

*Monster Flick* [GRC presentation #3]:

## Monologue/Voice-over

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Scene: Darkness—fade into smokey intro of ‘Doubtful of Your Love’ . . . let whole song run through. Fade to silence at end but keep picture running . . . following is spoken over images of the band playing [could use stills? Sarah Hunter’s photos?]

Witness the SWAY of The Grand Saloon. Plowing their guitars through the bones of the dead, familiar tunes rise up . . . MUTILATED and TORN from the shallow graves of late night AM radio waves. Teetering on the verge of EXCITEMENT and FEAR, these three young men STRUGGLE to control what they create.

Lacking in technical surety, but LOST in the ecstasy of creation, THEY PLAY —WINGING IT . . . improvising on a riff that has existed forever, but will never sound the same again. Grinding and banging on corpses once loved, they seek NOT the sweet dulcet tones of nostalgia, NOR the bittersweet song of success, but rather the DARK and OFFENSIVE corners and boundaries of a practice arrested and appropriated by the pseudo-scientific placards of safety, order, and progress.

It is LOOSE-ENDS, ladies and gentlemen, that keep The Grand Saloon afloat.

And while she sways—in dark waters, in dangerous oceans—she dreams of the spectacular failure that was the Titanic.

Scene: Band images fade into image of the Titanic sinking . . .

Scene: Title – Inviting The Monster

**PART 1: ERROR AND CHANCE**

Scene: Text—“Deviations and errors are essential pre-conditions of progress” Paul Feyerabend in ‘Farewell to Reason’

Scene: Text—12:00AM Midnight, Thursday 12 May

French social theorist, Paul Virilio, has claimed . . .

To INVENT the ‘SHIP’ was to DISCOVER the ‘SHIPWRECK’ . . . to invent the train was to invent its derailment . . . and that “Each period of technological development, with its instruments and machines, brings its share of SPECIALISED ACCIDENTS, thus revealing *en negatif* the scope of scientific thought.”

Contrary to popular belief, mistakes and accidents, chance operations and random interjections play a hugely important role in “progress”, or in the “evolution” things. In Anna Gerber’s recent book “All Messed Up”, she states —

“We can think of these ideas in terms of process or even invention; a mistake prompted the discovery of penicillin and played a catalytic role in the inventions of everyday things such as the tea bag, Velcro, the Post-it note, the X-ray, Silly Putty, Scotchgard, Ivory soap, and even the Slinky.” [Anna to speak]

The world of the accident, was explored by Paul Virilio in 2003 by way of an exhibition entitled ‘Unknown Quantity’. The exhibition—an outcome or manifestation of his own text, the “Museum of Accidents”—showcased natural disasters and man-made catastrophes . . .

Scene: photos or footage of earthquakes, typhoons, floods, nuclear mishaps, train derailments, and plane crashes.

In his presentation of such traumatic events Virilio attempts to claim a space, or a “room” for fallibility, that he calls the ‘Museum of Accidents’. In doing so he seeks to present and understand ‘progress’ as something beyond the LINEAR and CONTINUOUS.

In this sense Virilio's interests are prefigured by a fundamental shift in scientific thought, generally represented by 'Chaos Theory'. In the crudest sense, Chaos Theory ACCEPTS irregularities in scientific investigation rather than dismissing them as useless, or unhelpful. In pre-Chaos science, irregularities were considered as nuances—problematic disruptions or foreign intrusions that got in the way of objective experimentation.

James Gleick, in his book *Chaos* explains that classical science believed that the irregular sides of nature, the discontinuous and erratic sides were PUZZLES to science

. . . or worse MONSTROSITIES!

## **PART 2: MONSTERS**

Scene: Shed from outside looking up. Sound: Thunder crashes.

Sitting alone in an old shed on a hill in the middle of a cold and wintry night, I'd like to speak briefly, ladies and gentlemen, about monsters . . .

Scene: cycle of monsters . . .

Different people at different times have all faced different perceived threats, while certain anxieties seem to have crossed both time and space . . .

medieval demons (hell), the Devil, Were-wolf, Mummy, Dracula, . . .

I am interested in the monster as a MANIFESTATION of ANXIETY

I am interested in the monster as an EMBODIMENT of CRITIQUE.

And I am interested in the monster as a MARK of EVOLUTION.

In Psychiatry, anxiety is defined as “a state of apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from the anticipation of a realistic or fantasized threatening event or situation, often impairing physical and psychological functioning”. I am interested in

anxiety . . . more specifically than fear. Rather than a MOMENT of being ‘scared’ or ‘frightened’, I want to locate the enduring, drawn-out and underlying UNEASINESS of a perceived threat.

Margaret Tarrat, in *Monsters from The Id*, states that “Most writers in English on science fiction films view them as reflections of society’s anxiety about it’s increasing technological prowess and it’s responsibility to control the gigantic forces of destruction it possesses”. However, more specifically interested in personal or individual anxiety, she claims that “battles with sinister monsters or extraterrestrial forces are an externalisation of the civilised person’s conflict with his or her primitive subconscious or id”.

Whether this internalised CONFLICT is individual or collective, the monster, once materialised, will embody a critique of whatever anxiety has brought it forth into the world.

### Scene: Teenage Werewolf (critique scene?)

Of course a monster is only monstrous—UNACCEPTABLE or OFFENSIVE—in relation to some already existing, and generally ACCEPTABLE thing. The monster, in this sense, exists as a SUBVERSION of a DOMINANT, or widely accepted form or idea. It’s interesting to note that a monster does not have to do “bad things” in order to offend . . .

The creature from the black lagoon, for instance, never set out to hurt anyone . . .

### Scene: Creature from The Black Lagoon

. . . it’s very existence can be enough. Simply through it’s OTHERNESS—an aberration of some kind—the unnamable thing will upset or offend our EXPECTATIONS or our HABITS, requiring us to rethink, or CRITIQUE, our own behaviour.

In this sense, the monster disrupts pattern and might indicate an evolutionary transmutation in whatever SYSTEM it inhabits. This transmutation, this hybridisation, this transgression, exists before us as an affront to the comfort of our everyday experience. An uncomfortable transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar . . .

at once dead AND alive **Scene: Frankenstein**

human AND animal **Scene: Teenage Werewolf**

biological AND mechanical **Scene: Terminator**

. . . the monster offends our taxonomic urge. It is our inability to CATEGORISE, and thus CONTAIN with CERTAINTY that is the seed of our discomfort or fear.

What this new hybrid construction might 'DO', is unknown to us. And a fear of the unknown is surely the most common, and deep seated fear of all?

### **PART 3: THE MONSTER IN DESIGN**

It has been said that to truly understand a culture you must know what it fears. After 10 years in the industry, and now within a position of relative 'safety', I find I'm no longer very excited by, or even interested in conceiving of design as a purely linear and preconceived activity. So through the figure of the monster I am interested in how I might RE-UNDERSTAND the culture of DESIGN in terms of IT'S fears and anxieties. To attempt to 'see' it from it's other side . . . en negatif, as Paul Virilio might say.

In Colin Milburn's recent text *Monsters in Eden*, the relevance of monstrosity to evolutionary thought is discussed through a drawing together of the texts of Charles Darwin and Jacques Derrida. "Together," he claims, "Darwin and Derrida enact a

critique of artifactual constructions of nature that disrespects boundaries and emphasizes the deviances, the perversions, the mutations, and the monstrosities of the world.”

In Derrida, the figure of the monster embodies a means of thinking otherwise—what Derrida himself refers to as a “discursive monster”. It seems to me that discourse, through its interdependent relationship with practice, will inevitably be a part of my invitation to the monster. To actually invite the monster, to attempt to NOTICE, what is lurking in the shadows, perhaps even to locate the shadows, might, I think, be more difficult than it sounds? If I just come on over to design and ask it what it’s afraid of, it might not tell me. Would you? This would appear to be where I’ll need to begin. In the movies monsters are hard to find when you’re looking for them, they usually only appear when they are least expected, from the dark, under the bed, or in the wardrobe.

Where to begin? Let me speculate . . .

I envisage, in the beginning, two monsters. May we call one PROCESS

Scene: silhouette of a monster, with title ‘Process’ above. [Sound: Thunder crashing]

and the other ARTEFACT.

Scene: silhouette of a monster, with title ‘Artefact’ above. [Sound: Thunder crashing]

Perhaps these two will eventually unite and become one MONSTER OF MONSTERS. . . [Sound: Thunder crashing]

. . . DISCURSING anything they can get their god-forsaken hands on! But relax. For now there are two—one is THIS, and one is THAT. Each one a PROJECT through which I—the ‘Mad Designer’—might locate, and draw out Design’s deepest darkest fears and anxieties. One monstrous in the making, the other monstrous in the made.

But still where to begin? Where do I get my parts? Which GRAVES to rob?

Scene: Running around the design studio at night with ‘night vision’ on  
Rubbish bins? Other people’s desks? Boardroom floors?

Which reminds me that I’m suspicious of Anna Gerber’s book. If the sole benefit of my monstrosity was to provide a contextual crutch for a “messed up” aesthetic I should be disappointed. The flaw in her assertion that we might make mistakes on purpose is illustrated through the design of the book. A preconceived collection of formal contrivances that undermine the subtitle of the book, *Unpredictable Graphics*. In fact Paul Elliman hits the nail on the head on page 203, “I have trouble appreciating the chanceness or the accidental if you’ve had to set too many traps for it”.

Is it perhaps the NOTICING, rather than the SET-UP, that is more important. I must remember to avoid the inevitable temptation to name the unnamable! To NOT tie up the loose-ends. I’m reminded of something else I read recently, something Stuart Bailey wrote in *Dot Dot Dot* number 8, “Don’t aim so hard: . . . the idea that you come closest to making accurate work when not trying too hard”

Which—in turn—reminds me of something else, something the French painter Dubuffet wrote, “Never work hard. Let us reject tedious work . . . to take trouble where none is needed”.

I can be tedious. Design IS tedious—both in it’s practice and it’s discourse. Perhaps this is through necessity, but perhaps it is also the location of some anxiety. If we are essentially DISCIPLINED in aiming hard—in rationalising, defining and explaining what we do, are we capable of NOTICING?

I’m drawn to Paul Virilio’s suggestion that we view progress as something beyond the LINEAR and CONTINUOUS. My investigation into the figure of the monster—chasing a metaphor—is motivated by a desire to escape. To escape the ‘linear problem-solving paradigm’ that so haunts Design, and is perhaps, ironically what drew me to it in the first place. This will sound childish and naïve, but I think, in some ways that what I’m trying to do is to make design fun again . . .

Rick Poyner suggests, in his book *Obey The Giant*, that “Designers who allow space for the peculiar, the wayward, the imperfect—and, sometimes, the just plain ‘wrong’—set in motion a process and create the conditions for the viewer to have truly unexpected encounters with design that are one of its keenest, most human pleasures and a large part of its point”.

On that note I’d like to leave you all with a song. In The Grand Saloon we have never collectively aimed to BE anything in particular. This is helped I guess, by the fact we are each quite different, and the project is a collaborative one. But more importantly, I think, in not aiming so hard—in improvising, or WINGING IT—we are better enabled to NOTICE the potential of our various errors and deviations. I am often surprised by how things turn out. It keeps me on the edge of my seat . . .

If you can bear to witness it, this monster should be familiar to you, we create it quickly, and it is full of mistakes and loose-ends . . .

I’d like it if design could be as fun as playing in a band.

Scene: The Grand Saloon – Ring of Fire. Roll credits over footage, cut at “Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen”.

**E N D**