

UNIT 1: BRIEF 4: HAZEL GRAHAM

“I’m a changingable feast, as are all of we.”

{Bella Baxter, *Poor Things* 2023}

Bella Baxter was the creation of Godwin Baxter (she calls him God) in the film *Poor Things* (2023)¹. Godwin was the creator (iterator?), Bella was the created (iterated?). Bella was a real human created/iterated by science (iteration)/desire. Can anything that is created/iterated be objectively ‘real’?

1. Godwin created Bella by taking the dead body a woman and inserting the brain of her still alive, unborn child, into her skull to create this feat of science.

Walter Benjamin argues that film is ‘reality’, by using the analogy of the cameraman to a surgeon in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Benjamin, 1986). Drawing a correlation between physical proximity to the subject and this producing ‘reality’, he argues just as a surgeon “cuts into the patient’s body”, the cameraman “penetrates deeply into its web”, through mechanical equipment (the camera), and it is therefore ‘real’. Bella and Godwin’s relationship is that of the cameraman and subject too; he cuts into her body to create her and they live together in close physical proximity and she is ‘real’, supporting Benjamins argument.

Through the process of subverting screenprinting and hacking my own print to create ten separate layers on ten individual pieces of plexiglass, I inverted the process of screenprinting creating a layered 3D object. I stacked the individual pieces, initially in order, with space between each layer, to expose the process and to challenge the view of the whole. Through a systematic and rigorous process of iterating, I ‘verted’² one hundred times, one frame at a time. Each formation was the same ‘reality’ – parts of a landscape – but depending on the orientation, direction and formation of the layers it looked like everything and anything in between; a “changeable feast” perhaps? This process drew my attention to the role of the creator/iterator and the influence they have on the iteration/creation through choice in placement of elements. Just as Godwin was the creator of Bella, his iterative process of science, (and her iterative process of herself) was influenced by his (her) desire and choices, that were pertinent and evident in her (her) creation (iterations). Therefore challenging the view of the ability to create an iteration of ‘objective reality’.

2. Verted: Vert is ‘to turn’. To subvert screenprinting, I iterated through all the verts I could find: invert (the process of printing on separate layers), revert (from the back), divert (placement of layers in random order), avert (turning the whole stack), vertical (initial orientation of the stack), vertigo (dizzy from the animation of all 100 iterations), convert (changing the order so the whole was something else), extrovert (largest layer first), introvert (smallest layer first).

The process of iterating highlights an argument of creator v created. Benjamin holds proximity as 'reality', but when dissecting the process of film making the numerous iterations involved (rehearsing, acting, wardrobe, make up, lighting, sets, multiple takes, filming out of sequence, editing, grading, sound, publicity, circulation), when stitched together with the director's (creator's) desires or values, will influence the created: an objective reality cannot be achieved. Equally graphic design communication, as a discipline, not only goes through a series of iterations in creation, but the graphic designer themselves (the creator) will always have some part of influence on the 'reality' of what they are creating, as no matter which way you look at it, how elements are ordered, placed, iterated, will affect the output. (Discussed at length by Wim Crouwel and Jan Van Toorn in *The Debate: The Legendary Contest of Two Giants of Graphic Design*, 2008).

Although, if you choose to believe God was the original 'creator' and we are all the 'created', we could question, are we real? In the words of Alasdair Gray "You, dear reader, have now two accounts to choose between and there can be no doubt which is most probable" (*Poor Things*, 1992).³

3. In the spirit of being 'real' (transparent?) you should be aware that this is the seventh iteration of this essay, so is it 'real' or a constructed reality? Additionally, this is one iteration of this essay, that could easily have been about adhoc-ism as coined by Jencks and Silver in *Adhocism, The Case for Improvisation* (1972); 'auras' as discussed by Walter Benjamin in conjunction with time and space noted by Spivak in '*The Politics of Translation*' (1993); or Process as manifested by Maura et al in *Conditional Design Manifesto* (2013). All of which would have influenced this creation.

References

Benjamin, W. (1935). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. London: Penguin Books.

Gray, A. (1992). *Poor Things*. London: Bloomsbury

Poor Things (2023) Directed by Yorgos Lanthimos [Feature film]. UK: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures International.

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Crouwel, W. Toorn, J. V. Poynor, R., Edited by Frederique Huygen and De, V. (2015). *The Debate : The Legendary Contest of Two Giants of Graphic Design*. New York: The Monacelli Press.