Editorial

The articles in this edition of *Image & Text* demonstrate how issues surrounding the construction and visualisation of identity continue to present fertile ground for critical and sustained engagement. The distinctive circumstances of South Africa and its physical, political, cultural, social and historical richness encourage an on-going desire to examine how it represents itself with images and stories that reflect its diversities more candidly. Four of the five authors published in this edition locate their investigations of identity in the South African environment. The fifth article adopts a more distant perspective in its focus on Victorian England. In the articles, themes of socio-political thinking and concern, personal politics and autobiographical urges variously intersect with considerations of historical and contemporary contexts, imaginative powers, unique insights and technical virtuosity. Class, race, gender, personal and national identities are placed under close scrutiny.

Historical contexts form the backdrop for the articles by Catherine Karusseit and Deirdre Pretorius. Karusseit considers domestic architecture from the nineteenth century Victorian period to reveal how it was structured around prevalent social ideologies. In her article *Victorian respectability and gendered domestic space*, Karusseit outlines the relationship between ideas of Victorian middle-class respectability, domesticity and domestic space. She then employs a feminist critical approach to analyse selected drawings executed by George Scharf, an antiquarian, scholar and artist of the time to illustrate the extent to which domestic space was gendered. Scharf's drawings provide a highly detailed and lucid revelation of how space was structured around a heavily polarised understanding of gender roles with their implicit and pre-determined positions of influence.

Deirdre Pretorius also alludes to polarisation and binary identities in her examination of representations of class, race and gender and their alignment with the Bolshevik 'binary model of thinking' that fostered the reductionist tendency to visually label and assign people to the categories of either heroes or villains. Pretorius discusses a selected sample of cartoons published between 1933 and 1936 in the official Communist Party of South Africa's newspaper *Unsebenzi / South African Worker.* She explains that despite significant research into the decisive role of the South African Communist Party in the liberation struggle and in shaping political identity, and the volume of printed material generated by the Party itself, the graphic and visual dimensions inherent in its conceptions of identities have received very little critical attention. Her consideration of the cartoons is informed by the historical context of oppressive legislation, communist ideology, the medium itself in terms of functionality capacity, creative influences and the exploitation of cartooning conventions. Lastly, an analysis of the relation of the 'self' to the 'other' as portrayed in the cartoons allows the revelation of class, race and gender identities to emerge.

While both Karusseit and Pretorius are mindful in pointing out the relevance of their historical stance to contemporary considerations, the articles by Robin Sassen and David Paton deal more directly with contemporary conditions and the manner in which artists exploit the nature and techniques of printmaking and digital artists' books respectively. Sassen examines two installations by printmakers, one by Paul Emmanuel and the other by Berni Searle. She argues that both these artists use their work to ponder their own identities and that their works serve as a prism that reflects the relationship between the performance and printmaking cultures in post-apartheid South Africa. Both artists employ blind embossing on their own bodies – Searle to explore the ambiguities, anomalies and diverse roots in her identity, and Emmanuel to examine the political implications of his gender. Paton also refers to the work of Paul Emmanuel, but in a consideration of the nature of digital artists' books and the exploration of identity. More specifically, the article by Paton investigates the role of sound as a critical element in triggering an imaginative narrative. He compares the use of sound in the digital of work of artists Marc Edwards and Paul Emmanuel and postulates that while each of the artists uses their work as a site for reflections on personal identity, they differ in the manner in which they direct reader/viewer participation. Edwards creates distance and a denial of interactivity in contrast to Emmanuel who invites intimacy and interactivity through aural encouragement and instruction to engage the narrative.

Lizè Groenewald adopts a much wider approach to identity. She presents the speculative, but none the less compelling, argument that the current series of South African banknotes, first issued in the early 1990s at a critical turning point in the history of the country, contributed to and continue to contribute to the political project of identity construction. She suggests that the banknotes offer an opportunity for the theoretical analysis of a quotidian design artifact in order to expose the imagined cultural, political and social identity of the South African nation. Groenewald traces the connections between utopian and nationalist thinking and rhetoric and utilises these commonalities to construct a theoretical framework with which to examine the figurations on the 1992 banknote series as expressions of utopian desire and national identity.