Fuck It! New Media Art, Design and (re)presentation

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Abstract

The advent of New Media has not only made considerable contributions to the cannon of art but has in essence shaken its very foundations. Anxieties appear when New Media role players, artists and 'commercialised users' have to "play nice". Disrobing the participatory process of art and design through the use of communication technologies fucking provides an interpretation of New Media in the locale of sexual consumption. South Africa is still grappling with the technologies of a post industrial age. Access is not a matter of fact and literacy of such media cannot be taken for granted. Fucking around with sexual (re)presentation is a dangerous liaison. There is an inherent hesitation to equate South African erotic with colonial imports of uncivilised sexual prowess. This risky enclosure investigates the uncomfortable intercourse of discourse on Art, Design and Queer theory. In a techno-socio-sexual economy where information is readily available and almost nothing is unattainable, is fucking the common ground for these uncomfortable bedfellows? *W*ithin the lines of computer code and pixel can we, as artist and designers, remap an(other) erotic? Can we (re)present that which has remained mis-represented?

KEYWORDS: New Media, art history, visual culture, design, Queer theory, sexuality, lesbian

1. Introduction - I'm gonna take you there

Conceptualised at the very moment of resignation I, a researcher and multi-media designer, was ready to take it up the proverbial ass. I was overwhelmed by the perceived exclusiveness of artistic expression and the commercial pursuits of design[1]. And then – FUCK IT!

Sex grabs our attention and speaks a language we understand. There has never been a deficit of imagery and imagination. There is no scarcity of creative minds, from all fields and expertise, ready and willing to satisfy desire. Furthermore contemporary mass media grants almost everybody access to information and visuals from anywhere across the world. Max Rippon (2006, p8) states that consequently the sexual has been accelerated, digitised, and globalised. Do you like it like a tortoise or do you like it like a rabbit?

It is of no surprise that sex, sexuality and sexual encounters remain a climax of dispute for researchers. In *Queer Theory, Cyber-Ethnographies and Researching Online Sex Environments;* Chris Ashford (2009, p300) states that traditionally the researcher trespasses into the research locale and then must return to home-objective, in contrast, the online researcher cannot really leave the research locale. Not when online has become such an interregnal part of our lives; not when the lines between online and offline have been

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[1]It is important to note that when the research uses the term it is referring specifically, but not exclusively to graphic design and multimedia design. These disciplines encompass graphic user interfaces, interactivity, motion graphics and image making such as photography and illustration.

irreversibly blurred. To Ashford (2009, p298), online researchers, deviant sexual researchers and me, are less academics gone native, but rather natives gone academic. Therefore this research is more than an academic inquiry; it is also a personal investigation.

I graduated as a multimedia designer with new media as my primary playground. As I left the creative womb of my university an umbilical cord tied me, tread through me. More than a mission statement of the Greenside Design Center, it was my duty to "advocate social advancement through responsible design". Respect for all people regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation is what mother design and South Africa carved on my heart. And so I explored Visual Culture Theory in a post graduate deviation. Many of my fellow graduates asked "why are you wasting your time with theory?" or "are you too afraid of going into industry?"

"Maybe it is recognition, perhaps discovery, sometimes sacrifice, always treasure" (Winterson, 2007, p90). I had found buried treasure, but also a few missing shoes and oddities. These are peculiarities I found. Firstly, Visual Culture Theory, as set out before me, did not consider the *labour* of design; it was more occupied with the *product* of design. Walker and Chaplin (1997, p44) assert that Visual Culture Theory is more concerned with the aesthetics and designed aspects of visual culture.

Secondly, Visual Culture Theory seemed to negate that the designer more often than not had to produce design for client briefs and that these briefs are informed by capitalist and advertising strategies. Even though a core responsibility of a designer is to educate the client, the statement 'the client is always right' remains a troubling propriety. It is rather presumptions of me to solely blame clients and advertising for the commercial nature of design. According to Kim McCarten(2000, p167) design labour and imagery is wet in socialisation. Additionally, Ken Garland (2000, [sp])states in *The First things First Manifesto*[2]that designers have been educated that feeding the commodity machine is the most lucrative and effective use of design skills and that for some[3] it has become 'what designers do'. Furthermore, McCarten (2000, p167) states that designers without a 'perverse' curiosity and 'devious' suspicion are not even aware of dominant perspectives. This contextualises some of the antagonism I received from my fellow multimedia graduates.

Thirdly, the products of design scrutinised by Visual Culture Theory seemed reluctant to consider that many designers and designs are created pro-bon(e)o. These designs include work produced for non-profit and non-governmental organisations as well as collaborations with artist, musicians and activist. Garland (2000, [sp]) asserts that worthy pursuits of design skills are environmental, political and social interventions. But are these worthy interventions still considered design?

Upon completion of my postgraduate degree as well as publishing a book on Visual Culture Theory I decided that it was again time for me to see other people. I asked for my records and books back and decided that I really did not need my favourite sweater. Still I remained committed to my multimedia roots and so it became my map. I enrolled in a Masters in Fine Arts. I was accepted not only on merit of my academic performance but also on my 'creative' skill. Entering the art community was far more difficult than I expected and so my courtship began. They say threesomes never work, but I am a polygamous romantic.

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[2]The original *First Things First* manifesto was written and published by Ken Garland. Over four hundred graphic designers and artists undersigned this document. The manifesto was republished in 2000 by several international design publications such as *Adbusters*(Canada), *Emigre*51(1) and *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design* (United States), *Eye* magazine 33(8), *Blueprint* (Britain) and *Items* (Netherlands).
[3] Please note that the manifesto states *some* designers, not *all* designers. The avocations *of The First Things First* manifesto will be unpacked in *'I don't want your money honey'*.

As an investigatory probe of New Media this research uses the plush and the hardcore, both the software and hardware technologies of the internet as a site. In visual culture, new technology is also referred to as new media or Computer Mediated Technology (CMC). According to Walker and Chaplin (1997, p196) technology develops in waves of succession, similar to my own journey. Photography evolved to film; film to television; television to video; video to computer graphics and multimedia, the internet and Virtual Reality. The research will employ new media and the internet interchangeably as sex toys of new agency. Additionally, as Rachael Greene (2004, p8) states, the internet is a chaotic - which encapsulates both the everyday and the exotic, public and private, autonomous and commercial.

2. Aims - Foreplay

Do you like what you are reading? Welcome to the triple feature show. The research aims to do the following, and do it hard: Firstly this research compares debates between art and design in theory as well as practice in the advent of new media. Secondly, investigates the representations of sex in new media and online spaces. Thirdly, considers the problematic position of technology and sex in South African. In order to contextualise my research argument, the research will examine the controversy surrounding the exhibition of photographer-activist Zanele Muholi at Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, South Africa in March 2010.

3. Theoretical framework – Whips and chains

"There can be no one queer research methodology, but many methodologies" (Ashford, 2009, p309)

Remaining true to the multiple nature of multimedia design practice, I employ what Karen Tongson (2007, p356) refers to as a "critical experimentation with a kind of intellectual karaoke". In doing so, the research made use of oppositional, intersecting and overlapping theoretical treatments to address the objectives of the research.

As a post-apartheid South African, the use of postmodern theory and postcolonial theory was and remains implicit in my research. This research questions not only the (re)presentational practices of new media art and design but also the (re)presentation of sex and sexuality in the advent of new media. The post-structural underpinnings of postmodernism and post-colonialism uncover the politics at play in the production of knowledge which creates and sustains censorship and visibility (Spivak, 1987, p113).

Sex has been theorised by many discourses. But queer theory is a network of possibilities. Ashford (2009, p303) states that: "Gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" cannot constitute any gender, sex or sexuality in totality. In response Annamarie Jagose (1996, [sp]) describes, queer theory as critical methodologies which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between biological sex, gender and sexual desire, specifically in terms of supposed original hetronormativity.

Finally, according to Andrew Feenberg (2002, p28) an imperative alternative to totality of traditional accounts of theorising, especially pertaining to technology is conceived by post-human critique of humanism. The post-human critique argues, according to Feenberg (2002, p29), that categories or distinctions (such as race, gender and sexuality) must be defined by the terms which allowed them to be conceived initially and that the practice of post-humanism critique disallows the marginalisation of supposed 'deviants' and their fornications.

4. Art and Design - Don't compare me to that other affair

Anxieties appear when new media role players, artist and so called 'commercialised users' have to share and play nice. Discourse is conflicted. Commercial use and artistic use of new media is camped. Commercial technology and artistic technology is separated. Firstly, this section of the research outlines a fragmented chronology of theory aligned not only to the education of art and design but also the products thereof. Secondly the notions of legitimacy, authorship, commercialism and provocation as destabilised by new media are investigated. Will it be in the back seat of my car or in your office? Preferably during business hours, because you know how I like it...

4.1. Position 69

ZoyaKocur and Simon Leung (2009, p2) point out that the role of art continues to be evaluated against political, economic and technological fluctuations. Both 'globalisation' and 'new media' developed shifts of thinking and art practices *had* to address these.

The inclusion of visual culture into the cannon of art emerged as a radical political and 'artistic' movement during the 1960. According to Walker and Chaplin (1997, p35) civil rights movements prompted re-evaluations of many intellectual fields. For example the act of including artefacts outside the traditional art cannon assisted in the excavation of woman-created visuals; femininity, sexual difference and sexuality which also resulted in focus of masculine representations and later queer representations (Walker and Chaplin 1997, p38). Not only did the cannon relax a bit, it also took of its colonial bra and let loose. As so much concepts of the central, the periphery and 'the other' arouse. This expansion did not only recognise the representation of the periphery, or non-west, but also auto-representation by the periphery (Walker and Chaplin 1997, p38). Advancement in the corpus of the art cannon have been celebrated and honoured for its contributions, but there are still restrictions, most of these rely on 'creditability'.

Art historian Zerner (1982, p27) states that Visual Culture Theory brought with it 'a crisis in the discipline'. Art History had to radically revaluate its very nature and function. This included the autocratic character of the discourse, the distinction between high and low brow, aesthetics as a western import as well as the (gendered) agency of the artist (Harris, J 2001, p2-4).Consequently Art History reassembled itself as Radical Art History[4] which was more critically reflective and included popular culture as objects of study.

The connoisseur(art historians/curators), however, remained imperative, legitimised by interpretation and explaining visual cues (Zerner 1982, p27, Werkmeister 1982, p287, Walker &Chaplin 1997, p37). Zerner (1982:27) states that even though the connoisseur was momentarily destabilised, he holds the necessary skill and *objectivity* to evaluate the appropriate visuals suited for study. The agency of the artist still seems intact as well. To Andrea Fraser (2009, p72) the myth of art as non-economical validates that the individual nature *is* value. Without the 'particular genius of an artist' the contemporary art apparatus would collapse within itself. The creative/commercial argument will be detailed in *'I don't want your money honey'*.

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[4]Radical Art History, is also referred to as New or Critical Art History (Werkmeister, 1982:284)

In contrast, visual culture studies focus on a vast variety of two, three and four[5] dimensional visuals which people consume and produce as part of their cultural, social, economic and political lives (Walker&Chaplin 1997, p32). According to Malcolm Barnard (2001, p2) visual culture studies is inclusive of art, design, personal and body-related phenomena. Furthermore, Visual Culture studies developed, and remains, a multi-disciplinary discourse influenced by psychoanalysis, formalism and semiotics as well as post-discourses to mention but a few (Walker & Chaplin 1997, p35, Barnard 2001, p2).

According to Kocur and Leung (2009, p2) early "critical theory" normalised and infiltrated the language of art institutions. It is important to note that language of art institutions is addressed, but not the visual language of art practices. To address this sentiment Kocur and Leung (2009, p2) mention that that there is still no consensus to the status of critical theory in contemporary art.

The relationship between Art History and Visual Culture Studies is still not consolidated. Some theorists are aggressively asserting a clear distinction between the two, whilst others welcome a polygamous relationship (Wilson 2003, p225). More than the disruption of Visual Culture Theory, the advent of new media has disrupted the practice and premise of art and design discourse alike.

4.2.   You're freaky, but sexy

Liz Kotz(2009, p101) states in *Video Projections: The Spaces Between Screen* that the desire for new media art is not difficult to understand. Kotz is specifically addressing video art and television as a medium, in the context of this research a distinction can be drawn between video and interactive media as well as television screens and computer screens. Kotz(2009, p101) attains that "monitors are awkward, badly designed" and perhaps more irksome linked to "all the degraded industrial uses of technology". New media may be a continuation of percussive language, but as we know, each sexual encounter teaches us something new.

Since the avant-garde novelty of the internet has passed and is increasingly replaced by 'perceived' branding tools, connoisseurs appraise that work that begins or exists within the internet and commercial forms can never rise above their own limits to achieve the status of art (Greene 2004, p12). Duly noted, new media art is often critiqued for its lack of craft in relation to more traditional practices such as painting and sculpture. According to Rachel Greene (2004, p12) the insults range from: "veering too close to graphic design" to "exploiting cheap 'whizz bang' programming tricks". Jane Harris (2005, p24)arrived at the same conclusion stating that the 'new' relationships in technology and the arts could cynically be viewed as shock tactics and that these 'shock tactics' override any real concept. Carle Vance (2009, p135) states that new media have shorter histories than traditional art forms. Consequently new media technologies have less prestige and legitimacy. Vance (2009, p135) reiterates that the general circulation of new media in popular culture renders them vulnerable to 'artistic' critique. It is depressing nonetheless that this critique relies simply on the *perceived* qualities of design.

It is interesting to note that 'traditional'[6] design has also been critiqued for the use of new media. In a reflection of new media and design published in *Creative Review*, Nico McDonald (2004, p50) states that though designers, specifically in Britain, have tackled 'newish 'media such as litho printing, some designers remain reluctant to appropriate new media. According to McDonald (2004, p50) the character of British design did not value "web as precious as print". Another comparison can be drawn between

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[5]The fourth dimension relates to interactive realm which manifests itself in computer mediated technology.
[6] This relates to print media

Harris' statements that shock tactics override concept. McDonald (2004, p50) views that a lack of confidence in design conceptualisation results in an obsession with tools or 'effects'.

As stated in '*Position 69*', as much as Art History has been troubled by Visual Culture Theory as well as the advent of new media the agency of the artist remains intact. Perhaps one of the most troubling proprieties of New Media unsettles the author. Authorship, or plagiarism for the threatened, is merely a Ctrl C – Ctrl V away[7]. Greene (2004, p103) states that on the internet, images and text can be freely copied and multiplied; as such there is a feverish search for new forms of inscribing authorship, lest the agency of the art gadget runs out of batteries.

As much as I contest that design is a desirable bedfellow, another distinction is drawn from 'proper' use of new media technologies and 'public' use of technologies. According to Charles Leadbeater (2008, p1) more people have access to creative tools such as image making, cinematic expressions and performance. Consequently more people are creating and sharing creative expressions. However Leadbeater (2008, p3) cautions that banishing the gate keepers of *quality* culture will result in digital wastelands. Unorganised information replaces high quality literature and journalism. Amateur and pirated music and film are unbecoming the eminence of culture industries. It is interesting to note that Leadbeater is defending the culture *industry* rather than the proprieties of design.

4.3.   I don't want your money honey

> "...unlike those who pursue commercialised uses of technologies, these artists seek to make personal statements without regard for the commodity value of what they do. Like other artists who work in paint or wood or steel, these artists explore, and often subvert, both critical and technological potentials of new media." (Rush, M 2005, p9)

Statements such as the above declare a distinction between art as subversive and design as commercial. As contextualised in the introduction of this research, this avowal is enough to kick a lover out of my bed, not for eating toast but as an insult to my very methodology as a designer.

Walker and Chaplin (1997, p182) state that the idea that art is not business is a myth. Andrea Fraser (2009, p69) elaborates upon this argument by highlighting that even though art projects (conceivably in comparison to design practices) may not share themes, they share labour. Fraser's concept of labour reflects the 'invisible' effort which is not transferred to the product. This sentiment is an echo of Mark Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (in Durham and Kellner eds. 2001, p95) precepts:

> "No object has an inherent value; it is valuable only to the extent that it can be exchanged. The use value of art, its mode of being, is treated as a fetish; and the fetish, the work's social rating (misinterpreted as its artistic status) becomes its use value – the only quality which is enjoyed. The commodity function of art disappears only to be wholly realized when art becomes a species of commodity instead; marketable and interchangeable like an industrial product."

Additionally Fraser (2009, p69) reiterates that fundamental payment of artist by cultural institutions indicates that 'art as service' are a simple economical fact.

If new media artists and 'commercialised users' are bound by the same capitalist system and employ the same technologies it is bizarre to assume that 'commercial users' do not or cannot seek to make personal statements or critically explore and/or subvert the potentials of new media.

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[7]Cntl C and Ctrl V, or Apple C and apple v for Macintosh users, is a shortcut to copy and paste digital media.

Conversely, new media pokes a hole in commercialism; whereas new media is less occupied with capital and more with exchanging fluids. Greene (2004, p108) asserts that the net-community model is one of sharing and trading. Nothing is really owned online and according to Greene (2004, p108) capital is accumulated through usage[8]. Susan Buck-Morss (2009, p548) reiterates this statement by saying that internet technologies are affecting intellectual and artistic practice profoundly. Buck-Morss (2009, p538) continues in stating that if the creative process is inherently socialist, the value of creative artefacts increase by being shared

At times sexual liaisons are uncouthly interrupted by someone, possibly your mother, walking in on a feverish fucking. However an interjection is required. This argument does not insinuate that all art is commercial; it merely draws attention to the sentiment that not all design is informed by commercial agendas.

> "We propose a reversal of priorities in favour of more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication - a mind shift away from product marketing and toward the exploration and production of a new kind of meaning. The scope of debate is shrinking; it must expand. Consumerism is running uncontested; it must be challenged by other perspectives expressed, in part, through the visual languages and resources of design." (Garland, 2000, [sp])

There are valuable examples of critical awareness of new media designers. These examples must not be ushered out like cheap prostitutes. The *First Things First Manifesto* (1964 and 2000) illuminates critical responsiveness and expression from the earliest forms of design. *The Manifesto* is not only critical towards capitalist culture but embodies the methodologies of new media as it opens up radical dialogue between design, designers and design priorities.

In addition Elena Stanić and Corina Lipavskystate in *Atlas of Graphic Designers* (2009) states that design, from its very beginnings, has faced pressures of opposites. These include art/profession, form/function, medium/process and style/content. According to Stanić and Lipavsky (2009, p10) technological advances changes and generates paradigms in design. No longer does design focus on oppositional opposites but rather reconsideration, or rather redesign, self-reflection and criticality. Additionally the ethical aspects have lead designers to explore beyond commercial effectiveness towards social and political matters (Stanić&Lipavsky, 2009, p11). Ida Engholm (2010, p146) states that subsequently new media itself has become increasingly sensitive towards culture and humanities.

Furthermore, 'commercial users' are immersed in the new media techno-social landscape which offers them a unique insight. Walker and Chaplin (1997, p41) state that design scholars are generally more conscious of commerce and consider technological change more critically. By demystifying and demythologising the media, visual culture studies do not only inform artist and designer alike, but also arm them against blandishments and misrepresentation of totalising hegemonies (Walker and Chaplin 1997, p44).

Therefore a fucking between new media role players is desirable, wet and lush.

5. New Media – will do absolutely *anything*

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[8] It is however important to note that use-ability is scripted by vehicles of capitalism. This will be addressed in the notions of digital divide.

"Invent a new medium, and BANG! See how long it takes someone to mix a little sex in with the technology." (J.D. Biersdorfer, 2000, p123). Eruptions are not without stimulation. New media designers/artists do not only use communication technologies but employ them- they are as much technology as technology itself. According to Walker and Chaplin (1997, p196), new media designers/artists adapt technology, construct new structures of technology and produce the act of communication/representation itself. Kotz (2009, p102) reiterates that the increased mobility and flexibility of new media practices offer great possibilities for restructuring of core relationships. One can deduce that the new media artist and designer mould an*other* erotic unhinged from traditional constructs of patriarchal desire.

According to Greene (2004, p8) the screen is fundamental for experiencing the ever increasing digital new media. Kotz (2009, p102) identifies that light and projections inhabit capacities for distortion and illusion of rational relations. In a sense, pixel projections troubles inside/outside distinctions and interior life and external reality. Moreover, the nature of projected images, the shiny pixel, elicits fantasies of seeing 'things' that are not there – yet.

Mark B. N. Hansen (2004, p108) compels that *New Media*, per se, erases institutionalization of race (and by extent treatments of class, gender and sexuality) and allows for play with such signifiers. Therefore, within the virtual realm one can construct a completely new 'body', with or without social and cultural markers, or one can even choose to remain bodiless. Hansen (2004, p112) ultimately imagines a 'whatever' body and a 'whatever' body cannot be 'commodified' and neither can their sexual liaisons.

Josephine Ho (2003, p3) asserts that new media and the internet have exceeded the scope of hetronomative representation. The internet is an orgy. New and old information is dissimilated, kinky and virtuous pleasures are exchanged, and we are all bumping into each other. Therefore different sexual communities, new sexual counter cultures and discourses are formed. Ho (200, p:3) reiterates that the hybrid sexual subject is here and is announcing sexual revolution.

Communication technologies and the online virtual community have and continue to offer minority bodies identity playgrounds, sandcastles and spades. In the reading *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*, Editor Christopher Pullen (2010, p1) states that online opportunities have allowed deviant sexualities to simulate identities and test them within environments. Such experimentation and free play has been unimaginable before the advent of virtual worlds.

6. Will you play with me in the dark?

According to Ho(2003, p5), preceding censorship focused on political content of communication, but now censorship has changed its focus on sexual content. When, if possible, representing and including minority sexuality in Africa is like fucking without a condom. Sexual practices allude to the exotic or fecund justified 'uncivilised' notions of African bodies. Moreso queered sexuality has often been renounced as un-African (Horn 2006, Potgieter 2003 & van Zyl 2005). Therefore, attention directed towards on 'deviant' sexuality by Western, and at times global, projects tend to keep deviant bodies and desires closeted (van Zyl 2005, p23).

In March 2010 South African Minister of arts and culture Lulu Xingwana walked out of an exhibition held at Constitution Hill, Johannesburg. The exhibition featured work of activist-photographer *Zanele* Muholi. Journalist David Smith (2010, [sp]) reports that the government minister found the photographs of nude lesbian couples "immoral" and "against nation building". Futhermore, the minister was quoted in

saying "[it was time for] a long overdue debate on what is art and where do we draw the line between art and pornography" (Zanele Muholi… 2010, p[sp])

A page from the catalogue of the Innovative Women exhibition showing Zanele Muholi's photographs.

Sedgwick (1990, p302) notes modern culture is constantly blurring 'sex' and 'sexuality'. And virtually (pun intended) any visuals about sex are pornographic (Vance C, 2009, p132). According to Carole Vance (2009, p134) moral custodians continue to disseminate connotations between pornographic and obscene visuals to homosexual and sexual visualisations and such imagery is named seemingly mindless and masturbatory vehicles. Ho (2003, p2) elaborates in stating that new media technologies which facilitate any form of sex and sexuality have been judged as "nothing more than a selfish act of egoistic gratification". It seems that sex(ual) representation and the appropriation of new media share common critiques. As mentioned previously in '*You're freaky, but sexy'*, the perceived 'shock tactic' of new media, and now deviant desires, render concepts and provocations irrelevant or 'mindless' (Harris, 2005, p24).

In doing so, othered sexual visuals are discredited from dialog and debate. To eliminate a broad range of images, under the pretence of pornography, is to erase the diversity of not only imagery but also the complex language of desire, whether it is heteronormative or deviant. Vance (2009, p135) states that the totalitarian project of eliminating objectionable images in an attempt to change the culture that produces them is short sighted. Such extreme strategies illuminate the resistance to question where sexual culture comes from and whether it calls upon transformation.

In an interview with Vivian Attwood (2001, [sp]), Muholi states that we can no longer pretend that the field of representation is heterosexual. Muholi (in Attwood (2001, [sp]), stresses that we need images to support our identities. Muholi (Smith 2010, [sp]) further advocates that gender non-conforming communities must be visualised and South Africa must be educated other(ed) sexualities. However, in a *Mail and Guardian* newspaper article of the preceding year, the question was raised whether the Muholi's sexual provocations would have the intended effect contained in the white walls of neo-liberal art galleries? (Perceptions challenged? 2009, p[sp])

Comparing print/traditional media and online Biersdorfer(2000, p124) states that it is the interactivity what really sets the two apart. It seems almost redundant to make this conclusion. I believe the point Biersdorfer is making is that the *user* censors rather than visual custodians of popular culture.

The internet as untamed, perhaps at the most unregulated, is growing at a phenomenal rate. According to Biersdorfer(2000, p126) the conjunction of users and innovative technology is "where the action is at!" In a South African research study Jeanne Prinsloo, Nicolene McLean and Relebohli Moletsane (2011,

p140) reports that we have twenty-two political lesbian aligned web spaces. It is important to note that a large proportion of this research was uncovered within these sites and that I as a designer have visually contributed to four of these sites[9].

Prinsloo, McLean and Moletsane (2011, p140) state that the availability of 'pornography' on the internet has resulted in fear and moral panic by South African government and law enforcement. This has resulted in more attempts to censor and even ban alternative sexual representation.[10]

7. The Digital Divide

Although Pullen (2010, p1) states that the internet seemingly reveals new social worlds beyond the scope of the virtual and the disconected, the troubling word here is *seemingly* and that Pullen's 'disconected' are the offline bodies and *not* the bodies unable to conect.

Many developing nations, such as South Africa, are still grappling with post-industrial technologies. For such nations accessibility and literacy of modern technologies and online spaces are limited and even impracticable for a large majority of South African citizens. Prinsloo, McLean and Moletsane(2011, p173) evaluate that in 2011, only 15% of South Africans have access to the internet, 52% of internet users are male and only 17% of internet users have a higher education degree.

According to Wasserman (2003, p79) the widening *Digital Divide* between the developed and the developing is intertwined with political, economic, social and cultural factors. Prinsloo, McLean and Moletsane(2011, p136) reflected this phenomena in stating that, the digital divide is usually associated with the uneven destitution of South Africa to information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure between developed and developing nations but also relates to discrepancies over demographic differences such as class, race and gender.

Leadbeater (2008, p2) states that the web rewards those who are conected already. Networks, thinking and resources are reinforced in the privileged connected. Inadmitantly new media artists and designers are conected. New Media can mobilise global colonialism. It is not merely a question of who *has* access to new media, but who *can* access new media? It is not only a task of reading transformative media but using it. What happens to the disconnected? Are the connected aware of the power they wield? Do they take up the task of speaking? Do they speak others into their stories, their worlds? *W*ithin the lines of computer code and pixel can we, as artist and designers, remap an(other) erotic? Can we (re)present that which has remained mis-represented? Or do we all just adapt and navigate our techno-socio-sexual landscape?

8. CumClusion

Post-human advocate Linda Carroli (1997, p359) notes that no one ever used 'community' in a hostile sense, but she could see how traditional sense of community, as founded upon assumptions of agreement, rationality and collectivity, translates as alien in our post-modern play and our relation to the internet. The key distinction between real life community and virtual community is that of accountability

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[9] These include Joburg Pride, Out in Africa, OUT LGBT Wellbeing and GALA (the Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Witwatersrand)

[10] For additional reading on South African censorship of sexual imagery and internet usage consult "The internet and sexual identities: Exploring transgender and lesbian use of the internet in South Africa" in *EROTICS: Sex, rights and the internet* (2011)

and enforcement rather than collaboration and communication. The privileged, patriarchal, heteronormal and Eurocentric, is not so much accountable to the community but holds the community accountable. This is a reflection of power relations and binary hierarchies.

To Carroli (1997, p361), collaboration and communication inherit to new media and the internet offers a viable means of attending to desire, diversity and difference without subscribing to the legitimizing forces of consensus.

> "... taking on all comers, and if its resistances monitor and control passions, then it is possible to identify an oppositional force, another dissident kind of globalisation that eroticises difference, that tattoos its citizens with *'amor en Aztlán'* with love drawn from mythical and forbidden territories..." (Sandoval C, 2002, p21)

> "And perhaps I have to say that the landing-place I am really looking for isn't a place at all: it is a person, it's you. It's the one place they cannot build upon, buy or bomb because it doesn't exist anywhere they can find it." (Winterson, 2007, p169)

The internet creates an economy of ideas, where what you share is who you are. This economy should not remain restricted to online. According to Donald Lowe (as quoted in Pellegrin 2002, p141) culture, sexual and virtual, obtains a political force when it comes into contradiction with economic or political logics that try to re-function it for exploitation or domination.

Ho (2003, p7), argues that cyber-sex practitioners, whether they be active participants of stimulation or visual authors, have become sex liberators. In their acts to uphold basic rights of autonomy, freedom of expression, affinity, information and resistance they have become the emancipators of the new era of sexual oppression, the new era of censorship. New media did not bring forth the witness of contemporary sexual revolution, but new media participants have. New media practitioners are creating this new world day and night. We have "stayed up later than the net monitors", "slept less than the net police" and are "more creative and imaginative than net authorities" (Ho 2003, p7)

Jane Harris (2005, p23) states that the evolution of new media incorporates a complex range of processes and relationships of skills and skilled. New Media artists and designers are no longer lone masturbators in their shuttered, musty bedrooms. Production requires collaboration. We, South African artists and designers alike, must seize the spatial and temporal incongruities of (dis)connected bodies and communities. We must work *with* and not *for*. Queer theorist Elisabeth Freeman (2005, p57) propagates that the (dis)advantaged can provide delightful interruptions and momentarily discharge from elsewhere and other(ed) times and reveal naturalised fictions. May our lust be our freedom – or let my lust be my ruin if all ells is prescribed, presented to and for me. Fuck it!

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