GRAPHIC INTERVENTION: INTERROGATING NEWSPAPER DESIGN AS A SITE OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Design by Research

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In 2004 The Age newspaper proclaimed that it is ‘The world's most liveable newspaper.’ This proclamation firmly situated the newspaper in the realm of the domestic. To be classified as liveable, a shelter or structure must be deemed fit to live in. It must facilitate a sense of ease and a moderate degree of comfort. A liveable setting provides its occupants with a sense of security and control as well as the confidence to invite others into that space. This liveable structure in turn becomes a social structure. When we are comfortable and confident with the quality of our setting, we invite others in, forming social networks, which provide companionship and community.

This Masters project investigates how graphic design systems and structures influence and shape our emotive and social relationship with society. It examines how graphic design within ephemeral artefacts of the everyday, such as the newspaper, gives visual expression to social myths, shaping narratives of ordinary people's lives into soap operas, which we consume voraciously and somewhat unconsciously. By analysing how design functions within the newspaper, framing, interpreting and emotionally manipulating everyday tragedies such as love triangle murders or, what is here termed modern, gothic tales, this thesis seeks to highlight the role of design in cultural and social production.

It uses a series of exhibitions and publications to critically interpret and rework the formal and communication strategies of newspaper design to reveal how graphic design can be used as a strategy for cultural intervention. The central aim of the project is to challenge the anonymous, if not unseen, nature of graphic design and its central role within the media in shaping popular and consumable images of community and citizenship.
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DECLARATION
This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award to
the candidate of any other degree or diploma.

To the best of the candidate’s knowledge contains no material previously
published or written by another person except where due reference is made in
the text of the examinable outcome.
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Investigating Design Form

Chapter One
This Masters thesis uses the newspaper to investigate how graphic design, as a mode of social and cultural production, influences and shapes our emotional and intellectual relationship with society. It examines how graphic design, as a set of seemingly neutral communication systems and structures, is in fact a set of deliberate and orchestrated visual strategies that actively contribute to the production of meaning and the articulation of a social body. By examining the newspaper's design form from a structural and cultural perspective, the thesis seeks to explore the connection between design, media forms and the public construction of the ordinary citizen.  

This thesis will use a combination of formal, visual and cultural analysis to deconstruct the elements and rules underlying the newspaper's design infrastructure and question how its transparency, its 'unseenness,' functions within the daily media construction and maintenance of a society's public discourse in this instance, Victoria, Australia. The hypothesis is that design is not a transparent and universally rational activity. Rather, as evidenced in the newspaper, it is a highly controlled and ordered environment, where images, words and graphic elements, including typography, space and proportion, converge to construct a highly charged and idiosyncratic version of the ordinary citizen's everyday world. The key themes to be investigated are: graphic design and public narratives (gothic tales), the newspaper as community, and the potential of graphic intervention strategies, including publication and exhibition, to critique the media's construction of community narratives.

Newspaper design as form

Traditionally within the newspaper field, design has been considered a tool for journalism, a practice that illuminates the views and words of the journalist. Allen Hutt, in the late 1960s, asserts that graphic design operates within the newspaper only as 'a vehicle for journalism; and it is journalism that is most important'. He explains that 'first-class content, therefore requires first-class form; and so the proper relationship of form and content is the central question of newspaper typography'. Hutt proposes that form should be 'conditioned by content'. Form must 'fit the news' and thus be adaptable to change (Hutt 1967, p.1). Newspaper design, for Hutt, is the servant of content, skillfully deferring to the agenda of the editor and his journalists. The form of the newspaper thus becomes inseparable from the content within, it sets the neutral infrastructure in which content will be consumed and assessed. On the surface it adopts a subservient role, conveying information to readers in a clear and transparent manner. In this model, good form, that is the newspaper's design, must be immediate, alert and clear, and should signal importance, engender interest and be inviting. More importantly, this form must communicate the voice of the journalist.

In 2003, Chris Frost re-asserted Hutt's ideals, insisting that good newspaper design is achieved through ensuring that the journalist's voice is heard in a clear and attractive tone. He elaborates that the purpose of good design 'is to sell journalism to the reader and make the act of consuming it as easy as possible' (Frost 2003, p.5). Frost's pragmatic description of good newspaper design neatly sidesteps the pivotal role a newspaper's design plays in the...
construction and consumption of its community, informing, influencing and shaping the community's opinions and perspective of itself. As Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone (2001) argues, graphic form as a language and mode of communication 'proposes relationships between the world and the public' and the 'citizen and consumer' (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.3).

Form in its narrowest definition is the layout and typography, the graphic, visible structure of the newspaper: it is 'everything a newspaper does to present the look of the news' and more (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.4). The designed form of the newspaper represents and constructs the reality of its readers, fabricating an environment where text and image appear coherent, ordered and whole. As this thesis will show, the form is far from neutral; rather it functions to transmit and shape a civic culture by initiating a public conversation which is shaped by an array of disparate voices. More than a mere structural entity, the form of a newspaper resonates culturally as it forms a social and political relationship with and between its readers.

EXPLAINING FORM
Barnhurst and Nerone argue that form in the context of newspaper design works to construct the 'audience's field of vision'. This field of vision, they assert, is highly controlled for the purpose of 'distributing power'. They elaborate that the quality of a newspaper is determined by its perceived ability to 'provide adequate, reliable information in a clear transparent fashion' (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.2). This affirms Hutt's proposition that a newspaper should be clear and considered, providing readers with the tools to process and retrieve information with ease. But this is where the similarity of thought begins and ends. Barnhurst and Nerone go on to expand that form is not transparent or neutral. They propose that form functions to make the visible structure of a newspaper recognisable and in the process constructs the 'ways that the newspaper imagines and proposes that it mediates in the world'. As they further explain, form functions to illustrate ideal scenarios and relationships 'between the world and the public':

At any moment in its history, news form seems natural and pretends to be transparent-an order of words, images and colours within pages and sections, reflecting and containing events that remain distant and yet distinctly present. Form structures and expresses that environment a space that comfortably pretends to represent something larger: the world-at large, its economics, politics, sociality, and emotion (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.6).

For Barnhurst and Nerone, the form of a newspaper sets up an environment for the readers to traverse the political agendas embedded within. Thus, the form shapes and constrains meaning by constructing a setting in which choice is limited by conventions, strategies and rules.

FORM AS AN ACTIVE FORCE
Barnhurst and Nerone's argument shifts the role of formal structures from that of serving the journalist's voice to that of being an active force which shapes and constructs an environment that serves many interests. The form of the newspaper constrains and is selective as to how and what it illuminates. Readers establish meaning in the newspaper through its material properties and relationships. The designed form—the combination of type and image, the size of an article's headlines and relationship to image, its placement on the page and relationship to other articles—expresses meaning and constrains meaning. It guides the reader towards acceptable interpretations and reading of content: the content of an article, of a page and a section.

Design has a paradoxical presence in our lives. At times it is silent, mysterious and austere, at others it is loud, cheeky and in-your-face. In Strangely Familiar: Design and Everyday Life, Andrew Blauvelt reminds us that for many people design artefacts are intangible and mysterious for they 'tend to conceal rather than reveal the process of their making' (Blauvelt 2003, p.15). For example, if we look analytically at Melbourne's newspaper, The Age, we can see that a collective image of society is being offered daily. On Tuesday, May 14th, 2002, The Age's front page comprised three stories: Matthew and Maritza Wales's twelve-minute appearance in the Melbourne Magistrate court, the public announcement of the death of the actor Ruth Cracknell, and the price increase of subsidised prescription drugs. Two stories focussed on death: the Wales-King by murder and Cracknell through a long and bravely-fought illness. The third story outlined the impact on the cost of pharmaceuticals of the 2002 Federal Government budget. Murder, death and the economics of illness, which are all essential life themes, thus enveloped The Age reader's vision on this day.
When we analyse the design form, we see that each story is presented to the reader through a concise and neat package comprising descriptive headline typeset in the font Pax, a photograph/illustration outlined in a .5 black border accompanied with a succinct description and body copy type set in Utopia, justified, 8.5pt, with journalist and photo credits. A line rule of .5 except at the top of the page separates each story. The leading story of death through murder is announced with an emotive headline, ‘12 minutes in a packed court as two lives veer on a dreadful course’. It is type set in Pax semi-bold 48 pt. This headline is dwarfed by a full colour horizontal image 15.5x21cms of Mrs Wales leaving the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court. The intensity of her image dominates the page. To the right (of this story), occupying two columns, is the pharmaceuticals story report. Its headline, ‘Drugs up $6.20 in budget overhaul’, Pax Bold 57 pt. dominates the page because of its scale. An accompanying cartoon is darkly humorous as it depicts then Treasurer, Peter Costello, flanked by then Prime Minister, John Howard, throwing old people off a ship into the ocean, with the caption ‘Old people overboard’. The small scale of the cartoon allows the reader to forge an intimate relationship with its content.

The story announcing ‘Ruth Cracknell, grand dame of stage and screen, dies at 76’, type set Pax regular head 38pt, acts as a stabilising anchor from its position at the bottom page, spanning six columns. The full-colour close-up of Cracknell’s smiling face fills the fifth and sixth column, 10x6.5cms, contrasting with the pinched face of Maritza Wales. Positioned to the bottom right of Wales, Cracknell draws the reader’s eye diagonally down. Her gentle, grandmotherly image holds our attention as we are reminded of our national loss through the sentimental photo caption which reads, ‘Ruth Cracknell commanded widespread respect’. The youthful Wales, in contrast, is portrayed as distant and inaccessible as she moves away from the gaze of the camera and reader, her arms thrust forward, mouth tight and hair pulled back into a flawless ponytail.

The semioticians Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) observe that ‘in everyday interaction, social relations determine the distance (literally and figuratively) we keep from one another’. This enables us to maintain a distance from individuals with whom we are unfamiliar. Distance is seen as a tool to separate those with whom we have intimate relationships from non-intimates. Distance enables us to connect and disconnect with individuals and publicly acknowledge intimate relationships as in ‘to smell or touch the other person’, as well as keeping undesirables at bay (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p.130).

Within the front page of The Age, Ruth Cracknell, a much-loved actress, is a desirable subject and we are able to come close to her through the emotional warmth conveyed by the newspaper story and design form. In contrast, Maritza Wales, the potential murderess, is kept at bay, made distant so we can observe her, safe in the knowledge that she is unaware of our scrutiny.

As this analysis of a front-page of The Age indicates, the power of graphic design as form is linked to its ability to create what appears to be natural connections and relationships. Kress and Van Leeuwen propose that the grammar of visual design represents ‘patterns of experience’, which enable individuals to construct and visualise a ‘mental picture of death’ which in turn precipitates the skill to ‘make sense of their experience’ (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p.129). A newspaper like The Age can capture these patterns of experience on just one page in the way it combines seemingly unrelated news reports into a picture of daily life; in this instance, of the recurring patterns of murder, illness and death, of love, goodness and weakness. Combined, these patterns can form narratives of society in pain with pictures of troubled individuals caught in scenarios full of angst, illness and grief. These patterns of experience are constructed as much by the graphic form as by the journalist’s reports, as the design constructs the imaginary world context and the visual connections, presenting the reader with signposts for interpretation and direction.

As Kress and van Leeuwen argue, the grammar of visual design is more than an inventory of elements and rules. It is a culturally specific form of communication, ‘enacting social interactions as social relations’. It is the hypothesis of this Masters that newspapers such as The Age rely on the visual grammar of design to enable public citizens to discuss and ‘encode experience visually’, thus connecting it to their daily lives (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p.129). As such, the newspaper as visual form plays a powerful and pivotal role in the domain of public communication and in the construction of society’s narratives. More specifically, it constructs what this thesis terms “modern gothic tales” of society in pain, of troubled ordinary people caught in scenarios full of pathos, illness and grief and particularly caught in everyday murders motivated by love.
LIFE NARRATIVES/PUBLIC NARRATIVES
Michel de Certeau (1998) theorises that people create individual life narratives through a process of habitual responses to their environment and private living conditions. In this way:

A place inhabited by the same person for certain duration draws a portrait that resembles this person based on objects (present or absent) and the habits they imply. The game of exclusions and preferences, the arrangement of furniture, the choice of materials, the range of forms and colours (de Certeau 1998, p.243).

It can be argued that newspaper design, through games of inclusion and exclusion, presents a public life narrative. The public life narrative of the newspaper is at once private and public, implying a form which when repeated daily becomes a habitual mode of reading the world through the visual arrangement of the pages and the use of colour and tone. De Certeau extrapolates that as exterior space in the contemporary city appears more restrictive and hazardous to negotiate, city dwellers seek to personalise it and find ways of defining value within it. As a metaphor for the city, the contemporary newspaper responds to the need for a comfortable familiar site in which its citizen readers can settle into its contents and feel secure. While not a surrogate home, newspapers such as The Age, with its news of personalities and happenings at home and abroad, offer a tangible and familiar social and cultural environment for the individual to associate with and feel secure within even though murders, crime and death occur. The newspaper provides ‘a place for the body, a place for life’ (de Certeau 1998, p.245). A place to picture and mirror society.

The ordinary or everyday citizen as defined by Lawrence Grossberg (1997), Simon Frith (1993), Jon Savage (1993) and Meaghan Morris (1988) belongs to the masses. She enters into culture through the discourse and domain of the popular media: television, magazines and more specifically newspapers. Popular culture refers to that which is ‘accessible’ and ‘comprehensible’. Grossberg defines it as a public sphere in which people struggle over social reality and their place in it. He speaks of a struggle in which the ‘people…try to make sense of and improve their lives’, to find their space, their place within the discourse of the dominant culture (Grossberg 1997, p.345).

My argument is that the newspaper constitutes a legitimate space in which to encounter and, through graphic intervention, challenge dominant culture. The newspaper is visible and influential, it is everyday anonymous graphic design. As a graphic interventionist, the newspaper presents me with a medium and a site in which to contest the construction of meaning by analysing and destabilising its design structures and communication strategies, by disorganising and reorganising the texts and narratives and transforming them into a series of publications and installations.

In doing this, I wanted to follow the lead of Grossberg and use the newspaper to demonstrate how texts and audiences are located and ‘articulated by broader contexts that determine the identity and effects of cultural practice’ (Grossberg 1997, p.204).

Hence, one of the purposes of this thesis is to use the newspaper to challenge graphic design’s involvement in shaping the public social discourse. Can graphic design, which is essentially a servant of the media, be turned back on itself and used as a strategy for social and cultural intervention, that is for critiquing and deconstructing the conventions of the media, its employment of language, and its visual and verbal narratives? The thesis asks can the designer as cultural producer reappropriate design strategies to challenge and renegotiate the public narrative of the media and, in the process, draw attention to the manner in which the media insidiously shapes our ideas and imagination of social citizenship?
12 minutes in a packed court as two lives veer on a dreadful course.

Ruth Cracknell, grand dame of stage and screen, dies at 76.
When selecting the newspaper as my case study, I was inspired by the news reportage of domestic violence and bizarre tragedies that befall ordinary citizens and feature prominently as human interest stories which unfold over considerable periods of time. These are the stories which, in the tragic case of Melinda Freeman who was murdered by her husband, feature sensational headlines such as, ‘By Patrick Donovan court reporter— A man told his lover that they could be together only if his wife was dead, the Coroner’s Court was told yesterday’ (Donovan 2000). As these stories run over weeks, months and, in cases like Freeman’s, up to seven years and more, we, the readers, are introduced to the intimacies of peoples’ lives. We become privy to their secrets, irrespective of their wishes, as we avidly consume their tragic stories of love, murder and intrigue like television soap operas. Their lives become familiar, yet unfamiliar, ordinary yet extraordinary, through their retelling in the popular sphere. They become part of the public culture.

In his editorial on ‘The spectacular rise of media voyeurism’, Hugh Mackay (2002) speculates that we consume sensational stories of murder because such stories reveal insights into human behaviour. They take us to the edge, forcing us to consider the possible limits of human behaviour and endurance. These stories, he elaborates, fulfil a common need to feel connected to the stories of others (Mackay 2002). This connection, however, is subject to the intentions of the media. We are able to disconnect from the story as effortlessly as we do from sitcom soap. This theory is supported by the typographer and historian, Robin Kinross, who refers to typographic printed text as having a social dimension. Widely published and distributed typographic text enables individuals to come together, to share opinions to argue and consider. He writes:

a text is produced by writers, editors and printers. With luck, if they keep their heads down, designers might find a role somewhere too. Then it is multiplied and distributed. Finally, it is read alone but in common, for shared meaning (Kinross 1997, p.22).

By critically deconstructing and reconstructing gothic tales stories such as the Melinda Freeman Murder and The Society Murders, my aim was to question how the design form of the newspaper shapes the experience of reading, how it emotionally engages and leads to the possible shared meaning of passages such as:

Ms Gilmore said her husband, Geoff, and Mr. Freeman both played for the Whittlesea Football club and she met Craig and Melinda Freeman in August 1990. She said she was having martial problems and became involved in a sexual relationship with Mr. Freeman in 1991 (Donovan 1997).

It is my contention that, in the reporting of human-interest stories such as the Melinda Freeman Murder and The Society Murders, we are left to ask what are the shared meanings we are seeking as a community of readers. Freeman’s stories, which is also the story of her family and friends, captivated the media sporadically for seven years. The media dutifully introduced us to her through court reports and feature articles on her family. We were able to visually identify with Melinda Freeman and her husband through photographs which ranged from family snapshots to photojournalist images of the family going to and from the Coroners Court. The concern here is what the reporting of these stories seeks to tell us about our society and its values and struggles. Do the Melinda Freeman Murder and The Society Murders become symbols of our need to understand ourselves as members of society? Do the Melinda Freeman Murder and The Society Murders become symbols of our need to relate ourselves to the larger public sphere?

Grossberg states that, ‘The popular articulates everyday life as a structured mobility by constructing the spaces and places of everyday life, the spaces within which, and the places in which, people live their everyday lives’(Grossberg 1997, p.211). It can be argued that the newspaper becomes a site in which to engage and interpret ‘everyday life’, a safe authoritative structured space to watch it implode. I categorise the Melinda Freeman Murder and The Society Murders news stories as a form of popular genre that I call gothic tales of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Within the public arena, these personal tragedies turn into popular media entertainment stories, mini soap operas that engage and influence our imaginations. Like the episodes within television soap opera, they are constructed through design, through form as well as content. The contention, therefore, is that in order to fully appreciate the function of these gothic tales within the public sphere, the social narratives and sub narratives of the newspaper need to be read and understood not only through content, but also through the reading of design narrative.
As noted there are two levels of methods used in my research. The first level uses image and text installation exhibitions and books as a method of critical inquiry and exploration, while the second level involves the use of Design and Cultural Theory methods as a theoretical, critical and contextualising framework. In working as a graphic interventionist I am seeking to both articulate, develop and practice a method of reading both the newspaper’s graphic form and content. This is why my discursive method and strategy for interrogating the newspaper draws on design history, cultural theory, visual image studies, graphic and textual deconstruction.

Johanna Drucker’s investigation into the visual representation of the written language has had far reaching consequences for this project’s understanding of how design form constructs the reading experience. Through her writing, design and production of artists’ books such as *The Word Made Flesh* (1989), Drucker demonstrates how language is given material form and made readable. She moves beyond formal experimentation with type to explore the connection between visual material and visual meaning. Concentrating on the formal qualities of page and type, on the size, shapes and place on page she investigates the non-linear potential of the book, playing with its format conventions to test her ideas about how we see, interpret and create meaning through the process of reading.

My interest is in Drucker’s (1989) investigation into the relations between fiction as a ‘literary form’ and fiction as a ‘cultural form’. Her use of theory as the catalyst for exploring the visual materiality of writing is particularly insightful. Drucker speaks of her artists’ books, including *Through Light and the Alphabet* (1986) and the *History of the/my Wor(l)d* (1990), as forming a dialogue between the semiotic and symbolic orders of experience. She exploits the expressive potential of typography to actualise and render her ideas visible. She constructs narrative in diverse forms, multilayering her texts and interweaving the personal with the theoretical and the historical, so that her narratives operate as both objective and subjective commentary. Here design becomes both description and commentary. Drucker’s use of design and multi-layering to fuse the objective with the subjective voice provides a strategy for deconstruction and graphic intervention that I could apply to the analysis of the newspaper and its telling of gothic tales, with their uncanny fusion of public and personal narratives.

A secondary aim of this study, therefore, is to contest the media’s and, more specifically, the newspaper’s representation of the ordinary citizen as presented in gothic tales, by rendering and dismantling the design-based authoritative structures of display, including the newspaper, its grid and columns. Using a graphic interventionist method inspired by Drucker and manifested in a series of publications and installations, it investigates a selection of tragic newspaper stories in depth, analysing how the design, the typographic palette, layout, photographs, maps and diagrams can assist in converting peoples’ lives into the public serials of soap opera proportions. The aim of the graphic intervention activities is to draw attention to the shared nature of story telling within the popular media, to tease out and draw parallels across media platforms, for example, how the genre of midday and evening soap operas screened on television can influence the telling of factual murder stories in the daily press. Constructed as installations, my “gothic tales” examine how the worlds of entertainment and fact can blur.

What follows is an outline of the structure of this thesis and an overview of the content of each chapter provided.

Chapter 2, Reading the Media: The Gothic Tale and the Graphic Interventionist, is a detailed account of the graphic interventionist work produced over the course of this Masters, focussing on the key practice that has been central to my study— installation design. This mode of practice I refer to as ‘practices of intervention’. In this practice I use the newspaper as the source material to critique and analyse the connections between the media as represented by the newspaper form and the ordinary citizen. In doing so I ask how does the media, as represented in the newspaper, communicate and construct its subject?

Chapter 3, Critical Narratives: Fact or Fiction - A Lover’s Tale, explores the graphic designer’s role in the construction of social identity and neighbourhood and, more specifically, the role of the designer as a cultural
interventionist. In this chapter, I include what I term an interventionist insert. This insert, *Tabloid, A Lover’s Tale*, is denoted through a change in paper stock and a graphic response to text. The insert is central to this chapter and is situated to extend and demonstrate how theory and practice are central to this thesis. *Tabloid, A Lover’s Tale* presents an experimental fictional re-interpretation of the press coverage of an actual murder investigation. I visually explore the imaginative and emotive process of reading sensational gothic tales such as the *Melinda Freeman Murder* in the daily press.

Chapter 4, Newspaper Design Today: Broadsheet to Tabloid, maps the terrain of the newspaper, discussing in detail its specific form and formations. ‘Mapping a story—*The Society Murders*, demonstrates how graphic form articulates and communicates newspaper content, in this case *The Age* newspaper in its then newly designed format. In this chapter I explore the manner in which everyday life and the ordinary citizen are interpreted and articulated throughout the pages of the newspaper; how images and text combine. The purpose of this chapter is to establish the design code of the newspaper and to demonstrate how it operates within an expanded semiotic system of graphic elements.

Chapter 5, Conclusion: *The Society Murders* and the Newspaper Soap Opera, returns to the central themes at the heart of this thesis. In this chapter I argue that the newspaper presents an impression of seriousness through a design framework, which is designed to instill trust, security and visual stability. The effect is that when the world appears wayward and out-of control, the newspaper remains fixed and measured. I critically read the newspaper to extract a range of meanings oscillating from the real to the imagined.

The primary intention of this thesis is to establish that design is not neutral by demonstrating how the ordinary citizen is constructed and consumed through newspaper design form.
Reading the Media
The Gothic Tale and the Graphic Interventionist

Chapter Two
This chapter is devoted to presenting my experiments and investigations into graphic design as a practice of critical intervention. Practice and theory are woven together to explore the relationship between language and structure. I will focus on the use of publications and exhibition/installation, a key strategy wherein my design explorations have been formalised and presented. Within my work, the gallery space presents a site for the interchange of ideas and exploration of the role of design in shaping social dialogues. As a physical space, it offers a myriad of opportunities to reformulate and re-present individual histories. Installation is approached as a metaphorical marginal zone, where newspaper gothic tales, their narratives, typography, grids, lines, headings, subheadings and photographs are interrogated and reshaped in order to question social order as presented in the popular media.

One premise of my critique is to assert that the ordinary citizen is mediated and actualised in the newspaper, not only through text, but also through its design strategies and visual forms.

**Days of Our Lives**

In 1996 I began to record dialogue from popular American midday soap television shows, such as *Days of Our Lives* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, as well as the then new phenomenon of ‘talk shows’, as exemplified by the long running *Oprah Winfrey* and the defunct *Phil Donahue* show. I transcribed and reconfigured conversations and statements to create mini urban stories that took the shape and form of melodramas, whose characters were locked in a heightened battle to have their stories retold and validated. The central premise of my story telling was to question and challenge ideas about belief and reality, by suggesting that different popular forms of entertainment contain many similarities in their text/narrative construction.

I focussed on the meeting point between the personal and the public, negotiating the spaces where personal interaction and engagement contest the means of representation. Narrative was defined in these early book projects in three ways: spoken and unspoken; written and unwritten; seen and unseen. When recording the text, I consciously placed myself within the narrative, responding emotively to the dialogue and casting my values and aspirations into the transcribed text. I felt compelled to describe the setting in which the narrative was sourced, listing the props and their locations within each frame. I would repeat and mesh together talk show conversations with the soap narratives. The text often felt awkward and private, the banal uttering of intimate conversations, which take shape in the privacy of one’s home.

I was interested in how the text of the midday soap shows appeared in shape and tone to mimic the so-called real life text expressed by the participants on the talk shows. It appeared that the only discernible difference between the two mediums was their visual form, hence my obsession with describing the interiors of both genres. I would discuss the lighting, its source,
form and intensity, the position shape and form of the objects within the stage, the chairs, lampshades, seating, curtains and doors, as well as the geographic positioning of each character/player. This information would be woven into the dialogue to help capture or set the tone and mood of the text. These urban stories, whose central themes were love, betrayal, hope and misfortune, were re-presented and reconceptualized graphically and textually through a variety of mediums, which referenced the props on the shows, such as large-scale paintings, billboard-size posters, books, constructed furniture and video pieces. Each of these mediums would be overlaid with snippets of text and fragments of image. Thus the television shows became syphons in which to capture the moods and aspirations of the ordinary citizen who I imagined, like myself, was participating in the dialogue from the anonymity and safety of their home.

In 1999 I shifted my focus from television text to newspaper text. The summer of 1999 saw the media transfixed with the reporting of a series of beach drownings that happened in close succession. The drowning of a teenage refugee, who had lost his parents in his war-torn country, was the first story to capture curiosity and feed the appetite of Melbourne’s citizens. The tragic drowning of four members of an extended family followed it. I was struck with the different ways in which each of these drownings was reported. For weeks people, would recount the horror of the stories. For a brief period I avoided surf beaches fearful the victim’s fate would become mine. I was captivated and repelled by these stories, as the front pages of *The Australian*, *The Herald-Sun* and *The Age* were emblazoned with the smiling faces of the dead, contrasted with the mournful crumpled dispositions of the victims’ family and friends. I was hooked. The newspaper simultaneously offered me soap and ‘talk back’ in an artful and graphic manner.

**MODERN GOTHIC TALES: THE SOAP OPERA**

Newspapers offer a framework from which to observe personal histories, our own histories, histories that shape and formulate our relationship with and response to society. The newspaper actively engages and confronts, soliciting reactions and unsettling the frameworks in which we desire and evaluate change. Meaghan Morris (1998) observes that media, such as morning newspapers, monitors history and public debates. In defining a case for the study of historical context within objects, Morris writes, ‘A critical reading can extract from its objects a parable of practice that converts them into models with a past and a potential for reuse, thus aspiring to invest them with a future’ (Morris 1988, p.3).

Morris goes on to qualify that she attempts to study an object from a ‘literary solution’, one which favours, ‘however domestic the setting, a picaresque form of narrative’ (Morris 1988, p.3). It is this notion of a picaresque narrative that intrigues me, because it allows for slippages and seepages of lived experience to accumulate and become transparent. As Morris explains, the picaresque narrative is one containing ‘an endless series of minuscule events, popular heroes act out theoretical logics of formidable complexity against a more or less well-defined social background’ (Morris 1988, p.3).
A picaresque story essentially is a narrative which revolves around a roguish character who embarks on a journey where a series of events/situations happen one after the other. The character is rarely changed by these events and seldom reaches an epiphany of change. For my purposes, I have adjusted Morris’s concept of picaresque narratives to develop the concept of gothic tales to describe those newspaper stories of everyday human drama. The gothic tales that attracted my attention—the stories of drownings and, of love tryst murders such as the Freeman Murder, (which shall be discussed later in this chapter), echoed the dramatic tropes of the TV soap opera in their form and retelling. They are sensational and suspenseful narratives unfolding daily in newsprint.

Gothic tales belong to a style of fiction that emphasises the dark and grotesque. In exploring the genre of Female Gothic in cinema, film critic Adrian Martin (2001) defines two distinct styles. The first style presents a female protagonist who questions the love of her spouse or love partner. She fears he/she may not really care for her or perhaps hate her and her speculations set the scene for imagined and actual emotional and physical harm to unfold. Martin cites Alfred Hitchcock’s classical psychological thriller Rebecca (1944), based on a novel by Daphne du Maurier, as a gothic tale of fear, mistrust and escalating hysteria (Martin, 2001). Rebecca de Winter in death is a powerful and dark force, who is able to lay control over her husband, the wealthy and debonair Maxim de Winter, his new young bride, who is the nameless narrator of this tale, and Mrs Danvers, the housekeeper of their estate. Rebecca’s haunting presence permeates every detail of the main characters’ lives. The young Mrs de Winter appears a powerless victim to a blood-soaked memory that serves to erode her psychological and physical well-being. To survive, she must face and lay claim to Rebecca who symbolises her own inherent neurosis. Her quest leads her to her greatest anxiety, her lack of faith in her distant husband’s love for her.

The second form of the Female Gothic genre, elucidated by the feminist sci-fi writer Joanna Russ (1970), explores similar tenets; however, it seeks to be reflective, placing value on the woman’s real-life experiences. It values her anxiety, acknowledging that terrible things can and do happen, and that those we trust can behave in dark, unpredictable and sinister ways. Paranoia is justified and legitimised the Tanner Murders and the Freeman Murder, which shall be explored further in this chapter, both fit well into this category.
They are sensational violent soap opera tales to be pleasurably presented and consumed through the graphic design of the newspaper.

Martin (2001) argues that The Female Gothic is, at its core, a genre based on instability, ambiguity and ambivalence. In soap opera, desire and ambiguity are interlinked. Furthermore, soap operas often present and develop story patterns along similar lines to female gothic films; however, its characters are more closely aligned to those that populate the picaresque form of narrative. Individuals cannot be trusted; lovers are involved in secret love trysts with their partners, best friends or enemies. Soap operas bring to life complex and fraught relationships and social identities.

As Martha Nochimson (1992) argues in *No End to Her*, soap opera is immersed in a feminine discourse that privileges continuity, with its key themes being women and desire. Nochimson argues that soap opera disturbs conventional narratives by not allowing for closure: 'without closure to support the hero’s desire for control, the soap opera becomes a reflection of the heroine’s desire to resist control' (Nochimson 1992, p.9). For example, in the American TV soap opera: *The Bold and the Beautiful*, the central theme for the last nineteen years has been the complex and fraught relationship between two key characters: Brooke Logan and Ridge Forrester. Audiences have been privy to their convoluted sexual and emotional dalliances which have involved countless love triangles and marriages involving friends and family. Brooke has married, divorced and had children with both Ridge and his father Eric Forrester. Suspense, betrayal, deceit and endless unrequited love furnish their complex scripted lives. The Brooke Logan/Forrester character is cast as both the huntress and the hunted, forever moving in and out of her husband/ex-husband’s life, she is locked eternally in suspenseful anticipation, resisting Ridge’s need to control her narrative.

Nochimson observes that the experience of suspense in the soap opera narrative ‘anticipates with hope that which is forbidden’. She clarifies that suspense functions within the narrative to ‘intensify receptivity to the heroine’s pursuit of her desire’. When contrasted with the young Mrs de Winter, Brooke Forrester is a subversion of the Hollywood narrative of the heroine, as she is not locked in a discourse where her feminine desire is ‘from the beginning, overt, innocent and wholesome’ (Nochimson 1992, p.124). Nochimson, in her analysis of desire within soap opera, shows that the soap opera narrative subverts the Hollywood convention of ‘containment’, since there is ‘no end to HER’, no end to Brooke’s narrative. Similarly, as I will explore, there is ‘no end’, to the gothic tales, which appear in the newspaper (Nochimson 1992, p.124).

Everyday newspaper headlines present dark and grotesque stories which capture our attention. These headlines, centred on crime, are designed to shock, frighten, excite and entertain. As the media theorist Yvonne Jewkes (2004) argues in *Media and Crime*, a text which explores the role media plays in the representation and consumption of crime, crime and violence have become ‘Objectified and commodified, and thus desired, to the extent where they are widely distributed through all forms of media to be pleasurably consumed’ (Jewkes 2004, p.32). Crime, thus, becomes forever linked and integral to culture and cultural practices. We engage with culture through reading and watching. Soap operas take their cues from the news stories which circulate within the media, using stories centred around serious and violent crimes as a means to achieve high ratings. The public is fascinated with crime and violence; newspapers, like soap opera, represent crime tales as pleasure and spectacle.

The American author, Richard Ford, in the opening chapter *The Lay of the Land* (2006), describes with humour how his antihero Frank Bascombe is deeply disturbed by a violent crime that he reads about in his daily newspaper: ‘Last week, I read in the Ashbury Press, a story that has come to sting me like a nettle’. The heading which draws him in, ‘Tex Nursing Deaths’, intrigues, repulses, shocks and has him hankering for more detailed information (Ford 2006, p.1). Hook, line and sinker, he is caught. The story in question details how a disgruntled nursing student shoots his teacher in cold blood. Frank cannot purge himself of the image of the woman dying and the calculated words of her murderer who asks, ‘Are you prepared to meet your maker?’ Her reply is, ‘Yes.
Yes, I think I am’ (Ford 2006, p.2). Ford constructs a plausible scenario, a tale not dissimilar from the ones we have become accustomed to— that is inexplicable acts of violence by seemingly rational individuals. His focus on Frank’s palpable anxiety and horror of this tale, and how it haunts him for many weeks, beautifully captures the moment when individual lives intersect, when the private and the public become blurred. Weeks later Frank, still musing on the sad story, loudly proclaims in private:

Holy shit! How in the world did she ever know that? All up and down this middle section of seaboard (the Press is the Jersey Shore’s paper of record), there must’ve been hundreds of similar rumblings and inaudible alarms ringing household to household upon Ms. McCurdy’s last words being taken in (Ford 2006, p.3).

Frank unwittingly becomes embroiled in the life of another person through the act of reading the newspaper. This private and singular act vividly illustrates John Fiske’s observation that the reading of the newspaper is an ‘act of both solitary interpretation and collective behaviour’ (Fiske 1992). Frank is able to understand life and to appreciate the ordinary through the violent act of another. As de Certeau acknowledges, ‘the readable transforms itself into the memorable’ (de Certeau 1998, p.xxi). Crime is ubiquitous, yet still newsworthy for it possesses the power to disturb and unsettle.

INTERVENTIONS AND INSTALLATIONS (EVERYDAY GOTHIC TALES)
Newspaper editors are very aware that crime sells, especially crime stories that have the potential to be serialized within the newspaper over a protracted period of time. The media presents both factual and fictional crimes in a manner which distorts and manipulates the ‘public’s understanding of crime’ (Jewkes 2004, p.141). The news is both central and peripheral to contemporary visual culture. It claims a reality and it establishes our everyday view of the world. It is worth pondering Jewkes’s observation that:

“spectacle” of the news reporting has arguably blurred the lines between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ and made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between ‘fact’ and fiction’ (2004, p.33).

Using a series of exhibitions /installations and publications, I began to investigate the social space of the newspaper and to work within and outside its physical and metaphorical margins to reveal the manner in which design helps to construct social and cultural narratives. I sought to position the newspaper as a designed space in which the gothic tales of public life are envisioned, enacted and scrutinised in a manner akin to soap operas. In the installations, I invited the viewer and reader to critically enter into this space which has ‘a multiplicity of functions and practices’ (Grossberg 2001, p.204). The aim was to use graphic strategies to play with and expose the newspaper as a space or, better still, as a neighbourhood, where individual lives are represented as gothic tales of love, dysfunction, hate and angst.

Using exhibitions/ installations to interrogate newspaper gothic tales, I have sought to explore the above ideas and rearticulate/re-represent the everyday neighbourhood we encounter in the media and render it unfamiliar and uncomfortable. The aim has been to test the soap opera nature of their appeal and the manner in which we might read and engage with them, in order to unveil the patterns and strategies of their telling.
I staged three graphic installations in the course of this Masters project:
Exhibition 1: *Ordinary Days*, Talk Gallery, Melbourne, November 1999
Exhibition 2: *Tabloid*, West Space Gallery, Melbourne, September 2000
Exhibition 3: *Tabloid 2*, West Space Gallery, Melbourne, March 2003

*Ordinary days* will be discussed below while *Tabloid* and *Tabloid 2* will be discussed in greater detail within later chapters.

The architectural space of the gallery provides an invaluable site to explore and expose story telling within the media, and more specifically newspapers. It functions as a particularised space, a known space, where the private and the everyday fuse together through its perceived practical use. In my neighbourhood, Melbourne, the gallery has been traditionally reserved for the viewing of art. Design is rarely exhibited, apart from the occasional review of a respected design studio, such as Emery Vincent (Attiwill 1999). Design’s place in cultural production is reserved for the production of exhibition catalogues and posters, that is the publicity ephemera associated with exhibiting. It is important to point out that in my exhibition work I have not set out to contest this, or to argue that design needs to operate in this context. I have, however, created work which uses design, that is image, text, type and layout, as its reference point to produce work envisaged for this environment. Whether the work is design or art is irrelevant. What is relevant is what the work seeks to establish and critique.

I chose to test my ideas within an exhibition format because I have experience with this context of display and enjoy the complexities it presents. Exhibiting exposes my work to established and new audiences. In my installations, gothic tales taken from newspaper texts are reformulated into fictional interpretative narratives, similar to that of soap operas. They are at once familiar and suspenseful, fact and fiction, objective and subjective. The individual histories of the press stories are retold through the dismantling and reconstruction of the design strategies used in their representation in the newspaper. Design signposts are shifted and reconfigured in order to present new ways of traversing and engaging with the newspaper as a social space. While vestiges of the original stories remain, the reader/viewer is no longer able to comfortably recognise how to negotiate and respond to their visual and textual content. Rather he/she is continually challenged with how to respond and identify with content, which is paradoxically familiar yet unfamiliar.

Viewers of the exhibitions are confronted by a sense of neighbourhood that is both public and private, separated yet conversely united; ‘untouchable because it is distant, and yet recognisable through its relative stability; neither intimate nor anonymous’ (de Certeau 1998, p.46). Thus, they are introduced to new interpretative environments, where the margins and intersections function as unexpected spaces to experience and question media design and its role in articulating social spaces for the service of everyday life. Individual’s histories are retold through the dismantling and reconstruction of design strategies of newspaper stories.
Ordinary Days

Exhibition 1 Ordinary Days: The Tanner and Freeman Murders:
Talk Gallery Melbourne, November 1999

When discussing the assassination of John F Kennedy, Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) observe that:

Photography, in allowing individuals to see history in intimate settings, intertwines that history with personal memory and shifts the telling firmly into the realm of raw emotion, with the filter hidden. The photographic report becomes a prosthetic memory (2001, p.177).

Shared history, as shaped through the press in the context of the death of an American President, is monumental. The death of a figurehead, importantly a president, shocks and disturbs, constituting what Barnhurst and Nerone refer to as the ‘core definition of news— that is the unexpected and startling as against the routine’. The gravity of such an event can instil in the ordinary citizen overwhelming unease and a credible sense of anxiety, ‘raising all fears and doubts about the security of society and the continuity of the nation’ (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.143). When it comes to gothic tales of everyday murders. one could extend these ideas to argue that the newspaper operates as a ‘national image-space’, projecting our social and moral values while helping us to negotiate and determine corrupt and vile acts (Morris 1988, p.4).

Human interest stories generate collective attention, presenting a context for public discourse they ‘provide powerful collective representations’ in which audiences are removed but recognise their fellow citizens and share their emotive and intellectual response to the story (Fine & White 2002, p.59). For a narrative to be powerful, evocative and engaging, the reader needs to be transported to a world that is compelling and worthy of discussion with others. This world must provide an otherness of setting, an interpretive space in which the audiences can situate themselves within the setting. The characters at play must be recognisable.

The Ordinary Days installation marked the beginning of my explorations and outlines my rudimentary exploration of these ideas. It illustrates the beginning of my investigation of the way in which gothic tales of tragedy, for example murder love triangles, which befall ordinary citizens, are portrayed and described by journalists and interpreted by newspaper designers, picture and sub-editors. Comprising photographs and text, Ordinary Days interrogated two murders that occupied the public imagination over a lengthy period of time, 23 years for The Tanner Murders and 2 years for The Freeman Murder and the reporting of which had all the hallmarks of an everyday soap opera. The Tanner and Freeman Murders both have their compelling narratives and constitute powerful tales of what happens when our perception of the ordinary becomes spliced open to reveal the nasty underbelly of domestic life. They are gothic tales, which speak of love gone sour due to greed and mistrust.

The first story has become known as the The Tanner Murders case. The The Tanner Murders case is intriguing because it contains numerous subplots, twists and violent turns. Denis Tanner was a police sergeant stationed at St. Kilda police headquarters, who was on trial for the suspected murder of his sister-in-law, Jennifer Tanner, as well as for the murder of Adele Bailey, a well-known transvestite prostitute who operated out of Kings Cross, Sydney. A formidable character, Sergeant Tanner was also accused of corruption and intimidation.

The second story was the Freeman case. Ian Freeman was murdered by his wife’s lover, so she could have access to her husband’s life insurance. Ian Freeman, by all accounts, was a hard working ordinary bloke who desired the best for his children and operated a moderately successful newsagency in the boroughs of a nondescript Sydney suburb. Sue Freeman, his second wife, was portrayed in the newspaper reportage as resentful of the way Ian financially supported his children. Her resentment led to an overarching compulsion to engage a hit man to murder Ian at the cost of $50,000. The court alleged that Sue started an affair with Emmanuel Chatzidimitriou with the view of using him to carry out her wishes. Once she had secured his trust, the two forged an elaborate plan to lure and kill Ian Freeman.
As hinted, there are marked similarities and differences between the two stories. The sad tale of Jennifer Tanner has left an indelible mark on the general public’s conscience, because its life in the media was long and protracted. Its horror was overwhelming, for it involved murder, the police force, corruption and cover up. In 2005, twenty one years after the death of Jennifer Tanner, Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon announced a $2million reward to find her killer. In contrast, The Freeman Murder case, involving the middle-aged newsagency proprietor, had a relatively short history. The murderess, Sue Freeman was dubbed the black widow as the audacity of her murder scheme and the coldness in which it was enacted captivated newspaper readers. While the names of the victims in The Tanner Murders have become etched in my mind, the second case has become a blurred and distant memory. I do not consciously remember the name of the victim, his wife, daughter or murderer.

Ordinary days: IMAGE AND MEMORY
The Tanner and Freeman murders where both repulsive and unnerving. In The Tanner Murders we are confronted by a burly police sergeant who is central to some despicable crimes and acts of violence. In The Freeman Murder we are introduced to an attractive woman who is prepared to risk all in order to reinvent her life. Both murder cases are sensational and larger-than-life. We encounter and smell death through the drudgery, greed and pettiness of these two characters’ deeds. The Age newspaper’s photographic portrayal of Denis Tanner, Sue Freeman, their respective victims, accomplices and their families and friends drew me into their melodramatic tales. I could not let go. To purge myself of these images I needed to graphically explore and dissect them through scrutinising the tropes and forms integral to the graphic design of the newspaper. Ordinary Days explores these two tales visually, dissecting the functioning of the newspaper’s key devices of image and text, within six large digital prints and textually through fourteen typographic prints.

Over six weeks in May-June 1999 I collected all of the images and text printed in The Age and The Herald-Sun which were associated with the The Tanner Murders and the murder trial of Sue Freeman. This data served as the material for the subject matter depicted in the six large digital prints (1mx1.5m). The six digital prints each comprised details of newspaper images taken from these two very different news stories, which were reported in all forms of popular media at the time. One aim of the digital prints was to visually demonstrate how memory and fact dissipate over time, leaving a stretched and unfamiliar image of an event that has long since passed and no longer holds our interest. Their original cautionary meaning evaporates until the next gothic tale surfaces. The Tanner and Freeman Murder stories were reported concurrently with both suspected perpetrators being portrayed as cold-blooded and lacking in remorse or empathy for their victims or their victim’s families. The journalists went to great lengths to describe the lack of emotion on the perpetrators’ faces, which was in stark contrast to the photographic images reproduced in the newspaper of their smiling victims in happier times. In October 1998, Andrew Rule wrote a feature report on the death of Jennifer...
Im of a son
ently asleep on his front lawn
Ms Adele Bailey, 23, whose death is being investigated by the 1978. She suspected a link.
Tanner. His story titled 'The suicide that wasn’t', reads as an emotional and dark mini soap opera. We are aware through this following passage of writing where his sympathies lay.

Those attending the inquest instinctively split into two uneven camps. Jennifer Tanner came from a big family and so did her husband. But on most hearing days her parents, the Blakes, were accompanied by at least two of their three surviving daughters and several other relatives. They crowded into one side of the court, behind the counsel assisting the coroner, Jeremy Rapke, and task force police (Rule, 1998).

By contrast, the other side of the court was all but deserted. Although Laurie Tanner is one of five children, although his parents are still alive and although he was secretary of the local show society when his wife died, no one saw fit to accompany him and his brother. Except, that is, on days when two other Tanner brothers, Bruce and Frank, their mother, June, and Denis’s wife, Lynne, were called to give evidence that was singular for its hostility and brevity (Rule, 1998).

Celia Lury (2001) argues that photographs are one of the most pervasive sources of imagery in contemporary society for they 'endlessly invite deduction, speculation and fantasy about the self'. In Susan Sontag’s celebrated text On Photography, she remarks, 'photographs furnish evidence' and she elaborates: 'photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it' (Sontag 2001, p.9). In the Tanner and Freeman Murders, photography allows us to acknowledge that the unimaginable has taken place. We are able to inhabit the characters that populate these narratives, and for a brief period take 'imaginary possession of a past that is unreal' through the 'possession of space', in this case the space of the newspaper. The photographic images enable us to certify the experience at whom we gaze at (Sontag 2001, p.9). Returning to Lury's proposition that photographs provide the source material for self-identity, we are left to speculate as to what is being reflected.

Photographs in the context of the newspaper serve to heighten our emotional response to news items. Images considered of significance weigh down the page. In The Age newspaper’s coverage of the Tanner trial, images (which served as source material for Ordinary Days) are emphasised and Denis Tanner’s bulky image dominates the page. His larger-than-life presence is contrasted with the smaller inset of the victim, a youthful smiling woman who tilts her head to give the impression that it is resting coyly on her right hand. Significantly, the photo was taken two days before her alleged suicide/murder. In the Freeman Murder, the wife, Sue, dominates the page, with straight blonde hair, her face tight indicating a closed disposition. She wears a crumpled suit jacket and a mid-length skirt, her hands tightly clutched and thrust towards her thigh. Beside her image is a small insert of a smiling Ian Freeman, who looks to be in his early forties. Next to these images is a slighter smaller image of Ian Freeman’s distraught daughter listening to the proceedings in the courtroom. These images serve as memory of the events and precede the written accounts, facts and figures. They will become a vague residue of individuals caught within a time and place since past which was once depicted in the grainy and disposable newspaper. Consequently, their re-emergence in our memories is dependent upon our facility to separate them from similar stories and images.

When selecting the reproduced newspaper images from each case I was struck by the visual contrast between the victims, their families and the alleged murder suspects. The differences compelled me to scrutinise these images, dissect and penetrate their exterior. I attempted to do this by closely cropping the faces and hands of both the victims and the accused. In both cases, their facial expressions and hand movements appeared to be of interest to the reporters. As I selected areas to enlarge on the basis of this intuition, I was struck by the visual contrast between the victims, their families and the alleged murder suspects. The differences compelled me to scrutinise these images, dissect and penetrate their exterior. I attempted to do this by closely cropping the faces and hands of both the victims and the accused. In both cases, their facial expressions and hand movements appeared to be of interest to the reporters. As I selected areas to enlarge on the basis of this intuition, I was conscious of my obsessive need to take in all the details. I stared intently, scrutinising the shape of their eyes, mouths, teeth and noses. I could not help but classify these individuals according to their attire. My eyes would flit to and from each image on the page. When each image lost my attention I would return to the news text, which would immediately propel me back to the images. I was mesmerised.

The images reminded me of those that can be found neatly pasted into almost anyone’s private family scrapbook. I thus treated the images nostalgically, blurring out the details, rendering their faces into a soft distant memory. To achieve this, I enlarged the images several times on the photocopier, which allowed me to become familiar and conversely emotionally distant. As the images increased in size, details overlooked suddenly came to the fray. Facial expressions appeared to hold greater intensity. Mouths appeared contorted, eyes dark and brooding. The photocopier proved an invaluable tool
to distort, twist and turn the images in unpredictable ways. By moving further into the image’s interior, by reducing or expanding, I was able to reinforce the photographic trope of the newspaper close-up. The close-up is staged to create immediacy and reiterate the journalist’s and the viewer’s relationship to the scene and its unfolding narrative. The close-up also is charged with an emotional force, which is hard to overlook or miss. The close-up shifts from a literal presentation of the victim, to an abstract emotive response to the image. I stripped back the context and re-represented the close-up, in order to question its relationship to the media narrative and by extension its role in articulating the subject’s position and placement in everyday life. The close-up then becomes no longer a representational image of a smiling woman; rather it is symbolic of a victim, whose presence is only recognisable through a grainy newspaper shot. She becomes a grainy emotion, displaced and violently removed from our gaze. When manipulated, the visual structure of these images of crime scenes, of relatives caught in grief, and of victims, manifested different interpretations of experience. The visual distortion brought to the surface the consistent meaning with which the reader was meant to associate and identify—that what you are reading is a terrible and senseless crime. There is little that separates you, the reader/spectator, from this act and its hapless participants. You are linked emotionally and sentimentally.

Ordinary people are able to experience a collective shock and grief and identify with extraordinary people through newspaper and media coverage. However, history, as Morris points out, is tied to context and place, it is staged within a social background embedded in its narrative structure (Morris 1998). Hence, the history of the ordinary citizen, as in Tanner and Freeman, when manifested in the public domain of the newspaper, inadvertently overlaps our own personal history and becomes part collective memory of time and place. The Tanner and Freeman Murders did not change the course of history; however, they each inform us that human nature has the potential to be dark and unpredictable. In *The Tanner Murders*, the message is that institutions such as the police force cannot always be trusted in times of personal and social need.

In *Ordinary Days* the photographic images I selected from the newspaper serve as emblematic images of personal loss. They are simultaneously descriptive and empty, for they rely on text, captions and headlines to bring their form and emotional energy into focus. News can operate at the intersection of private and public grief and bewilderment. What I wanted to demonstrate in *Ordinary Days* was that design defines that intersection, drawing the reader in through picture placement and juxtaposition. The photographic image becomes embedded in its newspaper narrative structure. It moves beyond being a record of a crime scene, a police search in bushland, a smiling women in the company of friends. It is rendered as an abstraction of an event and its aftermath, a symbol of why, how, what and when. It is simultaneously entertainment and spectacle.
Ordinary days TEXT AND VOICE

My analysis showed that the newspaper text that accompanied the reporting of the Tanner and Freeman trials was presented in a cloak of objective reporting. The language appeared direct and factual. I wanted to test whether the reporter’s voice was factual, laced with an opinion, or an emotive response to the key players. I decided to slice the paragraphs up, to separate the sentences and thus dismantle the paragraphs and the structure of the text (see illustrations). By isolating sentences from paragraphs, I was able to unsettle the journalistic voice, to focus in on the emotive thrust of the reporting. I was able to study the words used and reconfigure the narrative in order to find new and implied rhythms and tempos. I deliberately sought to find or create clichés to imbue the text with new and implied emotion, which would allow the viewer to speculate on the protagonists’ feelings and statements.

Once the paragraphs were completely disembodied, I reassembled the sentences, forcing them into new fictional paragraphs. When I started to reconfigure the work graphically, I felt it important to break down and reveal the newspaper’s layout grid in order to show what graphic structures seek to hide. I purposefully explored alternative compositions to that of the newspaper. Layering and reassembling text, I sought to test how elements relate and interact with one another, integrating them into a new version of events. Finally in the text pages, I decided not to include removed photographic images choosing instead to treat text in a pictorial manner. I was interested to see how viewers would relate to Sue Freeman and Denis Tanner without being able to see them initially, how would memory and habit come into play? Would text as image serve as the lenses in which to see and re-imagine and see anew?
De Certeau argues that the site of the home and all that it contains presents a life narrative of its occupants. This life narrative emits an image of its occupants which, he elaborates, is dense ‘materially and emotionally’ (de Certeau 1998, p. 147). He also clearly articulates how formal structures embedded in every day artefacts, such as the newspaper, construct our relationship to others in our community. When describing the functioning of the urban neighbourhood or community, de Certeau proposes that the user becomes familiar with the space of the neighbourhood through engagement with that space on a daily basis:

The everyday is dynamic and open to many possibilities, and human interaction is an essential part of the everyday. The neighbourhood, created through a newspaper like Melbourne’s *The Age*, is peppered with personal and collective tales, so that it is easily recognised, traversed and consumed. It is a public space in which the individual can safely watch everyday life unfold, and where we can identify with its key themes of political and civic commentary, and analysis, education, economics and entertainment. It appears to me that for the reader the newspaper is not dissimilar to the neighbourhood which they physically inhabit. They are familiar with the streetscape, the detours and easy access points, the shortcuts, signs and posts. They avoid the streets’ less savoury aspects. In a similar way to a road map, the newspaper presents the quickest and most sensible route to obtain knowledge and stories. The reader can feel secure that she will not take a bad turn into unknown territory. My contention is that the graphic design of the newspaper facilitates this way-finding, presenting a clean and uncluttered road map of the territory, outlining where and how to get to information of interest, together with what is and is not important. The cultural theorist, Ien Ang, suggests that once a practice is considered ‘natural’, that is when it becomes integrated into the routines of everyday life and is ‘felt to be natural’, then ‘structurally [it] is not natural at all’ (Ang 1996, p.21). The point I wish to make from this is that graphic design within the newspaper mediates and constructs a representation of the world, which is different from our immediate experience.
In order to explore these ideas, I created approximately ten books purposely designed to be easily reproducible and intimate in their scale. The books are divided into two distinct categories: limited editions and those that have no edition and are able to be reproduced as many times as is desirable. They each explore type, language and graphic form. In most instances, they have been designed using collage techniques. The source material comes from *The Age* and *The Herald-Sun* newspapers.

The key focus of my books as demonstrated in *Breaking News*, a text presented for discussion, is the construction of the subject within the newspaper, drawing on our relationship to and understanding of the everyday. My books chart the personal histories of players within a constructed media narrative, drawing attention to the materiality of the newspaper, and examining how the newspaper uses graphic structures to create a neighbourhood replete with social identities. These identities emerge from the graphic margins, the social space of the book. I have deliberately set out to draw attention to the formal and visual aspects of the books, questioning how meaning is articulated and reinforced through design structures and how discourses of power insidiously inform popular culture narratives.

Miller and McHoul, refer to subjectivity and power as being interlinked and inseparable. They refer to power as the 'exercise of knowledge and agency to construct and police the subject' (Miller & McHoul 1998, p.1). For them, subjectivity operates as a means to experience oneself as human, and thus move through society. The social being is able to make sense of society and her place within the everyday, by making sense of the way to conduct her life through watching the lives of others. Power refers to the agencies that deliver the cues to the individual, such as television current affair programs with their human-interest stories. *In Breaking News* I attempt to examine how design facilitates and makes the everyday 'invisible but ever present' (Miller & McHoul 1998, p. 9). I consciously employed the book and its codex structure to publicise and reveal what the newspaper chooses to hide.

The book 'is a highly complex organization of material and conceptual elements' (Lupton & Miller 1996). It is made up of many parts, which serve to structurally define content and put it in place. This structure is referred to as the codex. The codex maintains, presents and communicates information. It is both functional and aesthetic, concept and content. It is denoted through uniform pages in a book which are bound together. Jost Hochuli and Robin Kinross dryly proclaim that the book designer is focussed on the material qualities and functions of the book:

The book designer is concerned with the following particular matters: format, extent, typography these three partly determine each other); materials (papers, binding materials); reproduction; printing and finishing (Hochuli & Kinross 1996, p.32).

Only when the designer has considered these pertinent areas will a complete and considered form materialise. The role of the book designer appears interchangeable with that of the newspaper designer. As with newspaper design, codes and rules must be strictly adhered to. The designer must intimately know the function of the head, gloss, body, foot, appendix, margin, figure and spine. Book design is a serious business, which must ensure that the end user is not fraught in her attempt to consume its content. In setting out to dismantle the book, its head margin, outer margin, inner margin, foot margin, running head, page numbers, spine, I wanted to expand upon this highly detailed structure.
**Breaking News**

*Breaking News*
Book One
Unique edition
A5, Parallax paper 180gsm, saddle stitch.

*Breaking News* is an interpretative account of two news stories reported in parallel in *The Age* on Tuesday, October 1, 1999. The stories were displayed on the same page. The first, gruesome and tragic, tells the story of a former policeman, who murdered his new born infant, and his attempt to murder his wife. The second tells the story of a disgruntled truck driver protesting against Mobile-BHP. His wife and three children are photographed with him sitting in the front cabin of his truck. This staged image confidently tells of a family united and supportive. The two stories are startlingly in contrast. The first is a family which has been ruthlessly destroyed by the husband’s desire to marry his overseas lover. The second is about a family who is united in difficult times.

The main text in *Breaking News* is set in Garamond and Garamond Book, utilizing italics, and light and bold weights. It is tightly set together, visually presenting the false impression of a continuous linear sentence. The text is set in 7/9/10 point: the leading oscillates from open to tight. Garamond is a classical typeface, which brings an unsettling visual beauty to the work. I deliberately decreased the margins, ensuring that each page felt tight and difficult to disassociate from. Each voice within the narrative is denoted by the different weights of the typeface. They take on the role of storytellers who interject and take over the telling of the story from each other. Each voice shifts the narrative into new realms. With *Breaking News*, the journalist’s text (voice of authority) is always set in Garamond light 7point. Its presence is deliberately muted in order to diffuse its power and to allow the protagonists to talk over it, thus allowing for the imagined emotive tenets of each story to take over. The narrative deliberately sets up an imagined scenario, from surmised emotive reactions of the actors.

**Design Form**

In *Breaking News* I worked with the idea of polyphonic and polymorphous texts. Inter-slicing voices were contained in both news stories. Drucker refers to polymorphous text as having a feminine form. This does not situate it as ‘female’, rather it is feminine by virtue of ‘occupying a place in the system of rhetoric which deliberately sets itself in opposition to a masculine trope of unity, singularity, linearity’ (Drucker 1998, p.257). She cites polymorphous text as having the capacity for a multitude of layered meanings. It allows for the inter-slicing of more than one voice, with the ultimate goal of leading to fractured meanings which work with and against one another.

Gui Bonsiepe, *Visual/Verbal Rhetoric* (1965), divides rhetoric into two categories; the first uses persuasion, the second description and analysis. He states, ‘the aim of rhetoric is primarily to shape opinions, to determine the attitudes of other people, or to influence their actions’. It is ‘the art of saying something in a new form’ (Bonsiepe 1965, p.167). Drucker’s citing of polymorphous text within the cannon of rhetoric infuses rhetoric with the potential to move beyond the shaping of a singular form of action or a determined opinion. It paves the way for dissent and questioning of sanctioned actions and belief systems.

The physical form of *Breaking News* reiterates the imagined responses of newsworthy families within the text. I have attempted to diffuse the form of the book by working within a singular column that visually dissociates the text from its original source, the newspaper. However, the narrative also presents as self-conscious critique of the newspaper, as I describe how the stories were placed in the paper, the page numbers, headlines, size and quality of the photographs, which accompanied each story. The newspaper is, therefore, present in a contrived and self-conscious manner. The sequence of each news story is unsettled, it is released from the usual newspaper reporting’s fixed, stable and linear structure. The voices of each character are independent, yet visually they are presented in harmony. The narrative is at once public and private.
The following is a section of the text within *Breaking News*. It illustrates how I turned public writing into personal writing, reinscribing and reclaiming personal histories from the public domain of the newspaper. I consciously attempted to acknowledge that 'personal writing' is always an inscription of the individual within the symbolic (Drucker 1998 p.62). Layers of text are interwoven, fragmented and disjointed. Meaghan Morris argues that 'non-historians do not usually want anybody’s history, or even simply to be touched by the dignity and authority that historicy still endows, we are drawn to histories that pressure us, solicit, engage or confront us' (Morris 1998, p. 5). The narrative serves as a visual inscription of multi-layered text. It reveals how language operates as a system, which creates and inscribes our relationship to power structures.

The body in *Breaking News* is referred to as the main part of a text. It is the substance, the weight of the document. It is instilled with authority and promise.

The headline is horrifying, a by-line for a Gothic tale of inconceivable actions.

**Dead: Baby Adam**

Eight weeks old. A beautiful head covered with dark hair. Adam gently looks out onto the world with an alert expression. Startled and surprised, he appears older than just eight weeks.

Sadness and disbelief, is contained within the image of this newborn.

**Adam: 8 weeks old.**

Man set fire to his wife and baby, murder trial told. My eyes move back and forth from the bold text to the image inset of a young baby.

Underneath this story is a large image spanning across four columns depicting a scene of a mother and father in their truck hugging two of their children, whilst their third child looks on through the truck window, grinning. This scenario, staged for the camera, represents a couple united in their love for their children. It sits uncomfortably below the horror of the tale above. This is its intention. It is contrived to illustrate the tale of a truckie standing up to big business, and the impact of his stance is ever present by the fact of his wife and children’s placement in his truck. This father’s obligations both morally and ethically are explicit. The actions of baby Adam’s father, are clear and inexcusable.

At the top of this page in the left hand corner, the text reads in italic set type

The Age

Tuesday October 1, 1999

Breaking News

Sharon had suspected that something was wrong, despite the birth of their beautiful boy. Mark, her husband was removed and resentful, hardly showing an interest in their newborn son’s development. She had never felt so low. As she lay across the bed, staring up to the ceiling, she couldn’t help but wonder what had she done that was wrong. They had a boy, for Christ’s sake, a little man to fill their days. Why was everything falling apart? He kept referring to her as unbalanced. Perhaps she was, but who could blame her, with a husband that kept putting her down?

I bring my face closer to the image of baby Adam. I notice that his little hand is clenched; his dark eyes appear large, set into his soft round face. He is rugged up, cosy and secure. What a gentle little face he has. I pull away from the image muttering and shaking my head.

"A former police man murdered his two month-old son and attempted to murder his wife."

I cannot help but accuse the man of the deed he is being accused of. I brand him as evil, his actions calculated and inexcusable. I once again shake my head in disbelief as I read the text, my eyes flitting back and forth from the image of the baby to that of the accompanying text.

It is difficult but not impossible-

A family sits tight.

Tight on the lonesome road. Disgruntled.

Disgruntled truck drivers yesterday blocked of the Mobile-BHP terminal

**Spread: Breaking News Hand-made book**
Breaking News interweaves the voices of the parents from both stories: news reportage is intermixed with an interpretative account of each of the parent’s feelings and emotive reactions to their individual circumstances. The resulting dialogue is a gothic tale, which attempts to explore the reader’s response to such stories, to demonstrate how we react to such events from the perspective of our own lives, values and experiences.

In re-writing the text for Breaking News and Ordinary Days, I attempted to deny the text as a definitive truth, making no claims to accurate retelling of a newspaper story. The text is understood and re-interpreted through the written word and its visual treatment. Drawing attention to the text’s visual presence allows for the dissembling of authoritative structures, underpinning this are continual references to the specificity of the newspaper and its materiality. Lupton and Miller (2000) refer to the act of rewriting as a ‘powerful response to the ubiquity of narrative sign systems’. By inhabiting and inverting text, the ‘structures of mass media can be reshuffled and reinhabited’ (Lupton & Miller 2000, p.23). I set out to constantly make reference to the body of the narratives that I craft, their materiality is ever present and constantly open to speculation and rejection. The body text becomes a crucial site in which to engage with and examine how authority in everyday life is constructed. Each page is fused with photo captions, footnotes, subheads. McHoul and Miller state, ‘the body is in the text of everyday life, by enacting that text, it becomes not a product but the processor of everyday life’ (McHoul & Miller 1998, p.16).

Text is deliberately repeated in order to disorientate the reader and to create new linkages and meanings. I sought to present scenarios where the reader begins to hear and visualize alternative texts. The new text shifts and turns, effacing the old and then resurrecting it. The text is barely recognizable from its initial source, it is enacted to not only process everyday life, but to understand how it operates in the context of its physical production. I have deliberately sought to speak of the body, to allow it to ramble and digress. Drucker acutely observes that, ‘literary text wants no visual interference or manipulation’ (1998, p.255). All interference and resistance must be minimised in order to allow the reader a smooth reading of the unfolding linear structure (Drucker 1998, p.255). My book design for Breaking News and my typographic explorations in Ordinary Days deny a smooth reading. Forever detouring and swerving, text becomes open ended and polymorphous through typographic interventions. In Breaking News, voices within the texts are dispersed and denoted through differing type families, font sizes, leading, kerning and line lengths.

Public and private language overlap through the graphic interweaving of disparate voices. The narrative does not proclaim to report or speak with a literary voice. It abandons a linear format, negating the newspaper and book’s proclaimed function of communicating ideas and opinions as effectively as possible. I have sought to situate the reader within the body of the text. Drucker (1998) states, ‘any text assumes a reader and marks that assumption to some extent’. She refers to these texts as ‘marked text’. Marked text ‘aggressively situates the reader in relation to the various enunciations in the text - reader, speaker, subject author - though with manipulative utilisation of the strategies of graphic design’ (Drucker 1998). Realism is exposed as melodrama.
SUMMARY
This chapter has questioned the role of the media in the creation of social order and the links between the seemingly functional world of the soap opera and everyday press stories of murders, especially murders involving love, marriage and family gone wrong. It argues that murders tales such as *The Tanner Murders* and *The Freeman Murder* function as gothic tales which newspapers design draws into our field of vision and our everyday lives.

Through description of installation and books this chapter has charted the development of critical interventionist strategies which seek to interrogate the use of photographs and text within the newspaper.

I have described the ideas informing the production of *Ordinary Days* and *Breaking News* in order to explain the development of my ‘practice of intervention’, the aim of which is to allow the reader to enter the private space of the stories by dissociating them from the authoritative and recognizable form of the newspaper. I sought to encourage the viewer to become conscious of how they weave their own story into that which they were seeing and reading. I encourage the viewer to construct and take ownership of these gothic narratives.

I attempt to destabilise and to impose a conflict on hierarchy in design. Seeking to discover and create new patterns, as Stuart Hall (1999), succinctly articulates, ‘messages have a complex structure of dominance’ (p.507). A message can only be received and understood if we are able to recognise the authoritative structures which hold in place and give endorsement to ‘institutional power relations’ (Hall 1999, p.507).

I have sought to rework the illustrated visual structures of the book and the newspaper to realise new meanings, and different expressions and interpretations of experience.
This chapter accordingly seeks to use the newspaper and a constructed gothic narrative to challenge graphic design’s involvement in shaping the public social discourse. It asks whether graphic design, which is essentially a servant of the media, can be turned back on itself and used as a strategy for social and cultural intervention, for critiquing and deconstructing the conventions of the media, its employment of language, and its visual and verbal narratives. The specific focus is on the context and strategies of *Tabloid*, an installation exhibited at West Space Gallery in November 2000. The graphic work that comprised *Tabloid* used an interpretative and graphic narrative as an interventionist strategy, to reveal how design in the newspaper is not neutral, but rather shapes our understanding of and relationship to mainstream society.

The ‘gothic narrative insert’ strategies developed through *Tabloid* presented the impetus and inspiration to develop and use within this chapter’s pages in a similar manner to chapter two. The aim being to simulate the reader’s experience—to make one conscious of the subliminal nature at which design works and how the reader, as de Certeau suggests embeds herself in the text, making it her own.

The insert included here, *Tabloid, A Lover’s Tale*, mimics and echoes the strategies developed in the West Space exhibition. It uses an interventionist strategy to demonstrate how the newspaper becomes a site for public entertainment, a place to watch various and diverse mini Tabloid soap operas unfurl. News functions as public entertainment, colourful and perverse and full of identifiable characters and places. The question underlying this interrogation, is can the designer, as cultural producer, reappropriate design strategies to challenge and renegotiate the public narrative of the media, in the process drawing attention to the manner in which the media insidiously shapes our ideas and imagination of social citizenship? As an active and complicit partner in the mechanics of representation, it is vital that the designer is able to question and to consider how she actively shapes and depicts society.

*Tabloid, A Lover’s Tale*

The newspaper is highly visible as you encounter it at the makeshift newsstands around the city, milk bars and newsagents, on public transport and within the work place. It is not uncommon to find a paper left at a table, a café or on a park bench or tram seat. Its presence is woven into our daily lives, lurking always on the periphery until we choose to bring it closely into our vision. It seeks to define a prescribed moment, to bring our day into a unified relief. As explored in chapter two, picaresque narratives populate newspapers. Individual’s stories are dealt with episodically. Victims’ and suspects’ lives are rendered as tragic adventures, populated with rogues and misfits.

*Tabloid, A Lover’s Tale* demonstrates how crime reporting in the newspaper helps to define society’s morals, informing us about what is acceptable and normal behaviour, warning us of the dire consequences which befall individuals when they deviate from that which is perceived as good and correct, as well as helping us to establish the differences between normal and deviant actions. Crime journalism, as a media genre embedded in the newspaper, holds morbid fascination to both media and its audience. Its subject matter is dramatic and intense, characterised by individuals caught up in mayhem of their own and other people’s making. In *Media Stories: Murder, Motives and Moralities*, Kleberg and Pollack (2005) argue that in crime journalism reporting...
Critical Narratives - Fact or Fiction

is infused with both speculative and factual information in order to moralise and legitimise ‘pronouncements on the condition of society’ (2005, p.3).

Jewkes (2004) concurs, arguing that in its reporting of crime the media can be likened to a ‘prism’, in that it not only reflects the news but subtly contorts and distorts ‘the view of the world it projects’ (1994, p.37). Media images cannot be understood as an accurate picture of reality. Rather, they are, as Jewkes asserts, ‘culturally determined and dependent’ on a mediated image of ‘reality’ which is shaped by ‘media production processes’ and the assumptions that ‘media professionals make about their audiences’ (Jewkes 1994, p.37).

Crime news, thus, is constructed and manufactured according to ideological agendas. As Jewkes writes, the crime stories that are deemed newsworthy have all been through rigorous selection processes by journalists and editors:

- They sift and select news items, prioritize some stories over others, edit words, choose the tone that will be adopted (some stories will be treated seriously, others might get a humorous or ironic treatment) and decide on the visual images that accompany the story (1994, p.37).

Known as agenda setting, this process involves the media considering first and foremost how to construct audiences, then setting an agenda based around those stories which have newsworthiness qualities, public appeal and public interest. Which returns us to the argument that media images are not reality, but rather a version of reality. The spectacle of news reporting, as Jewkes explains, has blurred the lines between ‘real’ and ‘fake’, thus rendering it difficult to distinguish between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ (Jewkes 1994, p.55).

In order to better understand agenda setting in the media, it is worth considering Miller and McHoul’s reading of ‘culture’ as a clump of signifying practices ‘with its own determinations of meaning’. Culture, therefore, cannot be read as a mirror of our ideas, but rather as a site to examine how texts function and what they foreground (Miller & McHoul 1998).

A message can only be received and understood if we are able to recognise the authoritative structures, which hold it in place and give it endorsement. The newspaper is an authoritative and socially sanctioned form of power. It seamlessly exercises knowledge and helps to construct and contain social identities, from political leaders, law makers and media celebrities to youth, the aged, house parents, blue collar and professional workers and the unemployed.

The subject is able to traverse the everyday, through acknowledging the social legitimacy of the space of the newspaper. This presents us with productive models of how to negotiate, live and understand life, as well as to present narratives as to what happens when we miss or deviate from socially sanctioned behaviour.

Expressed and crafted using the graphic strategies of newspaper text, Tabloid: A Lover’s Tale, together with photographic images taken from the Tabloid exhibition, explored the nature of newspaper design and critically expose its complicity in the construction of social narratives and social myths.

Through reframing the newspaper, I attempted to open up a path to navigate and interrogate the assumed objectivity of news reporting and newspaper design and more fundamentally of graphic design.

The installation, Tabloid, and the textual response to this exhibition, Tabloid: A Lover’s Tale, evolved from a collection of news items sourced from The Age newspaper from April until May 1997. These news items, which aptly fit my category of gothic tales, charted the murder on the 4th October 1991 of a young mother Melinda Freeman. The headline for her story was disturbing and intriguing, ‘Melinda Freeman was murdered hours after this photo was taken. Six years on, who did it?’ (Donovan 1997). This was followed a month later by the next headline, ‘Court told of lover and death’ (Donovan 1997). The subsequent four headlines, which introduced and set the parameters for this story, were tawdry, exciting and enticing. The line had been thrown and this fish had the bait firmly in her mouth, reluctant to let go. I wanted to know how this story would evolve and conclude, who indeed did do it? I was comforted by the fact that I was reading such a tale in the pages of a respected daily newspaper as opposed to a tabloid. My fascination and perverse intrigue was legitimised as I comfortably settled into one of the final headlines detailing her story on the 18 6 1997, ‘Police dispute burglary link on wife’s death’ (Donovan 1997).
Tabloid

Critical Narratives-Fact or Fiction
A Lover’s Tale?

(this is visually presented in the thesis which is accompanied with visual images)
Tabloid Critical Narratives
Fact or Fiction? A lover's tale.

Lover 16 06 97
Lover tells court of husband's comment.

Court reporter

The photograph in The Age newspaper, located on page three, Wednesday 6 June 1997, depicts Tammy gripping her husband's hand, their fingers interlocked, warm and clammy, fixed together by nervous sweat. Doug is short and stocky; he is wearing an open shirt, a dark ribbed woolen jumper and loose fitting jeans. Together they try to move quickly from the court building. Doug's head is tilted down. His feet mechanically move thrusting him forwards. He is suddenly aware of every movement that he makes. For the first time in his life, he feels awkward and uncomfortable like a punch-drunk footballer weaving on the footy ground. The photograph and subsequent news reportage distils and conveys the anxiety and public humiliation of this moment.

The text above is the introductory paragraph of a narrative, which tracks the court trial of a man in his early thirties. He is accused of murdering his wife.

As the story unfolds, the reader/viewer becomes aware of the husband's suspected motives, through the voice of his ex-lover;

"Belinda had been my best friend. Things like this do happen, I mean people have affairs! Sean should not have killed her. I don't think he did it for me. As I said in my statement, in a court of law, I had no intention of leaving my husband. Sean knew I wasn't the type to put up with an ex wife coming around."

I first came across the article that this story is based on in The Age newspaper on 18 6 1997. Since then I have tracked the story from its first initial reportage which appeared on page ten in the 'News in brief' column situated on the left-hand page in the top far right corner. The text was succinct and matter of fact:

A young mother was found murdered in her suburban home on Sunday morning by her husband. Police are currently investigating…

The Banner on this page was composed of the following elements:

The Age, Day, Date, Year, the by-line Breaking news (italised) all typeset in Berling Roman 18point and an clip art arrow referring readers to the papers web address.

All of this information is underlined in a .7 width line demarcating its position and status on the page in a clear manner.

The story was reported in both the Age and the Herald Sun. I chose to follow and examine The Age version of events.

The report on the following day was situated on page four. It was type set across two columns. Positioned once again in the far right corner on the left-hand side page. The headline was 30 point in Berling Roman, bold, followed by a by-line, the reporter's name then the body of text— Utopia 8.7point, 9.2 point leading, justified. Information provided was detailed; discussing the extent of the dead women's injuries— how her husband found her. His initial emotional response became the focus of the news item.
weeping, screaming and gabbling
The gruesome details of the injuries the victim sustained were gleaned through comments to the media by her husband and the police. In the first two reports it was stated that the murder victim had disturbed an intruder. Personal items and video equipment had been taken.

Noel Freeman. Father. Told police.
His son called him after discovering.
Discovering body, Mrs Freeman's.
He was "weeping, screaming and gabbling".
He drove. Straight to Sean's house and saw.
Saw Mr Freeman sitting.
Sitting on a couch.
Clutching Brent and sobbing. Sobbing, Clutching, sitting on a chair.

The house. Ransacked he said.
House has been ransacked, clutching Brent gabbing.

Subsequent reportage spanned across three columns. The story was accompanied with studio photographs of the deceased, Belinda Freeman hugging her young son Brent. By the third reportage, which took place two weeks later, we, the reader/viewer are made aware that the police suspected foul play. The husband has been transformed. He is no longer portrayed as the grieving spouse. He is the main murder suspect.

The burglary "appeared to be set up"
"a very cool person" to have killed.
Cool person, to have killed and carried out the burglary.
Set up. Cool person. Hearing continues.
State Forensic Science Laboratory.
Court
Constable Robert Huygen.

At this point the news item shifts from reportage of a murder to a speculative ‘who dunnit’. It is transformed textually into a complex serial, revealing over a period of time, factual, speculative and subjective information. Plot lines are developed and constructed, new characters are introduced for the express purpose of laying the foundation for the ultimate showdown in court, when the final conclusion may be revealed. The typesetting of the article constantly changes throughout the life of the story, the head line which at first appeared innocuous, 14 point Berling Roman, bold, oscillated from 30 to 60 points Berling Roman bold, loose kerning accompanied with photographic stills and captions.

Fingers interlocked with Tammy's, he looks down onto the broken asphalt. There is nowhere else to look. The cameras click around him. Men scream at them to look up. Doug is caught in a maelstrom of his wife's making. Tammy, big and strong, squeezes his hand tighter. Her wedding ring cold against the flesh of his thick and large callused hands.

When the story appeared two months later the focus and tone had shifted. The husband Sean Freeman, his family and his deceased wife's family were re-introduced to the reader/viewer attending the court hearing:

Mother believes son-in-law killed, court told. (Berling Roman 28 points—1.5 kerning)

The heading is positioned centrally on page four, the body text Utopia 8.7 point— 9.2 point leading is formatted across four columns each 60mm wide with a 5mm gutter. It is positioned underneath a large photo depicting the key players/characters of the news report.
Mother believes son-in-law killed, court told
Belinda had been bashed to death. Tammy had to put it out of her mind. What could she say, she couldn’t admit to what had been said privately between her and Sean. What had happened to Belinda could easily be misconstrued as being Tammy’s fault. Belinda had been her friend; her husband and Doug played footy together every Saturday afternoon in winter. Sean was being accused of Belinda’s murder. Tammy had changed her statement in court today. She admitted that she had believed all along that Sean was guilty of this hideous crime. Tammy felt it important to let them know it had not been her intention to ever leave her husband for Sean. She did not want her best friend Belinda to die.

The drama of the story was suggested both textually and visually. At the height of its perceived public interest, photographs accompanied it. The photographs ranged from black and white grainy family snaps to considered and carefully composed studies of family members either milling or moving in and out of court buildings. The photographs became the dominant visual element on the page; they served to physically and emotionally locate the main players of the story.

Belinda beams. An attractive girl, her hair has gone frizzy from years of dying with peroxide. Large cat eyes, she smiles for all to see. Her photo is positioned in the far right of the newspaper article. It is small in comparison to the image of Tammy, flanked by her husband and sister. Sean’s image is the largest of the three. He is caught in side profile, mouth slightly pinched, hair immaculately combed, crisp suit, with large lapels, starched shirt, carefully buttoned up. He appears impish, an average fellow, surveying the scene. A professional studio photographer had taken Belinda’s photo. She is positioned against a muted backdrop. The photographer has taken a close up of her face, and her torso is cropped. The focus is on Belinda’s smile, her face framed by teased blonde streaked hair. Both the photographs of Sean, Tammy, her sister and husband have been taken by a photojournalist. No one is smiling; each individual is caught in a private moment, their faces turned away.
Lover tells court of husband’s comment.

Court reporter

LOVER HUSBAND WIFE FRIEND VICTIM DEAD
COURT REPORTER PHOTOGRAPHER READER

Tammy, exlover to murder victims husband, Sean
Sean, accused murderer
Belinda, murder victim, wife of Sean
Doug, Tammy’s husband, associate of Sean
Screwing her face into a tight ball of flesh, what a fool! Acknowledged that she still thought it had taken Ben to a professional level. 

Pinched, with an average suit, the image is flanked by small in the right far right.

Belinda beams. An attractive girl, Tammy had been unhappy for awhile. Doug and her would fight over little things. It just didn't feel right anymore. She wasn't looking for what she found.

Ten and Tammy would meet in a small parking lot in the quiet street. The cold wind filled the car with the sound of his engine. It had pulled off the road after a late night discussion about being together.

Sean was dying, and there was nothing she could do. 

"Why did you do that?" she asked. 

"I've always been a bit of a fool," he said. "I never thought it would end like this."

"But you loved her," she said.

He nodded. 

"Yes, I did. But it was a selfish love."

"What could she say? It all had happened from there."

"Screwed her face into a tight ball of flesh. What a fool!"

Acknowledged that she still thought it had taken Ben to a professional level. Pinched, with an average suit, the image is flanked by small in the right far right.
Tammy stares ahead. Her face is pinched, mouth tightly shut. Her thick blonde fringe puffs around her broad forehead covering her eyebrows. She looks pitiful. Her skin hangs loosely around her chin. Her girth is thick, swathed in a tight-fitting winter jacket.

**Tammy's jacket stretches over the bulk of her body, resting uncomfortably against her thighs.**
The photograph in the Age newspaper, located on page four, Wednesday 6 May 1999, captures her husband's hand clasping hers. The photograph, titled "Lover tells court of husband's comment," shows Doug and Tammy, both wearing casual clothes, standing in the courtroom. Doug's hand is clasped over Tammy's, and Tammy is wearing a white shirt. The photograph captures a moment of emotional tension between the two.
Tammy holds her husband's hand, her nails digging into his skin. Shame and horror threaten to topple her. Her husband's grip, she senses, is like the weight of his home court building. Belinda had been bashed to death. Tammy holds it all in her mind. What could have convinced her to do what had been done to Belinda? As her husband and Doug played footy together every Saturday afternoon in winter, Sean was being accused of Belinda's murder. Tammy had changed her statement in court today. She admitted that she had believed all along that Sean was guilty of this hideous crime. Tammy knew it was important to let them know it had not been her intention to ever leave her husband for her husband look down. She looks ahead. Words, accusations and revelations whirl in her mind. She grimaces at the thought of Sean's clumsy hold. An urge to heave in this street causes her to stumble. Bile collects in her throat, she runs her tongue across her teeth, distracted by their roughness, she sucks her cheeks in, heart pounding.
The council...
Tammy tightly holds her husband and sister's hands. Their grip keeps her steady, in control. Both her sister and husband look down. She looks ahead, nodding, vacillating, and revolting what she's heard. She grimaces at the thought of Seán's death. An urge to hear his view causes her to crumble. She clutches her throat, she runs her tongue across her teeth, distracted by their roughness, ridges, edges, and contours. Her hand moves to her left hip, and she sucks her cheeks tightly, tightly, tightly, into her skin, pulling her mouth, nose touching a thin mist of his. Her hand moves up to a lover's tiff, down to her left hand, back seat of the car, pants down around Tammy's knees, sharp and quick. Sean had said that night he'd leave his wife for her.
exploded because Tammy wanted to leave early, go home to her husband, and fall asleep. Sean had held her in his thick nails in screaming spray of his been
Tammy secretly believed that
Sean had murdered his wife.
Sean had said that night he'd been his wife
had left him. Tammy believed in the original
warning to be with him, saying his
attention, the University of his
work, Tammy played up to his anger,
managing circumstances. Tammy following
wouldn't keep him smiling. What a fool.

A young man witness to the same stopped
and asked her if she was all right. "Fuck off
man, or I'll kill you," Sean had said. She
shuddered at the insult. How could Sean
sounded. Tammy didn't move, mesmerized by his anger, staring
into Sean's face like a dumbstruck rabbit
too dazzled to register the impending
danger. The onlooker lost his nerve and
quickly walked away.
"She's dead?" Tammy asked him at the time, about all the things he said prior to Belinda's murder. He told her to shut up, that it wasn't good to bring up the past. His word was his bond. Since his arrest, Tammy has never trusted him, she was afraid of him. "How can I trust him?" Tammy asked Belinda. "How can I trust him when he says he never loved me?" Tammy asked Belinda. "How can I trust him when he says he never loved me?"

Tammy recalls the intensity of her needs. "He was so possessive, he wouldn't let her go out. He wouldn't let her talk to other men. He wouldn't let her have any friends. He was always jealous of her."

Of course Tammy knew that Belinda had no friends. You know, Tammy said that she was the type that could handle the ex-wife coming around. Belinda was her ex-wife, but when she would talk about their kids, she would always talk about how much she loved them. "He's got to remember, sometimes things don't work out. I know I did a lot around my statement. I just couldn't bring myself to think... what I thought that he had killed her because of her."

Tammy has no idea why Belinda was killed. She just knows that she was the type that could handle the ex-wife coming around. Belinda was her ex-wife, but when she would talk about their kids, she would always talk about how much she loved them. "He's got to remember, sometimes things don't work out. I know I did a lot around my statement. I just couldn't bring myself to think... what I thought that he had killed her because of her."
An attractive girl, her hair slightly impish, was standing in the scene. A professional studio photographer has taken a close up of her face. He is wearing a slightly crispy shirt, with his hair covered with a hamper. He is looking at his subject and taking a photo. The photographer has taken a photo of the girl's face. The girl's face is turned slightly to the left, and her hair is slightly windblown.

Seana is a bit of a sensitive girl, but she is good at holding her own. She has long, dark hair that falls to her shoulders. Her eyes are big and blue, and she has a gentle expression on her face. She is wearing a simple white shirt, and she looks a bit lost in thought.

The photographer is a bit of a perfectionist, and he is taking his time to get the perfect shot. The girl looks a bit nervous, but she is trying to smile for the camera. She is looking a bit tired, and she seems to be a bit out of her element.

The photographer is a bit of a perfectionist, and he is taking his time to get the perfect shot. The girl looks a bit nervous, but she is trying to smile for the camera. She is looking a bit tired, and she seems to be a bit out of her element.
ex-Lover
Husband
Wife
Associate
Victim
Murder
Jury
Reporter
Photograph
Story
SUMMARY
This chapter has sought to graphically reveal how the newspaper acts as the guardian of symbolic neighbourhoods, where community and personal information is filtered and delivered according to the neighbourhood’s codes, values and social rituals. The good character of a neighbourhood is held (portrayed by its press) through an appropriate delivery of its citizens’ misdemeanours and triumphs. Certeau describes the neighbourhood as a place in which conformity and proper social standards must prevail, noting that:

The neighbourhood is a social universe that does not take transgression very well; this is incompatible with the supposed transparency of everyday life, with its immediate legibility; it must take place elsewhere, hide itself in the darkness of the ‘bad side of town,’ or flee into the private folds of the household (de Certeau et al 1998, p.18).

In Tabloid: A lover’s Tale, I have explored the bad side of town, to reveal how language and image operate in the public space of the newspaper to rupture information that is simplistic and attractive, friendly and manageable. I did this by presenting a way of looking at, constructing and engaging with narrative through the appropriation of and re-reading of newspaper/journalist text. The construction and display of the text for A Lover’s Tale seeks to question whether design has the capabilities to critically engage, subvert or intervene in the mechanics of representation. The aim was to reveal, and at the same time make transparent, models of display within the newspaper. To achieve this I analysed the newspaper in an integrated way, using design strategies to reveal how a newspaper’s sum parts interact and affect one another. I dismantled and drew attention to the act of reading, allowing for the text to be read in both a linear and haphazard fashion. By creating visual layers, graphically and physically, I created opportunities for the reader to visually weave through the text, while at the same time drawing attention to the visual dimensions of the page. Each spread functioned as both image and text. Narratives became embedded within narratives.

A Lover’s Tale, sought to give conscious presence to a variety of voices—the voice of a woman who was the ex-lover of a murder suspect, her husband, the court journalist, the factual information relating to the court trial as well as my voice as the reader/author, expressed through the emotive descriptions of photographs. The narrative revealed itself to be a constructed artifact through its graphic interpretation and display. It revealed my own and the journalist’s interpretations of a cast of characters, in this instance a composite of my own words and those of The Age journalist. Tabloid oscillated between the private, and the public, the factual and the fictional. It demonstrated how the newspaper functions as serial entertainment and can present a contrived, if not fictional, account of an individual’s life.

Tooran (1998) argues ‘the inevitable difference between the reality of existence and the representation of it disappears in a conflict free staging’ (Tooran 1998, p.154). He clarifies that design, through a ‘bombardment of fragmentary impressions’ beguiles, consumers and citizens, lessening and to an extent negating our interest in the ‘reality behind the images and messages of the culture industry’ (Tooran 1998, p.154). I worked with this strategy, of which Tooran purposefully speaks with disdain. In A Lover’s Tale the text shifts through my rewriting and display, and fact becomes entwined with speculation. Factual reports taken from the newspaper are shifted to my interpretive prose through the breaking down and removal of sentences. The layering of transparent pages, which allowed the reader to peer into the layers, enabled me to break from the linear tradition of moving through pages in a book. Repetition and quotation were used as devices to draw out and focus on hidden and implied meanings. Similar graphic devices, such as cropping and rhythm, further developed the notion of multiple readings. The text’s content and its treatment as physical form become inseparable from the reading of the work. Through display I assert and draw attention to the text’s material properties, to how writing functions to be both looked at and read, and to how fact and fiction become interchangeable as well as interdependent.

The content and headlines of the newspaper articles served as the source material, which I used to re-create a narrative composed of actual and speculative information. Headlines were immersed in the stories’ structure. I attempted to bring to life the voice of all the characters that made up this tragic gothic tale. The characters’ names have been changed in the interest of fiction, however the events and how they are told in court proceedings are the same. Melinda’s voice is omitted. She is a silent witness to her own death and the subsequent events that unfold. However her image is forever to the forefront of this story. She is depicted as she was hours before her death: beaming and happy, an image of optimism and life.
On Monday February 2, 2002, the readers of the Melbourne Age newspaper were confidently informed that ‘From today, The Age has a bright new look with a design emphasis on freshness and clarity’. Design was immediately put under the spotlight. Readers of the paper were introduced to the concept that the new design would improve their relationship with the paper by delivering clear and concise information with dollops of freshness and clarity.

Design was to act as a contemporary Mary Poppins, sweeping away chaos and confusion with a neat, happy and clear disposition. ‘Keep it simple’ was the message of the day.

Greg Hywood, the publisher of The Age, introduced the rationale for the redesign of the newspaper on page nine with the following headline which announced optimistically, ‘Newspapers—a sunrise industry’ (Heywood 2002, p.A09). In his introductory paragraph he mapped a brief history of The Age:

The Age has prospered for nearly 150 years because it has changed with the times. In the early days, newspapers were almost entirely publications of record. In Melbourne in the 1890s readers would have been unaware of what occurred outside their immediate neighbourhood until their newspaper arrived in the morning. Papers were filled with basic information. There was no commentary or analysis and certainly nothing that dealt with the issues of the everyday life (Hywood 2002, p.9).

It can be argued that the new Age signalled a shift in function for the newspaper, from publication of public record to that of civic orator, commentator and analyst. Its new image was supported by the development of well-conceived graphic design systems. Design was to be used to convince the public that changes in editorial policy were responsive to, and reflective of, the ever-changing composition of an increasingly informed and visually hungry public. In an editorial further explaining the redesign, Bill Farr, the art director of The Age, and James de Vries, the director of the design consultancy DeLuce & Associates, emphasise that the redesign had been a thoughtful and considered process, adding ‘we have been well aware of the risks that come with change’. The readers, they reassured, could be confident that the ‘redesign of The Age certainly wasn’t embarked upon frivolously. It’s been all about communication of content’ (Farr & de Vries, 2002, p.A09). Implicit in this statement is the importance of design form to articulate and communicate newspaper content.

De Vries (2002), in his lecture at RMIT School of Applied Communication, ‘A Century to Find Pax: The Story of the Re-Design of The Age Newspaper’ suggests that the newspaper designer’s role is to ‘translate the world we create for discussion’. This world is that which is shaped by and confined to
Margaret Wales-King and Paul King

story of the Wales-King murders

content is reinscribed with new

fabricate a new map, whereby

narrative. I use this material to

newspaper text and photographic

articulated and interpreted through

understanding of how everyday life is

contributes to a deeper

the design for m of the newspaper

dwindling readership.

redesign in an effort to retain a

making as newspapers are using

and factual reporting to opinion

changes in newspaper formats and

emotional response. It highlights

Murders

of the reporting of

examine how the visual composition

works to shape our

meanings and emphasis. I argue that

the pages of the newspaper. It is

selective and biased towards its

readers’ perceived interests. Design

translates this journalistic world into

visual form, enabling it to be gazed

upon, glimpsed and expounsh visual,

as well as read, according to a

prescribed text.

Three months later after the new

layout The Society Murders presented

readers with the ideal opportunity to

see how well the redesign would

communicate sensationalist content

in a clear and thoughtful manner.

Using the new-look Age and The

Society Murders, this chapter will

analyse and describe the design form

which constructs the newspaper into a

tight and cohesive format. It

specifically looks at The Age and The

Sunday Age, focusing on the portrayal

and positioning of one-on going

story, The Society Murders. This was a

murder case that captured the

attention of Melbourne’s ordinary

citizens over a period of months and

years: it later fed a docu-drama

screened nationally on Australian

television in 2006, based on the


story of the Wales-King murders, by

Hilary Bonney. The Society Murders

appears as a true gothic tale of family

intrigue and love gone wrong.

A key component of this discursive

mapping exercise is to analyse the

design form of the newspaper, and to

examine how the visual composition

of the reporting of The Society

Murders works to shape our

emotional response. It highlights

changes in newspaper formats and

agendas from broadsheet to tabloid,

and factual reporting to opinion

making as newspapers are using

redesign in an effort to retain a

dwindling readership.

The aim is to reveal how analysing

the design form of the newspaper

contributes to a deeper

understanding of how everyday life is

articulated and interpreted through

newspaper text and photographic

narrative. I use this material to

fabricate a new map, whereby

content is reinscribed with new

meanings and emphasis. I argue that

the newspaper could not compete in

a society that has at its fingertips an

array of communicative gadgets and

tools, if it did not explicitly

understand and know how to exploit

the power of design.

THE MODERN NEWSPAPER

Early nineteenth century newspapers

where influenced by, and in many

respects directly imitated, the

aesthetic of book design, until

advertising created increasing

pressure for newspapers to appear

more interesting. Robert Craig notes

that the competition in the news

business ensured that publishers

identified the need to ‘promote their

own newspapers with visually new

means, and began using the graphic

devices pioneered by advertisers’. 

The devices Craig references are now

the visual staple of news graphics-

displays headlines: display

typography; varied layout styles,

differing type weights and styles,

photography and illustrations.

Commercial interests ‘spurred the

evolution of publication design’

setting the scene for the nineteenth

century newspaper to depart

radically from the paper of record:

The persuasive character of

newspapers took two directions during

the nineteenth century. First,

newspapers tried to persuade

consumers to buy their product as

competition for audience among media

developed. Second, the advertisers

used increasing amounts of space for

advertising (Craig 1990, p.2).

Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) argue

that the ‘rise of the professional

newspaper occurred simultaneously

with the development of an aesthetic

of modernism’. Modernism presented a

new template to distil, order and

display a socially and politically

complex world. As they succinctly

state:

In the fine arts of the early twentieth

century, Modernism represented a

response to conflict, to world war and

social disorder and economic

dislocations occasioned in part to

industrial capitalism. Emphasising

simplicity, clarity and mastery. As it

spread from the fine arts and informed

styles adopted by newspapers,

Modernism retained the warring

attributes of mastery and revolution

(Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.188).

‘Modern Style’ became appropriate

for the newspaper because it helped

to engineer a new ‘social map’. A

map that would filter unnecessary

information (Barnhurst & Nerone

2001). This new order would bring a

visual calm that would supersed the

Victorian newspaper. Modern design

within the newspaper marked a

radical shift over time in style and

form. Fewer items occupied the front

page and a hierarchy of information

instigated a change in the reading

habits of the newspaper’s audiences.

Readability, clarity, organisation and,

importantly, the idea of order,

signified logic and stability in a world

considered to be in a constant state

of change (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001).
The new organisation of newspapers, through fewer columns, horizontal layouts, and simplified headlines, drew on early Modernist ideas about geometry and the rejection of decoration. Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) divide the rise of Modernism in Western newspaper design into four distinct phases: Protomodern Phase, 1910s-present, Classicist Phase, 1930s-present; High Modern Phase; 1970s onwards; and Late Modern Phase, 1980s-present.

Each phase is marked by political, social and technological change, upheaval and advances. The Protomodernist Phase saw the industrial newspaper replaced with the professional newspaper. Modernist reforms, such as a code of ethics for reporters and editors, were initiated by the press as a response to a lack of trust in industrialised media. Cultural value was placed on clarity and order. At the same time, modern journalism proposed a new way of looking at and understanding newspaper pages, particularly the front page which is given the privileged status of a 'single canvas' (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001).

The Classicist Phase saw a decline of loss of readers, of advertising, and revenue, which was advanced by the Great Depression and World War II. The newspaper during this period became more visually focussed through tight spatial organisation, with text aligned into rectangles and the introduction of borders to demarcate stories. The Classicist Phase saw a return to the ideals of the Victorian era, that is a search for classical purity in pure form. Advancements in offset printing and phototypesetting saw more physical space devoted to photographic images.

The High Modern Phase is seen by many as the height of Modernist doctrine which saw the complexity of the news page reduced to a series of rectangles often referred to as modules. The newspaper was seen as a 'conceptual canvas' in which to push and pull news (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001). Barnhurst and Nerone see this period somewhat derisively, as heralding the rise of the graphic design professional. They write, 'graphic design professionals ruled supreme or close to it (despite their many demurrers)' (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.209).

The final phase, Late Modern, is what design scholars (Hutt 1960), (Craig 1999) and (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001) refer to as a 'designer's newspaper' and involves the growth of the Modern graphic design profession with art directors being brought in to direct the redesign of newspapers.

In 1929, The Times of London commissioned Stanley Morrison to introduce a modernist style to its pages. Similarly, in the 1970s newspapers hired design consultants such as Massimo Vignelli to redesign their newspaper, using interpretations of Swiss School-style grids. Both Morrison and Vignelli approached the task as guardians of good taste striving, in Morrison’s case for the clarity of good book design, and in Vignelli’s, for the visual reduction of information into a concise and rational form. By the end of the twentieth century, the packaging of the news came to the forefront.

BROADSHEET TO TABLOID? The term tabloid traditionally refers to small format newspapers. Barnhurst asserts, 'within its small size, a tabloid adopts a moral, rather than an intellectual view of the world' (Barnhurst 1995, p.29). In contrast a broadsheet newspaper is a full-sized newspaper, approximately 14x24 inches. The Age newspaper’s size format indicates that it is a broadsheet. Its proportions command that the reader take note of the seriousness of its news items. Barnhurst refers to broadsheets as establishment symbols, and argues that the authority of a broadsheet traditionally resides in the ‘huge investments required for the purchase of large presses’ (Barnhurst 1995, p.24). This is clearly the case with Fairfax, the publishers of The Age, who justified the re-building of their printing plant in the following manner:

Fairfax’s decision to invest $220 million in a world-class printing plant at Tullamarine is a vote of confidence in the future of print. Later this year we will have the opportunity to produce a newspaper of a quality unsurpassed in the world. It is therefore the right time to make sure that the Age’s content and design meets reader needs in the new millennium (Farr & de Vries 2002, p.A09).

The Age newspaper is not a tabloid by strict definition. Its size format is that of a broadsheet. Its proportions command that the reader take note of the seriousness of its news items. Barnhurst’s distinction between the two formats of newspaper clarifies the differences in size; however, he is not convincing when he argues that the distinction between the two formats lies in the fact that the
broadsheets are more authoritative, because they refrain from moral judgment. Claims within an editorial in the new Age suggest that the broadsheet is undergoing considerable changes: 

Newspapers are by definition ephemeral things. They deal with what is constantly changing, with the events and passions and persons of the day. But, like people, newspapers have identifiable characters expressed through the way they look, the stories they consider important, the way they present the news to their readers and the editorial opinions they declare (Farr & de Vries 2002, p.A09).

Mario Garcia (2005), in his polemic The March of The Tabloids published on the Poynter News website, proposed that the conversion to tabloid-size newspapers will be the key to the survival of broadsheet newspapers in the future. He notes that the ‘tabloidization of newspapers is a global phenomenon’, borne from a need to keep hold onto ‘readers in a hurry’ (Garcia 2005).

Tabloidization as a defining term suggests the transformation of rationalist discourses into sensationalist discourses. Ian Connell (1998) notes that broadsheets now allocate a high priority to stories which once would have been dismissed as sensationalist in their narrative plot as well as adopting the authoritative broadsheet, went to great lengths to reassure the public that they were not moving to become a tabloid.

The paper’s anxiety was captured in March 2005 when Richard Aedy, presenter of the popular ABC Radio National program Life Matters, boldly asked Andrew Jaspen, editor-in-chief of The Age ‘Are you going to make The Age tabloid?’, Jaspen responded with ‘I don’t know’. Then, after a pause, he added, ‘I don’t like the tabloid size, I actually like something smaller, a site in which to access crude and vulgar stories. Tabloid news is seen as sensationalist and anti-rational.

In 2004, The Times of London overhauled its paper, converting to tabloid size; however, mindful of reader backlash it referred to its new size as ‘compact’. Compact has become the standard catchphrase adopted by British newspapers scaling down. First used in the 1970s by the English newspaper The Daily Mail, the term arose out of anxiety that readers would feel that the size decrease would impact on the quality of the newspaper, drawing it closer to ‘tabloids’ in content and approach (Garcia 2005).

But as Garcia notes, smaller format newspapers are ‘more reader-friendly for users who seek simpler storytelling, quicker messages, and who seem to prefer anything else, the smaller packages’. He also notes that the term, tabloid, need not mean poor quality journalism, given that tabloids are more adept at presenting ‘news in a concise manner’ (Garcia 2005).

In 2005, The Jersey Journal made the transition from Broadsheet size to tabloid. Katherine Q Seelye, reports in the New York Times, that ‘The News Is Big. It’s the Papers That Are getting Small’ (Seelye 2005). This headline both confronts and soothes the reader, allaying fears that despite the trend for broadsheet papers to decrease in scale, they are yet to fall foul to tabloid populist-style approaches to journalism.

Steve Newhouse, editor-in-chief of The Jersey Journal, acknowledges that the new size format responded to a dwindling circulation: ‘We were nervous about putting out a tabloid, but we’re making sure that The Jersey Journal has a future’ (Newhouse 2005). Dwindling circulation was the key factor behind the redesign of The Age which, traditionally regarded as the authoritative broadsheet, went to great lengths to reassure the public that they were not moving to become a tabloid.

The March of The Tabloids is a global phenomenon, borne from a need to keep hold onto ‘readers in a hurry’ (Garcia 2005). This headline both confronts and soothes the reader, allaying fears that despite the trend for broadsheet papers to decrease in scale, they are yet to fall foul to tabloid populist-style approaches to journalism.

Their readership is 1.5 million; ours during the week is 7 million, so yes they’ve got twice the number of readers as we have, but surely you’ve looked into what kind of readers we’ve got compared to what kind of readers they’ve got. We don’t want their readers: it’s a different market. Our market is pretty well a pure AB market, right? (Life Matters 2005)

Jaspen elaborated that The Age’s target AB market is made up of readers who value and can recognise
content which is driven and delivered by good journalistic principles, stating that 'readers come to the newspaper wanting a serious, mature considered read'. Aedy, again challenged Jaspen, proposing that tabloids such as The Herald-Sun set the new agendas due to their high circulation figures, to which 'I want to talk about audience of our papers, not sales, as audience' (Life Matters 2005).

Editors-in-chiefs such as Jaspen have a fiscal duty of care to consider their audience needs. As Jaspen acknowledges, 'The job of any modern newspaper, is in a sense, to continually evaluate, assess what you’re doing' (Life Matters 2005).

The fact is that broadsheets are in a period of, if not decline, then radical redesign. The significance of this trend is evidenced in the New York Times announcement that it was preparing to convert to tabloid proportions in August 2007. Seeley notes that the 'European newspapers that have converted to tabloid have seen their circulations rise, especially among women and younger readers, whom advertisers covet' (Seeley 2005).

Significant, The Times of London, declaring that it would continue to 'uphold the traditional virtues and values' that had made it respected around the world', introduced the tabloid size format, to draw back 'younger readers' to its papers (The Times of London 2004). In late 2004 The Times of London was able to cite an increase of 3.4 percent in its readership, as the new format succeeded in stemming and bypassing a perceived circulations crisis brought on by the The Independent having scaled back to 'compact' a year earlier. The redesign of The Age in 2002 can be seen as part of this trend in which 'an expanding vocabulary of visual form has begun to break down the divide between broadsheets and tabloids' (Garcia 2005).

Historically, when newspapers experienced a decline in audiences, designers were commissioned to stem the decline and reinvigorate the newspapers through a graphic repackaging of the news. In Are Graphic Designers killing the Newspaper? Barnhurst suggests that 'the history of the dying American newspapers is strewn with designers', and that the re-design of newspapers such as the The New York Herald Tribune can in practice alienate the readers (Barnhurst 2000).

Designers, he notes, can be both 'morticians' and 'saviours' (Barnhurst 2000). But despite the failures, redesign offers hope to newspapers experiencing dwindling markets. Savvy news corporations are willing to invest in design to visually restructure news content, in order to reposition and recapture markets. The redesign of newspapers is a global phenomenon, which happens surprisingly often. A newspaper's design is its identity, and that identity is 'a valuable asset'. Mindful of this, newspaper publishers are more likely to play with existing elements of a newspaper, that is to 'sharpen' and 'focus' its appearance before they embark on a major overhaul. (Berry date p. xiv). The need to change the look of a paper is bound up in questions of economics and technological change as well as the need to hold onto audiences who are as we are reminded 'the most conservative audiences on earth' (Berry 2003, p.xi).
Launching its redesign in February 2002, *The Age* stressed that the design and content change came at 'the right time', meeting the readers' needs in the 'new millennium'. The success of the new *Age* was to be predicated on the premise that 'if our readers, many who have limited time, struggle to find information they require, we have failed in our task' (Hywood 2002, A09).

*The Age*'s marketing strategy was to appease readers' concerns by focussing on the newspaper being reader friendly and quick in its delivery of news content. 'See *The Age* differently' became the tagline as readers were informed that the redesign made 'the news that is hard to handle easy to read' and 'hassle free' (Hywood 2002). Newspaper space was devoted to outlining these changes and a special website was launched to assist readers 'through the changes and provide answers to commonly asked questions' (Hywood 2002). The structure, design and layout, and content of *The Age* appeared to be presented to its readers in a clear and transparent fashion. '*The Age* has been redesigned to bring you news quicker. Flip the front section for Express and, true to its name, it gives you a one-page summary of the day’s main news’ (de Vries & Farr 2002).

Promotional summaries cheerfully address how design will impact on the reader’s relationship to the paper. One such summary states 'a greater number of stories will be conveniently completed on page one. So you’ll spend less time turning pages and more time keeping up with the news' (de Vries & Farr 2002). Here the emphasis is on 'quickness'. The readers of the 21st century it seems are in a hurry and the redesign of broadsheets, such as *The Age* and internationally-respected newspapers such as *The Times of London*, play to this. The message is that the redesign of the newspaper is a key strategy to hold onto time-poor audiences.

The newspaper has historically engaged in a complex dialogue with the prevailing culture. The question of interest here is the manner in which the design form of the newspaper shapes and communicates this dialogue. Reading the rationale for the redesign of *The Age* newspaper, one is quickly led to believe that we hunger for cleanliness and simplicity. The complexity of the times is leading us to crave for information to be reduced and explained in a manner that avoids information overload. With our city streets cluttered with competing messages and sounds, we want, or perhaps need, our newspapers to visually contradict the chaotic nature of our lives.

Within the context of new newspaper design, where speed, summary and entertainment become inseparable, little room is left for the intellectual and artistic reinterpretation of graphic form. To have the complexities of life flattened out into a quick and manageable view of the world serves corporate and political interests well. And this makes it difficult for the designer to take a political or intellectual stand, especially when faced with newspaper guidelines whose interests lie in a homogenised controlled readership, as opposed to one which is pluralist, speculative and questioning.
One sees evidence of this in the chirpy yet firm statements issued by *The Age* to its readers:

With *The Age*, apart from the practical and commercial needs of the redesign project, we have worked with a few guiding principles in the designs.

We wanted a more ordered layout to provide readers with cleaner typography and easier signs of story priorities set by editors (de Vries & Farr 2002).

Within the new Age, information is be reduced to digestible text bites which will not alienate or confuse. Text and image will be presented in a manner which is interesting and effortless. Conflict will be erased through simplicity and controlled editing, with the design form shaping a friendly framework in which to digest content.

THE DESIGN FORM OF NEWSPAPERS: THE INVISIBLE STORY TELLER

With *The Age* redesign my concern for graphic intervention shifted from the concentration on text and image as the means of story telling, to the interrogation of the placement of the unfolding gothic narrative within the totality of the actual form of the newspaper. I focussed on how its design form—front page, headline, whole newspaper layout, the use of the grid and headline—contributed to the construction of dramatic narrative news in everyday life. I began to question the supposted objectivity of the design strategies such as the grid and the idea that design can somehow be anonymous. I set out to reveal how it sublimely shapes an ordered view of our immediate world through tone, scale, shape and colour. What happens when we consciously and systematically unpack the design form of the newspaper and focus on how it presents compelling gothic tales such as *The Society Murders*? Does the new design of *The Age* operate as broadsheet or tabloid or something in between?

The design form of a newspaper can be read as a code or semiotic system of ‘differential signs through which the order and meaning of design are understood or inferred by the reader’ (Craig 1990, p.2). The graphic code-grid layout, columns, headlines, images, typography, colours narrative rhythm classifies and connects information for readers. It acts to organise their experience/perception of the world. The visual form of the newspaper, according to Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) ‘frames the news contained therein’. *The Age’s* redesign was promoted as a ‘road map’ for change, developed from extensive research into readers’ needs. Within the “New-Look Age”, design form would visually organise information and meaning and deliver,

...a clear and simple appearance that is apparent from the very front page. Major changes include new headline fonts, an altered body type (bigger) and an eight-column grid (previously seven) for the inside pages. The front page will continue to run the most important news stories of the day and features snap shot panel down from the left-hand side (de Vries & Farr 2002, p. A09).
The Age education website, targeted towards post primary students, further explained the new design code listing in clear, punchy language the function and role ‘Layout’ and ‘Design’ play in maintaining readership:

- Make the page and the stories attractive and easy to read.
- Give newspaper an identity and reflect its aims, give it personality (it looks fun, bright or intelligent).
- Make best of the premium resources - space.
- Accommodate both the news stories and the advertising, without making advertising seem more important than the news (The Age 2007).

The appearance of simplicity is one of the most important codes of graphic design especially in the field of information design. Erik Speikerman, amongst many, argues that good design should remain objective and invisible, the reader/viewer should not focus her attention as to whether the choice of column width, line weight or headline type is correct (Speikerman 1993, p.15). However, in The Aesthetics of Transience, Max Bruinsma challenges this idea. He argues that the Modernist grid which rigidly orders and separates text and image is no longer the only structural grid option. Postmodernism and the computer has shaped a new aesthetic where relationships are more fluid and open: to ‘fragments of content’ which give rise to ‘adhoc narratives’ told by storytellers who shift the ‘basic elements’ of their narratives each time they are ‘retold’. Graphic design, he continues, is ‘more than ever, now about subjective interpretation of signs’ (Brunisma 1993, p.44). The essence of a newspaper Berry (2003) states is embodied in the selective choices that are made in presenting news. The choices he infers are dependent on the lexicon of design. The design of the paper, its visual vocabulary, remains firm and steadfast; however, as Berry reassures ‘the news is different everyday, but the graphic vocabulary for each paper remains the same’ (2003, xi.). This runs counter to Brunisma’s call for a post modernist approach to design. The late modern newspaper rules supreme in the twenty first century despite the potential of design to visually splice and reconfigure dramatic news narrative, as we will later see in this chapter. To borrow from Barnhurst and Nerone, the design elements in the newspaper operate as a type of grammar and the form ‘as a map expressed through that grammar’ (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.220).

Nerone and Barnhurst appear suspicious and sceptical of design, sensing its power to soothe and disguise mayhem and anarchy:

It seems to us that news by definition is messy—the very category, as it’s socially constructed, emphasizes novelty, conflict and timeliness (among other things). The news is weird; the news is new; the news is dramatic. Its’ a jumble. But modern design, by definition, is rational, functional, and premeditated; it tames the mess by artifice (2001, p.188).
Design is presented as being at war with ideas, at odds with journalistic content. Order is to be privileged over disorder. As we will see, design enables conflicting texts of murder, mayhem and civic pride to reside neatly together in the media neighbourhood; which is the newspaper. Design is imperative to a newspaper's economic survival.

It is of value at this point to focus attention on the graphic grammar and form of the newspaper, specifically the newspaper grid, newspaper headlines, typography and text. In integrating the design form of the newspapers in the following pages, I will focus on yet another gothic tale, *The Society Murders*, a story which coincided with the redesign of *The Age*. The redesign of *The Age* and this gothic tale which ignited morbid fascination in readers across Victoria presented an ideal opportunity to combine graphic intervention with graphic analysis. I begin with an inventory of the form of *The Age* newspaper, moving to a more detailed analysis of the graphic portrayal of *The Society Murders* between May 9-12, 2002. *The Society Murders* through design reads as a melodramatic soap opera that is understood through a set of images and an ensemble of graphic and textual devices employed to engage news audiences.

THE MODERN GRID: THE REASSURING ORDER OF SIMPLICITY

Craig (1999) argues that a publication that is considered well-designed and professional transfers those prized attributes to its readers, who believe that a well-ordered design is reflective of the intelligent, professional and careful approach of its journalists. Design thus becomes naturalised, invisible and accepted to be trustworthy and user friendly.

The grid is the fundamental design strategy that ensures 'graphic simplicity' and clear communication. Simplicity in design discourse is read as the reduction of ideas and forms into understandable and clear formats. Simplicity is teamed with words such as clear, considered, professional and detailed. Within newspaper design, the grid is the essential translator of complex information, presenting an image of clarity, order and control. As a mathematical system, it organizes pages and intentionally reduces the available creative solutions open to the designer. As a form, its main purpose is to define and structure how we consume content. Metaphorically, it functions to alleviate our fear of complexity, ensuring that the dirt and grime caused by indecision and carelessness is wiped away from our view. Most importantly, the grid helps to present an image of the complete and coherent consumable object.

The layout grid is the architectural framework of the newspaper. Most newspapers ascribe to a rectangular layout system, often referred to as a modular layout system. Modernist in origin, the use of the layout grid 'reached its heights in the 1970’s [and] reduced the complexity of the news to a series of rectangles sometimes called modules’ (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.209). The international adoption of this grid-based mathematical arrangement of a page is largely attributable to the spread of Swiss School design and typographic principles which Barnhurst argues changed the nature of newspaper design in the 1970s as evidenced in the *Minneapolis Times* in 1971. The Swiss School promoted the grid as the central tenet of 'good design' practice in which designing was approached as a 'scientific' system dedicated to the clear and objective communication of information.

The use of the grid in *The Age* and all newspapers is informed by the Swiss School ideal that design form itself is without meaning, beyond the construction of an invisible and reassuring sense of order. In the new *Age* the grid is composed of eight columns. These columns are used to position type and images on the page. They also allow for flexibility and visual difference. For example, type can be formatted across two or three columns, an image can span across four or more columns, creating scale differences within the page. *The Age* adheres to what is called a W-format. A W-format means that a wide column is run down the left hand side of the page. This column is traditionally used to run news summaries or feature popular columnists. An eight-column grid allows for greater flexibility, enabling the designer greater opportunity to explore visual arrangements on the page.

*The Age* eight column grid
THE NEWSPAPER HEADLINE: SIGNALS AND SUMMARIES

Police search Matthew Wales’ house

Barnhurst and Nerone refer to headlines as ‘sense making devices’ (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001). It is the frontpage headline type that first captures readers’ attention on the streets, or in the newsagent, identifying both the newspaper and its big story of the day. It injects it with life and vitality— with its multiple voices and acts as a series of ‘signals and summaries’ that map the narratives of the day’s news. Once in the hands of the readers, the headline type identifies stories and entices the reader to read more. They present entry points into interpreting the agenda of the text/stories and allude to the position of the author in relation to the news item being reported. They also offer short and snappy overviews of a news story’s tone or content and graphically signal the mood of the reported story.

In design terms, the headline is the most important textual and graphic element on the page for audiences. The editorial team’s role is to inscribe importance to a headline by connecting its text into an image that is seen, rather than read. This is achieved through demarcating the headline from the body copy through a different typeface and a different type weight, i.e. semi bold, bold or black or exaggerated type size. In this manner, they establish the headline as both anchor and navigator, proclaiming through size and text weight the importance of different stories, while directing audiences through the landscape of the paper, like landmarks. In this way, headlines operate in much the ‘same way as enlarged names of countries and major cities signal what matters on a map’ (Barnhurst & Nerone 2001, p.198). Thus the newspaper becomes the symbolic world of its citizens in which reading destinations are determined through visual presence and catchy slogans.

Rethink on anti-terror laws

The Age News section Century and Pax: bold and semi bold forms

TYPOGRAPHY AND TEXT

Legibility in the context of newspaper design is evaluated by the reader’s ability to effectively and accurately take in information. The choice of body type—its scale, type size and volume—is crucial in determine legibility and tone on the page. Typographic weight enables the reader to ascertain quickly which is the lead story and make visual connections. Speed and accuracy determine and dictate how and why type is chosen. The visual identity of a newspaper is ‘set in its type’. The text type is integral as to how comfortably we read and respond to the paper. The body type used in the The Age newspaper is Utopia, which the designers refer to as ‘the story text’ (de Vries & Farr 2002).

The Age body type Utopia, 8.8points and 97 percent width. Leading 10 points.
THE FRONT PAGE

The story of the wealthy family, the intrigue and the internal squabbles has made headlines everywhere. Indeed, in the past 12 months, The Age has published more than 50 reports, including six on the front page, and the Herald Sun has run more than 70 articles, including 12 on page one. The prosecution case is straightforward.

Matthew Wales, the youngest of Margaret’s five children, poisoned and bashed his mother and stepfather because he resented her continued dominance and financial control over him. With their deaths, the struggling, former hairdresser was set to inherit more than a million dollars (Silvestor 2003).

The front page of the newspaper significantly signals to the reader what is the important and critical news both on a domestic and international front. The front page helps to inform the reader as to what is considered most important and why. It operates on the level of communication and function. It is the first point of address, but it does more than demarcate news story priority. It sets the ideological agenda by aesthetically defining its target audiences. It is at once spruiker and guardian, intercepting and announcing content in a manner befitting its target audiences.

On the 29th April, the front page of The Age announced that Margaret Wales-King and her husband Paul King were found dead in a shallow bush grave off the Woods Point Road at Cumberland Junction 20 kilometres from Marysville (Schwartz 2002). Three weeks later, Matthew Wales and his wife Maritza Wales were charged with their murders. The murder victims’ case was dubbed The Society Murders by the news media. It contained all the ingredients of a modern soap opera that would inflame the public’s interest—a double murder, intrigue and socialities. On Sunday 12 May 2002, the cover story of the Sunday Age stated in bold large serif letters, ‘Son, wife charged’ (Schwartz 2002).

Across Melbourne I imagined a collective ‘I told you so’ being muttered from the bed and breakfast rooms of its ordinary citizens. Everyday life was unfolding, being dealt with as a community collectively bit into its Vegemite toast.

The Society Murders is a human interest story which captured collective attention from the media and the public. This story, through media coverage, shifted from a tragic tale of matricide to a public melodrama and soap opera. The front page of The Age on Thursday May 9, 2002 and earlier front pages, as we will see, positions this gothic tale as important and newsworthy.

BLURRING FACT AND OPINION: EVERYDAY SOAP OPERAS

Newspapers actively shape the manner in which a society and its participants are understood. Barnhurst fondly points out that the newspaper for the American citizen is an expression of values, of ‘zeal’, the American ‘persona control over him. With their deaths, the struggling, former hairdresser was set to inherit more than a million dollars (Silvestor 2003).

It began with a disappearance and ended with an arrest. Larry Schwartz details a murder investigation that gripped the state.

...
On Thursday, May 9, 2002 the front page of The Age ran with the four following stories:

### Rethink on anti-terror laws
Lead story -Pax Bold, justified—Body type 8.8pt
justified. Positioned on the top of the page. Story spread over six columns, photographic image height 5.5cms x width 5cms, positioned at the top of the third column in line with the typographic baseline grid. The photographic image is that of the two New York World Trade Centre buildings under attack on September 11 2001. As stated, the image is centrally placed. It acts as a visual pedestal structurally supporting the story's headline.

### A police inquiry continues as murder victims are laid to rest
Down page story -Pax Regular, justified-Body type 8.8pt justified. Positioned underneath, Rethink on anti-terror wars, 1/3rd down the page, central to the four leading stories. Text formatted in one column only, positioned in the fifth column, between the main photographic image depicting mourners at a funeral, height 15.4cms x width 20.4cms and the two images of the murder victims Paul King and Margaret Wales-King, both boxes: height 7.1cms x width 4.9cms, which are placed above one another in the seventh column. The image of the mourners for this story, visually dominates the entire front page.

### Israel vows attacks after bomb deaths
Downpage story-Pax Bold, justified-Body type 8.8pt.
Positioned directly next to, no image accompanies this story. The text is formatted across four columns.

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A key finding of The Australian Press Council 2006 report on the future of newspapers in Australia noted ‘bad news sells’; in particular, crime stories. Statistically, crime stories overwhelmingly dominate the front pages of Australian broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. Arguing that the future of newsprint lies in ‘news priorities adopted by editors’, the report noted an increasing ‘blurring of fact and opinion’ resulting from the increased crossover of news and commentary (The Australian Press Council 2006). The redesign of The Age and its zealous and fervent reporting of The Society Murders seems to give support to the report’s findings. The telling—text and image—have all the hallmarks of gothic tales as explored in chapters 2 and 3: heightened emotion and betrayal as the following deconstruction exercise illustrates:

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‘A police inquiry continues, as murder victims are laid to rest’

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Stop! Don’t race through the amber!

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Israel vows attacks after bomb deaths
Murphy goes on to report that Mrs Wales eldest son read the eulogy. Murphy notes the physical positioning of each family member as they left the church lead by Damian Wales at the completion of the ceremony. He draws the reader’s attention to the fact that Mrs Wales-King’s youngest son is ten meters behind his siblings, holding his wife’s hand. The reference to the position of the youngest son clearly alludes to an emotional separation in the family. Murphy finally reports that the investigation into the murder of the married couple, who were ‘last seen alive leaving Matthew Wales’ house in Burke Road, Glen Iris, is continuing’ (Murphy 2002).

The suggested meaning that arises from the represented social relations between the Wales-Kings and the viewer is that a public distance has arisen between key members; we the readers are able to identify this distance through the photographic depiction. The photograph posits an emotional distance between family members and the public looking onto this scene.

The Wales-King story is a hard news, downpage story. The headlines of downpage hard news stories are always set in Pax Regular head at either 38pt or 28.5pt. The text is always justified and set in a standard by-line upper/lowercase. But this was not the lead story of the day. The lead story on the front page is always set in Pax Bold head at 78 pt or more. It is always justified as a standard by-line upper/lowercase. The body type, Utopia, is set at 8.8pt at 97 per cent and is justified.

When the front page of The Age on May 9, 2002 is folded in half, we are able to see two headlines: Rethink on anti-terror laws and A police inquiry continues as murder victims are laid to rest. We also glimpse a building exploding which is the New York World Trade Towers, half of an image depicting mourners at a funeral, and a portrait image of Paul King. King’s smiling face fills the picture box, his right ear is cropped and his left ear touches the edge. His happiness is in stark contrast to the mourners, who are caught in varying expressions of grief and disbelief, their heads collectively turned sideways, staring outside of the boundaries of the page. King smiles directly at the reader in a warm and open gesture. When the page is opened fully, we are able to complete the narrative of the front page as we encounter Margaret Wales-King, smiling, her head turned towards the mourners. We are now able to read the introduction to the less important stories, which are further elaborated on in the news section of the paper. As stated, one small photograph accompanies the lead story, and three photographs of varying sizes accompany the downpage story.
The leading story headline announces a rethink on terror. This is followed by a story about the murder victims' funeral, with accompanying poignant photos of the victims in happier carefree times, a story about not racing through traffic lights and a report on Israel’s vow to attack after bomb deaths.

The image of the New York Trade Centre could easily accompany the bomb deaths story. They both refer to terrorism and discuss its political ramifications on a local and international scale. In terms of placement on the page, we begin with terrorism and end at the bottom of the page with threats of sanctioned terrorism. Cutting through both of these stories is the tale of Margaret Wales-King and Paul King who are victims of murder. We are left to speculate on their terror. The focus of the front page of this day then is victims. Victims of terrorism, victims of murder. The emotional heavity of the page is softened by a *Stop! Don’t race through amber*! story, which warns the general public not to race through amber traffic lights.

Design makes the murder and mayhem of this day palatable, through a visually controlled page, where the images are lined up with text, thus removing any chance of visually stumbling onto an ill-considered pause. Headlines read horizontally and are placed across the front page in a uniform manner. Lines are used to demarcate spaces, ensuring that the reader does not become lost or confused. This front page is an ordered and controlled reading of the world, as mayhem and murder spill neatly into aligned columns.

Kress and van Leeuwen propose that the world represented ‘visually in the mass media’ is a different world from that represented in language, and that it produces ‘different citizens/subjects’ (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p.38). The newspaper is both visual and verbal; it does not visually reproduce ‘structures of reality’. The argument here is that it produces ‘images of reality’ which are ‘bound up with the interests of the social institutions within which the pictures are produced, circulated and read’. (Kress & Leeuwen 1996, p.45). Kress and van Leeuwen demonstrate through linguistic and social semiotic analysis that visual structures are not merely formal but have an important semantic dimension (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p.45). Texts in newspapers are multimodal. A multimodal text is one that uses several types of communication, such as writing and image, in an integrated manner to articulate and represent a message. Modality comes from linguistics and refers to the validity of statements and their inherent ability to make true statements about the world. Modality is ‘interpersonal rather than ideational’ (Kress & Leeuwen 1996, p.160) for it produces shared truths which align or distance its readers from one another. The following description of the front page of *The Sunday Age* and six photographs highlights this observation. The interpersonal meanings of the photographs analysed can be read independently of the accompanying text, but these photographs belong to a larger text, the front page of the newspaper. In the multimodal landscape of the newspaper, design is central to ‘the choices as to how messages are shaped and expressed’ (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p.159).

As we will further see the centrality of design will be demonstrated by focussing our gaze onto the front page of *The Sunday Age* on May 12, 2002.
May 12, 2002, The Sunday Age, front page, ran with two stories. The first, ‘Son, wife charged’ and the second, ‘AFI’s cash crisis’. The first story dominates the page both in terms of typography and image treatment. It is accompanied by four images of differing scales. It was displayed over six columns, spanning the entire length of the news space on the front page. Directly beneath at the bottom of the page, in the space reserved for advertising features, is an advertisement for a Caulfield Grammar, Open Day, that reads ‘Caulfield: more than a school’. Caulfield Grammar is the former school of Matthew Wales and his siblings.

At the bottom of the fifth column, the reader is informed that the story is continued in NEWS 4.

The entire page of NEWS 4 is devoted to the story. The following headlines appear on NEWS page 4, May 12, 2002:

Secrets of a shallow grave
Pax bold, 114 pts, centrally justified. Positioned underneath leading photo, depicting Matthew Wales and two police officers enclosed in the interior of a police vehicle.

How a Melbourne mystery unfolded
Pax regular head, 57 pts. Centrally justified. Positioned directly underneath Secrets of a shallow grave.

ARMADALE: THE DRAMATIC ARREST
Franklin Gothic bold, 16 pts uppercase 16pts, centrally justified. Positioned above the leading photograph of Paul Wales. Goodbye, my sister of passion, grace and integrity: Di- Pax Regular 38pts, justified. Positioned, 3/4s down the page.

Murders: son and wife charged- Pax semi bold, 57 pts, ragged text. Positioned in the eighth column in line directly with the top of the leading photograph.
The six photographic images displayed on this page, which I shall now examine, accompanied the previously mentioned headlines.

The Sunday Age, May 12, 2002, News section Page 4

SIX PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES
1. Charged Matthew Wales arrives at the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court with Police officers. 18x26.5cms. Positioned at the top of the second column, spans five columns and occupies 1/3rd of the page. This image depicts Matthew Wales, flanked by two police officers. The officer on his left is fully visible, the officer on his right, head and shoulders are cropped out of view. His presence is hinted at through the display of a triangular slice of his suit and tie. The three men appear cramped within the interior of the car, their bodies filling all the available space.

Matthew’s clenched hands are held tightly in place between his knees. The viewer is able to ascertain that on his wrists he is wearing a heavy bracelet watch and three bracelets. The officer on his left has his hands in full view. He appears to be holding a folder. He is wearing a watch on his left hand. A bright light in the far left top hand corner illuminates the photograph. The flash of light is the flash of a camera. One can barely make out through the car window an image of a photographer pushing a camera against the car window in order to photograph its occupants. Matthew stares straight ahead with a slight frown.

2. Far left: the bush area where the bodies were found. 10x5cms. Positioned directly halfway down the page occupying one column. This image is directly in alignment with the left hand side of the photograph of Paul Wales and the two detectives it depicts a path leading into dense bushy scrub. In many respects it is nondescript and could be an image taken from any bush setting. It gives few clues. As stated in the caption, it is the bush area where the bodies were found; hence it is the area not the specific place.

3. Left: the couple’s funeral. 10x10.5cms positioned directly halfway down the page occupying two columns. The image is in direct alignment with the bush setting and a 5mm space separates the two images. It depicts young mourners clutching one another, their faces caught in various contortions of grief. The image is tightly cropped, further enhancing the pathos of the scene. A young woman directly faces the viewer, her arms wrap around her body. A woman with long blonde hair and spectacles rests her head on this woman’s left shoulder.

4. Above: Matthew Wales leaves his Glen Iris home yesterday. 5.5x10.5cms. Positioned directly halfway down the page occupying two columns. The photograph is a hazy cropped image of Matthew appearing to drive his car. The tight cropping focuses our attention directly onto Matthew, who appears nervous and is trying to retreat from an uncomfortable confrontation. The cropping attempts to reinforce movement. On closer examination, it is hard to ascertain whether the vehicle is stationary or on the move.

5. Right: A car similar to the couples Mercedes. 4.3x6.8cms. Positioned directly halfway down the page occupying one and 1/5 of a column. The photographic image is that of a car. The background is blurred. The style of the shot suggests that it has been taken from a promotional Mercedes catalogue. It is placed directly underneath the image of Paul Wales driving his car, aligned to the far right of this image. The text describing the four images is placed to the left of this image and is aligned to the baseline grid.

6. Di Yeldham at the memorial service for her sister, Margaret. 5x8.5cms. Margaret’s younger sister is depicted at the funeral service for her sister and brother-in-law. She is positioned in the opposite direction of Paul Wales; her gaze is centred to the right of the page, whilst his is to the left.
These six images create a narrative separate to and paradoxically in defiance of the accompanying headlines and photographic descriptors. They offer little insight into the motives behind the killings of Margaret Wales-King or her husband Peter King. What can be established is that each depicts a scene which, we assume from prior knowledge, signifies an important event or describes or illustrates visually key themes of an important news story.

But what is the story that is being told? Three men sit beside each other in the back seat of a car. Of the three men, only two are in full view. Both these men stare ahead, lost in private thought. Their mouths are closed and expressionless. It appears that no or little dialogue has taken place between them.

The man in the centre of the picture is Matthew Wales, suspected of murdering his mother and stepfather. His head is shaven, he wears a dark shirt, with sleeves rolled up. His appearance is casual and neat. The thick bracelet watch and gold bracelets border on gaudiness. The police officer next to him is dressed in a dark suit, which is unbuttoned to reveal a plump stomach. He wears a patterned tie, has short dark hair and in contrast to the clean-shaven Matthew, sports a thick short moustache. Both he and Matthew stare straight ahead. The third officer is not in full view. His presence is important; however, his appearance is not. He is not the subject.

The image of these three men dominates page four of the news section of The Sunday Age newspaper. It operates as anchor and starting point, the beginning and the end for the stories on page four. Your eye automatically moves on to the right side to stare at two images of cars. In one, a man can be made out, in the other the driver is indistinguishable through the slight blurring of the car windows. In the first image, the focus is on the driver, in the second the focus is on the car.

Together the images tell the story of movement and speed. They become disturbing when they become visually linked to the image on their left of crying men and women dressed in dark sombre clothes. The next image of a lonely and empty bush-walking track further adds to the suspense. Without the captions we could easily mistake the pictures to be telling us that (a) this is a story about a man who killed himself in a car on a lonely bush track (b) a story of a man who loved driving and died peacefully in his beloved bush setting or (c) cars are dangerous and speed kills.

The size of the photographs and their relative position to one another help the viewer to construct a plausible reading and make connections and associations based on a set of values and beliefs. The photographs’ intended meanings are dependent on the headlines which accompany them; they allow the viewer to witness snippets of an event. What can be told at a glance before reading the body text is in Armadale a dramatic arrest took place. Matthew Wales has been charged with the murder of his mother and stepfather, ‘Murders: son and wife charged’ (Heinrichs 2000). The mystery unfolded when the ‘secrets of a shallow grave’, located in a lonely bush setting were revealed (Schawtz 2000). The murder victims’ family and friends are immersed in grief and shock. Margaret’s sister Di Yeldamn, in a moving memorial service, said ‘goodbye, my sister of passion, grace and integrity’ (Heinrichs 2000). Why, how could her own son kill such a loved and graceful woman? Matthew stares ahead sitting in the police car, a deep frown etched upon his face. Look at the pain and suffering that he has caused. This is an important tale which needs to be told.

Images do more than represent a thing, action or event. They reveal a set of relations which exist between the viewer, the viewed and the settings in which events take place. As Kress and van Leewen point out, viewers of images in newspapers become ‘interactive participants’ by ‘making sense of images in the context of social institutions’ (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p.45).

The newspaper works as a social institution. It presents a guide as to what happens when we stray from the norm. Photographs shape our gaze. We are able to read the images in relation to the events being depicted and the facial expressions of those being viewed. We are always aware that what or whom we are viewing is distant from our immediate world. Their stories become recognisable through their entering into the newspaper world.
The key words used in the publicity material for the redesign of *The Age* were order, communication, story priority and content. These key terms would meld together to forge a layout, where readers would traverse through its pages unencumbered by chaos and information overload. The simplicity could, and would, only be achieved through an ordered layout.

We have divided the news pages into eight vertical columns, which should allow greater flexibility and interest in how pages are laid out. We have set body copy (newsprint) on a horizontal grid, which allows all the rows of text to line up neatly and make a cleaner, more organized-looking page. We wanted to keep our pages simple, which is a lot harder than making them complicated (*The Age 1 February 2002)*.

The role of the contemporary newspaper, Hywood claims, is to inform, initiate debate and present an authoritative voice on domestic and world issues and events. It also seeks to entertain. The newspaper for Hywood is the familial voice of reason, a figurehead presiding within the community town square. This duality of function can blur in the public consciousness. The newspaper can function as community guardian, keeper of tales and narrator of all matters that are deemed in the citizen’s best interest to hear. Hywood’s portrayal of a public, which is more visually attuned than ever, could easily be misconstrued as one that is easily bored and frustrated that they cannot channel-surf through the pages of the paper. Hence, as Hywood predicts, ‘this will not be the last of the changes to *The Age*; its ability to remain a relevant participant in our community depends on its willingness to meet readers’ needs’ (Hywood 2002).

The design of newspapers manufactures a sense of entering a place in which the reader can traverse and move along a spatial field, privy to the configurations of everyday life. The newspaper is an important document for charting how a society wishes to portray itself, revealing its social, political and cultural concerns. It also represents the ubiquitous role and place of design within people’s lives. Grossberg argues that, rather than asking how texts communicate the experience of everyday life, we should explore and understand the ways in which everyday life is interpreted and articulated by focusing attention on the ‘specific forms and formations’ which render it visible (Grossberg 1997, p209). In conclusion, the form of *The Age* and *The Sunday Age* newspapers presents an active configuration of possibilities. As demonstrated, the forms and formations operate within an expanded semiotic system of graphic elements which conspire to formulate new contrasts of meaning, emphasis and significance. The newspaper is a critical site into which the trajectory of everyday life intersects with design through visual form. Design responds to shifts in cultural values, embracing and demonstrating the potency of organising information in an ordered and clear fashion. It shapes, visualizes and makes these changing values concrete. Newspapers are steering closer to tabloid style reporting as a means to hold onto readers in a hurry. Tabloid-style reporting is not constrained to tabloid-style formats.

Tabloidisation of newspapers is a global phenomenon which caters well to the human interest story. *The Age* newspaper, as we have seen from the analysis of *The Society Murders*, focussed on design to enhance and retell a sensational narrative.

I have sought to redescribe the paper’s context with the purpose of fabricating another map in which the symbolic world of its citizens is made visible. The postmodern newspaper is adept at imagining its audiences, presenting news which appears to present an accurate account of the day’s news. The reporting and visual portrayal of *The Society Murders* presents an image of the newspaper’s image of its citizenry. The reader is made to feel empowered through the acquisition of information.

On April 27, 2007 Fairfax publishers announced that *The Age* and *The Sunday Age* would become ‘narrow broadsheets’.
Conclusion

The Society Murders and the Newspaper Soap Opera

Chapter Five
Margaret’s youngest son, Matthew, confessed and is due to be sentenced in the Supreme Court today, along with his wife Maritza, who has pleaded guilty to perverting the course of justice. But despite its apparent legal simplicity, Melbourne has been fascinated by the case dubbed “The Society Murders”.

As murders go, police see the killing of Margaret Wales-King and her husband Paul as tragic yet simple—a classic domestic crime motivated by resentment and greed. To them, it is an open-and-shut case (The Age 2002).

In May 2002, Chris Maxwell, the President of Liberty Victoria, wrote a scathing report on the undue focus by the news media on The Society Murders. He notes that a democratic system encourages and depends upon ‘a free flow of information and fearless independent media’. As he explains, the ‘recent saturation coverage of the Wales-King murders’ raises many important questions as to the role and function of the media, questions about how public interest and curiosity is served with ‘blow-by-blow reporting’ of a criminal investigation.

According to Michael Gawenda, editor-in-chief of The Age (1997 to 2004), a ‘good newspaper both reflects and celebrates the community it serves’. He elaborates that a newspaper functions to ‘cover the lives - the dreams and aspirations and problems - that confront ordinary people’ (Gawenda 2000). Jim McGuigan argues in a similar manner that the cultural public sphere is mediated through genres of mass popular culture, such as the tabloid newspaper, and that the popular press teaches its audience that the everyday is an emotional state to be felt, not dissimilar from a soap opera. His ordinary citizen, who is preoccupied with the ‘dilemmas of everyday life and personal satisfaction’, reads the newspaper as a place ‘for thought and feeling’ (McGuigan 2005, p.10).

As we have seen in The Tanner Murders and The Freeman Murder, the popular press takes on the role of social educator, focussing on melodramatic news stories in order to teach audiences lessons about the everyday. The newspaper ‘sets a frame, a tissue of confirmations, beliefs and expectations’ (Mercer 1986, p.55). As McGuigan puts it ‘The lessons taught are not so much cognitive— to do with knowing — but, rather, emotional— to do with feeling’ (McGuigan 2005, p.8). Within this cultural sphere stories such as The Tanner Murders, The Freeman Murder and the The Society Murders help to define society’s morals, and the struggle to establish what is acceptable and what is not. They suggest how to judge behavior which is deviant and not permissible. The intention of this thesis was to explore how the newspaper plays a key role in this process and the way in which we imagine and understand ourselves to be.

As I have shown, there is a sharpening differentiation and polarization between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. Sensational journalism, which was once the province of ‘low brow media’, now is part of all media. The tabloidisation of news is bound to a series of processes that transform ‘rationalist’ discourses into ‘sensationalist’ discourses (Connell 1998). News reporting has been transformed into narrative discourse a species of storytelling that exhibits characters and conventional plot structures. As I have shown, narratives are best understood through a narrator, a directed voice, a point of view and in most instances an agenda which is either political, moral, social or ideological. The Tanner Murders and The Freeman Murder storytelling served as a powerful tool for identity formation, playing a powerful role in the construction and control of civil society. The Society Murders, in particular, works as a dramatic narrative tale, a human interest story which demonstrates the power of newstories to act as cautionary moral fables.

Maxwell (2002) asks do we have a ‘right to know’ that ‘Matthew Wales broke down in tears as his murdered mother and stepfather were farewelled at a sombre family funeral?’ Similarly Kolstrup states, ‘news is not fiction: news is fact’ (Kolstrup 2002, p.92). However, media images are not reality: they are as we have seen, a version of reality that is dynamic and open to many possibilities.
By way of conclusion, I want to return to my key arguments about the fusing of form and narrative to highlight the newspaper as a site to witness and unravel melodramatic soap opera narrative. In chapter four, I deconstructed the newspaper form focussing attention on how the newspaper's sum parts merge effortlessly together to construct dramatic news narrative. I argued that the newspaper form operates within an expanded symbolic system of graphic elements, and that the popularity of the human interest story is linked to the current tabloidization of the news press. Few news stories present compelling narratives in which audiences relentlessly follow. Tabloid 2 the final installation created for this Masters thesis explores this issue in the following manner:

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When dawn broke on Friday 5 April, Maritza Elizabeth Wales was already locked into a story that was not of her making, but which would lead to her undoing (Bonney 2003).

Exhibition 3: **Tabloid 2: The Society Murders**
West Space Inc. Melbourne, March 2003

**Tabloid 2** staged at West Space Gallery, Melbourne, in March 2003, is an interpretative account of my response to *The Society Murders*. It consisted of forty-two black and white A2 cropped photocopied images and four A0 text pages pasted to the wall of the galley. The images and text were all sourced from newspaper photographs that accompanied three stories reported in *The Age* in May 2002. Each story dealt with the universal themes of loss, grief and death. Two stories dealt with courage and evoked sympathy, while the third was distinctly different, in that its characters found themselves entrenched in a dark and gothic tale of their own making.

The significance of the images, and their placement and position in relation to one another, was revealed within a four-page fictional narrative, pinned onto the left hand side wall. The narrative titled *Courtroom Reunion* was an interpretative account of the first court appearance of Matthew and Maritza Wales. They stand accused of murdering Matthew’s ‘socialite’ mother and stepfather.

**Tabloid 2** was exhibited in West Space’s Gallery Three. It is a small rectangular space, which can be sealed through shutting a floor-to-ceiling door. When the space is sealed, the room appears smaller and more intimate. The focus of the space is the end wall; it is dimensionally smaller in comparison to the right and left walls which flank it. I purposefully utilised the end wall to draw in the viewer. Hung collectively on this wall, the forty-two images operated as the symbolic front page of the **Tabloid 2** visual narrative. Individually the images represented key sequences and events within the personal and public narrative of Matthew and Maritza Wales and *The Society Murders* trial.

**THE SOCIETY MURDERS: A VISUAL NARRATIVE**
I envisioned the exhibition design as an enlarged newspaper page, which would entice the viewer/reader to enter into its dark, dense narrative. Suspense and tension were emphasized through the enlarging and cropping of faces fixed in a state of suspended emotion. Imitating newspaper devices, the cropping served to draw the viewer further into **Tabloid 2**’s interior, into the heart of the narrative. When the images and the accompanying text pages were read together, they lulled the viewer into believing that she alone would be able to unravel the knotted narrative threads. John Silvestor, reporting *The Age* readers’ fascination with *The Society Murders*, dryly states:

The prosecution case is straightforward. Matthew Wales, the youngest of Margaret’s five children, poisoned and bashed his mother and stepfather because he resented her continued dominance and financial control over him. With their deaths, the struggling, former hairdresser was set to inherit more than a million dollars.

Meanwhile, the Wales family remains convinced there is more to the murders than has been exposed in court. They employed a public relations firm to help promote their assertion that while Matthew was the killer, his wife’s role has been vastly underplayed. She gave her husband a false alibi and was involved in the cover-up for more than a month, but the family maintains she is guilty of much more. Margaret’s daughter-in-law, Elizabeth Wales, told 3AW’s Neil Mitchell on December 5:
"We are all very unhappy with Maritza being charged with perverting the course of justice . . . and obviously she can’t be charged with anything else at this stage because there is not enough concrete evidence. But there are enough anomalies to make you wonder."

She openly lobbied for Maritza to be jailed. "If she gets away with a suspended sentence or a rap across the knuckles, then certainly we will be very unhappy."

But police say there is no evidence to support their theory and believe she may simply have been caught up in the web of greed, malevolence and violence. Matthew has denied claims of his wife’s involvement, telling police: ‘Maritza had nothing to do with this at all.’ (Silvestor 2003)

Silvestor sets the scene for readers of The Age to see Maritiza as the classic soap opera villain. The family’s public contempt for her fuels interest. This story will not go away. It holds our collective attention. It is dramatic and intriguing replete with a family of characters who demand that their version of the story be narrated. Conflict, tension and human drama energise this dark narrative.

Like The Tanner Murders and The Freeman Murder, this story provides a moral about social life and individuals. Audiences participate in the story through its retelling in the discursive space of the newspaper. The narrative strategy employed is to report on the simmering tensions and conflict within the family. The drama unfolding provides a moral message about greed and betrayal.

Kolstrup states that ‘the journalistic reconstruction of reality requires tools, conceptual tools, cognitive frameworks, structural models’ (Kolstrup 2002, p.87). He proposes that these tools enable news to be translated into ‘narrativisation’, this being achieved through a model which adheres to this basic narrative scheme:


We are able to release our own emotions and actively share our response with a community of readers. Soap operas and gothic tales similarly follow this model. A situation will be crafted to establish conflict. Conflict in turn will lead to a form of action which may or may not be resolved and, finally, a contrived situation/scenario will encourage the viewer/reader to form an understanding of the underlying moral of the story. Soap opera is a serial narrative which depends on conflict and a web of dark secrets to propel it endlessly into a narrative abyss. Robert C. Allen candidly notes that the ‘opera’ in ‘soap opera’ signals a travesty: the highest of dramatic art forms is made to describe the lowest’ (Allen 1995, p.4). It is the drama and intrigue that holds viewers and which suspends disbelief. The viewer is privy over a long period of time to the dark secrets which populate the characters’ lives.

In this exhibition I visually argued that stories such as The Society Murders share common themes with the soap opera genre. Its narrative similarly crosses back and forth from the past to the present, interspersing different voices into the text and cutting from one plot line and location to another. Soap operas straddle the tension between the real and the unreal. As a form of story telling the viewer is asked to reassess their idea of reality. Louise Spence highlights this tension between the ordinary and ‘out-of ordinary’ in soap opera. She writes:

- Soaps are populated with “real” people in a knowable landscape, people and places we are familiar with. Familiar in the sense that we have seen them on soap operas before and familiar in that they have aspects that are not too dissimilar to people and places we know or know about from real-life texts, such as news stories or a friend’s account (or community gossip) (Spence 1998, p.184).

The Society Murders tale embodies this tension between the real and unreal. We know this family, we recognize its members, we are able to recoil, sympathise and be spellbound by the gravity of the crime enacted by the youngest son towards his mother and stepfather. Matthew is our worst fear. By Matthew’s and by extension his immediate family’s story entering into the public domain of the newspaper we are afforded the opportunity to speculate, question and be appalled by his action. We are left to ask who are we as a community, how does this tale reflect and construct our sense of identity? The soap opera affords us the opportunity to enter into other’s lives, albeit a contrived life, far removed from our own reality: ‘soaps are fictional yet about the world’ (Spence 1998, p.187).

The Society Murders is a mesmerising and memorable tale for it provides a particular graphic picture of our community.
The grainy black and white newspaper images and typeset pages of Tabloid 2 graphically explore Kolstrup’s model and parallels to Soap Opera highlighting conflict through the use of differing typographic weights and tones, differentiating headlines from by-lines, body copy from captions. The actual narrative is not evoked through text alone, but depends on subtle graphic interventions to highlight and steer the reader towards differing points of perspective. It oscillates between the past, present and future.

THE SOCIETY MURDERS: A VISUAL NARRATIVE

Within the narrative Matthew is a hapless figure searching for validation. He is like a soap opera villain, dangerous yet redeemable. Despite the depravity of his actions, Matthew is depicted as capable of love. His wife Maritza however, is silent, rarely meeting his gaze, the strong matriarch publicly retracting her affection. Much was made of Maritza’s demeanour in order to draw parallels between Maritza and Matthew’s victims, Margaret Wales-King and Paul King, in accused by Matthew of being emotionally controlling and distant.

When Maritza pleads guilty to attempting to pervert the course of justice, she shatters her feigned silence, by mouthing back to Matthew ‘I love you’. Her actions excite the journalists, enabling them to use the short twelve minutes that Matthew and Maritza spend in court to construct an enduring and bitter-sweet love story. In true romance style, Matthew in his testimony states ‘Remember one thing, she - Maritza loves me to death. Maritza had nothing to do with this...OK? You must believe me’ (Silvestor 2003).

The main focus of the Tabloid 2 installation is the patchwork paper quilt of grainy images. Each image has been enlarged to draw attention to and exaggerate the emotions, gestures and physical attributes of the players. On first glance, the viewer is made to feel situated within the story, as images of varying descriptions vie for attention. Enlarged faces and snippets of text read singularly make little sense, but together the viewer is lulled into believing that the story will unravel and reveal its moral pitch. The viewer is left to identify with the initial situation, to check the clues and dutifully follow the signposts.

The following extract from one of Tabloid 2’s four interpretative text pages describes the cropped photograph of Maritza Wales leaving the court building. This photograph is of great significance to the overall four-page interpretative narrative, and it appears six times in various croppings on the main image wall. It is the connecting thread to which the narrative adheres.

12 minutes in a packed court...Tuesday, May 14, 2002 Lead story, accompanied by lead full-colour image of Maritza Wales 218hmm x150wmm. Photographic image of Maritza Wales leaving the Magistrates’ Court. The photograph is positioned in the third column, it spans across three columns. ...two lives veer on a dreadful course. Maritza is the sole focus within the photograph, she stares neither past nor at anyone in particular. She appears transfixed in time, insconsolably aware of her position and the ensuing media frenzy, which awkwardly will attempt to fix her in time. Maritza is wearing an olive sweater and a denim jacket. To her left is a young woman holding a folder, this woman’s head is tilted downward. The angle gives the impression that her eyes are closed. To Maritza’s right is an elderly man; he wears a white shirt, a yellow tie covered with a colourful dot pattern. His mouth is open slightly. He could almost be perceived to be whistling faintly through his teeth. He stares at the back of Maritza’s head. In the far right corner I can make out a man holding a television camera. Maritza is buffeted intentionally and unintentionally by a throng of media, legal and family members. In the far distance a cluster of trees and a corner of a building are illuminated by the soft Autumn light of day.
Images within newspapers function as illustrations, records of an event, time and place and importantly as entertainment. Images help to communicate stories, offer clues as to how we should understand and read a news story. Daryl R. Moen refers to photographs in the newspaper as ‘stop signs in the designer’s traffic pattern’ (1989, p.4). Stop signs bring to a halt the onslaught of textual traffic; the viewer is able to enter into the photograph, explore its shape and form and connect its image with the narrative of the text being read. Photographs command our attention and help us to form relationships between picture and story. Moen cautions that ‘a page of pictures does not make a story, but a page of pictures with continuity does’ (1989, p.4). Barnhurst and Nerone expand on Moen’s observation, acknowledging that pictures function to be emotive and episodic. They function to extend narrative, as...groupings or entire pages of images seem to invite the reader to examine a variety of events in much the same way that older forms of written journalism left the reader free to choose and make sense of the news (Barnhurst & Nerone 2002, p.173).

The configuration of images, due to their uniform size and similarity in cropping, gives the impression of continuity of visual style. The viewer is led to believe that each image is related to the other, and that with a little effort a narrative would unfold. I interspersed text with the images to keep the viewer active, supplying suggestive words and statements, as does a newspaper, to accompany the images. Words, like headings and captions, should open up the reading to allow for closure, a final solution to the reading of the story. An interpretative story which draws attention to how the viewer/reader is being visually manipulated.

The text for this latest installment in The Society Murder saga spans across seven columns, it is broken up by three large images each measuring 186mmh x144mmw. Individually they span across 2.2 columns, together they span over six columns.

The first image is that of Matthew Wales, he appears to be sitting in the front seat of a car. He wears a baseball hat. He scowls quizzically towards the viewer. A 3mm white border separates him from the image of his mother, Margaret Wales-King, and her husband, Paul King. Margaret and Paul are stylishly dressed, she in a dark sequinned dress, he in a dinner suit, white shirt with small black buttons and a pert. bow tie. They are intimately holding each other's hands in a gesture of pride as opposed to possession. To the far left is Maritza Wales. Her image is a close-up crop of a previous image depicting her leaving the Magistrates’ Court on Tuesday, May 14, 2002.

Social Dramas

Multiplots in soap operas energise the gaps in the narrative ‘delighting the spectator with the infinite variety and the multiple resonances of seemingly unrelated events’ (Nochimson 1992).

In constructing my final interpretative story, I was conscious of appearing to visually retell an important narrative. In daytime soaps, such as Days of Our Lives and Another World, suspense and tension is signified through a lingering close-up of the actor’s face. This framed image still acts as a mesmeric pause, which succinctly punctuates the scene. The viewer is left to revel in and be awe-struck by the intensity of emotion on display. Closure is resisted and suspended. The characters within my narrative are presented through awkward and tight crops. Matthew Wales’s full face is never witnessed: instead, he is presented as a tight sliver set against a murky grey background. His victims, mother and stepfather, are presented in happier times, their faces sliced to draw attention to their smiling crinkled eyes. Matthew’s stepfather is always presented with his wife. Margaret Wales-King appears alone only once. Her image butts awkwardly into that of Maritza Wales. Directly above is an image of a man smiling, a young girl nestles diagonally into his right shoulder. Matthew and Maritza are presented as forlorn and suspenseful. Maritza’s gaze is never met, her eyes are cast down, mouth tightly clenched. Matthew’s gaze is menacing as he confronts his viewer with great intensity.

A family torn apart... Located at the bottom of page 15 is a strip of photographs butted together 70mm x 380mmw. This rectangular strip is framed within a .8 black border which snugly defines and collates the images together in a unified whole. The first two images within this photographic cartoon strip are that of Margaret Wales-King and Paul King’s friends, the second is that of Matthew and Maritza Wales leaving St Peter’s Catholic Church after the funeral for Margaret and Paul.

Five friends are photographed stridently walking towards the camera, or to be more exact away from the Magistrates’ Court. A middle-aged woman and an elderly gentleman are to the forefront of the image, three men ranging in ages walk closely
behind them. The figures create a triangular image of stability and harmony, a perfectly balanced composition. Each individual appears slightly embarrassed yet strangely exhilarated by the media’s presence. When studying their faces they appear caught in the transition between laughter and tears. A collection of individuals who are vague players in an intense family drama. Their names, occupations and social status are irrelevant, they serve to announce the introduction of this story; to set the tone and mood as the photographic narrative unfolds.

Returning to the image of Maritza and Matthew—their position in relation to the camera is in stark contrast to that of their parents’ friends. Maritza is oblivious to the camera, she is caught in a side profile, the side of her face gently lit by the mid-morning sun. Matthew turns his head. A deeply private moment has been rendered into a public spectacle. Grossberg uses the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle to illustrate our predicament when interpreting meaning from the ‘intersections of popular discourse, everyday life and the machineries of power’ (Grossberg 1997, p.209). He describes a blank box containing a vast array of disparate jigsaw pieces. The box gives no clue as to the relationship between each piece. The individual in possession of this box need not know that the pieces do not belong, for they have the capacity to create their own pictorial meaning. He argues that we cannot know how the overall picture will manifest itself, until we have embarked upon the journey of assembling the pieces. ‘No piece can be taken for granted, its significance might never be exhausted’. The surface we are trying to create is never ‘blank or innocent’. It is scarred by ‘traces of its history, a history of functions and effects’ (Grossberg 1997, p.209).
Tabloid 2 installation shot West Space Inc. Melbourne, 2003
SUMMARY

The primary intention of this thesis has been to establish that design is not neutral by demonstrating how the ordinary citizen is constructed and consumed through newspaper design form. Accordingly, analysis has focussed on the construction and maintenance of an environment in which everyday life is set and staged.

I have argued that the newspaper presents an impression of seriousness through a design framework which is designed to instill trust, security and visual stability. The effect is that when the world appears wayward and out of control the newspaper remains fixed and measured. It is not a carrier for the authentic voice of the people. It is, however, a marker, a collective series of typographic and graphic marks and statements, ideas and opinions, which express the way a section of society will be seen, reviewed and remembered. My contention is that the designer can reclaim personal space, reveal how social reality and, by extension, social identities are defined and represented through graphic structures. Narrative in all my exhibitions presents a public site to present alternative histories and readings of the dark stories retold.

Newspapers, as a genre of popular culture, nearly support Grossberg’s (1997) observation that the mainstream is marked by differences, that is visual differences, which denote overlapping style, intention and agenda. The newspaper competes for the public’s attention. The newspaper articulates its audience through visual presentation and style. It seeks to present the appearance of unity, where disparate voices and information are made to sit comfortably through design. It homogenises its content visually, concretising local alliances, not only though written content, but also through visual form and style. Newspapers constitute many forms and each form differs in its social, economic and political intentions. When you collect the range of newspapers within a city, you quickly see the differences before you read the content. Design allows you to make these judgements, enabling you to differentiate a community newspaper from a national newspaper, a tabloid from a broadsheet. This thesis has argued that design is clearly used to map out a navigable path to experience content. It functions at the intersection of pluralism and singularity, shifting in relation to content and context. It does not seek to rarefy positions, but rather to disguise or conversely highlight them. It is able to reflect ideas and determine meanings.

In conclusion, let us return to the central themes at the heart of this thesis. I have sought to question and test the relationship of design to meaning and, more specifically, visual text as exemplified by the newspaper. By looking critically at the manner in which domestic relationships are portrayed in the daily newspaper, I have sought to reveal how media design can be scrutinised and used as source material. Underpinning this study is the demonstration of the designer’s role within the media and its formation of social ideas in the public sphere. The suggestion is that the social sphere of community and neighborhood is determined and defined through the media and, more specifically, through the daily press, as illustrated in the reports on domestic tragedies sourced from Victoria’s daily newspaper, The Age. Individual chapters have attempted to understand how news narratives of the ordinary citizen are articulated and represented through graphic design systems and structures. They represent an attempt to deconstruct both news narrative and newspaper form.

Within all my design work, I have sought to critically read the newspaper, to extract a range of meanings oscillating from the real to the imagined. Large-scale installation/exhibition projects have provided me with the opportunity to demonstrate how through design we experience and respond to newspaper content. Design is integral to creating an image world, replete with distinctive social neighbourhoods and dark life narratives. In Tabloid, Tabloid 2, Ordinary Days and my book projects the viewer is invited to create his or her own stories from the artifacts supplied. To undertake a journey to assemble all the pieces of the gothic tale, I sought to draw attention to the newspaper, to expose how it presents a narrow reality. Exposing what the newspaper excludes and prioritizes, I explore how it tells stories such as The Society Murders.

I have inhabited and reconstructed the newspaper, specifically The Age and its stories, to examine and demonstrate the crucial role design plays in the articulation and communication of the day’s news. Analysis and graphic interventionist strategies have been employed, to show how newspaper form as a cultural practice seeks to be coherent, assembling elements that are concrete and everyday as well as ideological. Fiske argues that by internalising the spaces and places of others we are able to exert control over ‘social identities and social relations’ (Fiske 1998). In the ‘Social role of the graphic designer’, Pierre Bernard (1994) proposes that the objective of graphic design is to
integrate messages of form and content into society through structures such as newspaper grids, diagrams, maps and charts. Bernard argues that these structures locate and articulate specific messages linked to specific situations. He elaborates that, despite their disposability, newspapers, through orchestrated graphic systems, naturalize and render ideals, values and beliefs permanent. The objective of graphic design in the context of the newspaper is to confirm established values. Design sets the condition of normalcy, using grid structures that contain information in a considered, thoughtful and measured manner. As Bernard highlights, design 'transforms the idea, the judgment, and the aesthetic value into tangible “natural” reality'. He argues that design is too often presented as functional, disguising its symbolic ‘ideological integration’ of idea, forms and perspectives.

Craig also observes that graphic design constructs and reinforces dominant and circulated beliefs. It moves beyond the communication of ornamentation, to reinforcing or persuading the reader/viewer into believing and acknowledging prescribed and sanctioned perspectives:

Better graphic organization of a newspaper has its own values as well. A publication, where design is well organized, carries the connotations of professionalism, concern with detail, carefulness, thoughtfulness, exactitude etc. Since these are already values the press espouses, their visual presence in design helps to underscore their presence in other aspects of the newspaper, whether they are present or not (1990, 25).

Craig draws attention to graphic design’s communicative presence and power, succinctly stating that ‘it forms a system of communicative differences’ that conspire to ‘make it a sign system capable of carrying a variety of meanings and connotations that bear ideological significance’ (Craig 1990, p.26). This explains how graphic design is often referred to as silent, familiar yet strangely unfamiliar, with the assumption that an informed designer is able to guide us in how we should engage with, interpret and communicate this formal structure and in turn the content.

This Masters has established how graphic design systems and structures influence and shape our emotive and social relationship with society. It has examined how graphic design within ephemeral artefacts of the everyday, such as the newspaper, gives visual expression to social myths, shaping narratives of ordinary people’s lives into soap operas, which we consume voraciously and somewhat unconsciously. By analysing how design functions within the newspaper, framing, interpreting and emotionally manipulating everyday tragedies, such as love triangle murders or other modern gothic tales, it highlights the role of design in cultural and social production. It uses a series of installations to critically interpret and rework the formal and communication strategies of newspaper design and to reveal how graphic design can be used as a strategy for cultural intervention. The central aim of the project is to challenge the anonymous, if not unseen, nature of graphic design and its central role within the media, in shaping popular and consumable images of community and citizenship.

In 2004, Melbourne, Australia was identified as the world’s most liveable city. The Victorian Tourism Minister John Pandazopoulos was quoted in The Age on February 6, 2004 stating that the award was based on ‘infrastructure, access, education levels, crime rate, focus on the environment, culture and events’. These cited key areas could easily be the sections which make up the composition of the newspaper. In 2004 The Age newspaper proclaimed that it is ‘The world’s most liveable newspaper’, in the process illustrating how the newspaper represents and mediates everyday life.

In defining itself as ‘liveable’, The Age newspaper automatically seeks to align itself with Melbourne, its place of publication. Melbourne, the city, and The Age, Melbourne’s newspaper, become interchangeable. The form and content of the paper reflects the most liveable city’s form. In 2007 The Age newspaper won the coveted Pacific Area Newspaper Publishers’ Association Newspaper of the Year award. Chief executive and publisher Don Churchill proclaimed that the newspaper had ‘reconnected with Melbourne’.

Conclusion - The Society Murders and the Newspaper Soap Opera


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