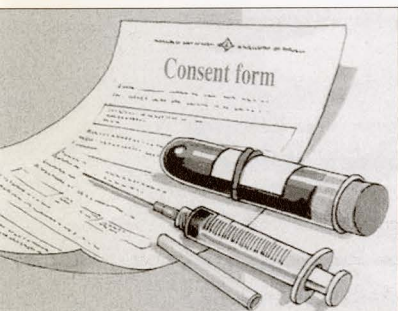
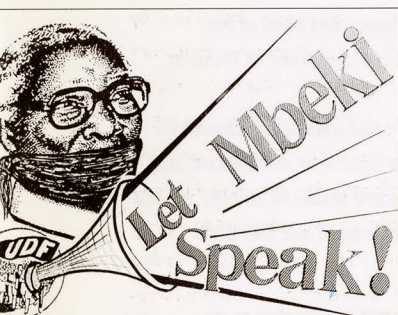


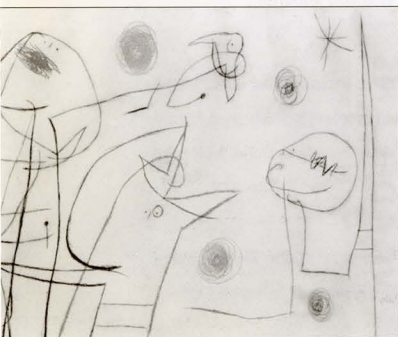
EDITORIAL COMMENT



This issue of *Image & Text* continues the cross disciplinary debate around themes of interest and relevance to design that has become the hallmark of most of the issues of the journal published over the last decade. Four of the articles in the present issue engage directly with areas of design practice in the South African context through the consideration of furniture, health materials, posters and monuments. The other two articles, namely a retrospective response to the 2002 exhibition of artist Joan Miró's work in Johannesburg and a thoughtful critique of the gendering of technology, move outside the immediate domain of design, but nevertheless, offer observations and insights of value to designers and design researchers.



Authors Von Veh and Freschi utilise recent exhibitions held in Johannesburg as a basis for their articles. Von Veh considers an exhibition of work by furniture designer Philip Oosthuizen in terms of the visual and conceptual influences informing his work. She suggests that the conceptual richness of Oosthuizen's work lies in his ability to combine both the methodologies and aesthetics of ecological furniture design, Arts and Crafts ideals, a Zen approach to minimal intervention in nature and a reverence for the inherent properties of indigenous South African woods. Von Veh's article points to a growing sophistication and confidence among South African designers that is evidenced in their ability to tap into and combine global inspirations and local circumstances innovatively in the conception and execution of their work.



Freschi pursues a number of strands suggested by the 2002 Joan Miró exhibition *The Magical Universe of Joan Miró* and its accompanying catalogue. These strands include problems around the issues of artistic integrity and commercialism, Surrealism, notions of primitivism and references to child art in Miró's work. Freschi maintains that the open-ended nature of Miró's work and its consequent ability to elicit infinite metaphoric play constitute the fundamental quality that ensures its continued interest and enduring appeal. He proposes that it is this quality that could have provided a

curatorial strategy to frame the work critically in a South African context. In his opinion, the failure to adequately engage with the exhibition at this level results in the loss of an opportunity to move beyond a neo-colonial mentality and to forge a relevant connection to local artistic production and viewers.

In contrast to a consideration of the open-ended nature of the visual, the articles by Carstens, and Pretorius and Sauthoff place the focus on the examination of how visual meaning may be purposively fixed in response to specific contexts, communication objectives and the responsive characteristics of audiences. Carstens reports on a qualitative study undertaken to determine how well a sample of urban low-literate adults understands visual symbolism in print material that deals with HIV/AIDS. In addition to providing a number of valuable pointers that need to be taken into consideration when designing visual materials for low-literates, Carstens' project underscores the prevalence, and inappropriateness, of design approaches based on Western cultural models and the use of visual styles associated with popular mass media.

Pretorius and Sauthoff adopt a speculative approach in their review of a purposive sample of propaganda posters disseminated in the 1980s by two anti-apartheid groups in South Africa, namely the United Democratic Front and the End Conscription Campaign. They specifically consider how the two organisations challenged apartheid visually and sought to shape the attitudes and influence the behaviour of their respective constituents. They suggest that although the United Democratic Front and the End Conscription Campaign were united by a common ideology, and often dealt with a similar range of themes and concepts in their posters, the manner in which they presented visual arguments differed considerably. This difference is particularly apparent in the ways the posters construct an authorial voice and provide an implied audience with a persuasive vision of itself.

Marschall and Du Preez tackle questions of identity informed by the ideological concerns of nationality and gender respectively. Marshall considers the debates surrounding the erection, removal, modification and relocation of national monuments in post-apartheid South Africa. She examines how monuments acquire their meaning, under what circumstances the meaning can change and to what extent a monument can be re-interpreted to suit the needs of the present. Her conclusion is that although the meaning of monuments is essentially fluid and not as clear and fixed as generally assumed, a paradoxical situation has arisen in South Africa. While the fluidity of meaning is readily accepted with respect to some older monuments erected during the apartheid era, it appears that the initiators and designers of new monuments frequently strive to fix the meaning of their creations through the attachment of explanatory texts.

Du Preez traces the historical and current connections between gender and technology and analyses how technology is sexed and gendered in selected visual examples of film and advertising. She suggests that most technologies, including newer technologies like the Internet, continue to privilege masculinity and males. Furthermore, representations of the connection between women and technology in specifically Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1926) and recent print advertisements for personal computers, provide evidence of the continuation of patriarchal viewpoints, expectations and prejudices. Du Preez proposes that the time has come to subvert existing myths about woman and technology and to reconfigure women's interactions with technologies. This is critical in terms of the practical realities of women's lives and in recognition of the importance of political agency even in an age of fragmented and interspersed identities.

Although diverse in subject matter and priorities, the above mentioned articles address a range of questions pertinent to design – questions of history, criticism and theory – and point to a number of perspectives from which the content of design may be explored.