

Editorial

> **Fatima Cassim**

Lecturer in Information Design, Department of Visual Arts,
University of Pretoria, South Africa.

fatima.cassim@up.ac.za

> **Rory du Plessis**

Lecturer in Visual Culture Studies, Department of Visual Arts,
University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

rory.duplessis@up.ac.za

> **Kyle Rath**

Lecturer in Information Design, Department of Visual Arts,
University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

kyle.rath@up.ac.za

In *How to see the world*, Nicholas Mirzoeff (2015:[sp]) elucidates that

When visual culture became a keyword and focus of study in and around 1990, ... it centred on the question of visual and media representation, especially in mass and popular culture. The shorthand for understanding the issues concerning visual culture at that time was to say it was about the Barbie doll, the *Star Trek* series and everything concerning Madonna. By which we should understand that people were centrally concerned with how identity, especially gender and sexual identity, was represented in popular culture, and the ways in which artists and filmmakers responded to those representations. I do not mean to say that these issues no longer matter but that the ways in which we engage with them have changed.

This issue of *Image & Text* highlights some the new shifts and focus areas that have come to encompass the study of visual culture. While the first few decades of *Image & Text* predominated in content that sought to understand and interpret popular culture (see Langa 2012), the more recent issues of the journal contain content that engages in postcolonial readings of archival material and art historical works, opening up novel dimensions in understanding and probing the representations of identity, as well as providing an ongoing platform for design discourses. In particular, this issue investigates a multitude of visual texts – paintings from the Spanish Netherlands, Charles Chaplin's *Modern times* (1936), photographs from a memoir in the early 1920s, and instances

of racism covered by South African social media – to engage in philosophical theory, histories of blackness, while also seeking to open up meeting points between animal, human and nonhuman objects to challenge either the dominant discourses of aesthetics or to ‘disrupt the production of race as species’ (see the article de Robillard & Lipschitz).

The first article is by Bernadette Van Haute and is entitled ‘The black servant in portrait, genre and still-life painting in the Spanish Netherlands’. Van Haute frames her investigation in terms of Peter Burke’s theory of the cultural history of images and seeks to broaden the ‘understanding of the history of blackness in the Spanish Netherlands’. Martin Rossouw’s article ‘Of metaphor and machine: some nuts and bolts behind *Modern times* as philosophy’ provides a sophisticated contribution to the debates and discourses of film as philosophy. Rossouw questions Thomas Wartenberg’s view of *Modern times* (1936) as illustrating ‘a theory in itself’. Instead, Rossouw proposes that the film ‘mobilises a more general and fundamental concept – the conceptual metaphor that the film and Marx’s philosophy happen to share – and that it is only by means of this underlying concept that Wartenberg can identify *Modern times* as a cinematic illustration of the philosophical theory’.

The third article authored by Benita de Robillard and Ruth Lipschitz is titled ‘Race and “the Animal” in the Post-Apartheid “National Symbolic”’. The authors address ‘cultural formations of race and “the animal” within the contemporary post/apartheid setting’ and contend that ‘anti-racist politics in South Africa must confront the primal scene of the constitution of race through species and the “zoologo-racial order” it installs’. The fourth research article by Geoff Bender titled ‘Recomposing Werther’ uses a new materialist methodology to analyse two full-length nude portraits in Ralph Werther’s memoir, *The Female–Impersonators* (1922). Bender produces a compelling analysis that concludes that ‘Werther, as an actant in a complex visual negotiation, ultimately persuades us that his body is not to be pitied, but rather is a form to be aspired to, both culturally and aesthetically’.

The issue ends with an exhibition review and two book reviews. Louis Rogers reviews *Photographs from Boyhood*, an exhibition of hitherto unseen photographs taken by the young JM Coetzee between 1955 and 1956. Thereafter, Adèle Adendorff reviews the book *Critical addresses: the archive-in-practice*, edited by Leora Farber and Claire Jorgensen. Lastly, Fatima Cassim provides an insightful review of *Developing citizen designers* authored by Elizabeth Resnick.

Finally, this issue also marks a rather poignant change in the editorship for the journal. Jeanne van Eeden, one of the founding members of the journal in 1992, assistant editor from 1992 to 2007, co-editor from 2007 to 2010, and finally, editor from 2011, has handed over the editorship to Fatima Cassim and Rory du Plessis, while the design and layout

remains under the creative eye of Kyle Rath. Jeanne conscientiously nurtured the journal from its origins at the dawn of South Africa's socio-political transformations while also being a forerunner in establishing and cultivating the study of visual culture at South African universities. The three of us were under Jeanne's tutelage from our first year of undergraduate study. As we moved to postgraduate study and eventually to the employ of the Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria, Jeanne became our mentor and 'academic aid' in successfully journeying through the trials and tribulations of publishing our first scholarly articles, coping with an ever-increasing workload, and in balancing the many 'hats' that an academic must juggle – researcher, teacher, administration, and intrepid funding and / or marketing roles.

During her tenure at *Image & Text*, spanning 25 years, Jeanne was committed to advancing and promoting the scholarship of others by providing substantial support, generous guidance and meticulous editing. It is with great esteem that we bid Jeanne a farewell. In her stead, we excitedly enter a new era for the journal. We hope to continue in Jeanne's footsteps and are committed to ensuring that the journal remains at the forefront of publishing scholarly work in visual culture and design.

REFERENCES

Langa, J. 2012. Foreword. Evaluation, reflection, comment and analysis: Twenty years of *Image & Text*. *Image & Text* 20:6-29.

Mirzoeff, N. 2015. *How to see the world. A Pelican introduction*. London: Pelican books.