

Michael Wyatt

The development of a stimulating and evocative illustrative style.

<u>Contents:</u>	<u>Page:</u>
• 1. Abstract	2
• 2. Introduction	2
• 3. Why Illustration?	2
• 4. Aim	
○ 4.1 Context of Aim	3
○ 4.2 Objectives	8
• 5. Investigation	
○ 5.1 Gun Crime	8
○ 5.2 David Bradley	9
○ 5.3 Post Traumatic stress Disorder	14
○ 5.4 Case Studies	
▪ 5.4.1 Grady Estle Harp	18
▪ 5.4.2 Salah_Jiad Almasoudi	18
○ 5.5 Image Philosophy	
▪ 5.5.1 Kant – Beauty	20
▪ 5.5.2 Ambiguity and Intention	20
▪ 5.5.3 ‘The modes’	21
○ 5.6 Texture	
▪ 5.6.1 Experiment	22
▪ 5.6.2 Impasto	24
○ 5.7 Digital Implementation	28
• 6. Conclusion	32
• 7. Evaluation	33
• 8. Bibliography	35

1. Abstract:

This paper is a report of my own personal investigation into illustration. It covers my research and thoughts as I attempt to create a unique style of work that will best suit a specific theme. The organic relationship my research has to my illustrations, is reflected in the progressive style in which my report is written.

2. Introduction:

The contents of this report document my investigation into the development of an informed and reasoned response to the subject of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and its related somatic symptoms. It follows an attempt to cultivate a style that will break free from the constraints of the current norm; Vector illustrations.

This process includes a general exploration of many small components that manifest themselves within the illustrative style developed. The project predominately covers the exploration and experimentation of how to create a powerful image, through visual components and image philosophy.

3. Why Illustration?

Illustration has had, maintains, and will prevail to hold a major role in human society. It is the communication of a theme or story through a visual context. The magic behind which is that anybody can experience, and form a valid opinion on an image. The power of the subjective mind is something that excites; illustrators will try and manipulate this through many different techniques, attempting to stir a powerful response that will captivate a large demographic of viewers.

Perhaps in modern society, which is driven by the media, it could be argued that never before have we been so exposed to 'image'. I am sure we are not even aware of the severity that advertising has in shaping our subconscious mind.

Our current society is able to support such a rich diversity of illustration through mediums such as the Internet, magazines, and posters. But illustration was already important to our prehistoric ancestors. In the 'Fumane' cave in Verona, northern Italy, perhaps the oldest cave paintings were discovered in 2002. They are estimated

to be between 32,000 and 36,500 years old. This shows just how inherently important visual communication is to our species. This innate power is something that has always intrigued and stimulated me, and is the driving force behind this project.

(Dr. David Whitehouse, 2000.)

Tanja Szekessy(cited in Illustration now, Ed Julius Wiedemann, 2005)explains in three points what opportunities illustrators have open to them,

- “1-The possibility of using ancient manual as well as brand new technical means and everything in between,
- 2- they are not restricted to a particular place and can,
- 3-diffuse in the public perception their way of looking at things, as regards figurativeness and content, more or less modestly.”

I find this quote inspiring because it can often be daunting when comparing oneself to other artists. This opinion suggests that actually, we are fortunate to be able to reference these greats and build on what they were exploring.

4.Aim:

4.1 Context of Aim:

Illustrative techniques have progressed synchronically with developments in technology. As early as the 15th century, books were available with woodcut illustrations. This is an example of how the technology not only had an effect on how the images were produced, but also the stylistic qualities. Take this example from a 15th-century German block book, ‘*Ars bene moriendi.*’

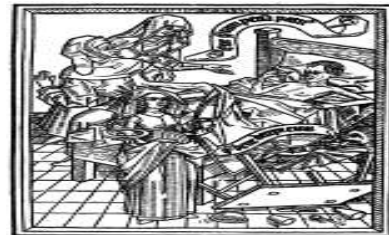


Fig. 1

- *Notice how shading is created by the use of thin engraved line segments.*
- *The practise of carving the wood restricted the artist to the use of sharp angular lines, hence defining the overall style of the piece.*

The 16th and 17th century saw the development of etching and engraving, whereas a real breakthrough occurred in the late 18th century; The invention of lithography enabled images to be produced easier, and to a higher standard of quality and detail. This technological advancement had an immediate impact on scale of production and depth of diversity, consequently spawning the 'Golden Age' of illustration.

The end of the 20th century saw the invention of the optic pen, which enables artists to render a completely digital image. Today, as computers have become more readily available in the home, almost anybody can create digital artwork. The relative ease at which people can expose their work by simply uploading it onto the Internet contributes to the incalculable body of work found online. (Wikipedia,[2007])

With this new creative accessibility we should ask whether we are diluting empowering artworks with a sea of mediocrity. Of course part of the beauty of illustration is that anybody can express his or her own feelings in any medium. However, in this digital world, are the illustrations we see around us really pushing boundaries and concepts, or have they stagnated somehow?

From my own experience I believe it is almost too easy to let the computer either create an image for you, or heavily influence your initial intentions. Working in a package such as Photoshop, tweaking levels, brightness and saturation will give you a quick and often beautiful output, but from my own perspective it is too easy to let this overpower what you are really trying to communicate.

It is plausible that we have let talented computer technicians create aesthetic digital images that are void of any real emotive challenges. Technology has opened up new doorways, but is it now restraining our development, and suffocating real creative ideas? I believe the answer to this is mixed. There will always be a saturation of 'vogue', but at the same time there will always be artists pushing the boundaries of perception.

Take for example this tutorial I found at <http://www.deviantart.com/view/30517486/>, which explains the process of Vectorising, a technique I believe to be contributing to the array of spurious images we find ourselves surrounded by.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

I understand and recognise that vector illustrations require skill. However, I believe the majority are depressingly lifeless.

Industry is driven by consumer demand, which dictates what will be produced, and at the moment our society has a disturbing asphyxiation with perfection. I believe the mainstreams disregard for imperfection thins the richness of life.

Look at how bland and dull this *Fig. 3* is. It is clear to see the vast chasm of warmth and personality between the two images when compared.

It is true that photographs can be beautiful, exploiting light, textures and form, imposing powerful emotions onto the viewer. However, there are special elements that a photo cannot actually capture, as we do not actually see them in reality, instead

we feel them. Illustration enables the fantastical to become reality, to allow the imagination of the beholder to run wild and stir feelings that even the most stunning photo cannot actually capture. *Fig. 3* is a perfect example of how we have stagnated. It appears to me that the vectored image is dead; it is a lessened reproduction of the photograph, which has been produced in an already restricted medium. Any qualities the photograph did have, have been lost. I believe illustration should be used to exaggerate and enhance, not to produce boring, lifeless mimics of other images.

An example of how I consider this vacant style affecting mainstream illustration is in the work of Jason Brooks. His vector illustrations have been very successful, but my own subjective opinion of his production style, no matter how talented it may be, is that his images are shallow, idealist, and boring. It fails me to see how someone can play with such a powerful theme as sex, and create such arid responses. There is nothing to his illustrations, just the same hollow smirk on the face of every character he depicts.

Fig. 4

Here we see two female figures that have no expression. They have no contrast in form, they have no contrast in hue, and yet they have

Fig. 5

This image does require certain technical skill, but it has very little to it; The element of sex is addressed and almost immediately dispelled. There is a lack of human qualities conveyed through the central character. In my opinion, she is lifeless.



Of course Brooks is only one example, and there are vector illustrations that do have depth and expression, take for example Arthur De Pins. The characters in his pieces exude much more life, and the emotions represented are sampled from a broader spectrum than those of Brooks. It should not be the case that an image is judged solely on the characters used, as of course, Brook's cliental may be slightly more demanding of a particular style, but even where style is concerned, De Pins manipulates colours and shapes in a far more engaging way.

Fig. 6

People's features have been over exaggerated to supply character and personality to the image. Notice the extreme tapering of the waist contrasted with the curvature of the hips on the central blonde female, creates a suggestive shape



Fig. 7

Once again De Pins has over exaggerated the form of the body to create vibrant and dynamic shapes that cut up the visual space of the image. The two voluptuous curves of the women frame the central character.



4.2 Objectives:

4.2 Objectives

Currently, I believe our visual world is crowded with a particular style of vectorised graphics. The purpose of this body of work is to explore the process of creating a stimulating and provocative illustrative style. This illustrative style should be based around a thorough understanding of the topic, and reasoned visual investigation. My initial intention is to create an image that will instantly grab the viewer's attention, and then hold them to thought as they contemplate what exactly is going on. I believe that I will only be able to do so, if I explore an issue that actually 'grabs me'.

I understand in the professional world that you are given a text or theme to formulate a response to, through an illustration. However, in the same vein as *Joel Lardner*, when he says, "I use self-initiated projects to reinvent and regenerate my artwork," I plan for this project to be a personal response, where I can play with ideas and develop an individual style.

I am also interested with the material properties of other mediums distant to computer graphics. I will investigate whether digital illustration has flattened the texture and palpability of traditional mediums, losing important qualities in the process.

5. Investigation:

Current issues on the news and in other media are something that unites the whole of our society. Individual people have mixed responses to works of art, and parallels can be drawn in people's responses to news stories. It is intriguing that some people can be accepting or understanding of controversial topics whereas others can be completely disgusted and even angry. Social debates like these provide excellent foundations to build an engaging illustrative style on top of. It would be interesting to challenge my own 'gut reaction' to a story and develop a balanced opinion, and rounded visual response.

Whilst reading the news one topic stood out, this was the issue of gang culture, and gun crime in particular. It angers me that there are people in the world who encourage violence, and consciously influence younger generations through their own

warped ideologies. I have created a response to this that tries to convey some issues that were raised in my research.

Weapons, especially firearms are designed to fit our body to anthropometrical measurements. They are meant to feel comfortable in our hands. Anything that has these qualities becomes beautiful. The silhouette of the gun has been used to show this aesthetic quality.

At the same time, the devastating consequences experienced when the weapon is actually used for its intended purpose are often clouded by the image associated with owning one. This is conveyed (crudely) by what exactly constitutes the shape (a man shot in the head.)



Fig.8

I didn't really enjoy working on this. It seemed very contrived and the end product is not powerful enough. What I had enjoyed while exploring the topic was trying to communicate a meaningful message, and making people aware of issues surrounding a theme.

5.1 David Bradley:

David Bradley killed his uncle and aunt, both aged 70, and their two sons 44 and 41, over a five-hour period.

He pleaded guilty to manslaughter charges on the grounds of diminished responsibility after two psychiatrists ruled he was mentally ill at the times of the killings.

The BBC reports that the prosecuting Toby Hedworth QC said,

“Both of these eminent doctors are of the view that the defendant has suffered lifelong behavioural and emotional difficulties, which worsened following his 1995 discharge from the Army.

“His mental state deteriorated more acutely in 1997.”

"They both agree at the time of the killings that the defendant was suffering from a mental disorder which constitutes an abnormality of the mind."

The article goes on to say,

“Mr Hedworth said the defence's expert believed Bradley was suffering post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after serving with the Army in Northern Ireland.”

I saw this initial report on David Bradley while looking at gun crime and I was enraged. I could understand how mental illness can change a persons reasoning, but surely it can't turn someone against people closest to them, especially to these extremes.

Other reports (“The Scotsman” newspaper, 2007) on Bradley claim that he,

“Contacted a veterans' group nine years ago to say he could not cope after seeing four colleagues killed in a "friendly fire" incident in Iraq in 1991.”

Perhaps this affected Bradley in a way I cannot understand. This article also states,

“All warfare comes with a mental health price. At one stage it was taking 12 years for people to come forward and admit they had a problem. Now the average is under a year for those leaving Iraq. *Images of warfare on television and in the media can trigger flashbacks which result in more referrals.*”

The ‘trigger’ was something that I thought could be exploited visually. Fig.9 is my first response as to what a character such as Bradley might have felt if a trigger, the TV in this instance, sparked his flashbacks.

I was also concerned with how to represent the discomfort of the central character. I thought of situations when I have felt uncomfortable, and responded with the following ideas,

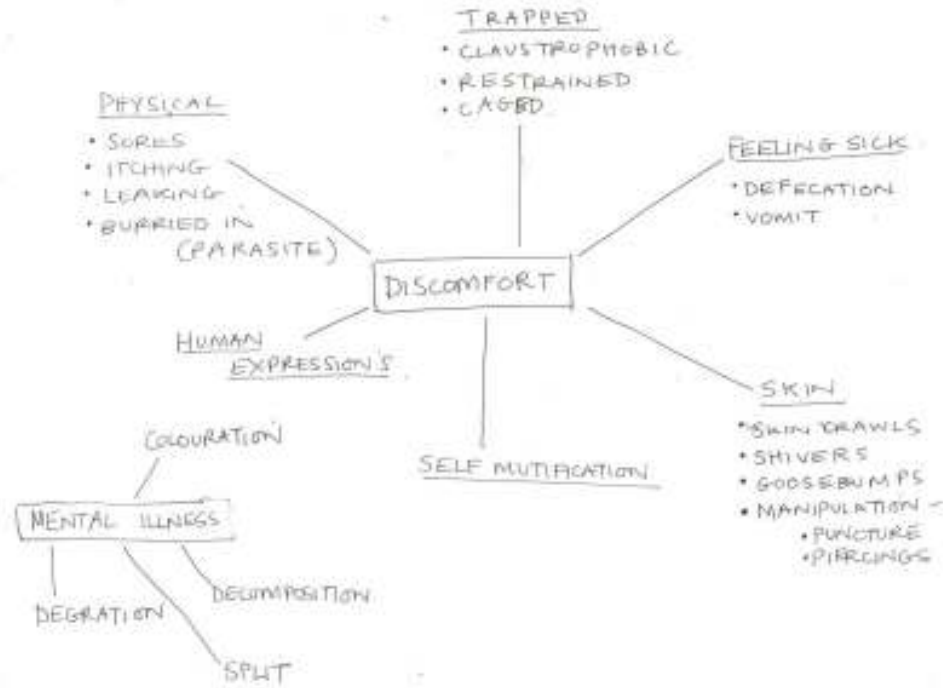


Fig. 9

The character is suspended by fishhooks and wires, which create a sense of weightlessness. This is juxtaposed with the pressure and distress the character is under to emphasise his helplessness. I have purposely chosen the strong reds to contradict with the familiar serene blue of the TV. The actual body of the character is once again composed of collaged photos, as I wanted to test how its detail would contrast with the washed background.



The manipulation of the human form in an uncontrollable manner creates strong feelings of discomfort, and there is a definite power in the way the flesh is twisted and compressed in Fig.9. This is something I chose to explore in a less violent manner, but with different metaphorical connotations.



Fig. 10

The 'army boot' depicted in Fig.10 is symbolic of authority and violence in many ways. It can be used to crush and bruise human skin, and the image of a heavy boot to the face is one of which we are very familiar with as film culture has become more and more explicit. I explored how the laces of the boot could pull and distort the face.

The experiences that soldiers have can trap them, bind them, shape them and shut them up. The face is blank and lifeless; expression is moulded solely from the taut cords spanning the face.

From this piece I was able to extract a specific element that interested me, which I wanted to investigate further, this was the manipulation and disfigurement of a submissive form. What I liked about this idea is that the viewer is more likely to empathise with the subject; human intuition wants to find out why the subject is so passively suffering.



Fig .11

In Fig. 11 I really tried to experiment purely with form, focusing on what feelings can be aroused when just the human body is used. There are some limbs which are flaccid and concealing, whilst others stretched out, in an obvious struggle. I believe the idea of conflict within on 'body' represents the confusion and constant mental debate that a PTSD victim may endure. One again, the use of suspension contradicts the feeling of distress with lack of control.

5.3 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:

I had played with some immediate visual responses to what I had read about David Bradley, but I was inquisitive to learn more about the mental illness he was afflicted by, and whether I could abstract any elements into a visual interpretation.

“Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a term for certain severe psychophysical consequences of exposure to, or confrontation with, stressful events that the person experiences as highly traumatic.”(Wikipedia,[2007])

People who suffer from PTSD lose a sense of conscious behaviour and will possibly lack remorse. The illness has four defined characteristics;

1. Intrusion: The sufferer is “plagued by recurrent nightmares or flashbacks.” These experiences consequently raise anxiety levels, and are born from an inability to process the experience of the trauma.
2. Hyperarousal: Extreme nervousness means high pitched sounds or sudden movements may ‘trigger’ a ‘fight or flight’ situation.
3. Avoidance: A combination of intrusion and hyperarousal inevitably lead to high levels of distress. The subject will revert to a state of avoidance and emotional detachment. This has a circular effect, reinitiating intrusion and hyperarousal.
4. Dissociation: This is another example of how the sufferer tries to deal with their symptoms. Derealisation and depersonalisation only segregate the victim further from reality.

(Wikipedia, [2007])

These four corner stones lay a foundation, on which the symptoms of the illness are built. According to Wikipedia,

“Symptoms can include the following:

- nightmares,
- flashbacks,
- emotional detachment or
- numbing of feelings (emotional self-mortification or dissociation),
- insomnia,
- avoidance of reminders and extreme distress when exposed to the reminders ("triggers"),
- loss of appetite,

- irritability,
- hypervigilance,
- memory loss (may appear as difficulty paying attention),
- excessive startle response,
- clinical depression, and anxiety.”

(Wikipedia, [2007])

In light of these symptoms, the idea of flashbacks drove my visual exploration. I was also keen to further my investigation of inner conflict, and how the victim feels uncomfortable in society.

Fig. 12

I introduced flashes of colour into the style, as well as incorporating a decayed human face into the image.

I now wanted to explore how colour could be used to manipulate emotion, and perhaps reveal something about the victim.



Fig. 13

The abstract shapes laid over the face change the colour and context of what is underneath. The red areas also uncover memories of the past in the spatters of blood.

I like the different moods that each of these individual areas convey. However, I am unhappy with subject and will now reintroduce a more realistic approach.



Fig. 14

There are many qualities to this image.

Primarily, the visual composition is stimulating enough to catch the viewer's attention.

There is enough ambiguity for somebody to be interested in what exactly is going on.

The blindfold, puzzle pieces, and hooks have unique characteristics and connotations, but are at the same time subtle

The contrasting areas of colour work well together creating areas of cold submission, and areas of hot guilt, focused on the bloody hands.

I still believe the overall power of the image could be stronger.



I was happy with the visual products created from my initial response to the subject. I was unhappy with the lack of power my images had to this point; they do not seem to have any real depth.

Whilst reading further on PTSD I was intrigued to learn that some people believe the ‘flashback’ symptom is ‘culture bound.’ It has been suggested that the media driven society that we live in today, has contributed to the rise in reported ‘flashbacks’ amongst PTSD sufferers. According to an experiment conducted by the British Journal Of Psychiatry (2003, page 262),

“Six of 41 ex-POWs (14.6%) who met criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) reported flashbacks in the month prior to the CAPS interview at a combined frequency and intensity score of 4 or greater. None of 41 ex-POWs who did not meet criteria for PTSD reported flashbacks at this level of frequency and intensity. In contrast, 75 of 124 Vietnam era veterans (60%) who had been diagnosed with combat-related PTSD and were administered

the CAPS while participating in a Veterans Administration PTSD treatment program reported flashbacks at this level of severity.”

The above extract would suggest that the ‘flashbacks’ are a much more prominent part of this mental illness today, than say 70 years ago. Reasons for this would be our over exposure to mediums that we don’t make a conscious decision to view, and that instead saturate our everyday life. Perhaps extra incentives such as funding and benefits, issued as an act of compensation by the government, influence what people believe they should see, or how they talk about what the experience.

Others argue that actually in fact the ‘flashback’ is a ‘universal phenomenon’ that everyone can experience. Some explain that the reason it appears more prominent today is from the way it is actually defined. Bessel Van Der Kolk (British Journal Of Psychiatry, 2003, page 162) on the other hand suggests,

“Traumatic experiences are encoded in the brain in a manner akin to skills, habits and reflex actions, such that they are preserved with a timeless accuracy, which, in turn, accounts for the long-term effects of PTSD.”

This raises the issue of flashbacks being part of a natural process, which everyone has stored their own mind.

There is not enough evidence to conclude whether it is culture bound. On a personal level I believe that even if the terminologies have changed, we live in more visual world than society at the time of the first world war, and therefore it is quite feasible that sufferers of PTSD are reminded of their traumatic experiences more regularly through the mental stimulation of TV, Radio, and the internet.

I decided I would like to design a visual response to this, revisiting the method of showing the sufferer in the context of his/her culture. However, before I did so I needed to investigate how the style and actual technique of production, could inject more emotive power into my images.

5.4 Case studies:

5.4.1 Grady Estle Harp

Incised into *War Songs: Safewater Buoy 2*, a poem written in Vietnam, 1968:

Do you remember the day I surprised you
at the beer party in Da Nang and we raced
along the barbed wire beach until our
fatigues were so green with happy sweat
that we ended the game with a swim out
by the fishing buoy and that night after
waving goodbye from the helicopter I sat
and chuckled over your jokes
while they killed you.

Grady Estle Harp
Served in Vietnam, Navy, assigned to the Marine Corps,
7th Fleet Special Landing Forces, 228th Battalion,
Quang Tri Province, Da Nang, and the DMZ,
battalion surgeon, 1968-69
(www.nvvam.org)

I came across this poem on a website dedicated to Vietnam veterans. It helps them live day-to-day with the haunting memories of the past, by creating a community in which they can create and share artwork. This poem really struck me. I am not sure whether it was the way, or the context that it was written which did so. It is clear however, that the poem has an unbelievable sense of reality, humanness, and depth. With this in mind, I wondered if it was possible for me to create any kind of powerful image without experiencing first hand.

5.4.2 Salah Jiad Almasoudi

Salah is an Iraqi artist who saw his world turned upside-down at the age of 7. Bright colourful memories of his childhood were soon ravaged by war. Art transformed from a luxury into “a way to diffuse energy.”

His paintings reflect the pain and sadness of war. Once more they are full of depth and character. Although they are abstracted, it is easy to empathise with the forlorn characters depicted in his artwork. (Jeannette Batz, 2002)



Fig. 15

The way that this image has been produced lends itself to the overall effect of disturbance and depth.

The picture has been built up in many layers and this adds a real quality that is sadly lacking in digital illustration.



Fig. 16

Notice how the loose interpretation of the face, and piercing black eyes engage the viewer and hold them in a haunting stare.

The solemn stare contrasts serenely with the kinetic brush strokes use to paint the image.

When I look upon illustrative artworks such as Salah's paintings, I am immediately taken back by the visual and emotional profoundness that they induce. Once again I wonder if it is the actual experience of war that gives Salah's painting this plausibility.

Would Van Gogh have crafted such beautiful and personal paintings if he were not so emotionally charged by his manic depression? Or in the same vein, would Lord Byron or Virginia Wolf manipulate language in such a way to distil feeling and sensation to their purest?

Julia Kite (no date) is a journalist who suffers from OCD, she states that,

“We insist on trapping ourselves in the selfish and insular world of glorified mental illness.”

The inspiration I found from this article, and how I can draw parallels to my investigation is that I should not be preoccupied with striving to understand an illness I will hopefully never actually experience. Instead I should supply my own

interpretation and draw on my own similar experiences to craft an intelligent and overall emotive illustrative style. She goes on to say,

“A good writer will let the characters speak for themselves, let the experiences become the sole possession of this imaginary person darting around the manuscript.”

5.5 Image Philosophy:

Elgin Carver(no date), one of the Vietnam War veterans said, “intellectualisations of artists and war stories should always be suspect.” I am wary of diluting my own subjective responses to the topics I have covered, by looking too much at how other people have gone about the same concepts, as well as making up flowery analysis’ of why I choose to do this or that. The image should have enough to speak for itself, or at least suggest ideas.

It is important for me to explore some philosophical ideas about the power behind images, so that I choose to apply these concepts if they will add to the power of the illustration.

5.5.1 Kant-Beauty:

Kant is a philosopher who has a thesis which states that beauty can be constituted by, “the free harmonious play of imagination and understanding.” (Critique of Judgement, 1790). John Armstrong(no date) goes on to dissect this statement and explore what Kant is really implying. The general outcome of which yields some fruitful opinions.

Armstrong argues that Kant suggests imagination is to, “draw together or differentiate elements of the visual field according to pre-conceptual order.” What he suggests by this is that when we look at a picture our mind will categorise elements that have similar attributes. These elements are then compared to other contrasting groups of species within the picture. Our imagination is at play as it works out the visual composition of the piece.

The generalisation of separate elements into particular classes is our way of ‘understanding,’ such that if we define the general concept of ‘tree’ we can equally

apply it to more than one individual object. Armstrong states that our understanding is at play as we partake in, “the pursuit of generalisation, without its achievement.” If our understanding is at play then we are general trying in vein to complete a futile task. If I can execute this type of ‘beauty,’ then my piece will definitely become more captivating.

Kant has a fitting view of how this can be best described. He saw this process similar to that of Adam before the fall, where a God has created a world before us, which we cannot understand, yet we believe that we will grasp it and it will be comprehensible. (John Armstrong, no date)

5.5.2 Ambiguity and Intention:

Perhaps the essence of David Cohen’s (no date) article on ambiguity and intention is when he talks about ambiguities ability to, “arrest and creatively exploit discrepancies,” and, “test received boundaries of cognition.”

These characteristics tie hand in hand with Kant’s ideas of letting understanding play. Ambiguity also allows the viewer to bridge gaps in the cognitive process of analysing the image with his/her own experiences, increasing emotional attachment to the picture.

Cohen speaks of the advantages ambiguity brings to a work of art, but also warns that although it is the hallmark of very good art, it is also the opposite. It is important to craft ambiguity, almost to the point where it has become intention on the artists part.

5.5.3 The ‘modes’:

It seems that understanding what exactly constitutes a particular emotion aroused from a painting is a challenging if not impossible process. When other mediums of sensual stimulation such as music are concerned, it seems intuitive for use to dissect the composition into separate components which can combine to stimulate certain feelings. Why do we have this problem with visual stimulation? Are there simply too many different elements that contribute to the overall effect of an image, such as colour, tone, composition, texture and so on.

Poussin was a 17th century classical French painter. One of Poussin's most important patrons was Paul Freart de Chantelou. When Chantelou expressed dissatisfaction with regard to Poussin's painting of 'Ordination,' Poussin decided to explain his logic behind the style in which he painted. This explanation referred to the idea of 'modes', which had been traditionally applied to music.

Poussin suggested that in the same way that a piece of music is written in a specific mode depending on what it is that the piece is trying to arouse, an image can be composed in a similar way. For example, if a piece of music was written in the Dorian mode it would be trying to convey matters that were grave, severe and wise.

Poussin is not suggesting that when an image is constructed, all of the subjects should have a standard expression appropriate to a particular mode. Besides, it is clear that without a certain amount of conflict within the painting there would be little if not any depth. Instead it could be interpreted that Poussin is illustrating, that the overall combination, the composition, of each individual element constituting an image should retain a general distinctiveness. Poussin himself was a master of composition and his theory that this could dictate the kind of 'mode' created by an image is often understated. (David Freedburg, no date)

I wanted to take this further, challenging whether texture can build on composition, adding to the palpability of artwork, and enhancing the effect of the desired mode.

5.6 Texture

5.6.1 Experiment

The texture of a painting can create a new dimension to the artwork. I believe that adding an extra textural element to illustration dealing with the symptoms of pain and distress, related to PTSD, will supply the extra stimulation require to enhance the viewers connection with the work.

Shannon Larratt adds different herbs and spices to the actual pigment of her paint, so that as people view the work, they are stimulated on an extra level, heightening their experience of the theme. Because illustration mainly focuses on creating an image that will be reproduced, this element would be lost in the process. Instead, I wondered if I could add some kind of textural quality to my paint, which would reflect the theme of war and discomfort.



Fig. 17

I have used sand to experiment with loose interpretations of relevant facial expressions.

Sand seemed an ideal textural medium for two main reasons. Firstly it has immediate connotations of war, sand bags, grit, and the harsh climate of the Gulf (particularly relevant today).

Secondly, its nature is to work its way deep into the crevasses of the skin. It is highly irritable and intrusive, reflecting many qualities of PTSD.

5.6.2 Impasto

The Impasto technique is the application of paint onto the canvas in very thick quantities. It provides almost a three dimensional relief. I believed that I could use this to push the textural element of my work further still. The idea of basically sculpting the paint was a powerful one. The style reflected my intentions of creating an image where the subject was trying to literally jump out at you in an admittedly crude, yet extremely powerful way. Although illustrations are captured through scan or photo, the way that light reflects off of the painting compared to that of a flat wash, is changed and has new dynamics. These effects are illustrated in a host of Artists work.

Fig. 18, Frank Auerbach, Head of E.O.W. IV, 1961.

Notice how the texture of the piece manipulates light to conclusive effects. It definitely adds tonal depth cross the piece.

The paint is applied so thickly and in such a manner that we can track exactly how it was crafted, helping us empathise with the maker of the piece, and what he was feeling as he painted it.



Fig. 19, Henry Moore, Woman Seated in the Underground, 1941.

The Tate online explains that, “the tension is heightened by the abrupt jump from foreground to background and the network of nervous, scratchy lines that describe the figure.”

The technique of scratching into the paint has been purposely done so by Moore to add to the overall feeling of angst and distress conveyed through the tonal qualities and composition of the image.

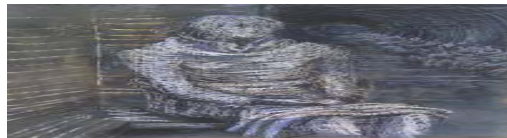




Fig. 20, Rembrandt, The Jewish Bride, 1666.

As in Rembrandt's "The Jewish Bride," Auerbach and Moore both, in less traditional means, employ chiaroscuro to their pieces, directing the eye to specific areas of the picture. (Mike W Bucknell, 2001) This contrast between light and dark also acts to accentuate the Impasto effect. I believe both impasto and chiaroscuro would add to any image where tension and distress play a prominent role in the overall theme of the piece.

I felt that I could now attempt to construct a series of more powerful responses to the theme of PTSD in relation to our current cultural society, where I would visually explore ambiguity, composition, and chiaroscuro, with texture acting as a palpable lubricant.



Fig. 21

I believe this piece is successful in creating a mood of ambiguity. The viewer can understand that because of tonal and composition contrasts, the character is segregated from the light area of the image. The lighting of the blue room is similar to that of a living room at night, and hopefully with the aid of text, and a grounding of newspaper, the viewer will understand what this room represents. Whilst the subject of the piece is in obvious stress, there is enough depth in the visual metaphors for the viewer to make hi/her own decisions as to exactly what is afflicting him.

Fig. 22

This is the initial sketch of Fig. 21 depicting an ordinary man dropping a plate as the TV triggers some sort of flashback.

I felt it was important to create more ambiguity to the piece, leaving the idea of the plate out. I think the key point to the piece is to show how the media is affecting the sufferer.



Fig.23

I believe, the texture of the sand mixed with the paint is effective in conveying how this everyday, generic man feels inside. Although this image is supposed to be stylised, the impasto of paint on the clothes of the character create a realistic impression that contrasts nicely with the harsh abstract environment.



Fig. 24

This illustration focuses more on conveying inner the most feelings that so many sufferers of PTSD have to live with everyday of their life. From my experiences of what I have read, I can see that sufferers find it hard to contain their memories and slot back into the almost surreal society that thankfully, most of us live. Personally I am emotionally inept when it comes to understanding the traumas of war, but I can empathise with feelings of frustration, and this is supplies the energy behind the piece.



Fig. 25

Artists such as Francis Bacon have clearly inspired this image. I wanted to portray a sense of transformation and movement in the central character. This is reflected in the energetic way the grounds were laid down, creating a perfect kinetic basis to craft an image on top of.

The eye is allowed to wonder around the page picking up on the dark themes running through the illustration, but at the same time, the composition will prompt it attention back to the central figure

*I believe the use of *pasto* in the enhancing *chiaroscuro*.*

5.7 Digital implementation

I felt that my investigation had helped me create illustrations that were reasoned and emotionally arousing. Because this digital image is so important in modern day illustration I believed it would be an interesting task to take what I had learnt and implement it in this medium.

I took inspiration from Jon Foster, who is an American freelance illustrator. He manages to produce digital artworks whilst maintaining the same quality and feel as solid paint. (Dawn, Amazon.co.uk book review, no date)

Fig. 26

Jon Foster's work reflects his own method of craft. This painting has a definite personality.

The fantastical world created in the image is infused by the expressive style in which it is painted. Instead of a realistic, but no doubt flat representation of what this scene may actually look like, Foster conveys the feel of the piece through his virtual brushwork. The movement saturating this illustration heightens the sense of disorientation, pushing the viewer into the role of the protagonist.



Unfortunately I did not have access to Adobe illustrator, or Corel painter, which allowed Foster to select specific brushes for Impasto painting. Instead I used Adobe Photoshop to create my digital image, focusing on using many layers to create visual depth. I wanted to make sure that I didn't let the computer do too much of the work through pixel manipulation, instead I wanted to best approach this image as I would have done with my actual paintings, i.e. laying grounds and adding washes.



Fig .27

This image is one of my earlier interpretations of PTSD, which I have scanned into the computer used as a basis to create this image.

Although I am happy with the issues that the illustration raises on an intellectual basis, it is evident that the digital image lacks in 3D texture. As a consequence of this, I feel as if the viewer may not be as emotionally attached to the image as some of the previous paintings, and instead only recognise this work as a 'pretty picture.' Such an opinion merely contradicts exactly what I am trying to convey - pain and distress.

6. Conclusion:

This project documents the attempt to create powerful and provocative style of illustration in response to a specific theme of personal choice. Exploring the mental illness of conflict associated PTSD, and the somatic symptoms associated with it, has been an informative journey.

Investigating the causes and consequences of the illness show how powerful the issue is. Studying the artworks and documentations created by actual sufferers of the illness illustrates how soul destroying it must be to live with this condition. A broader analysis of the ramifications of PTSD encourages a certain kind of empathy towards isolated cases such as David Bradley, that we might understand his pain and suffering. This theoretical dissection of PTSD meant that I was able to produce balanced works of art.

The distortion of the human form, particularly skin, was a successful visual representation of how I thought the victims of PTSD suffered. I believe that acts of mutilation on the human body create empathy in most people, as they put themselves in the position of the victim.

I struggled to produce any kind of engaging images from my initial response to the theme, and it was important that I looked at elements that might add strength to my illustrative style. The examination of papers discussing this topic encouraged me to add ambiguity, texture and conflict into my work.

Kant's observation that the brain makes subconscious attempts to categorise elements of an image determining on cohesion and differentiation, had an immediate effect in my style. I chose to divide the images in a tonal manner, where the main character has different relations to two or more suggestive spaces. For example, Fig. 27 shows the

→ Fig. 28

Silence/black

Rage/red

transition of mood, related to the space the character occupies, i.e. he is shadowed in silent pain to the left before he explodes with anger into the space defined by red on the right.

Poussin's idea of visual modes particularly influenced me and I was able build on the textural components associated with defining a general emotion.

Further inquiry into textural methods relative to conveying emotions of distress and war contributed significantly to my technical style. The power of Impasto in particular supplies any image with a textural relief that cannot be reproduced as effectively within the digitally created image. Supplementing the pigment of the paint with textural materials such as sand, added significantly to the palpability of theme, as well as creating more visual interest.

It would be fitting to summarise that in the context of this project many individual factors constitute a successful image. The careful deliberation of what universal elements should be exaggerated and manipulated, result in a considered and powerful stylistic response to a subject i.e. a specific choice of composition or colour palette. Quite how these decisions are implemented also contribute to the overall emotive direction of the piece, such as the medium or manner in which an image is rendered.

7. Evaluation:

This project has taught me just how valuable intellectual research of a subject is when formulating a visual response. It has reminded me of the beauty of discussion. The whole concept of subjectivity is a fascinating thing. It enables the interpretation of visual art and by its nature constructs a diverse sea of reaction. It is important for any illustrator to immerse himself or herself in the subject that they are concerned. It is only through this process, and through the arousal of probing questions that they will create an informed response.

The investigation was an enjoyable and stimulating process. Most of the difficulties I faced were really about breaking down mental barriers. I was preoccupied with how I could make this project 'innovative.' It took some time to realise that actually

whatever I produced was going to be new and original in its own way. In hindsight it is easy to see how each individual image shows a certain stage in my progression. It encourages me to see how constructive, inquisitive research can actually influence perception for the better.

I believe the most interesting and effective part of my visual progression was the introduction of sand as a textural element in the paint. I am very happy with the results of this experiment and it certainly gives my work a more intriguing aesthetic.

I had aimed to create a greater body of work, however, I don't think I estimated correctly just how long it would take to actually research my ideas, and perhaps more importantly, the amount of time it would take to produce them. To develop a style from scratch takes time; I am happy with how the style has progressed, but believe there is and will always be room for refinement.

I would like to carry on my investigation into texture, perhaps even moving away from the use of acrylics in my work and using other methods of colouring my images. However, if I were to explore with ulterior mediums I would be wary that the image did not turn into anarchy. Introduction of sand was a subtle process and I would be sure to remember this when incorporating other mediums.

I would also like to experiment with digital programs in a more comprehensive way. It is my position that more people need to be challenging how we see illustration. I would like to push the boundaries of textural perception within the digital environment as far as possible. Artists such as Jon foster show how this can be done, but I would like to build on his example to create bolder, more intrusive artworks.

8. Bibliography

Batz, J., “*Art is no escape from suffering and war*”,
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-94334711.html>
[Accessed January 2006]

BBC, “*Ex-soldier admits killing family*” (*David Bradley*),
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/6309169.stm>
[Accessed January 2006]

Harp, G.E., “*War Songs: Safewater Buoy 2*”,
<http://www.nvvam.org/ourartists/artists/carver/carver.htm>
[Accessed January 2006]

Kite, J., “*The Cult of the Tortured Artist*”,
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/features/torturedartist.shtml>
[Accessed February 2006]

Thompson, T., “*Soldiers with war trauma illness rely on charities for treatment*”,
<http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=26962007>
[Accessed January 2006]

Whitehouse, D., 2000, “*Cave paintings may be 'oldest yet'*”,
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/1000653.stm>
[Accessed December 2006]

Wiedemann, E.J., 2005, “*Illustration Now*”, Köln: Taschen

References:

Hedworth, T., (cited at, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/6309169.stm>, [2006])

Székessy, T., (cited in *Illustration now*, Ed Julius Wiedemann, 2005)

Image References:

Figure 1: (No title, no artist, no date)

http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/permanent/gutenberg/html/images/ars_1_big.gif

Figure 2: (No title, no artist, no date)

<http://www.deviantart.com/view/30517486/>

Figure 3: (No title, Runaway, 11223, ca.2006)

<http://www.deviantart.com/view/30517486/>

Figure 4,5: (No titles, Jason Brooks, no date)

<http://www.jason-brooks.com/portfolio/>

Figure 6,7: (No title, Arthur de Pins, no date)

<http://www.arthurdepins.com/index.php?page=goodies>

Figure 15,16: (No title, Salah Jiad Almasoudi, no date)

http://www.shiralart.com/shiralart/iraqiartist/members/SALAH_JIAD_ALMASOUDI/salah_jiad_work.htm

Figure 18: (Head of E.O.W. IV, Frank Auerbach, 1961)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Auerbach

Figure 19: (Woman Seated in the Underground, Henry Moore, 1941)

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=99999961&workid=9672&searchid=8607>

Figure 20: (The Jewish Bride, Rembrandt, 1666)

http://www.antiquevaluers.co.uk/old_harlequins/articles/paint.html

Figure 26: (no title, Jon Foster, ca.2002)

<http://www.conceptart.org/forums/showthread.php?t=2296>