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Abstract

Ways of Seeing

"Images ... define our experiences more precisely in areas where words are inadequate." (Berger 33)
"Different skins, you know, different ways of seeing the world." (Morrison)

The research question animating this article is: 'How does an individual creative worker re-present themselves as a contemporary - and evolving - brand?' Berger notes that the "principal aim has been to start a process of questioning" (5), and the raw material energising this exploration is the life's work of Richard Morrison, the creative director and artist who is the key moving force behind The Morrison Studio collective of designers, film makers and visual effects artists, working globally but based in London. The challenge of maintaining currency in this visually creative marketplace includes seeing what is unique about your potential contribution to a larger project, and communicating it in such a way that this forms an integral part of an evolving brand - on trend, bleeding edge, but reliably professional. One of the classic outputs of Morrison's oeuvre, for example, is the title sequence for Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*.

Passion cannot be seen yet Morrison conceives it as the central engine that harnesses skills, information and innovative ways of working to deliver the unexpected and the unforgettable. Morrison's perception is that the design itself can come after the creative artist has really seen and understood the client's perspective. As he says: "What some clients are interested in is 'How can we make money from what we're doing?'" Seeing the client, and the client's motivating needs, is central to Morrison's presentation of self as a brand: "the broader your outlook as a creative, the more chance you have of getting it right". Jones and Warren draw attention to one aspect of this dynamic: "Wealthy and private actors, both private and state, historically saw creative practice as something that money was spent on - commissioning a painting or a sculpture, giving salaries to composers to produce new works and so forth. Today, creativity has been reimagined as something that should directly or indirectly *make* money" (293). As Berger notes, "We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves...The world-as-it-is is more than pure objective fact, it includes consciousness" (9, 11). What is our consciousness around the creative image?

Individuality is central to Berger's vision of the image in the "specific vision of the image-maker...the result of an increasing consciousness of individuality, accompanying an increasing awareness of history" (10). Yet, as Berger argues "although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing" (10). Later, Berger links the meanings viewers attribute to images as indicating the "historical experience of our relation to the past...the experience of seeking to give meaning to our lives" (33). The seeing and the seeking go hand in hand, and constitute a key reason for Berger's assertion that "the entire art of the past has now become a political issue" (33). This partly reflects the ways in which it is seen, and in which it is presented for view, by whom, where and in which circumstances.

The creation of stand-out images in the visually-saturated 21st century demands a nuanced understanding of ways in which an idea can be re-presented for consumption in a manner that makes it fresh and arresting. The focus on the individual also entails an understanding of the ways in which others are valuable, or vital, in completing a coherent package of skills to address the creative challenge to hand. It is self-evident that other people see things differently, and can thus enrich the broadened outlook identified as important for "getting it right". Morrison talks about "little core teams, there's four or five of you in a hub... [sometimes] spread all round the world, but because of the Internet and the way things work you can still all be connected". Team work and members' individual personalities are consequently combined, in Morrison's view, with the core requirement of passion. As Morrison argues, "personality will carry you a long way in the creative field".

Morrison's key collaborator, senior designer and creative partner/art director Dean Wares lives in Valencia, Spain whereas Morrison is London-based and their clients are globally-dispersed. Although Morrison sees the Internet as a key technology for collaboratively visualising the ways in which to make a visual impact, Berger points to the role of the camera in relation to the quintessential pre-mechanical image: the painting. It is worth acknowledging here that Berger explicitly credits Walter Benjamin, including the use of his image (34), as the foundation for many of Berger's ideas, specifically referencing Benjamin's essay "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction". Noting that, prior to the invention of the camera, a painting could never be seen in more than one place at a time, Berger suggests that the camera foments a revolutionary transformation: "its meaning changes. Or, more exactly, its meaning multiplies and fragments into many meanings" (19). This disruption is further fractured once that camera-facilitated image is viewed on a screen, ubiquitous to Morrison's stock in trade, but in Berger's day (1972) particularly associated with the television:

> The painting enters each viewer's house. There it is surrounded by his wallpaper, his furniture, his mementoes. It enters the atmosphere of his family. It becomes their talking point. It lends its meaning to their meaning. At the same time it enters a million other houses and, in each of them, is seen in a different context. Because of the camera, the painting now travels to the spectator, rather than the spectator to the painting. In its travels, its meaning is diversified. (Berger, 19-20)

Even so, that image, travelling through space and time is seen on the screen in a sequential and temporal context: "because a film unfolds in time and a painting does not. In a film the way one image follows another, their succession constructs an argument which becomes irreversible. In a painting all its elements are there to be seen simultaneously." Both these dynamics, the still and the sequence, are key to the work of a visual artist such as Morrison responsible for branding a film, television series or event. But the works also create an unfolding sequence which tells a different story to each recipient according to the perceptions of the viewer/reader. For example, instead of valorising Gilliam's *Brazil*, Morrison's studio could have been tagged with Annaud's *Enemy at the Gates* or, even, the contemporary Sky series, Niel Jordan's *Riviera*. Knowing this sequence, and that the back catalogue begins with The Who's *Quadrophenia* (1979), changes the way we see what the Morrison Studio is doing now.

Ways of Working

Richard Morrison harnesses an evolutionary metaphor to explain his continuing contribution to the industry: "I've adapted, and not been a dinosaur who's just sunk in the mud". He argues that there is a need to explore where "the next niche is and be prepared for change 'cause the only constant thing in life is change. So as a creative you need to have that known." Effectively, adaptation and embracing innovation has become a key part of the Morrison Studio's brand. It is trumpeted in the decision that Morrison and Ware made when they decided to continue their work together, even after Ware moved to Spain. This demonstrated, in an age of faxes and landlines, that the Morrison Studio could make cross country collaboration work: the multiple locations championed the fact that they were open for business "without boundaries".

There was travel, too, and in those early pre-Internet days of remote location Morrison was a frequent visitor to the United States. "I'd be working in Los Angeles and he'd be wherever he was [...] we'd use snail mail to actually get stuff across, literally post it by FedEx [...]." The intercontinental (as opposed to inter-Europe) collaboration had the added value of offering interlocking working days: "I'd go to sleep, he wakes up [...] We were actually doubling our capacity." If anything, these dynamics are more entrenched with better communications. Currah argues that Hollywood attempts to manage the disruptive potential of the internet by "seeking to create a 'closed' sphere of innovation on a global scale [...] legitimated, enacted and performed within relational networks" (359). The Morrison Studio's own

dispersed existence is one element of these relational networks.

The specific challenge of technological vulnerability was always present, however, long before the Internet: "We'd have a case full of D1 tapes" - the professional standard video tape (1986-96) - "and we'd carefully make sure they'd go through the airport so they don't get rubbed [...] what we were doing is we were fitting ourselves up for the new change". At the same time, although the communication technologies change, there are constants in the ways that people use them. Throughout Morrison's career, "when I'm working for Americans, which I'm doing a lot, they expect me to be on the telephone at midnight [because of time zones]. [...] They think 'Oh I want to speak to Richard now. Oh it's midnight, so what?' They still phone up. That's constant, that never goes away." He argues that American clients are more complex to communicate with than his Scandinavian clients, giving the example that people assume a UK-US consistency because they share the English language. But "although you think they're talking in a tongue that's the same, their meaning and understanding can sometimes be quite a bit different." He uses the example of the A4 sheet of paper. It has different dimensions in the US than in the UK, illustrating those different ways of seeing.

Morrison believes that there are four key constants in his company's continuing success: deadlines; the capacity to scope a job so that you know who and how many people to pull in to it to meet the deadline; librarian skills; and insecurity. The deadlines have always been imposed on creative organisations by their clients, but being able to deliver to deadlines involves networks and self-knowledge: "If you can't do it yourself find a friend, find somebody that's good at adding up, find somebody that's good at admin. You know, don't try and take on what you can't do. Put your hand up straight away, call in somebody that can help you". Chapain and Comunian's work on creative and cultural industries (CCIs) also highlights the importance of "a new centrality to the role of individuals and their social networks in understanding the practice of CCIs" (718).

Franklin et al. suggest that this approach, adopted by The Morrison Studio, is a microcosm of the independent film sector as a whole. They argue that "the lifecycle of a film is segmented into sequential stages, moving through development, financing, production, sales, distribution and exhibition stages to final consumption. Different companies, each with specialized project tasks, take on responsibility and relative financial risk and reward at each stage" (323). The importance that Morrison places on social networks, however, highlights the importance of flexibility within relationships of trust - to the point where it might be as valid to engage someone on the basis of a history of working with that person as on the basis of that person's prior experience. As Cristopherson notes, "many creative workers are in vaguely defined and rapidly changing fields, seemingly making up their careers as they go along" (543).

The skills underlying Morrison's approach to creative collaboration, however, include a clear understanding of one's own strength and weaknesses and a cool evaluation of others, "just quietly research people". This people-based research includes both the capabilities of potential colleagues, in order to deliver the required product in the specified time frame, along with research into creative people whose work is admired and who might provide a blueprint for how to arrive at an individual's dream role. Morrison gives the example of Quentin Tarantino's trajectory to directing: "he started in a video rental and all he did is watch lots and lots of films, particularly westerns and Japanese samurai films and decided 'I can do that'". One of his great pleasures now is to mentor young designers to help them find their way in the industry. That's a strategy that may pay dividends into the future, via Storper and Scott's "traded and untraded interdependencies" which are, according to Gornostaeva, "expressed as the multiple economic and social transactions that the participants ought to conduct if they wish to perpetuate their existence" (39).

As for the library skills, he says that they are crucial but a bit comical:

> It's a bit like being a constant librarian in old-fashioned terms, you know, 'Where is that stuff stored?' Because it's not stored in a plan chest anymore where you open the drawer and there it is. It's now stored in, you know, big computers, in a cloud. 'Where did we put that file? Did we dump it down? Have we marked it up? [...] Where's it gone? What did we do it on?'

While juggling the demands of technology, people and product The Morrison brand involves both huge confidence and chronic insecurity. The confidence is evident in the low opinion Morrison has of the opportunities offered by professional disruptor sites such as 99designs: "I can't bear anything like that. I can see why it's happening but I think what you're doing is devaluing yourself even before you start [...] it would destroy your self-belief in what you're doing". At the same time, Morrison says, his security is his own insecurity: "I'm always out hunting to see what could be next [...] the job you finish could be your last job."

Ways of Branding

Christopherson argues that there is "considerable variation in the occupational identities of new media workers among advanced economies. In some economies, new media work is evolving in a form that is closer to that of the professional [in contrast to economies where it is] an entrepreneurial activity in which new media workers sell skills and services in a market" (543). For The Morrison Studio, its breadth, history and experience supports their desire to be branded as professional, but their working patterns entirely resonate with, and are integrated within, the entrepreneurial. Seeing their activity in this way is a juxtaposition with the proposition advanced by Berger that:

> The existing social conditions make the individual feel powerless. He lives in the contradiction between what he is and what he would like to be. Either he then becomes fully conscious of the contradiction and its causes, and so joins the political struggle for a full democracy which entails, among other things, the overthrow of capitalism; or else he lives, continually subject to an envy which, compounded with his sense of powerlessness, dissolves into recurrent day-dreams (148).

The role of the brand, and its publicity, is implicated by Berger in both the tension between what an individual is and what s/he would like to be; and in the creation of an envy that subjugates people. For Berger, the brand is about publicity and the commodifying of the future. Referring to publicity images, Berger argues that "they never speak of the present. Often they refer to the past and always they speak of the future". Brands are created and marketed by such publicity images that are often, these days, incorporated within social media and websites. At the same time, Berger argues that "Publicity is about social relationships, not objects [or experiences]. Its promise is not of pleasure, but of happiness: happiness as judged from the outside by others. The happiness of being envied is glamour." It is the dual pressure from the perception of the gap between the individual's actual and potential life, and the daydreaming and envy of that future, that helps construct Berger's powerless individual.

Morrison's view, fashioned in part by his success at adapting, at not being a dinosaur that sinks into the mud, is that the authenticity lies in the congruence of the brand and the belief. "A personal brand can help you straight away but as long as you believe it [...] You have to be true to what you're about and then it works. And then the thing becomes you [... you] just go for it and, you know, don't worry about failure. Failure will happen anyway".

Berger's commentary on publicity is partially divergent from branding. Publicity is generally a managed message, on that is paid for and promoted by the person or entity concerned. A brand is a more holistic construction and is implicated in ways of seeing in that different people will have very different perceptions of the same brand. Morrison's view of his personal brand, and the brand of the Morrison Studio, is that it encompasses much more than design expertise and technical know-how. He lionises the role of passion and talks about the importance of ways of managing deadlines, interlocking skills sets, creative elements and the insecurity of uncertainty.

For the producers who hire Morrison, and help build his brand, Berger's observation of the importance of history and the promise for the future remains key to their hiring decisions. Although carefully crafted, creative images are central to the Morrison Studio's work, it is not the surface presentation of those images that determines the way their work is perceived by people in the film industry, it is the labour and networks that underpin those images. While Morrison's outputs form

part of the visual environment critiqued in *Ways of Seeing*, it is informed by the dynamics of international capitalism via global networks and mobility. Although one of myriad small businesses that help make the film industry the complex and productive creative sphere that it is, Morrison Studios does not so much seek to create a public brand as to be known and valued by the small group of industry players upon whom the Studio relies for its existence. Their continued future depends upon the ways in which they are seen.

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