THE RECURRENCE OF 'POP' IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

When considering the vast output of contemporary visual art as a whole, one can discern the great amount of contemporary art that conveys certain aesthetics or motifs that indicate a recurrence or a reappearance of 'pop' elements characteristic of the Pop Art movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Signifying the continued esteem for the popular images, styles and accessibility of Pop Art, many contemporary artists continue to draw inspiration from Pop Art's ideas and traditions to add innovation and a 'trendiness' to their own works. The persistence of the pop element therefore generates an inevitability to explore its continuance in contemporary art.

Since the emergence of Postmodernism after the 1960s, and in subsequent contemporary artistic production, there has been a segment or division[1] within the arts in which there is a strong recurrence of 'pop', or the pop mindset introduced by the Pop artists[2] of the 1950s and 1960s. The incorporation of symbols from popular culture, the aesthetics and methods of commercial culture in art production, a Postmodern camp mentality, the integration with other areas of the visual arts such as graphic design and animation, and the close interconnectedness with technology, are all amassed in those forms of contemporary art that constitute a prolongation of the pop tradition.

'Pop', or pop-inspired art, as it is discussed in this study, conforms to specific criteria and characteristics (these are discussed in further detail in the

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[1] The continuation of the pop aesthetic in contemporary art figures only as a section within the broader realm of contemporary art, as there are other discourses, media and themes featuring in the current artworld. Therefore, pop is discussed only as *a* 'movement' or style within the wider spectrum of contemporary artistic production.

[2] 'Pop Art', referring to the Pop Art movement during the second half of the twentieth century, is spelt with capital letters in this study, in order to differentiate it from 'pop' (lower case letters), which defines a 'style' in art-making that builds on the traditions and stylistics of the Pop Art movement. This pop element in art, which manifests in much of Postmodern and contemporary art, forms the core of the research as it relates to the 'revivals' of Pop Art.

following chapters): It carries representations of popular iconography, or includes icons of popular culture, and is indeed an art *about* popular culture. Pop portrays the world of man-made or synthetic culture rather than 'nature' or objective reality, by employing the images and products of commercial culture and treating them as high art. Pop often subscribes to elements of kitsch or camp, frequently containing ironic or subversive undercurrents, and utilises the strategies of appropriation, eclecticism and intertextuality. As an art about popular culture, the inspiration for pop is fed by the media, influenced by the content and stylistics of film, television, magazines, animation, graffiti, advertising, and various forms of graphic design. Pop easily transgresses the lines that separate fine art[3] from more commercial forms of visual production, as it thrives upon the principles of deconstruction and pluralism. It can therefore also be described as an art of the grey areas,[4] since pop often re-materialises the difficulties concerning the definition of art, and problematises any clear distinctions between the various disciplines or spheres of contemporary visual production.

In an article that deals with recent works of South African artist Conrad Botes, art writer and lecturer Ashraf Jamal (2004:42) describes the term 'pop' as follows:

> Pop … is not the popular (though it may include this category); rather, pop is an exploration of surfaces, a serialisation of taste … An art of the now, it understands influence and echo as pastiche. Self-mocking and wry, it is an art perfectly suited to a postmodern sensibility; that is, a sensibility that hovers between intention and the act, between style and its copy, between meaning and sound bites, between art and its undoing.

The world at present is one of fluidity and indistinct boundaries, and while this fluidity is manifested in all aspects of life, it is often exceptionally apparent in the world of visual culture. In contemporary westernised societies, the various

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[3] For the purposes of this research paper, the term 'fine art' refers to the realm of so-called 'high art' and includes specific, traditional art practises such as painting and sculpture.

[4] The 'art of the grey areas' is a style of artmaking that is situated outside the traditional boundaries of art. As discussed further in chapter two, this type of art is usually positioned between different fields of visual production such as art and design, for example. It is therefore both art *and* design, and neither strictly art *nor* strictly design.

manifestations of visual culture are becoming progressively more intertwined and amalgamated, paralleling the increased interconnectedness of technology and information systems.

Contemporary art does not carry a single, fixed identity - it takes on many different and unconventional forms and, arguably, it has an equal status with other forms of visual production such as design. In addition, cross-fertilisation between the different domains of visual production is more pronounced in contemporary visual culture than ever before. What is prevalent today is an inter-disciplinary visual production (Walker 1994:119), with a blurring of the boundaries between different visual media. Already evident in the Pop Art movement is the narrowing of boundaries between artistic visual production and advertising especially, as theorist Jean Baudrillard (1994:87) states: "Today what we are experiencing is the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising". The aim of this study then, is to document and express some of the ways in which visual art has, since the advent of the Pop Art movement, broadened its various faculties, crossing its borders into adjoining areas such as industrial and graphic design, the mass media, advertising, animation, and other aspects of popular culture. An important feature of pop, as described in this study, configures around the conflating of high art and popular culture production.

If the Pop Art movement figured the institution of the pop mentality and the popular element within high art – a first wave of pop as it were, then this study proposes a second and a third wave response to the codes and aesthetics of pop. At the height of Postmodernism in the 1980s, and with the rebirth of painting, the continued incorporation of elements from popular culture, as well as the graffiti movement, the second wave materialises into Postmodern pop. Contemporary pop, or the third wave of pop[5], is signified by the sustained intertextuality and eclectic aesthetics, the merging of the different

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[5] The terms 'first wave', 'second wave' and 'third wave of pop' are the author's own terms, employed in order to structure the argumentation of the study into three distinct 'phases' of the appearance or re-appearance of the pop element in visual art, and are not the appropriations of an already existing literary source.

spheres of visual culture, and a growing relationship between high art and the mass media, in an aftermath of Postmodernism.

As will be discussed in the following chapters, when fine art moves closer to more commercial forms of visual production and other disciplines within the visual arts, the effect produced seems to be a pop aesthetic. Pop, as described in this study, demonstrates a union of contemporary high art with popular culture that is also characteristic of the Pop Art movement.

This study proposes to examine some of the lingering effects of Pop Art in selected contemporary works of art as a result of the growing relationship between high art, the mass media and popular culture. The Pop Art movement and the following second and third wave responses to the aesthetics of pop are discussed in light of a number of imperative arguments proposed in this study. These include the collapsing of the boundaries between high art and low art, or elite and mass cultural realms, evident already in Pop Art's indebtedness to the codes, subjects, and techniques of mass communication and the media; the representation of 'culture' as opposed to 'nature', insofar as it concerns the simulation of pre-existing signs; the intention to produce art that is interpreted as a natural response of the artist to his/her surroundings and experience of reality – that of the contemporary urban environment; and the blurring of boundaries that once separated high art from other visual areas, such as graphic design and illustration.

As mentioned previously, the study focuses on a specific "movement" or style of art production evident within the world of contemporary art, and therefore does not include detailed discussions on other genres and schools of thought within contemporary artistic practise, such as New Genre Public Art, Political Art, Performance Art, Land Art and numerous other forms of contemporary art-making. There are also countless artists and works that could be included in this study, nevertheless, because of the space and time limitations of the mini-dissertation, only a select group of artists and works is discussed. The works chosen for this study illustrate certain stylistic tendencies and pop

iconography that are relevant to the argumentations of this study and these are discussed accordingly. The works cited are therefore not necessarily interpreted and analysed in depth, especially concerning content and inherent meaning of the works. For the purposes of this study precedence has been given firstly to surface aesthetics as they illustrate the various arguments made in the study. [6]

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This study aims to provide an exploration of the recurrence of pop as a trend in contemporary visual culture, which will be presented in the form of an overview of broad tendencies, rather than a detailed interpretation or an analysis of content. This study is therefore a speculative and explanatory overview of a tendency in contemporary visual production, focusing principally on surface aesthetics and stylistics.

At this stage it is important to mention the research difficulties arising from the this particular study, as firstly there are very few conclusive literary resources available on certain specific arguments proposed in the study, such as the amalgamation of contemporary high art and graphic design, the influence of technology on such an amalgamation, and the contemporary pop element in visual art. Much of the research has been based on short articles found in magazine publications on the relevant visual fields, and as far as it was achievable the attempt has been made to ground the research in the appropriate literary theory. The decision was therefore made to relate and connect the argumentation of the study as much as possible to applicable visual examples that demonstrate the different contentions as laid out in the study.

The theoretical framework employed in this study is primarily based on Postmodern theories as they apply to the visual arts, with specific focus given

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[6] This study also examines the effects of pop in the South African context where this is applicable, and includes references to the author's own artworks where they serve to demonstrate some of the arguments made in this study

to the binary opposition between so-called high art and applied or low art. This area is the domain of contemplation for the Pop Art movement, considered by many to be the 'beginning' of Postmodernism in the arts. Relevant to this focal point are the theories proposed by the British Independent Group, especially those of Lawrence Alloway. The theories of Arthur C Danto, Frederic Jameson and Andreas Huyssen on the socio-political contexts of Postmodernism have also provided insights into the changing attitude of visual art during the second half of the twentieth century. As antithesis to Postmodern theory, Modernism is also referred to in the formalistic theories of Clement Greenberg in particular.

Post-structuralism is a system of thought furthermore employed in this study, as it has significantly influenced the development of Postmodernism and contemporary artistic practice, as for instance with Conceptualism. Postmodernism, fed by post-structuralist and deconstructionist systems of thought has "led to new attitudes …and a pluralistic acceptance of many approaches to art-making…" (Lovejoy 1997:89). Post-structuralist theory brings to this study the constant implication of binary oppositions, such as 'high art/low art', 'fine art/applied art', high art/commercial art', 'art/design', 'nature/culture' and so on. The research endeavours to show how the constant oscillation between the oppositions is progressively being narrowed, and that these binaries are also increasingly co-dependant. This is especially true for areas such as design and art, and the section dealing with the amalgamation of art and design, (with regard to stylistic forms rather than subject matter), is largely based on the suppositions of design critics Alex Coles and Rick Poynor.

The influence of Postmodernism on urban society is also briefly discussed with attention directed toward debates concerning globalisation and technological development, and their effects on contemporary aesthetics within the visual arts, with Margot Lovejoy and Jean Baudrillard's theories on technology, the media, and simulation employed.

The method of research employed in this mini-dissertation consists primarily of a literature study that comprises relevant sources that have been consulted, and their various arguments and viewpoints assembled to form the theoretical basis for the study. A description of visual examples from selected artists' works follows throughout the study as they illustrate the main contentions made here, such as the examples that support the main arguments concerning the blurring of boundaries in contemporary visual production.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter Two commences with a detailed outline of the three waves of pop, beginning with the Pop Art movement, its effects on Postmodern art, and the enduring presence of pop in contemporary art. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to an examination of contemporary pop, examining its characteristics, aesthetics and methods of production. The aesthetics of kitsch and camp, usually evident in most pop creations, are discussed with primacy given to the camp mentality present in the works of mostly younger generations of contemporary artists. The art of commercial culture is an integral component of pop that focuses on the art of the commodity, as well as the commodification of the art object (Taylor 1992:178), as exemplified in the work of Takashi Murakami, for example. Another central factor in contemporary pop is the transgression of the boundaries between the different visual media, and the increased interconnectedness of visual disciplines, particularly within the fields of contemporary art and graphic design, where there is a cross-fertilisation of styles and aesthetics. Lastly, the continuation of pop is abetted by the emergent relationship between art and technology, the effects of globalisation and the consequent cross-pollination of artistic styles and movements internationally.

Chapter Three directs the focus of the argumentation in Chapter Two toward aspects of contemporary South African art. South African popular culture and its unique identity are examined, and the stimulation gained from South

African popular culture, as well as global influences on local art production, is investigated within artworks that subscribe to a South African pop aesthetic.

Chapter Four concludes this study and provides a summary of the main contentions made in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER 2: POP ART AND ITS REVIVALS

This chapter provides a genealogy of pop, outlining Pop Art and its resurgence in a second and third wave of art forms with a pop aesthetic. The pop aesthetic, introduced and popularised by the artists of the Pop Art movement, has resurfaced continually since the Pop Art movement, and features strongly in contemporary art production and visual culture in general. The second part of this chapter is therefore dedicated to an examination of the third wave of pop, or contemporary pop, and the key qualities and criteria that contribute to its pop aesthetic.

Figure 1: Faile, *10 Ways; Untitled; Dog* (2004)
Mixed media
Dimensions unavailable
(Blackley 2004:15).

Figure 1 is one example of the works produced by a New York based group called Faile, and portrays various allusions to pop, Pop Art, and popular culture. Clear references to popular, religious and commercial iconography,

such as Mother Mary and Jesus Christ, the use of typographical elements from magazine cut-outs, the bright, synthetic colours, and the influences of comic illustration, graffiti tags, and graphic design, all show the indebtedness not only to the Pop Art movement, with particular references to the works of Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, but these are also the qualities and characteristics of contemporary pop art.

Faile was formed in 2000 by artists Patrick McNeil, Aiko Nakagawa and Patrick Miller, with the aim of exploration and collaboration with other artists and designers world wide on various projects and experiments (Blackley 2004:14). Introduced to the world of street art by McNeil, the group's ideas were based around large-scale silk-screen illustrations and stencil paintings, which were plastered at night on the walls, streets and bus shelters of public spaces in cities around the world.

Faile's art is more or less a form of advertising by which they achieve fame and recognisability amongst members of different sub-cultures and ardent collectors of graphic design memorabilia. Faile tries their hand at all forms of visual production, such as designing for fashion shows, toy design, and collaborations with the British design company, Tomato. The clear definitions between artist, designer, and illustrator are blurred, and the need to distinguish between them has little importance for the group. As one of the members confirms, "… we are part of a really interesting time in art and design where people are using their work and voice … in ways that bypass a more traditional route" (Blackley 2004:17).

The example of Faile illustrates a clear relation of contemporary art to that of the Pop Art movement, with its elements of the 'popular' and recognisable iconography and the use of less traditional means of producing art. It also represents the collaboration and growing inter-relation between different areas within visual production such as graphic design, advertising, street art and high art, so that they are co-dependent rather than existing separately. Faile's methods show a distant resemblance to that of Andy Warhol and his

assistants in the Silver Factory, especially in its 'mass production' with the silkscreen technique.

The Pop Art movement left a permanent effect on the development of subsequent artistic production and later 'movements'. Its repercussions are still felt by many contemporary artists who continue to draw inspiration from pop. Since the Pop Art movement of the 1950s and 1960s, countless artists have responded positively to the existence and development of popular culture and the mass media, and enthusiastically incorporate its subjects and processes into their own works. Like their Pop Art predecessors, these artists find creative stimulation from popular culture and the products of mass media, and utilise its imagery and methods, raising it to the level of so-called high art. This they often do by adopting a connoisseural, camp or ironic attitude towards it.

The following section of this study outlines the three waves of pop as they have manifested in the visual arts since the Pop Art movement.

2.1 THREE WAVES OF POP

2.1.1 FIRST WAVE: THE POP ART MOVEMENT

In 1952 a group of young artists, architects and intellectuals began to meet at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, for discussions and lectures. [1] The Independent Group (Lucie-smith 1969:133), as they were known, was largely responsible for the formulation, discussion, and dissemination of many of the basic ideas of the British Pop Art movement (Alloway 1974:31). Under the leadership of Lawrence Alloway, the Independent Group discussed British Pop in terms of an art form that made use of the objects, materials and technologies of mass culture, often borrowing from advertising, photography, comic strips, and other mass media sources. Intrigued by the impact of

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[1] Some of the most important members of the Independent Group included artists Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, architects Alison and Peter Smithson, and critics Lawrence Alloway and Reyner Banham (Lucie-smith 1969:133).
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American mass media on British culture after the end of the Second World War, they investigated the areas of popular taste and kitsch, previously considered only to be outside of the realms of high art. Alloway (1974:31-32), who first coined the term 'Pop' Art, wrote that:

> The area of contact was mass-produced urban culture: movies, advertising, science fiction, Pop music. … We felt none of the dislike of commercial culture standard among intellectuals, but accepted it as a fact … and consumed it enthusiastically. … To take Pop culture out of the realm of "escapism", "sheer entertainment", "relaxation", and to treat it with the seriousness of art.

Although the Pop Art movement had its inception in London, abetted by the development of the Independent Group, it had a second birth, independently, in New York (Lippard 1974:9). Most of the American Pop artists, such as Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and James Rosenquist shared a background in the commercial art world, and often chose to live and work in New York, which represented not only the centre of the art world, but also of the advertising world as the foundation of consumer culture. During the 1960s, the mass media was an undeniably dominant institution in the life of the average American. Correspondingly, images and methods derived from the mass media predominated in American Pop Art.

The influences of advertising and mass communications had enormous impact upon the visual arts in New York. The urban environment of the city, with its billboards, advertisements, and popular culture iconography everywhere, inspired the American Pop artists (Alloway 1974:53). Already New York had become the new art capital of the Western world, which can be attributed to the Abstract Expressionists, where previously Europe had dominated the art world. Abstract Expressionism had given the American artists recognition and placed New York at the forefront of the Modern art movement. However, by the late 1950s, Pop artists, searching for new possibilities, questioned Abstract Expressionism, which to them had become too inward, unrealistic and elitist. The Pop artists aspired to create a kind of art

that reflected the complex, contemporary world of the mid-twentieth century urban environment.

Following immediately after what they saw as the pretentious self-indulgence of the Abstract Expressionists, the Pop artists endeavoured to re-focus art on the objects of everyday-reality and argued for a new definition of what constituted an artwork.

For the most part, the Independent Group in Britain and the forerunners of Pop Art in America, such as Tom Wesselman, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, and Andy Warhol, developed their ideas independently of one another. That so many artists had similar ideas simultaneously, underscores the apparent cultural need to define what was happening in society, not only in the art world, but in the domain of mass culture: the rise of consumerism and commercial culture after the Second World War.

In its most recognised forms, such as Andy Warhol's 'soup cans' and Roy Lichtenstein's enormous cartoon paintings, Pop Art was known for its embracing of the post-Second World War rise of mass production, by adopting the symbols of commercial consumption along with the bold and often oversized aesthetic of commercial art and advertising. The links (both visual and conceptual) between Pop Art and the mass media were significantly evident, and indications of cross-fertilisation between the two visual spheres already began to materialise (Marmer 1974:148). Some of the Pop artists, such as Andy Warhol and James Rosenquist, also came directly from the world of commercial art, having being signboard artists, billboard painters, or having worked in the fields of advertising and graphic design (Lippard 1974:90).

The Pop artists made use of secondary sources, mostly taken from the mass media (Lippard 1974:82), rather than working from direct observation of nature or objective reality. Their assertion was that in a mass media, consumer society, the individual's life was more filled with man-made things than natural ones. They sought to combine art with everyday life and culture by employing

images and material of popular culture and mass media as sources of iconography, techniques and modes of representation. Pop Art took as its subjects not direct reality, but existing representations and interpretations of reality, found in the humanly constructed world of popular culture. It therefore marked a definitive shift from nature (or objective reality) to culture, concerning the object of scrutiny in a work of art (Harrison 2001:11). Never before had commercial subject matter been utilised as a total basis for fine art to such an extent as within the Pop Art movement, where themes of mass culture replaced nature and reality as subject matter and sources of contemplation in the arts.

Figure 2: Andy Warhol
Four Marilyns (1962)
Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen on canvas
73,7 x 58,4 cm
(www.allposters.com).

Andy Warhol's serialised portraits of celebrities illustrate the situation well. In 1962 he made a series of serial portraits of Marilyn Monroe (figure 2), in which he duplicated a single frontal photo of the actress, and reproduced it several times with the silkscreen technique, while adding only slight modifications to the original (Huyssen 1989:53). In this manner, Warhol's art becomes a reproduction of a reproduction. It is no longer reality itself that provides the

content of the work, but rather a secondary reality in which the image of a mass idol appears innumerable times in the media.

By drawing the attention of the audience to the imagery of everyday urban life, Pop Art not only demanded the elimination of the separation between high art and low art, but the merging of art with daily life and reality. The intention was to connect art with everyday existence. In *After the End of Art* (1997:131) Arthur C Danto further explains this connection:

> Pop Art set itself against art as a whole in favour of real life. But …
> … beyond that … answered to something very deep in the human
> psychology of the moment … some universal sense that people
> wanted to enjoy their lives now, as they were, and not on some
> different plane … for which the present was a preparation.

The latter situation that Danto describes, is the "different plane" toward which the Abstract Expressionists tended. Their art was of a deeper, spiritual nature, concerned with unconscious processes, and they saw themselves as "shamans, in touch with primordial forces" (Danto 1997:130). This type of moral and spiritual preconception inevitably brought a feeling of exclusion for those who did not necessarily have aspirations for its high ideals. Pop Art, on the other hand, brought the realm of art closer to the here-and-now for viewers, with recognisable imagery that generated themes they could easily relate to their own existence.

During the 1960s, the Pop Art movement was at the summit of what was taking place in the art world, though by 1970, Minimalist and Conceptual movements had already acquired the attention of the art world and critics.[2] Nevertheless, Pop Art had found a ready audience among both art collectors and consumers of mass-culture for whom it signified the ultimate intersection of high and popular culture (Taylor 1989:14). After its climax, Pop Art moved somewhat toward the background of the art scene, but only until the mid-1970s, when it re-emerged in Britain's artistic Punk Rock scene, or what is

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[2] With the exclusion of the older generations of Pop artists who continued to produce works of Pop Art.

known as the New Wave scene (Taylor 1989:18), with similarities between Pop Art and New Wave music, graphics and fashion, recognisable in the imagery and work of both 'movements'.

2.1.2 SECOND WAVE: POSTMODERN POP

By the end of the 1970s, Pop Art had completely resurfaced among a whole new generation of artists and graphic designers, drawn by the prospects of reworking and appropriating second-hand material, and incorporating the low-art materials of popular culture in their work. This 'second wave' of pop art was attributable to the emergence of artists such as David Salle, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Sherrie Levine and others. With the death of Andy Warhol in 1987, Pop Art further established its second phase, given rise by museum retrospectives, new publications on Pop Art and numerous Pop Art exhibitions. Postmodernism's emergence as a worldview in the mid-1970s, undeniably endowed Pop Art with a further capacity for expanding, by affirming the Pop movement's significance, and therefore stimulating a new wave of critical attention. Principle issues such as appropriation and simulation, and the commodification of art (Taylor 1992:178), as exemplified especially in Andy Warhol's work, coincided with those issues at the heart of the Postmodern debate during the 1980s (Harrison 2001:208). Postmodernism's investigation and further exploration of pop manifested in Postmodernism's own dependence on mass media imagery.

Accordingly, during the late 1970s and 1980s, a new number of new pop artists emerged, who again began appropriating images from both the history of art and the mass media, with differences only in intention and practise. The appropriation of previous styles, elements and images had become the basis for a large quantity of Postmodern art, and revealed a continued interest in the self-conscious attitude cultivated by the Pop artists. This section within Postmodern art is therefore identified I this study as Postmodern pop, or the second wave of pop. The Postmodern response to pop reinforced Pop art's representation of 'culture' as opposed to 'nature',

reflecting westernised urban society in the capitalist-consumerist phase (Walker 1994:88). An example of such a response can be seen in the earlier works of Jeff Koons that included a commercial arrangement of consumer products, such as Hoover vacuum cleaners and Spalding basketballs exhibited as art (Rosenblum 1992:18). (The art of Jeff Koons is referred to in further detail in the following sections).

Pop Art was the 'transition' from Modernism's obsession with progress and its rejection of art's history to the Postmodern sensibility that embraced diversity in subject matter and methods, and freely appropriated ideas and images from all facets of culture, past or present, high or low. For the Postmodern 'appropriationists', as for the Pop artists, popular culture and the mass media were vast reservoirs of creative information to be tapped. Fredric Jameson (1991:2) explicates this as follows:

> The postmodernists have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader's Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the B-grade Hollywood film.

The Modernist supposition of only one authentic and international style was rejected in favour of the idea that a plurality of styles co-existed, without any one dominating. Eclecticism and hybrid styles became fashionable, often in the form of 'quotations', pastiche, intertextuality, and a recycling of history and past styles (Walker 1994:88). Complexity, ambiguity and contradiction were the values that replaced Modernism's purity, simplicity and rationality. Mixtures of high and low culture, fine art and commercial art styles were encouraged as a way of producing visual art with multiple meanings that could ideally be appreciated by audiences from different levels of sophistication and degrees of knowledge (Walker 1994:14).

Postmodernism and Conceptualism emerged in part as a reaction against the formalism articulated the Modernists. Postmodern art brought about a deconstruction of Modernism and the conventional definition of what constituted an artwork. The conceptual art of Marcel Duchamp can be

considered an example of the undoing of such conventional definitions of the art object, because they "recontextualised and reoriented art away from its own identity as a form …towards the kind of instability and undecidability of Postmodernism" (Lovejoy 1997:81). As seen with Duchamp's ready-mades, Postmodernism encouraged the assumption that every object or image carries a meaning and subtext, and is worthy of critical attention. Furthermore, Postmodernism promoted the idea of multiple meanings associated with a single text or image, as Margot Lovejoy states:

> Postmodernism views text and images as radically polyvalent. Around 1960, French Structuralist, and Post Structuralist theorists such a [Michel] Foucault, [Roland] Barthes, and [Francois] Lyotard attacked the very concept of objectivity and of fixed meaning…

Postmodernism, and especially Conceptual art, had its origin within Post-structuralism (Harrison 2001:13) and deconstructionist thinking, and subsequently, "…as all deconstructivists have discovered, there is no single meaning to any text." (Woolley 1992:202). Deconstruction as a philosophy affected the arts by destroying assumptions of fixed meaning in favour of a polysemic position in which a plurality of meanings coexist. This meant not only the negation of absolute and fixed meaning concerning the content of a work of art, but also ensured a fluidity and flexibility regarding the definitions of what art is. The theorist Paul Wood (2004:21) describes this process as follows:

> … [The] evolution of the conceptual neo-avant-garde into a variety of hybrid practises, mixing photographs and texts, performances and installations, and making increasing use of the new technology of video… . Such art questioned the object of art … largely out of a sense that, in its fixation on a purified aesthetic, art had failed to come to terms with the wider modern condition in which it was practised.

Postmodern and deconstructionist art validated a less purified aesthetic, in which the borders around different genres, media and subjects could be crossed. As mentioned previously, pluralism brought about a situation in which no single artistic style dominated, but many existed at the same time. Pluralism manifested in the visual arts in various ways, one of which resulted in

an increased inter-disciplinary correspondence and a transgression of the margins between the different areas of visual production. Boundaries became permeable, and fine art, design, advertising, architecture, fashion and filmmaking began overlapping in an intertextual appropriation of styles and methods. [3]

There was also a transgression of boundaries between high art and more commercial forms of art. A case in point is the exhibition *Keith Haring, Andy Warhol and Walt Disney*, organized by Bruce D Kurtz at the Phoenix Museum in Arizona in 1991 (Walker 1996:13). Walt Disney, an icon of American mass culture, was treated as an artist comparable and equal to Warhol and Haring. Disney created an animated empire featuring *Mickey Mouse*, *Donald Duck* and other characters that became the ultimate example of popular or commercial art's mass appeal. Andy Warhol was the first to utilise the icon-producing effects of the mass media in his art. His incursion into the aesthetic territory of mass media icons gave licence to the next generation, as represented in the exhibition by Keith Haring. Haring's drawings on billboards, advertising posters and subway walls imitated advertising's context and addressed the mass media's populist audience (Kurtz 1992:13). Each artist artistically represented the pulse of American popular culture, and the high-art-low-art scale between elite and commercial art was undermined by the comparison of Disney animations to the work of artists such as Warhol.

Visual artists, including David Salle, Sherrie Levine and Barbara Kruger, began producing artworks by re-appropriating the images, styles and conventions of representation of the mass media, cultivating irony, aesthetic distance, ambiguity and contradictions to reveal the hollowness of popular media stereotypes.

David Salle in particular made a significant contribution to the resurgence of painting that occurred in the 1980s after the declaration of its so-called 'demise'. It is noteworthy that his visual style of intertextual juxta-positioning

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[3] An example of Deconstruction and Conceptualism's transgression of borders, such as the substantial recourse to design and typography, is signified, for instance, in the work of Barbara Kruger.

and layering of images to generate visual complexity was typical of much of graphic design, video art and pop music videos during this time (figure 3). Salle openly appropriated the images of consumer society that had initially attracted the artists of the Pop Art movement. Salle took his images from both high and low culture, selected from a variety of sources such as films, graphic design, comics, soft-pornography and artworks from the past (Livingstone 1990:226).

Figure 3: David Salle
Bigger Rack (1997-8)
Oil and acrylic on canvas
244 x 320 cm
(www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/david_salle.htm).

Salle's art represented a possible response not only to the 'death of painting' crisis, but also to the situation of image-overload and excess of information associated with a media-saturated environment (Baudrillard 1994:80). The fragmented randomness and overlapping of images in his paintings prohibits the depiction of actual space or a coherent narrative or meaning. This can be likened to the condition of contemporary visual culture in which images,

linked only by a chain of associations, constitute the visual environment of contemporary urban culture.

Postmodern art displays a borrowing of whatever images have attained the status of cultural signs – images communicating meaning because of their commonness and recognisability. It can therefore also be said that the postmodernists often make use of clichés. One artist who has successfully capitalised on the use of clichés, is Jeff Koons, whose work is considered in the following sections.

2.1.3 THIRD WAVE: CONTEMPORARY POP

In much of contemporary artistic production, the various media and art forms are interacting more and more, and artistic expression is becoming increasingly multi-media in character (Jameson 1991:4). It is clear that the borders that separate the different forms of visual art are more porous than before, and that rigid differentiation between contemporary high art and more commercial forms of art are liable to further deconstruction.

Contemporary works of art defy categorisation and can no longer be called artworks by virtue of their specific visual properties alone. Perhaps the most defining aspect of contemporary art is its indefinability. The growing speed of the transference of ideas, money, information and culture around the world seems to have taken hold of the art world, and many of the boundaries and distinctions within art production have loosened, so that high art, popular culture, the mass media and the applied arts often merge and collaborate. Analogous to the Pop artist's incorporation of elements from applied or commercial art, many contemporary artworks show an integration not only with the technologies and methodologies of mass media, such as film and the use of computers, but also with the visual and aesthetic elements of popular culture and commercial art (Walker 1994:14). The third wave of pop, or contemporary pop, is therefore primarily defined by an integration of the different areas within visual production, and of 'high art' and mass culture.

Steven Henry Madoff (2004:sp) describes this kind of visual art in the introduction to *Art on the Edge: 17 Contemporary American Artists* as follows:

> … the easy glide between the fantastic and mundane, the large scale that seeks to turn every picture into a spectacle, the interest in pop culture, and the fluent use of technology are essential to so much of [contemporary] art. The mass media – television, movies, pop music and videos, the Internet, video games and commercial graphics – are the air in which contemporary art breathes, the mirror in which artists see themselves, the filter through which their objects pass. … It is unlikely that the lessons of art history … have had any greater influence on them than the last 30 years of film and TV.

The language of contemporary art, like the media-saturated, multi-cultural westernised world, is polyglot, receptive to the influences of the different spheres of mass-culture. It manifests in the fluidity, diversity and great variety of contemporary art. Art production in the form of painting, sculpture, photography, installation, video and so forth, represents both the individuality and pluralism at work within the world of current visual art. It embodies the "great flattening" (Madoff 2004:sp) or a democratisation of the arts that creates equality among mediums, approaches, styles, traditions, technologies and methods of display.

One important reason for the recurrence of pop iconography in contemporary visual art, and the growing relationship between art and the mass media, is the expansion of mass communication systems during the second half of the twentieth century (Harrison 2001:20). The arrival and development of television, as well as the escalation of graphic design, print media and advertising, prefiguring the information age, brought about a greater dissemination, diffusion and awareness of popular culture within westernised societies. Analogous to the development of the mass media, were globalisation and cross-cultural influences during and after the Cold War, which conveyed in particular American popular culture to Europe and the East. This resulted in a worldwide awareness and fascination with American culture. The pop element in contemporary art is still fed to a great

extent by the production of American popular culture, but as the following sections within this chapter shows, there is currently a growing fascination with popular culture production from the East, such as Japanese anime culture for example. The recurrence of pop is therefore intimately tied to technological developments, information circulation and globalisation.[4]

Contemporary pop continues to be an art that is predominantly about manufactured culture or synthetic culture rather than nature and objective reality, comprising more the assemblage of ready-made elements than the creation of organic compositions. Theorist Marco Livingstone (1990:247) states accordingly that:

> Faking, copying, appropriating and simulating one thing for another, artists have continued to meditate on concepts of originality and authenticity in ways that display the lasting inspiration of the Pop Art movement.

Pop's use of media images, the representation of ready-made objects as art, the methods of seriality and repetition, and the constant reference to mass production, verify the synthetic, simulated nature of pop, and provide a 'truthful' representation, as it were, of the synthetic environment of contemporary urban society, with its increasing simulacra and simulated visual realities.

Jean Baudrillard (1994:125) describes the contemporary urban environment as an aestheticised hyperreality – an illusory, mediated world affected by the media in its role of simulation, in which the real is beyond representation because it functions entirely within the realm of simulation. Media saturation, or an image and information overload contributes to a loss of 'reality' that is experienced by global urbanities. Popular culture and media images dominate contemporary westernised societies, and also their sense of reality. Images, copies, simulations and representations have been circulated by the

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[4] The influence of technology and globalisation upon the arts is further explored in the last section of this chapter.

mass media to such an extent that there are no longer any authentic originals.

Artists, whose subjects comprise the various aspects of popular culture, can therefore be considered as responding to the increasing authority and dominance of the mass media in shaping their society's collective sense of reality. They reflect on this new 'reality' of their urban environment by representing a second-hand, appropriated version of the visual environment of advertisements, television programs, and commercial commodities, while also drawing inspiration and stimulation from the same man-made culture (Walker 1994:88).

For the body of works done in partial fulfilment of my Master's degree, [5] I have also drawn upon the visual productions of mass media culture, exploring popular culture's intrusion into the dreams and realities of the individual in contemporary urban society - the way media images insinuate themselves into the individual's unconscious like unexpected guests. As an art *about* popular culture, I have appropriated from the content and stylistics of everyday visual culture, such as film and fashion photography, television, and certain modes of graphic design and illustration, creating works that are both a product of popular visual culture and my own subtext or observation of it (figure 4). The experience of reality in the westernised urban environment to me becomes an experience of fragmented 'clips' and 'snippets' of cultural images, artefacts, digital screens and bright pantone colours. There is no coherence felt, nor the need to create logical order and sense out of this environment of endless floating signifiers - only the compulsion to re-appropriate whatever has left an impression on the mind.

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[5] This exhibition of a body of works forms the practical component of the Master's in Fine Arts degree at the University of Pretoria, and is titled *Through the Looking Glass.*

Figure 4: Lize Muller
Keep Talking (triptych) (2006)
Oil and acrylic on board
1840mm x 2760mm
(Photograph by author).

Many contemporary artists are similarly responding to their surroundings by appropriating from man-made visual culture, and writing in the introduction for *Vitamin P: New Perspectives in Painting*, Barry Schwabsky (2002:8) states accordingly:

> One can wonder whether today's painters consider themselves heirs to a tradition that stretches back to Giotto … or if they feel themselves utterly cut off from all that, participants in, or competitors with a wholly immediate image world that includes billboards, video games, magazine ads, pornography, instructional diagrams, television, and an infinite number of other things.

In terms of source material and stylistics, contemporary visual art is showing little restraint and hesitation in borrowing from already mediated, manmade, mass-culture. Many artists agree that if one of the responsibilities of artists is to

represent and record the world around them, it would mean that they have to reflect the constructed world as well, including the images of mass-culture that surround them daily. Along these stipulations it seems only sensible to recognise the complexity and diversity of contemporary westernised urban culture, and its impact on the visual arts.

The Pop artists already shared this sentiment, as Edward Lucie-Smith (1994:231) states: "… what they share, is the tone and imagery of the modern megapolis, of majority living, of men penned in cities and cut of from nature". He continues elsewhere, "the main activity of the Pop artist … is not so much to produce works of art, as to make sense of the environment" (Lucie-Smith 1994:232).

Contemporary art often engages a multi-disciplinary discourse, utilising a diverse body of skills and people to ultimately connect a variety of audiences with a substantial discourse pertaining to relevant issues that shape the contemporary world. The relationship between artist and viewer has grown increasingly complex from the second half of the twentieth century, and contemporary art is also becoming increasingly more global. This causes a gradual breaking down of cultural barriers that separate elitist high art from the public forum of the everyman (Walker 1994:14). As argued in the last section of this chapter, the globalising of artistic trends and the mounting connection with audiences perpetuate the popularity of pop imagery in contemporary art.

Julian Stallabrass (1999:4) describes a movement in British art that he has coined 'High Art Lite', which has figured predominantly since the 1990s, and features the works of the younger generations of British artists. High Art Lite relates closely to what this study describes as pop. Most significantly, High Art Lite and contemporary pop share a fascination with material from the mass media, such as "television programmes, films, tabloid newspapers, and the major and minor obsessions of these popular organs: drugs, sex, violence, music, celebrity, UFO's" (Stallabrass 1999:4). The employment of subject matter and themes from popular culture, the novel, fresh and 'designed'

appearance of the works and the element of humour and irony, are what distinguishes not only the High Art Lite movement but also all contemporary works of pop. The following section of this chapter is therefore dedicated to an outlining of these various characteristics of contemporary pop.

2.2 CONTEMPORARY POP

The following section systematically examines contemporary pop by way of breaking it down into subdivisions relating to the central criteria or features inherent to pop. It presents first the fact that pop often carries a strong element of kitsch that often translates into a subtle irony, and can therefore be read as subscribing to a camp mentality. Subsequently, it is demonstrated that pop is an art of commercial culture, appropriating the images, subjects and methods of commercial and mass culture, while often transforming the art object itself into a consumable commodity. Thirdly, the significance of the collapsing of boundaries between different visual media is surveyed, with specific emphasis given to the area where design and art overlap and cross-fertilise, generating a potent pop factor. Lastly, the significant influence that technology, information systems, new media and globalisation have on the development and distribution of pop is examined, revealing the grounds for pop's 'global' or 'universal' aesthetic.

2.2.1 POP AND THE AESTHETICS OF KITSCH AND CAMP

Contemporary pop often encompasses a strong association with camp and the ironic humour that ensues from the employment of kitsch. This section examines the accounts of kitsch and camp and their relationship to the recurrence of pop in contemporary art. In dealing with this relationship, the study turns first to Clement Greenberg's theories on kitsch.

Clement Greenberg's cultural position and conceptions regarding the preservation of culture had its most evident expression in "Avant-garde and

Kitsch" (1939). In this essay, Greenberg (1939:11) articulated both a critique of capitalist culture and a concern for the continued existence of so-called "genuine culture", or the preservation of cultural standards that he perceived as the responsibility of the avant-garde. Greenberg argued that the survival of genuine culture was under threat, first owing to the rapidly disappearing class of the "rich and cultured" (Greenberg 1939:9), and second to the emergence of mass-culture (or the "rear-garde"), and its commodities, which Greenberg termed kitsch. Greenberg conceived of an oppositional and hierarchical relationship between 'high' culture and mass-culture, with high culture logically being superior to mass- or popular culture.

For Greenberg, the only art that could be of real value and substance would exclude everything except its own properties and materials. Only the art object that is paint on canvas and whose subject-matter is paint on canvas, could be acknowledged as pure and avant-garde art. For a time Greenberg's suppositions governed the production of visual art. The Abstract Expressionists were the triumph of his view, drawn by the idea that art should be extracted from the world, to exist in its unique individuality, set apart from other forms of cultural production.

In view of Greenberg's postulations about high art and low art, it can therefore be said that Pop Art and art about popular culture were initially viewed as inferior to Modern art, and were not considered as forms of 'genuine' art, but as forms of kitsch, low art and superficial decoration. One of the major contributions made by the Pop artists that rendered Clement Greenberg's Modernist suppositions invalid, was exactly the destruction of the boundaries between high art and low art, and between the avant-garde and kitsch. By introducing elements and sensibilities from mass culture into high art, the Pop artists destroyed the platform on which high art rested, and paved the way for Postmodern artists to utilise this negation of the distinction between high art and kitsch.

As the pioneers of Pop, Lawrence Alloway and the Independent Group called for the abolition of fixed and absolute aesthetic standards, such as

those that accorded with Greenbergian formalism, through the proposal of a non-hierarchical organisation of cultural forms. Alloway considered art, including Pop Art, as a form of visual communication with no difference from any other form of visual communication (Harrison 2001:30). Alloway (1997:7) outlined his theory of a "fine art-pop art continuum" in his article *The Arts and The Mass Media* in 1958, in which he proposed an arrangement of mass and fine art in an equal continuum, as opposed to the traditional, hierarchical organisation suggested by Greenberg.

Alloway rejected Greenberg's negative appraisal of the products of mass culture. He strongly objected to Greenberg's perception of kitsch as a discriminatory term for the various forms of mass culture. Alloway perceived the mass media, instead, as comprising qualities that he regarded consistent with their status as products of technology and industry. He also viewed Pop Art in terms of its topicality – as facilitating people's adaptation to their ever-changing environment and the expression thereof (Alloway 1997:7).

As mentioned previously, in the Greenbergian perspective Pop Art would certainly fall into the category of kitsch, or the avant-garde's "rear-garde" (Greenberg 1939:9). There is some merit to this conclusion since Pop Art can in some ways be equated to Greenberg's attributes of kitsch. He described kitsch as "popular, commercial art … with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics … Hollywood movies, etc." (Greenberg 1939:9). But Greenberg's (1939:11) vision of kitsch was a market for the uncultured urban masses of the Western world, being themselves "insensible to the values of genuine culture". He did not foresee the works of Pop Art being absorbed in the realms of high art, being exhibited in reputable galleries, and enjoying such enormous success.

By examining the renowned *Notes on "Camp"*, written by Susan Sontag for the *Partisan Review* in 1964, another strong argument can be made to refute the conclusion of Pop Art as a mere form of kitsch, by rather classifying artforms indebted to pop under the realm of 'camp'.

Sontag (1982:109) describes 'camp' as a certain mode of aestheticism that has a particular enthusiasm for artifice and exaggeration, seeing all things "in quotation marks". In these terms there exists an arguable affiliation between camp and kitsch. But as Sontag (1982:110) asserts, one must distinguish between naïve and deliberate camp. Kitsch most certainly falls under the caption of 'naïve camp', being unaware that it is "tasteless" and "un-cultured". Deliberate camp is described by Sontag (1982:110) as a subversive form of kitsch, and therefore implies a conceptual deliberation of employing kitsch. Contemporary pop, with its incorporation of the artefacts of kitsch, consumer products and advertisements, can in these terms be categorised as a form of deliberate camp or subversive kitsch, and not merely as a form of Greenbergian kitsch. Pop Art, and pop in contemporary art, often seem to perpetuate the ultimate camp statement: "It is good because it's awful" (Sontag 1982:119). Nigel Wheale's (1995:49) definition of camp as the celebration of "tastes and values which are conventionally scorned" underscores the objectives of artists employing pop. He provides as example the prints of Vladimir Tretchikoff, which even in their original period were kitsch. According to Wheale (1995:49), to value Tretchikoff *now* is camp.

John Storey (1998:154) reiterates Wheale's sentiments toward camp artists or the "new intellectuals" as he refers to them, stating:

> We might also think of the hedonistic irony of those for whom flying ducks and garden gnomes are always displayed in knowing inverted commas. Seeing the world through inverted commas can be a way of attacking the normative standards of dominant patterns of taste, but it can also be a means of patronising those supposedly without taste – those who display their ornaments without the inverted commas.

Contemporary pop plays games with the conventions of taste, and the products of kitsch and camp are inseparable from the overindulgence, banality and trivia of the mass-commodity culture that are incorporated into most pop artworks. The camp aspect common to works of contemporary pop features strongly in the art of Jeff Koons. American "neo-pop" (Walker 1994:46) artist Koons, strives to convince viewers not to be ashamed of kitsch.

Decades after the Pop Art movement, Koons "proclaim[s] a new segment of popular bad taste as his own" (Rosenblum 1992:16). He re-appropriates images from Disney, department store catalogues, advertisements, kitsch souvenirs, toys and so forth, and reincarnates them as objects 'de arte'. Rosenblum (1992:17) explains that "[i]n this, Koons often resurrects, as do many of artists of his generation, the spirit of 1960s Pop, which enthusiastically embraced the visual pollutions of the crass world out there".

Koons exploits the kitsch banality of trivial, everyday objects that have become icons of popular culture, such as toys (*Popples* and *Pink Panther*), basketballs, vacuum cleaners, celebrities and standard soft pornography. His iconography is that of low-culture, kitsch, schlock[6] images that function as works of parody, or camp that propagates the ironic humour of pop (figure 5).

Figure 5: Jeff Koons
Micheal Jackson and Bubbles (1988)
Ceramic, 100 x 180 x 82.5 cm
(Koons 2000:38).

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[6] Nigel Wheale (1995:48) describes schlock as cheap, decorative trivia, or meaningless objects that have sentimental value as gifts or mementoes.

The use of images and commodities from the mass media already involves a certain degree of kitschification that is characteristic of most pop works, and the kitsch or camp element in pop is intrinsic to artworks that are produced between the borders of high art and commercial culture. The imagery used in Koons's more recent works, such as for the exhibition *Easy, Fun, Ethereal* in 2000 (Krens 2000:10), has been drawn from photographs, both personal and from glossy magazines, brochures and advertisements, which are randomly re-assembled into kaleidoscopic juxtapositionings of childhood and adult fantasies. The works still depict the iconic kitsch and banal treatment that gives his work its neo-pop feel. In the preface to the catalogue of *Easy, Fun, Ethereal,* Krens (2000:10) states that, "[k]eeping his finger on the pulse of contemporary culture, the artist has created a new brand of pop painting in order to realise his stated ambition to 'communicate with the masses' ".

2.2.2 THE ART OF COMMERCIAL CULTURE

Not only are the borders between high art and commercial visual production blurred in the images of contemporary pop, the very aesthetic function of art has often been deconstructed so that high art merges with commercial practise. If the Pop artists introduced the 'Art of the Commodity' (Taylor 1992:178), then certain contemporary artists have launched the 'Commodification of Art' (Taylor 1992:178) to full effect. Not only have the products of mass media and commercial culture found their way into the territory of high art, but these artists have also demonstrated that their art can be commercialised successfully.

Jeff Koons' art typifies a growing interest in the consequences of art's commodification and its place in the late phase of capitalism. In an age dominated by the media, Koons already recognised that the artist could learn from the mass media, and demonstrated the way in which art and business could merge successfully. His marketing strategies have solidified his recognisabilty and popularity as an artist through the media presentation of Koons' story of rise to fame and success. Koons has featured in nearly every

glossy magazine and newspaper, including *Time, People, Newsweek, Cosmopolitan, Vanity Fair* and *Playboy* (Rosenblum 1992:11), and he has a cult following among both serious art collectors and fans of kitsch culture.

Keith Haring is another artist who worked by crossing over between the realms of high art and popular culture. During the 1980s and 1990s, he gained street credibility by drawing on the walls of subways in New York. The motifs and iconography that Haring invented and repeated were influenced by the graffiti movement that reached a peak in New York during the late 1970s (Walker 1994:121), and were similar to both the "tags" of graffiti writers and appropriations of the trademarks or logos of industrial companies. His iconography gave him a unique visual identity and brought him fame amongst both art circles and mainstream culture (figure 6). Haring's graphic style represented a type of convergence of high art and popular culture of the streets.

Figure 6: Keith Haring wall ([Sa])
Dimensions unavailable
(Frank 1987:42).

Haring's appeal to youth sub-cultures, his friendship and collaborations with graffiti artists and pop music stars such as Madonna, as well as his exhibitions in nightclubs rather than art galleries, confirmed his establishment of a following amongst the majority of New York society, and amongst those who perhaps otherwise would not have taken an interest in high art. Haring, wanting his art to also be available to 'ordinary people', opened retail outlets, which he called "Pop Shops" (Walker 1994:121) to merchandise his art in New York (1986) and in Tokyo (1988). It was clear to Haring that artists could reach the wider public provided they were willing to adopt a popular style and utilise the strategies of mass-culture and marketing in popularising their art.

In terms of these dynamics between art, commerce and mass-production, Japanese artist Takashi Murakami can perhaps be considered as the most likely successor of Andy Warhol. Warhol was the first to purposely mimic the methods of industrial production in his studio, which he called The Silver Factory (Barnard 1998:60). Murakami similarly set up a studio in the form of a 'factory' in homage to Warhol, originally naming it the Hiropon Factory. However, while Warhol's assistants tended to be "frolicking scenesters" (Siegel 2003:48), Murakami's workshops in Japan, Brooklyn, New York and Paris employ full-time workers, accountants, publicists and managers, and utilise a computerised administrative system. The workshops are now collectively entitled the *Kaikai Kiki Corporation* (meaning 'bizarre'), and function as a major, multi-level enterprise rather than merely being a satire of contemporary business.

Murakami moreover violates conventional artistic practise of keeping high art realms separate from commercial art practises in his work for the *Louis Vuitton Corporation*. In 2003 Murakami and fashion designer Marc Jacobs launched the *Cherry Blossom* limited edition, and the *Multicolor* and *Eye Love* lines (Wikipedia 2005:[Sp]). Murakami designed the coloured 'LV' logo and patterned "cute" icons for the *Louis Vuitton* handbags, luggage carriers and shoes (figure 7). Shortly after the new lines were introduced to the public market, Murakami further confused art audiences by producing large scale

paintings of the 'LV' monogram, thereby demonstrating his belief that "the idea of a hierarchy between high art and low or mass culture is a Western one" (Siegel 2003:48), and therefore does not apply in his work. Along with his paintings and installations, Murakami also merchandises the repertoire of characters and icons appearing in his art, in the form of key-chains, mouse pads, plush toys, cell phone accessories, and so forth (Howe 2003:1).

Figure 7: Marc Jacobs and Takashi Murakami ([Sa])
Louis Vuitton Monogram Multicolore Speedy 30 Handbag
Dimensions unavailable
(www.parisfashion.alstarz.org/bags2.html).

Murakami began his art career as a traditionalist, studying the art of Nihonga, an amalgam of Western and Eastern painting styles dating to the late nineteenth century (Howe 2003:2). But after witnessing the rise of anime and manga[7] in Japanese culture during the 1980s, he became disillusioned with Nihonga, finding it irrelevant to everyday reality. He wrote in a 2001 retrospective of his work that "I set out to investigate the secret of market survivability – the universality of characters such as *Mickey Mouse*, *Sonic the Hedgehog, Doreamon, Miffy, Hello Kitty*, and their knock-offs produced in Hong Kong" (quoted by Howe 2003:2). The result of his investigation was, amongst other characters, *Mr Dob* in 1993, Murakami's most ubiquitous and

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[7] Anime is style of animation developed in Japan, characterised by stylised colourful art, futuristic settings, violence, and sex, and is influenced by Japanese comics known as manga.

enduring character (figure 8), which encompasses strong references to Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse.* Much of Murakami's success can be attributed to the way he ties artistic talent with a keen understanding and manipulation of market forces.

Figure 8: Takashi Murakami
*Dobs March (*1994)
Vinyl chloride and helium, 2.35 x 3 x 1.8 m
(www.thecityreview.com/s04pcon.html).

As mentioned previously, in much of contemporary artistic production, cross-references between the different media are increasing so that the various media and art forms are interacting further, and artistic expression is becoming more multi-media in character. Fredric Jameson (1991:4) states: "What has happened today is that aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production." Jameson (1983:112) further contends that artists no longer only quote the texts and images of commercial culture, they incorporate them to the point where the line between art and commercial forms seems increasingly difficult to draw. He asserts that "commodity production … is now intimately tied in with the styling changes, which derive from artistic experimentation; our advertising, for example, is fed

by postmodernism in all the arts and inconceivable without it" (Jameson 1983:124).

The borders between high art and commercial visual production are blurred in works of contemporary pop, and this is especially apparent in an area where high art and design connect or cross each others' borders, as demonstrated in the following section.

2.2.3 ART AND DESIGN: BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES

The lines separating art from graphic design have in the last decades become especially undecided, as certain contemporary artists' work readily borrows from the graphic language, and designers produce projects in the name of art. Questions concerning the relationship between art and graphic design, their similarities and differences, and the ways in which they sometimes converge, are at the centre of many debates and discussions in both design and art discourses.[8]

Many artists are fascinated by design's role in contemporary society, commerce, and the construction of popular culture. They make works that engage with these fields, creating designs of their own, or undertaking forays into design to refresh and extend their art. Certain designers again are increasingly inclined to use their creations as vehicles for the kinds of personal expression and commentary usually associated with art practise. They are producing self-initiated projects, and other more art-like forms of design that are often presented in magazines and books as the independent creations of designers.

Artists and designers have also been collaborating on projects or crossing over into each other's spheres, although this trend is not a new development.

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[8] It is nevertheless important at this stage to note that the disciplines of art and design in their respectative entireties are not fusing, but that there are segments within the two disciplines that veer closer to one another, and this study applies therefore only to specific sections within contemporary art and design.

The collaboration of artists and designers already occurred during the Bauhaus movement, which saw one of the greatest cross-disciplinary collaborations in the history of visual art and design.

It remains important to direct the question of what distinguishes art from design. According to design critic Rick Poynor (2005:1), the contrast usually made between the roles of designer and artist is that "the designer must deal with matters of practicality and function, while artists are free to do what they like in pursuit of their self-chosen goals". The designer works for a client, in accordance with a brief set by the client, and is therefore concerned primarily with the problems of the client rather than his own. The artist's first responsibility is to generate work from his own vision and truth (Poynor 2005:1). The critical difference remains therefore between "function and vision" (Poynor 2005:1).

In writing for the journal *Design Issues*, Alex Coles (2005:17) states that there has always been a fissure between art and design in contemporary Western culture. Purists believe that the distance between art and design should be "preserved in the name of specificity, especially in an age where there is a multimedia meltdown" (Coles 2005:17). They advise that art should take care not to surrender that which is particular to it. Less traditionalist visual producers insist that, on the contrary, to ensure its endurance and relevance in such an age, art needs to be more gregarious, and reach out beyond its own margins into adjoining areas.

Many designers and artists agree, in fact, that to insist on a definite distinction between the products of art and design may prove to be limiting and short-sighted. They consider rather that art and design exist in a continuum of possibilities, and that rigid definitions, which might make sense in theory, are not necessarily tenable in practise when both activities can take so many different forms. There has been much debate around blurring the boundaries between art and design in recent times, and some have gone so far as to question the usefulness of distinguishing between the two terms.

As Poynor states (2003:163):

> … It's been clear for at least a decade the old disciplinary
> definitions and certainties really don't hold up any longer.
> Both communication and its audience stand to benefit
> from this fluidity.

Dutch designer Tord Boontje combines the worlds of art and design with his decorative and ornamental designs of lighting, furniture and wall hangings. With his organic and romantic shapes he tries to bring the decorative back into design (Blackley 2004:52). The description of Boontje's works as pieces of "haute couture" (Dunmall 2004:110) implies the sense that aesthetics take precedence over function. His designs, incorporating archetypal shapes that include bunnies, flora, horses, and butterflies, appear in fact more like works of conceptual art installations rather than functional pieces of design. He also exhibits his work in a manner usually associated with high art shows, with the examples of *Forever* in London and New York in 2004, and *Happy Ever After* in Milan in 2004 (Blackley 2004:59) (figure 9).

Figure 9: Tord Boontje
Rocking Chair (2004)
Design Installation
(Blackley 2004:59).

As can be seen in the work of Tord Boontje, there is often a progressive movement toward the arts in the field of industrial and product design. As mentioned previously, the disciplines of art and design are traditionally separated by one word: function. But in contemporary artworks produced by designers and items of furniture created by artists, even this is debatable. Functional art, such as the wall lights of South African artist, Brett Murray ([Sa]), are functional objects (figure 10), while also embodying the iconic references significant of Murray's high art creations. Similarly, the famous *Eudora Chair* ([Sa]) (figure 11) by Critz Campbell, is an example of a combination of practical design and fine art. The *Eudora Chair* begs the question of whether it should be classified as art or furniture, or perhaps as both simultaneously.

Figure 10: Brett Murray
Wall Lights [Sa].
(www.users.iafrica.com/afrishop/brettmurray.htm)

Figure 11: Critz Campbell
Eudora Chair [Sa].
Dimensions unavailable
(www.b9furniture.com/NewFiles/Eudora.html)

Similar to the household names that the art world generates, the world of graphic design has also provided its share of celebrities. Designers such as Neville Brody, Philippe Starck, and David Carson often appear in popular magazines and on television, and are known as individual creatives, who have on occasion exhibited their works in solo exhibitions. David Carson, Stefan Sagmeister, and South African designer Garth Walker have become familiar and celebrated names, and are considered by their peers as artists in their own right. Their works have attained high recognisability, and they consequently only take on projects of their choice as they are approached specifically for their unique styles.

David Carson and Garth Walker have also ventured to work on self-initiated projects that are regarded as independent forms of design-for-design's-sake. Carson has brought out several visual publications of his work, such as *The End Of Print* in 1995, while Walker similarly produced the limited *I-Jusi* magazines. Many of the images in David Carson's publications can arguably be described as photographic works of art, combined with text, that have been reworked to reinforce the artistic and conceptual character of its content

(figure 12). They are designs that promote his own artistic and creative talent even more than they are products of graphic design and typography.

Figure 12: David Carson
Untitled (1995)
Dimensions unavailable
(www.typogabor.com/David_Carson/pages/04_david_carson.html).

Austrian born designer Stefan Sagmeister's iconic design for a 1999 American Institution for the Graphic Arts (AIGA) lecture poster, typifies his unconventional style of designing. For this poster he had his assistant cut the text into his skin and had himself photographed (figure 13). This unusual method is comparable to an act of conceptual performance art, almost as much as it is a product of graphic design.

Figure 13: Stefan Sagmeister
AIGA Lecture Poster 1999
Cranbrook Academy for Art and AIGA, Detroit
Dimension unavailable
(Fiell, Fiell 2005:157).

Originally from Finland, another 'design artist' is Kustaa Saksi. His organic shapes form psychedelic illustrations that are playful, chaotic and strange. He has broadened his work also to music videos, advertising for *Citroën* and *Diesel* (Saaksi 2005:[sp]), and illustrating for *Playboy* and *Wallpaper* magazines. Saksi designs firstly in the name of art, producing from his own creativity and initiative, and is commissioned by clients to design with the same freedom as the independent artist. Figure 14 is an example of an essentially 'designed' image, or a computer illustration, that is an artwork in its own right, since it is also an independent work by the artist and not a product of design with a client in mind.

Figure 14: Kustaa Saksi
Untitled [Sa].
Computer-generated print
Dimensions unavailable
(www.coshuk.com)

Not only are there designers who design in the name of art, or whose designs veer toward high art production, there is also an enormous segment of contemporary artists whose works collectively embody high art's appropriation of graphic design.

As mentioned previously, graphic design forms an enormous part of the visible reality and environment of contemporary westernised society. It is arguably an expected development for the images and commodities of graphic design, to be infused in contemporary artistic production in one way or another. Rick Poynor (2005:3) states that design, rather than art, is the dominant cultural force, and "foremost in embodying the visual spirit of the age". It is clear at least, that present-day visual culture has rendered design crucial to an understanding of contemporary art.

Design and the graphic language influence many artists today, and materialise in their work, either in forms relating to the codes of graphic design, or in images combined with text that often share graphic similarities

with graffiti and animation. Many artists are influenced by commercial visual productions of film, television, magazines, animation, graffiti and cartoon illustrations. For many Japanese artists, such as Takashi Murakami and Yoshitomo Nara, an important source of inspiration is found, for example, in the world of manga and anime illustration.

Takashi Murakami's manic, brightly coloured art transforms into walls of cartoon flowers with smiley faces, oversized mushrooms adorned with eyes, and cute but disturbing wide-eyed characters that are friendly yet sinister at the same time. His paintings, sculptures and merchandise items are products of Japanese popular culture, primarily otaku,[9] or the subculture of manga and anime collectors. Nonetheless, his work is also accessible to Western audiences through its Pop Art dimension, graphics and vivacity (figure 15).

Figure 15: Takashi Murakami
727 (1996)
Acrylic on canvas on board, 300 x 450 cm
(Breuvart 2002:229).

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[9] Otaku is a term that emerged in the 1980s to describe the Japanese subculture of manga and anime obsessives (Biro 2006:63).

Japanese neo-pop art has since the 1990s been promoted by a series of "*Superflat*" exhibitions, devised primarily by Murakami, and portrays otaku or "geek culture" through colourful, psychedelic, anime artworks that represent much of contemporary Japanese art (Biro 2006:63). Of the success of contemporary pop in Japan, Matthew Biro (2006:63) states that it lies in "its revelation of the tremendous wellspring of subcultural power that lies at the heart of some of the best Japanese painting and sculpture today." He further asserts:

> [Japanese pop] completely obliterates the distinction between art objects and pure commodities. And that this obliteration … reveals one of the major precipices upon which contemporary art now teeters (Biro 2006:63).

Figure 16: Yoshitomo Nara
Sleepless Night-sitting (1997)
Acrylic and cotton, 120 x 110cm
(Grosenick Riemschneider 2002: 326).

The art of Yoshitomo Nara (figure 16), Michael Majerus (figure 17) and numerous young Japanese visual producers, all display the 'cute' or sweet iconography and animated figures associated with anime films and

illustrations. Similar to Murakami's art, the flatness of the images, synthetic colours and graphic style of their works have awarded them with popularity amongst youth subcultures around the world, who subscribe to the light-hearted, digestible and popular images of Japanese pop. In a conference paper on New Media and Japanese visual production, Carine Zaayman (2005:111) states "decorativeness, playfulness, sexiness, love of technology and youthful abandon characterise the output of many artists and designers of Japan".

Figure 17: Micheal Majerus
Gold (2000)
Acrylic on canvas, 303 x 348 cm
(Grosenick Riemschneider 2002: 287).

Japanese culture has in the last decades become a seminal reference in contemporary popular culture of most westernised countries (Zaayman 2005:104). The infiltration of Japanese youth culture and its iconic references are apparent in the popularity of Japanese video and computer games, and animated programmes such as *Pokemon* and *Dragon Ball Z*. Figure 18 provides an example of an artwork by Thor-Magnus Lundeby in which he appropriates the visual appearance, iconography and characters of

Japanese video and computer games, again underpinning the 'super-flat' aesthetic inherent to the medium of electronic games, as well as of the productions of contemporary Japanese pop.

Figure 18: Thor-Magnus Lundeby
Bungalow Wall of More or Less Fame, Extended (2000-1)
Adhesives on wall, 4,5 x 9 m
Installation at Kiasma Museum, Helsinki
(Breuvart 2002:195).

Graffiti and street art have also proved to be a wealthy resource of creative stimulation for contemporary pop artists. Since the 1980s, many artists have been appropriating the markings, images and typographical elements of graffiti and spray-can art in their own works, including Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, and more recently, Zimbabwean-born artist Kudzanai Chiurai. Chiurai appropriates the images and designs found on graffiti walls,

and creates his own stencils and designs to construct his paintings with actual graffiti writing. These artists appropriate the language of street culture, "capturing a transient moment and in effecting a genuine convergence between their images as art and as signs of popular culture" (Livingstone 1990:228). For inspiration they are looking to the "grit and glamour" (Spence 2006:110) of urban culture, reproducing the graphic stylistics and typographical elements of graffiti art and Hip Hop culture.

Similar to graffiti art and Japanese anime art, other forms have emerged from youth subcultures and moved into more mainstream circles. In San Francisco, the works of Barry McGee, Margaret Killgallen, Ed Templeton and others, are known collectively as "skater art", and relates closely to graffiti. Most of these "skater artists" are ex-professional skateboarders who began showcasing their work in underground galleries, street culture magazines, and on street walls for a decade before they became noticed (Gavin 2005:65).

Skater art is strongly influenced by contemporary urban culture, which is evident in the imagery and the sense of experimentation in the works, and the development of the artists' own styles of creative exhibition display. Artists such as Killgallen and McGee are known especially for their installations and the way their panels are fitted together like puzzles, with their work spilling across the walls. Responding to street and urban culture, their work deals with subcultural influences in a new way. As opposed to graffiti art's aggressive undertones resulting from oppression in the "ghettos", skater-art presents a personal, upbeat reflection of urban decay, often with a tone of introspection, through the use of bright colours, print-influenced graphics and comics (Gavin 2005:65).

Ed Templeton began creating art that reflected the lifestyles of popular youth underground subcultures such as skateboarders and surfers. Not only does his art portray a graphic design sensibility, he also switches easily from his role as artist to that of designer. He creates skateboard graphics for the skateboard company that he founded, called *Toy Machine*, thus bringing his artistic designs into the commercial arena.

Barry McGee's graffiti-inspired wall paintings also deal with the life and people of the streets. Painting directly on the walls on the inside of the gallery, he fills his paintings with a community of male cartoon figures with unshaven faces, droopy eyes and expressions of melancholy (figure 19). Drawing inspiration from street life, graffiti, punk rock music, and the culture of tramps, drunks and losers, McGee makes art that evokes traces of human presence, not only visible in the characters, but evident in his hand-painted 'signage' technique that induces copies of early graphic design and typography (Ise 2000:1).

Figure 19: Barry McGee
Untitled (2004).
Dimension unavailable
(www.artseensoho.com).

Similarly, the late Margaret Kilgallen worked in a hand-painted signage technique akin to letterpress printing and hand-painted store signs. The overpowering scale of the text and images that form entire installations, creates spaces where the density of information simulates the contemporary visual environment of information overload (figure 20).

Figure 20: Margeret Kilgallen
In The Sweet Bye & Bye ([Sa])
Installation views at the Redcat Gallery (2005)
Photograph by Scott Groller
(www.redcat.org/gallery/kilgallen/install1.html).

The stylised, flat, graphic and carefully constructed compositions, resource familiar elements of people, places and markings, reminiscent of retro cartoon illustrations. Along with Ed Templeton, she also designed skateboard graphics for *Toy Machine.*

In my own work the influences of certain trends in contemporary graphic design can be seen, such as the combination of images with text, hard-edged colours, and the illustrated lighthearted iconography of hearts and birds that forms part of a popular 'style' or trend that has surfaced during the last two years in contemporary graphic design and illustration (figure 21).

Figure 21: Lize Muller
Have A Nice Forever (part of series) (2006)
Oil and acrylic on board
250mm x 600mm each
(Photograph by author).

It would seem that design and art may conceivably integrate even further and more frequently, and form a large grey area between strictly art and strictly design. Perhaps an 'art of the grey areas' already exists that would include works such as those done by artist Haluk Akakce (figure 22), which illustrate the joining of art and the graphic language. Rick Poynor (2005:3) suggests that often the most interesting works are created in the "gaps where there is room for manoeuvre and scope for debate". These types of works, which blur the definitions of art and design, are also referred to as "Design art" (Poynor 2005:3). This describes the relatively seamless exchange that often exists between the disciplines, and suggests a continuity between the two fields, since according to Poynor, neither word on its own seems adequate to describe how contemporary visual culture is evolving.

Figure 22: Haluk Akakce
Sweethearts (beneath the water's spate) (2001)
Latex, enamel paint, wood on wall
Installation at Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis
(Breuvart 2002: 24).

In the fields of contemporary art and design, it may therefore be more productive to approach their relationship more flexibly, embracing new kinds of thinking in both design and art in order to acknowledge an art of the grey areas, in which contemporary pop flourishes.

As demonstrated in the preceding section, contemporary pop is often the product that arises from the area of media convergence, such as the amalgamation of art and design, and generates images that show a flatness of surface, illustrated appearance, and a popular culture element that is emblematic of much of contemporary graphic design and commercial production. The following section examines the influence of technology and globalisation on visual art with regard to the recurrence of pop in contemporary art.

2.2.4 ART AND TECHNOLOGY

One of the most defining aspects of contemporary westernised societies is the interconnectedness of technologies and information systems. Everything is interrelated and often more functional when indivisible from each other. One need only examine the effects of *Blue Tooth*, or the latest products of *LG Electronic Design*, such as a refrigerator that includes a television screen and an Internet communication system through which one can order one's groceries. A parallel can be drawn between these types of technological developments and an increasing phenomenon in contemporary visual culture, where there is a convergence of media and visual disciplines, so that it is even more difficult to separate high art from popular culture[10].

Globalisation,[11] the escalation of graphic design, advertising, and the expansion of new technologies figuring the Information age, result in a greater diffusion, distribution and awareness of popular culture, especially within westernised societies (Harrison 2001:17). With new technologies and media being utilised in visual arts and culture, there is evidence for an unprecedented development in the possibilities of representation and the convergence of media. Developments in new media have therefore unlocked potential for new kinds of cultural dynamics and portend a new era in the dissemination of popular culture. Margot Lovejoy (1997:83) writes accordingly:

> In the wake of cultural deconstruction … resistance to technology as an integral aspect of art-making and cultural development began to erode. Not only had new media invaded and changed the very fabric of public life … they also began to play an integral part in altering

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[10] There is currently much philosophical debate surrounding the ideological influences of technology on human psychology, and the content and meaning within contemporary art concerning subjects such as virtual reality, the threat of technology and the questioning of human existence and its future. These topics will not be discussed in this study as the focus of argumentation remains predominantly on globalisation and technological influences on the physical aspects of contemporary pop art.

[11] Globalisation is an overarching term for a complex series of economic, social, technological, and political changes seen as an increasing interdependence and interaction between people and organisations in different locations. It includes greater international movement of commodities, money, information, and people; and the development of technology and infrastructures (Globalization 2006:sp).

perceptions and attitudes about the structure of art and its production and dissemination.

Electronics have proven to be an important factor for the popularisation of all fields, especially with regard to new trends in visual culture. Various new forms of popular expression are the result of an interaction of art and technology, with new media art such as video and computer generated art. Not only have new media problematised the conventional understanding of the art object, it has contributed enormously to the narrowing of the gap between high art and more commercial forms of visual production, such as film, animation and design.

The dematerialisation of the 'traditional' art object can be traced back to the Conceptual movement, during which technology and new media transformed the definition of art in a fundamental way. The Conceptual art movement facilitated the use of media technologies in video art, performance art, and installation art. It is clear that the traditional methods associated with fine art practise had expanded to include techniques originally utilised in commercial visual production and other art forms such as stage performance, film production, architecture, and graphic design, so that collaboration between various media is underscored.

As mentioned previously, new media use in contemporary art includes computer-generated image making, traditionally associated with graphic design or animation, and results in new aspects of artistic representation in computer and video electronic media. In this manner, Takashi Murakami and Jeff Koons have rendered the fusion of art and computing in their art making processes, utilising computer technologies for the illustration, rendering and planning of their art works.

The idea of globalisation relates closely to the multifarious practises in the visual arts. Technological progress is significantly relevant to the process of globalisation, and is accountable for the dispersing of culture, styles and ideas internationally, through various new information and communication

technologies. The Internet, television, computers, tele-communications, and easy travelling, all bring different cultures and nationalities closer, resulting in a greater cross-pollination of ideas, and especially of visual and artistic trends globally. Theorist Marco Livingstone (1990:228) reiterates, stating "[a] sense that the speed of present-day international travel and communications make it possible now for elements from any culture to be borrowed, appropriated or mimicked". The contemporary visual artist can know at all times what other artists are doing around the world, being part of a 'global art scene' or a "global village" (Jencks 1989:53).

The Internet and mass media have made subcultures and vernacular cultures accessible to larger audiences. Younger generations of visual producers, often more adept with technology and the speed of information, have shown that they are able to share and appropriate from different international visual cultures more effortlessly than their predecessors. One need only examine the example of television program channels such as *MTV* in popularising different youth subcultures and moving them into the mainstream, or the numerous art, design and animation publications and magazines that are distributed internationally, which contribute to the globalisation of visual trends and cultural output. (Global influences on South African art and culture is discussed in further detail in Chapter Three).

In my own work I have drawn inspiration from international artists whose works are readily available through the Internet, artbooks and magazines. The aesthetic style in my work is often the product of appropriation of the ideas and stylistics of these artists, thereby demonstrating the workings of the global art-scene. The exhibition *Through The Looking Glass,* also addresses how the globalisation of popular culture affects the individual in contemporary westernised societies. The iconography of the works move between the terrains of dominant culture, popular culture and global subcultures, and can be viewed as a response to globalisation and the concurrent disappearance or fragmentation of traditionally defined structures and identities. I have sought to create a series of works that embody a generally lighthearted sense of awareness of the individual in contemporary society. The works are also a

visual speculation on the influence of the daily visual intake of mass media and humanly constructed culture on the psyche of the individual.

The Information Age brought about an economy built upon the speed by which information is disseminated and gathered. Its manifestation in the art world causes the temporal gap between art appearing in the gallery and its consequent absorption into the mainstreams of mass-culture to quicken, thus contributing to sudden rise in popularity of many upcoming contemporary artists. In these terms, art also becomes inseparable from the products of "real-life", and its "status as 'art' becomes redundant" (Muller 2003:33). For many contemporary artists, the concept of redundancy becomes itself a source for subject matter, being recontextualised in the art-making process. Their works become an extension of the genealogy of pop and its use of popular, everyday iconography, appropriating common objects and images as vehicles for ambiguity, metaphor and allusions to something else.

The interaction of art and technology results in new forms of popular expression, with works that often include a pop aesthetic. It is a 'flat aesthetic' - an aesthetic of the information age – of flat-screen televisions, digital billboards, computer interfaces and 'super-flat exhibitions'. Pop also has a specific 'global identity' – an impersonal and universal aesthetic, often with a deliberately synthetic, manufactured appearance.

The visual stylistics of the multi-layered paintings in my exhibition *Through the Looking Glass*, the 'plasticness' of the paint and colours, and the graphic, flat quality of some of the works, all contribute to this 'pop' aesthetic that emerges from the intertextual referencing to the different media of popular visual production. The imagery used also accentuates an impersonal and universal element, by not being culturally specific. The clear emphasis on surface in the works extends to the flat aesthetic of 'pop' art, but also to the many references of human skin. Contemporary westernised society is defined by the culture of smooth surfaces, of high gloss enamel or plastic surfaces, and flawless skin. I have found the combination of detailed, rendered paintings of human signifiers with bold, flat, and colourful surfaces to be an

intriguing juxtaposed arrangement of subtlety and brashness that is characteristic of many of the works of contemporary pop (figure 23).

Figure 23: Lize Muller
You'll Feel Right As Rain (part of series) (2006)
Oil and acrylic on board
900mm x 1500mm each
(Photograph by author).

This chapter has outlined the three waves of pop in visual art since the 1950s, and subsequently examined the principle issues pertaining to the production of contemporary pop, such as the association of kitsch and camp to pop, the relation of high art to commercial culture, the relationship between art and design, and the influence of technology and globalisation on contemporary pop. Chapter Three investigates contemporary pop as it manifests specifically within the South African context, and looks at a range of examples of South African pop artworks.

CHAPTER 2: POP ART AND ITS REVIVALS

This chapter provides a genealogy of pop, outlining Pop Art and its resurgence in a second and third wave of art forms with a pop aesthetic. The pop aesthetic, introduced and popularised by the artists of the Pop Art movement, has resurfaced continually since the Pop Art movement, and features strongly in contemporary art production and visual culture in general. The second part of this chapter is therefore dedicated to an examination of the third wave of pop, or contemporary pop, and the key qualities and criteria that contribute to its pop aesthetic.

Figure 1: Faile, *10 Ways; Untitled; Dog* (2004)
Mixed media
Dimensions unavailable
(Blackley 2004:15).

Figure 1 is one example of the works produced by a New York based group called Faile, and portrays various allusions to pop, Pop Art, and popular culture. Clear references to popular, religious and commercial iconography,

such as Mother Mary and Jesus Christ, the use of typographical elements from magazine cut-outs, the bright, synthetic colours, and the influences of comic illustration, graffiti tags, and graphic design, all show the indebtedness not only to the Pop Art movement, with particular references to the works of Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, but these are also the qualities and characteristics of contemporary pop art.

Faile was formed in 2000 by artists Patrick McNeil, Aiko Nakagawa and Patrick Miller, with the aim of exploration and collaboration with other artists and designers world wide on various projects and experiments (Blackley 2004:14). Introduced to the world of street art by McNeil, the group's ideas were based around large-scale silk-screen illustrations and stencil paintings, which were plastered at night on the walls, streets and bus shelters of public spaces in cities around the world.

Faile's art is more or less a form of advertising by which they achieve fame and recognisability amongst members of different sub-cultures and ardent collectors of graphic design memorabilia. Faile tries their hand at all forms of visual production, such as designing for fashion shows, toy design, and collaborations with the British design company, Tomato. The clear definitions between artist, designer, and illustrator are blurred, and the need to distinguish between them has little importance for the group. As one of the members confirms, "… we are part of a really interesting time in art and design where people are using their work and voice … in ways that bypass a more traditional route" (Blackley 2004:17).

The example of Faile illustrates a clear relation of contemporary art to that of the Pop Art movement, with its elements of the 'popular' and recognisable iconography and the use of less traditional means of producing art. It also represents the collaboration and growing inter-relation between different areas within visual production such as graphic design, advertising, street art and high art, so that they are co-dependent rather than existing separately. Faile's methods show a distant resemblance to that of Andy Warhol and his

assistants in the Silver Factory, especially in its 'mass production' with the silkscreen technique.

The Pop Art movement left a permanent effect on the development of subsequent artistic production and later 'movements'. Its repercussions are still felt by many contemporary artists who continue to draw inspiration from pop. Since the Pop Art movement of the 1950s and 1960s, countless artists have responded positively to the existence and development of popular culture and the mass media, and enthusiastically incorporate its subjects and processes into their own works. Like their Pop Art predecessors, these artists find creative stimulation from popular culture and the products of mass media, and utilise its imagery and methods, raising it to the level of so-called high art. This they often do by adopting a connoisseural, camp or ironic attitude towards it.

The following section of this study outlines the three waves of pop as they have manifested in the visual arts since the Pop Art movement.

2.1 THREE WAVES OF POP

2.1.1 FIRST WAVE: THE POP ART MOVEMENT

In 1952 a group of young artists, architects and intellectuals began to meet at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, for discussions and lectures. [1] The Independent Group (Lucie-smith 1969:133), as they were known, was largely responsible for the formulation, discussion, and dissemination of many of the basic ideas of the British Pop Art movement (Alloway 1974:31). Under the leadership of Lawrence Alloway, the Independent Group discussed British Pop in terms of an art form that made use of the objects, materials and technologies of mass culture, often borrowing from advertising, photography, comic strips, and other mass media sources. Intrigued by the impact of

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[1] Some of the most important members of the Independent Group included artists Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, architects Alison and Peter Smithson, and critics Lawrence Alloway and Reyner Banham (Lucie-smith 1969:133).
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American mass media on British culture after the end of the Second World War, they investigated the areas of popular taste and kitsch, previously considered only to be outside of the realms of high art. Alloway (1974:31-32), who first coined the term 'Pop' Art, wrote that:

> The area of contact was mass-produced urban culture: movies, advertising, science fiction, Pop music. … We felt none of the dislike of commercial culture standard among intellectuals, but accepted it as a fact … and consumed it enthusiastically. … To take Pop culture out of the realm of "escapism", "sheer entertainment", "relaxation", and to treat it with the seriousness of art.

Although the Pop Art movement had its inception in London, abetted by the development of the Independent Group, it had a second birth, independently, in New York (Lippard 1974:9). Most of the American Pop artists, such as Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and James Rosenquist shared a background in the commercial art world, and often chose to live and work in New York, which represented not only the centre of the art world, but also of the advertising world as the foundation of consumer culture. During the 1960s, the mass media was an undeniably dominant institution in the life of the average American. Correspondingly, images and methods derived from the mass media predominated in American Pop Art.

The influences of advertising and mass communications had enormous impact upon the visual arts in New York. The urban environment of the city, with its billboards, advertisements, and popular culture iconography everywhere, inspired the American Pop artists (Alloway 1974:53). Already New York had become the new art capital of the Western world, which can be attributed to the Abstract Expressionists, where previously Europe had dominated the art world. Abstract Expressionism had given the American artists recognition and placed New York at the forefront of the Modern art movement. However, by the late 1950s, Pop artists, searching for new possibilities, questioned Abstract Expressionism, which to them had become too inward, unrealistic and elitist. The Pop artists aspired to create a kind of art

that reflected the complex, contemporary world of the mid-twentieth century urban environment.

Following immediately after what they saw as the pretentious self-indulgence of the Abstract Expressionists, the Pop artists endeavoured to re-focus art on the objects of everyday-reality and argued for a new definition of what constituted an artwork.

For the most part, the Independent Group in Britain and the forerunners of Pop Art in America, such as Tom Wesselman, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, and Andy Warhol, developed their ideas independently of one another. That so many artists had similar ideas simultaneously, underscores the apparent cultural need to define what was happening in society, not only in the art world, but in the domain of mass culture: the rise of consumerism and commercial culture after the Second World War.

In its most recognised forms, such as Andy Warhol's 'soup cans' and Roy Lichtenstein's enormous cartoon paintings, Pop Art was known for its embracing of the post-Second World War rise of mass production, by adopting the symbols of commercial consumption along with the bold and often oversized aesthetic of commercial art and advertising. The links (both visual and conceptual) between Pop Art and the mass media were significantly evident, and indications of cross-fertilisation between the two visual spheres already began to materialise (Marmer 1974:148). Some of the Pop artists, such as Andy Warhol and James Rosenquist, also came directly from the world of commercial art, having being signboard artists, billboard painters, or having worked in the fields of advertising and graphic design (Lippard 1974:90).

The Pop artists made use of secondary sources, mostly taken from the mass media (Lippard 1974:82), rather than working from direct observation of nature or objective reality. Their assertion was that in a mass media, consumer society, the individual's life was more filled with man-made things than natural ones. They sought to combine art with everyday life and culture by employing

images and material of popular culture and mass media as sources of iconography, techniques and modes of representation. Pop Art took as its subjects not direct reality, but existing representations and interpretations of reality, found in the humanly constructed world of popular culture. It therefore marked a definitive shift from nature (or objective reality) to culture, concerning the object of scrutiny in a work of art (Harrison 2001:11). Never before had commercial subject matter been utilised as a total basis for fine art to such an extent as within the Pop Art movement, where themes of mass culture replaced nature and reality as subject matter and sources of contemplation in the arts.

Figure 2: Andy Warhol
Four Marilyns (1962)
Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen on canvas
73,7 x 58,4 cm
(www.allposters.com).

Andy Warhol's serialised portraits of celebrities illustrate the situation well. In 1962 he made a series of serial portraits of Marilyn Monroe (figure 2), in which he duplicated a single frontal photo of the actress, and reproduced it several times with the silkscreen technique, while adding only slight modifications to the original (Huyssen 1989:53). In this manner, Warhol's art becomes a reproduction of a reproduction. It is no longer reality itself that provides the

content of the work, but rather a secondary reality in which the image of a mass idol appears innumerable times in the media.

By drawing the attention of the audience to the imagery of everyday urban life, Pop Art not only demanded the elimination of the separation between high art and low art, but the merging of art with daily life and reality. The intention was to connect art with everyday existence. In *After the End of Art* (1997:131) Arthur C Danto further explains this connection:

> Pop Art set itself against art as a whole in favour of real life. But …
> … beyond that … answered to something very deep in the human
> psychology of the moment … some universal sense that people
> wanted to enjoy their lives now, as they were, and not on some
> different plane … for which the present was a preparation.

The latter situation that Danto describes, is the "different plane" toward which the Abstract Expressionists tended. Their art was of a deeper, spiritual nature, concerned with unconscious processes, and they saw themselves as "shamans, in touch with primordial forces" (Danto 1997:130). This type of moral and spiritual preconception inevitably brought a feeling of exclusion for those who did not necessarily have aspirations for its high ideals. Pop Art, on the other hand, brought the realm of art closer to the here-and-now for viewers, with recognisable imagery that generated themes they could easily relate to their own existence.

During the 1960s, the Pop Art movement was at the summit of what was taking place in the art world, though by 1970, Minimalist and Conceptual movements had already acquired the attention of the art world and critics.[2] Nevertheless, Pop Art had found a ready audience among both art collectors and consumers of mass-culture for whom it signified the ultimate intersection of high and popular culture (Taylor 1989:14). After its climax, Pop Art moved somewhat toward the background of the art scene, but only until the mid-1970s, when it re-emerged in Britain's artistic Punk Rock scene, or what is

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[2] With the exclusion of the older generations of Pop artists who continued to produce works of Pop Art.

known as the New Wave scene (Taylor 1989:18), with similarities between Pop Art and New Wave music, graphics and fashion, recognisable in the imagery and work of both 'movements'.

2.1.2 SECOND WAVE: POSTMODERN POP

By the end of the 1970s, Pop Art had completely resurfaced among a whole new generation of artists and graphic designers, drawn by the prospects of reworking and appropriating second-hand material, and incorporating the low-art materials of popular culture in their work. This 'second wave' of pop art was attributable to the emergence of artists such as David Salle, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Sherrie Levine and others. With the death of Andy Warhol in 1987, Pop Art further established its second phase, given rise by museum retrospectives, new publications on Pop Art and numerous Pop Art exhibitions. Postmodernism's emergence as a worldview in the mid-1970s, undeniably endowed Pop Art with a further capacity for expanding, by affirming the Pop movement's significance, and therefore stimulating a new wave of critical attention. Principle issues such as appropriation and simulation, and the commodification of art (Taylor 1992:178), as exemplified especially in Andy Warhol's work, coincided with those issues at the heart of the Postmodern debate during the 1980s (Harrison 2001:208). Postmodernism's investigation and further exploration of pop manifested in Postmodernism's own dependence on mass media imagery.

Accordingly, during the late 1970s and 1980s, a new number of new pop artists emerged, who again began appropriating images from both the history of art and the mass media, with differences only in intention and practise. The appropriation of previous styles, elements and images had become the basis for a large quantity of Postmodern art, and revealed a continued interest in the self-conscious attitude cultivated by the Pop artists. This section within Postmodern art is therefore identified I this study as Postmodern pop, or the second wave of pop. The Postmodern response to pop reinforced Pop art's representation of 'culture' as opposed to 'nature',

reflecting westernised urban society in the capitalist-consumerist phase (Walker 1994:88). An example of such a response can be seen in the earlier works of Jeff Koons that included a commercial arrangement of consumer products, such as Hoover vacuum cleaners and Spalding basketballs exhibited as art (Rosenblum 1992:18). (The art of Jeff Koons is referred to in further detail in the following sections).

Pop Art was the 'transition' from Modernism's obsession with progress and its rejection of art's history to the Postmodern sensibility that embraced diversity in subject matter and methods, and freely appropriated ideas and images from all facets of culture, past or present, high or low. For the Postmodern 'appropriationists', as for the Pop artists, popular culture and the mass media were vast reservoirs of creative information to be tapped. Fredric Jameson (1991:2) explicates this as follows:

> The postmodernists have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader's Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the B-grade Hollywood film.

The Modernist supposition of only one authentic and international style was rejected in favour of the idea that a plurality of styles co-existed, without any one dominating. Eclecticism and hybrid styles became fashionable, often in the form of 'quotations', pastiche, intertextuality, and a recycling of history and past styles (Walker 1994:88). Complexity, ambiguity and contradiction were the values that replaced Modernism's purity, simplicity and rationality. Mixtures of high and low culture, fine art and commercial art styles were encouraged as a way of producing visual art with multiple meanings that could ideally be appreciated by audiences from different levels of sophistication and degrees of knowledge (Walker 1994:14).

Postmodernism and Conceptualism emerged in part as a reaction against the formalism articulated the Modernists. Postmodern art brought about a deconstruction of Modernism and the conventional definition of what constituted an artwork. The conceptual art of Marcel Duchamp can be

considered an example of the undoing of such conventional definitions of the art object, because they "recontextualised and reoriented art away from its own identity as a form …towards the kind of instability and undecidability of Postmodernism" (Lovejoy 1997:81). As seen with Duchamp's ready-mades, Postmodernism encouraged the assumption that every object or image carries a meaning and subtext, and is worthy of critical attention. Furthermore, Postmodernism promoted the idea of multiple meanings associated with a single text or image, as Margot Lovejoy states:

> Postmodernism views text and images as radically polyvalent. Around 1960, French Structuralist, and Post Structuralist theorists such a [Michel] Foucault, [Roland] Barthes, and [Francois] Lyotard attacked the very concept of objectivity and of fixed meaning…

Postmodernism, and especially Conceptual art, had its origin within Post-structuralism (Harrison 2001:13) and deconstructionist thinking, and subsequently, "…as all deconstructivists have discovered, there is no single meaning to any text." (Woolley 1992:202). Deconstruction as a philosophy affected the arts by destroying assumptions of fixed meaning in favour of a polysemic position in which a plurality of meanings coexist. This meant not only the negation of absolute and fixed meaning concerning the content of a work of art, but also ensured a fluidity and flexibility regarding the definitions of what art is. The theorist Paul Wood (2004:21) describes this process as follows:

> … [The] evolution of the conceptual neo-avant-garde into a variety of hybrid practises, mixing photographs and texts, performances and installations, and making increasing use of the new technology of video… . Such art questioned the object of art … largely out of a sense that, in its fixation on a purified aesthetic, art had failed to come to terms with the wider modern condition in which it was practised.

Postmodern and deconstructionist art validated a less purified aesthetic, in which the borders around different genres, media and subjects could be crossed. As mentioned previously, pluralism brought about a situation in which no single artistic style dominated, but many existed at the same time. Pluralism manifested in the visual arts in various ways, one of which resulted in

an increased inter-disciplinary correspondence and a transgression of the margins between the different areas of visual production. Boundaries became permeable, and fine art, design, advertising, architecture, fashion and filmmaking began overlapping in an intertextual appropriation of styles and methods. [3]

There was also a transgression of boundaries between high art and more commercial forms of art. A case in point is the exhibition *Keith Haring, Andy Warhol and Walt Disney*, organized by Bruce D Kurtz at the Phoenix Museum in Arizona in 1991 (Walker 1996:13). Walt Disney, an icon of American mass culture, was treated as an artist comparable and equal to Warhol and Haring. Disney created an animated empire featuring *Mickey Mouse*, *Donald Duck* and other characters that became the ultimate example of popular or commercial art's mass appeal. Andy Warhol was the first to utilise the icon-producing effects of the mass media in his art. His incursion into the aesthetic territory of mass media icons gave licence to the next generation, as represented in the exhibition by Keith Haring. Haring's drawings on billboards, advertising posters and subway walls imitated advertising's context and addressed the mass media's populist audience (Kurtz 1992:13). Each artist artistically represented the pulse of American popular culture, and the high-art-low-art scale between elite and commercial art was undermined by the comparison of Disney animations to the work of artists such as Warhol.

Visual artists, including David Salle, Sherrie Levine and Barbara Kruger, began producing artworks by re-appropriating the images, styles and conventions of representation of the mass media, cultivating irony, aesthetic distance, ambiguity and contradictions to reveal the hollowness of popular media stereotypes.

David Salle in particular made a significant contribution to the resurgence of painting that occurred in the 1980s after the declaration of its so-called 'demise'. It is noteworthy that his visual style of intertextual juxta-positioning

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[3] An example of Deconstruction and Conceptualism's transgression of borders, such as the substantial recourse to design and typography, is signified, for instance, in the work of Barbara Kruger.

and layering of images to generate visual complexity was typical of much of graphic design, video art and pop music videos during this time (figure 3). Salle openly appropriated the images of consumer society that had initially attracted the artists of the Pop Art movement. Salle took his images from both high and low culture, selected from a variety of sources such as films, graphic design, comics, soft-pornography and artworks from the past (Livingstone 1990:226).

Figure 3: David Salle
Bigger Rack (1997-8)
Oil and acrylic on canvas
244 x 320 cm
(www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/david_salle.htm).

Salle's art represented a possible response not only to the 'death of painting' crisis, but also to the situation of image-overload and excess of information associated with a media-saturated environment (Baudrillard 1994:80). The fragmented randomness and overlapping of images in his paintings prohibits the depiction of actual space or a coherent narrative or meaning. This can be likened to the condition of contemporary visual culture in which images,

linked only by a chain of associations, constitute the visual environment of contemporary urban culture.

Postmodern art displays a borrowing of whatever images have attained the status of cultural signs – images communicating meaning because of their commonness and recognisability. It can therefore also be said that the postmodernists often make use of clichés. One artist who has successfully capitalised on the use of clichés, is Jeff Koons, whose work is considered in the following sections.

2.1.3 THIRD WAVE: CONTEMPORARY POP

In much of contemporary artistic production, the various media and art forms are interacting more and more, and artistic expression is becoming increasingly multi-media in character (Jameson 1991:4). It is clear that the borders that separate the different forms of visual art are more porous than before, and that rigid differentiation between contemporary high art and more commercial forms of art are liable to further deconstruction.

Contemporary works of art defy categorisation and can no longer be called artworks by virtue of their specific visual properties alone. Perhaps the most defining aspect of contemporary art is its indefinability. The growing speed of the transference of ideas, money, information and culture around the world seems to have taken hold of the art world, and many of the boundaries and distinctions within art production have loosened, so that high art, popular culture, the mass media and the applied arts often merge and collaborate. Analogous to the Pop artist's incorporation of elements from applied or commercial art, many contemporary artworks show an integration not only with the technologies and methodologies of mass media, such as film and the use of computers, but also with the visual and aesthetic elements of popular culture and commercial art (Walker 1994:14). The third wave of pop, or contemporary pop, is therefore primarily defined by an integration of the different areas within visual production, and of 'high art' and mass culture.

Steven Henry Madoff (2004:sp) describes this kind of visual art in the introduction to *Art on the Edge: 17 Contemporary American Artists* as follows:

> … the easy glide between the fantastic and mundane, the large scale that seeks to turn every picture into a spectacle, the interest in pop culture, and the fluent use of technology are essential to so much of [contemporary] art. The mass media – television, movies, pop music and videos, the Internet, video games and commercial graphics – are the air in which contemporary art breathes, the mirror in which artists see themselves, the filter through which their objects pass. … It is unlikely that the lessons of art history … have had any greater influence on them than the last 30 years of film and TV.

The language of contemporary art, like the media-saturated, multi-cultural westernised world, is polyglot, receptive to the influences of the different spheres of mass-culture. It manifests in the fluidity, diversity and great variety of contemporary art. Art production in the form of painting, sculpture, photography, installation, video and so forth, represents both the individuality and pluralism at work within the world of current visual art. It embodies the "great flattening" (Madoff 2004:sp) or a democratisation of the arts that creates equality among mediums, approaches, styles, traditions, technologies and methods of display.

One important reason for the recurrence of pop iconography in contemporary visual art, and the growing relationship between art and the mass media, is the expansion of mass communication systems during the second half of the twentieth century (Harrison 2001:20). The arrival and development of television, as well as the escalation of graphic design, print media and advertising, prefiguring the information age, brought about a greater dissemination, diffusion and awareness of popular culture within westernised societies. Analogous to the development of the mass media, were globalisation and cross-cultural influences during and after the Cold War, which conveyed in particular American popular culture to Europe and the East. This resulted in a worldwide awareness and fascination with American culture. The pop element in contemporary art is still fed to a great

extent by the production of American popular culture, but as the following sections within this chapter shows, there is currently a growing fascination with popular culture production from the East, such as Japanese anime culture for example. The recurrence of pop is therefore intimately tied to technological developments, information circulation and globalisation.[4]

Contemporary pop continues to be an art that is predominantly about manufactured culture or synthetic culture rather than nature and objective reality, comprising more the assemblage of ready-made elements than the creation of organic compositions. Theorist Marco Livingstone (1990:247) states accordingly that:

> Faking, copying, appropriating and simulating one thing for another, artists have continued to meditate on concepts of originality and authenticity in ways that display the lasting inspiration of the Pop Art movement.

Pop's use of media images, the representation of ready-made objects as art, the methods of seriality and repetition, and the constant reference to mass production, verify the synthetic, simulated nature of pop, and provide a 'truthful' representation, as it were, of the synthetic environment of contemporary urban society, with its increasing simulacra and simulated visual realities.

Jean Baudrillard (1994:125) describes the contemporary urban environment as an aestheticised hyperreality – an illusory, mediated world affected by the media in its role of simulation, in which the real is beyond representation because it functions entirely within the realm of simulation. Media saturation, or an image and information overload contributes to a loss of 'reality' that is experienced by global urbanities. Popular culture and media images dominate contemporary westernised societies, and also their sense of reality. Images, copies, simulations and representations have been circulated by the

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[4] The influence of technology and globalisation upon the arts is further explored in the last section of this chapter.

mass media to such an extent that there are no longer any authentic originals.

Artists, whose subjects comprise the various aspects of popular culture, can therefore be considered as responding to the increasing authority and dominance of the mass media in shaping their society's collective sense of reality. They reflect on this new 'reality' of their urban environment by representing a second-hand, appropriated version of the visual environment of advertisements, television programs, and commercial commodities, while also drawing inspiration and stimulation from the same man-made culture (Walker 1994:88).

For the body of works done in partial fulfilment of my Master's degree, [5] I have also drawn upon the visual productions of mass media culture, exploring popular culture's intrusion into the dreams and realities of the individual in contemporary urban society - the way media images insinuate themselves into the individual's unconscious like unexpected guests. As an art *about* popular culture, I have appropriated from the content and stylistics of everyday visual culture, such as film and fashion photography, television, and certain modes of graphic design and illustration, creating works that are both a product of popular visual culture and my own subtext or observation of it (figure 4). The experience of reality in the westernised urban environment to me becomes an experience of fragmented 'clips' and 'snippets' of cultural images, artefacts, digital screens and bright pantone colours. There is no coherence felt, nor the need to create logical order and sense out of this environment of endless floating signifiers - only the compulsion to re-appropriate whatever has left an impression on the mind.

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[5] This exhibition of a body of works forms the practical component of the Master's in Fine Arts degree at the University of Pretoria, and is titled *Through the Looking Glass.*

Figure 4: Lize Muller
Keep Talking (triptych) (2006)
Oil and acrylic on board
1840mm x 2760mm
(Photograph by author).

Many contemporary artists are similarly responding to their surroundings by appropriating from man-made visual culture, and writing in the introduction for *Vitamin P: New Perspectives in Painting*, Barry Schwabsky (2002:8) states accordingly:

> One can wonder whether today's painters consider themselves heirs to a tradition that stretches back to Giotto … or if they feel themselves utterly cut off from all that, participants in, or competitors with a wholly immediate image world that includes billboards, video games, magazine ads, pornography, instructional diagrams, television, and an infinite number of other things.

In terms of source material and stylistics, contemporary visual art is showing little restraint and hesitation in borrowing from already mediated, manmade, mass-culture. Many artists agree that if one of the responsibilities of artists is to

represent and record the world around them, it would mean that they have to reflect the constructed world as well, including the images of mass-culture that surround them daily. Along these stipulations it seems only sensible to recognise the complexity and diversity of contemporary westernised urban culture, and its impact on the visual arts.

The Pop artists already shared this sentiment, as Edward Lucie-Smith (1994:231) states: "… what they share, is the tone and imagery of the modern megapolis, of majority living, of men penned in cities and cut of from nature". He continues elsewhere, "the main activity of the Pop artist … is not so much to produce works of art, as to make sense of the environment" (Lucie-Smith 1994:232).

Contemporary art often engages a multi-disciplinary discourse, utilising a diverse body of skills and people to ultimately connect a variety of audiences with a substantial discourse pertaining to relevant issues that shape the contemporary world. The relationship between artist and viewer has grown increasingly complex from the second half of the twentieth century, and contemporary art is also becoming increasingly more global. This causes a gradual breaking down of cultural barriers that separate elitist high art from the public forum of the everyman (Walker 1994:14). As argued in the last section of this chapter, the globalising of artistic trends and the mounting connection with audiences perpetuate the popularity of pop imagery in contemporary art.

Julian Stallabrass (1999:4) describes a movement in British art that he has coined 'High Art Lite', which has figured predominantly since the 1990s, and features the works of the younger generations of British artists. High Art Lite relates closely to what this study describes as pop. Most significantly, High Art Lite and contemporary pop share a fascination with material from the mass media, such as "television programmes, films, tabloid newspapers, and the major and minor obsessions of these popular organs: drugs, sex, violence, music, celebrity, UFO's" (Stallabrass 1999:4). The employment of subject matter and themes from popular culture, the novel, fresh and 'designed'

appearance of the works and the element of humour and irony, are what distinguishes not only the High Art Lite movement but also all contemporary works of pop. The following section of this chapter is therefore dedicated to an outlining of these various characteristics of contemporary pop.

2.2 CONTEMPORARY POP

The following section systematically examines contemporary pop by way of breaking it down into subdivisions relating to the central criteria or features inherent to pop. It presents first the fact that pop often carries a strong element of kitsch that often translates into a subtle irony, and can therefore be read as subscribing to a camp mentality. Subsequently, it is demonstrated that pop is an art of commercial culture, appropriating the images, subjects and methods of commercial and mass culture, while often transforming the art object itself into a consumable commodity. Thirdly, the significance of the collapsing of boundaries between different visual media is surveyed, with specific emphasis given to the area where design and art overlap and cross-fertilise, generating a potent pop factor. Lastly, the significant influence that technology, information systems, new media and globalisation have on the development and distribution of pop is examined, revealing the grounds for pop's 'global' or 'universal' aesthetic.

2.2.1 POP AND THE AESTHETICS OF KITSCH AND CAMP

Contemporary pop often encompasses a strong association with camp and the ironic humour that ensues from the employment of kitsch. This section examines the accounts of kitsch and camp and their relationship to the recurrence of pop in contemporary art. In dealing with this relationship, the study turns first to Clement Greenberg's theories on kitsch.

Clement Greenberg's cultural position and conceptions regarding the preservation of culture had its most evident expression in "Avant-garde and

Kitsch" (1939). In this essay, Greenberg (1939:11) articulated both a critique of capitalist culture and a concern for the continued existence of so-called "genuine culture", or the preservation of cultural standards that he perceived as the responsibility of the avant-garde. Greenberg argued that the survival of genuine culture was under threat, first owing to the rapidly disappearing class of the "rich and cultured" (Greenberg 1939:9), and second to the emergence of mass-culture (or the "rear-garde"), and its commodities, which Greenberg termed kitsch. Greenberg conceived of an oppositional and hierarchical relationship between 'high' culture and mass-culture, with high culture logically being superior to mass- or popular culture.

For Greenberg, the only art that could be of real value and substance would exclude everything except its own properties and materials. Only the art object that is paint on canvas and whose subject-matter is paint on canvas, could be acknowledged as pure and avant-garde art. For a time Greenberg's suppositions governed the production of visual art. The Abstract Expressionists were the triumph of his view, drawn by the idea that art should be extracted from the world, to exist in its unique individuality, set apart from other forms of cultural production.

In view of Greenberg's postulations about high art and low art, it can therefore be said that Pop Art and art about popular culture were initially viewed as inferior to Modern art, and were not considered as forms of 'genuine' art, but as forms of kitsch, low art and superficial decoration. One of the major contributions made by the Pop artists that rendered Clement Greenberg's Modernist suppositions invalid, was exactly the destruction of the boundaries between high art and low art, and between the avant-garde and kitsch. By introducing elements and sensibilities from mass culture into high art, the Pop artists destroyed the platform on which high art rested, and paved the way for Postmodern artists to utilise this negation of the distinction between high art and kitsch.

As the pioneers of Pop, Lawrence Alloway and the Independent Group called for the abolition of fixed and absolute aesthetic standards, such as

those that accorded with Greenbergian formalism, through the proposal of a non-hierarchical organisation of cultural forms. Alloway considered art, including Pop Art, as a form of visual communication with no difference from any other form of visual communication (Harrison 2001:30). Alloway (1997:7) outlined his theory of a "fine art-pop art continuum" in his article *The Arts and The Mass Media* in 1958, in which he proposed an arrangement of mass and fine art in an equal continuum, as opposed to the traditional, hierarchical organisation suggested by Greenberg.

Alloway rejected Greenberg's negative appraisal of the products of mass culture. He strongly objected to Greenberg's perception of kitsch as a discriminatory term for the various forms of mass culture. Alloway perceived the mass media, instead, as comprising qualities that he regarded consistent with their status as products of technology and industry. He also viewed Pop Art in terms of its topicality – as facilitating people's adaptation to their ever-changing environment and the expression thereof (Alloway 1997:7).

As mentioned previously, in the Greenbergian perspective Pop Art would certainly fall into the category of kitsch, or the avant-garde's "rear-garde" (Greenberg 1939:9). There is some merit to this conclusion since Pop Art can in some ways be equated to Greenberg's attributes of kitsch. He described kitsch as "popular, commercial art … with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics … Hollywood movies, etc." (Greenberg 1939:9). But Greenberg's (1939:11) vision of kitsch was a market for the uncultured urban masses of the Western world, being themselves "insensible to the values of genuine culture". He did not foresee the works of Pop Art being absorbed in the realms of high art, being exhibited in reputable galleries, and enjoying such enormous success.

By examining the renowned *Notes on "Camp"*, written by Susan Sontag for the *Partisan Review* in 1964, another strong argument can be made to refute the conclusion of Pop Art as a mere form of kitsch, by rather classifying artforms indebted to pop under the realm of 'camp'.

Sontag (1982:109) describes 'camp' as a certain mode of aestheticism that has a particular enthusiasm for artifice and exaggeration, seeing all things "in quotation marks". In these terms there exists an arguable affiliation between camp and kitsch. But as Sontag (1982:110) asserts, one must distinguish between naïve and deliberate camp. Kitsch most certainly falls under the caption of 'naïve camp', being unaware that it is "tasteless" and "un-cultured". Deliberate camp is described by Sontag (1982:110) as a subversive form of kitsch, and therefore implies a conceptual deliberation of employing kitsch. Contemporary pop, with its incorporation of the artefacts of kitsch, consumer products and advertisements, can in these terms be categorised as a form of deliberate camp or subversive kitsch, and not merely as a form of Greenbergian kitsch. Pop Art, and pop in contemporary art, often seem to perpetuate the ultimate camp statement: "It is good because it's awful" (Sontag 1982:119). Nigel Wheale's (1995:49) definition of camp as the celebration of "tastes and values which are conventionally scorned" underscores the objectives of artists employing pop. He provides as example the prints of Vladimir Tretchikoff, which even in their original period were kitsch. According to Wheale (1995:49), to value Tretchikoff *now* is camp.

John Storey (1998:154) reiterates Wheale's sentiments toward camp artists or the "new intellectuals" as he refers to them, stating:

> We might also think of the hedonistic irony of those for whom flying ducks and garden gnomes are always displayed in knowing inverted commas. Seeing the world through inverted commas can be a way of attacking the normative standards of dominant patterns of taste, but it can also be a means of patronising those supposedly without taste – those who display their ornaments without the inverted commas.

Contemporary pop plays games with the conventions of taste, and the products of kitsch and camp are inseparable from the overindulgence, banality and trivia of the mass-commodity culture that are incorporated into most pop artworks. The camp aspect common to works of contemporary pop features strongly in the art of Jeff Koons. American "neo-pop" (Walker 1994:46) artist Koons, strives to convince viewers not to be ashamed of kitsch.

Decades after the Pop Art movement, Koons "proclaim[s] a new segment of popular bad taste as his own" (Rosenblum 1992:16). He re-appropriates images from Disney, department store catalogues, advertisements, kitsch souvenirs, toys and so forth, and reincarnates them as objects 'de arte'. Rosenblum (1992:17) explains that "[i]n this, Koons often resurrects, as do many of artists of his generation, the spirit of 1960s Pop, which enthusiastically embraced the visual pollutions of the crass world out there".

Koons exploits the kitsch banality of trivial, everyday objects that have become icons of popular culture, such as toys (*Popples* and *Pink Panther*), basketballs, vacuum cleaners, celebrities and standard soft pornography. His iconography is that of low-culture, kitsch, schlock[6] images that function as works of parody, or camp that propagates the ironic humour of pop (figure 5).

Figure 5: Jeff Koons
Micheal Jackson and Bubbles (1988)
Ceramic, 100 x 180 x 82.5 cm
(Koons 2000:38).

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[6] Nigel Wheale (1995:48) describes schlock as cheap, decorative trivia, or meaningless objects that have sentimental value as gifts or mementoes.

The use of images and commodities from the mass media already involves a certain degree of kitschification that is characteristic of most pop works, and the kitsch or camp element in pop is intrinsic to artworks that are produced between the borders of high art and commercial culture. The imagery used in Koons's more recent works, such as for the exhibition *Easy, Fun, Ethereal* in 2000 (Krens 2000:10), has been drawn from photographs, both personal and from glossy magazines, brochures and advertisements, which are randomly re-assembled into kaleidoscopic juxtapositionings of childhood and adult fantasies. The works still depict the iconic kitsch and banal treatment that gives his work its neo-pop feel. In the preface to the catalogue of *Easy, Fun, Ethereal,* Krens (2000:10) states that, "[k]eeping his finger on the pulse of contemporary culture, the artist has created a new brand of pop painting in order to realise his stated ambition to 'communicate with the masses' ".

2.2.2 THE ART OF COMMERCIAL CULTURE

Not only are the borders between high art and commercial visual production blurred in the images of contemporary pop, the very aesthetic function of art has often been deconstructed so that high art merges with commercial practise. If the Pop artists introduced the 'Art of the Commodity' (Taylor 1992:178), then certain contemporary artists have launched the 'Commodification of Art' (Taylor 1992:178) to full effect. Not only have the products of mass media and commercial culture found their way into the territory of high art, but these artists have also demonstrated that their art can be commercialised successfully.

Jeff Koons' art typifies a growing interest in the consequences of art's commodification and its place in the late phase of capitalism. In an age dominated by the media, Koons already recognised that the artist could learn from the mass media, and demonstrated the way in which art and business could merge successfully. His marketing strategies have solidified his recognisabilty and popularity as an artist through the media presentation of Koons' story of rise to fame and success. Koons has featured in nearly every

glossy magazine and newspaper, including *Time, People, Newsweek, Cosmopolitan, Vanity Fair* and *Playboy* (Rosenblum 1992:11), and he has a cult following among both serious art collectors and fans of kitsch culture.

Keith Haring is another artist who worked by crossing over between the realms of high art and popular culture. During the 1980s and 1990s, he gained street credibility by drawing on the walls of subways in New York. The motifs and iconography that Haring invented and repeated were influenced by the graffiti movement that reached a peak in New York during the late 1970s (Walker 1994:121), and were similar to both the "tags" of graffiti writers and appropriations of the trademarks or logos of industrial companies. His iconography gave him a unique visual identity and brought him fame amongst both art circles and mainstream culture (figure 6). Haring's graphic style represented a type of convergence of high art and popular culture of the streets.

Figure 6: Keith Haring wall ([Sa])
Dimensions unavailable
(Frank 1987:42).

Haring's appeal to youth sub-cultures, his friendship and collaborations with graffiti artists and pop music stars such as Madonna, as well as his exhibitions in nightclubs rather than art galleries, confirmed his establishment of a following amongst the majority of New York society, and amongst those who perhaps otherwise would not have taken an interest in high art. Haring, wanting his art to also be available to 'ordinary people', opened retail outlets, which he called "Pop Shops" (Walker 1994:121) to merchandise his art in New York (1986) and in Tokyo (1988). It was clear to Haring that artists could reach the wider public provided they were willing to adopt a popular style and utilise the strategies of mass-culture and marketing in popularising their art.

In terms of these dynamics between art, commerce and mass-production, Japanese artist Takashi Murakami can perhaps be considered as the most likely successor of Andy Warhol. Warhol was the first to purposely mimic the methods of industrial production in his studio, which he called The Silver Factory (Barnard 1998:60). Murakami similarly set up a studio in the form of a 'factory' in homage to Warhol, originally naming it the Hiropon Factory. However, while Warhol's assistants tended to be "frolicking scenesters" (Siegel 2003:48), Murakami's workshops in Japan, Brooklyn, New York and Paris employ full-time workers, accountants, publicists and managers, and utilise a computerised administrative system. The workshops are now collectively entitled the *Kaikai Kiki Corporation* (meaning 'bizarre'), and function as a major, multi-level enterprise rather than merely being a satire of contemporary business.

Murakami moreover violates conventional artistic practise of keeping high art realms separate from commercial art practises in his work for the *Louis Vuitton Corporation*. In 2003 Murakami and fashion designer Marc Jacobs launched the *Cherry Blossom* limited edition, and the *Multicolor* and *Eye Love* lines (Wikipedia 2005:[Sp]). Murakami designed the coloured 'LV' logo and patterned "cute" icons for the *Louis Vuitton* handbags, luggage carriers and shoes (figure 7). Shortly after the new lines were introduced to the public market, Murakami further confused art audiences by producing large scale

paintings of the 'LV' monogram, thereby demonstrating his belief that "the idea of a hierarchy between high art and low or mass culture is a Western one" (Siegel 2003:48), and therefore does not apply in his work. Along with his paintings and installations, Murakami also merchandises the repertoire of characters and icons appearing in his art, in the form of key-chains, mouse pads, plush toys, cell phone accessories, and so forth (Howe 2003:1).

Figure 7: Marc Jacobs and Takashi Murakami ([Sa])
Louis Vuitton Monogram Multicolore Speedy 30 Handbag
Dimensions unavailable
(www.parisfashion.alstarz.org/bags2.html).

Murakami began his art career as a traditionalist, studying the art of Nihonga, an amalgam of Western and Eastern painting styles dating to the late nineteenth century (Howe 2003:2). But after witnessing the rise of anime and manga[7] in Japanese culture during the 1980s, he became disillusioned with Nihonga, finding it irrelevant to everyday reality. He wrote in a 2001 retrospective of his work that "I set out to investigate the secret of market survivability – the universality of characters such as *Mickey Mouse*, *Sonic the Hedgehog, Doreamon, Miffy, Hello Kitty*, and their knock-offs produced in Hong Kong" (quoted by Howe 2003:2). The result of his investigation was, amongst other characters, *Mr Dob* in 1993, Murakami's most ubiquitous and

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[7] Anime is style of animation developed in Japan, characterised by stylised colourful art, futuristic settings, violence, and sex, and is influenced by Japanese comics known as manga.

enduring character (figure 8), which encompasses strong references to Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse*. Much of Murakami's success can be attributed to the way he ties artistic talent with a keen understanding and manipulation of market forces.

Figure 8: Takashi Murakami
*Dobs March (*1994)
Vinyl chloride and helium, 2.35 x 3 x 1.8 m
(www.thecityreview.com/s04pcon.html).

As mentioned previously, in much of contemporary artistic production, cross-references between the different media are increasing so that the various media and art forms are interacting further, and artistic expression is becoming more multi-media in character. Fredric Jameson (1991:4) states: "What has happened today is that aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production." Jameson (1983:112) further contends that artists no longer only quote the texts and images of commercial culture, they incorporate them to the point where the line between art and commercial forms seems increasingly difficult to draw. He asserts that "commodity production … is now intimately tied in with the styling changes, which derive from artistic experimentation; our advertising, for example, is fed

by postmodernism in all the arts and inconceivable without it" (Jameson 1983:124).

The borders between high art and commercial visual production are blurred in works of contemporary pop, and this is especially apparent in an area where high art and design connect or cross each others' borders, as demonstrated in the following section.

2.2.3 ART AND DESIGN: BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES

The lines separating art from graphic design have in the last decades become especially undecided, as certain contemporary artists' work readily borrows from the graphic language, and designers produce projects in the name of art. Questions concerning the relationship between art and graphic design, their similarities and differences, and the ways in which they sometimes converge, are at the centre of many debates and discussions in both design and art discourses.[8]

Many artists are fascinated by design's role in contemporary society, commerce, and the construction of popular culture. They make works that engage with these fields, creating designs of their own, or undertaking forays into design to refresh and extend their art. Certain designers again are increasingly inclined to use their creations as vehicles for the kinds of personal expression and commentary usually associated with art practise. They are producing self-initiated projects, and other more art-like forms of design that are often presented in magazines and books as the independent creations of designers.

Artists and designers have also been collaborating on projects or crossing over into each other's spheres, although this trend is not a new development.

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[8] It is nevertheless important at this stage to note that the disciplines of art and design in their respectative entireties are not fusing, but that there are segments within the two disciplines that veer closer to one another, and this study applies therefore only to specific sections within contemporary art and design.

The collaboration of artists and designers already occurred during the Bauhaus movement, which saw one of the greatest cross-disciplinary collaborations in the history of visual art and design.

It remains important to direct the question of what distinguishes art from design. According to design critic Rick Poynor (2005:1), the contrast usually made between the roles of designer and artist is that "the designer must deal with matters of practicality and function, while artists are free to do what they like in pursuit of their self-chosen goals". The designer works for a client, in accordance with a brief set by the client, and is therefore concerned primarily with the problems of the client rather than his own. The artist's first responsibility is to generate work from his own vision and truth (Poynor 2005:1). The critical difference remains therefore between "function and vision" (Poynor 2005:1).

In writing for the journal *Design Issues*, Alex Coles (2005:17) states that there has always been a fissure between art and design in contemporary Western culture. Purists believe that the distance between art and design should be "preserved in the name of specificity, especially in an age where there is a multimedia meltdown" (Coles 2005:17). They advise that art should take care not to surrender that which is particular to it. Less traditionalist visual producers insist that, on the contrary, to ensure its endurance and relevance in such an age, art needs to be more gregarious, and reach out beyond its own margins into adjoining areas.

Many designers and artists agree, in fact, that to insist on a definite distinction between the products of art and design may prove to be limiting and short-sighted. They consider rather that art and design exist in a continuum of possibilities, and that rigid definitions, which might make sense in theory, are not necessarily tenable in practise when both activities can take so many different forms. There has been much debate around blurring the boundaries between art and design in recent times, and some have gone so far as to question the usefulness of distinguishing between the two terms.

As Poynor states (2003:163):

> … It's been clear for at least a decade the old disciplinary
> definitions and certainties really don't hold up any longer.
> Both communication and its audience stand to benefit
> from this fluidity.

Dutch designer Tord Boontje combines the worlds of art and design with his decorative and ornamental designs of lighting, furniture and wall hangings. With his organic and romantic shapes he tries to bring the decorative back into design (Blackley 2004:52). The description of Boontje's works as pieces of "haute couture" (Dunmall 2004:110) implies the sense that aesthetics take precedence over function. His designs, incorporating archetypal shapes that include bunnies, flora, horses, and butterflies, appear in fact more like works of conceptual art installations rather than functional pieces of design. He also exhibits his work in a manner usually associated with high art shows, with the examples of *Forever* in London and New York in 2004, and *Happy Ever After* in Milan in 2004 (Blackley 2004:59) (figure 9).

Figure 9: Tord Boontje
Rocking Chair (2004)
Design Installation
(Blackley 2004:59).

As can be seen in the work of Tord Boontje, there is often a progressive movement toward the arts in the field of industrial and product design. As mentioned previously, the disciplines of art and design are traditionally separated by one word: function. But in contemporary artworks produced by designers and items of furniture created by artists, even this is debatable. Functional art, such as the wall lights of South African artist, Brett Murray ([Sa]), are functional objects (figure 10), while also embodying the iconic references significant of Murray's high art creations. Similarly, the famous *Eudora Chair* ([Sa]) (figure 11) by Critz Campbell, is an example of a combination of practical design and fine art. The *Eudora Chair* begs the question of whether it should be classified as art or furniture, or perhaps as both simultaneously.

Figure 10: Brett Murray
Wall Lights [Sa].
(www.users.iafrica.com/afrishop/brettmurray.htm)

Figure 11: Critz Campbell
Eudora Chair [Sa].
Dimensions unavailable
(www.b9furniture.com/NewFiles/Eudora.html)

Similar to the household names that the art world generates, the world of graphic design has also provided its share of celebrities. Designers such as Neville Brody, Philippe Starck, and David Carson often appear in popular magazines and on television, and are known as individual creatives, who have on occasion exhibited their works in solo exhibitions. David Carson, Stefan Sagmeister, and South African designer Garth Walker have become familiar and celebrated names, and are considered by their peers as artists in their own right. Their works have attained high recognisability, and they consequently only take on projects of their choice as they are approached specifically for their unique styles.

David Carson and Garth Walker have also ventured to work on self-initiated projects that are regarded as independent forms of design-for-design's-sake. Carson has brought out several visual publications of his work, such as *The End Of Print* in 1995, while Walker similarly produced the limited *I-Jusi* magazines. Many of the images in David Carson's publications can arguably be described as photographic works of art, combined with text, that have been reworked to reinforce the artistic and conceptual character of its content

(figure 12). They are designs that promote his own artistic and creative talent even more than they are products of graphic design and typography.

Figure 12: David Carson
Untitled (1995)
Dimensions unavailable
(www.typogabor.com/David_Carson/pages/04_david_carson.html).

Austrian born designer Stefan Sagmeister's iconic design for a 1999 American Institution for the Graphic Arts (AIGA) lecture poster, typifies his unconventional style of designing. For this poster he had his assistant cut the text into his skin and had himself photographed (figure 13). This unusual method is comparable to an act of conceptual performance art, almost as much as it is a product of graphic design.

Figure 13: Stefan Sagmeister
AIGA Lecture Poster 1999
Cranbrook Academy for Art and AIGA, Detroit
Dimension unavailable
(Fiell, Fiell 2005:157).

Originally from Finland, another 'design artist' is Kustaa Saksi. His organic shapes form psychedelic illustrations that are playful, chaotic and strange. He has broadened his work also to music videos, advertising for *Citroën* and *Diesel* (Saaksi 2005:[sp]), and illustrating for *Playboy* and *Wallpaper* magazines. Saksi designs firstly in the name of art, producing from his own creativity and initiative, and is commissioned by clients to design with the same freedom as the independent artist. Figure 14 is an example of an essentially 'designed' image, or a computer illustration, that is an artwork in its own right, since it is also an independent work by the artist and not a product of design with a client in mind.

Figure 14: Kustaa Saksi
Untitled [Sa].
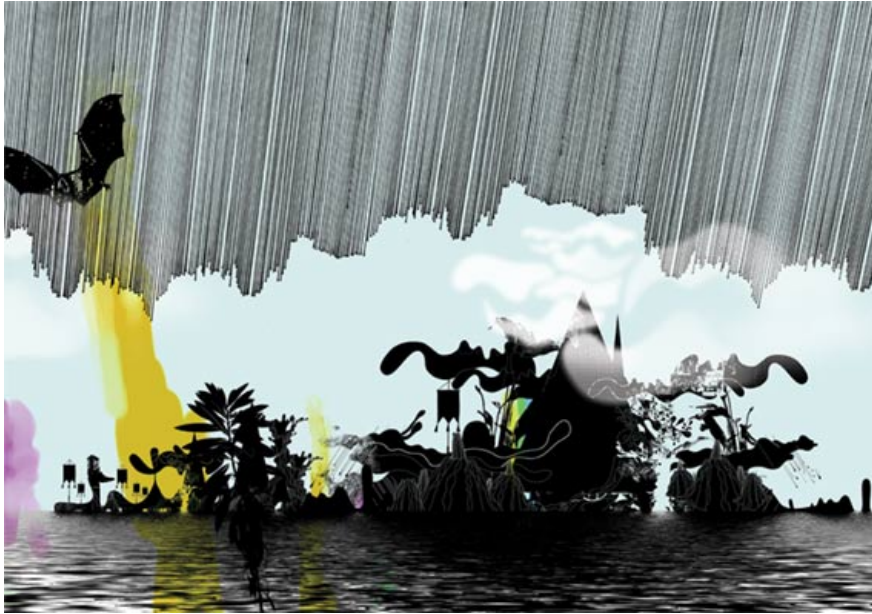Computer-generated print
Dimensions unavailable
(www.coshuk.com)

Not only are there designers who design in the name of art, or whose designs veer toward high art production, there is also an enormous segment of contemporary artists whose works collectively embody high art's appropriation of graphic design.

As mentioned previously, graphic design forms an enormous part of the visible reality and environment of contemporary westernised society. It is arguably an expected development for the images and commodities of graphic design, to be infused in contemporary artistic production in one way or another. Rick Poynor (2005:3) states that design, rather than art, is the dominant cultural force, and "foremost in embodying the visual spirit of the age". It is clear at least, that present-day visual culture has rendered design crucial to an understanding of contemporary art.

Design and the graphic language influence many artists today, and materialise in their work, either in forms relating to the codes of graphic design, or in images combined with text that often share graphic similarities

with graffiti and animation. Many artists are influenced by commercial visual productions of film, television, magazines, animation, graffiti and cartoon illustrations. For many Japanese artists, such as Takashi Murakami and Yoshitomo Nara, an important source of inspiration is found, for example, in the world of manga and anime illustration.

Takashi Murakami's manic, brightly coloured art transforms into walls of cartoon flowers with smiley faces, oversized mushrooms adorned with eyes, and cute but disturbing wide-eyed characters that are friendly yet sinister at the same time. His paintings, sculptures and merchandise items are products of Japanese popular culture, primarily otaku,[9] or the subculture of manga and anime collectors. Nonetheless, his work is also accessible to Western audiences through its Pop Art dimension, graphics and vivacity (figure 15).

Figure 15: Takashi Murakami
727 (1996)
Acrylic on canvas on board, 300 x 450 cm
(Breuvart 2002:229).

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[9] Otaku is a term that emerged in the 1980s to describe the Japanese subculture of manga and anime obsessives (Biro 2006:63).

Japanese neo-pop art has since the 1990s been promoted by a series of "*Superflat*" exhibitions, devised primarily by Murakami, and portrays otaku or "geek culture" through colourful, psychedelic, anime artworks that represent much of contemporary Japanese art (Biro 2006:63). Of the success of contemporary pop in Japan, Matthew Biro (2006:63) states that it lies in "its revelation of the tremendous wellspring of subcultural power that lies at the heart of some of the best Japanese painting and sculpture today." He further asserts:

> [Japanese pop] completely obliterates the distinction between art objects and pure commodities. And that this obliteration … reveals one of the major precipices upon which contemporary art now teeters (Biro 2006:63).

Figure 16: Yoshitomo Nara
Sleepless Night-sitting (1997)
Acrylic and cotton, 120 x 110cm
(Grosenick Riemschneider 2002: 326).

The art of Yoshitomo Nara (figure 16), Michael Majerus (figure 17) and numerous young Japanese visual producers, all display the 'cute' or sweet iconography and animated figures associated with anime films and

illustrations. Similar to Murakami's art, the flatness of the images, synthetic colours and graphic style of their works have awarded them with popularity amongst youth subcultures around the world, who subscribe to the light-hearted, digestible and popular images of Japanese pop. In a conference paper on New Media and Japanese visual production, Carine Zaayman (2005:111) states "decorativeness, playfulness, sexiness, love of technology and youthful abandon characterise the output of many artists and designers of Japan".

Figure 17: Micheal Majerus
Gold (2000)
Acrylic on canvas, 303 x 348 cm
(Grosenick Riemschneider 2002: 287).

Japanese culture has in the last decades become a seminal reference in contemporary popular culture of most westernised countries (Zaayman 2005:104). The infiltration of Japanese youth culture and its iconic references are apparent in the popularity of Japanese video and computer games, and animated programmes such as *Pokemon* and *Dragon Ball Z*. Figure 18 provides an example of an artwork by Thor-Magnus Lundeby in which he appropriates the visual appearance, iconography and characters of

Japanese video and computer games, again underpinning the 'super-flat' aesthetic inherent to the medium of electronic games, as well as of the productions of contemporary Japanese pop.

Figure 18: Thor-Magnus Lundeby
Bungalow Wall of More or Less Fame, Extended (2000-1)
Adhesives on wall, 4,5 x 9 m
Installation at Kiasma Museum, Helsinki
(Breuvart 2002:195).

Graffiti and street art have also proved to be a wealthy resource of creative stimulation for contemporary pop artists. Since the 1980s, many artists have been appropriating the markings, images and typographical elements of graffiti and spray-can art in their own works, including Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, and more recently, Zimbabwean-born artist Kudzanai Chiurai. Chiurai appropriates the images and designs found on graffiti walls,

and creates his own stencils and designs to construct his paintings with actual graffiti writing. These artists appropriate the language of street culture, "capturing a transient moment and in effecting a genuine convergence between their images as art and as signs of popular culture" (Livingstone 1990:228). For inspiration they are looking to the "grit and glamour" (Spence 2006:110) of urban culture, reproducing the graphic stylistics and typographical elements of graffiti art and Hip Hop culture.

Similar to graffiti art and Japanese anime art, other forms have emerged from youth subcultures and moved into more mainstream circles. In San Francisco, the works of Barry McGee, Margaret Killgallen, Ed Templeton and others, are known collectively as "skater art", and relates closely to graffiti. Most of these "skater artists" are ex-professional skateboarders who began showcasing their work in underground galleries, street culture magazines, and on street walls for a decade before they became noticed (Gavin 2005:65).

Skater art is strongly influenced by contemporary urban culture, which is evident in the imagery and the sense of experimentation in the works, and the development of the artists' own styles of creative exhibition display. Artists such as Killgallen and McGee are known especially for their installations and the way their panels are fitted together like puzzles, with their work spilling across the walls. Responding to street and urban culture, their work deals with subcultural influences in a new way. As opposed to graffiti art's aggressive undertones resulting from oppression in the "ghettos", skater-art presents a personal, upbeat reflection of urban decay, often with a tone of introspection, through the use of bright colours, print-influenced graphics and comics (Gavin 2005:65).

Ed Templeton began creating art that reflected the lifestyles of popular youth underground subcultures such as skateboarders and surfers. Not only does his art portray a graphic design sensibility, he also switches easily from his role as artist to that of designer. He creates skateboard graphics for the skateboard company that he founded, called *Toy Machine*, thus bringing his artistic designs into the commercial arena.

Barry McGee's graffiti-inspired wall paintings also deal with the life and people of the streets. Painting directly on the walls on the inside of the gallery, he fills his paintings with a community of male cartoon figures with unshaven faces, droopy eyes and expressions of melancholy (figure 19). Drawing inspiration from street life, graffiti, punk rock music, and the culture of tramps, drunks and losers, McGee makes art that evokes traces of human presence, not only visible in the characters, but evident in his hand-painted 'signage' technique that induces copies of early graphic design and typography (Ise 2000:1).

Figure 19: Barry McGee
Untitled (2004).
Dimension unavailable
(www.artseensoho.com).

Similarly, the late Margaret Kilgallen worked in a hand-painted signage technique akin to letterpress printing and hand-painted store signs. The overpowering scale of the text and images that form entire installations, creates spaces where the density of information simulates the contemporary visual environment of information overload (figure 20).

Figure 20: Margeret Kilgallen
In The Sweet Bye & Bye ([Sa])
Installation views at the Redcat Gallery (2005)
Photograph by Scott Groller
(www.redcat.org/gallery/kilgallen/install1.html).

The stylised, flat, graphic and carefully constructed compositions, resource familiar elements of people, places and markings, reminiscent of retro cartoon illustrations. Along with Ed Templeton, she also designed skateboard graphics for *Toy Machine.*

In my own work the influences of certain trends in contemporary graphic design can be seen, such as the combination of images with text, hard-edged colours, and the illustrated lighthearted iconography of hearts and birds that forms part of a popular 'style' or trend that has surfaced during the last two years in contemporary graphic design and illustration (figure 21).

Figure 21: Lize Muller
Have A Nice Forever (part of series) (2006)
Oil and acrylic on board
250mm x 600mm each
(Photograph by author).

It would seem that design and art may conceivably integrate even further and more frequently, and form a large grey area between strictly art and strictly design. Perhaps an 'art of the grey areas' already exists that would include works such as those done by artist Haluk Akakce (figure 22), which illustrate the joining of art and the graphic language. Rick Poynor (2005:3) suggests that often the most interesting works are created in the "gaps where there is room for manoeuvre and scope for debate". These types of works, which blur the definitions of art and design, are also referred to as "Design art" (Poynor 2005:3). This describes the relatively seamless exchange that often exists between the disciplines, and suggests a continuity between the two fields, since according to Poynor, neither word on its own seems adequate to describe how contemporary visual culture is evolving.
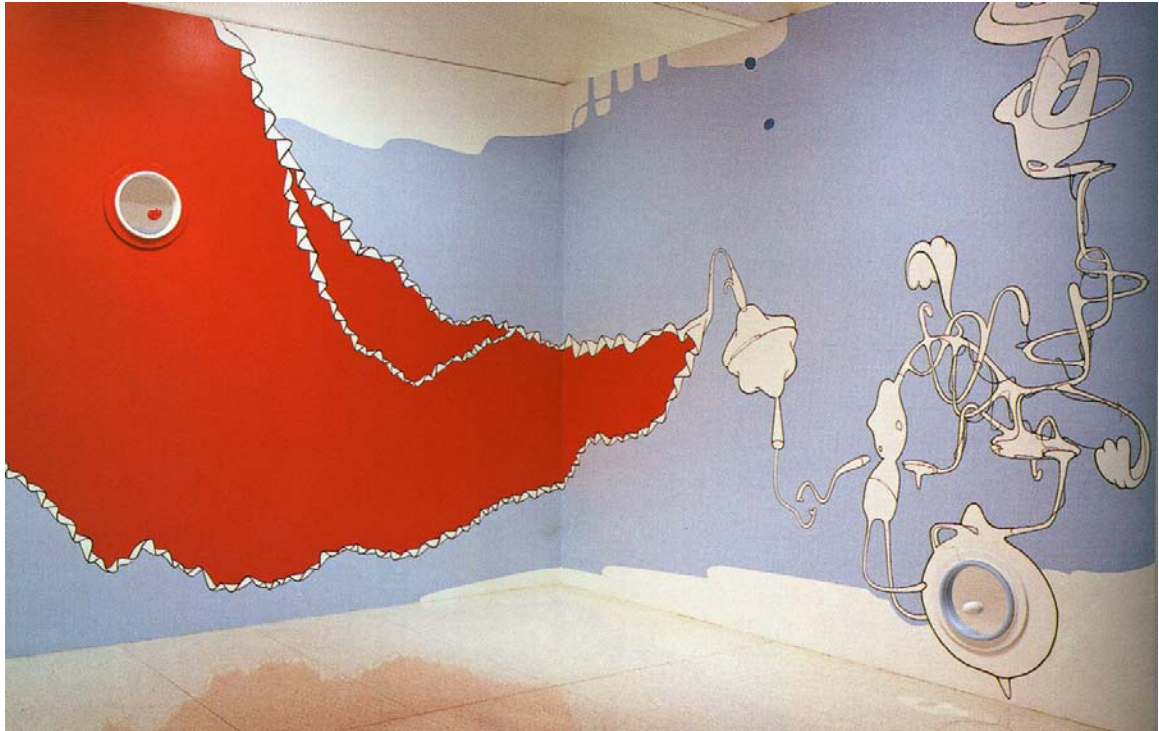
Figure 22: Haluk Akakce
Sweethearts (beneath the water's spate) (2001)
Latex, enamel paint, wood on wall
Installation at Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis
(Breuvart 2002: 24).

In the fields of contemporary art and design, it may therefore be more productive to approach their relationship more flexibly, embracing new kinds of thinking in both design and art in order to acknowledge an art of the grey areas, in which contemporary pop flourishes.

As demonstrated in the preceding section, contemporary pop is often the product that arises from the area of media convergence, such as the amalgamation of art and design, and generates images that show a flatness of surface, illustrated appearance, and a popular culture element that is emblematic of much of contemporary graphic design and commercial production. The following section examines the influence of technology and globalisation on visual art with regard to the recurrence of pop in contemporary art.

2.2.4 ART AND TECHNOLOGY

One of the most defining aspects of contemporary westernised societies is the interconnectedness of technologies and information systems. Everything is interrelated and often more functional when indivisible from each other. One need only examine the effects of *Blue Tooth*, or the latest products of *LG Electronic Design*, such as a refrigerator that includes a television screen and an Internet communication system through which one can order one's groceries. A parallel can be drawn between these types of technological developments and an increasing phenomenon in contemporary visual culture, where there is a convergence of media and visual disciplines, so that it is even more difficult to separate high art from popular culture[10].

Globalisation,[11] the escalation of graphic design, advertising, and the expansion of new technologies figuring the Information age, result in a greater diffusion, distribution and awareness of popular culture, especially within westernised societies (Harrison 2001:17). With new technologies and media being utilised in visual arts and culture, there is evidence for an unprecedented development in the possibilities of representation and the convergence of media. Developments in new media have therefore unlocked potential for new kinds of cultural dynamics and portend a new era in the dissemination of popular culture. Margot Lovejoy (1997:83) writes accordingly:

> In the wake of cultural deconstruction … resistance to technology as an integral aspect of art-making and cultural development began to erode. Not only had new media invaded and changed the very fabric of public life … they also began to play an integral part in altering

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[10] There is currently much philosophical debate surrounding the ideological influences of technology on human psychology, and the content and meaning within contemporary art concerning subjects such as virtual reality, the threat of technology and the questioning of human existence and its future. These topics will not be discussed in this study as the focus of argumentation remains predominantly on globalisation and technological influences on the physical aspects of contemporary pop art.

[11] Globalisation is an overarching term for a complex series of economic, social, technological, and political changes seen as an increasing interdependence and interaction between people and organisations in different locations. It includes greater international movement of commodities, money, information, and people; and the development of technology and infrastructures (Globalization 2006:sp).

perceptions and attitudes about the structure of art and its production and dissemination.

Electronics have proven to be an important factor for the popularisation of all fields, especially with regard to new trends in visual culture. Various new forms of popular expression are the result of an interaction of art and technology, with new media art such as video and computer generated art. Not only have new media problematised the conventional understanding of the art object, it has contributed enormously to the narrowing of the gap between high art and more commercial forms of visual production, such as film, animation and design.

The dematerialisation of the 'traditional' art object can be traced back to the Conceptual movement, during which technology and new media transformed the definition of art in a fundamental way. The Conceptual art movement facilitated the use of media technologies in video art, performance art, and installation art. It is clear that the traditional methods associated with fine art practise had expanded to include techniques originally utilised in commercial visual production and other art forms such as stage performance, film production, architecture, and graphic design, so that collaboration between various media is underscored.

As mentioned previously, new media use in contemporary art includes computer-generated image making, traditionally associated with graphic design or animation, and results in new aspects of artistic representation in computer and video electronic media. In this manner, Takashi Murakami and Jeff Koons have rendered the fusion of art and computing in their art making processes, utilising computer technologies for the illustration, rendering and planning of their art works.

The idea of globalisation relates closely to the multifarious practises in the visual arts. Technological progress is significantly relevant to the process of globalisation, and is accountable for the dispersing of culture, styles and ideas internationally, through various new information and communication

technologies. The Internet, television, computers, tele-communications, and easy travelling, all bring different cultures and nationalities closer, resulting in a greater cross-pollination of ideas, and especially of visual and artistic trends globally. Theorist Marco Livingstone (1990:228) reiterates, stating "[a] sense that the speed of present-day international travel and communications make it possible now for elements from any culture to be borrowed, appropriated or mimicked". The contemporary visual artist can know at all times what other artists are doing around the world, being part of a 'global art scene' or a "global village" (Jencks 1989:53).

The Internet and mass media have made subcultures and vernacular cultures accessible to larger audiences. Younger generations of visual producers, often more adept with technology and the speed of information, have shown that they are able to share and appropriate from different international visual cultures more effortlessly than their predecessors. One need only examine the example of television program channels such as *MTV* in popularising different youth subcultures and moving them into the mainstream, or the numerous art, design and animation publications and magazines that are distributed internationally, which contribute to the globalisation of visual trends and cultural output. (Global influences on South African art and culture is discussed in further detail in Chapter Three).

In my own work I have drawn inspiration from international artists whose works are readily available through the Internet, artbooks and magazines. The aesthetic style in my work is often the product of appropriation of the ideas and stylistics of these artists, thereby demonstrating the workings of the global art-scene. The exhibition *Through The Looking Glass,* also addresses how the globalisation of popular culture affects the individual in contemporary westernised societies. The iconography of the works move between the terrains of dominant culture, popular culture and global subcultures, and can be viewed as a response to globalisation and the concurrent disappearance or fragmentation of traditionally defined structures and identities. I have sought to create a series of works that embody a generally lighthearted sense of awareness of the individual in contemporary society. The works are also a

visual speculation on the influence of the daily visual intake of mass media and humanly constructed culture on the psyche of the individual.

The Information Age brought about an economy built upon the speed by which information is disseminated and gathered. Its manifestation in the art world causes the temporal gap between art appearing in the gallery and its consequent absorption into the mainstreams of mass-culture to quicken, thus contributing to sudden rise in popularity of many upcoming contemporary artists. In these terms, art also becomes inseparable from the products of "real-life", and its "status as 'art' becomes redundant" (Muller 2003:33). For many contemporary artists, the concept of redundancy becomes itself a source for subject matter, being recontextualised in the art-making process. Their works become an extension of the genealogy of pop and its use of popular, everyday iconography, appropriating common objects and images as vehicles for ambiguity, metaphor and allusions to something else.

The interaction of art and technology results in new forms of popular expression, with works that often include a pop aesthetic. It is a 'flat aesthetic' - an aesthetic of the information age – of flat-screen televisions, digital billboards, computer interfaces and 'super-flat exhibitions'. Pop also has a specific 'global identity' – an impersonal and universal aesthetic, often with a deliberately synthetic, manufactured appearance.

The visual stylistics of the multi-layered paintings in my exhibition *Through the Looking Glass*, the 'plasticness' of the paint and colours, and the graphic, flat quality of some of the works, all contribute to this 'pop' aesthetic that emerges from the intertextual referencing to the different media of popular visual production. The imagery used also accentuates an impersonal and universal element, by not being culturally specific. The clear emphasis on surface in the works extends to the flat aesthetic of 'pop' art, but also to the many references of human skin. Contemporary westernised society is defined by the culture of smooth surfaces, of high gloss enamel or plastic surfaces, and flawless skin. I have found the combination of detailed, rendered paintings of human signifiers with bold, flat, and colourful surfaces to be an

intriguing juxtaposed arrangement of subtlety and brashness that is characteristic of many of the works of contemporary pop (figure 23).

Figure 23: Lize Muller
You'll Feel Right As Rain (part of series) (2006)
Oil and acrylic on board
900mm x 1500mm each
(Photograph by author).

This chapter has outlined the three waves of pop in visual art since the 1950s, and subsequently examined the principle issues pertaining to the production of contemporary pop, such as the association of kitsch and camp to pop, the relation of high art to commercial culture, the relationship between art and design, and the influence of technology and globalisation on contemporary pop. Chapter Three investigates contemporary pop as it manifests specifically within the South African context, and looks at a range of examples of South African pop artworks.

CHAPTER 3: CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN POP

This chapter explores selected aspects of the manifestation of contemporary pop within the South African context, by examining South Africa's distinctive visual culture that is fed particularly by local social and political history, as well as increasing globalisation and cross-cultural influences. Younger generations of artists, often subscribing to the many different popular youth subcultures, particularly inform the pop aesthetic within the larger South African art scene.

3.1 SOUTH AFRICAN POPULAR CULTURE

Popular culture is often understood as that which is not high or serious culture. However, in the South African post-apartheid context, it is often difficult to separate popular culture from the highbrow. South African culture is an amalgamation of popular and intellectual culture, or the "proletarian and indigenous crossed with imported Eurocentric forms" (Pretorius [sa]:1). South African popular culture is young and still finding its feet, subject to the strains of an emerging society and its simultaneous, various ideologies (Pretorius [sa]:1).

Apartheid played a significant role in the development of South African culture and identity. On the one end of the scale, it executed an enormous amount of damage through the suppression and destruction of selected cultural forms and identities, while at the same time causing a popular, grassroots counter-culture to spring up, which was strong, resistant and subversive. This counter-culture manifested its aesthetics in what is known as Resistance Art, which brought a fresh and alternative perspective to the South African art scene during the 1980s and 1990s.

Resistance Art is by definition of the term politically informed, and is a reaction or resistance not only to apartheid but also to the predominantly 'white' body of art that constituted the South African art identity. Resistance Art resulted also in a stylistic subversion of traditional South African high art. Its aesthetics

often showed a movement toward more popular and recognisable iconography, as seen in the work of Willie Bester, Brett Murray and Wayne Barker for example, and demonstrate some of the first elements of what this study describes as pop.

Contemporary South African identity and popular culture still lie embedded within its own history of Apartheid and post-apartheid, with socio-political issues such as racism, the new democracy, HIV/aids, violence, technology and global influences. South Africa is a melting pot for different cultures, not only local ones, but also from abroad. Constantly mutating, there are cultural influences from Britain, America, Europe, Japan and so forth, all combining with cultures informed by local history.

South African popular culture is linked particularly with different youth subcultures, such as skateboarders, rappers, design and animation fanatics and many others (Klopper 2005:176). In her essay on the reframing of youth identities in contemporary South Africa, art historian Sandra Klopper (2005:175) writes about the effects of globalisation on youth cultures and states that the youth's interests and aesthetic preferences have become "increasingly eclectic and fragmented". Their "cultural attachments" are also more transient and superficial, and change all the time as they adopt different subcultural identities. Klopper (2005:176) further states that the youth of South Africa shows a growing connection to cosmopolitan or global youth identities, such as rasta or reggae culture, Hip Hop and skateboarding culture, with visual aesthetics strongly rooted in graffiti. There is also a growing following of Japanese anime culture, with concentration in manga films and comics. The manga aesthetic has influenced many South African graffiti artists who appropriate its iconography and its visual icons such as *Hello Kitty* (Klopper 2005:184).

Youth cultures in contemporary South Africa identify more effortlessly with international subcultures than previous generations, partly because global communication systems, such as the Internet and television, are more accessible and advanced, and ideas and styles are more dispersible and

readily available for consumption and appropriation. The pop element in the visual aesthetics of some of these subcultural productions find their way to South African youth cultures and are appropriated and made their own.

There is often especially a return to playfulness on the part of these younger generations of artists in South Africa, who, being exhausted from the burdensome gravity and blandness of postcolonial and academic high art, are seeking to engage with critical issues in a new manner. Although they do not necessarily always move away from socio-political themes, they employ a lighter, more commercial, popular, and often humorous approach in their artmaking. Moving closer toward the realm of pop, these type of works frequently reveal an anti-intellectualism and an anti-theoretical attitude that typifies a growing mood amongst emerging youth subcultures in South Africa.[1]

Against the backdrop of apartheid and its aftermath, and the accompanying disposition of seriousness, soberness, and morality, many artists seek a lightness to return to art. It often results in an ironic humour that is kitsch and playful but "bittersweet" (Jamal 2004:41), such as the 'boere-barok' element in the work of Eduaard Claassen (discussed further in the following section), and Conrad Botes' *Bitterkomix*. Art critic Ashraf Jamal (2004:41) describes the process as follows:

> There is a movement in South African art, or better a *seam*, which has managed to bypass the dominant and/or emergent qualities such as high-minded seriousness, moral indignation, or crass opportunism and banalisation of aesthetic value that destroy the merit of making art in the first place. That seam is not easily depicted since it doesn't follow a prescribed set of rules. However, if it can be said to have a distinctive trait, then it is a bittersweet humour.

Jamal (2004:41) further explains that this "bittersweet humour" is a kind of humour that carries a deathly or "thanatological" quality, and lends itself to the unsettling nature of the art's impact. One artist who embodies this seam is

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[1] This phenomenon seems to be mainly evident amongst white suburban youths.

Conrad Botes, who has lately gained high recognisability. Jamal (2004:42) suggests that one of the reasons for the increasing popularity of the work of Conrad Botes lies in his ability to design, finish and package his work (figure 24). The popularity lies in the merchandise itself: "Botes' works look good on the walls of inner-city late-modern dwellings" (Jamal 2004:42). However, another more significant reason for his popularity stems from the banal, schlock-horror content that lends a pop aspect to the works (Jamal 2004:43). Botes' works are "prettyfied" (Jamal 2004:41) accounts of severe and often shocking events and subjects from social and political arenas, so that the visual aesthetics complicate the impact of the works: they appear shocking and innocent at the same time (figure 25). Jamal (2004:41) writes that Botes is:

> Not willing to simply embrace the darkness at the core of [his] work, but aim rather to find an aesthetic strategy that sharpens its edge at the same time as it makes the work more accessible, and thereby, less daunting.
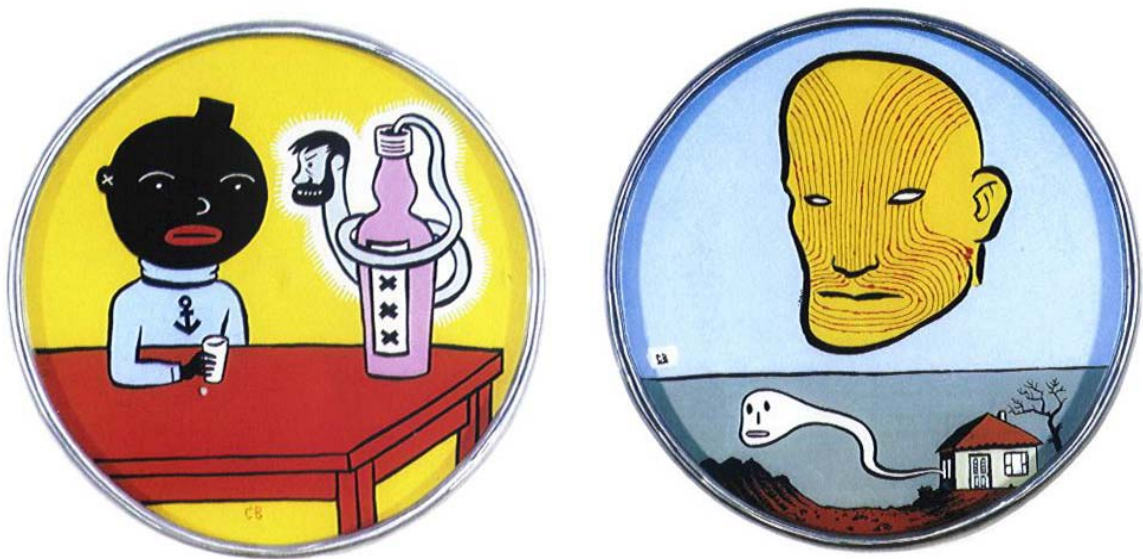

Figure 24: Conrad Botes
Reverie (2001) and *Haunted House* (2001)
Reversed glass oil paintings, each 36cm in diameter
(O' Toole 2002:30).

Figure 25: Conrad Botes
Details from solo exhibition *The Big White Sleep*, Bologna, Italy (2003)
Reverse glass paintings
(Jamal 2004:47).

It can be said that Conrad Botes works within a pop tradition, since he produces works that show strong similarities with that of the Pop artists. He subscribes to the graphic flatness, sharpness of line, and bold usage of colour eminent in the work of pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, and second-wave artists, such as Keith Haring and David Salle (figure 26). Like Haring, Botes is influenced by Pop Art, graffiti, and the comic strip, and is lured by the effects of the "cut-out and the cut-up" (Jamal 2004:41) which is a distinguishing trait of Pop Art in general. This 'cut-out' effect depicts a certain depthlessness, flatness and artificiality, and gives the works a sense of incompletion, of mixed codes or seemingly arbitrary combinations of elements, which also allows the artist "to bypass the compulsive tendency to explain the works created" (Jamal 2004:42).

Figure 26: Corad Botes
Installation view showing:
(Left) *The Disasters of War* (2003)
Found paper, acrylic and reverse glass painting
(Right) *Theatre of Cruelty* (2003)
Oil on canvas
At Art Omni, International artist's residency, New York (2003)
(Jamal 2004: 45).

The fragmented texts and 'incomplete' imagery reveal the outlook of the artist. Botes usually refrains from explaining or anchoring any meaning or content in his work, leaving it open to individual interpretation. Many younger generation artists, resisting the fixing of meaning, adopt this approach, feeling drained from the usual exhaustive, serious explanations and vindications for works of high art. These artists tend to produce pop art that is fresh, 'cool', accessible, and popular, without stern excess of meaning. This new generation of pop artists like Botes, produces works that are different from the general body of South African art which invests in grandeur, significance and meaning, as Ashraf Jamal (2004:42) describes:

> To neither morbidly probe the past, nor zealously proclaim
> a future, nor haplessly and elegantly languish on the fence,
> to bypass the very economy that keeps South Africa's artistic
> imagination in thrall. For to my mind at least, South Africa

and its art remain stuck in their own exhausted credentials.

Jamal (2004:42) believes that South Africans in general are still shaped by a moral seriousness, and in contrast Botes' "spoof high art" (Jamal 2004:45) emerges as uncomplicated and having a non-intellectual accessability. Jamal (2004:47) states that, "this quality is, I think, summed up in Thomas Mann's depiction of the composer Leverkuhn in his novel *Doctor Faustus*: 'Generally speaking, he was more inclined to laughter and pranks than to metaphysical conversation.'"

As mentioned previously, this anti- intellectual stance is adopted chiefly by white suburban youths who subscribe to the culture of *MTV*'s *Jack-ass* and its local offspring, *Crazy Monkey* and *Straight Out Of Benoni* that typifies the form of arbitrary, ironic humour and camp mentality espoused by younger generations of artists. The appropriation of subcultural output and commercial culture in their art also promotes this ironic humour and plays at the seriousness of preceding art movements.

3.2 SOUTH AFRICAN POP

This section focuses more closely on the different aspects that direct the pop element in contemporary South African art and looks at some of the works of a few pop artists.

Similar to Conrad Botes, Brett Murray's art subscribes to the same bittersweet humour that typifies South African pop. Working in a convention of satire, his pieces provoke amusement at the same time that they address the darker socio-political issues of South African life. Murray (quoted by Williamson 2004:262) states that he is "trying to find the weird spaces between comedy and tragedy". Like all other descendants of pop, Murray draws on the icons of popular culture to act as the mediums for the content of the works, and has appropriated many of the commercial and animated characters of mass culture, such as *Richie Rich*, *Pink Panther*, the *Oros Man*, *Colonel Sanders* and

Bart Simpson. Using these characters as signifiers, Murray poses questions about dominance and the abuse of power, whether for political, cultural or commercial ends (Williamson 2004:262), such as the questioning of the influences of American popular culture on South African culture.

Cultural globalisation has influenced South African nationality and identity, and also its visual culture. Contemporary South African pop is therefore informed by the appropriation of forms and aesthetics from both local and global commercial cultures. Artist Gordon Froud explores the manifestations of global commercial iconography and their effects on identity. His exhibition, *Lost and Found* in 2003, featured an installation of small sculptures made from found objects (mostly cheap plastic toys) that have been conjoined into strange new configurations, or cast in bronze and aluminium. Froud frequently travels around the world, where he collects small items of memorabilia, toys, and other objects that he picks up from the streets, and uses them to construct his characters. In an online review for *Artthrob*, Carine Zaayman (2003:sp) describes their effect as follows:

> These objects testify to the fact that they have followed
> various routes to become artworks. Sometimes collected from
> friends, but more often picked up on the streets, the objects
> communicate a sense of both particularity (hailing from specific
> contexts and having unique associations), and, through consistent
> use of McDonald's toys for instance, also reminding us of the
> "sameness" that globalism brings in its wake.

Like Brett Murray, Froud's art is a conjunction of the banal and the meaningful, of humour and tragedy, generating a kitsch irony. According to Zaayman (2003:2), "It is this irony of form and content that produces a microcosm of the consumerism-infused culture and raises questions regarding the role of individual agency therein".

With regard to the role that global cultures play in the development of South African pop, many upcoming young artists show a growing interest in influences from the East. Carine Zaayman (2005:105) states that since the 1990s, "many South African subcultures show an increasing interest in

Japanese pop", and that the focus of that interest centres around anime and manga comic books and animated programs such as *Pokemon*, as well as a new escalating industry of designer toys, often referred to as 'plush toys'.

Watkins Tudor Jones is an artist whose work demonstrates the 'cute' but sinister humour that is typical of manga animations in general. His exhibition *Fantastic Kill 1* (2004) launched Jones' range of malevolent manga stuffed toys and illustrations, revealing elements of commercialism, pop, and the "pokemonesque" (Beukes 2004:87) as exemplified in *Panda, Frog, Sheep, Nagapie* (Figure 27).
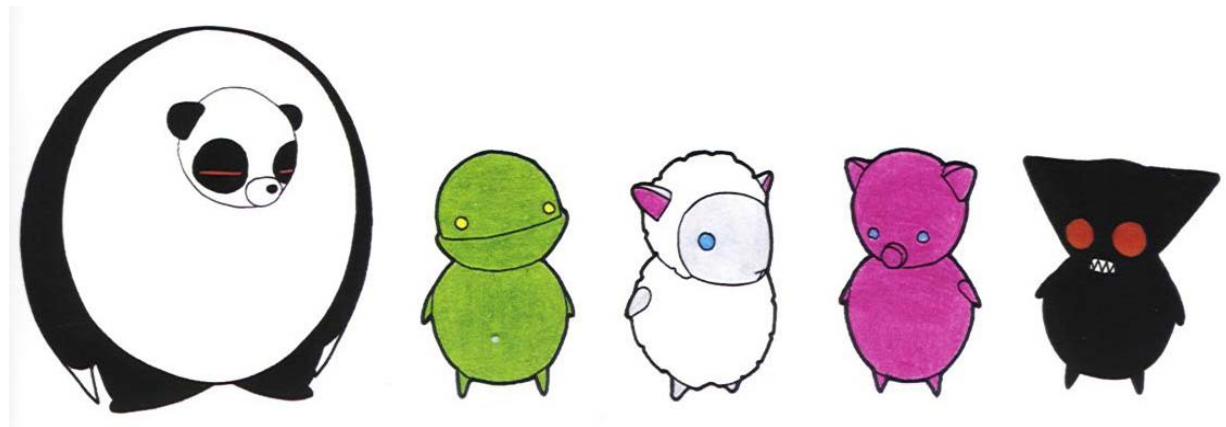

Figure 27: Watkin Tudor Jones
Panda, Frog, Sheep, Pig, Nagapie (2004)
Digital print on canvas
Dimensions unavailable
(Beukes 2004:87).

Teresa-Anne Mackintosh is another young artist who employs the Japanese influences of anime to merge high art with popular culture. The characters in Mackintosh's films, paintings and sculptures resemble the characters of animated programs such as *Pokemon* and *South Park* (figure 28). Her ability to reflect the position of the ever-blurring line between fine art and popular culture, gives the work its pop edge (Sudheim 2004:77). Mackintosh explains her approach as follows (in Sudheim 2004:77):

> Maybe my work forms part of a the contemporary mainstream makeup by reason that it exists and is created now, as simple

as that. … I definitely relate to the fact that boundary lines between high art and popular culture are blurred and move all the time. Toy design, fashion illustration, art, its often all the same. Perhaps the flatness of my current work extends past a literal graphic sensibility and is speaking some global language? I don't know. And, ultimately, it is better not to know … then you can forget about the whole messy business of intellectual analysis, critical theory, and semiological nitpicking, and appreciate the work for what it is.

Figure 28: Teresa-Anne Mackintosh
Jackie the Kid, installation view of *Tina* sculptures (2004)
NSA Gallery, Durban
Fibreglass, plastic, steel, rubber, each 152 x 55 x 50 cm
(Sudheim 2004:77).

As an amalgamation of different media forms and elements of popular culture, Mackintosh's works represent a simulacrum of media bombardment and saturation that has become characteristic of South African mass culture, and is expressed in the random, animated fragments that constitute her exhibitions (figure 29).
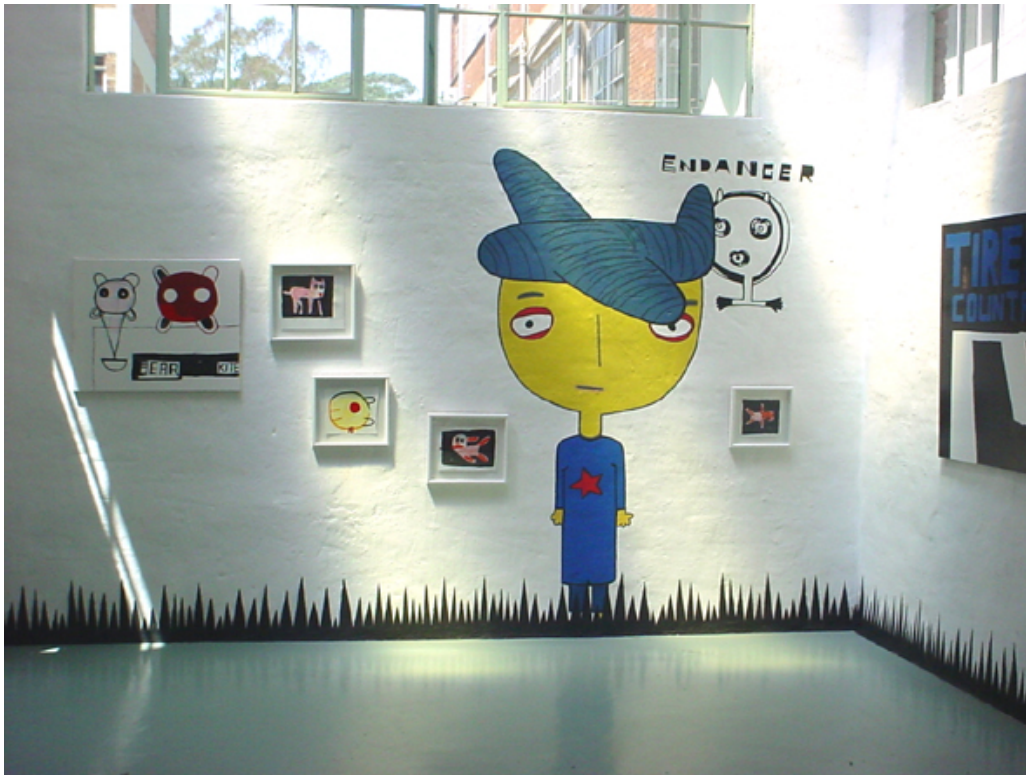
Figure 29: Theresa-Anne Mackintosh
Theresa-Anne Mackintosh, Installation view (2005)
Franchise Gallery, Johannesburg
(Photograph by author).

Artist Mathew Hindley [2] also draws his inspiration from both local and global popular culture, instantly hinting at the pop element, but his visual stylistics also build upon the cross-pollinating relationship between art and graphic design. Like Botes and Mackintosh, Hindley's work does not immediately suggest significant meaning, nor does it speak to any one specific context. His exhibition at the Bell-Roberts Art Gallery in Cape Town in 2004, entitled *Surrender,* perhaps suggests that his art speaks of his 'surrender' to the elusive contemporary language of visual production in which "no clear conceptual or content markers exist" (Zaayman 2004:71).

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[2] Although Mathew Hindley has until recently mainly produced work in the form of new media and video installations, a gradually growing domain of two-dimensional drawings and paintings has lately represented his art production. (These are discussed in this study).
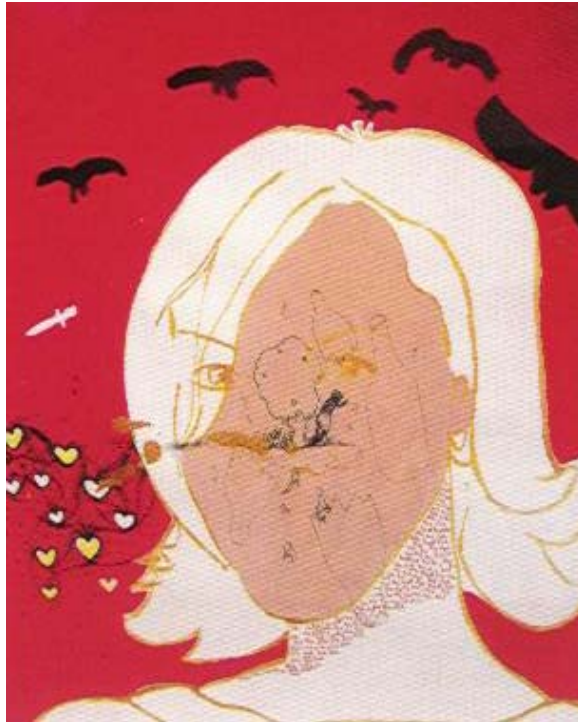
Figure 30: Matthew Hindley, *Charlize* (2003)
Ink on paper
Dimensions unavailable
(Murinik 2004a:71).

Hindley's graphic style is one of simplification, with its cartoon-like outlines and compositions, and his work is reminiscent of both American and Japanese Pop Art, which Hindley acknowledges as prominent influences (Zaayman 2004:71). For source material and images, Hindley turns to events described in the newspapers, pop music lyrics (especially those of Britney Spears and Kylie Minogue, whose lyrics he appropriates in many of the titles to his works), tabloids and chronicles of celebrityhood (figure 30). This fact brings Hindley's work strikingly close to the contents of most of Andy Warhol's works. Like Warhol, Hindley's art attests to an ambiguity and tension at work between the apparently playful surface-design and the submerged emotional associations (figure 31 and 32). Similar to Conrad Botes, he finds resonance for contemporary 'psychodramas' (Zaayman 2004:71) in pop, as art writer and critic, Tracey Murinik (2004:142a) describes:

> … [the artworks] inscribe sombre reflections on an
> apparently abandoned and traumatised universe. Informed
> by media reportage, individual experience and a
> developing personal iconography of metaphorical

characters, these scenarios are rendered as encoded
fictions or metaphors of trauma, couched in "pop" style.

For Hindley, pop music, in spite of its seeming superficiality, is often a direct
and effective translation of human emotion and experience (Zaayman
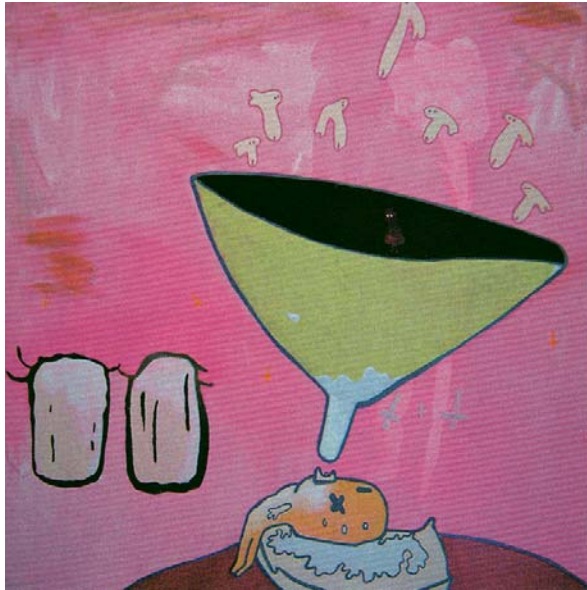2004:71).

Figure 31: Matthew Hindley
From the Bottom of my Broken Heart (2004)
Mixed media on canvas
Dimensions unavailable
(Zaayman 2004:71).

Figure 32: Matthew Hindley
Hollywood, CA (2004)
Mixed media on canvas
Dimensions unavailable
(Zaayman 2004:71).

Similar to Hindley, some of the works for my exhibition *Through the Looking
Glass* also play on ideas of celebrityhood, in which the act of looking extends
past the superficial exterior of the images onto its content, so that the idea of
'invasion of privacy' perturbs the viewer's frame of mind. An example of this
can be seen in *Mirror, Mirror* (figure 33), where personal and public identities
merge in the face of the mirror. The work engages with the idea that the
private lives of public people, politicians, stars and personalities are known by
most individuals in westernised societies who read newspapers and tabloid
magazines. However, most people prefer to keep their fascination covert,
hiding their sense of shame in being captivated by the lives of those they do
not actually know intimately. I have alsontried to play with the idea of
celebrity fascination in contemporary popular culture and these popular

icons' collective pop element, in a way that might remind one of Andy
Warhol's 'commemorative' celebrity portraits.

Figure 33: Lize Muller
Mirror, Mirror (part of series) (2006)
Oil on mirror
Dimensions variable
(Photograph by author).

South African pop follows the international trend of contemporary pop that is
fed by commercial art influences, and as already noted in the style of
Matthew Hindley's work, South African pop has also been influenced by the
graphic language of hip-hop culture, and of design and graffiti.

Mustafa Maluka's art is born from his experiences of Hip Hop culture, break
dance and graffiti. Graffiti in particular, with the combining of written and
visual texts, and the dramatic, bright, 'synthetic' colours, influences Maluka's
visual approach (Goniwe 2004:222). His work consists mainly of oversized
portraits of cultural, political and popular icons with high recognisability, such

as Malcolm X, Steve Biko and *Mr T* from the TV series, *The A-team* (figure 34). The painting technique for the portraits reveals the clear associations with contemporary pop, with a combination of graffiti, graphic design and 'Pop Art colours', along with the images of popular and familiar subjects.

Figure 34: Mustafa Maluka
Mr T in Ghana (2000)
Acrylic, oil and spray-paint on canvas
Dimensions unavailable
(Goniwe 2004:223).

Analogous to the diverse cultures in South Africa is an interdisciplinary approach concerning different visual media in the producing of new forms of contemporary South African art. As an artist, Sharlene Khan (2004:23) states of her own work:

> I personally believe the arts need to contribute more to one another, for strengths drawn from each discipline to be used in producing work that can, on the one hand, be critical of multiculturalist euphoria, yet also be celebratory of living in a diverse society.

The amalgamation of different media, such as art and graphic design, has also manifested itself in contemporary South African art to produce a local version of an 'art of the grey areas'. The computer-generated works of graphic designer and artist Eduard Claassen can be considered as prime examples of design-like art, or designs that portray local identity and history (for example the Voortrekker Monument), in the form of limited edition artworks (figure 35).
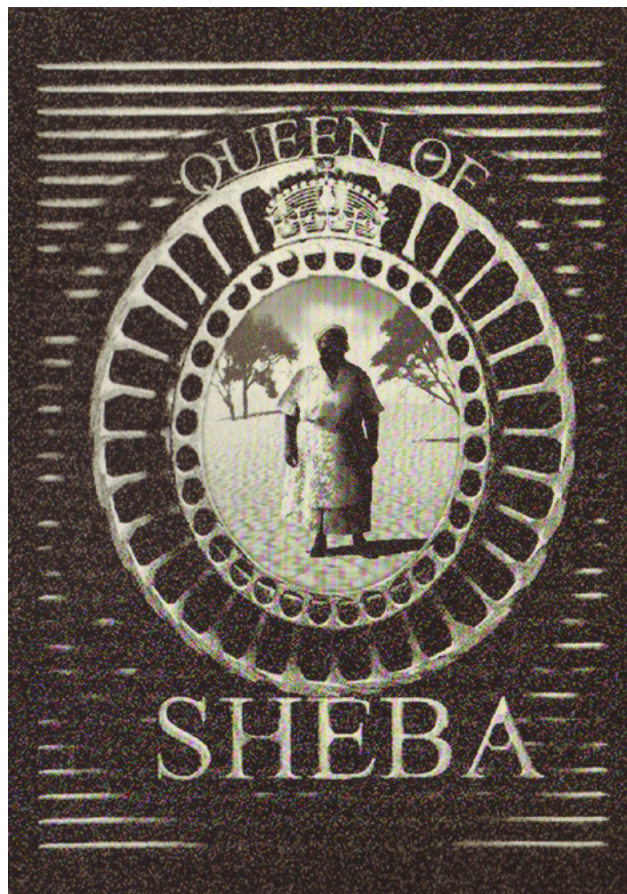

Figure 35: Eduard Claassen
The Queen of Sheba (sa)
Digital Print
Dimensions unavailable
(Buys 2005:33).

With regard to the materialisation of contemporary pop in South African art and design, the images of designer Garth Walker, of *Orange Juice Design* in Durban, are perhaps the most superlative examples. The exclusive South African *I-jusi Magazine* is the outlet for his creative and resourceful designs

and images that he draws from the visual culture of the streets and townships of Durban to create a unique "African Design" (Richardson [Sa]:1). Appropriating the visual motifs and styles of local popular and street culture, Walker, and other visual contributors of the *I-jusi Magazine* present examples of contemporary South African pop design, such as seen in an issue that featured African hairstyle portraits by local barbers (figure 36).

Figure 36: Shani Ahmed
Spread from *I-jusi* magazine (National Typografika issue) [Sa]
Dimensions unavailable
(http://www.fontshop.com/features/fontmag/003/ijusi/index.cfm).

Recent issues of *I-jusi* focus on death, religion, pornography, street style, crime and other issues that are inherent to topics of actuality in South Africa. These issues are presented with sardonic twists, ironic humour and blatant commentary that is particular to the 'bittersweet' South African pop (figure 37). Mixing icons from past and present, as well as the visual productions of different subcultures they form a "new visual language" that "everybody can understand … that starts on the streets and ends up in glossy magazines on coffee tables" (Richardson [Sa]:1).

Figure 37: Garth Walker
Spread from *i-jusi* magazine (Amaout: Street Style issue) [Sa]
Dimensions unavailable
(http://www.fontshop.com/features/fontmag/003/ijusi/index.cfm).

This chapter has demonstrated the manifestation of contemporary pop within the South African context. It has offered a brief discussion of South African popular culture with regard to the expression thereof in visual art. It has shown that especially younger upcoming artists appeal to the aesthetics of contemporary pop and have produced their own unique version of pop, though often by appropriating and incorporating global stylistics and universal popular iconography. South African pop is characterised by a 'bittersweet humour' that is born out of a merging between light-hearted humour and the seriousness of socio-political content and commentary. Chapter Four concludes this study and presents a summary of the main argumentations in it.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

This study has provided a genealogy of the recurrence of pop, outlining three waves of pop, with the first wave represented by the Pop Art movement. It has firstly recapitulated briefly on how the first wave pioneers of pop eliminated the distinctions between high art and commercial art by appropriating the images and techniques of consumer and popular culture. More than anything else, however, the artists of the Pop Art movement were responding to the culture of their time. Transforming ordinary objects and images into art allowed them to define for themselves, and the rest of society, what popular culture was. The most revolutionary aspect of the movement was that it redeemed popular culture, which critics such as Greenberg generally thought of as uneducated and escapist. Pop Art first called critical attention to the beauty of everyday trivial design, popular taste, and mass culture in general, and brought it into the realm of high art.

The study then demonstrated how the second wave of pop accordingly developed by building on the principles set by the Pop artists. Postmodernism maintained the interest in commercial subject matter of popular visual culture, and the frequent use of appropriation and intertextual referencing of different visual sources. The second wave of pop had its most evident manifestation in neo-pop works by artists such as David Salle and Jeff Koons. The Modernist principles rejected by the Pop Artists were also further negated by the Postmodernists, and replaced by pluralistic and deconstructionist theories concerning the visual arts, paving the way for a polysemic approach not only toward meaning in the arts, but also toward inter-connectivity between different visual media and disciplines.

The third wave of pop, or, contemporary pop, was briefly introduced before the study continued by outlining the central codes of pop as they manifest in the third wave. This study showed pop's association with the aesthetics of kitsch and camp; its affiliation with commercial culture and the methods of mass production; the narrowing relation and blurring of distinct boundaries between art and design, which has been examined as a central focus to

contemporary art's relationship with commercial culture; and the influence of technology and new media on art production, shown to further facilitate the growing interrelation of art and popular culture, as well as an accelerating dissemination of popular cultural productions and an emergent globalisation of artistic trends.

The third chapter offered an overview of contemporary pop as it manifests in the South African context, showing the reliance of pop producers in South Africa on international trends and influences, as well as revealing the emergence of a younger generation of artists whose works feed off popular culture imagery and iconography. South African pop has a distinct character that lies embedded in the socio-political history of South Africa, although the combination of subject matter with humour and light-heartedness lends it a unique bitter-sweet irony.

In conclusion, and as mentioned previously, the artists of contemporary pop have a distinctive relation to the mass media and frequently use material drawn from mass culture. The embracing of popular visual culture by pop seems to be a fulfilment of the Postmodern assertion that there is no longer a clear and meaningful distinction between high art and popular culture. Pop is therefore typically prefigured by the interaction of art and the mass media, the convergence of different visual disciplines, and the appropriation of popular cultural production. Being knowledgeable about the subjects and forms of the mass media, such as different television programmes and celebrities, *and* being an enthusiast or admirer rather than a critical analyst, often seems to be more conducive to an understanding of pop.

Describing some of the works of British Hi Art Lite, artist Martin Maloney (quoted by Stallabrass 1999:151), states that:

> The dreamy qualities in the artworks do not express a personal poetic. They come from the commercial exploitation of our desire for that poetic. The artworks show the blank beauty of a generation seduced by the romantic poses of people, places and things from t.v. and magazines … When I look at the work I am shocked by the artists' fascination with the trivial. I see the emptiness of the superficial but somehow I've been made to enjoy that.

Pop does provide a generally enjoyable and accessible aesthetic, and is especially popular with the different subcultures of the younger generations in westernised post-industrial societies. Visually, contemporary pop can be described in terms of its smooth clean surfaces, its manufactured look, its eclectically appropriated iconography and motifs, the flat aesthetic, bright synthetic colours, ironic humour, and the element of kitsch or camp.

In 1957 Richard Hamilton listed the characteristics of Pop Art as "popular (designed for a mass audience); transient (short term solution); expendable (easily forgotten); low cost; mass produced, young (aimed at youth); witty; sexy; gimmicky; glamorous; and big business" (Livingstone 1990:36). Even though contemporary pop has changed significantly since the inauguration of the pop aesthetic during the Pop Art movement, it arguably continues to subscribe to Hamilton's list of characteristics, although not always in the original context.

Therefore, in light of Hamilton's postulations about Pop Art, it can be said that contemporary pop is 'popular' in its appropriation of popular mass media imagery and themes, and is essentially aimed at a larger audience than the conventional high art intellectual minority. Pop is 'transient' and 'expendable' with regard to its commercial subject matter, but also insofar as individual artists and works are rapidly absorbed by the media and made accessible through various art publications, only to be replaced by newer works and newer artists. Pop is 'low cost', concerning again its subjects, mediums and imagery, and 'mass produced' as cultural artefacts for mass consumption, such as exemplified by the art of Takashi Murakami. Pop is 'young', aimed predominantly at youth subcultures, and produced mostly by younger generations of artists. Pop is 'witty', 'sexy', 'gimmicky' and 'glamorous' in both its content and visual stylistics, such as the bold usage of bright colours, the smooth surface aesthetic, and the camp sensibility that lends it its ironic humour. Pop is often 'big business', since it has a high marketability due to its popularity, and is usually commercialised effectively, while it also appropriates the aesthetics of 'big business' mass production.

The recurrence of pop in contemporary visual art is an evident continuation of the standards and aesthetics that were originally introduced by the Pop artists of the 1950s and 1960s. Regarding the future of pop in the visual arts, various speculations can be made; however, based on the persistence of pop during the last five decades, a strong argument can be made that its continuation will endure alongside the systematic progress of technological development and cultural globalisation, the increasing interdependence of different visual disciplines, and the narrowing association between high art practise and mass cultural production. The pop aesthetic seems also to be increasingly popular with younger generations of visual producers and young upcoming artists. Perhaps pop has become a 'populist' form of art practice that carries the possible capacity for liberating high art from the stigma of being too high-brow.

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