

Image [&] Narrative two themed journal issues –

The Story of Things: reading narrative in the visual

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Guest edited by Carson & Miller

based on the conference *The Story of Things: reading narrative in the visual* (January 2010)

Summary of Abstracts

ISSUE I

Introduction

Carson & Miller

Part 1 – **Telling the Story of Things**

Relating Stories

Dr. Patricia Allmer

The act and practise of relating is a key element in developing narratives. This essay will explore the interplay and connections between relating and narrating, and the possibilities of producing alternative narratives, independent from hierarchical structures located in linearity, causality and genealogy, by exploring what Gilles Deleuze termed 'involution,' as an alternative device of relating. This essay will explore and exemplify this, by focusing on artistic and curatorial strategies of the artist/curators Carson & Miller in the exhibition *The Story of Things*. This exhibition's re-organisation of anthropological and ethnographic objects challenges the conventional and traditional representation of such objects in linear and genealogical ways. Curatorial and artistic strategies of display, such as unconventional juxtapositions, slight shifts of the constituent parts of objects, and incongruous combinations of them will be examined. The essay will argue that such strategies are effective in establishing new modes of narrative organisation and new products of combination and juxtaposition.

Scrapbook (a visual essay)

Carson & Miller

Working with a range of material (objects, ephemera, texts) characteristic of a scrapbook, Carson & Miller will produce a visual essay that investigates the experience of reading such matter in this often underrated and undervalued form. In this context the notion of reading (and, subsequently re-reading and mis-reading) will be utilised to explore the construction of narrative and the manner in which such narratives can present misleading, misinterpreted or inaccurate accounts of things. In doing so, such accounts can produce a multiplicity of new narratives.

To develop this idea visually Carson & Miller will harness the tradition and format of a scrapbook. Scrapbooks imply the creative use of material which would be valued differently (or indeed undervalued) in other contexts; the inclusion of scraps in the scrapbook claims that which is defined as 'scrap' as valuable and worthy of possession. In essence a scrapbook brings together disparate material and is often constructed according to its own internal ordering and logic; sometimes things are related by type, sometimes unlikely objects are combined or juxtaposed in fortuitous encounters. Such fortuitous encounters tell their own stories but also produce new narratives through generating new combinations of significance (Allmer, 2009).

Part 2 – **Object as Catalyst: the potential for narrative within the artefact**

Artefacts and Anecdotes

Prof. Karen Bassi

Speaking of what he calls the "uneasy dialogue" between ancient historians and Classical archaeologists, Ray Laurence (2004) notes the absence of "a theory of representation of the material world in language." And he suggests that the cause of this uneasiness is a poor understanding of "the role of material objects in texts." It may be going too far to suggest that this unease is due to the fact that inanimate objects and physical structures in texts necessarily refer to the temporal limits of human life. Nonetheless, such a theory must be based first of all on an understanding of their temporal effects; in disciplinary terms, it must establish the criteria by which physical objects and features become sources of historical "evidence" or archaeological "artefacts." How do we respond to the claim in a recent (2007) article in Brill's *New Pauly Online*, for example, that archaeological artefacts are "tangible evidence for the past" (haptisches Zeugnis der Vergangenheit)? While this claim may seem hopelessly naive, it has a history that can be traced to the anecdotal effects of physical objects described in ancient Greek narrative (cf. Fineman, 1991). Utilizing work in museum studies, thing theory, phenomenology, and the history of disciplines, this article brings this history into contact with contemporary archaeological theory and, more specifically, with the metaphor of "reading" the past in its material remains. The question posed here is how objects within narrative prefigure "the potential for narrative within the artefact."

Ephemeral Art: Telling Stories to the Dead

Dr. Mary O' Neill

The endurance of the form of story telling and the compulsion to tell them suggests that telling stories is not merely an entertainment, an optional extra which we can choose to engage with or not, but a fundamental aspect of being. We tell stories to construct and maintain our world. When our sense of reality is damaged through traumatic experiences we attempt to repair our relationship with the world through the repeated telling of our stories. These stories are not just a means of telling but also an attempt to understand. Stories are performed and performative; they do not leave us unchanged but can in fact motivate us to act. They are not merely about things that have happened, but are about significant events that change us. Through our stories we demonstrate that we have not only had experiences but that those experiences have become part of one's knowledge.

In this essay O' Neill will explore the potential of objects to tell a story, the object that is both the subject of the story and the form of telling. Two ephemeral art works will be considered: *1001 Nights Cast* – a durational performance by Barbara Campbell (1st performance 21.06.05 – 1001st performance 17.03.08) and *Time and Mrs Tiber* (1977) by Canadian artist Liz Magor. Both works embody the process of decay and tell a story of existence overshadowed by the knowledge of certain death and the telling of the story as a means of confronting that knowledge. The ephemeral art object tells a story in circumstances when there are no words, when we have nothing left to say.

Belongings

Lucy May Schofield & Sylvia Waltering

Belongings is a collaborative project by Lucy May Schofield and Sylvia Waltering, involving the contribution of other women. This article will combine a reflexive, written element with visual essay which explores the combination of images and stories produced by the artists.

To create the work individual contributors were selected and approached with the simple request to provide the artists with an object that has a special story or memory attached to it. They were also asked to record that story, and return the text in a sealed envelope so it would not be revealed. The objects were then used as muse, stimulation and inspiration. Through actively engaging with the objects and their owners, photographically recording them and by reading the objects themselves Schofield and Waltering focus on creating narrative potential, offering alternative interpretations and opening up the possibilities for new creative readings. *Belongings* also stimulates thought on the importance of private possessions in relation to memory.

ISSUE 2

Introduction

Carson & Miller

Part I – ***Visualising the Remembered Narrative: archetype, biography, autobiography***

Rephrased, Replaced, Repainted: visual anachronism as a narrative device

Gyöngyvér Horváth

When Carlo Crivelli placed the scene of *The Annunciation* (1486, National Gallery, London) in the Renaissance town of Ascoli, dressed the humbled Mary in the latest fashion, and included the intervening Saint Emidius, the patron saint of the city, he created a visual analogy of what Aelred of Rievaulx, a Cistercian monk had advised to his readers three centuries earlier: "First enter the room of blessed Mary (...) wait there for the arrival of the angel, so that you may see him as he comes in, hear him as he utters his greeting, and so, filled with amazement and rapt out of yourself, greet your most sweet Lady together with the angel."

Both the painting with its updated, 15th century stage, and the text, with the appeal to join, created the atmosphere of presentness in order to encourage active participation in the biblical event. Crivelli's ahistorical rendering of the story uses multiplied temporal and diegetic levels, and can be best described by the phenomenon of visual anachronism, an effective narrative strategy still used by such contemporary artists as Cindy Sherman or Adi Nes.

This essay will examine the phenomenon of visual anachronism and its role in narrative understanding. This text will argue that there is a difference in the narrative perception between the 'that-time' and the present-day viewer, and in both cases it depends on the beholder's time experience.

Lost Children, the Moors & Evil Monsters: the photographic story of the Moors Murders

Helen Pleasance

The persistent power of the Moors Murders as a British cultural narrative is dependent upon the potent photographic images in which it is rendered. These images fall into three categories; the haunting snapshots of children who disappeared and were subsequently discovered to have been abducted and murdered, the desolate Yorkshire Moors on which their bodies were buried, and those of their murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley. These images, in Susan Sontag's words, provide 'both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence.' (1979) It is in this play between presence and absence that their power lies.

This article will examine the different images in order to explain their cumulative narrative power. The photographs of the children provide an uncanny archive of that which is irrevocably lost, articulated more starkly through the images of the moors to which they

are lost. While the arrest photographs of Brady and Hindley work in the opposite direction, seeming to be a direct representation of an evil responsible for such a loss.

The Moors Murders narrative provides an extreme example of the dual ways in which photographs work as both absolute evidence of a reality that they capture directly, and as a haunting archive of loss. In examining this, the essay will suggest how, more generally, photographic narratives work strangely between concepts of the real and the spectral. Photographs always testify to things that really happened, while, simultaneously, replacing things that are permanently lost in the past.

Read You Like A Book: Time and Relative Dimensions in Storytelling

Mike Nicholson

Life unfolds as irreversible, linear progression – day on day on day – like the reading of a traditional codex book. Yet we process our experiences through random and subjective means. Abstractions of memory, imagination and emotion allow us to connect points and personal themes in the story of ourselves, back and forth across distances of time and physical geography. Can apparently limited architectures of paper, book and page be used to explore and express the above? Are new story shapes and structures possible?

Mike Nicholson's *Bio Auto Graphic* editions travel a landscape of metaphor, metafiction and psycho-geography. Senses of place and self have developed in parallel with the resonance of objects and a relish for the significance of the insignificant. The most profound journeys, towards a morality that links individuals to society, may even bring us back to where we started.

The gaps between things drive the work; tensions of image and text, self-image and the image others see of us, what we say and what we actually mean, what we expect of others and what they expect of us.

In this article Nicholson will use the combined visual languages of text and image to reveal his methodology by example – from past editions as well as with new material – showing techniques of verbal and visual repetition, juxtaposition and balance that reflect subjective experience.

If not answers, then Nicholson's text and image narrative work at least pursues the right questions.

Part 2 – Authoring and Reading the Sequential Narrative: linear and non-linear approaches

The Pre-Narrative Monstrosity of Images: how images demand narrative

Dr. William Brown

André Gaudreault (1990) has pointed out that early silent cinema screenings required a narrator in order to help audiences make sense of the images that they saw. Soon after, filmmakers began to adopt narrative techniques in order to tell stories – leading to the predominance of narrative within film production. Gaudreault has differentiated the presentation of images in early silent cinema from narration by calling it *monstration*. That is, simply *showing* images.

Jean-Luc Nancy (2003), meanwhile, has argued that all images are *monstrous*: that is, images are incomprehensible to spectators, in that they lie outside of meaning. Or rather, they do not lie outside of meaning so much as *before* meaning. Images are monstrous because upon initial viewing they do not make sense. In this way, images are pre-sense, they are present.

In this article, William Brown will combine Gaudreault and Nancy's ideas through their shared use of the term for showing, *monstration*. Brown proposes that images do indeed pre-exist narrative, but that they simultaneously demand narrative in order for us to make sense of them. Given the monstrous nature of images, narrative in effect serves as a coping mechanism for consumers of images, who need various narrative techniques (film narrative, spoken words, text alongside the image, or even texts relating to the images that circulate more widely, as well as theoretical frameworks themselves) in order to make sense of images. But that narrative always comes after images, and images therefore exist pre-narrative.

Towards Ephemeral Narrative

Jacqueline Butler and Gavin Parry

The intrinsic ruptures between still elements allow the photo-sequence to be allusive and tangential. Indeed telling a straightforward story with a sequence of stills is notoriously difficult. static photographs *show* far more than they *tell*, so the photo essay relies as much on ellipsis and association as coherent argument or story. (Campany, 2007)

The quote above outlines the difficult relationship the photographic still has with narrative. This idea of photographs "showing" rather than "telling" urges us to value the primacy of responses rather than readings. The "ruptures" between a series of photographic stills can open non-temporal spaces for thoughts and ideas, engaging the viewer with the possibility of what we would term as ephemeral narratives, encouraging a more sensual and intuitive engagement with the photographs themselves.

This essay begins with the tentative assertion that the photographic narrative is an oxymoron, and that the inherent qualities of the still image have a paradoxical relationship with the temporal and structural thrust of the narrative form. Jacqueline Butler and Gavin Parry's intention is to encourage a looking into the photograph, to respond to visual stimulation, rather than looking out and around for a reading; to loosen the narrative hooks that the *reader* would normally anticipate.

Referring to their collaborative publication *not just another story* (2007) Butler and Parry will examine initial intentions to elicit a response rather than a reading of the overall publication to reflections on their continuing efforts to dislocate the viewer and stimulate diversions on reading of narrative in still photographic sequences. They will explore ways through which their practice

confronts ideas around narratives, and prompts the viewer to re-engage with alternative ways of experiencing sequential still images. Butler and Parry will consider the value of shifting the emphasis from familiar modes of reading through linear or non-linear structures, towards a more visceral ephemeral narrative.

Signification Under Sentence: examining how the juxtaposition of verse with film affects narrative

Dr. Pete Atkinson

We interpret the moving-image, and the narrative it may represent for us, through language. But verse utilises the very devices of language in order to create new sense, and to tempt signification beyond that more conventionally produced. Applying close textual analysis of excerpts from film/poem work, this essay observes how the employment of verse commentary can produce images that are *in excess* of those produced by the visual images it accompanies. This results in ambiguous readings of moving-image texts and invokes more complex dimensions to the narrative world. This demonstrates that our reading of moving-image as narrative is a matter of convention and dependent upon training. Like verse, the edited form of film is inherently rhythmic and this article illustrates that the combining of these two textual disciplines illustrates that other ways of *reading* visual images, and presenting narrative, are possible.