

Searching Beyond

Work in progress by practice-based research
degree students in art and design

Searching Beyond ... Symposium

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Design

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ELEMENTS OF SHAMANISM WITHIN PERFORMANCE ART

In the opening address to Tate Modern's *Live Culture* conference in 2003, the academic, and founder of Performance Studies International, Peggy Phelan proposed that (performance art) "has developed from three points : theatre, painting and a return to shamanism."

This alleged relationship between the latter is suggested by a plethora of contemporary academics, critics, cultural commentators and peer artists. Little is done, however in attempting to substantiate these claims and the paucity of research into these linkages is noticeable.

The paper examines this purported relationship between performance art and shamanism. Beginning by establishing the current anthropological definition of what constitutes a shaman the paper will then introduce the discovery of three key signifiers common to both performance art practice and shamanism: altered states of consciousness, ritual, and healing. Furthermore, upon having identified these elements the study will examine their modes of application within performance art.

Focusing on the work of the artist Alastair MaLennan as an exemplar, the enquiry will conclude with an analysis of the allied concepts of catharsis, the sacred and the profane, and liminality.

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TRANSGRESSION AND PROGRESS: FUTURE BODIES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

From the fictional (Gibson's cyberpunk cowboy) to the discursive (Haraway's feminist cyborg and N. Katherine Hayles's *How we Became Posthuman*), and from the fantastic (Kurzweil's conception of immortalised uploaded consciousness) to the real (transgenics, neuro-prosthetics, cloning, tissue engineering), over the last few decades, we have become increasingly aware of the potential of technology to transform the human body and mind.

The desire for extended or enhanced bodies raises hopes for the future of the human body and human condition. But it also arouses anxieties about loss of identity, essence and autonomy. The unknowable body of the future is a hybrid hotchpotch of the technological, biomedical, cultural and aesthetic and it is stereotypically visualised as beautiful, perfect and young, or grotesque, monstrous and threatening depending on the view it represents.

The subject of my theoretical and practical enquiry is the visual representation of the future human in art and popular science media; the imagery associated with the physical body and the ways in which it might be altered or transformed by advances in science and biotechnology. While science media imagery communicates, informs and illustrates, contemporary art, by virtue of 'visualising, abstracting, imagining, inventing, pretending, storytelling, re-presenting and ceaselessly reinterpreting things' is able to envision, reveal and critique, and to create new spaces or openings for debate and enquiry.

The appearance and expressions of the face impact on our perceptions of identity and identification, and the way it is visualised can unsettle, attract or repel us. This paper discusses the way the face is imaged and manipulated as a way of representing the physical changes that biotechnologies might facilitate, with particular reference to the active, affective and performative properties of such facial imagery.

Jan Bennett
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SEARCHING BEYOND: PHOTOGRAPHIC DECONSTRUCTION ACCORDING TO FLUSSER

The three works on display are a selection from a series of images created as part of my investigation into the 'workings' of camera technology. My research is looking at the relationship between creativity and the program of the camera. In other words, how does the 'programmable' within photography work with and against the creative intentions of the photographic artist?

Vilem Flusser (1920-1991) provides a startling critique of photography in his book, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983), which examines the parameters of the photographic medium in a unique and perhaps unparalleled view. For Flusser, photographs or technical images, to use his terminology, are the consequence of pre-programmed photographic apparatuses i.e. they are produced from within a pre-deterministic domain in which the photographer – when making a particular image – is, by default, projected into a programmed relationship with the technology. On this view, all existential choices are related to programmed choice.

Flusser's ideas have attracted hostility and misunderstanding: Photography, after a long struggle, finally won the battle to prove itself as an art form and along comes another theorist highlighting, what would seem to be, a major creative shortcoming of the medium. However, if we wholly engage with his thesis, we find that Flusser is not saying that photography cannot be creative and become a vehicle capable of revealing existential 'truths', but that we should pay attention to the increasing automation of programmed camera devices: For as human photographic intention slips into the domain of automaticity the overlooked and often non-understood program of the device becomes the tool by which our photographic paradigms are constructed; it is the programmed revealing of our world, through technical images, which becomes a primary site on which our critical judgements are based - this can lead to deception.

For Flusser, automaticity venerates apparatuses and programs – it provides models for receivers actions which short-circuit human intention and creativity. On this view, the automatically generated photograph becomes no more than an auto-realised element of the camera's program – not a creative existential choice, but a programmed choice. The way out of this impasse, he argues, is to examine the photographic apparatus in an attempt to deconstruct the rigidity of photo-programming. This is achieved through the creation of images, which go against automaticity by revealing new possibilities not designed into the program.

This body of work is an attempt at an unconventional and deconstructive enquiry into the mysterious workings of the 'black box', which, in light of its increasing automation and techno-realism, is becoming the guardian for the way we see our world through the medium of technical imagery.

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THE SPATIAL AND GRAPHIC EFFECTS OF COLOUR ON A CERAMIC SURFACE

This research paper discusses current findings and continuing investigations arising from my doctoral research, which examines the ways by which colour can be manipulated and juxtaposed to create the illusion of spatial depth and graphic movement across and within a predominately two-dimensional ceramic surface.

Literature within the field is primarily concerned with a technological and chemical understanding of the creation of specific colours (Hopper 1984, Cooper, 2004, Kingery, 1986), and fails to address the spatial and graphic effects of colour and value. Therefore there is a paucity of debate, discussion and literature regarding the sensorial experience of the illusory properties of colour in ceramics, as highlighted by Claudia Clare in *Ceramic Review* (Jan/ Feb 2007) and Mary Barringer in *The Studio Potter* (Dec 2006).

Many artists working with colour in ceramics see themselves primarily as painters, presumably due to their expressive, direct, and gestural approach to the application of colour and surface quality. Robin Welch and Jun Kaneko are key examples, and others taking a similar approach include Sandy Brown, Craig Underhill and Betty Woodman. However, there is a fundamental difference between painting and ceramics with regard to colour; the coloured surface only reveals itself after it is removed from the kiln, therefore an artist working with clay cannot respond and reflect on visual properties of colour and surface in the same way as a painter. (George Woodman, *The Studio Potter*, 1986).

Key principles of relevant theories of colour, psychology and physiology relating to the creation and perception of spatial and dynamic effects; specifically the visual effects of contrast, the gradation of value, the degree of transparency and opacity of the coloured medium, the level of perceived translucency and the physiognomic process of perception, are examined and discussed in relation to studio-based investigations.

Drawing on specific examples of key artists including Mark Rothko and J.M.W Turner, this paper also discusses the ways by which an understanding of the manipulation and juxtaposition of colour in painting can be applied to the application and aesthetic evaluation of slips and stains to the surface of ceramic artworks using a mono-printing technique on porcelain paper-clay.

The aim of this paper is to encourage further debate and discussion regarding the potential of ceramic colour to create, negate or enhance visual effects through its manipulation and juxtaposition, and to demonstrate the ways in which doctoral research has had a positive impact on my professional practice.

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SEARCHING BEYOND THROUGH DIALOGUE

This paper discusses some limitations to the status of many contemporary artworks as authentic dialogue and mode of new social understanding and discusses how these limitations might be talked through by “Invitation to Dialogue 2008”. It contributes to the conversation on the role and status of dialogue in contemporary art as practice and understanding. Nearly all twentieth-century artworks have been written as the product of the creative individual artist or genius. In contrast, recent social-activist and neo-conceptual artists have cited dialogue as a social mode of meaning-generation in contemporary art. For example, the WochenKlausur group offers a series of conversations as an artwork, a claim grounded in the conceptual and process-based traditions of art. Ingold Airlines and Gallery Space Recall present the professional, dialogical and relational dimension as locus for the meaning generation in the artwork, practices which Bourriaud has termed operative realism. These dialogical artistic practices are open to the wider criticisms of the contemporary fashion for dialogue as part of the cult of conversation, dialogue as social influence technique and the criticism that practices which are operative realist are limited to being an uncritical parody or inauthentic dialogue which doesn't lead to ideological or practical learning. This paper explores how Gadamer's notion of dialogue as transcendental understanding, Martin Buber's focus on the relational dimension of dialogue and Mihai Sora's notion of the authentic in dialogue might contribute to a clearer understanding of how artistic practice might search beyond the limitations of the cult of conversation, operative realism, and the scepticism of social influence. It describes how these understandings inform the presenter's approach to his work “Invitation to Dialogue 2008”.

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SPATIAL COLOUR EFFECTS ACROSS THREE-DIMENSIONAL FORM: THE TILT EFFECT

This doctoral research investigates the spatial phenomena that occur on the surfaces of the ceramic art forms that I make as a practitioner. It examines the spatial activity created by colour combinations, drawn from landscape, when applied to three-dimensional conical forms. Understandings of the colour movement of earlier ceramic works could only be found from examples in painting where perceived spaces complied comfortably with physiological and psychological colour movements. Highly saturated hues appeared larger than less saturated hues, and warm colours advanced and cool colours receded, thus creating visible distortions to the form. The following research anticipated results that did not fit so adequately with understood physiological phenomena, whereby physical space might affect and alter findings.

My initial studio-based investigation was derived from a landscape scene, Table Mountain in the Black Mountains of south Wales. The resulting conical forms exhibited a spatial occurrence that did not comply with physiological colour states on a two-dimensional surface. This is the tilt effect, an illusion on the inner wall at the juncture of two bands that appears to bend form, creating tension between inner and outer surfaces. A more in-depth investigation was then undertaken which sought to clarify and more fully understand this occurrence. The second series of forms confirmed the tilt effect to be a phenomenon that occurs more readily under certain arrangements, for example, between certain distances from the rim and base of the wall; when the tonal values between the bands are more extreme yet also when they are applied in reverse configuration etc.

The spatial manoeuvres of colours bound by the tilt effect on the inner wall emerge determinably through a particular context. The bowl's dimensional presence means that we no longer respond to colours according to physiologically freer colours that can be found on a two-dimensional surface. In fact the effect is so determinate in its spatial control of colour it can be compared to the effects of perspective within painting.

Furthermore the tension that arises between inner and outer surfaces fosters an ambiguous and unstable reading of the form, often a key factor in the effectiveness of art. The thrown vessel then has the potential to become a canvas for painting that can exhibit notions of uncertain spaces found within landscape. The vessel in ceramics is no longer a functional bowl, but a form that questions the ways in which we see colour and space together, a marriage through which the constantly known spaces of both, become lost.

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OSMOTIC SYSTEMS: WHAT DO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN NEW MEDIA ART REVEAL ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND TECHNOLOGY?

Artists have always been involved with pushing political, social, technological and aesthetic boundaries among many others. However, recently artists like Philip Beesley, Scott Snibbe, Susan Broadhurst, Ned Kahn, Wim Delvoye and SymbioticA, an Australian based artistic laboratory, have started to readdress the understanding of the relationship between humans and technology, ultimately highlighting the fallacy of seeing human experience based on mind/body dichotomy and the error in perceiving the essence of technology as either artificial or synthetic.

This paper will examine my video projection works and works by some of these artists with reference to three constructs:

- Human experience as an embodied experience, as highlighted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, exemplified by performance/new media artists Susan Broadhurst and Susan Kozel and at the very essence of interactive installations by Philip Beesley and Scott Snibe. For example, *Hylozoic Soil* (2007) by Philip Beesley is an interactive geotextile mesh that envelops the viewer and participates a complex breathing exercise in response to the viewer.
- Technology as an extension of an embodied human experience, as theorised by Dr. Andy Miah, reader in New Media and Bioethics at the University of the West of Scotland and explored by SimbioticA in the *Harlequin Coat* (2007), a collaborative work with Orlan, which was a composite, organic coat, created using various skin samples. Wim Delvoye, the creator of *Cloaca* and Hybrid Art runner up in Ars Electronica Prix addressed this issue further by creating a mechanical system that in the process of digestion produced human-type excrement.
- Humans and technology as open, complex and osmotic systems, as examined by Edmund Husserl in the period around 1912 and most recently by authors such as Jim Crutchfield and Robert Pepperell, advocate of the Posthuman Condition, and exemplified by me and all of the above artists.

The paper will conclude by highlighting the importance of a collaborative practice between science and art in developing new understanding in what it means to be human and to perceive, interact and contribute to the world around us.

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