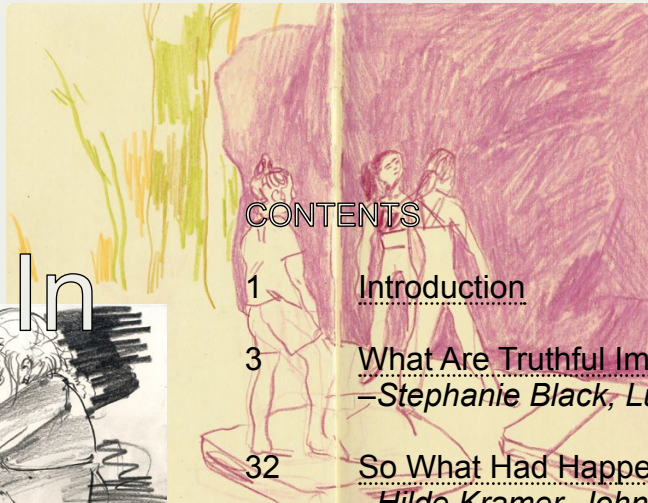


Issue 4
May 2024

Colouring In 'Truth'

A research project by
Stephanie Black and
Luise Vormittag

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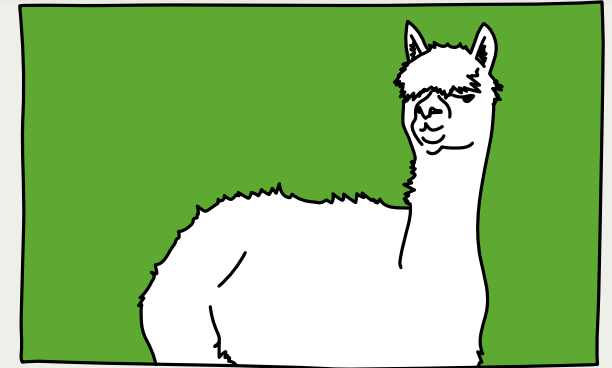


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Introduction

What are truthful images? How can illustration — which often takes the form of fabricated pictures — carry the burden of truth? What kinds of reality do we expect illustration to show us?

In this fourth (and final) issue of *Colouring In*, we plunge into a hugely engaging exploration of the many different ways in which illustration practice intersects and overlaps with notions of truthfulness. The American literary scholar Shoshana Felman notes how truth requires art for its transmission and for its realisation in our consciousness (2000:105). We couldn't agree more. However straightforward this statement might seem, our discussions regarding how this might play out in detail in the context of illustration has meant that this has definitely been the most complex and dizzying topic we have delved into in the course of this series. Our brilliant contributors bring a host of fascinating perspectives to the theme, and the two of us spent many hours debating a seemingly never-ending flow of ideas and examples.

For this issue we decided to pair some of our contributors along thematic commonalities. This resulted in four pairings where each illustrator

discusses and presents their work in response and contrast to the other. (Three of these presentations and discussions took place as part of the curriculum of MA Illustration at Kingston School of Art, London, during the autumn term of 2023). After these initial conversations, they each devised their own method for writing it up for publication in this issue of *Colouring In*. Hilde Kramer and John Miers discuss ideas around fragmentation and personhood that arose in their respective illustrative projects. Holly O'Neil and Louis Netter compare their approaches to drawing on site. Michelle Salamon and Geoff Grandfield reflect on the possibilities of illustration as a site of recall and remembrance. Mrudula K and Kathryn Martin consider the importance of sharing individual and collective stories of embodied difference.

In addition to these extraordinarily rich paired discussions we are thrilled to include a number of solo-authored pieces. These include submissions from Susan Doyle, who gives us a wonderful historical survey of 'truthy images', Carolyn Shapiro, who shares her research on Rousseau's 'illusory image', O Haruna, who discusses aspects of his PhD research on representations of Black British masculinity, and Rebecca Douglas Home, who introduces us to the challenges of running a news picture desk in our 'post-truth era'.

As in all three previous issues of *Colouring In* we were keen to work with illustration students and solicit their input. We ran two workshops with MA students

at Kingston where we visually deconstructed and then reconstructed seemingly objective images. You can read the entertaining write up by students Chloe Hayward and Ann Wong reflecting on these workshops. Our reflections on this can be found below under the heading of “*Objectivity*”.

Our own survey unfolds over the following pages. It threatened to overwhelm us with increasingly knotty questions alongside a superabundance of examples, where illustration and various conceptions of truth, reality and representation intersect. In our conversations we repeatedly returned to the tensions that arise between totalising truth claims and relativist statements of individualised perspectives. Illustration can bridge this unproductive binary by proposing and constructing partial but relatable and shared worlds — see for example Bug Shepherd-Barron's book *Through the Vitriol* (2022) or illustrator Cat Sim's collaboration with climate-adaptation researchers in *Everyday Stories of Climate Change* (2022).

As we write, developments in AI are constantly in the news, and of course the many challenges that arise from this have also seeped into our conversations. Questions around the increasing likelihood of the circulation of deceptive images are frequently discussed in the media, but another, perhaps more surprising effect of AI generated images we found was that even when people knew them to be fake, they continued to exert their power. One distressing example is the horrendous abuse wrought by non-

consensual deepfake pornography — despite their occasionally obvious fabricated nature, these images remain sadistic and vicious.

After weeks of conversations, we have wrestled some of our considerations into seven categories. Of course there could have been more, but we had to draw a line at some point. We realise our piece is extraordinarily lengthy. We couldn't help ourselves. We hope you enjoy dipping in and out. As always — do get in touch with any feedback!

SB, LV

What Are Truthful Images? —Stephanie Black and Luise Vormittag

*In this survey Stephanie Black and Luise Vormittag
reflect on seven possible intersections of
illustration and truth*

Under which circumstances might illustration, a mode of expression generally associated with fiction and fabrication, be considered truthful? What kind of veridical claims can illustrated images make? After countless hours of conversation we managed to agree on seven (provisional!) categories to help us make sense of the myriad of ideas we were considering. Over the following pages you will find our thoughts on the overlap between illustration practice and witnessing, the possibilities of illustration to act as evidence, the occasionally awkward conjunction of objectivity and illustration, illustration's role in visual persuasion and deception, the ability of illustration to construct truths and synthesise knowledge, issues arising from questions on representation and positionality, and finally the role of illustration in circumnavigating taboo and censorship. We are sure we have left out a great deal... do get in touch to tell us where we have fallen short.

Witness

To witness something is more than merely seeing an event unfold. To speak of witnessing anticipates a subsequent retelling of an event — the testimony. It is precisely through this later rearticulation that the act of seeing, retrospectively, becomes an act of witnessing.

The American academic Shoshana Felman reflects on the role of the witness and their testimony in her work on trauma, history and political violence:

“To bear witness is to take responsibility for the truth” (1991:39)

Felman also comments on the importance of an audience ready to hear the testimony:

“Memory is conjured here essentially in order to address another [...]. To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself [...] to others: to take responsibility — in speech — for history or for the truth of an occurrence [...]” (1991:39–40).

Derrida also notes the importance of an audience primed to receive “the truth” of a witness statement. He writes that:

“[...] ‘bearing witness’ — is always to render public. The value of publicity, that is, of broad

daylight [...] seems associated in some way with that of testimony” (2000:30)

Thus witnessing involves seeing, followed by a public re-telling. With a little scrutiny this seemingly straightforward sequence fans out to reveal a multitude of elements: visual perception, an act of translation (namely the production of an account in coherent, communicable form), the passing of time, a change of context, and the presence of a public primed to receive this narration. This list significantly overlaps with principles and strategies often used by illustrators. The emphasis on seeing and the translation of what has been observed into communicable form for a new audience at a different time in a different context resonate well with our field.

In front of the law a witness is called upon to contribute to the establishment of truth and certainty, even though the notion of the unreliable witness destabilises this ambition. To bear witness as an illustrator inevitably foregrounds the inescapable partiality of the process. The way an event is perceived, interpreted and reported is highly contingent on the witness-illustrator themselves.*

New York-based illustrator Molly Crabapple's portfolio includes an impressive body of work as a reportage illustrator, with drawings from places such as Palestine, Ukraine and Guantánamo Bay. The great volume of her work is as extraordinary as the places she has managed to gain access

to. The illustrations appear to be at least partially drawn on site, or at least they intend to give that impression, with her work bearing markers typically associated with on-location work (ink splatters taking a particularly prominent place).^[1] Ironically this body of work prompted us to focus less on the subject matter, and more on the impressive feats of the illustrator herself, drawing us into speculations of *how* she did this. How did she gain access to all these places, how did she negotiate the site, how did she manage to make the space and time to draw there and capture the tumultuous events seemingly on the fly? Does this mean that this method — the fearless and talented reportage illustrator who seeks to document chaotic, occasionally dangerous or sinister environments — runs the risk of drawing greater attention to the compelling story of their own daring feats, rather than the events they are ostensibly testifying to?

Renowned British illustrator Sue Coe addresses this dilemma directly when she says:

“I'm asking you not to see me but to see through my eyes” (Coe in Coates-Smith 2000:80)

Coe is best known for her work on slaughterhouses, which — similar to some of the places visited by Crabapple — are notoriously difficult to gain access to. Coe recounts how bringing a camera would have been out of the question, while a sketchbook was considered harmless (1995:v).

[*] See also Louis Netter's and Holly O'Neil's discussions of this pp. 44–55

[1] Referring to these kinds of markers that are often unquestioningly interpreted as indexical signs of authentic on-location presence, Catrin Morgan has spoken of the “mythical speech of reportage illustration” (Morgan 2016)

While Crabapple's illustrations purport to be drawn in the midst of things, thereby effectively collapsing together the acts of witnessing and giving testimony, Coe's method relies on sketchbook work that is then translated into more elaborately composed paintings in her studio later on.



The painted work is often not a straightforward representation of what would have unfolded before her eyes on site, but a more imaginative, interpretive depiction, where Coe uses pictorial space and areas of light and dark with particularly compelling effect. While the locations she negotiates are every bit as challenging as Crabapple's, the work does not conjure the same sense of spectacular adventure. Perhaps Coe's unambiguous position as a committed activist,

as well as the more obviously considered 'artistry' of her renderings lends her subject matter greater prominence (compared to Crabapple)? The fact that she re-works her sketchbook drawings in the studio can be interpreted as a deeper dedication to the cause, that compels her to reflect on the primary research from her on-location visit, identifying themes and motifs, which are then articulated in the form of a more reflective testimony. (We recognise that there might well be external factors, for example publishing deadlines, that prevent Crabapple from doing the same.)

Generally speaking, Coe's long-term commitment to a number of causes (cruelty towards animals, the AIDS epidemic, mistreatment of sweatshop workers) has resulted in a body of work that powerfully bears witness to some of the brutal elements of our social and economic systems that are generally excluded from public view.

Both Crabapple and Coe identify with journalism and the act of reporting^[2], where the focus remains on circumstances or events that are otherwise inaccessible to the intended audience. In contrast illustrator Robert Weaver recorded the mundane everyday (see for example *A Pedestrian View: The Vogelmann Diary*) — those scenarios that slip into invisibility not because they are purposefully hidden (such as the violent practices in Guantánamo or in slaughterhouses) but because they are experienced as too quotidian to notice. This kind of work overlaps

IMAGE
Artists' impression of
Sue Coe *Goat Outside
Slaughterhouse P.A.*,
1990

[2] Crabapple refers to herself as a 'journalist' on her website; Coe in her interview with Coates-Smith talks about her work in the context of 'reportage' (2000)

with some of the concerns of ethnography in its focus on recording the habitual, everyday life practices of a society or culture, in this case street-scenes of early 1980s New York. The idiosyncratic framing of the images once again draws attention to the partiality inherent in the act of witnessing and the unreliability of the testimony is further underscored by Weaver conjuring a fictional “Vogelman” as the purported author of this work.

The figure of the illustrator-as-witness inevitably highlights the selectivity and the specificities of all acts of witnessing. In these illustrations our individual differences in perception and recounting are made obvious and remind us that all such acts of witnessing, whether they involve the creation of an illustration or not, are highly contingent. Felman highlights this general paradox of the witness: The overall aim is to arrive at an unequivocal account of general validity, something that goes beyond the personal, while at the same time each testimony is unique and irreplaceable (1991:40, 42).

One of the indisputable strengths of the illustrator-as-witness is the *demand* for an audience that is inherent in the work (whether or not the work does indeed gather up a significant number of viewers is another matter). The existence of the illustrations themselves is a call to the public to take note. Curator Kate Macfarlane suggests that one of the qualities of “graphic witnessing” is “to remove contemporary events from the real-time

of mass-shared media and other photographic forms” (2020:56). The fact that the production of an illustration unfolds on a different time scale compared to the instantaneous nature of most photographs taken today, can also prompt a different kind of scrutiny and reflection in the audience. The work can be understood as an appeal to spend time and pay attention, an invitation to join a “community of seeing” (Felman 1991:42).

For illustrators who are bold enough to propel themselves into disturbing environments and come face-to-face with the suffering of others, it is not uncommon to question the validity of their work. Coe highlights the fraught experience of being a witness without power, of creating a testimony of someone's pain, without the capacity to alter their conditions (Coe in Coates-Smith 2000: 80). However she concludes: “For me the process of witnessing through using a pencil has [prompted me to think]: ‘Well, maybe I can do a little thing’” (ibid.). Perhaps it's not so little after all.

Evidence

While the act of bearing witness has significant overlaps with principles and strategies employed by many illustrators (see section above), the notion of evidence presents itself as a more awkward fit for our discipline. Evidence is information that can be used for the establishment of facts. The implicit

understanding of an illustration as an interpretive, fabricated image appears to preclude its capacity to stake a sufficiently stable veridical claim to ever be considered as evidence. Even lens-based images such as photos and videos, which tend to be perceived as more objective (see discussion on objectivity below), are not always deemed suitable for the establishment of facts.

With the ubiquity of smartphones, the use of photos and videos as a record of violent and disturbing events has become more frequent, for example as a tool to document racialised police violence in the US (see Richardson 2020). A harrowing instance is Darnella Frazier's video of the brutal murder of George Floyd in May 2020 in Minneapolis, which ended up being instrumental in the conviction of his killers. However media scholar Sandra Ristovska, whose research focuses on the use of video footage as evidence in courts and tribunals, points out that even seemingly obvious video evidence can be subject to biased interpretation, and is therefore frequently dismissed in legal proceedings (Ristovska 2021). The reason that Frazier's video of Floyd's murder stood up in court was because its narrative was corroborated by many other accounts and videos.

Given that even video, a medium that is generally perceived as transparent and objective, can face such resistance to be accepted as evidence, what chance is there for illustration — images that have

been clearly manufactured by way of a human interpretation of events — to carry the burden of proof? We would like to put forward two examples for consideration.

In December 2019 the *New York Times* published an article called 'What the C.I.A.'s Torture Program Looked Like to the Tortured'. It contains eight extremely graphic illustrations by Abu Zubaydah, an inmate at Guantánamo Bay, who drew these images at the behest of Prof Mark Denbeaux — a member of his legal team. Abu Zubaydah is a Palestinian man born in Saudi Arabia, who was alleged to have been a high-ranking member of Al Qaeda, an accusation now known to be false. He was captured in 2002 and has been held at various US-operated overseas prisons and so-called “black sites” ever since with no charge and no prospect of release. He was also the first victim subjected to the notorious “enhanced interrogation techniques” by the CIA. (See the *New York Times* article linked above, or this article in *The Guardian* for a more detailed account of Zubaydah's case.)

The *New York Times* article was based on a 2019 report 'How America Tortures' from the Law School at Seton Hall University (New Jersey) overseen by Denbeaux, which was followed by a second report 'American Torturers', also by Seton Hall Law School in 2023, which includes the original eight drawings, alongside 32 new ones, as a visual account of Zubaydah's appallingly brutal and humiliating

torture. Journalist Carol Rosenberg writes in the *New York Times* how Zubaydah's illustrations 'put flesh, bones and emotion' on accounts of the CIA's torture practices, which up to this point had been mainly linguistic, often inaccurate and/or sanitized.^[3] At the point of the article's publication (2019) more disturbing descriptions of the scandalous "enhanced interrogation techniques" had been leaking out for over a decade, but these images added many new details, and — perhaps most importantly — bestowed a nerve-wracking, visceral quality to these accounts.

In absence of any other visual evidence of the CIA's torture programmes (notoriously video evidence was destroyed in 2005 in violation of a court order) Zubaydah was able to use simple means — pen and paper — to present a powerful, visual testimony.^[4] There is no indication that Zubaydah has had any formal training in image making, but nevertheless the images are blisteringly accurate, so much so that the authorities redacted his portrayal of one of the interrogators, for fear of him being recognised. Drawn from memory the illustrations often contain chronological sequences, magnified details and annotations, forcing us to confront the full horror of what Zubaydah endured.

In his two reports Denbeaux has mobilised Zubaydah's illustrations as part of an overall narrative of the nightmarish treatment of his client (as well as many other prisoners), with the ultimate aim of exposing the US agencies involved. Denbeaux

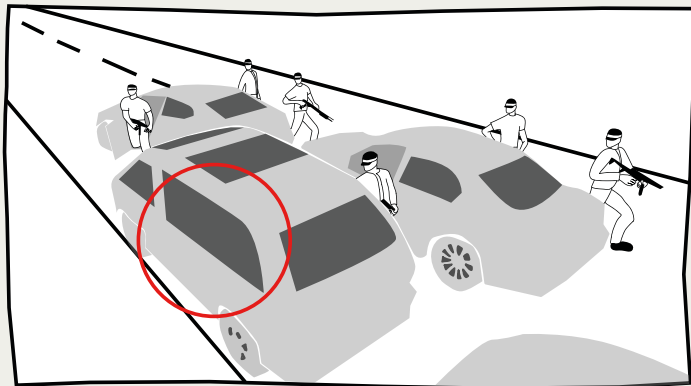
writes that "[Zubaydah's] drawings display the grizzly truth that the CIA, the FBI, and other members of the federal government, understandably, wished the public would never see" (2023:7). They acquire their *evidentiary status* in a similar way as Frazier's video of George Floyd's murder — through corroboration, by strengthening and confirming other pieces of information we have on the appalling situation of prisoners at Guantánamo. They acquire their incredible *power* through their visceral, emotional impact, the "flesh, bones and emotion" described by journalist Rosenberg. These illustrations confirm our worst suspicions of abuses of power, and once seen, cannot be forgotten.

In contrast to the emotional impact of Zubaydah's personal testimony, Forensic Architecture's visual reconstructions stake their evidentiary claims in a different manner. While Zubaydah uses simple, analogue means, works from memory, and produces his illustrations alone, Forensic Architecture mobilise a juggernaut of technically complex visual methods for their work investigating human rights violations. Their analysis of the killing of Mark Duggan by the Metropolitan Police in North London in 2011 is summarised in this video, and is a good example of their methods. Their analysis is rigorous, painstaking and spatially precise, cross-referencing and synthesising countless snippets of visual media (obtained from multiple sources) alongside other data such as witness statements and diagrams, in order to arrive at a computer-generated 3D reconstruction.

[3] In the introduction to his 2019 report Denbeaux describes the language around torture in the CIA's legal memos as 'formal, legalistic, antiseptic, and euphemistic' (2019:6)

[4] In contrast to Zubaydah whose work derives from his own experience, American artist Daniel Heyman adopts a different approach. In his Abu Ghraib Detainee Interview Project Heyman joined a team of lawyers who interviewed former Iraqi detainees of the notorious prison facility. Rather than visualising the heinous acts of abuse, Heyman decided to create portraits of the interviewees during their moment of testimony, when they were in a place of dignity. The account of their ordeal is rendered in written language that fills the flat pictorial space around them. (See also Sabrina DeTurk's discussion in *Afterimage* (2011: 68–70))

The key question in this case was whether Duggan had brandished a gun when he was shot dead by police, as the officer who killed him claimed. Despite inconclusive and contradictory accounts, an inquest jury in 2014 found that Duggan's killing had indeed been “lawful”, a verdict that prompted rage and indignation amongst Duggan's family and supporters. In 2018 the Duggan family's lawyers commissioned Forensic Architecture to conduct an in-depth analysis of the incident to help challenge the conclusions by the jury (and a subsequent police report).



The ensuing meticulous work by Forensic Architecture found that evidence had indeed been overlooked and misinterpreted in previous investigations, and that the spatial and biomechanical data they had brought together suggested it was unlikely that Duggan had held a gun at the decisive moment. By amalgamating

a large volume of information (photos, witness statements, etc.) in one “illustration”, namely the detailed 3D visual reconstruction, they could reveal that key statements by the police officer in question do not stack up. Despite this work, the Met Police refused to reopen the investigation.

The formal qualities of the visuals produced by Forensic Architecture could be described as cold and lifeless — we see stiff and faceless grey figures awkwardly moving about, but this pared down, clinical representation contributes to their persuasiveness. This work is meant to convince us through its mathematical exactitude and “mechanical objectivity” (see discussion in next section), not visual appeal or sentiment. It is important to remember that this visual language is also a rhetorical device (see discussion below in “Persuasiveness / Deception”) — the visual rhetoric of objectivity. In this case it was used by an organisation whom we trust to be sincere and transparent in order to highlight the inconsistencies in the Met Police's position. However we must remain alert to the fact that this same aesthetic can be mobilised to more nefarious ends. Its formal qualities are utterly persuasive, and would remain so, even if they were achieved using inaccurate, misleading or even fictitious data.

While the visuals produced by Forensic Architecture's mobilisation of technical procedures affords us the possibility of supposedly simulating the lines of sight of individual officers, it is worth remembering that

perception itself does not look like this. We do not see in geometrically precise linear perspective, and our memory does not afford us the possibility to replay sequences in slow motion. Instead our perception is reflective of our biases and ultimately our way of life. The fact that the Met Police continue to use disproportionate levels of force against Black people gives us a clear indication of what many officers actually see in these encounters: a threat to be “neutralised” at all cost.

While Zubaydah's illustrations open up and unpack the details of his torture, presenting us with multiple isolated close-ups and breaking up brutal practices into distinct sequential stages, Forensic Architecture's work acquires its power through the capacity of images to bring dispersed information together. Where previously witness statements, diagrams, photos and videos in the Duggan case were scattered, they are now synthesised in the video footage, highlighting those elements that do not fit the overall emerging picture.

What both projects have in common is the process of corroboration that enables the illustrations in question to carry the burden of proof and act as evidence. In Zubaydah's case the illustrations acquire their evidentiary status by corresponding with other pieces of information that had started to circulate about the C.I.A.'s torture programme, reinforcing them and adding new visceral details. In the case of Forensic Architecture's Mark Duggan

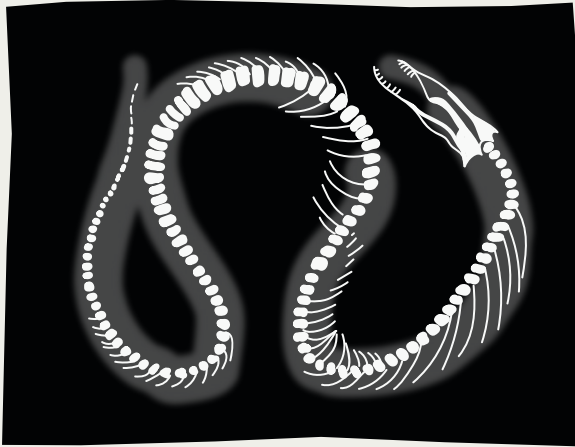
video, the process of cross-referencing reveals those pieces of information that are unlikely to be true. Both examples show illustrated images that indeed are capable of making evidentiary claims and carrying the burden of truth.

Objectivity

The procedures and protocols, and the concomitant visual language of objectivity, mobilised for example in the project by Forensic Architecture discussed above, is not usually part of the discourse in illustration. Objectivity can be described as a desire for “blind sight”, a “knowledge that bears no trace of the knower”, an “epistemic virtue” that came to particular prominence in scientific image making in the 19th century (Daston & Galison 2007:17, 39). In their brilliant book *Objectivity* (2007) science historians Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison use a fascinating catalogue of scientific images to reflect on the history and practices (gestures, techniques and habits) of objectivity. They describe how the public persona of the artist and the scientist polarised during the mid 19th century:

“Artists were exhorted to express, even flaunt, their subjectivity, at the same time that scientists were admonished to restrain theirs. In order to qualify as art, paintings were required to show the visible trace of the artist's ‘personality’...”
(Ibid: 37)

IMAGE
Artists' impression of
an x-ray of a snake



So while scientists tried to develop working procedures that avoided human interference in the production of knowledge, artists were required to foreground their individual subjecthood. This reminds us of illustration students who often talk about their ambition to develop a personal style in their work, a recognisable way of working that emphasises a subjective, unique view of the world. This is an understandable goal for students, as it is often precisely the existence of a personal style that leads to commercial illustration commissions (Hoogslag 2019: 286), presumably as this guarantees a predictable outcome for the commissioner in the risk-averse and time-poor creative industries.

In science the mandate to not interfere in the production of imagery through any human involvement

— may that be by way of bias, interpretation or judgement — was historically meant to put in place a strict set of protocols to create scientific images automatically, either requiring the use of an actual machine, or requiring a person's mechanised actions (Daston & Galison 2007: 121). The conviction that a certain procedural use of technology will result in reliably objective imagery beyond human fallibility was an idea first developed in the 19th century, and it continues to hold sway today — for example in Forensic Architecture's use of photogrammetry in the Mark Duggan video discussed above.

William Fox Talbot, an early pioneer of photo-mechanical reproduction, once hailed photographic images as “impressed by the agency of Light alone, without any aid whatever from the artist's pencil” (Fox Talbot 1844). Even though photography had a complex relationship to scientific objectivity from the start (Daston & Galison 2007: 125–138), and today digital image manipulation and AI image generators continue to destabilise associations of photorealistic images with an objective “reality” out there, something of that trust in the supposed automatism of the photographic process remains. For example Ari Felman's animated film Waltz with Bashir (2008) starts by confidently presenting itself as a drawn documentary, seemingly demonstrating that “the artist's pencil” can indeed tell us a truthful story. However, the drawn animation switches to live-action footage in the final scene, falling back on our trust in “the agency of Light alone”, presumably to

assure the audience beyond any doubt that the story the film is telling us is indeed objectively “true”.

But while we still might hold on to the idea that certain types of technology can create objectively “true” images (for example medical imaging techniques), it has also become common practice to question both the existence and the desirability of objectivity more generally. Celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey extol the importance of *personal* stories and *personal* experiences as a method of “speaking your truth”. Celebrating individual accounts of marginalised positions and perspectives (Winfrey refers to women's brave testimonies of sexual violence) contains the honourable aspiration of challenging and transforming oppressive (and often violent) power structures, however without more nuanced thought and theoretical grounding the simple insistence on the validity of “personal truths” can, if unchecked, skid towards preposterous lamentations by self-styled “victims of the deep state”, absurd declarations of “alternative facts”, and other forms of epistemic rot. Surely women's testimonies of sexual violence should be believed because they actually took place, rather than because they represent a personalised version of truth? We need to sustain a shared understanding of a common world, in which truth claims can be received, acknowledged and, if necessary, tested. (See also the discussions below in ‘Persuasiveness/ Deception’ and ‘Representation / Positionality’.) What to do? For our student workshop with KSA

illustration students in October 2023 we gathered up images that claimed various forms of transcendent, objective knowledge: X-ray images, architectural plans, instructional illustrations, illustrated typologies, and various forms of photographic records.* Our first prompt was to critique notions of truthfulness and objectivity engrained in these images, not through language, but by employing visual strategies. Students used some interesting techniques (zooming in, redacting, redrawing images in a different style) and gained familiarity with visual languages associated with objectivity.

We then spent some time discussing Bruno Latour's work with students (via this *New York Times Magazine* article, where journalist Ava Kofman does a wonderful job of summarising some of his work for a general readership). We discussed how a focus on the *conditions* of the construction of knowledge is an alternative to the epistemic nihilism and chaos of the post-truth era. All knowledge might be constructed, yes, but that doesn't mean all knowledge is equally valid. Latour suggests we pay attention to the networks and practices that produce and sustain knowledge, in order to maintain the possibility of a shared, recognisable world.

We looked back over the first exercise and reflected on how the cheeky put-down of the visual languages associated with totalising forms of knowledge is fun, but also how it is much harder to articulate a response that doesn't slide into a dangerous “anything goes”

relativism. The second prompt we therefore set for our students was to reveal the methods of knowledge production in the images in question; not necessarily to critique them, but to show us the networks and practices that resulted in the production of these illustrations. What kinds of expertise, what forms of technology, which economic, social and political formations contribute to the networks that gave rise to them? The results were complex and thoughtful, with illustration students using diagrams, sequence and storytelling to speculate on the various “actors” that brought this image into being.

This has some overlaps with illustrator Catherine Anyango Grünewald's student project with the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm entitled ‘Re-Remembering Saint Barthélemy’, where students were prompted to visually respond to archival images in their collection, bringing the otherwise unseen colonial, political and technological systems that underpin the existence of these images to the fore.

“Illustrators do not have to solve historical problems,” says Anyango Grünewald, “we can however change the perspective from which we see certain events... We can design how attention is directed to facts” (Anyango Grünewald 2021)

So while the pursuit of objectivity in the form of “blind sight” and “knowledge that bears no trace of the knower” is not viable for illustrators, we can

nevertheless use our work to reflect on systems and bodies of knowledge, and — by doing so — advocate for a greater inclusion of perspectives in a shared world.

Persuasiveness / Deception

Rhetoric is the art of speaking persuasively, and our student workshop began to explore some of the *visual* strategies that compel us to believe the truthfulness of an image, e.g. the expository nature of the images, the authority of the publisher, or auratic traces of a production process. We are interested in pursuing our examination of how the constituent parts of images cooperate to convince us. In this respect our aims are similar to those of Judith Williamson in her now-classic semiotic analysis of how advertising images work, but here we examine how images that we don't suspect of working on us quite so overtly might operate.

To explore what makes visual rhetoric persuasive we found the concepts of ethos, logos and pathos from Aristotle's analysis of spoken rhetoric to be useful tools for opening up images to see how they work. Journalist and author Sam Leith's book *You Talkin' To Me?* (2011) provides a helpful guide to these terms for non-experts such as ourselves. He describes the three different approaches to building a persuasive argument as follows. Ethos is an appeal to the audience based on the integrity

and standing of the speaker, which establishes a connection with the listener. In illustration we might see this appeal in the work of an illustrator (or publisher) we recognise either as an authority, or belonging to our social group, or a first-hand witness to events. The link between ethos and style is made by Leith, recognising that the language used to deliver such appeals is fundamental to them landing successfully (Leith, 2011: 49). In this respect we might see the link between ethos and style in our response to distinctive visual languages, for these are representative of an illustrator or a particular type of illustration we might have established a rapport with (from Lauren Child to Banksy). Another way in which ethos might work through illustration could be the use of recognisable characters to persuade us (such as the wise cat of the Charley Says British public information broadcasts of the 1970s).

Logos is an approach to argumentation that prioritises a logical, carefully staged line of reasoning that appears to be self-evident. This might map onto the plausibility of the “objective” plans and diagrams given to the students in our workshops (discussed above). Logos represents the believability of the staged process represented by assembly instructions.

The third persuasive strategy is pathos, which Leith described as an appeal to emotion and includes fear, pity and laughter (which he notes is “involuntary assent” Leith 2011: 66). In illustration we may see this in the wholesome, patriotic, early works of Norman

Rockwell, or Quentin Blake's illustrations for Michael Rosen's Sad Book.

The three rhetorical approaches can be seen within images that persuade us, and may be utilised deliberately, or operate unintentionally, in making truth claims through images. We need to sharpen our wits in order to detect when the powerful devices of visual rhetoric are put to use in the service of untruths, asking “is persuasion at work here?” and “to what end?” These are particularly pressing questions at this point in time, for (as scholar Thomas Zoglauer explains) the internet has become the source of so much of our information, but its lack of gatekeepers has resulted in the outsourcing of responsibility for determining what is true to all of us readers and viewers. We can now gorge ourselves on information, but we also have to work to determine the veracity of what we see and read online (Zoglauer 2023:2).

To complicate matters further there's more fat and gristle than ever. At the time of writing, we exist within a “post-truth” political landscape, defined by BBC journalist Sean Coughlan (2017) as where objective facts hold less sway in public discourse than appeals to emotion. Interviewed by Coughlan, philosopher A.C. Grayling traces the phenomenon back to the 2008 financial crash and parallel developments in social media, noting its roots in relativism and post-modernism and the threat posed to democracy by post-truthiness in politics. In the UK, we saw a pronounced shift towards pathos and

ethos in the rhetoric surrounding the 2016 campaign for Britain to leave the European Union, at the same time as the United States was asked to vote for a new president who instrumentalised so-called alternative facts. Within the subsequent analysis of these seismic political shifts, it was revealed that voters in both situations had been subjected to targeted advertising (of the kind usually used in psychological warfare) on the social media platform Facebook, clearly implicating visual communication in the peddling of post-truth claims. This made clear the link between pathos-led visual rhetoric, “psychological operations” and real effects in the world.^[5] Examples of ethos at work within fake news images are rolling in with greater regularity, thanks to developments in AI deepfake software. Whilst surveying examples for this article we saw the Mayor of Kyiv being mimicked for nefarious ends, AI offering an incarcerated Imran Khan the possibility of delivering an official political address via a deepfake proxy, and a political campaign in Indonesia featuring an endorsement from former President Suharto — a political figure who is *actually dead*.

The production of untruthful images using AI can be found in further varied examples as deepfake fraud schemes and malicious deepfake pornography, both have the potential to cause significant emotional harm. Writing in the New Yorker, scholar and journalist Daniel Immerwahr discusses the challenges such deepfakes pose to truth and democracy, and finds them to be of limited concern (Immerwahr, 2023).

Situating such examples within a historical trajectory of deceptive image making, Immerwahr suggests that they simply aren't very convincing in either a visual or plausible sense, and operate instead as smutty cartoons designed to insinuate, to criticise and to humiliate, but not to deceive.* Therefore, for Immerwahr, deepfake visual untruths do not pose a threat to democratic political systems and instead reveal truths about the society producing and circulating them.^[6] Whilst we celebrate his exploratory approach to recent developments in image making, by presenting deepfake imagery as a mirror rather than a weapon, Immerwahr's argument appears to sidestep the key concern here which is that even when we know that images are not truthful *their rhetoric still operates*. In the previous examples, from psyops to misogynistic malice, and including smutty cartoons, the images have an effect in the world whether they pass as the truth or not.

Immerwahr's faith in our ability to detect untruthful images can also be found in historical presumptions concerning the discernable nature of lies. Psychologists Aldert Vrij, Maria Hartwig, and Par Anders Granhag point us to lay assumptions about deception from Freud onwards which suggest that it “leaks” out of the lying individual through their actions, which betray them. We acknowledge that this is nonsense, as Vrij et al discuss in relation to our overly confident assessments (despite pitifully poor performance) of our abilities in detecting deceit in non-verbal cues

[*] See articles by Susan Doyle and Rebecca Douglas Home in this issue for further discussion of the historical background to AI deepfakes

[5] “Psyops” is explained by Carole Cadwalladr as “changing people's minds not through persuasion but through ‘informational dominance’, a set of techniques that includes rumour, disinformation and fake news” (Cadwalladr, 2018)

[6] Interestingly, he suggests that the biggest lies (such as Barack Obama not being American) don't require the services of images. These lies tap into fundamental beliefs, resonating so deeply they do not require evidence, and nor do they bend in the face of refutation of any kind, even birth certificates

IMAGE
Artists' impression
of Catrin Morgan's
book *Phantom
Settlements*, 2011

(Vrij et al, 2019: 298). However, it is a useful device to help us to discuss how the following practitioners explore and construct “leaky” images to draw our attention to the fact that rhetoric is at work, and how images deceive us.

Initially devised as an experiment in incorporating fiction into art magazine *Modern Painters*, the fabrication of the fictional artist Nat Tate and gallery launch of his biography operated effectively as cultural critique, revealing how endorsements by those in positions of authority persuade us through a large dose of ethos, supported by plausible enough photographs interspersed throughout the book and artwork purported to be by Tate. Questioning plausibility from the outset, we can see overt interrogation of the networks behind facts in the work of Jamie Shovlin, who is “less interested in the idea that something might be true or not, and more interested in how it goes about substantiating its story” (Wrigley, 2012). His meticulous blend of fact and fiction mirrors our students' exploration of visual languages assumed to be truthful due to their scientific exactitude, and he also utilises the form of the archive for its connotations of objectivity. By doing so he draws our attention to the rhetoric of ethos and logos at work in these forms and languages. Both of these examples have been described as hoaxes, although their makers suggest the motives are more questioning in nature, an area of practice that extends to the critical and satirical *Scarfolk* project by Richard

Littler. On his blog about Scarfolk, the fictional town in Northwest England trapped perpetually in the 1970s, you can encounter Littler's meticulous constructions of public information communications. These allow him to highlight the social and political attitudes reflected by the materials informing his images, as well as drawing uncomfortable parallels with our contemporary context.



The “leakiest” example we have found is that of Catrin Morgan's book *Phantom Settlements* (2011). Morgan is an authorial illustrator and academic with a long-standing concern with deception in images, and produced the book with Mireille Fauchon. A performative multimodal text demonstrating its message through image, text, page and type design, and structure, *Phantom Settlements* lays out the rhetorical function of images in constructing *and*

unmasking a deception. Morgan's description of the project situates it as an extension of the practices outlined in the previous paragraph, with the addition of a more critical role for the image as signpost, stating that the authors “wanted to see whether illustration could be used not only to alter the editorial flavour of a text, but also to assist the reader in determining its truthfulness” (Morgan 2011: 349). The book uses a repeating structure to demonstrate how each stage of building a deception occurs, with images varying in clarity and emphasis to reflect their role in each stage. However, the final chapter uses images to alert the reader to something amiss with the truthfulness of the story being told. Morgan describes the visual strategy adopted:

“Chapter 5 is illustrated with what appear to be straightforward images of the artists and works being referenced but on closer inspection turn out to be photorealistic images in a fan art style. Whilst the text in this chapter might seem to be the most straightforward account of the conversation, it is in fact as heavily edited as each of the other chapters. The job of the illustrations in this chapter was to suggest that all was not as it first appeared” (Ibid: 339)

The images in Morgan's final chapter don't clearly operate by way of Aristotelian rhetoric, rather they jam the rhetorical work of the image and create a rupture that draws our attention to how rhetoric is always at work, even stealthily. In this respect, it

is an arms-length solution to the problems raised in relation to actions taken to tackle post-truths, as relayed in Zoglauer's account of the discourse. He summarises (and despatches) the concerns of those academics arguing against the “epistemic policing” represented by attempts to curtail the circulation of untruths.

He also has no time for their claim that labelling fibs as “fake news” is harmful, in its framing as “discriminatory use of language that seeks to discredit and suppress oppositional expressions of opinion” (Zoglauer 2023: 22). In Morgan's work we see illustration act as a quiet signpost to asking better questions of the material, thereby avoiding the value judgements and shaming associated with pointing out post-truths — which could backfire.

These last four examples guide us in the questions we all need to be asking of how images work in the service of truths and untruths, with Morgan's work showing how illustration can be part of the process of determining where the latter lies. But we haven't yet considered what illustration might be or do if it were to work within the shifting landscape of ethos and deepfakes, rather than trying to equip ourselves with tools to fight it. By way of a thought experiment, we introduce the work of Holly Herndon and Mat Dryhurst as it poses intriguing questions concerning authorship, remuneration and creative identity in relation to its decentralisation of style. We are specifically interested in their creation of a “digital twin” or “vocal deepfake”

of Herndon, called “Holly+”. The creation of a model that could be hired to collaborate, for a fee, is Herndon and Dryhurst's contribution to the discussion of how to reconfigure the link between ethos, style, and money so effectively disrupted by AI, to (as Herndon says) “build a new economy around this where people aren't totally fucked” (Wiener, 2023). We look forward to seeing how their proposals play out in different scenarios, in particular how they challenge or utilise the persistence of (ethos-based) rhetoric even when we know the output to be a version of Herndon rather than the author herself.

Constructing Truths

The question of when it might be appropriate to *construct* images that tell the truth arises directly from our thought experiment, above. Here, we look at what happens when the means utilised in the production of our previous examples of untruths are coupled to the aim of communicating truth.

In the examples of deepfake imagery discussed earlier, the creation of a new composite from existing parts was used to persuade us of something that had not happened. In the contexts discussed these images were untruths, but might there be a role for such images in serving the truth? If we were going to adopt a post-truth, entirely relativistic position, then images synthesised from numerous sources might well represent the truth. Zoglauer sets out

constructivist perspectives on truth commensurate with this point, noting the drive towards social change inherent in many of constructivism's permutations (e.g. he discusses social constructivism, laboratory constructivism, media constructivism) but also dismissing the extreme conclusion that reality does not exist. We discussed this “epistemic nihilism” with the students in relation to Bruno Latour's work, noting that he was similarly misinterpreted with regard to the existence of an external reality. Zoglauer references Canadian Philosopher Ian Hacking on this point to explain the widespread misunderstanding: “according to constructivism, it is not individual things and material objects that are socially constructed, but ideas, categories and classification” (Ibid: 55). Therefore it is our perception and interpretation of reality that is socially constructed, rather than the matter itself.



The response to a series of Amnesty International social media adverts circulated in 2023 allows us to explore the practical application of the theoretical basis outlined above. Amnesty used AI-generated photorealistic constructed images of conflicts between protesters and police in Colombia to visualise the widespread protests there in 2021. The organisation explained that they had used generated images so as not to jeopardise the safety of any real people involved, as a photograph would likely have allowed. However, in response to criticism, Amnesty withdrew the images in case viewers' suspicion of AI images detracted from the extensive field work and reporting they had undertaken on the very real issues depicted. In Amnesty's defence, accompanying each image was a disclaimer that it had been generated using AI, so there was not an overt aim to deceive. However, these images transgressed the lingering assumption that photographic-style images record what happened, "without any aid whatever from the artist's pencil" (Fox Talbot 1844), thereby confirming its persistence even if we know better about such images.

Concerns about the Amnesty images raised by human rights advocate Sam Gregory (of Witness, a human rights group seeking to help people use video and technology to protect and defend human rights) point to a deeper problem posed by their use of such images (DeGeurin and Barr, 2023). Gregory points to the challenges faced by activists and journalists highlighting human rights violations

globally, who have their work dismissed and delegitimised as fake by authoritarian governments. This then places the burden of proving the truth onto the journalist or activist, thus showing the constructed image to be instrumental in eroding the fragile systems in place to hold authority to account in relation to unpalatable truths.

Part of Gregory's proposed plan for enabling us to distinguish reliable content from constructed and deceptive content is to grant journalists, community leaders and election officials access to the digital tools available to detect deepfakes. He explains that free access to such tools render them useless, as anyone hoping to deceive their audience will test their material on the detection software and revise it to evade detection. Gregory's suggestion reinstates the gatekeepers Zoglauer (2023: 2) saw diminished by the internet rhetorical free-for-all which placed responsibility for determining truth onto all of our shoulders. Here, they can be reframed as responsible editors safeguarding our interests.

By circumventing the problems posed to our perception of truth by photorealistic synthesised images, the following examples instead utilise drawing to bring together different perspectives to tell a truth. They allow us to consider what synthesised depictions of truth can allow. Gemma Sou, Adeeba Nuraina Risha, Gina Ziervogel collaborated with illustrator Cat Sims to convey the stories of ordinary people affected by climate change

in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Puerto Rico, Barbuda and South Africa. Their primary research informs the illustrated book adopted as a vehicle for their findings, conveying the shared experiences common to participants in their research. The authors state the intentions behind creating composites of the testimony they collected, writing that they “aimed to bring through the personalities, humour, voices, and identities of people because the media often homogenise people into groups such as ‘climate victims’ or ‘poor people’” (Sou et al, 2022: 34). Here, the authors' comments suggest that synthesis, if not used carefully, can be reductive and flattening and diminish the people involved.

By adopting a school lesson as the device used to unify the issues arising in different locations, the comic introduces the real daily effects of the climate crisis as well as raising questions about some of the structural causes for them directly in the panels. The focus on individuals allows us to consider the personal impact of something so complex, while highlighting practical small adaptations that demonstrate the resilience of people experiencing the brunt of crises. The writers are careful not to put too celebratory a gloss on these achievements, though, noting that “we have been careful not to romanticise people's capacity, because governments and international organisations must do a lot more to support families. If not, the burden of responsibility will continue to fall on the shoulders of low-income families.” The burden of the labour required by adaptive actions is

frequently borne by women, they note (Ibid: 29–30). Whilst not directly applicable in this case due to the synthesised nature of the individuals pictured, the authors' comments highlight a broader problem with the strategy of focusing on the singular example to represent the general. It can shift our focus onto the achievements of the individual who is then celebrated as a figurehead, an exemplar to be congratulated, diverting our attention from considering (and tackling) the systemic problems leading to their need for action.

In a series entitled *America's Dirty Divide*, UK news outlet *The Guardian* published a comic by Julia Louise Pereira which synthesises a variety of research sources to explain why and how designing climate-resilient cities needs to be done with and for the communities that live there. By using drawing to enable an acceptable synthesis of numerous complicated resources, the comic allows us an entry point into the wide-ranging academic research underpinning the issues discussed. The comic, as published online, also came complete with a list of sources and further reading, enabling us to fact check the piece as well as equip ourselves with further information. This approach is particularly powerful in relation to the post-truth situation outlined previously. The climate crisis is a discussion troubled by conspiracies and claims based on “alternative facts” rather than a verifiable evidence base, and this synthetic approach in comics form goes some way to preparing us to enter the debate surrounding challenges facing the planet.

The strategy adopted by the previous three examples shows two of the principles explored so far used in combination: synthesis, and the use of the particular to represent the universal. What is curious about this is the extra labour involved in boiling down information representing the bigger picture, condensing it into a synthesis that can be conveyed by a representative hypothetical individual, in order to communicate a message about that bigger picture. This is hugely *valuable* labour, given that it improves the accessibility of broad sets of data that are made digestible to the lay reader in a bitesize TLDR form. For us, this raises questions concerning the role of the illustrator and their skillset. Firstly, we appreciate them occupying the role of editor, sifting information, making a judgement and taking a position concerning the information we access. Again, with reference to Zoglauer's point, we see an example of someone filtering information as a welcome activity.

Secondly, critical thinking is the skillset underpinning that editorial role and the illustrative practices employed therein to synthesise complex multi-disciplinary perspectives into images. Critical thinking skills are high level cognitive skills not replicated by generative AI outcomes at this point, and are reflected in Benjamin Bloom's hierarchical taxonomy of learning objectives, as published in his influential book *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals: Handbook 1 Cognitive Domain* (Bloom, 1956). Here, synthesis is positioned near the top of the pyramid as one of the

highest-level thinking skills achievable (surpassed only by evaluation).

Bloom describes synthesis as:

“The putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole. This involves the process of working with pieces, parts, elements, etc., and arranging and combining them in such a way as to constitute a pattern or structure not clearly there before” (Bloom, 1956: 206)^[7]

Recognising that these skills can be taught, and given the role we have observed them taking in helping illustrators to navigate truth, we wonder whether there is a more substantial place for critical thinking skills within the training of illustrators.

Skills that enable illustrators to synthesise research and present it in a manner that is received as truthful may be in demand at the point of writing, where appearing truthful in a post-truth world filled with AI-generated images is a unique selling point of design businesses such as Templo. Pali Palavathanan (Founder and Creative Director) identifies their mission (“human rights, climate change and anti-corruption”) and the link between their values and approach to producing visuals:

“All of our work is anchored in truth and accuracy. There's so much misinformation and a lack of transparency. For credibility, we cannot be

[7] Subsequent revisions by Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl situate this skill right at the top of the list and rename it “creativity”, which necessarily involves evaluation of inputs before creating something new can begin (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001)

IMAGE
Artists' impression of
Bug Shepherd-
Barron's book *Through
the Vitriol*, 2022

generating inauthentic imagery or responses”
(Bourton, 2023)

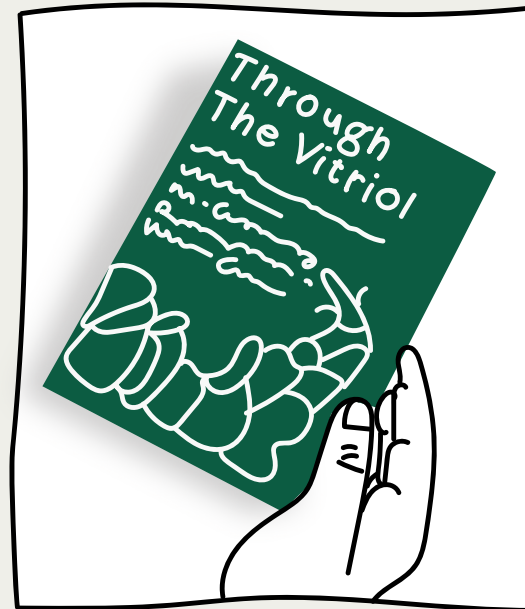
His comments suggest that in his field there is more of a professional need in his field for the drawn synthesis represented by Sims' work than there is for the generative AI-produced image. Hoorah to illustration!

Representation / Positionality

In her famous 1988 article ‘Situated Knowledges’ Donna Haraway coins the term ‘the god trick’ (1988:581). She is talking about how scientific imaging technologies promise us limitless, transcendent vision, the supposed ability to see everything from a vantage point up above. She contrasts this with the actual embodied nature of all vision and argues for the benefits of partial perspective, limited location and situated knowledge. Our eyes, she writes, are organic, perceptual systems, giving us “specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life” (Ibid: 583, emphasis in original).

In illustration, questions of whose ways of seeing, whose ways of life, are being articulated in the images that we produce and consume have come to the fore more recently. In the last decade people have finally begun to ask who is being commissioned to create illustrations of whom and what. This can result in uncomfortable

conversations, especially if these questions (unsurprisingly) reveal that power imbalances and discrimination prevalent in society at large are mirrored in the world of illustration — see for example this account of who gets to draw images of Black women for the cover of *The New Yorker*, or the staggering fact that it is still a rarity to see a medical illustration of a Black fetus today.



Bug Shepherd-Barron's illustrated book project *Through the Vitriol* (2022) is a brilliant example of an illustrator not only foregrounding her own lived experience of being a transfeminine person

in her illustration work, but also using the work to explicitly discuss the abysmal history of the depiction of trans and gender non-conforming people in mainstream Western cinema. Shepherd-Barron's humour, intelligence, generosity and wit speak through her illustrated protagonist who walks you through the narrative, pulling together a wide range of interesting sources and thought-provoking citations. Quoting American activist Marian Wright Edelman, who famously said that "it's hard to be what you can't see", Shepherd-Barron's character advises us to: "Look for things you can identify with and get joy from" (2022:49). Positive and diverse representation matters, she says, because ultimately these depictions create an environment in which a broader range of people can give themselves permission to carve out a life that feels right and joyful to them (2022:47).

It is of vital importance that more diverse perspectives and positions are brought into illustration — both to keep our discipline relevant and vibrant, while also acknowledging illustration's role as a conduit for broader cultural discussions: if our field stays narrow, the topics and themes that are brought into the visual landscape remain limited too. Multiple barriers to enter the profession of illustration remain a problem, despite initiatives such as Agents for Change. However, the debate about who is best placed to make valid representations of a specific group or experience, while urgent and necessary, should not make us retreat into a self-imposed

solipsism in our practice out of fear of getting the representation of other people and cultures wrong. This would result in autoethnography being the only justified mode of generating work, a scenario which is clearly nonsensical.

In a recent interview illustrator Cecilia Flumé acknowledges that working with other people's stories might indeed be terrifying. She reminds us that while it is right to ask whether it is appropriate to represent someone else's narrative, these questions should not necessarily stop us from going ahead with the project, but instead invite us to consider *how* one might do so in a thoughtful way.

"Instead of asking the question 'can I?' try asking 'how can I?'" (Flumé in Taylor 2024: 30)

Acknowledging and communicating your own position is an important part of this, alongside an honest interrogation of your motivations and methods. Illustrator Yeni Kim for example worked with an ethnographer and solicited ample community participation in her project that sought to capture aspects of Jeju culture and heritage. Jeju is a self-governing island in South Korea, and while Kim herself is Korean, she does not have a personal connection to the island's community, culture or language. After extensive research, library and museum visits, time spent on the island interviewing and getting to know community elders and conducting

experimental workshops with local children, she developed a bilingual picture book (in Jeju language and Standard Korean) that tells the (fictional) story of a day in the life of a mother and daughter *haenyeo* — a culture of female free divers specific to Jeju island (see Kim's 2022 article in *The Journal of Illustration* for a detailed and thoughtful write-up of this project). In this project Kim was motivated to contribute to the preservation of a disappearing culture. She explains that despite all her careful research she does not consider herself an expert in Jeju's cultural heritage, and neither does she have lived experience of the diving tradition she is depicting in her book. However she argues that the role of an illustrator in this context can be to educate an audience, to invite people to take an interest in something that is on the cusp of oblivion:

“As an illustrator, rather than delivering exact information, I can invite people to develop an interest in the images, and in the culture that I can capture through the images.” (Kim 2021)*

Haraway's appeal to understand all forms of looking and seeing as situated and embodied (1988), was part of a larger movement in feminist and critical race scholarship that called for greater attention to how a researcher's self-identification, experiences of marginalisation or privilege might influence their work. Reflecting on one's positionality has in recent years also become more established in illustration, see for example Jaleen Grove's article ‘The Lacuna's

Calling' (2023) in *Colouring In: The Past*, or illustrator and academic Rachel Emily Taylor's disclaimer in the introduction of her recent book (2024:12), where she acknowledges the inevitable biases her ethnicity, nationality and institutional affiliations bring to her research.

While this is undoubtedly a positive development, and both Grove and Taylor use the acknowledgement of their position as the starting point for a rigorous, wide-reaching and creative body of work, we must remain cautious to not let declarations of positionality lay the ground for unbridled relativism, the conviction that there cannot be any form of shared truth, but only particular, individual experience and context-specific knowledge. Haraway reminds us that “relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization [...] both make it impossible to see well.” (1988: 584)

What we have seen in the examples mentioned here, is how thoughtful illustration projects can do their part in bridging the singular and the universal. For example, neither of us identify as trans, and yet, reading Bug Shepherd-Barron's book *Through the Vitriol* was profoundly moving and delightful for us, for three distinct reasons: It gave us the opportunity to learn about the perspective, experience and knowledge of someone who in some ways is different to us, it invited a re-examination of aspects of our own lives and experiences which had been cast in a new light by these differences and commonalities,

[*] For another example of an illustrator working with somebody else's stories, see Hilde Kramer's project *Music from Siberia*, discussed pp. 32–40)

and, perhaps most importantly, it reaffirmed our common humanity.

Memetic Images

Our final grouping brings together images that operate in relation to truths that are subject to external limitations, such as taboo or censorship. Here we investigate images that allow their makers to say what is socially unacceptable, and examine their affordances in relation to messages that could pose a threat to safety. We found this function within memes, and we are particularly curious about them because they are not an easy fit for a discussion of illustrative practices. Illustrators don't often allow for decentred authorship and open source usage, and this makes us wonder what it might allow, were we to reconfigure our approach to authorship in the way that Holly Herndon is so radically reimagining it in music. In addition, the social media context for the examples discussed here heavily influences the articulation of illustration processes and products by anyone with a commercial practice working in 2024. Their work in that digital space is subject to the same logic that underpins the spread of a meme, therefore how memes operate indirectly informs the nature of illustration outputs.

Dating from 2012, the “Confession Bear” is one of a number of Advice Animal memes appearing on Reddit and is an example of participatory culture. Jacqueline Ryan Vickery (Associate Professor of

Media Arts, University of North Texas) writes about the complicated ways in which this simple image text combination has been utilised, and how it both liberates and constrains the speaker.

Confession Bear combines a photograph of a sad-looking bear with user-generated text at the top and bottom (an “image macro meme” according to Mina, 2019), and was used to voice anonymous confessions of an increasingly weighty nature, moving from humour to anxiety/taboo, then to voicing revelations of a traumatic nature. Vickery references Foucault to explain the benefits of confessing via such a mechanism, and of users challenging their own position as “silenced victims” in relation to the trauma category of examples (Vickery 2014: 311). However, she also points out that in relation to the taboo category, where examples included subjects such as “taboo sexual desires or acts, politically incorrect or taboo beliefs, and/or morally or ethically questionable behaviors”, the meme does nothing to undo the taboo that limits the free discussion of such issues in society (Ibid: 314). For example, Vickery observes that societal expectations of social, personal, or financial success aren't challenged by making a meme about one's failure, and its anonymity limits the impact of any liberatory function that confessing has: “the secret remains a secret even after it has been confessed, as such liberation is contained within the meme itself and does not transcend into offline spaces and lives” (Ibid: 320). In addition,

the meme's format limits the user's creativity, for there is no possibility of authoring the image in the way that the *PostSecret* project allows. However, the benefit of such a rigid format is that it breaks down barriers to entry, also allowing submissions to be untraceable. In rhetorical terms, the link we usually see between style and ethos is challenged, in that style no longer points to its author and their individuality. Instead, style occupies a relational function, situating the message within a specific conversation held by a community of Reddit users.

What is particularly intriguing about Vickery's analysis of the Confession Bear meme is the discussion of *untruthful* confessions, and what this reveals about the desire to engage in truth-telling. Vickery notes:

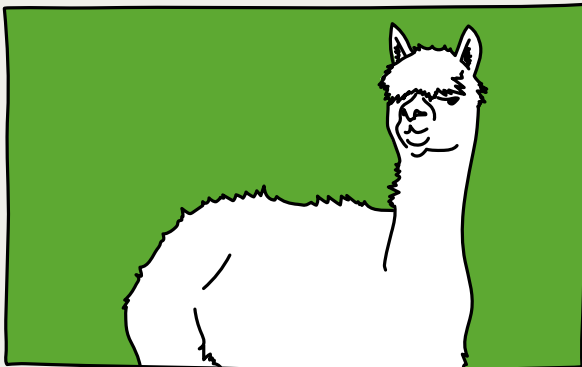
“There is a dialectic tension wherein users assume many confessions are false, yet they still long for authenticity and attempt to regulate false confessions in order to maintain some pretense of authenticity. In other words, acknowledging the potential for false confessions does not diminish the pleasures of participating in the space and sharing one's confessions (authentic or otherwise)” (Ibid: 323)

Here, the image allows us to gain satisfaction from engaging in truth-oriented behaviour, where the action of confession and participation seem to be prioritised over the content of the message — over truth itself.

The following example allows us to consider how the image could work within an overtly specified set of constraints, such as state censorship. Digital media scholar An Xiao Mina's book on the social and political role of memes offers many examples of where figurative language uses a visual symbol to stand for something that cannot be discussed publicly, and relies on a specific audience recognising the (frequently metonymic, it appears) relationship between symbol and censored topic. We have seen the persistence of this approach in examples from recent years such as images of A4 paper and drawings and emojis of watermelons.

Of particular note is Mina's discussion of the “*grass mud horse*”, often pictured with a river crab. This was a meme which allowed its participants to speak covertly about the need to speak covertly. The two creatures have their origins in provocative linguistic puns allowing internet users to comment on internet censorship (being in this case the “Great Firewall of China”). Here, the grass mud horse (visually this can be anything alpaca-esque) was used to represent freedom and the ability to tell the truth about one's situation, whereas the river crab stands for censorship and antagonised the grass mud horse. Mina uses these two to explain how canny activists adopted the ways of memes to circulate political messages, allowing them to communicate rapidly and widely. By passing as internet inanity, the activist meme troubles the highly-calibrated censorship apparatus, which can neither judge the content

accurately nor remove it at scale without drawing attention to the act of censorship at work. One of the main tools used by activists to encourage participation with memes is humour (of a particularly irreverent kind), which acts to build solidarity as a profound extension of Leith's "involuntary assent". It does so by thwarting the social division borne of the fear sown by censorship, and replacing it with positive emotions (laughter) and a sense of kinship with like-minded people. Mina elaborates on the potential of memes to build community, in that "they break the silence of self censorship through an addictive participatory culture, while making people with similar concerns and issues visible to each other" (Mina, 2019).



However, as communication scholar Grant Kien points out, forming any online community (conversely) contributes to the isolating echo-chamber surrounding each of us, leaving us impervious to new ideas

or challenges to our own personal "truths" (Kien, 2019: 91). His work on memes in a post-truth political landscape outlines a situation in which we find emotionally impactful content rewarding, seek more of it, and find the participatory engagement with it exciting. This explains the buzz of engaging with Vickery's potentially untrue confessions, but Kien's comments suggest that it comes with a hangover:

"Clever postmodern playfulness (in rhetorical terms, pathos or feelings)—demonstrated through prosumerist appropriation and transformation of media content from one meaning to another—seems more important than intelligence (logos or logic) for uniting people in a 'post-truth' society" (Ibid: 91)

In Kien's account of the rhetorical operations of memes, laughter as an appeal to pathos is a high-arousal physiological experience, which helps to circulate memes more quickly (Ibid: 58).^[8] But the speed of circulation of emotionally persuasive content is detrimental to allowing us the time for a negotiated meaning, with Kien citing Stuart Hall to describe interpretations of media that are more complicated than an immediate agreement or dismissal (Ibid: 60). Furthermore, balanced content that elicits a negotiated reading by being less simplistic won't circulate as it's not exciting. What Kien describes is a mechanism that is primed for untruths to flourish as it prioritises pathos over critical thinking:

IMAGE
Artists' impression of
a "grass mud horse"

[8] Kien makes reference to the research of Berger and Milkman (2012: 192) to support this claim

“The dominance of electronic media in the twentieth century has encouraged a focus on pathos. The excitement I mentioned above has aroused audiences to grant primacy to the feeling one gets from communication, to the detriment of scrutinizing logic and credibility” (Ibid: 57)

We cannot draw profound conclusions about the relative merits of different roles taken by memetic images from just two examples, but by exploring memes we have been able to consider the image as a shibboleth. We saw the symbolic memetic image allow safe recognition of like-minded others at the same time as it contributed to building this community through humour and the allure of participatory culture's feedback loop. To a greater or lesser degree in each case it enabled liberation and recognition, with its power lying in the cumulative effect of numerous iterations.

Despite the shortcomings listed here, Mina ends her discussion with an inspiring statement on the transformative power of memes:

“Memes are the media through which we test and iterate and envision and contest the type of society we want to live in” (Mina, 2019)

These are powerful claims, but whilst we can see what memetic images can do, in this instance as image makers we can't easily capture their strengths.

Prevalent approaches to authorship and copyright influence illustrators' approach to both the production and circulation of images, which we appreciate is important for many reasons. Whereas, in contrast, the memetic image is shapeshifting in nature and needs to be open to mutations beyond what its originator intended. Otherwise these images would be viral but not memes, and from what we can see illustration seeks out the former online but decries the latter. The social media context for memetic images, as well as the content of the images themselves, compels us to “prosume” through a sense of urgency and the reward of snappy participation, and here we've seen these desires triumph over the truthfulness of content. But what can illustrators do in this regard? If we return to Sue Coe's captivating pronouncement that illustration can “slow time down” we might consider how an oppositional approach may be powerful (Heller 1999: 21). We are not arguing for purely anachronistic practices, rather this is a call for us all to remember to recognise and value the slower works that might not clock up likes and achieve virality. We have seen illustrative practices navigate complexity and nuance over the four PDFs of Colouring In, and argued that illustration exhibits high levels of critical thinking. Therefore we wonder whether a valuable strength of illustration is its potential to use these skills to build corridors between our echo chambers.

Conclusion

What can we make of all of this? There is clearly not one single conclusion to be drawn from the many complicated overlaps between illustration and notions of truthfulness. Even speaking of “truth” on its own spawns seemingly unending discussions, where we brought in questions as to the nature of images and contemporary illustration practice in particular, we found ourselves catapulted into a myriad of complex philosophical challenges. We may not yet have escaped the mire, but we can summarise a few points that really stayed with us.

In our contemporary media landscape, where much communication is emotionally charged, truthfulness and careful consideration often take a back seat. We all know this, but despite this knowledge it can be hard to withstand the allure of high-arousal physiological responses to emotive messages and imagery. The fact that these messages and images might not be truthful does not necessarily detract from their appeal. Even if we know images to be fabricated or fake — simulating a reality that we know to be untrue — they can continue to wield power. The anonymous confessions published under the Confession Bear Meme might indeed be made up, and we know that the pornographic images of Taylor Swift are not really her, but that does little to diminish their influence.

This reminds us that more than ever we all need to be mindful of the institutions, organisations and

individuals making claims and publishing images. This is particularly urgent when using a visual language typically associated with objectivity — may that be photography (which somewhat erroneously carries this association) or the type of visual analysis practised by Forensic Architecture. We trust Forensic Architecture to give us a convincing, precise and transparent synthesis of data, but the same apparently logical and irrefutable visual language could be used to mislead and deceive. Even if images and illustrations are seemingly clear and self-evident, we found *ethos* — i.e. an appeal to the audience based on the integrity and standing of the speaker (or illustrator) — to be of greater importance than we initially anticipated. We were prepared for lengthy discussions of the balance of pathos and logos, but weren't expecting this insight!

We saw *ethos* surface in our discussions of illustrators' style, of the plausibility of the professional back-catalogue of the speaker, and in our discussion of deepfakes. In relation to *ethos*, we saw our comments on the role of the illustrator coalescing around the idea of the illustrator being someone we trust as an editor of information. In this respect we envisaged illustrators exercising their critical thinking skills to undertake a valuable service in finding, filtering and synthesising information into digestible forms. This saves us time as viewers, while also elevating the position of *ethos* within the three pillars of Aristotelian rhetoric. We also considered the role of the illustrator as someone who

can unmask untruths. Further to this, Catrin Morgan's critical practice also reveals how deception operates, equipping us with an understanding of images that will help us to navigate our post-truth environment.

These last examples are to be celebrated in what, for us while writing this, occasionally seemed to be an overly challenging cultural landscape. We are buoyed by our findings, in that we have identified several qualities of illustration that enable it to stage meaningful interventions. While there is a lot of discussion in the media that focuses on AI generated images that have a photorealistic quality, with much (and necessary) debate on their potential to deceive, illustration as a more obviously fabricated image can quietly get on with reflecting on the kinds of claims it is able to put forward. For example, illustration can slow time down and has the potential to take us out of the turmoil and chaos of the 24h news feed and invite us to enter into more reflective spaces. We argue that making space in the canon for (and frameworks to evaluate) illustration that operates outside of the immediate rewards of the online pathos factory is more important now than ever, given what “slower” work can offer. Because (much) illustration takes time to produce, it indicates a certain level of dedication and commitment on behalf of its maker, inviting the audience to do the work justice and also take time to absorb it. For example Sue Coe's work on slaughterhouses does not shock and repulse us in the way that a filmed documentary of the mass killing of animals would. Her work invites a

more wide-ranging reflection on our relationship to animals and the complex and merciless systems of industrialised agriculture.

Our final offering is our observation on the capacity of illustration to draw up relatable worlds. This might not sound like much as it seems so obvious, but as publics become increasingly fractured this starts to feel like a revolutionary act. As we are all getting sucked into our algorithmically produced content-bubbles, the idea of living in a connected, shared world seems to be slipping out of reach. Illustration can challenge that. For example Yeni Kim's sensitive work on the disappearing culture of Jeju island reminds us that even if something is not part of our immediate experience, we do well to consider it with the care and thoughtfulness it warrants. Illustration can show us things beyond our own realm, and remind us of our shared humanity.

SB, LV

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So What Had Happened Was ... –Hilde Kramer and John Miers

*Hilde Kramer and John Miers discuss
fragmentation, authenticity, truth and
fiction in their recent illustration projects*

This article is a record and adaptation of a conversation between Hilde Kramer and John Miers that took place at Kingston University on September 12, 2023. During the conversation we discussed how the concept of “truth” has been explored, invoked and questioned in our recent projects. Two of the themes that recurred during the conversation were the idea that the way we present accounts of real events and circumstances affects the audience's assessment of the truthfulness of that account, and that the raw details of first-hand accounts and factual information often need to be embellished, edited, and contextualised for their relevance and claims to truthfulness to be made apparent.

We have incorporated those observations into our approach to constructing this document. Much of the text below is taken from a transcript of our conversation. We had initially considered using that

transcript to provide all the text for this article. After all, it and the audio recording from which it is taken are direct, truthful records of the time we spent in dialogue. But like most primary documents they are also fragmentary, relatively unstructured, and lacking textual or rhetorical polish. I mean, one thing about direct transcripts is that, is that they record all the, you know, verbal tics and punctuations, the um, the bits where you're like searching for a word or a way to express something and it just, you know it just doesn't ...

So this introduction, as well as the individual introductions to our projects, and some of our concluding remarks, have been newly written to provide context and coherence that even a heavily edited transcript on its own would not have offered. The smaller subsections, in which we respond individually to questions about specific aspects of our negotiation of the concept of truth through illustration practice, are taken directly from the transcript.

In this manner the relationship of this article to the event that initiated it and the records of that event echoes the approaches we have taken in our individual illustrative practices: the resulting text would not exist without the event and its documentation, but coherently representing that event has necessitated multiple acts of intervention and interpretation, as is the case whenever we try to present truths such that their value and relevance can be understood.



Project description: John Miers
Conflict or Compromise?

Conflict or Compromise? (Miers, 2022a)^[1] is the second comic I've published about my experience of multiple sclerosis (MS). It continues the illustrative strategy of its predecessor, *So I Guess My Body Pretty Much Hates Me Now*, where I adopt other people's modes of graphic expression to tell personal stories. In the earlier comic I drew a story about diagnosis and formal medical treatment in the manner of "outsider" artist Mark Beyer, to visually embody the bewilderment and alienation that those processes can produce. The second story in that comic depicted an episode of bowel incontinence in excruciating detail, and for that I adopted the underground "comix" style of Ivan Brunetti to assert agency over an intensely distressing experience by reframing it as gross-out humour. This approach

was influenced by the "drawing demonstrations" produced by Simon Grennan as part of his theorisation of narrative drawing (2012, 2017)^{[2][3]}, and by my own theorisation of drawing style as a type of visual metaphor (Miers 2017, 2022b)^{[4][5]}.

So I Guess ... was produced during a postdoctoral residency at the Archives and Special Collections Centre at London College of Communication, UAL. Part of that archival research, which wasn't captured in the earlier comic, investigated the biographies of two individuals who also had MS: cartoonist John Hicklenton and musician Lindsay Cooper.

Their testimonies, captured respectively in the documentary *Here's Johnny* (2008)^[6], and in private diaries, capture very different approaches to conceptualising MS.

The documentary opens with Hicklenton describing his struggles with the disease as "a horrible and brutal war", the first of many martial metaphors he employs. Cooper framed her understanding of MS through new-age spiritual practices, leading her to discuss it as an entity with which one might be able to negotiate constructively.

My initial reaction to these framings was dismissive, even scornful:

"If Hicklenton had read Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1978)^[7] he'd know that seeing illness

IMAGE
Miers, J. (2022) *Conflict or Compromise?*
p. 9, panels 2–3

[1] Miers, J. (2022a) '*Conflict or Compromise? ...*' Biography, 44(3), pp. 25–38

[2] Grennan, S. (2012) '*Demonstrating discourses: Two comic strip projects in self-constraint*', Studies in Comics, 2(2), pp. 295–316

[3] Grennan, S. (2017) *A Theory of Narrative Drawing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

[4] Miers, J. (2017) *Visual Metaphor and Drawn Narratives*. PhD thesis. Central Saint Martins, UAL

[5] Miers, J. (2022b) '*Psychologies of Perception: Stories of Depiction*', in I. Horton and M. Gray (eds) *Comics and Art History: Alternative Approaches ...* Oxford: Routledge

[6] *Here's Johnny* [DVD] (2008). Animal Monday

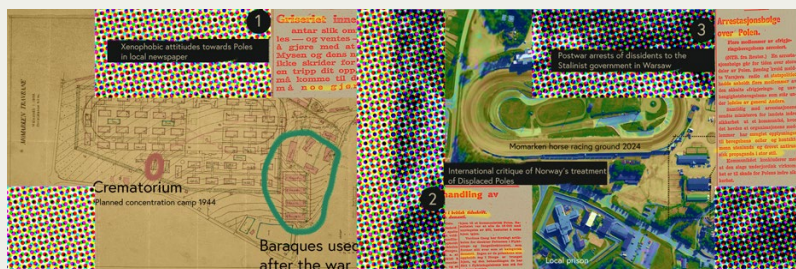
[7] Sontag, S. (1978) *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

as war is psychologically damaging and leads to victim-blaming. And if Cooper is basing her view on pseudoscience like *Passion and Reason* (Lazarus and Lazarus, 1994)^[8] then it's just feelgood mumbo-jumbo.

... But these are people who had this disease decades ago, who wouldn't have had the treatment options I've had, and are no longer around to speak for themselves. Who am I to criticise anything that they did to try to cope with it?"

Conflict or Compromise? Is my attempt to work through those reactions by illustrating them.

Project description: Hilde Kramer
Music from Siberia



In a subproject called *Sound as Illustration* embedded in the artistic research project *Illuminating the Non-Representable*, we ask how sound may illustrate different narratives. The project builds on Second

World War history in south-east Norway. Our information came from a self-published book written by a local teacher, Arne Sandem (1990)^[9] in Momarken, Norway. Here, a horse-racing ground served as a forced labourer's camp during the war and was intended to become a full-scale concentration camp. However this plan was not realised and the site eventually became housing for Displaced Polish Persons in 1945–47. UNRRA (the predecessor of the United Nations) gathered Polish people related to music in this camp, with an intention to rebuild Warsaw with culture. We wanted to frame this as an exploration of the concept of character, where we wanted to describe one of the six hundred men in the camp through sound. In response, my collaborator Fredrik Rysjedal made a surround sound installation called *How Long Did You Stay in the Water?* (Rysjedal and Kramer 2021).^[10]

The information we retrieved was fascinating, though full of challenges. How could we treat this sensitive material within an ethical framework? We noticed that some details in the information we had received did not add up, and I continued digging into archives. The information that we retrieved was not only interesting from an artistic point of view, it also opened some interesting perspectives on WWII history. Thanee Andino joined me in the making of *Music from Siberia*, a performance that took place at the University Museum in Bergen in October 2021 (Kramer & Andino 2021).^[11] In this performance we tested out sound, gestures, mark-making,

IMAGE
Kramer, H. (2024)
*'Construction drawing
Momarken horseracing
ground'* (edited)

[8] Lazarus, R.S. and
Lazarus, B.N. (1994)
*Passion and Reason:
Making Sense of Our
Emotions*. Oxford
University Press

[9] Sandem, A. (1990)
*Den siste SS-leiren:
SS-Sonderlager Mysen*.
Mysen: Eget forlag

[10] Rysjedal, F and
Kramer, H. (2021,
October 8–10) *How
Long Did You Stay
in The Water*,
(illuminating the
Non-Representable)

[11] Kramer, H. and
Andino, T. (2021)
Music from Siberia

and images to highlight, obscure and question our findings. The ethical challenges regarding the representation of others and the use of biographical material in illustrated narratives was at the core of the performance.

Fragmentation

Traditionally (auto)biographical writing is expected to present a unified person, or a unified narrative. In your work you foreground fragmentation. What ideas around “personhood” emerge through your work? And how do those ideas manifest in your illustration practice?

John Miers: There are gaps you have to fill and gaps you have to create in order to have a story about yourself. Maybe one of the ways we deal with that in illustration is just deliberately not insisting on that single unified self.

In terms of visual languages, within comics studies there's an established line of argument regarding how we deal with these fragmentary narratives that are made up of separate pictures in boxes: any individual depiction that we see of a character is not the totality of that character (Kukkonen, 2008).^[12] Also, even in relatively mainstream comics, stylistic experimentation is a thing. There's a well-known artist called JH Williams III and his whole shtick is that there'll be a page that's a Jack Kirby pastiche,

and another that's mimicking the style of another artist (Morrison and Williams III, 2006).^[13]

So maybe that lays more groundwork for a comics artist to go, yeah, OK, I can have people with different styles sitting together.



Hilde Kramer: The development of the performance Music from Siberia began with a wish to explore the concept of ‘character’ as sound, and in particular what a ‘protagonist’ may sound like. Not many scholars have written about character in illustration, strangely enough since it is such a central feature in illustration practice. So, we went to film and sound theory to see what we could learn from them. In film

IMAGE
Kramer, H. (2024)
‘Leitmotif: A man with three national identities’ (edited)

[12] Kukkonen, K. (2008) *‘Beyond Language: Metaphor and Metonymy in Comics Storytelling’*, English Language Notes, 46(2), pp. 89–98

[13] Morrison, G. and Williams III, J. (2006) *Seven Soldiers of Victory*. New York: DC Comics (1)

theory and musicology, a ‘leitmotif’ is a short recurring theme that can identify a person, an object or a landscape (Cord, 1995).^[14] But as our research developed, we discovered a discrepancy between the story the family had preserved, and material found in public archives. The character that seemed to emerge was far more complex than the traditional pure ‘protagonist’ and ‘antagonist’ definitions one often finds in popular literature.

Mieke Bal asks how one may decide which one considers provisionally to be a character’s relevant characteristics and which are of secondary relevance, and suggests using a method that involves selecting relevant semantic axes. These could be rich-poor, man-woman, reactionary-progressive etc. She also suggests social or family roles to be of importance. (Bal 2014). E.M. Forster, who was the first to write about ‘flat’ vs. ‘round’ characters wrote that the true test of roundness is in a character’s ability to surprise in a convincing way (Forster, 1927).^[15] The round character stands in contrast to the flat character, a term also coined by Forster. Flat characters have fewer traits, and usually remain unchanged. Roland Barthes writes in *The Fetish of Character* about destroying the ‘multilevel unity of the whole work and bringing forward only isolated popular passages’ (Barthes, 2001).^[16] Theodor Adorno also writes about fetish-character in connection to music and what he calls the regression of listening, in connection to music as a consumed product, and the impact of technological development.^[17] I believe that some

of the same rules apply for illustration; we should be careful to provide flatness to characters in leading roles, otherwise it may reduce the audience’s possibility to read ambiguous or contradicting interpretations of a narrative. Give the reader/viewers brains something to work on!

Speaking authentically

Conventionally (auto)biography is understood as a genre rooted in “truth telling” and fact. In your work “fiction” has lost its connotation of falsehood and becomes an acknowledgement of the partiality of truths. Can you discuss how ideas of authenticity, narrative, and fiction play out in your work and what illustrative strategies you use to tease this out?

Hilde Kramer: Following up on fragmentation, style and the identity of an illustrator: As a young person starting out with illustration, every illustration I made would be so different that people did not understand that this was me using a plurality of modes of expression. Modality offers a multitude of possible interpretations of one message. And in one way that aspect has continued to define who I am as an illustrator. But I think this does not only apply to me nor to illustrators in specific. This is a human aspect.

John Miers: Speaking “inauthentically” as different narrators in my comics has helped me to find ways of speaking directly about deeply upsetting aspects

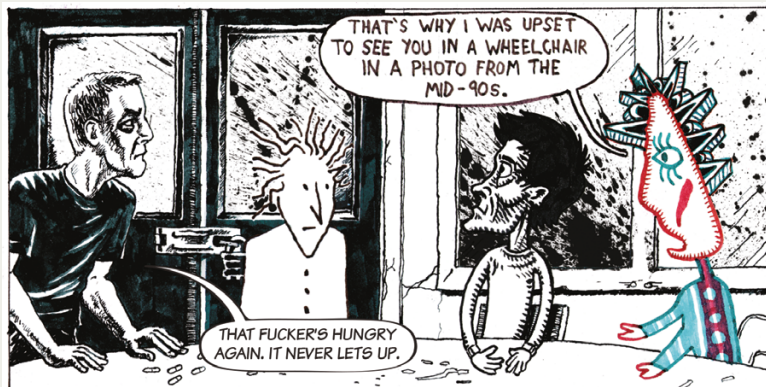
[14] Cord, W. (1995) *An Introduction to Richard Wagner’s der Ring des Nibelungen*. N.p.: Ohio University Press

[15] Forster, E.M. ([1927] 1980) *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Penguin

[16] Barthes, R., (2001) ‘On the Fetish Character’. In *The Culture Industry: selected essays on mass industry*. London. Routledge Classics. pp. 29–60

[17] Adorno, T. (1994) ‘On the Fetish-Character in Music and Regression of Listening’. *Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. Steven David Ross. Albany: State U of New York P. pp. 539–47

of illness. Mark Beyer's characters exist in this kind of nonsensically cruel universe with no plot. It's just bad things happen and they survive (Beyer, 2016).^[18] You get told, you've got this disease, nobody can do anything to stop your body from slowly destroying itself. And you just say, well, why me? So what I was trying to capture by drawing "as" Beyer was more of a mood.



With Brunetti, that rests more on cultural associations people might have with a given style. If you recognise the underground comix tradition, you recognise that it's intended to be funny but also transgressive (Brunetti, 1994).^[19] The time I spent in that toilet over those few pages was one of the most humiliating experiences of my life. I mean the levels of panic and fear going on and I was like, but it's kind of funny? Or it could be. Well, if I draw it like this, it can be funny.

Ethics

*Is there harm in (self) revelation?
Is it our responsibility to speak about things that
hitherto might have been shrouded in silence?*

John Miers: When you framed it in terms of revelation, that drew my attention, not so much to the complications of using Cooper's diary, but to telling the people closest to me about what was in this comic.

My partner and I were getting ready to go to this conference where I was going to present *So I Guess* Obviously, I'd told her about the "event", but at the conference, I'm going to not only tell everybody, but show them pictures, and that was actually quite tough for her.

And then explaining to my parents. That's different because I do kind of put a brave face on. You don't want them to worry do you? Telling them, look, this happened to me. And you're going to want to read it. I'm going to want you to read it because I want you to understand.

But it's going to upset you.

Hilde Kramer: No matter how much one tries to prepare the ground in a project, there will be challenges. Consequently, Ethics is increasingly becoming a central aspect of artistic research

IMAGE
Miers, J. (2022) *Conflict or Compromise?*
p. 7, panel 1

[18] Beyer, M. (2016) *Agony*. New York
Review Comics

[19] Brunetti, I. (1994) *Schizo. Fantagraphics*
(1)

1. Why would someone who **couldn't fit** keep photos of a **dissemination** in a shoebox? **couldn't** **fit**

2. Is he found among the members of the **organization**?

3. Or is he the **guy** standing next to the 11 coffins draped with swastika flags?

to highlight parts of the text that contain important information. During the performance we mimicked such clichés to highlight the ethical challenges we faced in telling this story. And we came across other performance projects that applied similar artistic strategies (Lima, Spahr, Ministro, & Soto, 2021).^[21]

Can you say something about how you use illustration to reflect on human identity as grounded in experiences of our bodies?

John Miers: Drawing style itself can serve as a metaphor that creates expectations about the nature of the fictional world that you're about to

[20] Crispin, D. (2022). *The messiness of doing v. the integrity of action: towards an embodied ethics of artistic research*. from MAP ETHICS!: *The messiness of doing v. the integrity of action: towards an embodied ethics of artistic research*

[21] Lima, R., Spahr, J., Ministro, B., & Soto, C. (2021, September 20–24). *Borradura. From Erase!*

[22] Kress, G. J., Ogborn, J., & Tratsarelis, C. (2014). *Multimodal teaching and learning. The Rhetorics of the Science Classroom*. London and New York: Bloomsbury

enter, about the kinds of activities and behaviours that may take place there. That includes depictions of bodies. Comics scholars have commented on how the elastic, invulnerable nature of cartoon bodies helps to underscore the slapstick nature of the violence that takes place in them (LaMarre, 2011).^[23] Similarly, when I mimic Brunetti's perverted version of traditional cartooning styles, because the style has these meanings that have accrued around it, it helps guide the reader as to how to approach the story, how I'm approaching my memory of that profoundly challenging experience of embodiment.

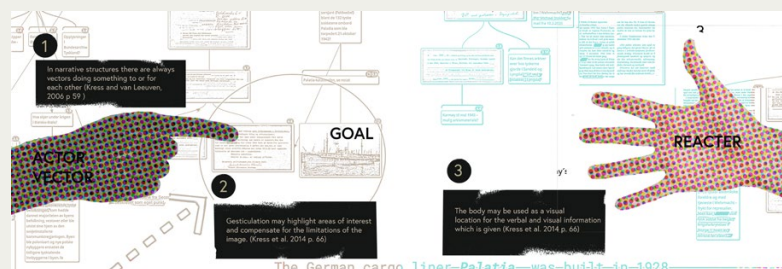
If I'd drawn it in John Hicklenton's style (apart from the fact that it would have taken much longer because it's much more detailed!), it would have read as body horror rather than gross-out humour.

Conclusion

You both spoke about using a variety of modes of expression in your work as illustrators. Some people might be confused by this way of working, especially in the context of an industry where having a recognisable “voice” is often held as a self-evident requirement for illustrators. To wrap up, could you comment on how the issues we've been discussing relate more broadly to our construction of identities as illustrators?

Hilde Kramer: I mentioned earlier the potential of

modality. The illustrator may choose a visual language with high or low modality impact. Illustration that builds on real events and circumstances harbours the possibility to influence the viewers' reception, as in John's example here with choices of style in drawing human bodies.



John Miers: The concept of modality, as employed by Kress and Van Leeuwen, refers to “the truth value or credibility of (linguistically realized) statements about the world” (2006, p. 155).^[24] I was so delighted when we met at Kingston, because the first thing you said to me was that you recognised me from my comic. So you'd judged that at least some of the visual truth claims I'd made held in reality. But you also commented that my self-portraiture in that comic was quite unflattering, so that was an acknowledgement of lower modality aspects of those drawings.

But there is — or at least was when we started our careers — an expectation that illustrators should construct a single visual language that becomes

IMAGE
Kramer, H. (2024)
'*Gestures, vectors
and embodiment*'
(edited)

[23] LaMarre, T.
(2011) '*Believe in
Comics: Forms
of Expression in
Barefoot Gen*',
in T. Perper and
M. Cornog (eds)
*Mangatopia: Essays
on Manga and Anime
in the Modern World:
Essays on Manga
and Anime in the
Modern World*. Santa
Barbara: Libraries
Unlimited

[24] Kress, G.R.
and Van Leeuwen,
T. (2006) *Reading
images: the grammar
of visual design*.
London; New York:
Routledge

[] Foá, M.,
Grisewood, J.,
Hosea, B., &
Mcall, C. (2022).
*Performance
Drawing*. London,
Dublin, New York:
Bloomsbury

your whole visual identity. We both had stories about this, I think.

Hilde Kramer: I was still a student and I was asked to make a portrait of a writer. So I started drawing and I needed to warm up, so I was drawing a lot of lines. And then afterwards I made a drawing with these very precise lines, everything very defined. And this writer, he looked at them and said “this is not the same person”. Illustrators accept that we can be different, we do different stuff. While our audience might not understand that and think that it's, I don't know, acting.

John Miers: Soon after I graduated I went to a portfolio review event where the advice was: “Commissioners want to look at a portfolio and say OK I like your drawing of a cake. I'm going to commission you to draw a sock and I want to know that the drawing of the sock is going to be very similar to the drawing of the cake. And that's what your portfolio has to say to them.”

But the idea of trying to manufacture a portfolio that said, I've honed my shortcuts and my repertoire of cliches that I'll use to depict anything, and that represents me as an artist ... *That* would have been the lie.

HK, JM

I Swear...

There's Some Truth In Modern-Day Mythmaking

—O Haruna

O Haruna reflects on truth and representation in his autoethnographic animatic

What exactly is *truth*? And why does the way it is represented inherently change it? I will use my auto-ethnographic animatic called *I Swear...* to reflect on practices of modern-day mythmaking.

Context

I Swear... is an animatic (a moving storyboard or rough animation) that feeds into a practice-based PhD that explores racial identities within animation. The goal of the research is to explore how Black British masculinities can be represented in short, animated narratives that are based on lived experiences, focusing on adolescence as a key stage within the identity formation process (Erikson 1968).^[1]

The Plot

The plot narrativizes my secondary school experiences of peers spreading rumours from the perspective of a new student who has yet to directly encounter me. Denied any shared experience, the audience is on the same footing as this new student, unable to differentiate poetic exaggerations and in-jokes from factual accounts. In the story, my peers' fascination of my sporting prowess spirals into an obsession of the Black body that performs it. Each of their vignettes tries to surpass the last, deifying and demonising me in the process. Delivered through different voices, each description of me reflects the individual students' unique perceptions of reality. Tacitly, the short questions whose point of view should be privileged in authorial descriptions of events, people and experiences.

Types Of Truth

One of the aims of *I Swear...* is to reveal the tension between the factual and the truth. In *interpretivist* or *constructivist* paradigms, truths are concerned with social realities and therefore dependent on context and formed in meaning making practices. As so succinctly summarised in McLuhan's title *The Medium is the Message* (2003)^[2], **what** representations communicate cannot be separate from **how** they communicate it. The *how* always influences and modifies the meaning bound in the *what*. A positivist/post-positivist

[1] Erikson, E. H. (1968) *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. London: Faber

[2] McLuhan, M. ([1964] 2003) *Understanding Media*. Corte Madera: Gingko Press

paradigm, on the other hand, more naturally lends itself to descriptions of physical realities. Thus, facts describe universally agreed events or properties in a shared reality which are typically empirically verified. In *I Swear...* these contrasting paradigms uneasily overlap and are connected through the ambiguities of poetics and visual devices.

Typical understandings of moving image might be situated on an axis, such as Furniss' mimesis — abstraction continuum (1998:5)^[3], whereby representations of reality and truth(s) are more credible or accepted the more mimetic (i.e. iconic or naturalised) they are. Traditional conventions of documentary, for example, emphasise the need for live-action imagery as indexical (traces) of a physical and profilic reality (Nichols 1991:150).^[4] In contrast *I Swear...* uses illustration and animation to refer to a *metaphysical* reality; not what the world is, but what the world means (Hoffer in Wells 1998:11).^[5] Because illustration and animation foreground interpretive recording (Ward 2005:101)^[6], which live-action documentaries eschew, *I Swear...* can highlight the fact that social realities are never unmediated, interrogating “the ways in which ‘the real’ has been constructed” (Wells 1997:40–41).^[7]

The use of animation as opposed to live-action, static imagery or text alone, facilitates additional modalities to creatively channel information. Modes might include styles, mediums, the aural, visual and the linguistic amongst others (Kress & Van



IMAGES
Stills from O Haruna,
I Swear...(2023)

[3] Furniss, M.
(1998) *Art in motion:
Animation Aesthetics*.
Sydney: John Libbey
& Company Pty Ltd

[4] Nichols, B. (1991)
*Representing reality:
issues and concepts
in documentary*.
Bloomington: Indiana
University Press

[5] Wells, P. (1998)
*Understanding
Animation*. Reprint.
Oxon: Routledge

[6] Ward, P. (2005)
*Documentary: The
Margins Of Reality*.
London: Wallflower

[7] Wells, P. (1997)
'The Beautiful Village
and the True Village',
In: Kearton, N. (ed.)
Art & Animation. New
York: John Wiley &
Son Inc, pp. 40–45

Leeuwen 2001:21–22)^[8] and are used within the piece at different times to either reinforce or oppose one another (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:11–26).^[9] In the latter case, I found a particular value in different types of counterpoints, suggesting viewpoints that differ, narrations that purport to be factual (though accompanying visuals hint otherwise), and linguistic information whose vocal and visual delivery reframes it as a joke. Ultimately, it is the productively unstable combination of visual, aural and linguistic channels that instil an uncertainty in whether modes are being used iconically, symbolically and in terms of the vocal performances: indexically.

Conclusion

I Swear... takes advantage of illustrative animation's capacity to render internal states visible (Wells 1998: 122), visualise moments that cannot be or have not been recorded through other means (Mihailova 2019: 51)^[10] and offer visual anonymity (Honesty Roe 2013: 79).^[11] As a result, animation offers a unique set of tools to articulate the negotiation of identity and the various meanings attached to my race. In using differing modes to counterpoint one another through increasingly implausible stories, factual events are intermingled with gossip and racialised clichés. Factuality is subsumed by implausibility, and the audience is left speculating on the nature of the original lived experiences the story was based upon. *I Swear...* is relegated to becoming a myth about mythmaking.



OH

IMAGES
Still from O Haruna,
I Swear...(2023)

[8] Kress, G., &
Van Leeuwen, T.
(2001). *Multimodal
discourse: The
modes and media
of contemporary
communication*.
London: Arnold
Publishers

[9] Nikolajeva, M. and
Scott, C. (2001) *How
Picturebooks Work*.
New York; London:
Garland

[10] Mihailova, M.
(2020) 'Before Sound,
there was Soul: The
Role of Animation
in Silent Nonfiction
Cinema', In: Murray,
J. & Ehrlich, N.
(eds.), *Draw from
Life: Issues and
Themes in Animated
Documentary
Cinema*. Edinburgh:
Edinburgh University
Press, pp. 31–46

[11] Honess Roe,
A. (2013) *Animated
Documentary*.
Basingstoke:
Palgrave Macmillan

IMAGE
Holly O'Neil, *Dust
Swallowed Me Whole*
(page from the graphic
novel)

Surrender to the Moment! –Louis Netter and Holly O'Neil

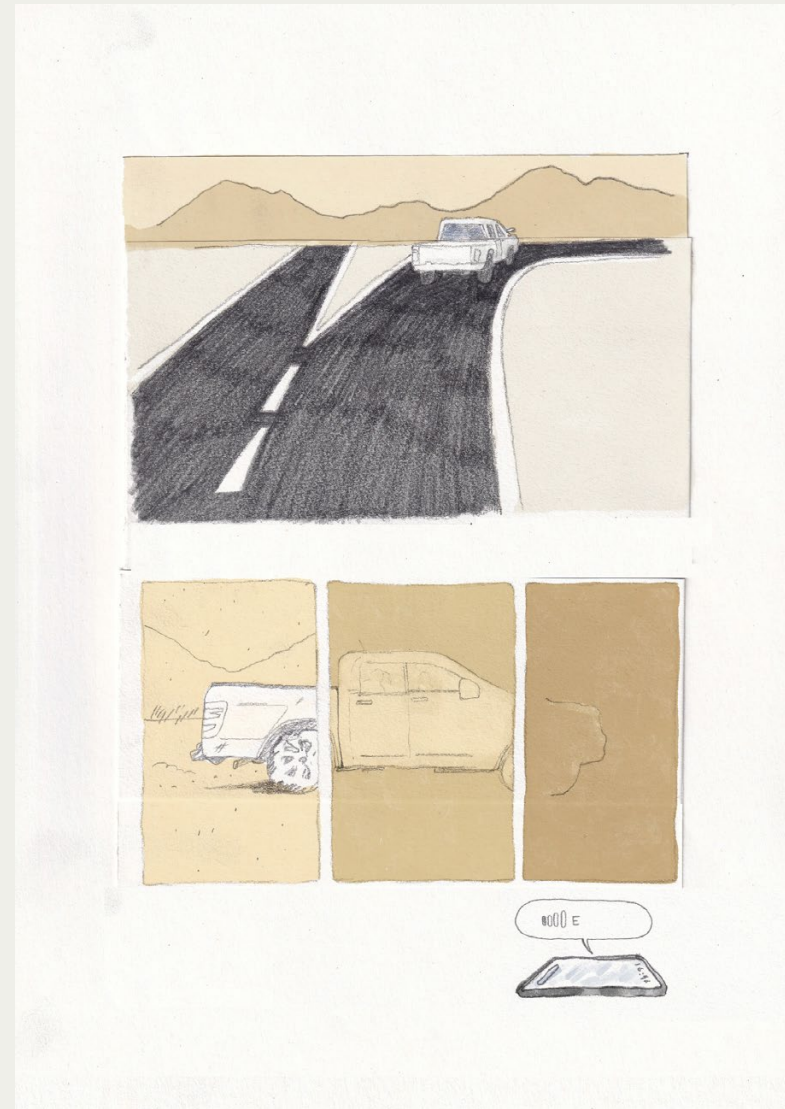
*Louis Netter and Holly O'Neil discuss subjectivity
and truth in reportage drawing*

Introduction

Holly O'Neil: *Dust Swallowed Me Whole*

“Her eyelid blinked sideways. Scales protruding from the fuzz of her chin. His gator hands gripped the wheel as we flew down the dusty road. Drones soared around us. The desert pulsed, exhaling clouds of sand. The last of my energy seeped from my body and I watched it pool in a black gunk in the footwell. I held my breath and prayed I'd be home soon.”

I wrote these words on my return to England after a traumatic fieldwork encounter in Arizona, USA. I had travelled to the States for research but shortly afterward found myself in a situation out of my control. These words are a dreamlike depiction of reality. But even so, in many ways, this did happen. This is a truth, an enmeshed reality in which the physical and internal coincide to produce facts not



as we know them. As an artist-anthropologist, my work involves “being there”, existing in space and documenting it, making sense, and rehashing experience into story, image, and knowledge. But after this traumatic time in the field, I began to ask myself, as both an illustrator and a social scientist: What do we owe our audience? Where lies the dusty boundary between real and fake? My 30-page, yet unpublished, “ethno-graphic” novel *Dust Swallowed Me Whole* was created in the aftermath of my disastrous fieldwork and uses the first-hand experience of being trapped on a cult's property to unpack the layers of reality and time-travel that exist in moments of crisis. In it, I interweave dreams, hallucinations, real-world conversations, and inner dialogue all on the same “real” plane. This led me to reflect on how, in many ways, the experience of drawing (its rehashing and reorganisation of narrative, emotion, and agency) can be fieldwork in itself. Drawing became a way to relive the fieldwork encounter from a safe distance, allowing for both the complete anonymity of my interlocutors, as well as the creation of a hyper-personal avatar whom I could “leave behind” in the work. The decision to anonymize my interlocutors grew out of my gradual understanding that this work was more of a personal reflective piece rather than a documentation of other people's lives. Hockney once said, “you take yourself around everywhere you go, don't you?” Neither the anthropologist's nor the artist's positionality and authorship can be shrugged off throughout both the making and

presenting of works. Through the field-diary and the re-drawn experience, I was able to time-travel and shape-shift, between places, dreams, fears, and current realities. I argue that as illustrators and anthropologists, this power to morph between realities should not deter those seeking “fact” or “truth” in its empirical, all-consuming stance, but instead should be seen as a tool to uncover and depict an understanding that is deeper than what meets the eye.

Louis Netter: Mining the pavement

The air smelled vaguely of sausages, the streets were clean, and old and new mingled cosily in the architecture, both grand and old world quaint. I am in Basel, Switzerland on my first trip for my new book about the grotesque. I did wonder whether this was the right place but now I see its perfect alchemy; continental sophistication infused with low libertine tastes. Like many remnants of the old world, a fascination with death and the grotesque is still present in hidden and not so hidden corners of the city. These strange talismanic figures are a fearful reminder to the peasantry that God is watching. A quarter of the way into the 21st century and we are looking at the future with great trepidation. Far from 80's and 90's swagger and the quiet belief that everything is actually going to be okay, we are stuck in the mud and mire of the sobering truth that the best times may have already passed us by.

IMAGE TOP
Louis Netter, *On the Rhine* (2023)

IMAGE BOTTOM
Holly O'Neil, *Eve*
(drawing a conversation)



While drawing, I have come to the conclusion that the last thing a reportage artist thinks about when he or she is drawing is truth. This is not because truth is not an important aspect of understanding people and places, it is because the demands of the act maintain the sole focus on wrestling the drawing into being and not on a continual questioning of the veracity of the drawing. Because human beings are not mechanical recording devices, it is inevitable that the seen becomes the felt, the questioned, the scorned, the pitied, the loved, the lusted for and all manner of other responses an illustrator might have to people and places. These thoughts and feelings inevitably sneak into the drawings. Of course, the drawing would not be there if the subject did not elicit some sort of commentary or theme identified by the artist. The subject of a reportage drawing is something that is pulled from fluid reality to be representative of that time and place for a reason or reasons known to the artist. The drawing could be seen as a more intimate vivification of the artist's confrontation with people and places through his or her own visual language. I have argued that reportage drawing is as much a communion with experience than a depiction of specific individuals and contexts.

The only hard evidence that a reportage drawing furnishes is that the artist created something which has the look, feel and immediacy of an eyewitness drawing. It might have actually taken place, but it might also be some evocation from a recent memory. To ask after the veracity of such drawing is a



distraction from a much richer discussion about what drawing does for our understanding of people and places. I believe that reportage drawings are stand-alone statements, being both anchored to the subject they are purporting to depict and equally untethered, projecting symbolic meaning far beyond the subject itself and beyond the confines of a mimetic rendering of 'reality.'

My recent trip to Basel Switzerland brought many of these questions to the fore and made me wonder how much my vision of the city was idiosyncratically my own and how much it actually revealed about the place. Maybe, by reflecting on the highly subjective understanding of a place we actually land on the 'subject' itself; namely, human perception.

Drawing as a gathering of experience

Holly O'Neil: Drawing on location is an act of time-travel between worlds. There's something transportive about opening a sketchbook to a drawing made on a cold and grey day, the pastel disrupted by raindrops, the paper folded at the edges. You once again feel the wind against your neck, remember the way you folded the page over your knee so as to keep the pencil against the soggy surface. Drawing from the real, both on location and from personal experience acts as a form of ecstatic "being there"-ness. As anthropologist Michael Taussig noted in his fieldwork sketchbook, exclaims, "I swear I saw this" (Taussig 2011). The

drawing from the real allows us to make sense of the world around us, reflecting on the experience as a whole, not just as a finished, neatly packaged image. Through having to look, draw, see and experience, the drawing made from the real takes on more than just the story of what has been drawn, instead pulling in a whole picture of a moment in time, from the perspective of its author.

Louis Netter: Drawing on site is very much about the circumstances surrounding the act itself. The weather, the artist's perch, the proximity to the subject, all impact on how the drawing gets made and how successful it is. When the weather is nice, you have the ability to move around more freely and you have more subjects who are enjoying the sunshine. With that however, you also have more people and this requires some thought to avoid detection and possibly to evade onlookers who might take an interest. Because my subjects are often chosen for their idiosyncrasies, features or iconicism, I don't want them seeing my depiction. Past experience has taught me that this can lead to anger and dismay among subjects even though my depiction is very often accurate (although admittedly identifying something perhaps less seemly about the individual). Ultimately, what is recorded is two-fold; a rendering of vision through the limitations of one's hand and a record of experience which can ultimately be seen as a condensation of thoughts and perceptions that reside in the drawing. The drawing is a container of energies guided by

intuition and emotion. A drawing is a reconstitution of the subject into formal referents. A drawing is a map but less of a specific and defined subject and more a sensory stage, a gathering of accumulated experience.

Methods for depicting subjects: specificity, exaggeration, synthesis, anonymisation

Holly O'Neil: The trouble with truth is that it does not belong to one person. Image-making, documentary and anthropological drawing, all come with a voice. They all belong to their author. In my own practice, wrangling the complex multiplicity of reality can become a weighty responsibility. The audience believes you, inherently, until they don't. Thus making sure we present a reality that is "truthful" is crucial. In this way, drawing acts as an invaluable tool when dealing with tense and potentially dangerous situations of identity and story. In my graphic novel, my experience is wildly different to that of my interlocutors, and the story I tell is from a specific personal perspective. For this reason, it did not make sense to draw my participants as active, exact replicas, in fact, their complete anonymity was needed to best protect their identities from the bias of my autobiographical work. In this way, drawing allowed a freedom and agency to merge, and anonymise my interlocutors into unrecognisable characters in a personal story. However, we must as social scientists, artists and authors, stay vigilant to how

IMAGE TOP
Holly O'Neil, *Climbers*
(sketchbook drawing
on location)

IMAGE BOTTOM
Louis Netter, *Woman
with her Wickelfisch*
(2023)

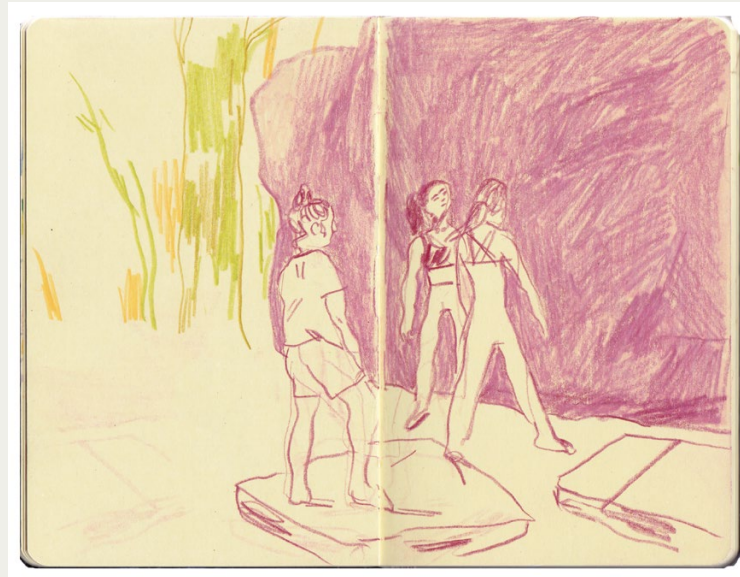


IMAGE TOP
Louis Netter, *Homeless man with book* (2023)



IMAGE BOTTOM
Louis Netter, *Basel street scene* (2023)



this editing challenges the trust of our audiences, how it challenges the truth itself.

Louis Netter: I have moved through various tools and methods over the past 20 years and I have found a method and set of tools that seems to work (at least from my perspective). I worked small for about 20 years and when I decided to go much larger, (A3) the drawing became much stronger. Perhaps the size enabled a more direct subject-to-drawing correspondence. I also think it was forcing me to move my arms more than my hand. This is a freeing experience and results in drawings which are more confident, proportional and inherently more gestural. I also ditched the pencil for a graphite stick which enables a wider range of marks and the ability to dash in tone quickly. The drawings come together more quickly in this manner and that amplifies their power. Speed enables the swift capture of fluid reality and often, the expressive qualities of the subject.

I tend to use elements of caricature in my drawing. This is my response to the demands of the act and a synthesis of features. My aim to elicit comment comes at the point of choosing my subject and the resultant commentary in the drawing is folded into the rendering, the formation of the drawing. It is not overtly conscious for me although, as noted, the subject is chosen because he or she is emblematic of something. I am hyper aware of micro and macro expressions that tip everyday human activity into something more profoundly symbolic. I love to hunt

for these moments. The truth of the drawings is almost entirely self monitored and assessed. The viewer must trust the artist that the drawing is a smuggled truth brought to them. I never anonymise my drawings although one doesn't have to if you are drawing ordinary people I am observing in a public place. If I am drawing someone well-known I would hope to actually capture their likeness. I don't imagine that drawing is inconsequential but equally, I don't think that it has the same ethical dilemmas that covert photography has. It doesn't have, as Susan Sontag noted, the same 'atomic' reality. Drawing creates its own reality, it is not shared with the reality we all engage in. Drawing is propositional. If you accept the logic of the visual language, you can participate in the reality of the drawing.

Where do we speak from?

Holly O'Neil: When we talk about truth in our image-making and reportage projects, often it is the images themselves that we refer to, the moments they capture and what we can deduce from them. However, there is also much to be said in what the image does not show. Like many anthropologists, I often talk about positionality when referring to my work, to question what I have created, why, and for whom.

When I first began to work in anthropology, a lecturer asked us to consider the ethics of story-telling and documenting. From where are we

speaking? Whose story are we telling? Why us? These ethical considerations of positionality and nuance have forever changed the way I approach drawing people. Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod writes that, "standing on shifting ground makes it clear that every view is a view from somewhere and every act of speaking, a speaking from somewhere" (Abu-Lughod 1991)^[1], and I believe this is the same with drawing. I feel that the people with whom I work — either by drawing them directly, to learn from in other ways, or to include in my wider context — are owed my honesty and my conscientious consideration, ethically and narratively. Considerations of their viewpoints and personal realities are crucial, whilst humbly recognising that the work will only ever be from the singular perspective of the one making it. As illustrators and social scientists, continuing to question how and why we do things and who we owe our work to can help us to continue to grow and progress. The anthro-artist's own story can become the work itself, as long as it is interwoven with honest and transparent self-reflection.

Reflecting on positionality from another angle, we might question where that positionality—the author—is literally and physically restricted. There is, of course, great strength to being a woman in reportage. My gender and sexuality have allowed me access to spaces often not available to outside eyes. Queer and women spaces are often inaccessible to our cis male counterparts, and we can reveal intimate experiences through the trust we gain when invited

to make work in these contexts. However in my personal experience being a woman in reportage is often complicated and, though I hate to admit it, can often leave me seething at my restrictions. This frustration is born from a struggle to remain both incognito and safe when working in “the field”. Throughout my career, there have been many moments when my presence as a woman has had a significant effect on my ability to perform as an anthropologist, an artist, and an observer. Whether it be my safety, unwanted attention, or inability to gain access to certain field sites or spaces in which to showcase work.

In the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls' report 'Gender Equality in the Creative Arts', they state that whilst female-identifying students make up 53% of all enrolments in creative and arts university programs, women account for only one-third of the workforce. On top of that, when those women pursue careers in the industry, two-thirds of all administrative roles are held by women (as opposed to two-thirds of managerial roles being held by men.) I digress here, though it does give a sense of where women's roles stand already within our industry. From there, we can look at the physical reality of being a woman in reportage. I have male ex-classmates who themselves are aware of this inequity, but who nevertheless have progressed much further with their reportage work through the same channels as myself and many female-identifying colleagues have. It is this “truth”

IMAGE
Holly O'Neil, *I felt scared in the car*
(page from the graphic novel—the blurred boundaries of reality and hallucination)



of the body with which we come to the drawing process that feels crucial.

My work with the cult brought about many “what if?” questions, the majority of which revolved around my positionality as a woman. I don't have answers to these questions, nor do I know for a fact whether the outcomes would have differed in any remarkable way, had I been a man. However, I do believe that we need to be aware of how our bodies alter the stories we can tell and consider this when making and viewing work. My privilege as a white, able-bodied woman allows me a particular kind of access, and I recognise that, regardless of the inequalities that I face due to my gender, I have a privileged position from which to make my work. However, questioning our privileges and restrictions allows us not only to challenge access for ourselves, but also for one another, and I believe that the illustration world has yet to catch up with anthropology's questions around gender, ethics, “the fieldsite”, and positionality.

Louis Netter: Positionality is a very popular word in academic practice today. While potentially seen as an overly conscious exercise, it is in fact a valuable place of departure. For the artist, our artwork projects out from ourselves. Who we are, what we value and what we believe is an essential part of how we construct our understanding of the world and how, as a result, we construct artwork within it. Additionally, if we investigate our own positionality, we can also see the multiplicity within ourselves. Rarely do any of us

emerge from a monocultural position, especially as artists. My own background is very international and my mother's Irish heritage is an enormous influence on how I see the world, I tend to champion the underdog and see the zest and energy in life. These different parts of us make a complex whole and when we look at them, we can see the alignment of concerns that come into our artwork and enable us to better articulate our orientation to our subjects.

The role of the audience

Holly O'Neil: Inherently, a drawing is an incomplete image, capturing just a moment in time from one perspective, documenting the immediate, direct experience of the illustrator. The audience completes the reportage image, deciphering and pulling from it what is there but also what is not. The reportage image, or an image created from the real, invites the audience to think past the edges of the page, envisioning the world in which this image was created as a temporal and momentous result of ‘being there’.

Louis Netter: My work explores subjective truths about people and places that point to wider themes and societal concerns. In this sense the ‘truth’ of the drawing comes from seeing people and places as totemic. I am witnessing real people in real places but I am also forcing the viewer to witness, to notice and to feel. In this case, the subjective truth is a



IMAGE TOP
Holly O'Neil, *Fireside*
(sketchbook drawing
on location)



IMAGE BOTTOM
Louis Netter, *Heat
wave in Basel* (2023)

bridge between my experience and my feelings inviting the viewer to enter that visual and emotional space which the drawing contains. If a subject does not reflect something beyond pure representation, they would not interest me and, I believe, would not interest anyone else either. People have relayed to me that my drawings have emotional power and that I am able to capture the character of people well. Looking at drawings I produced 6 years ago and earlier, it is clear that the drawings reflect a more representative and comprehensive vision of my experience. I have moved away from a more superficial, caricatural approach. This may be the result of the intense practice during my PhD. It also distinguishes my work further from the more objective wing of reportage practice. The audience participates in a reconstruction of my experience and I am explicitly interested in rendering moments that have poetic, emotional and social/political relevance to me. I am happy for these intentions to be very clear to the viewer.

Concluding thoughts

Holly O'Neil: Ultimately, reportage allows us to manipulate and exhaust the abundant qualities of "truth". As artists, on and drawing from location, the who, what, and why of both our authorship and our drawings are constantly called to the fore. Unlike other "documentary" media, such as film or photography, the drawn image makes no claims to absolute truth.

It does not shy away from its complete bias — how could it? The artist's presence is inescapable through their literal mark on the page. In this way, the drawing calls on truth from a different angle — the truth of the inherent experience of 'being there'. In academia, we are trained to keep a watchful eye for exaggeration and inaccurate facts within the written paper. In this context, it can be hard to place the 'facts' and 'truth' garnered from drawings. I argue that, in many ways, our reportage drawings become more truthful due to their total surrender to the moment, the experience, the inner monologue, and the now.

Louis Netter: The biggest challenge facing reportage drawing is an overcrowded world of images. We are drowning in visual content that is largely idiotic, even infantile. A quick glance at any Facebook or Instagram video feed will reveal what the Roman poet Juvenal said of the appetite of the populace for 'bread and circuses.'

Drawing is a niche part of this media landscape although its historical prominence as an important conduit for the news gives it a kind of historical, latent prestige. Most people can appreciate the dialogic qualities of reportage drawing as being evocative images made by people and of 'things in the world.'

However, this cultural moment could be seen to promote the consumption of every image in the same way and in the same context. If every visual



IMAGE TOP
Louis Netter,
Construction worker
(2023)



IMAGE BOTTOM
Louis Netter,
Ornamental witches
(2023)

image is seen as part of a steady succession of fleeting, largely meaningless images, then drawing becomes further reduced to quick summations of style, skill and closeness to life, the very conception that severely limits an understanding of the act.

Another way of looking at this cultural moment is that drawing asserts itself in opposition to the ubiquity of photography and film. It accumulates its power because it is not slick, it is not mimetic and it is made by the hand of a real human being. I don't fear AI's power to destroy art and I don't believe there is sufficient evidence to think that culture could ever be driven by anything other than human activity. Of course AI could promote that activity but it would be driven by human action (in opposition, support or through complacency).

Drawing holds a more primitive grip on our consciousness. We see it as a primordial mark that speaks to a desire to express at the most fundamental level. In that sense, no matter what era we look at a drawing, we see it first as an originary act, as something fundamentally human and before we see it as 'truthful' or not, we understand its nucleus is within the human experience.

LN, HO'N

IMAGE
Stephen Colbert, *The Colbert Report* (2005)

[1] 'truthiness', Tony
Johns (2006) *Urban
Dictionary*

"Truthiness": Persuasion and Visual Media –Susan Doyle

Susan Doyle offers us an wide-reaching survey
of "truthy" images

"TRUTHINESS". *Oxford English Dictionary* 2005

Chiefly *U.S.* The quality of appearing to be true while not actually or necessarily being so; the fact or quality of accepting or presenting something which is not true as the truth.

"And that brings us to tonight's word: truthiness. Now I'm sure some of the Word Police, the wordanistas over at Webster's, are gonna say, 'Hey, that's not a word.' Well, anybody who knows me knows that I'm no fan of dictionaries or reference books. They're elitist. Constantly telling us what is or isn't true, or what did or didn't happen. Who's Britannica to tell me the Panama Canal was finished in 1914? If I wanna say it happened in 1941, that's my right. I don't trust books. They're all fact, no heart."
(Stephen Colbert, "The Colbert Report," 2005)^[1]

This essay will focus on the notion of truthiness, a contemporary expression that refers to ideas and opinions that on the surface appear to be true, or might be true, but in fact, are false or inaccurate.



According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word first appeared in 1832 as a variation of truthfulness only to re-emerge within 21st century parlance to mean quite the opposite. I will discuss the context of its inversion within contemporary popular media, namely as a critique of a particular strain of political rhetoric. I will then explore precedents in visual culture history that, while not expressly political, stretch the bounds of truth for a variety of reasons. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these images and accompanying texts were shaped by social, religious, and yes, political exigencies, reflecting what was empirically known, but inflected by what was believed. Perceived as information in their own day, these images, regarded as rhetoric in modernity, raise the question of whether all images could or should be considered visual forms of truthiness? The remainder of the essay considers "truth" in contemporary media driven by capitalism and politics; and investigates the role of visual media and the Internet in influencing public discourse.

The Inversion of Truthiness: “The Colbert Report,” 2005

After falling into obscurity, the 19th century word truthiness, a variant of truthful, was reinvented in 2005 by the American humorist Stephen Colbert to refer to things that on the surface appeared to make sense — or might be true... but were indeed false. His popular cable TV program *The Colbert Report* included a segment called “The Word” in which Colbert play-acted as a news commentator who claimed to have originated the term *truthiness* to promote an improved kind of news reporting, one based on what is *believed* rather than tethered to facts that are informed by “elitist” sources like dictionaries and reference books. His character promised to “Feel the news at you,” and declared that “Truth comes from the gut — that’s how our nervous system works.”

Colbert was lampooning dubious assertions proliferating in the public sphere — particularly those favored by right-wing pundits in the growing “infotainment news” sector of cable television. “The Report” in general and “The Word” specifically was in part a send-up of the inflammatory and notoriously editorialized conservative Fox Network news TV show called *The O’Reilly Factor* hosted by the now-disgraced Bill O’Reilly. O’Reilly was famous not only for its bombastic style but his off-color comments in promoting contentious and propagandistic notions that pandered to a

conservative audience and fed factionalism in an increasingly divided American populace.

While Colbert’s hyped-up news anchor persona was intended to be outrageous, the humor indeed pointed to another serious phenomenon: the ramping up of polemic and otherwise not-fact-based observations espoused in the political sphere, even when contradicted by data, science or other compelling information. Indeed, during the “Bush-the-Younger” years (2001–2009), a Republican Party base was coalescing around Christian Evangelical notions, just as Bush himself infused policy decision-making with faith. As president he even used the historically loaded term “crusade” in his rationale for military and domestic efforts at defeating terrorism and his own influential advisor Karl Rove identified and apparently embraced the usefulness of the unverified as strategic. Rove was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, “the reality-based community believes that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality... That’s not the way the world really works anymore.”

This particular blurring of fact and opinion can in part be traced to the rise in cable news media in the late 20th and early 21st century. Previously, whether deserved or not, the major broadcast networks had established a reputation for truth in news media — even as those TV networks corporatized into polished behemoths supported by advertising dollars. Then, in the 1990s, broadband cable ushered in access

for hundreds of cable-based channels, and viewers of nearly every interest and political persuasion (liberal, conservative, nature shows, sports fans, movie-buffs etc) were courted by channels available through paid subscription. Thus audiences of freely available network news defected to its competitors on “cable news” that in turn gratified audiences with extended programming referred to as “infotainment”. In its meanest forms, these “news” shows became thinly-veiled political soapboxes. As the profusion of media expanded, consumers, seemingly careless of verification processes also accepted social media (Twitter, Facebook) as information nodes. Consequently, the credibility of news eroded to the point where in 2019 a Gallup Poll found that 62% of Americans no longer believed in the objectivity of news media.

How we perceive, discuss, and evaluate what is “true” is contingent on the framework through which it is considered. Certainly, the speed and ubiquity of digital media may have altered our consumption habits, but the unfixed nature of truth is not a new concept; it is a philosophical question dating back to Plato, and a question that has dogged illustration in particular as a form of persuasion because of the pivotal association of illustrators to their clients. Whether those clients be publishers, corporations, or governments, to some degree, they exercise influence over the artist's output.

Mapping Truthiness in Graphic History

Dubious or controversial “truths” survive in visual culture made throughout time and in countless locations. Perhaps it goes without saying that lack of knowledge (innocent error) is different from manipulative deployment of false or misleading information for power or personal gain. It is worth considering, for instance, whether artifacts like monuments that glorify conquerors and heroize conquest for the purposes of consolidating power are examples of truth or *truthiness*. After all, do they not also erase the valor of the vanquished — whose own cultural artifacts or monuments often don't survive to offer an alternative perspective?

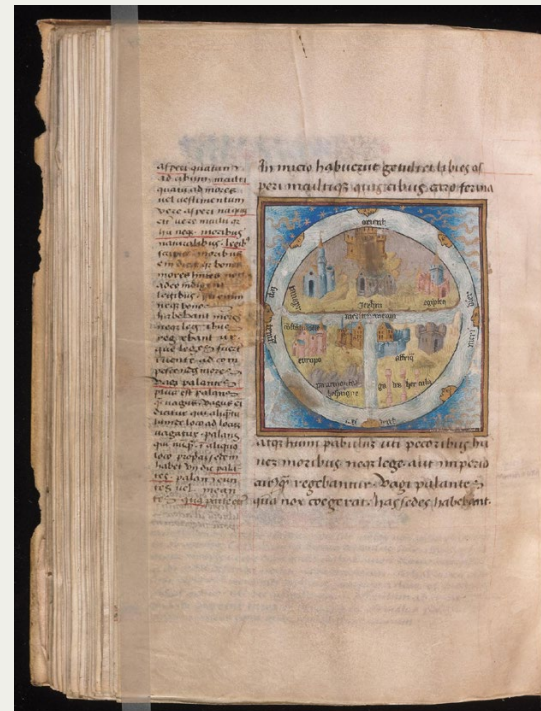
Maps, like monuments, are extant versions of truth that operate on multiple levels. On the surface, maps record a particular understanding of geography but they often show incomplete, inaccurate, or politically motivated information. Beyond topography, a map may also provide a unique view into the maker's aspirations as well as philosophical or religious beliefs — the “truth” as the map's patron wishes to communicate it. Furthermore, the tools of mapping and of sharing of maps change over time and therefore provide a record of acquired knowledge, as well as new methods of measurement or reproduction. Typically, redrawn maps with more accurate information replace outmoded maps. Not so in the three examples discussed below. Each includes a cartographic view of Africa that was

designed for a discrete, non-African audience and belies a certain ideology.

The first image shows a version of a “T–O Map” — an idealized map of the world devised in the 7th century and adapted in many variations thereafter. This painted version appears in *Bellum Catilinae and Bellum Iugurthinum, with scholia*, a sumptuous 15th century French illuminated manuscript that transcribes the account of two important conflicts in Roman history. The text, by the 1st century BCE Roman historian Sallust describes Catiline's War (a conspiracy to take over the government) and the Jugurthine War (an intrigue-filled conflict in North Africa between Rome and a king of Numidia from 111 to 105 BCE).

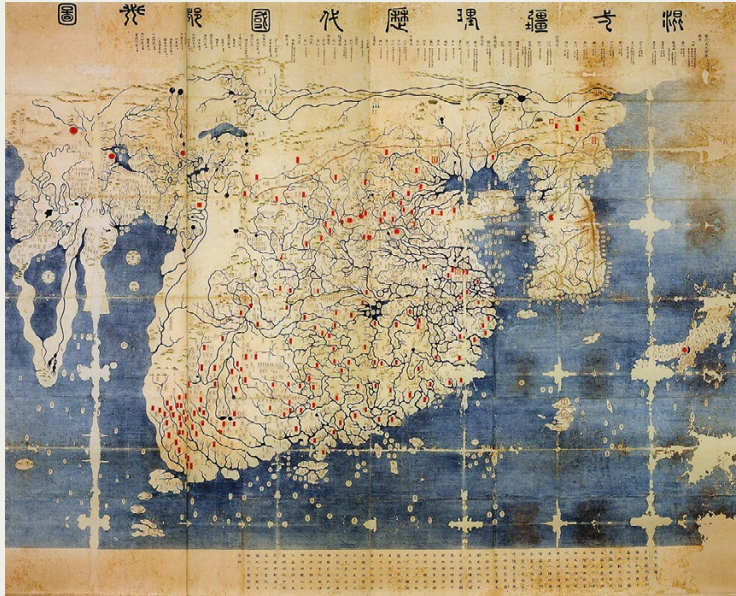
The map divides the “known world” into three parts using a T shape. On the left side of the lower half is all of Europe; on the right, shown the same size as Europe is Africa (the northern part of which was under Roman influence — hence known to Europeans). Asia, associated with the rising sun, occupies the entire upper half, equal in size to the aggregate of the other parts. Jerusalem, the important center of Christ's life and thus Christian faith, falls at the vertex of the T-shape — which, not incidentally, is reminiscent of the Crucifix, a symbol of death and resurrection that is central Christian ideology. The world is encircled in water, indicated by the liquid-textured “O” with the heavens outside of the earthly realm suggested by stars and swirls. The faces in the ocean, although

impassive, personify the winds adapted from ancient map “windroses”.



While French was the vernacular of the owner of this manuscript, Latin, the language of the church, the law, and learning is used throughout the text and in the map. Certainly, newer geography was known at this time, yet this map makes no attempt to address the landmasses accurately because the point of the map is the perfection of the circle of the earth, as God's creation.

IMAGE
Bellum Catilinae and Bellum Iugurthinum, with scholia, Sallust, 86 BCE – 34 BCE, manuscript, French, 15th century; Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library



The next map is a hand-painted view of East Asia made circa 1560. It is a version of the *Kangnido* or “The Comprehensive Map of Integrated Lands and Regions of Historical Countries and Capitals” that is believed first compiled circa 1402 by Korean scholars. This impressive map is dominated by China with an oversized Korea in the upper right and includes place names indicated with red markers with a block of information about administrative Yuan-Dynasty organization at the top (see [Kenzheakhmet 2023](#)). The map includes areas of Central Asia, Africa and modern-day Europe. Geography and toponyms on western region of the map are believed to have come from a variety of sources including Chinese maps,

information gleaned from traders and from classical Arab geography — which in turn was likely informed by 2nd century Greek geography (ibid.). Hand painted on paper, it was not meant to be easily reproduced and is one of only two 15–16th century copies of the 14th century original. Curiously, the Korean peninsula is shown as almost as large as all of Africa, which is the smaller oblong form with a large interior lake (a distorted Nile) jutting out into the sea almost all the way to the left margin. The map denotes toponyms of Northern Africa, the Iberian Peninsula and major European cities — many of which are derived from Arab maps transliterated into Chinese characters. The coastline of the Mediterranean Sea is very distorted and outlined as if it is a river rather than a body of water on the map, in a manner atypical of precedents. Discrepancies in scale in this design may have been a practical necessity given the quantity of East Asian information considered pivotal to the authors, or a reflection of the relative paucity of information about lands to the west. Regardless of the reason, this is a clear example of an ethnocentric viewpoint driving graphic distortion.

The final map of Africa is from an 18th C Italian publication based on a 2nd century set of maps designed by Klaudios Ptolemaios or Ptolemy (circa 100 – circa 170 CE) a Greco-Roman polymath. This plate shows a view encompassing the European countries bounding the Mediterranean Sea at the top with all of the African continent to the south. The landmass is distorted into a polygon with areas

IMAGE
Hongkōji Kangnido,
Korean, 15–16th
century, 220 by
280 cm, painted on
paper. This copy was
designed after a 14th
century precedent
and shows Asia,
Africa and Europe at
distorted sizes

systematically divided using straight horizontal markings in Ptolemy's latitude/longitude system—one that continues to inform contemporary map-making. The longitude markings at the top place “0” longitude at a point just west of Spain (Hispania) running through the “Fortunate Islands”. Like all maps until the establishment of the Prime Meridian, the origin point (“0” longitude) was in flux, prejudicial, and often passing through the mapmaker's own country. Ptolemy's map includes toponyms and knowledge of the coastline and interior waterways above the angular bulge of the equator — the widest point of the earth's circumference. Information about areas south of the equator is sparser because the regions were not as well known. Presented in Latin, a language known by the educated in Europe, the map uses ethnonyms and pejorative descriptors like *Anthropophagite incognita* (unknown cannibals) or *ichthyophagi* (fish eaters), *troglydyte* (troll) to describe indigenous people. It erroneously depicts a land-locked Africa because Ptolemy did not understand, or chose not to show, that it was possible to circumnavigate the southern tip of Africa — a voyage that was officially recorded in 1488. This error would have been known to the publisher of this map. However, the antiquated information was re-presented in a set intended for wealthy book collectors who delighted in references to their Classical heritage (see internet archive for many versions of Ptolemy's *Geologica* for example [this one](#) or [this one](#)). Shown here as a single image, it would have been divided into facing pages when bound into a volume.



Each of the three maps is an excellent exemplar of a graphic communication that is sensitive to the interests of its respective audience, and accordingly actively distorts or reproduces previous distortion of facts. *The Bellum* manuscript recreates an arcane map that was based on limited understanding of the earthly geography that was further distorted for religious ends. The 15th century version endorses the power of Christianity of its day, while the text commemorates sensational moments in Roman history. The comparison might lead one to think about the value of ethical behavior. *The Kangnido* reflects the sociopolitical interests of a regional power while diminishing the importance of known outsiders by dwarfing the scale and distorting the geography of foreign lands outside their control.

IMAGE
This 1748 map was inspired by Claudius Ptolemy (Roman). It colorfully identifies *Struthophagii* (Ostrich eaters) and the *Elephantophagii* (Eating Elephants). The name 'Egypt' is a Greek corruption of *Heka-Ptah*, the place where the god Ptah is worshipped. Map and translation courtesy of Professor Richard Lobban

Lastly, the 16th century print of *Ptolemy's Map III of Africa*, printed 1400 years after the originals were created, confirms the high stature of the wealthy book collector and western civilization by reiterating distortions of the African continent and including spurious descriptions of indigenous “others.”

Looking Up – Heavenly Truths



While maps of the earth had obvious practical applications-especially for political entities, the heavens were equally compelling to early thinkers.

Belief systems about the supernatural and the metaphysical intersected and were woven into efforts to understand earth and humankind in relation to observable celestial bodies. Sometime during the 3rd century BCE, Mesopotamians identified and named constellations — noting what was visible in the night sky throughout the calendar year as the earth's elliptical rotation changed what came into view. Associating pictorial forms and symbols with constellations became a rich and fanciful memory aid. Some of those forms related to mythology as well as animals and objects. Recognizing the constellations became an important aspect of geolocation and navigation and diagrammatically linking stars on constellation maps became a useful way to codify celestial relationships.

Ptolemy, whose influential maps were mentioned above, devoted much of his study to astronomy. He recorded his concepts in *Almagest* (2nd century CE), a treatise in which he synthesized his own observations and calculations with centuries of previous astronomical information. Some of Ptolemy's entries, according to modern scholarship, were somewhat “truthy” — perhaps even pure conjecture; but the treatise still remained influential until the 16th century (Dackermann 2011: 90–93). Nonetheless, Ptolemy's work was pivotal in systematizing understanding of and predicting the positions of planets through rational and geometrical models. However, he also wrote a treatise suggesting how stellar constellations might relate to earthly affairs

IMAGE
Woodcut circa 1583,
a woman gives birth
aided by a midwife
and two other
attendants, while two
men look at the stars
and plot a horoscope.
Courtesy of the
Wellcome Collection

— connecting them to weather and seasons; or the four humors (phlegm, black bile, yellow bile and blood) — a pseudo-scientific construct of early medicine. More *truthiness* than fact, astrology became associated with unfounded beliefs in celestial forces that could influence a person's destiny and other specific occurrences on earth (see Riley 1988:69–73). Forecasters were engaged to interpret the alignment of stars at an infant's birth to predict their future.



Even centuries later, Ptolemy's work continued to influence Renaissance thinkers. Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471–1528), who gained prominence

as an artist-theoretician through his own artistic and mathematical treatises, was one such artist. Dürer is (ironically perhaps) best known for his widely circulated image of the *Rhinoceros*, which was in fact inaccurate because it was imagined from *textual* descriptions. In collaboration with astronomers Johannes Stabius and Conrad Heinfogel, Dürer created drawings of constellations visible in the northern and southern skies. The maps' volumetric depictions of the namesake of each constellation (Ursa Major: bear, Libra: scales etc.) are superimposed over the chart of numbered stars. Dürer adds naturalistic detail that enlivens the science with fantastical narrative imagery. While this might seem to lead away from objective truth, Dürer's appealing image and innovative use of the woodcut medium indicates the desire to make information more accessible to print collectors possessing less knowledge of astronomy. It is also important to consider that thinkers in Early Modern Europe often attempted to reconcile new ideas based on observation, with accepted knowledge that was inherited from ancient texts. The Church still had real secular power, and influenced what could be taught or published. Intrepid scientists/theorists had to tread lightly when new ideas contradicted dogma, as is well noted in the case of Galileo, who incurred the Church's wrath by espousing a heliocentric model of the universe that seemed to subvert Biblical accounts. Dürer's star map implies legitimization by association, through the inclusion of four revered astronomers in the corners: Aratus Cilix (3rd century BCE, Greek)

IMAGE
Albrecht Dürer, *The Northern Celestial Hemisphere*, 1515 [woodcut]. Rosenwald Collection, National Gallery of Art. One of two celestial maps after charts by astronomer Conrad Heinfogel, onto which Dürer superimposes volumetric illustrations of constellations. Placement of ancient astronomers in the four corners implies the linkage of old and new scientific inquiry

Ptolemy (1st century BCE, Greek/Roman), Marcus Manilius (1st century CE, Syrian) Azophi Arabus (10th century, Persian). The companion chart showing the southern hemisphere was emblazoned with the Holy Roman Emperor's privilege (Dackerman 2011:90).

The Photo and Technological Truthiness

If print changed the world by allowing information and ideas to circulate more rapidly than ever before — the emergence of printed periodicals helped to further democratize thinking by creating broader, more affordable access than books or collectible prints. Newspapers, usually illustrated, brought about an expectation of more regularized and truthful news than the broadsides that preceded them. During the 19th century explosion of print media, wood engravings were the staple in western newspapers and much book publishing. Created in a multi-person process that often originated with only written prompts, the so-called “white line engravings” were typically finalized in styles particular to the engraving house. The final image was at best an approximation of its subject with obvious stylization, yet was accepted as more or less “true”.

Photography's eruption into the public sphere in the early 19th century caused a re-evaluation of how illustrative images were perceived. As a medium in which the effects of light literally “created” the image on sensitized paper, photography was heralded as

an objective process; calling into question the truthfulness of all image types that depended on human input. Illustration and traditional portraiture were suddenly considered less believable than they had been; although nearly from the outset, photographers developed their own ways to manipulate and enhance their images. Meanwhile, illustrators began to use photos as reference to expedite their processes and to ensure accuracy in their own depictions.

An example of the range and fusion of photographic innovations in the early years of photography was a Parisian portraitist, writer, and caricaturist Gaspard-Félix Tournachon who worked under the alias Nadar. Nadar made portrait photos of his subjects on commission and also used photos as a visual aid for his drawings. He manipulated photographic scenes for narrative purposes, and is most well known as a pioneer of aerial photography — which became useful for mapmaking and surveying.

Photo studios cropped up on both sides of the Atlantic, with those of Matthew Brady in New York and Washington being among the most prominent in the US. Brady's most important work came from teams he organized to document the Civil War through field photography, which required long exposures in portable dark-rooms. While Brady himself remained predominantly in the role of the project manager (see Brady's biography), the venture was no mean feat. Many iconic images

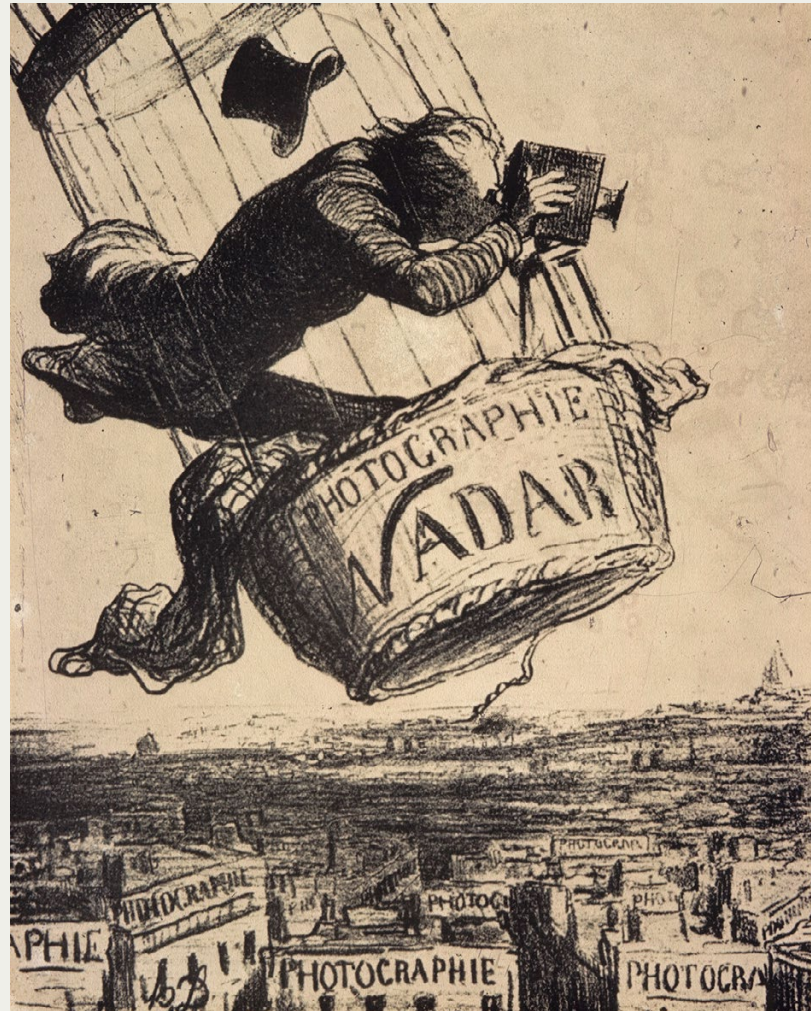
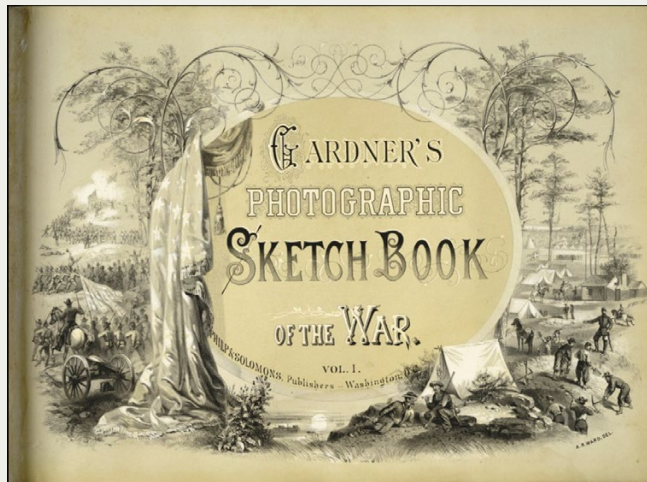


IMAGE LEFT
Felix Nadar, *Paul Nadar À La Chasse Aux Papillons* (*Hunting for Butterflies*), 1866 [photograph]. Here Nadar poses his son in front of a faux landscape backdrop, his hat and butterfly net suspended by invisible threads to imply wind and motion. Courtesy of Wikiart

IMAGE RIGHT
Honore Daumier, *Nadar Raising Photography to the Height of Art*, 1862 [lithograph]. Daumier caricatured the overtaking of Paris by photo studios with Nadar literally soaring above the competition. The caption relates to Nadar's aspirations to promote the artistic possibilities of photography rather than its commercial value

IMAGE
Alexander Gardner,
*Photographic Sketch
Book of the War*
(1865–6)

of the war came from his efforts including an 1862 exhibition of photographs of bloody Antietam battlefield scenes by Brady affiliates Alexander Gardner and James Gibson that shocked New Yorkers. Stereoscopic photo viewer cards photographs were produced of 70 of the 90 Gardner images, which allowed parlor audiences to experience the gruesome scenes as seemingly "3-dimensional" views.



While presented as a brutal-but-true representations of the war, contemporary research has concluded that in at least one case, the impulse to augment the narrative resulted in altering battle evidence. Gardner (at that point a *former* Brady affiliate) took two photos of the same corpse, shown first in one location, and then moved and re-photographed in quite another to create a more dramatic presentation.

The photos from July 1863 were published along with written commentary in two-volumes as *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the War*.

The particulars in the placement of the soldier's body and gun in the two photos underscores the persuasive intent of the re-staging of the second photograph. The first photo shows the figure splayed out in an open area, so covert actions as a sharpshooter are difficult to envision—and we feel pity for a fallen human. By placing the figure behind an embankment in the second version, we can easily imagine him hiding there with lethal intent. Note that the gun is propped up prominently, and oddly did not “fall” when the soldier was killed.

Brady photographed Abraham Lincoln 30 times from 1860–1864 tinkering with lighting, poses, and clothing to soften his gaunt appearance in ways that would be considered innocent compared with digital manipulation in contemporary media. In a circular and ironic twist, one of Brady's portraits of Lincoln, was later superimposed on the standing figure of another politician, namely John C. Calhoun, to create a post-assassination commemorative mezzotint of the president. The statesmen-like pose of Calhoun, complete with props, originated in a 1852 daguerreotype by Brady. In contrast to Lincoln, Calhoun was virulently pro-slavery and argued that states had a right to nullify federal policies—which directly fed into the Civil War animosities.



IMAGE LEFT
Alexander Gardner,
*Sharpshooter's Last
Sleep*, published,
1865–6. Plate
40 in *Gardner's
Photographic Sketch
Book of the War*

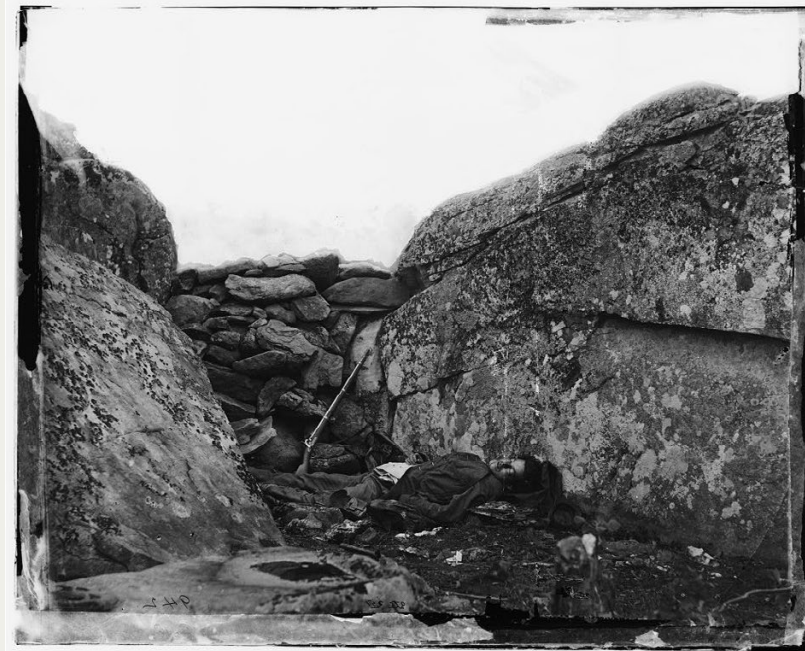


IMAGE RIGHT
Alexander Gardner,
*Home of a Rebel
Sharpshooter*,
published, 1865–66.
Plate 41 in *Gardner's
Photographic Sketch
Book of the War*



IMAGE LEFT
A.H. Ritchie, *John C. Calhoun* (1852).
Mezzotint from a daguerreotype by Matthew Brady, later painted by Thomas Hicks, then published as a mezzotint



IMAGE RIGHT
William Pate, *Abraham Lincoln*, mezzotint (1865).
This falsified post-assassination portrait of Abraham Lincoln is particularly loaded in that the figure and setting were originally published as a portrait of John C Calhoun — a staunch opponent of the president

The engraver of the Lincoln version certainly understood the implications of overwriting one individual's identity with the other. Patriotic symbols like the flag on the floor, and the two-volume works of Thomas Jefferson remain consistent in both images, while the wording of the loose documents on the tabletop are changed. In the Calhoun version: “Sovereignty of States”, “Strict Construction.”, “Free Trade” are spelled out but replaced in the second version with text aligned with Lincoln's presidency: “Constitution”, “Union” and “Freedom Proclamation.”

Whether this was a simple commercial convenience or subtle propaganda to demonstrate that Lincoln's ideology had triumphed, it is confounding that such manipulation was considered acceptable in such high-level portraiture. Regardless, the interlaced methodologies (photograph to painting, painting to print, print to composited print) that lead to the falsified Lincoln portrait point to the *truthiness* of print media as photo-mechanical technologies influenced growing markets.



Truthiness in Advertising: Cigarettes and Image-based Persuasion

In the 20th century high-volume periodical publishing using photomechanically reproduced images and text exploded in the West. A profusion of advertising underwrote these publications, using various *truthy* methods to sell products. One prevalent strategy was to associate goods and services with social “types” through fictitious testimonials designed to appeal to potential customers. A particularly comprehensive range of strategies appeared in advertisements created for cigarettes in the US in the early to mid-20th century with ads that aligned smoking with pleasure, desirability, masculinity, and feminism using images and “testimonials” from sportsmen, doctors, scientists, and other societal types — who were really just actors. However, famous celebrities also endorsed many types of products, including cigarettes.

While lung cancer was pretty rare in the 19th century, rates of the disease increased in the US in the early 20th century, and environmental causes, including smoking, were eventually established in medical research (Ruegg 2015). Nonetheless, in WWII, smoking was actually promoted as a respite for weary fighting men and their leaders; and mini-packs of cigarettes were even provided in deployed soldiers' rations. Advertising scenes depicted service men in all sorts of activities working, bonding, and relaxing with the aid of cigarettes, which perpetuated notions of smoking as a masculine habit and a well-deserved treat.

IMAGE
The wording of the loose documents on the tabletop are changed from Calhoun's “Sovereignty of States”, “Strict Construction.”, “Free Trade” to phrases aligned with Lincoln's presidency: “Constitution”, “Union” and “Freedom Proclamation”



U. S. RANGERS ... Hand-picked and especially trained, they're a swift-moving, hard-hitting outfit. Here's one in his "business-suit," camouflaged and invisible at thirty feet

*But there's no hiding
 Chesterfield's **MILDER**
 BETTER TASTE*

Here's real smoking ammunition tucked in the pockets of our fighting men, ready for instant service. Where a cigarette counts most, Chesterfield serves smokers well with its *Right Combination* of the world's best cigarette tobaccos.

*For Mildness... for Better Taste
 and Cooler Smoking... make your
 next pack...*

CHESTERFIELD
 RECOGNIZED EVERYWHERE
 THE CIGARETTE THAT GIVES SMOKERS
 WHAT THEY WANT

Copyright 1943, Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.

*** DON'T HIDE YOUR DOLLARS *** ENLIST THEM WITH UNCLE SAM *** BUY U. S. WAR BONDS FOR VICTORY ***



JANGLED NERVES

FOR GOODNESS' SAKE STOP THAT RACKET!

Don't let jangled nerves make childhood unhappy

When we suffer from jangled nerves we don't realize how harshly we speak. We wonder why we lose the love and respect of those who are close to us. That's the real danger of jangled nerves... the victim so seldom knows. And the more high-strung and alive you are, the greater the danger.

If things don't seem to be going so well—if money is on your mind—if you worry—then look out. Watch your nerves. Get your full amount of sleep. Eat regularly and sensibly. Find time for recreation. And smoke Camels—for Camel's costlier tobaccos never get on your nerves.

COSTLIER TOBACCOS
 Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE tobaccos than any other popular brand of cigarettes!

CAMELS—THEY NEVER GET ON YOUR NERVES!

How are YOUR nerves?
 TEST No. 4

How long will it take you to get out of this maze? Take your pencil (sharply pointed)—start at the center, and move out... But do not touch any of the original lines... 40 seconds is considered excellent time.

Frances Marcella (Camel smoker), Champion Woman Sprint Flyer, does the test in 26 seconds!

Copyright, 1933, W. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company

IMAGE LEFT
 Liggett and Myers Corp., *Chesterfield ad* (1943). This ridiculous advert shows a heavily camouflaged soldier grinning at the camera with a cigarette dangling from his lips. Assuming his leafy disguise did not burst into flames, the aroma of cigarette smoke would certainly have announced his presence to the enemy he was hiding from. Courtesy of Stanford's Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising

IMAGE RIGHT
 R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, *Camel Cigarettes ad* (1934). This scenario encourages mothers to smoke in order to calm their nerves. Courtesy of Stanford's Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising

Post war, with soldiers returning home, and research into lung cancer accelerating, cigarette manufacturers developed advertising campaigns that addressed rising concerns about the side-effects of smoking.



Their strategy was to undermine new science by repositioning concerns as topics for ad campaigns offering testimonials from a trusted “family doctor” or pseudoscience declared by unspecified “throat specialists”. Hence symptoms caused by smoking like “throat irritation” or “irritability and nervousness” were directly addressed and denied by actors pretending to be doctors in the advertisements. From 1947–1952 tobacco companies even created ads aimed at physicians to minimize their concerns by promoting certain brands as less likely to irritate patients.

A study published in the British Medical Journal in 1950 finally provided definitive data on the causal links of smoking to cancer, but it wasn't until the American Medical Association came out with its own study in 1954 that major brands stopped medically themed advertising. It took another half century after the causal links between cancer and smoking were known that the US government finally regulated cigarettes with the establishment of the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Tobacco Products in 2009. However, when the new government warnings included imagery in the forms of photos, testimonials, and graphs, tobacco companies filed a lawsuit. The courts ruled in favor of the cigarette companies, concluding that the images were designed to *elicit emotion* and were therefore not fact-based, whereas textual warnings were considered factual (see [this report](#)). The illustrated warnings were struck down. Given that the image-rich warnings used the same tactics that cigarette advertisers had successfully deployed for decades, it does suggest that pictures are more persuasive than text alone.

Truthiness and Medicine: Images and Fear of the unknown

From belief that vaccines will cause autism, or are designed to introduce microchips to track humans; or that fluoridation is a plot to poison populations, fear around medicine is not a new phenomenon.

IMAGE LEFT
From 1928 to 1932 Lucky Strike cigarettes ran ads claiming doctors found their brand “less irritating”. Although ads ran in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, actual doctors were prohibited from appearing in ads. Courtesy of [Stanford's Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising](#)

IMAGE RIGHT
Published in 1950 as part of the *More Doctors Smoke Camels* campaign, this Camel ad shows not only the fatherly “doctor type”, but quotes unknown scientific authorities as “throat specialists” and identifies a professional female as a smoker. Courtesy of [Stanford's Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising](#)

A study published in 2014 asserts that 49% of Americans agree with at least one medical conspiracy, but fear surrounding vaccines is present in other countries as well. For instance, during the 1990s polio vaccine campaigns in Pakistan struggled to create an impact due to conspiracy theories, thereby perpetuating the circulation of this disease in that country into the second decade of this century.



Why do these beliefs persist? Cognitive scientists consider belief in conspiracy theories an aspect of human evolution that hardwires us to detect patterns of danger by ascribing “events in the environment to the behavior of agents” (Andrade 2020). In the face of fear or the unknown the human amygdala, the home of our unconscious fight-or-flight instinct kicks in. That instinct of self-preservation sometimes causes the brain to latch onto non-causal coincidence or pattern

narratives that attribute bad outcomes to the unseen actions of powerful actors. Experts believe that visual aids including imagery, as an inherently intuitive form of communication, are effective in countering conspiracy theories because conspiracies are largely intuitive (ibid.)

For instance, during the Covid 19 pandemic multiple conspiracy theories circulated about its origins or that the virus didn't really exist at all and was a hoax to ramp up control by governments. In January 2020, a month after the first cases were documented, medical illustrators Alissa Eckert and Dan Higgins from the Centres of Disease Control and Prevention were asked to draw the virus to create an “identity” for the virus at a time when the public really did not understand what was happening. As a kind of “mugshot” of the virus, the visualization was educational and gave the public something visual to focus their fear on.

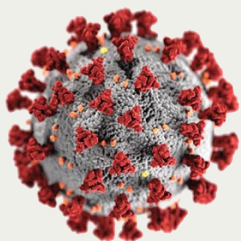
Interviewed in *Wallpaper* magazine in October 2020, after the image was ubiquitous in the media, Eckert's description of the creative process recounts the level of artistic discretion the illustrators were free to exercise in describing the virus:

We wanted it to be really bold and attractive. First of all, we wouldn't have wanted it to be too playful. People just wouldn't take it seriously if we did that, right? We needed something that felt serious. So, we played upon the realism

IMAGE
James Gillray,
*The cow-pock,-
or-The wonderful
effects of the new
inoculation!* - Vide -
*the Publications of ye
Anti-Vaccine Society*,
hand colored etching
with aquatint (1802).
Courtesy of Morgan
Library. Anti-vacci-
nation fears about
the newly-developed
smallpox vaccine
devised by Edward
Jenner in 1798, led
to hysteria about
what would happen
when humans were
exposed to bovine
virus material used in
the vaccine

a little bit, using it to help people understand that this thing actually exists. That was my main goal, to make it pop out of the page. A little bit of drama and dramatic lighting to play with the emotions. That's what I had in my head as I was designing.... I was thinking about making a velvety texture on the proteins, and something that looked like you could touch it and feel it. And I also wanted it to be solid, a bit rocky, something found in nature. Because if you relate it to something that exists, it's going to be more believable. The colours relate to the public health warning aspect, and the dramatic lighting, of course, the stark shadows. (Rawsthorn 2022)

While Eckert and Higgins conferred with scientists and referenced proteins specific to the virus, from the transcript it is clear that a chief concern was that the illustration manifested “bold, attractive, realism”. Eckert herself admits they downplayed the M proteins (in orange) which technically were more numerous, so viewers would focus on the S proteins (in red) that were more of a hallmark of this virus.



Achieved through strategic design and sophisticated digital drawing software, this visualization became an important tool in activating public response to a health emergency by giving shape to the fear of the unknown. It created a much needed “agent” to assign an environmental catastrophe to. But was it really true or rather more *truthy* given what we know of its design?

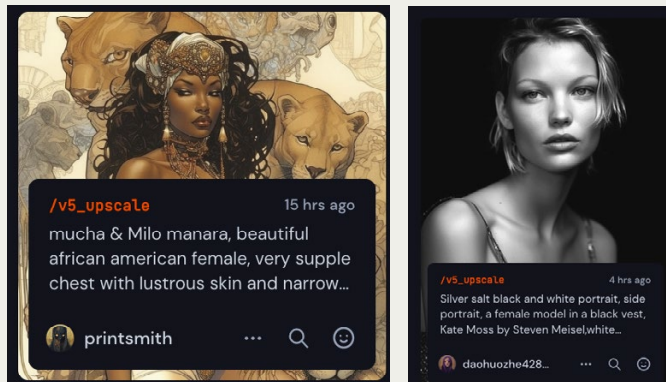
Truthiness and Visual Content on the Web

One might assume in the largely unregulated virtual space that all sorts of conspiracy theories might be more prevalent now than in the past. While a 2014 study found that approximately 50% of Americans believe in one conspiracy theory or another, a 2022 study concluded that the overall percentage of belief in conspiracy theories has not measurably increased in recent decades. Assuming both studies are accurate, we must infer that belief in conspiracy theories is not caused by the internet, but is perhaps just more apparent because of discussions about them in the media.

It is worth noting, however, that as powerful as words may be, research finds when shared media includes visuals (photos, illustrations or videos) posts are 11 times more likely to be reposted (see article on fake-news images). Social media platforms determine what to send users based on past behavior including whether they have “liked”,

IMAGE
Alissa Eckert,
MSMI; Dan Higgins,
MAMS, *Illustration
of the morphology
of coronaviruses*.
Courtesy of Public
Health Image Library,
CDC

“commented on” or “reposted” similar content. The overall process is more than efficient media delivery, it is a manipulation of the media loop in which consumers *become the product* as their data is harvested and sold to advertisers and political operatives to enable their desired outcomes.



It goes without saying that images, videos and voice recordings can be purposely manipulated or mis-identified to create false impressions—a real concern for content creators and online media consumers alike. With the advent of generative AI, it is not just humans who are churning out phony content for the Web, and the likelihood has increased that any post might include an image or text that was not the personal work of a human. With generative AI platforms on the rise, most with the ability to generate very believable imagery — akin to the “bold, attractive, realism” that made Eckhart and Higgins’ coronavirus illustration so

compelling — *misrepresentation* is at the fingertips of just about any savvy individual with a computer.

While AI detection software is becoming more available, there is no regulating body capable of monitoring images, or truly inhibiting the “scraping” of content into AI databases, nor of judging when AI output is so derivative of copyrighted material as to constitute plagiarism. This leaves it up to private individuals and groups to file legal challenges against AI developers — a lengthy and expensive prospect at best. So, in the absence of real regulation, it is imperative that viewers be more aware of who is generating content in order to protect themselves, the ethics of artistic creation, and ultimately the integrity of content shared on the web.

Furthermore, if we prudently assume that the system will continue its established pattern of accelerated re-transmission of sensory rich content (illustrations, photos, videos, memes) and that media sites will tailor feeds based on one’s data-determined affinities; it is up to users to choose how to knowledgeably participate in hyper-mediated public discourse. Only through challenging social and political thought across ideological divides can we identify and avoid truthiness in favor of truth. Otherwise, with communication faster than ever before, it seems likely our media connectedness might ultimately drive us further apart.

SD

IMAGES
Fake AI generated images of real people freely circulate, in which exoticism and sexism are reinforced by images created from datasets with inherent biases (see Carrera 2020). Both images downloaded by the author from the Midjourney Community Feed, 2023

[] Dackerman, S. (2011) *Prints in the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums

Picturing disruptive bodies –Kathryn Martin and Mrudula K

Kathryn Martin and Mrudula K discuss how both individual and collective experiences of embodied difference prompted the creation of powerful work

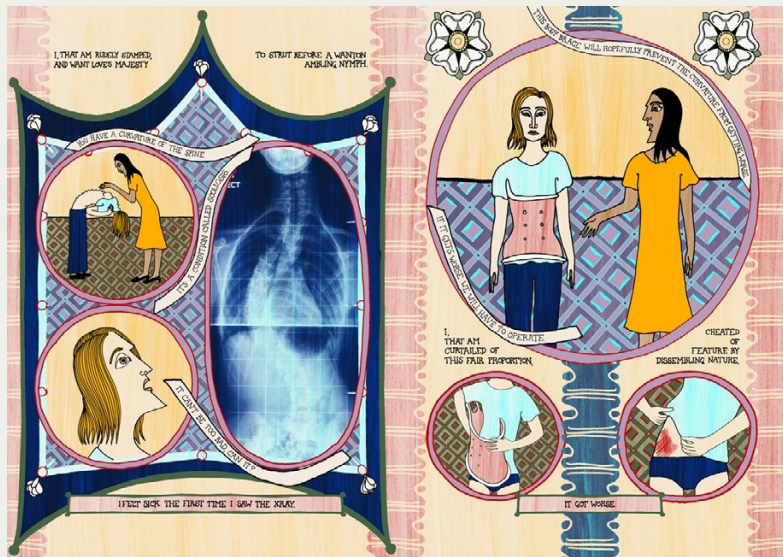
What is the body? This question seems so easy to answer at first glance, but dig a little deeper under the surface and you will find we all have different, complex interpretations in our answers. Contemplations about the body, and our lived experiences within particular bodies, have formed the basis of two creative projects by illustrators Mrudula K and Kathryn Martin, titled *Lonely Bodies* and *Richard III: Scoliosis* respectively.

Lonely Bodies is about the individual and collective experiences surrounding the loneliness experienced by many in the queer community. The project was driven by Mrudula's lived experience as a queer body. She grew up in a small town, where there was no access to information about queerness and the LGBTQIA+ community. Even if they had had this access, they wouldn't have had the words or the courage to untangle the attraction she felt towards women, and the discomfort of their own identity. This resulted in a deep-seated loneliness that she

tried to investigate through the project. Additionally, existing as a queer person can be inherently traumatic, from continuously masking and unmasking, having to come out multiple times, to at times dealing with downright queerphobia. The project aimed to explore the connection between queer trauma and loneliness. The underlying goal of the project was to find commonality between their own experiences and that of the wider queer community.

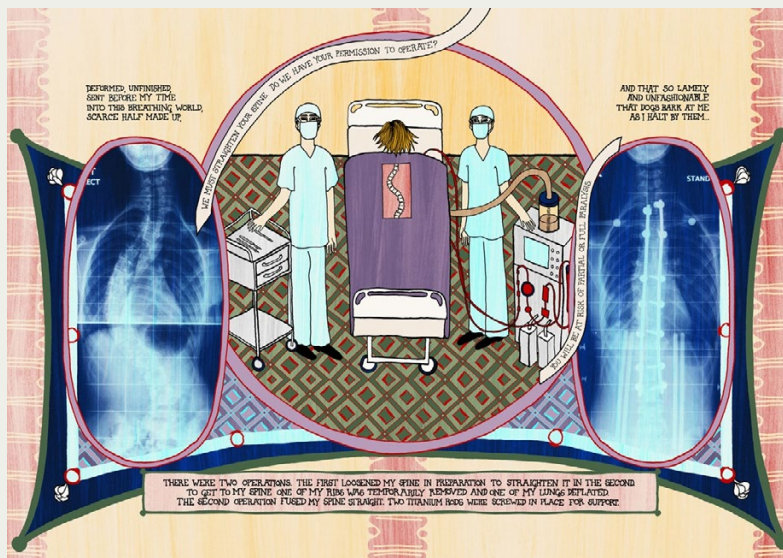
The project is as much about the process as it is about the outcome. Throughout its making, Mrudula held multiple conversations, interviews and workshops with those who identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. All participants added further insight, perspectives and occasionally even direct artwork to the outcome. The workshops also became a way of building a sense of community between the participants and the creator. Everyone's contributions were incorporated into the outcome — a Risograph printed zine. It acts as a guide to understanding queerness and gives queer people who may be feeling isolated a way to access the community through its pages.

Richard III: Scoliosis is a short comics adaptation of the opening monologue of Shakespeare's play *Richard III*. King Richard III, the last Plantagenet King of England, is an infamous historical figure whose story is fraught with political upheaval, violence and civil war. His story is best remembered through William Shakespeare's play, *Richard III*, in which he



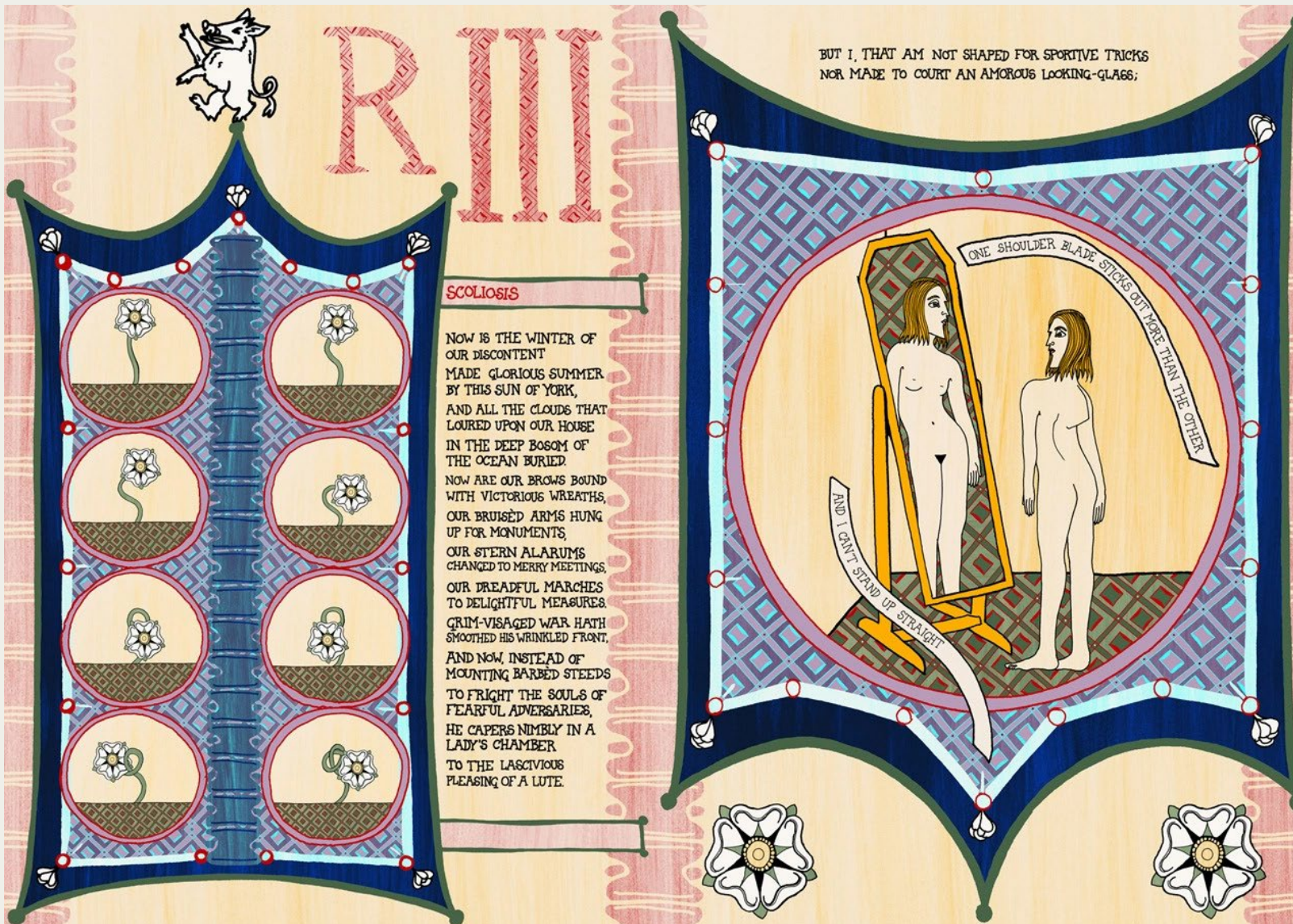
is portrayed as a master villain who schemes his way to the throne, at the expense of his brothers' and nephews' lives, and is finally defeated by Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth Field.

In 2012 an archaeological dig at a social services' car park in Leicester unearthed the burial site and remains of King Richard III. This astounding discovery proved that the real Richard III lived with the spinal condition scoliosis, a sideways curvature of the spine. Scoliosis is a physical condition that affects millions of people, including Kathryn Martin, and this personal connection to an infamous medieval villain made Kathryn reflect upon how frequently disabilities are intertwined with depictions of villainy, often being used as physical manifestations of an evil psyche.



Once the world had conclusive evidence of King Richard III's scoliosis, Kathryn was excited to see how future productions would reframe this tired trope. The first widely circulated filmed version of the play was the BBC's *Hollow Crown* production (2016), starring Benedict Cumberbatch. The film opens with Richard playing chess alone, topless, revealing to the audience the pronounced curve of his spine. Filmed from behind, this Richard is a twisted lump of flesh visually bristling with rage; it is a truly monstrous representation, and leans into every stereotype Kathryn had hoped would be readdressed in this new adaptation. As a viewer with scoliosis Kathryn was bitterly disappointed and uncomfortable watching an able-bodied actor

IMAGE
Kathryn Martin,
Richard III — Scoliosis
page 1 (2018)



portray a historical figure with disabilities in this way. It spurred her on to showcase her own story and lived experience with scoliosis in the frame of an adaptation of the opening monologue from *Richard III*, to challenge the Shakespearean words and visual depictions of a man whose spine looked eerily similar to her own.

Alongside Shakespeare's words that connect deformity to rejection, Kathryn tells the story of herself as a teenager being diagnosed with scoliosis and fitted with body braces as a preventative measure. She portrays the major spinal surgery she underwent aged fourteen, and the scars that still mark her body nearly two decades later. And lastly, Kathryn shows the joy and awe she felt when seeing the spine of King Richard III, allowing his spine for once to be framed in a positive light.

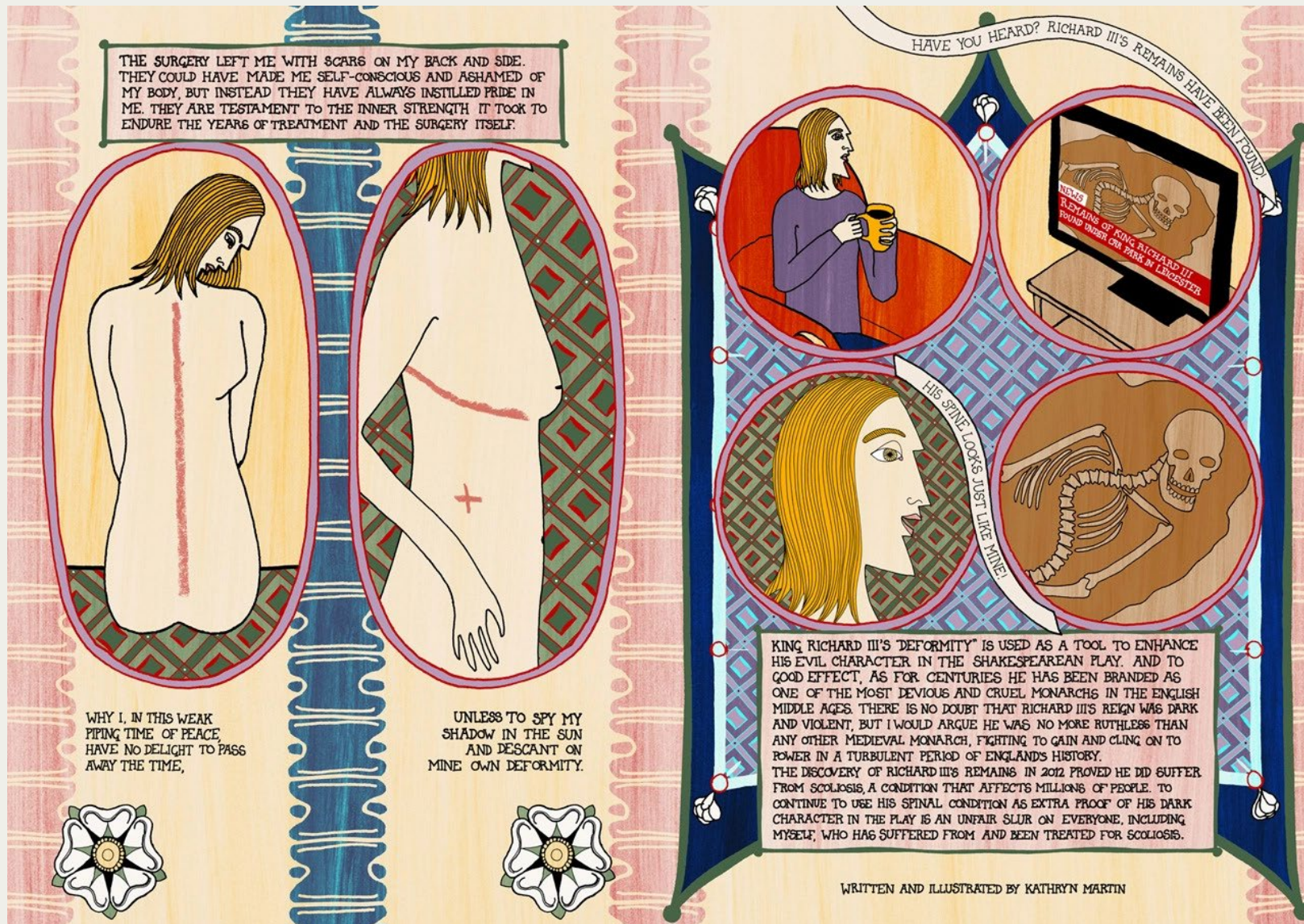
History, Stigma & Visual Languages

In both distant and recent history, queer bodies and bodies with physical differences have been misinterpreted by society, both when derided or when utilised in corporate publicity stunts promoting inclusivity. These are addressed and challenged through *Lonely Bodies* and *Richard III: Scoliosis*, utilising lived experience and authentic voices to provide a point of view with integrity, and attempt to right the wrongs of the misconceptions assigned to these stigmatised bodies.

Over the last decade, more and more of queer culture has been commodified and mass-produced. While this can mean more awareness of queer issues and wider accessibility to queer-themed products, it also means more exploitation of the queer community to benefit capitalist structures and more performative queerness. This was something Mrudula wanted to avoid through this project, as well as within her broader practice. The work and words of artist and educator Paul Soulellis, specifically within the realm of queer design, served as inspiration for the illustrations. Soulellis says, "...when asked what they thought queer design was, [Robin Mientjes] replied: attitude. And I think that covers a lot of what queerness means: an attitude in the face of conformity, an attitude in the sea of passivity, an attitude to say yes when others say no." It was this energy that Mrudula hoped to embody within their project. Rather than focus on the visual performance of being queer through colours, pride flags and rainbows, *Lonely Bodies* was driven by the words and work of the queer community.

This authenticity was integral to the success of *Lonely Bodies*. In action, this meant considering what queerness meant in every stage of the project, from research to making the final illustrations.

Zines have always had a deep significance within queer history, especially as mainstream media often didn't hold space for queer voices. An offshoot of the punk movement, queercore used music, writing,



and art, and circulated these materials through zines. It was this intrinsic connection between zines and queerness that led to using the zine as a format for this project. This was also the reasoning behind using the Risograph to produce the zine — to stay true to the DIY, radical and anti-capitalist nature of queer creativity.

The visual language within *Lonely Bodies* is intentionally rough and uncurated. This serves to add to the handmade, DIY appeal of the zine. The risograph's grainy texture, its misprints and imperfect colour further lends itself to this aesthetic. The illustrations themselves gravitate towards depicting the queer body — through eyes, through hands, through distorted figures. Loneliness exists internally, and depicting the physical body was a way of making it feel tangible and humanising it.

In *Richard III*, scoliosis and physical differences are immediately viewed as a negative. In Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part III*, Richard (then Duke of Gloucester) describes in a soliloquy having “an envious mountain on my back, Where sits deformity to mock my body”. For centuries the idea of the ‘hunchbacked’ villain has contributed to the trope of the ‘evil cripple’; a villain who is visually othered by some form of disfigurement or disability.

Upon the discovery of Richard III's remains, filmed in the documentary *Richard III: The King in the Car Park* for Channel 4, presenter Simon Farnaby

voices that Richard “could have been a hunchback but still been the nice guy”, again equating scoliosis with negativity. While scoliosis is at times a difficult physical condition to live with, causing pain and needing medical treatment, no physical conditions and/or disabilities should be viewed as an immediate negative, but merely a fact of life.

The only time Richard III is visually depicted in Kathryn's comic is at the very end, with the discovery of his skeletal remains. Whilst he remains an integral part of this comic, Kathryn's main aim was to showcase her own story in order to challenge the misconceptions built up about scoliosis by sensationalist depictions of the condition.

Adopting the aesthetic of an illuminated manuscript was a deliberate decision that went beyond evoking the medieval time period. Richard III's *Book of Hours*, an illuminated manuscript, was taken from his tent after the Battle of Bosworth Field, and still exists today. A *Book of Hours*, or a prayer book, was a personal item to be revered and respected, so by adopting this aesthetic for a personal project Kathryn is creating reverence and respect for a depiction of scoliosis. Richard III's illuminated *Book of Hours* is highly decorative, and in her comic the page designs are adorned with visual nods both to Yorkist heraldic imagery and spinal detailing. The white rose of the House of York, the noble family to which Richard belonged, appears throughout the decorative borders of the comic, alongside Richard's own

IMAGE TOP LEFT
Lonely Bodies Cover Art

IMAGE TOP RIGHT
Introduction to the
Lonely Bodies Zine

IMAGE BOTTOM
LEFT
Illustration within the
Lonely Bodies Zine
speaking to the queer
bodies conforming
to society's standard
through distortion of
the self

IMAGE BOTTOM
RIGHT
Illustration speaking
to the concept of
'Creative Care' as
spoken about by
Antonia Eugenie



heraldic symbol of the White Boar, as well as spinal vertebrae, and the metal rods and screws that now support Kathryn's spine.

Communities & Care

Lonely Bodies and *Richard III: Scoliosis* exist in two separate communities, and were created at different stages of the creators' interactions with the queer and scoliosis communities respectively. This fundamentally shifts the points of view showcased in each project; one presents the views of many and the other focuses on one particular experience.

In the case of *Lonely Bodies*, engaging with the queer community involved being as inclusive as possible — from the language used to the format of the workshops. During this phase, Mrudula offered different methods through which participants could engage with the project, such as online interviews, one-on-one workshops, anonymous forms and quick drop-ins. By having these multiple formats for submissions, there was flexibility around how much time participants wanted to give to the project and it provided various opportunities to engage in a manner they felt most comfortable with.

The nature of the project also meant that Mrudula had to contend with editing stories that weren't their own. To address this, they included all the necessary context required for each story, even

if it meant paring down the design. Additionally, they incorporated the participants' handwriting and artwork where it was available, to reduce their interference and stay true to what the participant wanted to say, both in language and the way it read visually.

Lonely Bodies was particularly aimed at those who didn't have access to the queer community. The final zine was distributed at various queer fairs and markets in London. Mrudula considered it a success that those outside the community understood that the zine spoke about the collective experience of queer voices, and not just their own. The zine got shortlisted in the Creative Conscience Awards 2021–22, and participants reached out to express that they were glad to see the project thriving outside of the university setting.

The sensitive nature of *Lonely Bodies* meant that it was vital to consider the safety of both the illustrator-facilitator and the participants. To ensure safety of the participants, options for varying degrees of anonymity were provided to each individual. Additionally, transcripts and recordings from interviews were shared with each participant to ensure that they were comfortable with what had been discussed and check if they wanted to retract any information or experiences in hindsight.

As the project also explored the connection between trauma and loneliness, an initial concept had included adding interactive activities into the zine. However,

IMAGE
Two pages within
the *Lonely Bodies*
Zine, depicting a
response from a
community member
and illustrations by
author and illustrator
Mrudula K



after discussing this with psychologists in the field, Mrudula concluded that inviting readers to confront their trauma possibly before they are ready, or without a trained professional to support them, risks endangering the person's wellbeing. Thus, to ensure the audience's safety, they decided to exclude this from the final outcome.

While initially considering queer loneliness as the topic for the project, Mrudula hadn't come out as queer publicly. They had to consider whether they were ready to take that step and talk about their experiences publicly. Additionally, she wasn't ready to come out to their family, so they had to create a delicate balance between being open and ensuring their safety. As the project has reached more audiences, she has had to come to terms with prioritising themselves over the project.

When making *Richard III: Scoliosis* in 2017, Kathryn was not in contact with a community of others living with scoliosis. This meant the points of view voiced in Kathryn's comic were very much her own, informed by her singular lived experience. Every case of scoliosis is unique, and others living with the same condition may have differing views to Kathryn regarding the intricacies of depicting scoliosis in media, and this would be an interesting line of enquiry to pursue in the future.

The nuanced lived experiences of a scoliosis community is something Kathryn now has better

access to, since joining the pilates and online community, *Build & Breathe Scoliosis*. The community is supportive of one another, forthcoming on how best to manage the condition, and sharing individual testimonies both before and after fusion surgery to inform others. This insight would be a valuable resource for the countless future productions of *Richard III* put on stage and screen in the years to come. In these future instances it would be a positive step forwards to see individuals living with scoliosis brought onboard as consultants, bridging the gap between propaganda-tinged sensationalism and sensitive realism.

By focusing on the realism of her own lived experience, Kathryn knew depictions of her naked body, x-rays and spinal surgery would feature prominently in the illustrations she created. While Kathryn is confident in sharing images of her scars and x-rays, giving people an insight into a real body with scoliosis, she knows she will never feel comfortable seeing imagery of the surgical procedures her body endured. This posed a potential problem when reaching the stage in the story that needed to represent her spinal surgery. Instead of risking traumatising herself by researching the surgery for visual reference, Kathryn instead used artistic licence informed by snippets of memories from her time in hospital. For example, a chest drain was at her bedside for a week, and a member of hospital staff described how her blood had been cleaned by a machine during her second surgery.

By prioritising what Kathryn felt comfortable engaging with for visual reference, she was able to complete this section of the narrative without risking her own wellbeing.

Reflections

A key similarity that arises within our projects is the link between the past and trauma. While both projects deal with different kinds of trauma, we both found the idea of revisiting the past to be retraumatizing. In both our projects, we chose to step away from potential triggers whether it was for ourselves or on behalf of the communities we were working with. Kathryn's project uses artistic licence to navigate these triggers during illustration, while Mrudula chose to modify the final concept to remove the possibility of triggers. Trauma is an intensely personal and fraught topic to navigate, and we both erred on the side of safety. Whether this was the right choice to make, depends on our individual truths.

Our projects both reflect on the idea of 'the body', whether through its tangible or intangible forms. While *Lonely Bodies* uses the body as a way to illustrate the tactility of emotions, Kathryn's project uses the body as the starting point to navigate her emotions surrounding physical symptoms. Our projects arise out of society's reaction to a body that's considered 'abnormal'. Here, body is meant

in the broadest possible sense: to mean the internal and externalised version of the body.

When we look at the body through the lens of 'truth', lived experience becomes particularly significant. Both our projects are driven by our individual truths. Kathryn's project draws upon her personal lived experience in reaction to an external community, while Mrudula's project attempts to find their experience reflected within an external community. These differing approaches towards our projects results in work that looks at truth through an internal as well as external lens.

KM, MK

Did It Even Happen? Questions from the picture desk –Rebecca Douglas-Home

Freelance picture editor Rebecca Douglas-Home introduces us to the challenges of running a news picture desk in the 'post-truth' era

Truth in journalism is a constant battle. Have you got the story, if so, are you sure it's correct? By the time a newspaper story is published it will have been 'stood up' (confirmed by a witness, or someone involved) by the reporter, checked by their editor, sub editors, and possibly a lawyer. Whether a journalist's news piece should report the straight facts of a situation or include their own opinion is a lively debate. A journalist being 'biased' is commonly used as a stick to beat them with on social media. Their work is degraded in the public view as a result.

Photojournalists don't escape this type of criticism either. Even intrepid photographers going to war zones and covering very difficult subjects also have to abide by rules. A photograph shouldn't be added to or amended. You aren't meant to take someone out of a picture to make the shot better (Steve



IMAGE
Created by AI image
generator Craiyon
using the prompt
'line drawing of a
newspaper picture
desk'

McCurry was caught out by this). Nor should you manipulate the scene in front of you. Don McCullin laid out images he found in a Vietnamese man's wallet to tell the viewer more about who the man was. The V&A describes his image as 'composed' and '...suggesting that McCullin may not have found the scene exactly as we see it here'. You can't fake an image (Robert Capa's Spanish Civil War image of a dying man was possibly staged). When rules have been bent or broken, cynicism creeps in.

When social media started it opened up a whole world of images a newspaper picture desk wouldn't normally have access to. It replaced the fevered paparazzi photography of the 2000's. Instagram and X (Twitter) had images taken by celebrities of themselves, opening up their (curated) lives in a way that we had never seen before. It also opened up a world of news photography. Remember the video clips of people falling from a plane as it took off from Kabul airport during the Afghanistan evacuation, Iranian women protesting the death of Mhasa Amini by bravely removing their hijabs and showing their hair and the shocking image of students hiding from a killer in Prague last year. We are accustomed to seeing images from social media used in news packages on TV and in our newspapers. The phrase 'pics or it didn't happen' is a cliché online but visual evidence makes a story hit home. Watching the second plane crash into the World Trade Center during the 9/11 attacks in the US on live TV, made a seemingly impossible event, terribly real.

Now AI image-making has entered this mix. It doesn't seem like long ago when we first started hearing of Midjourney, an experimental AI generator which created images by learning from information freely scraped from the internet. At that time the obvious sign that Midjourney pictures were AI-generated was that it "couldn't do hands". Things have moved on very fast. Eliot Higgins of Bellingcat famously created images of Donald Trump's arrest using Midjourney while he waited for the real event to take place. The latest incarnations of AI-generators can now "do hands" more realistically, though this is still one of the easiest ways to see if an image has been created using AI.

The problems that AI images present are potentially huge. News organisations may have to use images from social media less frequently, because at the moment unless an image is flagged by community notes on X (Twitter), there isn't a tool to check if an image is AI-generated. Though there are some in the works. Google has created SynthID to watermark images created by its own AI-generator, Imagen.

Depending on how large a newspaper is, a news picture desk can be one person at a computer, or 6 people each with their own role in a competitive, deadline-driven environment. The fear is always if you come across a great news image, you'd be tempted to use it without checking it. Piers Morgan was sacked as Editor of The Mirror because he used a fake image of British Soldiers torturing Iraqi

detainees on the front page in 2004, weeks after the real story of US soldiers torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib broke. Newspapers have never been immune from making errors of judgement. People on social media are fallible too; an AI-generated image of a father and his children in Gaza, purporting to be real, was shared 82,000 times on Facebook.

The biggest picture agency in the world, Getty Images, now has its own AI-Generator function trained on Getty's own creative content pictures, not its editorial archive. Getty is suing rival Stability AI in the US & UK alleging their generative AI was trained on its copyrighted photography. Copyright will be a test for the future of AI image making. Artists, illustrators and photographers whose work may have been used to train AI models will be heartened by the precedent set by the (non AI) US case of *The Andy Warhol Foundation v Lynn Goldsmith*. Goldsmith, a photographer, alleged that the use of her portrait of Prince by Warhol wasn't fair use and won last year. On the other hand, artists hoping to use AI as a tool to create original work may find it difficult to copyright. In the US, the copyright office has stipulated that 'To qualify as a work of "authorship" a work must be created by a human being'.

Some photographers have embraced AI. Once exclusively a fashion photographer, now also a Generative AI creative, Jon Compson has started to experiment with AI models. He captioned one of his images, "... this relationship between organic

and artificial is what intrigues me the most about generative AI, the idea of truth is being eroded." He may have a point, but what does that mean for news? AI isn't a photojournalist, reporter, or an eye witness. It wasn't there at the scene. Which is why picture desks, picture agencies and social media fact checkers have a very difficult job ahead. The onus is on them to check that what you're seeing really happened, never mind the bias.

RD-H

Visualising Absence

–Geoff Grandfield and Michelle Salamon

Geoff Grandfield and Michelle Salamon reflect on the possibilities of drawing to capture evaporating memories

Geoff Grandfield

My premise is that illustration can make visual form for the non-represented as well as its traditional application of showing the common-sense world of facts and stories. My enquiry is broadly centred on the contradiction of visualising absence but needs specific contextualisation. It is based on lived experience, on how an individual separated at *birth* understands and processes reality; quite relevant to the topic of 'truth'. There are many types of and reasons for infant-mother separation but it's important to stress that my focus is only on birth separation.

I am arguing that by representing, recognising and attributing behaviours associated with traumatic separation, can lead to a positive and enabling recognition of the world. The aim is to use the visual to help understanding, not as direct therapy but

as a step from the confusion of identity so often experienced or denied.

Developmental psychology and neuroscience have in recent years established that the act of permanent separation has an effect on how the infant brain evolves. Subjected to a higher presence of adrenaline and cortisol and lower serotonin, permanent separation constitutes a pre-verbal trauma. Separation is a disruption to the biological 'continuity of life'; due to the loss of the biological senses of taste, smell, touch, sound and sight of the person who brought you into the world and spent 9 months with in-utero. If the separation takes place before the acquisition of words, it is argued that recall is only possible in images. If one's introduction to the world is already marked by an inexplicable rupture of expectation, then it is understandable that learning words adds to the disordered condition of a world that makes little sense. When a separated person seeks meaning, it seems plausible that they are drawn to the perceptual evidence of the visual over the socially constructed meaning of words. It is argued, and my project is focused on supporting this, that a residual 'truth' or wholeness exists in the pre-verbal experience.

The initial phase of the project is a literature review that seeks to gather the existing knowledge relevant to cognition, developmental psychology, attachment, trauma and recovery. This includes reviewing the historic representations and metaphors of absence in visual communication forms. Establishing keywords



IMAGE LEFT
Geoff Grandfield, *Day 1* (2023) Visualising separation experience, part of practice based enquiry



IMAGE RIGHT
Geoff Grandfield, *Ministry of Fear* (2014), cover for Criterion DVD edition. In my PhD research I look at consistent themes across my practice. I illustrated Graham Greene's 1943 novel 15 years before being commissioned to make the DVD cover of Fritz Lang's 1944 film version. The oneiric narrative instability in this story is expressed by déjà-vu imagery that is familiar to film noir — a style that is common in my practice

and data from this material has developed the basis of visual representation and starting points for workshops with focus groups.

The aim is for the final phase to use resonant behaviours of a 'separated person' as a basis of a graphic narrative to articulate the legacy of the separation event in order to stabilise and validate an understanding of a normative denied identity.

Word and image

I feel the relationship between word and image to be both fascinating and slippery. My research-focus on a pre-verbal event prioritises the image, though associative words for absence can act as keys to access what is being visually sought. Words have a specificity that images rarely achieve. The word 'tomato' can be objectively descriptive whereas an image of a tomato will always contain subjective interpretation, particularly if it shows a green or yellow example. It can sometimes feel like words and numbers represent an external world whilst images are internal. Both are needed in order to communicate.

Drawing and remembering

The gaps between the imagined, the remembered and the lived experience have been central to my practice. 'Where do images come from' has been

a long-term question for me that may not have a conclusive answer. Perhaps it can be answered by asking 'where do images go?' What is the effect of a constructed image on an audience? My research aims to make visual form for what I struggle to find words for. Visual metaphors that produce a resonance with an audience can act as a validation. In adoption circles there is a reoccurring reference to "fog", a visual metaphor for impaired clarity. By recognising this state of being unfocused as a reality for many adoptees, an understanding and processing can begin. For me the research can be likened to entering a large room where unknown objects are covered in white dust sheets. Gradually each inquiry reveals what is hidden under each sheet.

Medium and process

Another emergence since beginning the PhD is a re-evaluation of my chosen medium. During my time as an art student chalk pastel offered expressive immediacy and vivid contrast. It was great for dramatic blocks of tone and scale. I developed techniques to control the edges and define them with sharp lines. I learnt there were many things impossible to achieve in such a messy, fugitive medium and worked out ways to avoid including them in my imagery. I tried using the inherent pastel capabilities of blending and blurring to correspond with ambiguity, the constant threat of smoke or fog. As I developed figurative shape silhouettes, I was also representing what

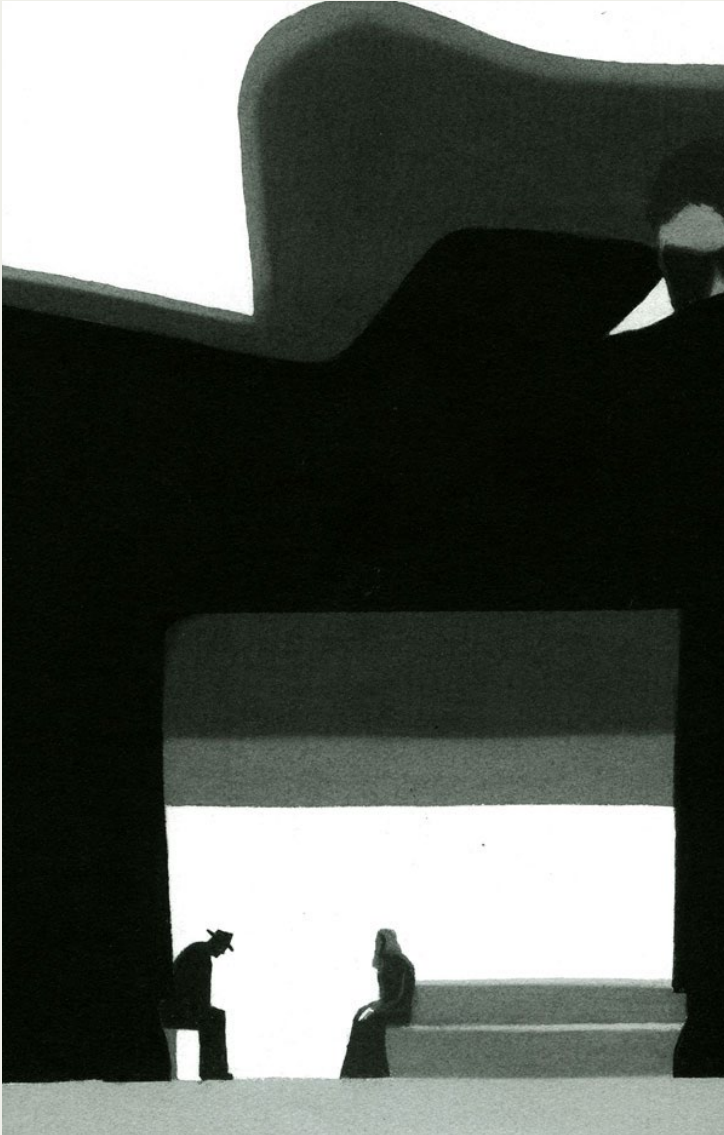


IMAGE LEFT
Geoff Grandfield,
*Raymond Chandler
illustration* (1997), for
Folio Society edition.
My PhD work looks at
alternative reading of
my practice images.
In this example we see
echoes of adoption,
absent relationships
between male and
female, shadowed by
a dead 'father' figure

IMAGE RIGHT
Geoff Grandfield,
Shopper Target
(2007), newspaper
editorial illustration for
The Times. My PhD
research looks at
alternative readings of
my previous practice,
for example here I
note the relationship
between an adult male
and a 'mother' figure

I didn't know or could not visualise. Rather than develop a detailed portrait I wanted to use volume and composition.

Reviewing how materials, intentions and feelings all combine to constitute the style of an outcome is significant to the question of embodiment. I recognised in the cinematic language of Film Noir a familiarity. Though working in a static image, my interest in visual instability, high contrast, ambiguity and black voids developed through watching the visual work of primarily emigres to post WW2 Hollywood. There was for me an evocative approximation between the celluloid shadow world of cinematographer John Alton and covering a sheet of paper with carbon black chalk.

Overall I consider my illustration practice has given me an expression of self that has helped form my self identity and the confidence to find ways to articulate the unknown or un-represented. The notion of truth will always be close to the specific values of an individual. By finding individual meaning and ways of communicating to an audience through creative practice, the larger social understanding and acceptance of difference may be possible.

Michelle Salamon

The hypothesis for my research is that the motor activity of drawing on paper, with no prerequisite of any kind of artistic skill, can increase the ability of an eyewitness to recall details of an offender fixed in his or her memory following a criminal incident. The research examines drawing as an activity or physical act, asking whether it can have purpose beyond the creation of an artefact, beyond the fields of art and design. The intention for this project is to better understand relationships between drawing and memory and ask if the physical act of drawing can be used as a tool to improve recall in eyewitness testimonies. The project explores how a tool commonly associated with art and design practice can address problems in the criminal justice system. Research carried out by the Innocence Project (Scheck Barry C. and Neufeld Peter J., 2022) has shown that 60% of wrongful convictions have been based (at least in part) on mistaken frontal identification by eyewitnesses or victims of the crime.

In order to gather a reliable data set in support of the hypothesis a cross disciplinary pilot study event took place in September 2023 as a collaboration between CSM (Michelle Salamon) and King's College London (legal academic Dr Hannah Quirk and associated lawyer and magistrate Dr Noga Shmueli Meyer). A total of 73 student volunteers participated across both institutions. Data was gathered from these "mock witnesses" to investigate whether the physical

IMAGE BOTTOM
The photo lineup
image used to identify
the suspect during the
CSM/KCL Pilot Study
Event



act of drawing can be used to improve memory recall for facial recognition in first person witnessed events.

The pilot project took place during Welcome Week, when students were attending Welcome orientation talks. During one of these talks they unsuspectingly acted as “witnesses” to a staged incident where someone (the “suspect”) enters the room and passes a note to the speaker, causing a minor disruption to the flow of the session. Following the talk, students were asked to identify the note giver from a photo lineup. The students, in their role as “eyewitnesses”, were split into two groups.

Group 1 – Drawing Group

People in this group were first asked to try and recall the suspect they saw, and then to sketch the suspect using pencil on paper. The quality of the drawing was irrelevant as its purpose in this experiment is to assist the memory recall. They were then asked to identify the suspect from a photo line-up comprising eight photographs, each of a similar-looking individual, including the “suspect”.

Group 2 – Control Group

This group merely participated in a review of the photo line-up. They were asked to identify the suspect from the same line-up without drawing.

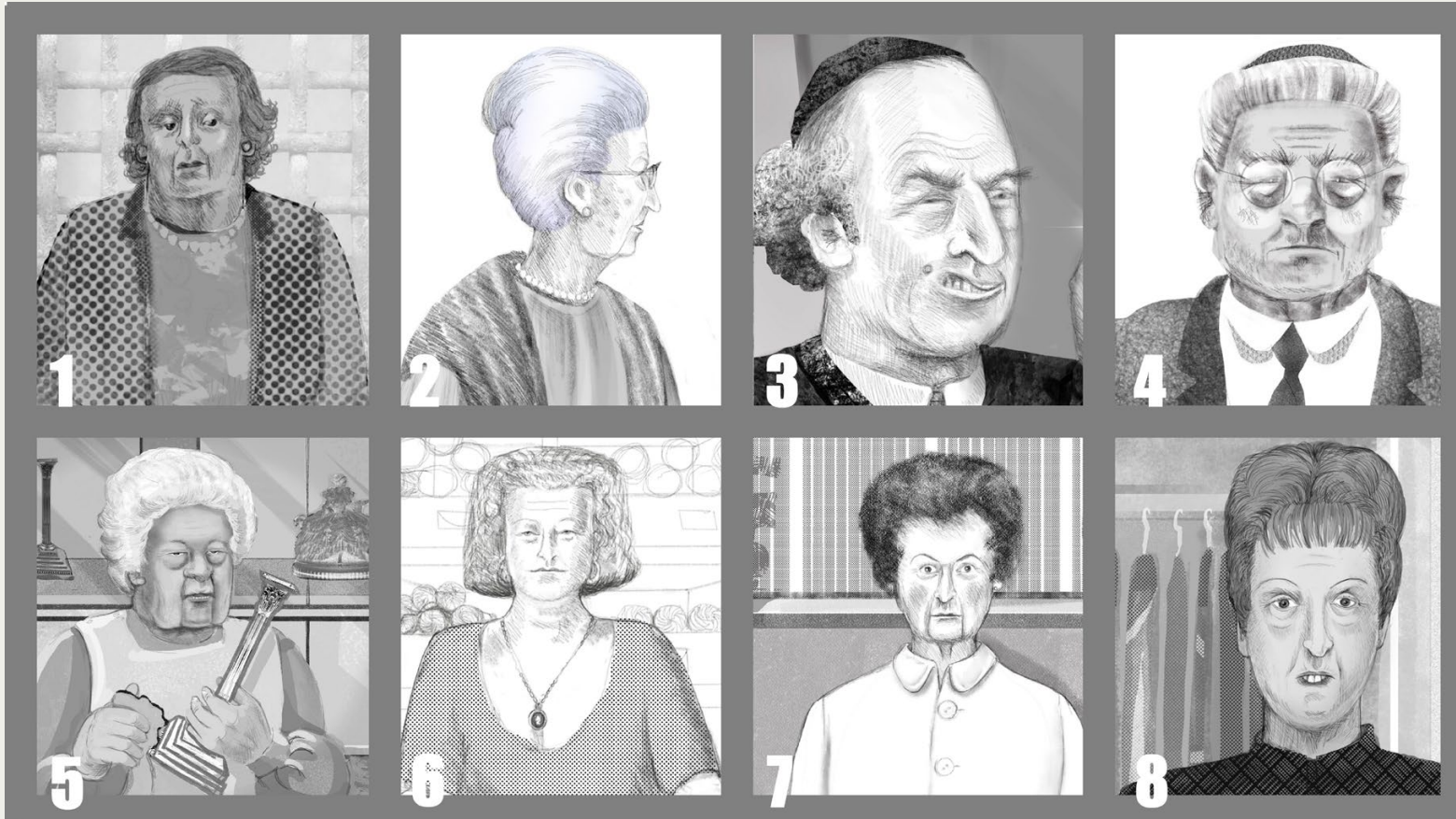
Forms were analysed to find trends that begin to tell a story. Analysis of the drawings created by the drawing participants provided insights into the sample groups, for example, the CSM Drawing Group students, who may be said to be more familiar with the act of drawing as part of their practice, had a 5.12% better rate of positive identification suggesting drawing is an effective trigger for recall. The KCL groups consisting of Law Undergraduates were given the same instructions as CSM but had an equal rate of positive and negative identifications. A number of them embellished their drawings with handwritten notes. This might be viewed as indicative of a forensic mindset or suggest they were driven to find a means to further communicate information. The Pilot Study is set to continue in order to add to the data set.

Drawing and remembering

In his talk at Kingston School of Art on 4 October 2023 Geoff Grandfield referred to his drawing media as “ectoplasm”, in other words as “a place that things emerge from”. This can be understood as trust in chance. The physical act of drawing is indeed important, especially when aligned with a belief that an image will emerge from the materials through the craft and effort of making.

I share with Geoff an interest in using drawing to reanimate or get to the truth of something that happened in the past. In my project, remembering

IMAGE
A lineup image
created from a series
of drawings made from
memory based on
important characters
recalled from my own
childhood experience



and drawing are intrinsically linked. Our research wants to prove how creating a connection between hand, eye and brain, can serve as a trigger for recall. Existing evidence from research by psychologists at University of Waterloo supports the theory that drawing can improve memory. Their research describes drawing as a “robust encoding manipulation that can, and does, improve memory performance dramatically.” (Wammes, J. D., Meade and Fernandes, 2016). Initial evidence collected from our first pilot study suggests that the physical interaction of pencil on the surface of paper can indeed help to engage the recalled memory of a witness following an incident or event.

In this work communication with a wider audience is not particularly relevant since the main recipient of its message is the maker. The physical process of making the drawing, the touch of the pencil on the surface of paper, can be viewed as a mechanism to connect the eye, hand and brain. In this case the act of drawing itself is more valuable than the drawings produced. Drawings themselves are not necessarily foregrounded as artefacts or outcomes but can function as an active part of a process, for example to trigger or activate memory recall.

Through my own practice I have noted how the act of drawing and memory recall work together in the process of making an image. My personal project *Memory Drawings*, partly laid the foundation for the research Pilot Study. In this project I challenged

myself to recall the faces of the congregation of my childhood synagogue. I found that through a process of drawing and redrawing, the physical touch of the pencil on a surface acted as a trigger for recall and helped me to find what Geoff described as “ectoplasm”, fragments of recalled faces that pieced together over time emerged from the contact of the media with the surface of the paper to become portraits.

GG, MS

Rousseau, Passion, and the Illusory Image

–Dr. Carolyn Shapiro

Dr. Carolyn Shapiro introduces the well-shaped sentences of Jean-Jacques Rousseau to the discussion of illustration and truth

This essay offers an overview of the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau with particular focus on his philosophy of language. I consider his delineation of the “passionate” truth reached through a complex, tumultuous negotiation within consciousness between an encountered image and its corresponding meaning. This relationship between image and word is, for Rousseau, always one of *difference*, specifically, of error. The ecstatic “clarifying transmutation” (Starobinski 1988, 356–364)^[1] into true meaning is instigated by the recognition of the perceived meaning of a given encountered image being erroneous. Rousseau calls this erroneously interpreted image “[t]he illusory image presented by passion” (Rousseau 1966, 13), with “passion” signifying here a lost desirable primordial state which infuses the distinctly human mode of communication that is language.

Rousseau loves the feeling of passion and its expansive extension of the conscious self which comprise the wellsprings of his philosophy of truth. Truth would not be truth without the “gaze... held in passionate fascination” (Rousseau 1966, 13).^[2] Rousseau's compounded quality of passionate fascination spills over with thrilling intensity, but it also carries with it the potential danger of “fascination”, a word whose etymology can be traced to the Latin *fascinatus*, for “bewitch, enchant, fascinate.” This bewitching quality of passionate fascination as the pathway to truth raises a red flag within the context of today's political climate in which “truth” can be overtaken by the ardent following of dangerously enchanting ideologies.

For illustrators today, the communication of meaning via an impassioned detour of erroneous meaning instigated by the encounter with an image might offer a rich deconstructive semiotic economy. On the other hand, as suggested above by way of etymological enquiry, Rousseau's penchant for roller-coaster-like acquisition of true meaning through the surmounting of error carries a hazardous elevation of “persuasion” over rational “convincing”, paving the way for an emotion-based, individualist anti-politics that aims to reverse, through a purportedly illuminating revelation of conspiracy: conspiracy becomes the negotiation ground for erroneous meaning instigated, for example, by a de-contextualised image. Increasingly prevalent today, the revelation

[1] Starobinski, Jean (1988), *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press

[2] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1966 [1781]), “*Essay on the Origin of Languages which treats of Melody and Musical Imitation*,” in *On the Origin of Language*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode

of conspiracy is linked into a charged grievance and persecution not unlike that expressed by Rousseau, whose ideal of a passionate heart can not only be achieved *despite* the constant adversaries to such a state but as the *necessary condition* for it:

“In this way I learnt from my own experience that the source of true happiness is within us, and that it is not in the power of men to make anyone truly miserable who is determined to be happy... The moments of rapture and walks were joys I owed to my persecutors; without them I should never have known or discovered the treasures that lay within me.” (Rousseau, 1979, 36)^[3]

Characteristic of much of Rousseau's writing, his wrenched personal tone reveals see-sawing feelings of abandonment and ecstasy. Rousseau embraces a paranoid disengagement with society that is in itself highly ambivalent, since he was very much in his early life as a writer a social being, enjoying his identity as a public intellectual. Known in his day simply as “Jean-Jacques”, Rousseau was born in Geneva in 1712 and died in Ermonville, France, in 1778, having lived an itinerant life in a constant state of exile, both geographical and psychic. His mother died a few days after he was born, and at the age of ten, his father went into exile, leaving Rousseau to the fates of successive apprenticeships. Rousseau would leave Geneva to pursue his amours, his religious affiliations, his writing. His perhaps extravagant indulgence in

recounting the tumultuousness of his life revels in personal suffering, often sounding anxious. On the other hand, Rousseau is also blissfully happy in his solitary wanderings, through which he granted himself pure freedom. In his beloved unshackled scenario of writing, Rousseau enjoyed the vastly uninterrupted expansion of his conscious self, of which he was constantly conscious. In these moments, Rousseau's writing reveals his ecstasy at having accessed something lost and untainted by civilisation.

While Rousseau is known for being a philosopher, his restless exploration of diverse genres including political tracts, philosophy of language, aesthetics, moral explorations, personal confessions and reveries and novels affirms him as being a writer more than anything else. As Peter France notes, despite Rousseau's judgement against the world of publishing, Rousseau “did not mind taking on the role of literary expert now and again, and he obviously took great pleasure in the well-shaped sentence, and indeed in the act of writing itself” (France 1979, 11)^[4]. And Rousseau has also been identified as the only writer of his time to communicate, with quite a modern sensibility, agonised personal predicaments about feeling rejected by society (France, 22).

Rousseau's philosophy of language as one of
image-word transmutation

For Rousseau, the image preceded the word within

[3] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1979 [1782]), *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Peter France, London: Penguin Books

[4] France, Peter (1979), “Introduction,” in *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, London: Penguin Books, 7–23

IMAGE
Artists' impression
of Maurice Quentin
de la Tour, *Portrait
of Jean-Jacques
Rousseau* (late 18th
century)

the history of language and stands in as a reminder of an original, unmediated communication. In “*That the First Language Had to Be Figurative*,” chapter 4 of his *Essay on the Origin of Languages which treats of Melody and Musical Imitation*” (1979 [1781]), Rousseau's example of “savage man's” process of language acquisition serves as a model for all human acquisition of language. Rousseau recounts: a (savage) man would have been frightened upon meeting a stranger, who would have been bigger than he was. The name “giant” would have come to mind as the meaning of the savage man facing him. However, upon getting to know the stranger, the savage man then realises the error caused by what he initially saw. The stranger is another man, not a “giant”. Rousseau explains:

“So he invents another name common to them and to him, such as the name *man*, for example, and leaves *giant* to the fictitious object that had impressed him during his illusion. That is how the figurative word is born before the literal word, when our gaze is held in passionate fascination; and how it is that *the first idea it conveys to us is not that of the truth...*”
(Rousseau, 1979, 13, emphasis mine)

I am fascinated with the recognition of error after an initial “gaze... held in passionate fascination”, through which language successfully emerges as the conscious self realises his own misunderstanding-in order-to-understand. Complex tensions characterise

this key moment of erroneous illusion, tensions that effect a “*clarifying* transmutation” of the self.
(Starobinski, 1988, 356, emphasis in the original.)



Writing about the origin of language, Rousseau presents “the figurative word” as a term which refers to the hieroglyph, an object of fascination to him and his 18th century fellow intellectuals. As an image that develops gradually into a corresponding word, the hieroglyph stands for a natural, pre-language moment of human communication that transforms though

time and usage into abstract language. Language, an attribute of “civilised man”, retains the primordial, “passionate” mark of an originary image. Rousseau constructs a parallel between the ancient hieroglyph, or “figurative image,” and the “illusory image”: both images act as loci of the conscious self that arrives at “true” meaning by transmuting error into clarity.

The role of Rousseau's ‘illusory image’ in politics and law

Political theorist Emma Planinc offers a vigorous investigation into “the figurative foundations of Rousseau's politics” (Planinc 2022).^[5] Planinc identifies the core positioning of the “figurative image” in Rousseau's philosophy of politics and law in her investigation of the highly dynamic “illusory image”: for Rousseau, it is the individual's relation to the originary “image”, illusory as it is, which is the conduit to the expression of the communal passionate heart. This shared expression carries with it a kind of loss of primordial nature as image transmutes into language. But this loss is also a gain, in that the longing for what is no longer here, or even never was here (the illusory image), builds a higher law outside of politics. This higher law comprises the Social Contract (Planinc 2022).

Planinc's thesis on the centrality of the image to Rousseau's philosophy of politics rests upon what she underlines as a phrase in Rousseau's *Social Contract*,

which speaks to a law “prior to the laws” “which uses neither force nor reasoning” and which has “recourse to an authority of a different order which might be able to ... *persuade without convincing*” (Planinc 2022, citing Rousseau, emphasis Planinc).

Political theorists today note the dangers of such an anti-rational desire and even tendency towards persuasion without convincing (Planinc 2022), but for Rousseau, such fervent and “passionate” attachment to a law (and to a lawgiver) indicates the transparency of heart and hearts that constitutes the joyful social body. It is almost as if the desired drama of the passionate gaze fuels an excuse to bypass reason and encourage following a different, less political, authority.

The bypassing of reason that embraces a less political authority installs consciousness itself as that which is “world-constituting or meaning-giving”

(Morrissey 1988, xx)^[6], so that an image is not something merely seen but immediately interpreted. This almost transcendental action eliminates any discontinuity between subject and object, endowing an all-powerful consciousness with the power of totalising meaning-making.

As Robert Morrissey notes of Rousseau's psychologically-inflected phenomenology, Rousseau actively blocked out any Otherness, exalting in a continuous “Sameness.” Absorbing every encounter

[5] Planinc, Emma, (2022), “*The Figurative Foundations of Rousseau's Politics*,” Cambridge University Press online)

[6] Morrissey, Robert J. (1988), “Introduction: Jean Starobinski and Otherness,” in Starobinski, Jean (1988), *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press

in “its coherent universality,” Rousseau's subjective writing often “ran the risk of interpretive delirium” (Morrissey, 1988, xxvii–xxviii). Reading Planinc's emphasis on Rousseau's desire to persuade rather than to convince alongside Morrissey's evaluation, Rousseau seems to be desiring a politics based on a homogenising, even narcissistic negation of any sort of difference whatsoever. Rousseau's desire for the continuity of communal, festive transparent heart-passion (Rousseau 1960)^[7] rings some alarm bells when we recognise symptoms that may be playing out in politics today, such as accusations of “fake news”, a charge indicating the threat posed by otherness and resistance to autocratic binding figures of power. Ultimately, understanding Rousseau's exaltation of the clarification of error as the path to true meaning opens up the strange possibility of a meeting place between illustration and conspiracy theory.

CS

[7] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1960 [1758]), trans. Allan Bloom, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

On Truthfulness –Chloe Hayward and Ann Wong

The 'Colouring In: Truth' workshop series, hosted by Stephanie Black and Luise Vormittag, took place on 4th and 11th October 2023 at Kingston School of Art's MA Illustration studio. Participants engaged in truth-dissecting illustrative exercises in the afternoon workshops, analysing 'truthy' images, such as photographs, architectural plans, and instruction manuals. In the first workshop, students questioned what made these images authorities on truth and how to break these images down to strip away their perceived truthfulness. In the second workshop, they reflected on the image making process and its relevance to the truthfulness of an image.

Among the participants were MA Illustration students Chloe Hayward and Ann Wong, who later shared reflections on the series and discussed the broader theme of truth within the context of illustration

Kingston University. Penrhyn Road campus coffee shop. 5pm. Ann and Chloe sit at a corner table, sipping on their drinks.

AW: (flips through notes) Wow. That was a lot to take in.

CH: (nods) It was. We talked about all kinds of ideas about truth. What's your take on it? Is it about being real, authentic, factual, universal, or something else? What's true to you, Ann?

AW: Hmm. Well, I guess things that the doctors say somehow sound true to me, or teachers, or experts in a special field.

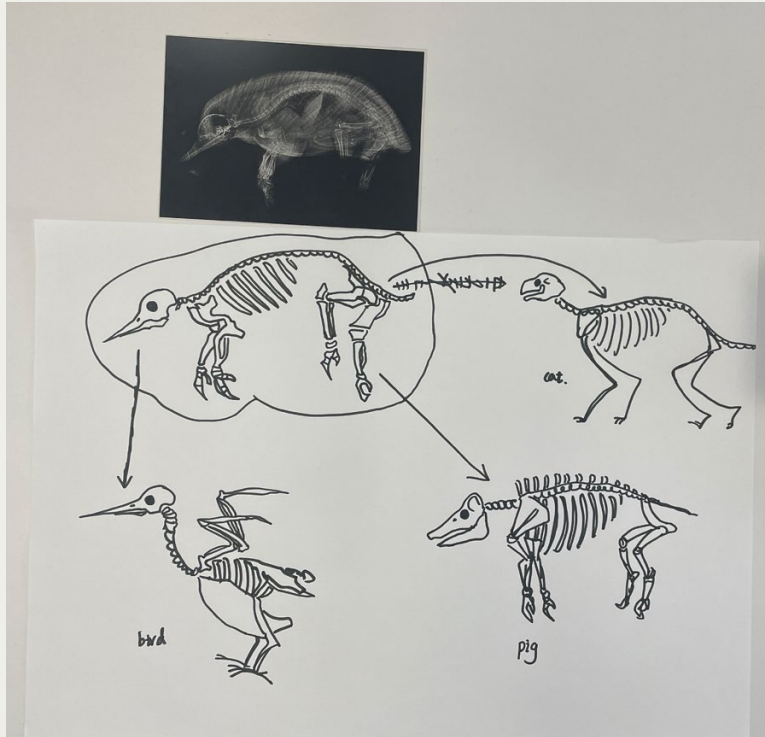
CH: So, to you, truth gives a sense of authority? Or is it the other way around — that authority speaks the truth?

AW: You know, when you think about it, certain illustration styles and mediums were historically linked to authoritative truth. Take illuminated manuscripts or etchings, for example. It's interesting how that shifted with technology. Images produced using technologies developed in the last two centuries, like photography or X-ray, have become powerful signifiers of authoritative truth as well.

CH: Absolutely. Photography brought this new level of realism and immediacy. It was like, 'Here's the truth, captured in a moment.' But I think that's changed now that photography has become more accessible. Most people can now use cameras and editing software. I reckon I'd be more willing to accept an unusual photograph that was developed

IMAGE LEFT
Wenyue Ju, Kingston,
Truthy image: X-Ray

IMAGE RIGHT
Jiahao Ji, Kingston,
Truthy image:
Architectural diagram



from film, from a hundred years ago, than a photo being shown to me on someone's phone.

AW: And can photographs be considered accurate in capturing emotional truths?

CH: Yeah, rough sketches can convey an emotion that's hard to capture accurately, that's still a truth. The accuracy and precision of diagrams is a truth too, they're just different truths. It's interesting how we as people have decided on what visuals tell which truths best.

AW: It's like the visual language that communicates truth has expanded into this vast palette of possibilities (leans back) — monochrome versus colour, maximalism versus minimalism, text versus no text — they all contribute to how truthful an image is perceived.

CH: I think my biggest takeaway from these workshops is that I'm actually quite gullible. (laughs) I'd taken quite a passive role when it came to accepting these forms as truth. I never would have stopped to think 'are these measurements correct, would this actually build a house?' or 'are these people in the photograph even friends? They could be strangers. They could be actors.' or even 'Does an instruction manual have to look like this? Can the illustrations be more impressionistic? Would that make a 'bad' instruction manual, or a 'better' one?'

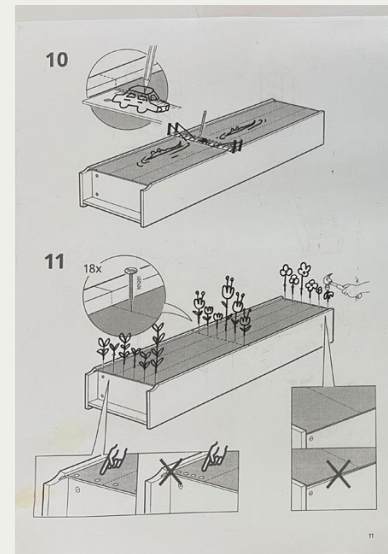


IMAGE TOP
Chia-Ying Lin,
Kingston, *Truthy
image: Instruction
manual*

IMAGE BOTTOM
Tina Lee, Kingston,
*Truthy image:
Photograph*

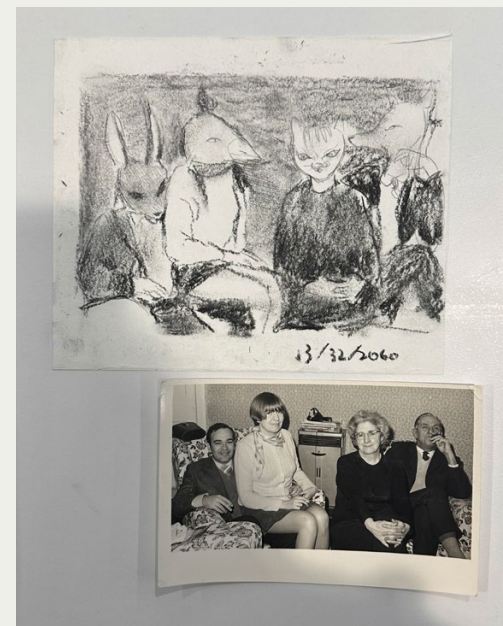
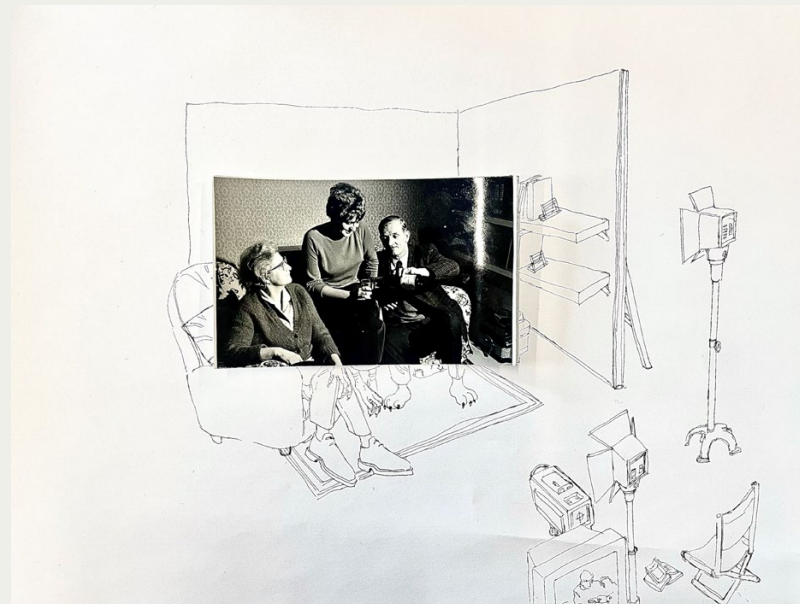




IMAGE LEFT
 Tian Gao, Kingston,
Truthy image:
Photograph

IMAGE TOP RIGHT
 Nuode Li, Kingston,
Truthy image:
Photograph

IMAGE BOTTOM
 RIGHT
 Ying-Chieh Lee,
 Kingston, *Truthy*
image: Photograph



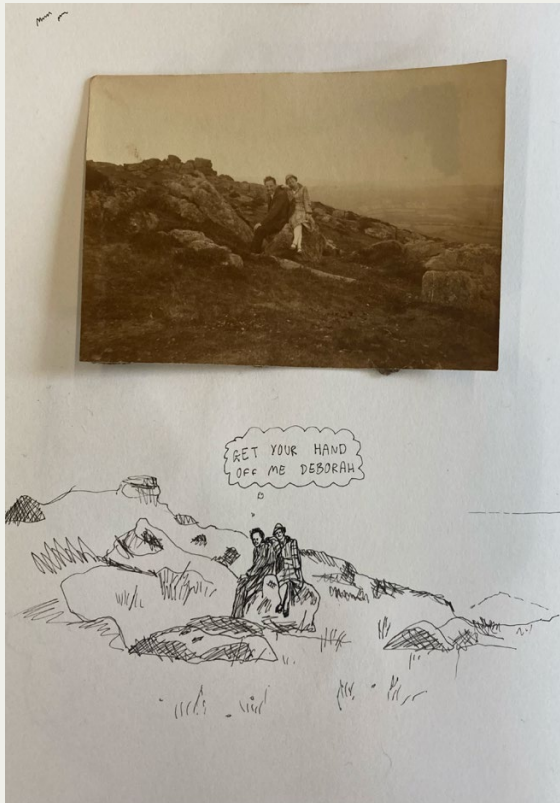
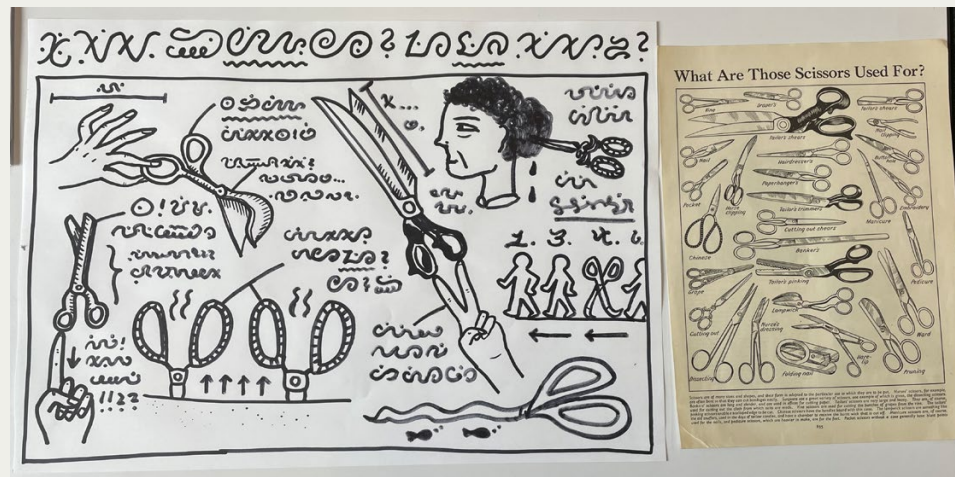


IMAGE LEFT
Chloe Hayward,
Kingston, *Truthy*
image: Photograph

IMAGE TOP RIGHT
Minglun Cai,
Kingston, *Truthy*
image: Photograph

IMAGE BOTTOM
RIGHT
Wong Man Hei,
Kingston, *Truthy*
image: Magazine
diagram



AW: I wouldn't say that is being gullible, we had just never been in the space to critically engage with the concept of truth. But now, with this newfound skepticism, I'm questioning everything. Even the text next to images, you know? Like how it seems to signify authoritative truth — especially with numbers and dates. The presence of labels, measurements, captions — it's all part of that visual grammar of truth. It's this subtle manipulation of perception. (leans forward) And the combination of text and images — it's a powerful duo. The text and the visual elements lend credibility to each other.

CH: There is so much to unpack, the use of text, the technology used to create images—

AW: And the physical, tangible form of an image.

CH: Right. (sips drink) But I like to think that we have scratched the surface of something here.

AW: I think we have.

*This conversation is a work of fiction inspired by various discussions between us after the 'Colouring In: Truth' workshops. While the dialogue aims to emulate a natural conversation, it is a curated representation and not a verbatim account. If the conversation gives the impression of truth, what visual elements contribute to that perception? Conversely, if it appears otherwise, what are the reasons behind such impressions?

CH, AW

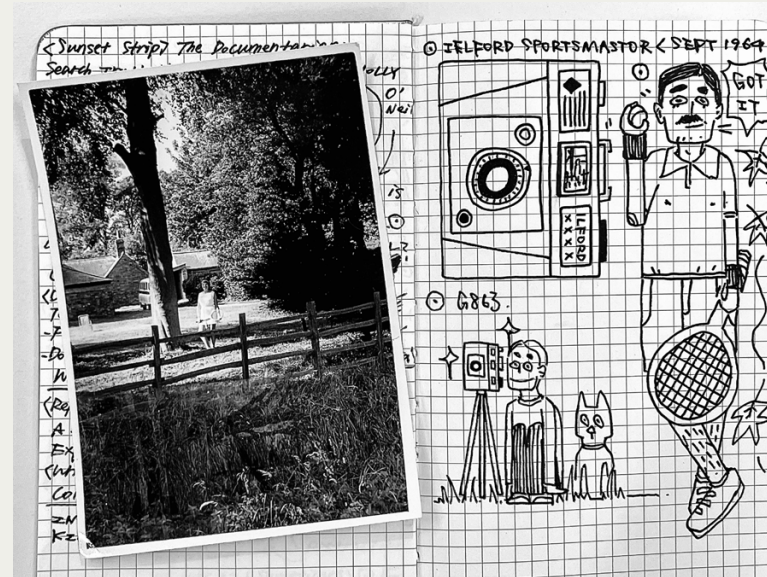


IMAGE TOP
Yuchen Cheng,
Kingston, *Truthy*
image: Photograph

IMAGE BOTTOM
Chia-Ying Lin,
Kingston, *Truthy*
image: Magazine
illustration

