version of this distinct art form in newspapers. It came to be called the comic strip and would entertain millions of readers the world over.

Although few have recognized the cultural and aesthetic values of the comic strip, and its partner the comic book, the time has come to acknowledge that these are no ephemeral forms of entertainment, although printed on cheap paper and designed to be thrown away. Rather they are a significant part of our heritage to be cherished for their enduring artistic and social importance. Several publishers have recently understood this and are issuing handsome, hardcover complete-collections of such strips as *Peanuts*, *Dennis the Menace*, *Dick Tracy, Terry and the Pirates*, and *Gasoline Alley*.

Comic art has much in common with other forms of literary and visual expression in the modern world. As in fiction, the elements of narrative, characterization, and setting are important, and as in poetry, ideas must be developed within a very short reading time through symbol and suggestion. As in drama, a story or incident must be staged before our eyes within a box-like frame and with sharp limitations on dialogue and compressed time; as in motion pictures, visual devices such as cutting, framing, close-ups, and montage are used by the comic artist, and settings can range from the realistic to the fantastic.

Whatever they share with the other arts, however, they differ in distinct ways that are ultimately unique. For one thing, comics depend on a balanced combination of words and pictures: the one depending on the other for maximum effect. What the proper balance may be, or how much text is too much, and whether or not you can have comics with no words whatsoever are questions still open for debate. Was *Prince Valiant,* with the narrative and dialogue beneath each frame, simply an illustrated medieval romance? Was the wordless *Henry* a legitimate comic strip? What about single panels like *The Far Side* and *Family Circus*?

Several essential features distinguish comics from other art forms. For example, they appear in daily newspapers delivered to homes and therefore are available to any household member of any age. Newspaper editors therefore take careful note to be sure no constituency is offended, sometimes editing or banning a questionable strip, which usually elicits a letter or two of complaint to the editor asking why the funnies aren't funny anymore. This kind of editing frequently happened to the politically oriented *Pogo* and continues to happen to *Doonesbury*. Comics have to be politically sensitive, but the best have pushed boundaries by treating provocative subjects with sufficient skill and humour. Despite a popularly held notion, comics were never just for children.

Another distinguishing feature is that comics give us a set of recurring characters with whom we become acquainted over time. Readers gain cumulative familiarity with the characters' personalities, which essentially remain the same throughout the lifetime of the strip. As in much humour, stock or stereotype characters are common, and formulaic repetition is one of those techniques that most often make us laugh (as in Charlie Brown's annual unsuccessful attempt to kick the football held by Lucy, a paradigm of existential frustration).

Comics were never just for children.

Words are usually spoken in irregular ovals called balloons: a technique that descends from early illustrated broadsheets and political cartoons. Because of limited space, dialogue is kept to an absolute minimum and the joke or story is related with the fewest words possible – a considerable challenge to the writer. Since sounds are not possible, comic artists resort to the poetic device of onomatopoeia, and while many traditional words such as 'slam', 'bang', 'sock', or 'bump' will serve, new word coinages have also proven necessary. Thus comics have enriched American English with such contributions as 'wow', 'whap', and 'zowie'.

While we can discuss comics in such general terms, it is also necessary to observe that they are richly diverse in style and content. Styles range from the pure fantasy and surrealism of *Calvin and Hobbes* and *Krazy Kat,* to the fashion-plate art of *Rex Morgan* and *Mary Worth*, to the gritty details of realism in the mean city streets of *Dick Tracy* and *Spider-Man*. The content embraces all genres found in fiction, drama, and film – domestic conflict, situation comedy, war, the western, adventure, espionage, crime and detection, the worlds of the child and teenager, the professions, animal fables, satire, politics, science fiction, fantasy, and the absurd. Just when we think there can be nothing new, something like *Pearls Before Swine* comes along and magically challenges the existing definitions.

The twenty-first century is a time in which most of the information we need is conveyed to us visually, by way of television, film, iPod, or computer screen. Comics then, and the later development the graphic novel, are admirably suited to provide people with a cultural experience that is both emotionally and intellectually satisfying. With comics in hand, we will remain verbally and visually literate, and hopefully a little more cheerful and humane.

READ ON...
M. Thomas Inge | Randolph-Macon College
Associate Editor: *Studies in Comics*, ISSN 20403232

The visual arts matter because they are about resistance, celebration and transformation.

Teresa Torres de Eça, Co-editor, *International Dialogues about Visual Culture, Education and Art*

READ ON...

Teresa Torres de Eça | International Society of Education through Art (InSEA)
Co-editor: *International Dialogues about Visual Culture, Education and Art*, ISBN 9781841501673

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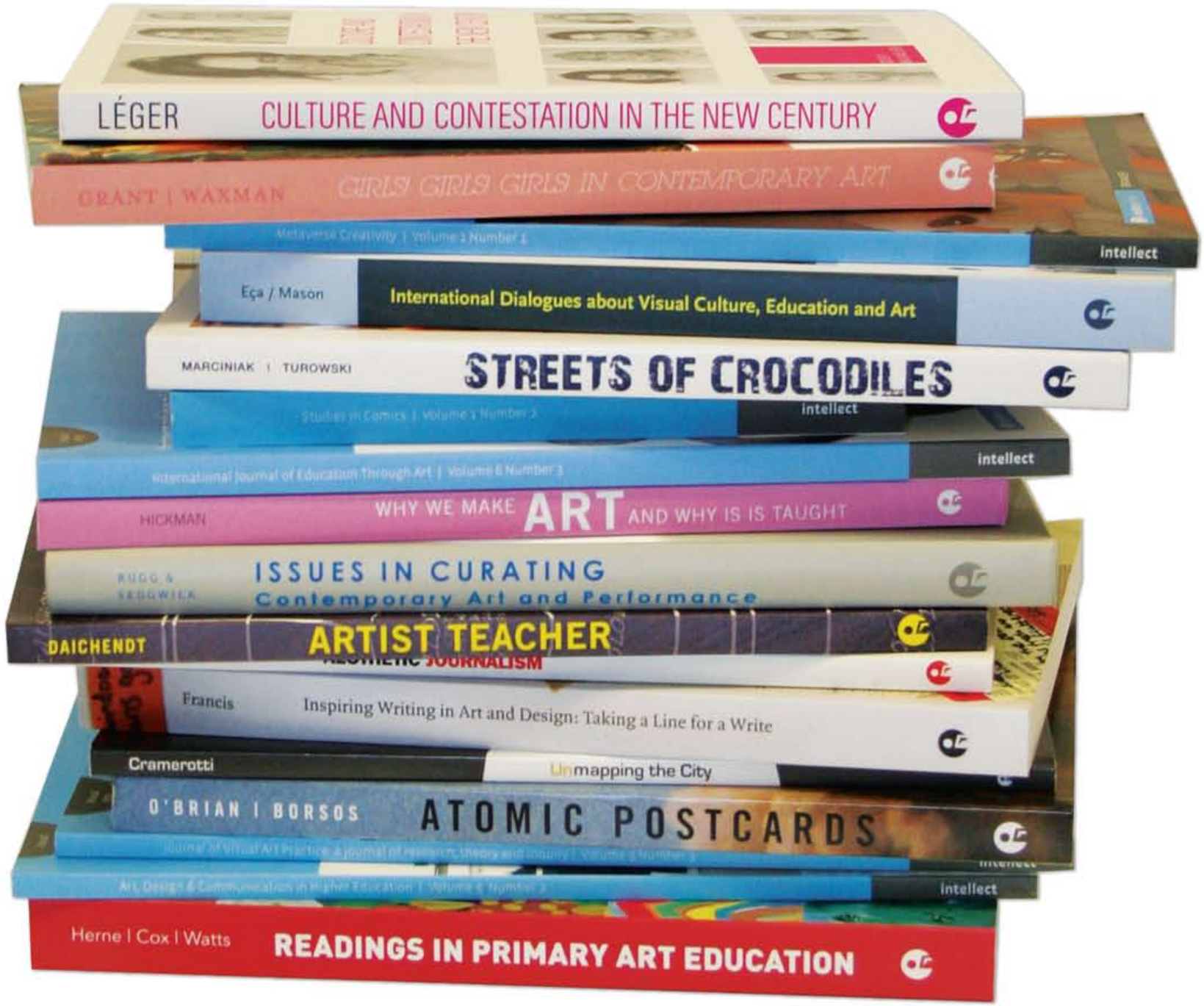

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ARTICLE

WHY DOES ART MATTER?

Pat Francis, Author, *Inspiring Writing in Art and Design: Taking a Line for a Write*

WHEN ASKED THIS question, the immediate response is to start a list of answers. I think this...then that...and...

But actually the importance of this question is the question itself. Not the answers. The answers will change through time, and for different individuals, and vary when a respondent is an artist, an observer, a critic, an audience etc.

My students study a range of art and design subjects, but as a writer and teacher I have found that the key to stimulating their writing is the asking of questions. The attempts at answers, the thoughts, the lists, the scribbling and arguments that ensue, start the line of a reflective journey that, in itself, justifies the existence of art.

It is not always about writing 'this is this', 'that is that' – setting something in stone. It is about the trying to understand, the witterings, the ruminations, the thinking out loud, the writing and not knowing what the end of the sentence is going to be, or when, or even if it is going to be a 'proper' sentence. And then something starts to happen, a random word comes to mind, or writes itself, and there is an insight. It is about the writing hand questioning the drawing hand: empathizing, challenging and remembering.

Rarely does this result in world-renowned writing, or first-class honoured essays, but it is about reflective ramblings that are much more exploratory and searching. They are not set in a formula, a style or a format. It is about seeing where the line will go, seeing where it will take you, writing without a known destination.

These ramble-some iterations may well be formed later into a publishable tract, a lucid review, the germs of a book, or an article, the seeds of a statement or caption, but these word sketches are at the heart of what art is: art matters because it is about exploring being alive.

The subtitle of my book is 'Taking a Line for a Write' and in the wordplay of the final word (write/right/rite) and in the reference to Paul Klee's exhortation to artists, I set out my pitch for a book on writing aimed at art and design students, written to inspire them into, and through, writing. They have come to college or university to study and develop art and design skills but frequently they have not thought about the writing they'll have to do.

Essays, dissertations, statements, reports, journals... Horrified, many students give up: others hate it, and most worry.

One written form that can help is the reflective journal. Kept regularly, roughly and alongside the art and design work, it is a place for thoughts, for ideas, for attempts at articulation, for reactions to research, for memories and associations. It is creative in itself and not just a chore. Often assessed in the project or unit, it needs to be a clear part of, and contributor to, the *process* of the project.

Giving a variety of practical methods, fun tasks, examples, and using references to creative writing techniques, the book tries to overcome barriers to writing. Experimenting with writing in different voices, talking to yourself, questioning and answering, interviewing yourself, drawing the journey of a project before adding words, creating a shape for a written piece (not literally but conceptually), these are some of the visual ways of making writing relate to the work. And writing about working and ideas, thoughts and feelings helps us to discover why art matters.

Writing reflects and pushes us beyond the surface, behind the mirror image, and encourages us to come at our ideas and ourselves from different directions, from other points of view.

Many artists have managed to elucidate, through writing, further thoughts to supplement, complement, and add to interpretations of their visual work. Some were, or are, great teachers; others quite private individuals who used their journals to question the unknown, to challenge themselves and give themselves a sense of doing something, when perhaps the artwork seems directionless. John Berger, Paul Klee, Vincent Van Gogh, Josef Herman, Frida Kahlo, Tracey Emin, and many others, have used words to explain why art matters, why they write, why they create and *why* they ask why.

All speak of a journey: the answers are not set in black and white, cemented in, blocked in, immutable.

They may write, as I do, 'I deny what once I proclaimed; I now understand what once was incomprehensible; I concede what once I defended; I see what once I could not feel; I contradict myself...'

And in writing that, I realize that that is what art does: we change, we age, we grow, we shrink, but we always move. We re-view, reflect, re-flex. Art is part of our journey.

READ ON...

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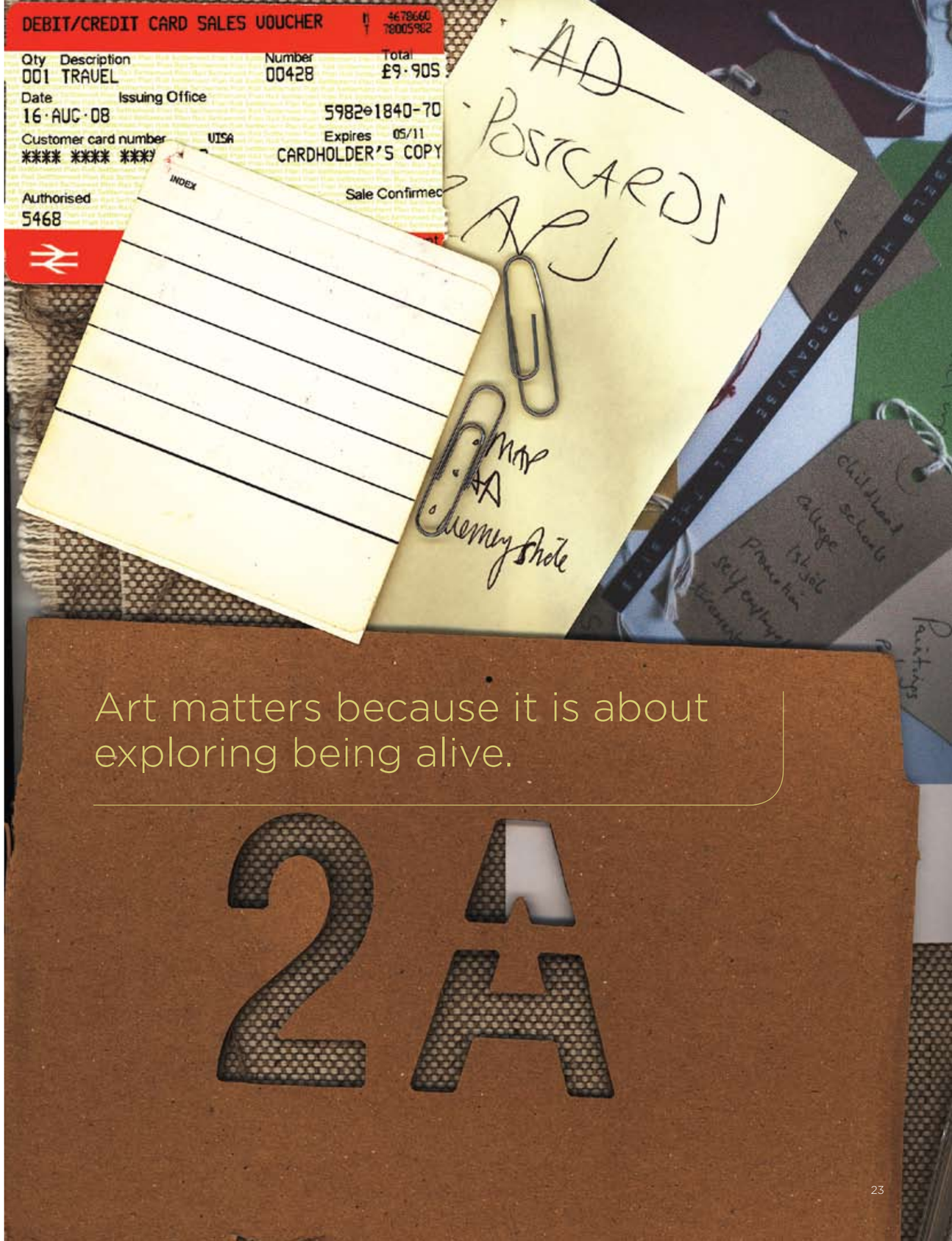
Author: *Inspiring Writing in Art and Design: Taking a Line for a Write,* ISBN 9781841502564



ARTICLE

VISUAL ART
SOME FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

Harry Jamieson, Author, *Visual Communication: More than Meets the Eye*

AS A NON-VERBAL source of information, the visual arts – distinct from the verbal and literary arts – carry their potential mainly through perceptual means, without resort to dictionaries and formalized grammar. Both the viewer and the artist-as-creator are engaged in making 'sense' of visual images, of things observed that do not carry clearly defined ways of interpretation.

Whereas the artist-as-creator has the mental and physical task of arranging the parts that make up a whole, e.g. a painting, which becomes an offering to the prospective viewer(s), the viewer has the task of perceiving the relationships between the parts that make up the whole. For him, or her, it is a process of mind, and thus it is an intellectual activity. Despite the lack of a formalized grammar, such as that which underpins verbal language, as viewers we are constantly called upon to process information of a non-verbal kind. As sentient beings, our connection with things outside our bodies is primarily perceptual. Generally speaking, it is not confined to cultural codes of interpretation. Although it must be admitted that cultural influences bear upon perception in many ways, e.g. focusing and interpreting.

As a presentation, as an offering to the visual sense, art can be seen to possess the possibility of carrying information on three different levels. Firstly, the aesthetic, the form there before the eye; secondly, as an icon, the ability to stand as a metaphor and thereby to migrate into the verbal register; and thirdly, as representation, bringing to mind, by virtue of likeness, a mental picture of place, thing or person. This uniqueness, which is not given to the verbal, can be understood as an essential contribution to the place of art, not only as a material manifestation but also as a challenge to the viewer's powers of perception and conception. Seen in this light, art matters because it can call into play a wider scope of representation and interpretation than that which is given by the verbal.

Seen in terms of information, these threefold aspects of visual art demonstrate that engagement with art practice and viewing offers a rich base for the engagement of mind. It is this engagement, first given to perception, and then to conception, that we need to explore in more detail. From this kind of approach we become aware of the limitations of judging art merely on the basis of its creative potential, which, by the way, relies on the fact that it is less constrained by rules than the verbal (which has an established grammar). Freed from highly restricted conventions, (although it must be admitted that art as practice is not entirely free from conventional forms of representation) art as a non-verbal form of representation lends itself more readily to individual invention. The work of Van Gogh and Cezanne are good examples of this propensity. The point here is that art as a form of visual representation can be more individualistic, less constrained by rules and regulations than the verbal, and thus more allied to man's natural state as a gatherer of sensory information.

Art matters because it is seen not as an 'extra' but as an extension of our sentient and mindful being.

From the viewer's perspective it calls upon a scan or search across a visual image. In terms of information theory, it amounts to a search for information. Such a search may be guided by previous experiences or expectations.

How this search is carried out relies on one fundamental factor: the awareness of difference. It is here that visual acuity takes centre stage, that is to say awareness of the 'difference that makes a difference', of the boundaries that allow for naming. It is here that we can see the unfolding of aesthetic appreciation, and, as such, the necessity of the kind of learning that encourages such awareness. This leads to the proposition that difference can be seen as a generator of information; put bluntly, without difference there is total unity. Difference requires at least two elements, and it is in the space between these elements that information arises. It is in this space, in this void, that the mind fills the gap, putting together that which is separate. This process can be described as 'in-forming'.

The amount of information gained, and here we will use the term 'information' in the active sense as that produced through an awareness of difference, is subject to this necessity. Without this awareness, without this ability to distinguish one thing from another, one colour, or tone from the next, there is little information to be found, and thus little to engage the observer as viewer.

This idea of difference as an informational source places added emphasis on the active role of the artist as a creator of information, as a person who first of all perceives or creates designs from which difference can be extracted from the interplay of the parts that make up the whole. The work of Bateson (1980) provides a useful reference for those who wish to explore more fully the notion of difference. His theorizing on difference as an informational source is significant, not only to a theory of mind but also for the implications it holds for our concern with art. For the purpose of this article it could be extended to include reference to similarity, to the notion of degrees of difference. The important point is that whether we speak about difference or similarity both require the existence of at least two entities, and that the difference between them does not inhere in that which is observed, only in the mind of the viewer.

By juxtaposing elements of various kinds – for example, colours, tones, etc. – in certain relationships, the artist presents opportunities for the viewer to extract differences or similarities of a particular kind. The artwork itself, we might say, becomes a catalyst for organizing/informing the mind of the viewer, and the amount of information it contains becomes a personal matter. When difference or similarity is neither perceived nor intuited, there is no gain of information of an aesthetic kind. Again we come back to the 'eye of the beholder' – a cliché but here we have given it greater significance.

The comments above focus on perception: the perception of difference and similarity arising from an awareness of elements given to vision, and their place as sources of information. But we cannot afford to neglect the place of conception in our assessment of information. A particularly good example can be found in the use of imagery in art, which, as icon, is intended to provoke a particular response from the viewer. Here its role is that of metaphor, in which case there is an absent partner. While the image is there before the eye, the viewer is called upon to produce, from memory, an idea or image that bears some association, a particular meaning. There is a difference between the observable image and the mental image: a conceptual relationship is found and this relationship becomes the meaning to that particular viewer. However, on those occasions when no relationship is established, the icon, as visual image, fails to serve the purpose for which it is intended.

Art is more allied to man's natural state as a gatherer of sensory information.

Again we may notice the primacy of the concept of relationships in our enquiry into information. In the case of perception the focus is upon observed relationships, which exploit the difference between entities. Difference, as already stated, is not substance, but a mode of apprehension. It is heightened by visual acuity, by a scanning process that seizes on the apprehension of those subtle differences that evade the inexperienced.

In the case of iconic images the relationship becomes one of finding difference of a different order, as in metaphor; it becomes a fusion of difference, of conceiving similarity in the difference. Again, it is not substance but an idea based upon reference. In either case, perceptual or conceptual, relationships have to be found, or, in the case of the artist as practitioner, to be created.

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READ ON...

Harry Jamieson | University of Liverpool
Author: *Visual Communication: More than Meets the Eye*, ISBN 9781841501413
Contributor: *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, ISSN 14702029

Q&A

Art matters more through being everything that is not anything else.

Jac Saorsa, Author, *Narrating the Catastrophe*

WHY DOES ART MATTER?

IN THE STRUGGLE that inevitably characterizes creativity, what may sometimes seem a purposeless endeavour is, in fact, the only thing that matters. Because I am an artist, art matters, but art matters more through being everything that is not anything else. Art is the beginning and end of human expression: it is a fundamental manifestation of the soul, a story told, everyone's story. Through art nobody dies.

Art is not in technique, or in beauty, or in nature, because the nature of art itself resides deep in shadows of the psyche, where rational thought fails to shine. Art is in passion and emotion, in pain and suffering as much as in joy and laughter, in shock and disgust as much as in security and love. Art is in the physicality of creation and the sensuality of interpretation. It provides alternative perceptions and becomes the 'Other' in relations between reality and imagination. Art is the antithesis of the practicality by which it is brought into being. It matters because it binds meat to mind and offers our individual souls a chance to bond.

READ ON...
Jac Saorsa | Transart Institute
Author: *Narrating the Catastrophe*,
ISBN 9781841504605

Image: © Jac Saorsa. *Reworked*, oil on canvas.

ARTICLE

THE ENCOUNTER

Vince Dziekan, Author, *Virtuality and the Art of Exhibition*

UPON A ROUND wooden tray, a proportioned arrangement of two small cups of coffee, complemented by a tea service made up of cup, pot and small vessels containing warmed milk and a chiselled mound of raw sugar partnered by a neatly-balanced spoon. We manage to negotiate the expansive, glass-lined space of the café without incident, arriving at a small table with an aspect facing onto the rooftop sculpture garden. Espressos for E. and I: Darjeeling for my wife, K.

Our meeting, today, had been coordinated over a tightening spiral of communiqués. Initial entreaties, like 'I will be in San Francisco in mid-June so it would be great if we could get together' becoming progressively more fine-grained and specific: 'I'll e-mail you when we are in town'; 'So, if you are free tomorrow afternoon...'; 'OK. SFMOMA. TXT on arrival'; 'Arrived. Waiting in foyer by the members desk'.

We settle, easing into the view that opens cinematically before us. It's a languid early summer afternoon and as the sculpture garden is fortuitously empty at the moment. We are afforded an otherwise uninterrupted composition of the city skyline above the garden's tree-lined boundary: punctuations of green emerging from a backdrop of predominantly grey surfaces, borders and ground. In the near foreground, pressing up against the imaginary picture plane, an angular figure – Alexander Calder's *Big Crinkly* (1969) – furtively eavesdrops on us as we begin to sip hot beverages between exchanges of word and gesture.

E. begins recounting a story about another occasion here when he had arranged to meet with a visiting German art critic. His storytelling gently animates the emptiness outside being shared between the afternoon and garden: from the vantage of one of the wooden benches, E. and his guest distractedly look on as a group of school children reluctantly congregate around Calder's *stabile*. A docent attempts to lead a discussion above the hush of only-partially stifled conversations and the urban pitch that seeps up from street level into the otherwise pristine sanctuary of the rooftop enclosure. A volley of questions, appeals and encouragements ensue. Certain students take the initiative of responding, reticently at first, to the solicitations of the guide, who perseveres in challenging them to interrogate the qualities of the abstract artwork. Slowly, answers emanate with growing volume and confidence from the group encircling the sculpture. I visualize this audible stream of descriptors as a 'tag cloud' of keywords rising from the huddle. The three planar surfaces that hang off the balancing rod, poised at the apex of the sculpture, form improvised speech bubbles of black, blue and grey in which words like 'metal', 'black' and 'hard-edged' are framed. I imagine the artist and critic conversing at a close remove, commenting between themselves on the

Image: © Vince Dziekan. *Fontana – Shadows*, SFMOMA, 2011.

dynamics at play in the scene transpiring before them; the spoken English they exchange coloured by their respective Franco and Germanic accents. The lesson's pedagogy unfolds. The sculpture continues to stand resolute in the face of such scrutiny as interjections turn their focus to describing the shapes of its various voids, negative spaces and the shadows that trail from the twin supports of its firmly planted legs and unfurling harlequin tail.

Conversations turn, as they do.

We finish our drinks and decide to explore the museum. We immediately gravitate to the turret, drawn to the natural light that infuses the interior spaces of the museum. We walk back and forth across the fifth-floor truss bridge to register our presence there on Bill Fontana's *Sonic Shadows*. I relate to E. how the architect Daniel Libeskind employed similar materials for the viewing platform in his design for the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester. (I make a mental note: I wonder if while designing his addition to the Contemporary Jewish Museum, located just a few blocks away on the other side of the Yerba Buena gardens, Libeskind was influenced by this particular architectural feature found in Mario Botta's building?) The surfaces of oscillating panels rigged by Fontana to the braces of the walkway catch the late-afternoon light entering through the oculus skylight, and, in so doing, set themselves apart from the pervasive white anonymity of their surrounds. Next, we move on to the galleries showing works by Belgian video artist, David Claerbout. There, E. and I discuss techniques used to achieve the expansive temporality of a piece such as *White House* (2005) and those of contemporaries such as John Gerrard and Victor Burgin; K. expresses her preference for the beauty and gentleness of *The American Room* (2009–2010).

E. has to catch his ferry back across the bay. We mutually exchange resolutions to remain in touch at the entrance to *The Steins Collect* exhibition. K. and I continue on, diligently following the path leading us through successive galleries showing assorted works by the likes of Cezanne, Renoir, Picasso and Matisse. But even so, my curiosity is drawn inexorably towards the archival materials that are carefully arranged in assorted shallow vitrines. Intimate snapshots revealing miniature salon interiors; their frames filled to overflowing with the bohemian accumulation of early-twentieth century Parisian sitting rooms and ateliers, walls piled high with an array of paintings. In certain cases, paintings and objects that can be distinguished within these pictures escape their black and white confines and rematerialize in the gallery with a self-assurance that asserts their enduring legacy amongst a wide world of things.

Later on, after returning to our hotel, I open an e-mail in which the following question is embedded: 'Does art matter?'

Yes, I imagine it does.

EXCERPT FROM:

'The World Is Everything That Is The Case'
(ISEA 2011, Istanbul)

READ ON...

Vince Dziekan | Monash University
Author: *Virtuality and the Art of Exhibition*,
ISBN 9781841504766

Image: © Jastrow, 2006.

Q&A

Art is a building block of civilization, and a building block of art is the image.

WHY DOES ART MATTER?

ART IS A building block of civilization, and a building block of art is the image. The image takes form in an abundance of different ways with the sole purpose of communicating. Images like the Chauvet Cave painting in Paris communicate human life over 300 decades ago. Images like Lukasa, an African memory board, pass on cultural traditions from generation to generation. One of the most sustainable and resilient images in history – the alphabet – enabled humans to translate speech into visual form and communicate across geographic borders and cultures. When the image of the written word is unable to permeate the intellectual wall of illiteracy, we resort to using other types of images, such as photographs and illustrations. However, even those images can result in communication problems, particularly when the culture reflected in their design does not match the culture of the user.

For instance, during knowledge-acquisition in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), under-represented youth form mental images of their own cultural identity in relation to what they are learning. The odds of them communicating effectively decrease when there is a lack of cultural resonance between their self-image and STEM images; and the effect of communicative ineffectiveness can be catastrophic to them and to society. Thus, Design Your Future, a maths art workshop, teaches youth mathematics using images like the Nok clay sculpture and graffiti. Images can change the world for the better when they yield communicative effectiveness, but cultural resonance is only one criterion for such effectiveness.

Read on...

Audrey G. Bennett | Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Author: *Engendering Interaction with Images*, ISBN 9781841504810

ARTICLE

CREATIVITY IN THE STREETS

G. James Daichendt, Author, *Artist-Teacher: A Philosophy for Creating and Teaching* and *Artist Scholar: Reflections on Writing and Research*

STREET ART IS an exciting and relevant example of creativity that has popped up in cities around the world. Installed in context-specific locations that reflect on broader cultural happenings, it is often dubbed the art of the people. The act of installing this renegade art form may be controversial, and yet the commentary that ensues from a successful placement touches upon an aspect of the art experience that should be celebrated. It is also part of what makes art so important and vital to engaging with our surroundings.

Art is a cultural product, invented and experienced by humans in a particular time and space. It can serve many goals and purposes but is subject to redefinition over time. This is a necessary presupposition in order to understand the history, philosophy, criticism and production of art. However, the importance of street art and its significance in the twenty-first century can be better understood when we examine it as a creative product.

Andy Warhol helped redefine what we consider art when he popularized McLuhan's (1967) statement: 'Art is anything you can get away with'. Whether it's business, commercialism, or just an idea, art is so much more than an aesthetic arrangement of colour and line; street art, in particular, is a type of human communication, with each other and with our environment. Street artists like Space Invader continually expand upon Warhol's idea with an unusual palette: tiles arranged to form a mosaic in the shape of a vintage video game character. Through their placement and 'invasions' into cities (where some have been installed in high numbers) these 'Invaders' critique the larger ills of a saturated visual marketplace.

Understanding the personal and societal impact of art requires some reflection on the activity that makes it possible. Dewey (1938) captured the essence of the art-making process with the concepts of impulse, desire, and purpose. These three ideas are helpful when visualizing the number of decisions that an artist makes over time. Essentially when an impulse is frustrated, desire is consciously selected from a library of impulses; and when a certain desire is selected with a method and direction then a purpose is generated. This purpose can then take the form of a finished piece of art.

The creative process is made up of many small decisions, but purpose is important for understanding the relevance of art. The final art product is symbolic of the many decisions and experiences that went into its creation. Street art and its placement is a reaction to the modern utopia that developed around the world during the past century.

> IN DETERMINING WHY ART MATTERS, BE SURE TO LOOK CAREFULLY AROUND YOU.

The city walls and urban environments constructed in the twentieth century represent much of the progress promised by proponents of modernism. The International Style of architecture, mainly influenced by the Bauhaus teachers and students, dramatically altered the way we as a public interact with public space (Daichendt 2010). New materials and advancements in construction allowed living spaces to be built much more cheaply and in a more pragmatic fashion;

the use of glass and the box-like design favoured by architects sought to take advantage of space and create a living utopia. This influence is heavily present in the urban environments of the United States, where decorative exteriors were removed and society was left with cold and plain rectangles: skyscrapers of metal and glass resembling shoeboxes. A critique by Tom Wolfe in his witty text *From Bauhaus to Our House* bellows that the folks who work in these buildings can barely appreciate them:

> Every child goes to school in a building that looks like a duplicating-machine replacement-parts wholesale distribution warehouse. Not even the school commissioners, who commissioned it and approved the plans, can figure out how it happened. The main thing is to try to avoid having to explain it to the parents.
>
> (Wolfe 1981: 1)

Instead of explaining, street artists have reacted against these developments. This is why Lewisohn (2008) sees street art and graffiti as a form of anti-modernism. The modern infrastructure and living spaces in which these artists have grown up is not working and their art is a form of social critique.

Ultimately the great experiment that was modernism did not succeed and street artists' creative use of the environment awakens the public from their slumber. Gablik (1985) argues that modernism has indeed failed and that as a result of this thinking there is no way to measure success, determine standards, or formulate what a work of art is. Recent developments in street art have addressed these concepts, in addition to the changing role of education, professionalism, and politics in the art world and beyond.

In determining why art matters, be sure to look carefully around you. The creative and critical voice of the artist is well kept in the ethos of street art. A far from perfect genre of art, its practitioners should be praised for utilizing a keen eye and reflective processes to help us all take notice of our surroundings.

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READ ON...

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Author: *Artist-Teacher: A Philosophy for Creating and Teaching*, ISBN 9781841504087 and *Artist Scholar: Reflections on Writing and Research*, ISBN 9781841504872

ARTICLE

GREAT ARTISTS MUST BE GREAT ENTERTAINERS

Gail Pearce, Editor, *Truth or Dare*

> It is not sufficient to compare the great directors of cinema with painters, architects or even musicians. They must be compared with thinkers.
>
> (Deleuze 1986)

ART IS MY gauge of the world: current, past, future. I can discover what is important this month, what was important that year – an act of creation parallels the original moment and develops it, drawing out aspects that otherwise may have remained hidden or unnoticed. Hindsight, alternative perspective, a need to comment in some way, all offer opportunities for art. Every time I write 'art' I see a platitude – the subject is too broad, the potential for bland overviews too great – but the thinking contained and/or hidden in 'art' is where the potential for complete engagement lies.

Nowadays I am starting to believe that great artists must be compared with entertainers. However, great entertainers must still have the strongest concepts.

> If we see very few things in an image, this is because we do not know how to read it properly.
>
> (Deleuze 1986)

Right now I am being drawn into immersive theatre, and noticing how narrative in interactive work is what makes it powerful. Learning to read in an all-encompassing environment is probably closer to the experience of a theme park.

Art now, particularly the work that overlaps cinema, and even encroaches on theatre, is open to, encourages, the audience to participate. Showing art as film in a gallery gives the viewer much more of an option to walk away. Viewing art as a web page runs the risk of allowing the audience to escape by a single click. Making an art installation that relies on the audience to participate in an activity is a part of how we play with and exploit technologies as they are developed. The task now is to keep the audience entranced, which is all the harder when the option to leave is so much easier.

Our pleasure in understanding the connection between the actions we take and the results that ensue is direct. It is connected to power and reaffirms our position as active beings in the world. The intervention of technology can enhance our awareness of this direct connection. The frustration of a technical disconnect is profound.

The pleasure we might take in a painting or static work of art could be said to be more cerebral. Emotions engage more slowly: time is required. As an example of our reputed shorter attention spans and need for more and faster entertainment, the interactive experience offers appropriate snippets to entice, and addictive rewards to hold.

Knowing how to read an image properly relies on the time the image requires, and often this is relative to the era the image was created. We expect to spend time looking hard if the painting we gaze at is in a gallery: time with the crowd drawers, the blockbuster exhibitions. In fact it is extremely hard to see the images because of the crowds, and they are usually of work made in the past, often at least 100 years old. Recent work, particularly digital and interactive artwork, has a smaller gallery audience pull (although online numbers are much higher); it is usually much easier to view because of the lack of pressing crowds, and thus much easier to spend time looking without being jostled. The space in a digital gallery offers the irony that nowadays, on the whole, audiences spend less time looking, absorbing and understanding.

Knowing how to read an image properly also relies on the medium. If the work is in immersive theatre, publicized by word of mouth, via social networks, theatre by Punchdrunk so much. It offers the same clues and random discovery options. Whereas *Mirror, Mirror* told its tale via technology (cutting edge for its time) and was designed for a single user, the appeal of the large-scale discovery, the crowd pleaser, and the flash mob excitement conspire to reflect today's technologies, more hidden, more known, and perhaps only as vaguely understood.

My stories are based on documentary themes – the evidence often researched from day-to-day news items and the idiosyncrasies of human behaviour. In 1995 Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller were creating *The Dark Pool* (1996), where a room full of books and artefacts told stories through sound triggered by devices in the space. Shown for the first time in the UK in Oxford in 2008 I was unaware of the work in 1995, but the creation of a mysterious environment, and a story to be guessed, has similarities to *Mirror, Mirror*.

THEME PARKS, GAMES AND INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS ALL QUALIFY AS ART.

a cult-like status develops and larger audiences are attracted, left free to roam and discover stories for themselves. Clues of one kind or another are distributed in the environment so that the audience can begin to understand what the meaning is. Technology is usually hidden and art is provided to tease meaning. Spending time in the environment allows further discoveries to be made; this could also be said to be true of online worlds.

An early online world was *Myst*, a graphic-adventure video game designed and directed by the brothers Robyn and Rand Miller. I came across it in 1995 and became entranced by the story and the interactive aspect of discovery. It also offered clear boundaries as to the sort of experience that was available: it was solitary; it was not online; it was not a dungeons and dragons game using text rather than image (indeed, Tim Berners-Lee was only just presenting the world-wide web); there was a sense of the new and of discovery. It was an accessible means of using a computer to find a story, and the predetermined options were well disguised (*Myst* was developed by Cyan (now Cyan Worlds) and is published and distributed by Brøderbund).

Perhaps as a result I made an interactive installation that relied on a hidden story and used DOS programming and simple technologies to achieve an immersive setting for a mysterious tale of murder and revenge (*Mirror, Mirror* 1996). No wonder I enjoy immersive

Ernest W. Adams suggests that the vast majority of what the game industry does is not art, but popular culture: 'Art is purchased in art galleries by art connoisseurs, it is criticized by art critics, it is conserved in art museums. It is not sold in toyshops' (Clarke and Mitchell 2007). However, as more and more toys are sold in gallery shops, and art is overlapping with theatre, dance and music, the boundaries we rely on have already shifted to such a degree that theme parks, games and interactive environments all qualify as art and the spectacle has infiltrated everywhere. What I want to believe is that art can bypass the spectacle and keep an audience enriched, questioning, and engaged.

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Read on...
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Editor: *Truth or Dare*, ISBN 9781841501758

ARTICLE

ART AND REVOLUTION

Lauren Mele and Alfredo Cramerotti, Author, *Aesthetic Journalism*

Image: © Ashraf Foda.

THE MOMENTUM OF instantaneous and mass communication is forever intensifying. Upon the advent of any violent occurrence or political conflict, there is almost an immediate reaction: camera phones are pulled out and events are streamed, uninhibited, live on the Internet. On 28 January 2011, the Egyptian artist Ahmed Basiony was shot and killed by a sniper in Tahrir Square, making him one of over 800 people killed in the revolutionary uprising. On the day before his death he wrote on his Facebook page, before making his way to Tahrir Square to participate in the fight for revolution, 'Bring a camera with you and don't be afraid or weak' (El Noshokaty 2011).

Art can be a powerful productive force and instrumental in sparking change or critical thinking, with the advent of recent uprisings and events in the Middle East and Asia we are reminded of this capability. However, art as a tool for mobilizing thought and action is not new; in fact, history has seen this happen time and time again. Kazimir Malevich, one of the leaders of the Russian avant-garde movement (post the October Revolution in 1917) and the father of supremitism, believed that pure form and positive change were transcended through abstraction. Art for Malevich was a tool capable of imposing a new social order, though this could not be done without difficulty; Soviet authorities confiscated his paintings for not portraying social realities during a retrospective of his work in the 1920s (Kramer 1990).

Sadly this type of discrimination by governments has not ceased. Political censorship of information, visual and textual, has always been present in recorded history; there has never been a point in time where certain information or images were not taboo or illegal. The detention of Ai Weiwei in March 2011 suggests how powerful, influential and potentially threatening the Chinese government regard his artwork. In an interview conducted five days before his disappearance he said, 'I no longer exist in the eyes of official China. If you enter my name in an online search machine, there appears a notice of failure... but at least I still have 70,000 followers on Twitter... I comment on problems of society, so people can see the flame is still burning' (Weiwei 2011).

In a sense, art can express a view, an emotion or opinion during a time of censorship and political unrest, and it can make a difference. This is not to say that artists are revolutionaries themselves, but the presence of thoughtful acknowledgment of conflict can provoke change. Ai Weiwei's disappearance inspired global frustration about the lack of freedom of expression in twenty-first century China. Art is not and cannot be separated from contemporary life, as Weiwei's case proves; it is a reactionary discipline and does not exist in a vacuum.

The motivation for revolutionary beliefs and endeavours, however, does not necessarily stem solely from politics, but from everyday life. The Italian futurist movement of the beginning of the twentieth century was inspired, in part, by artists' need for a change in tradition and in the status of art in bourgeoisie society. The futurists were motivated by the belief that formal innovative thinking could provoke much-needed changes in the social and aesthetic order of society (Bowler 1991); indeed art and social and political life cannot be separated when looking at the Italian futurists' motivations.

History clearly has a habit of repeating itself; Kazimir Malevich was not the first artist to push for social and political change through art, and Ahmed Basiony will not be the last artist to challenge the 'normal' and fight for freedom – inside the studio and out. Basiony's work is now being exhibited at the Egyptian pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale. In *30 Days of Running in the Place* (2010), Basiony does exactly what the title describes: he films himself running every day for 30 days, whilst wearing a body suit that visually shows the changes in his body temperature and vitals. The work demonstrates the frustration of 'running and getting nowhere', perhaps reflecting his feelings about the general progress of political change in Egypt. Although he did not survive to see the change he had been yearning for during his life, his piece echoes the fight.

> ART IS A REACTIONARY DISCIPLINE AND DOES NOT EXIST IN A VACUUM.

With the ever-growing presence of social networking and the instantaneous spread of information, art and the socio-political cannot be separated. Visual narratives are increasingly powerful and – to some parties – threatening modes of communication. 2011 has seen artistic ventures and projects rub shoulders with major political issues and ruffle the feathers of many individuals in public positions of power. Post the Wikileaks dilemma, information is becoming close to impossible to harness and conceal. One single event encourages a domino effect of reactionary events. Art will never cease to thrive and triumph in times of struggle and will always remain an important visual and theoretical counterpart to the everyday.

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READ ON....

Alfredo Cramerotti | Curator
Author: *Aesthetic Journalism*, ISBN 9781841502687
Lauren Mele | Independent scholar

Q&A

Critical analyses of comics can sometimes pay surprisingly little attention to the visual elements of the text.

Julia Round, Editor, *Studies in Comics*

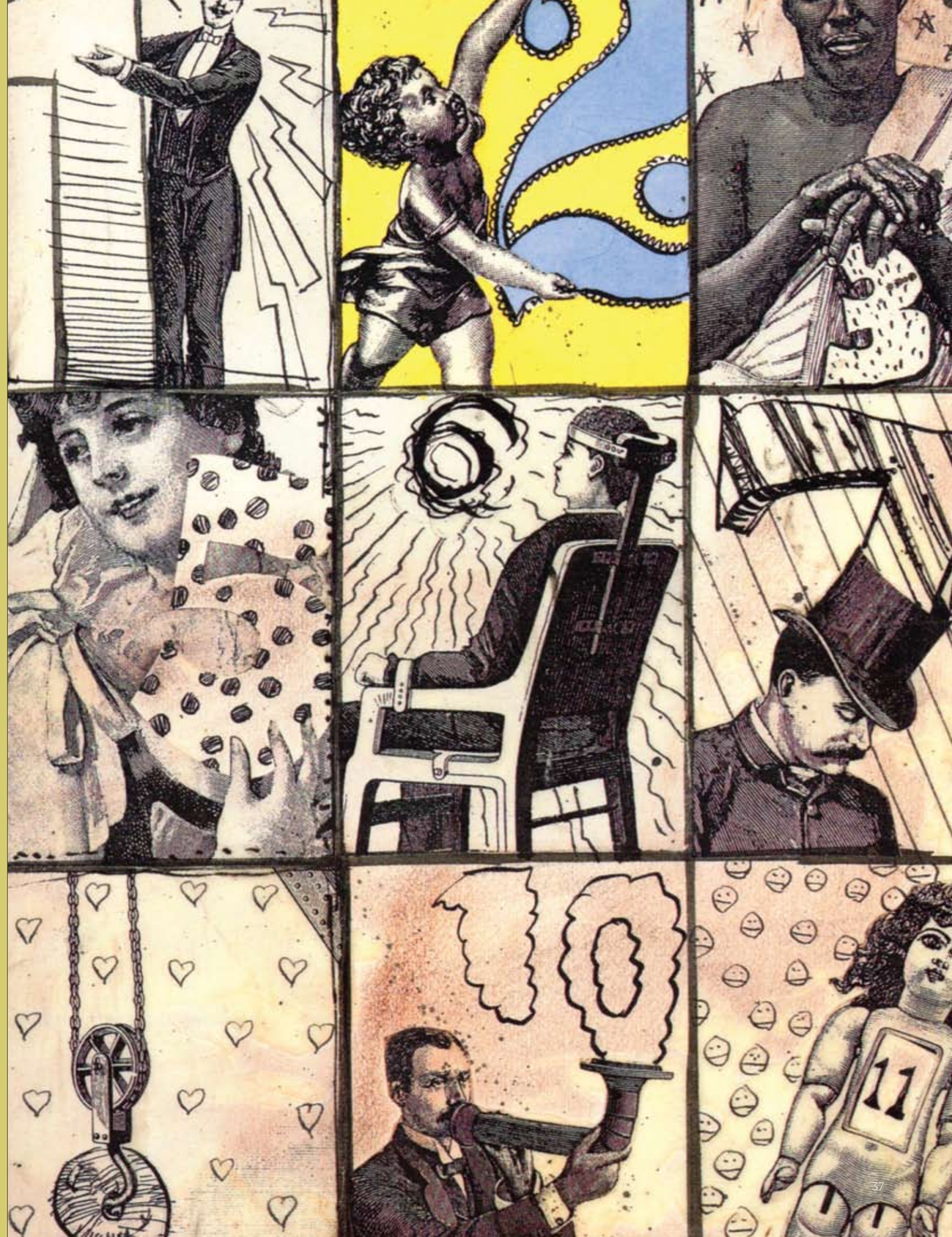
COMICS ARE OFTEN analysed in terms of their storyline or narrative: a situation that has been further encouraged today by their redefinition as 'graphic novels'. A focus on artists in the earlier days of the industry gave way, in the 1980s, to an increasing focus on the 'star writer', exemplified by Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Frank Miller and others. Today, critical analyses of comics can sometimes pay surprisingly little attention to the visual elements of the text.

This seems an odd situation when considering the importance of art. In comics, style and colour provide emotion; realism (or lack thereof) affects our interpretation and identification with characters or scenes; the visual perspective of panels can indicate falsity or otherwise affect the telling of the tale; and the page layout means that certain scenes are emphasized over others (for example via 'splash pages'). From a semiotic perspective it may even be appropriate to define the comic-book panel as a kind of hybrid signifier (whose signified is a fictional moment or scene within a tale); in each panel, word and image are inextricably bonded in a relationship that can be subversive, complementary or reflective.

At *Studies in Comics* we encourage contributors to approach comics from a variety of disciplines in order to explore both the visual and verbal elements of each text.

READ ON...

Julia Round | Bournemouth University
Editor: *Studies in Comics,* ISSN 20403232



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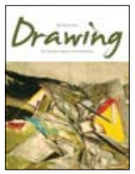

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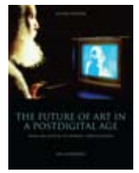

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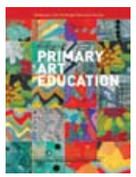

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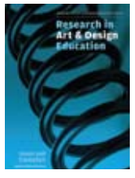

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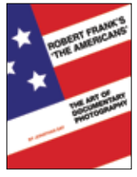

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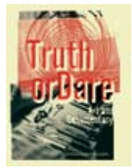

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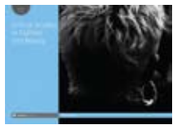

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