two years ago announced the October 1976 independence election.

A process now draws to its conclusion. Africans have been successively deprived since 1936 of each vestige of political incorporation in South Africa. They lost the common (Cape) franchise, the Native Representative Council, their elected representatives in the Senate, and citizenship itself. And at the same time the details of decentralised “self-government” were fleshed out. And a progressively greater degree of local control was delegated as Matanzima, and the SNP demonstrated its mettle in the Transkei.

The most recent events in Transkei politics have taken place in the run-up to the “independence election.” In November last year, the DPNP threw out its older, cautious leadership, and a group of younger, tougher men has been vigorously opposing the grant of independence. H. B. Neokazi, leader of the DPNP, made the accusation in February this year that the independent Transkei would be “a racial state with racial laws.” In June he called on the international community to “join us in pillorying this fraudulent and bogus scheme, which is designed to perpetuate oppression of the black people by the whites.” In August, Neokazi was detained under Proclamation 400. Also detained are at least 15 of his party’s top officials. When the deputy leader and general secretary were arrested, the Rand Daily Mail said that the DPNP’s entire executive was now in detention.

The concentration of local power by South Africa in the hands of a successor elite, that elite’s strong-arm tactics and petty corruption, and the gathering rush towards bureaucratic single-party rule, all suggest similarities between the Transkei and other “post-colonial states.” Matanzima’s reiterated commitment to upholding the power of the chiefs in the political system, in return for his power base in a regional bureaucracy. The Transkei government employs over 20,000 of the 47,000 Transkeians who work inside the territory.

As political allies for this bureaucracy, Matanzima is clearly looking to other groups: in particular, to small commercial farmers and to (so far only a few) small businessmen and entrepreneurs. The republic’s agricultural policy for the Bantustans centres on the creation of a class of wealthy peasants or small farmers. The number of families with a claim to smallholdings in the homelands must be reduced from 500,000 to 50,000, say the planners. That process is already under way in the Transkei. It involves reallocation and concentration of land, the “rationalisation” of agriculture, and a rise in cash crop production by the few—while the yields of subsistence agriculture by the many fall even lower.

Whether an alliance of this nature—equipped with its own police force, army and security laws by its backers in Pretoria—can long survive is the crucial question posed by Transkei’s “independence.” It remains to be seen whether the ruling elites within the Bantustans can cope with the misery and disaffection of their own populations. White South Africans have handed Matanzima a slice of power and a life-style to match it. They must now hope that this pocket Vorster can be counted on to discipline a huge black working class from whose labour he and his clique do not benefit directly.

The very migrant status of those workers is a double-edged factor. The “citizens” of the Transkei include many whose political catechism has been learnt in Soweto and other townships. We shall see.

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The psychology of human fancy

Andrew Colman and Wladyslaw Sluckin

What makes us like certain flowers, tunes, patterns—and dislike others? Research shows how this increases with familiarity, reaches a peak, and declines.

People’s everyday likes and dislikes merit the attention of psychologists. Our preferences for foods and drinks, clothes and hairstyles, colours, patterns, buildings, names and so forth are not easy to understand. Why is one floral arrangement more pleasing than another, and even some sights are pleasant when they are neither too dim nor too brilliant, and that sounds are pleasant when they are neither too strong nor too weak.

A rather more specific example of the aesthetic mean is the “golden section”: this occurs when the shorter side of a rectangle is to the longer side as the longer is to the sum of the two. In the Middle Ages, this was revered as the “divine proportion.” During the Renaissance the astronomer, Kepler, who was also an incorrigible occultist, described it as one of the two “treasures” of geometry (the other being Pythagoras’s theorem). In modern times the architect Le Corbusier made it the basis of his work.

Speculations of this kind allow research into aesthetic preferences, since one can obviously check whether, for instance, the golden section does embody the most pleasing proportions in the eyes of most viewers. Yet the very thought of researching into aesthetic preferences has always been deeply offensive to some artists and members of the general public. This reaction, however, is...
based on a misunderstanding of the aims of research; it is reminiscent of the poet Keats's strenuous objection to the investigation of the colours of the rainbow by physicists.

The history of experimental aesthetics began, despite such misgivings, in G. T. Fechner's laboratory in Germany in the 1880s and is, in fact, one of the very oldest branches of experimental psychology. By the turn of the century the methods used in this research were quite elaborate, but the results were nevertheless disappointing. A rectangle of any proportions, it turned out, was pleasing to some people. And though the golden section was most popular, slight deviations from it were hardly less so, in contrast to music where slightly mistuned chords are unanimously thought the ugliest of all. Findings on related problems were equally deflating: colour preferences were found to vary erratically, attempts to test the appeal of "unity in diversity" largely failed; and investigations of the "expressiveness of lines" proved inconclusive.

Interest in experimental aesthetics consequently declined during the 1920s and 1930s.

After decades of near-oblivion, there was a revival of interest in experimental aesthetics in the mid 1960s which is still continuing. This new phase is quite different in character from the early work: it is marked by new aims, techniques and theories and has been called the new experimental aesthetics.

One of the landmarks of the new experimental aesthetics is the "exposure hypothesis" put forward by Robert Zajonc of the University of Michigan in 1968. Zajonc assembled evidence which suggested that our liking for objects increases with familiarity: repeated exposure to a stimulus increases our liking for it. Although this idea would seem to conflict with that of everyday experience, in which familiarity can breed contempt, the evidence which Zajonc marshalled in its support was quite impressive.

Some of Zajonc's evidence was admittedly indirect and circumstantial. Words which often occur in our language, for example, are naturally more familiar than uncommon words. What is interesting is that these common words turn out to be more "positively-toned" than uncommon words. The word "happiness" occurs 13 times as frequently in our language as "unhappiness" and "beauty" is used 41 times oftener than "ugliness."

If our language reflects the world we experience, we can infer that things are "good" five times as often as they are "bad," and they "improve" 25 times as often as they "deteriorate."

"We find" things 4.5 times oftener than we "lose" them, presumably because we are "lucky" eleven times as often as we are "unlucky."

The most frequently mentioned flower, the rose, is also the most popular. The daisy is middling in how often it is mentioned, and in popularity: the cowslip is low on both counts. Frequent usage is not a reliable measure of how often objects crop up in daily life; but in the case of vegetables, Zajonc measured their preference against farm production figures, in thousands of tons, and found that there was a very high correlation.

These examples do not convincingly support the exposure hypothesis, because they do not show that familiarity causes liking. For all we can tell, liking may cause familiarity; people may become more familiar with the things they like for all sorts of reasons.

Zajonc therefore designed three experiments in order to test the exposure hypothesis directly. In the first, the subjects rated a set of pseudo-Turkish "words" (like ikikaf). In the second, some rather pretty Chinese idigrams were used. In the third, the subjects were given photographs of people's faces. The subjects in these experiments assessed the objects either for the first time they saw them, or after varying amounts of exposure intended to make them familiar with the materials. The results in each case revealed a strong relationship between exposure and liking: the more often the subjects had been exposed to the objects, the more favourably they rated them. These results strongly support the exposure hypothesis.

It may well be that, like some of our fears, certain preferences have biological roots. Many young animals—birds and mammals—develop strong preferences for familiar objects which they acquire simply by constant contact with these from the beginning of their lives. (This kind of acquisition is known as "imprinting.") Human psychological development also involves preferences for the familiar. Familiarity alone obviously does not make us like or dislike anything; but it would be worth knowing exactly how, and to what extent, it affects the development of the human aesthetic sense.

In our studies at Leicester University of some everyday likes and dislikes, we compared the responses of children of various ages and of young adults. Instead of artificially making subjects familiar with various materials by repeated exposures during the experiment, we have used objects which, for cultural reasons, are already to varying degrees familiar to people of different ages. We have thus investigated materials ranging from complete novelty to extremely high levels of familiarity indeed.

In one of our studies, we used letters of the alphabet and meaningless letter-like shapes. When children of different ages were shown these objects in pairs and asked which they preferred, an intriguing difference emerged. Five year old children, who were just learning to read, very strongly preferred the letters to the unfamiliar shapes. Ten year old children, who were all fluent readers and to whom the letters were therefore extremely familiar, showed only a slight preference for the letters over the unfamiliar shapes. These results clearly show that exposure to objects creates liking; but they also reveal that very high levels of exposure do not necessarily produce increased liking and may even lead to a decline.

In another experiment, we gave children of various ages and young adults an aesthetic choice between common words like "bag" and totally unfamiliar non-words like "keb." Most of our subjects preferred the real word, but the effect was far more pronounced among ten year olds than among younger or older subjects. We also made a

Which of the above rectangles pleases you most? Research shows that most people prefer the one which uses the "golden section." Ever since the Middle Ages, systems of proportion have been based on the golden section. For example, Le Corbusier's Modular (facing page below). Salvador Dali's Last Supper (facing page below) is also painted on a "golden rectangle." and the golden section is used to position the figures.

The inverted 'U' curve

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Chart position of 'I only have eyes for you' by Art Garfunkel

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The simplest way to make sense of all these findings is to use an inverted-u (see opposite) curve, suggested by some earlier research workers. The implication is that liking increases with familiarity, reaches a peak and then declines. According to this, we like moderately familiar things, but are less keen on very new or very familiar things. Thus children who are old enough to find letters of the alphabet moderately familiar far prefer them to new shapes, but older children are less keen because to them the letters are already becoming too familiar. Similarly, ten-year-old children show much the greatest preference for common words, since younger children find them still too new and adults find them too familiar and therefore boring. Uncommon words, finally, are obviously too new to be liked by children, but adults like them because they are reasonably familiar compared with the too-familiar common words.

The inverted-u provides a neat and convincing framework for interpreting our results, and it has the unique advantage of explaining apparently conflicting findings in the literature and confirming everyday experience. We are now seeing how it applies to common and uncommon Christian names; the results will be interesting in view of the fact that people often choose names for their children nowadays on purely aesthetic grounds. If the inverted-u turns out to be widely applicable, we can speculate about the various factors which may affect it.

Theoretical considerations suggest the peak of liking may occur earlier with objects which seem simple and predictable, and later with objects which seem complex and unpredictable. The former category includes things which have almost instant appeal, but which soon become boring; the latter category covers objects where liking develops more slowly, but lasts longer.

Research along these lines may help to explain the apparently haphazard way in which fashions change. Pop music should, according to the ideas above, show a rapid turnover, women's clothing fashions should change rather more slowly, and "classical" music compositions should gain and lose popularity over very long periods of time. Experience seems to confirm these speculations.