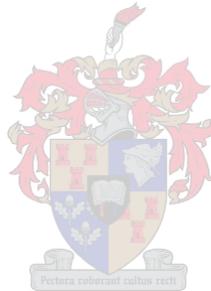


A RENEWED VIEWER-READER CONDITION:
mediating between semiotics and counter-semiotics

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

.....

SIGNATURE

..... 16 / 11 / 2006

DATE

ABSTRACT

As the title of this thesis anticipates, two modes for interpretation are discussed: visual semiotics and pictorial counter-semiotics. Rooted in and conceived from an established linguistic methodology for learning the significance of signs, visual semiotics constitutes an interpretative mindset which affords only a confined set of theories for the viewer. These conceptions, directing the codes by which, for example, visual narratives are created and understood, hold certain limits for the viewer's full appreciation and formation of the selfhood of pictures. Visual semiotics presents images to viewers as a form of *text*, implying that they be read and studied in a particular fashion – an attitude advancing the idea that images are subsidiary to text. This limited theory is investigated here.

Pictorial counter-semiotics, a misrecognized counterpart of semiotic study, offers a paradigmatic shift in the recognition and understanding of visual signification. By exposing a number of visual paradoxes, it enables the viewer to evaluate and reconsider his / her position on the construction and cultural implementation of pictures. Three particular instances of image-making, namely *anti-splendor*, 'exfoliation', and 'multistability', are brought in line with my own art and image-making processes to elucidate a counter means for picture interpretation.

Counter-semiotics is not an anti-semiotic stance. It is instead a conjoining feature of a viewer's interpretative mindset and effects the constant transference between pictorial convention and pictorial discovery.

OPSOMMING

Soos daar in die titel voorgestel word, ondersoek hierdie tesis twee wyses om beelde te vertolk: visuele semiotiek en pikturale kontrasemiotiek. Die eerste, visuele semiotiek, stel 'n groep teorieë voor wat hoofsaaklik op 'n gevestigde taalkundige metodiek vir die vertolking van tekens gebaseer is. Sulke veronderstelde konsepte bepaal die kodes waarvolgens visuele narratiewe geskep en verstaan word, maar sonder dat die kyker dit besef weerhou dit beduidende prente-aspekte wat aanvullend tot die kyker se volle begrip van prente se selfwees mag wees. Visuele semiotiek impliseer dat kykers prente as 'n vorm van *teks* moet sien en ook ontleed, wat gevolglik beteken dat prente sekondêr staan tot tekste. Die eng teorieë van visuele semiotiek word in hierdie tesis ondersoek.

Pikturale kontrasemiotiek is die voorgestelde naam vir 'n onerkende eweknie van semiotiese studies. So 'n tipe visuele vertolking bied 'n model wat 'n paradigmatverskuiwing in die herkenning en begrip van visuele kodes wil veroorsaak. Vanweë die ontbloting van bepaalde visuele paradokse, word die kyker in staat gestel om sy / haar posisie ten opsigte van die samestelling en kulturele implimentering van prente te herevalueer en te heroorweeg. Drie vorme van beeldskepping, naamlik '*anti-splendor*', '*exfoliation*' en '*multistability*', word met my eie werk en prosesse in verband gebring om 'n kontrawyse vir die vertolking van prente duidelik te maak.

Kontrasemiotiek is nie 'n anti-semiotiese perspektief nie. Inteendeel, dit is 'n aansluitende hooftrek van 'n kyker se vertolkingsingesteldheid en bring 'n onophoudelike kruisspel tussen pikturale konvensie en pikturale ontdekking teweeg.

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PHILOSOPHICAL OUTBURST

How sidious in tone
Our lives would be
If the *sine qua non*
Were the *cum qua si*.

INTRODUCTION

The Master's degree in Fine Art comprises both a practical and theoretical component. The practical component constitutes a body of work which is created in relation to a specialized field of the visual arts, while the theoretical component, which takes the form of a thesis, functions as a discussion regarding the development and contextualization of the practical work within that field of speciality. In respect of my practical work I have chosen to deal with the context of 'image-making', and concentrate specifically on the relationship between image and text, while the theoretical discussion explores the field of semiotics as a premise for my analysis of the image-text dichotomy.¹

My study of the relationship between image and text stems from a background in visual communication and my interest in pictorial narrative. Originally conceived as research that would inform my decisions around the creation and development of a visual language for picture-books (a genre generally associated with visual literature for children) and 'multi-phase' images (which are single-scene narratives; for example, editorial illustrations and allegorical paintings), it ventured into an investigative terrain which also regards image-making practices and processes as forms of narrative.² The cultural and narrative theorist, Mieke Bal (1999:220), writing about the theory of narrative states:

[N]arratology applies to virtually every cultural object. Not that everything 'is' narrative; but practically everything in culture has a narrative aspect to it, or at the very least, can be perceived, interpreted as narrative The

¹ It is becoming increasingly difficult to define the term 'image', mainly because our visual reality entails such diverse forms of intersecting visual mediums and channels. The American visual culture theorist, W.J.T. Mitchell (1986:10), in an attempt to define what the term 'image' constitutes, has even created an image 'family tree' which delineates five image-types: 'graphic' (pictures, statues, and designs); 'optical' (mirrors, and projections); 'perceptual' (sense data, and appearances); 'mental' (dreams, memories, and ideas); and 'verbal' (metaphors, and descriptions). To clarify: when I use the word 'image' in my theoretical discussion, I am referring specifically to two-dimensional, visual art forms or 'art on paper' (paintings, drawings, and illustrations) – work which would be labelled 'pictures' under Mitchell's graphic-image category.

² The semiotician, Göran Sonesson (1995), says: 'The only case normally discussed in art history is that which we will call the *multi-phase* picture, which is a single, static picture, containing persons and events which are known to represent various phases taken from the same event series, or *action scheme* [T]he temporal link is projected onto the picture, solely from our knowledge of the story [or] from the title.'

omnipresence of narrative makes a case for the importance of narratology only if narrative is crucial in those cultural artefacts we qualify as wholly or partially narrative. But there lies the problem, as well as the reason why narratology has traditionally been confined – more or less – to the category of story-telling, mostly literary, mostly novelistic.

My practical work does not conform to a conventional understanding of illustration as an art form which is employed to visually narrate, illustrate, or complement a textual story.³ Instead, the works perform as 'illustrations', because they imbue paradigms of image-making as types of visual narrative in which 'events' of the image-making process substitute 'events' of a narrative text. This means that, instead of his / her reliance on text (on a written story or a title for significance), the viewer is required to identify and consider formal principles of image-making (devices such as *chiaroscuro*; or the principles of 'balance') in order to visualize the contained 'narratives' of the image – in other words that which it 'illustrates' or represents.

I would like to point out, from the start, that my theoretical investigation does not involve a developed discussion of narratology. It investigates the formal elements (the ontology of graphic marks, and space), principles (pictorial balance, union, figure-ground relation, and contrast), and devices (*chiaroscuro*, cropping, layering, juxtaposition, and incongruent paring) of image-making. Apart from a discussion of pictorial narrative codes at the end of my thesis, no attention will be given to features of 'fabula' (elements of the narrative text: situational events, actors) and narrative devices (such as the use of a narrator), because these fall outside the framework of my theoretical investigation and the development of my argument. In my thesis the term 'narrative' is used in relation to my practical work to imply that the picture-making process can also be perceived as a 'plot' or sequence of visual events.

Fundamentally, my theoretical investigation is about the act of interpretation and making sense of forms of image-text (such as the relationship between the image

³ None of the images that makes up the body of my practical work is created to illustrate or supplement any form of text, or is furnished with a preconceived title. For me, the image-making process always precedes the naming or labelling of the image and, in most cases, I choose titles which evoke something entirely different from what the image represents. This deliberate way of juxtaposing image and text is aimed to address not only the viewer's understanding of the relationship between a representation and its accompanying title, and its significance, as a result of parallel inter-texts (because both the image and the title induce their own set of relative texts and contexts), but also, his / her familiarity with, and employment of visual narrative codes in order to construe visual events.

and its title). My thesis centres on semiotic methods which are employed by viewers in order to interpret images. Following from a concern regarding the state of a postmodern viewer's visual literacy, this theoretical investigation underscores why semiotics has established itself as a predominant interpretative mode; one which encapsulates culture's implementation and understanding of verbal and visual signs. Bal explains semiotics (1998:74) as follows:

Semiotics is the theory of signs and sign use, including *seeing* signs. It is not a historical but rather a hermeneutic discipline, but it can be usefully integrated within historical inquiries. Semiotics focuses on construction and representation, considering 'texts' as specific combinations of signs yielding meaning.

My thesis discloses particular viewpoints concerning the cultural condition of the postmodern viewer and his / her compulsion to recognize the significant content of images. I find myself in agreement with what the American cultural theorist, Susan Sontag (1990:5), refers to as 'the habit of approaching works of art in order to interpret them' (where she refers to text, I substitute image). Sontag asserts (1990:6):

[This habit] sustains the fancy that there really is such a thing as the content of a work of art The task of interpretation is virtually one of translation [Interpretation] presupposes a discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers. It seeks to resolve that discrepancy.

Semiotics is an ideal starting point for my theoretical investigation because it raises a number of theoretical questions regarding the act of interpretation, and the demystification of cultural visual phenomena. Of particular interest to me are semiotic notions around the relationship between image and text (what the viewer perceives as image, and what as text), ideas regarding the construction of a visual message or expression (which is defined by the relationship between image and text), the dissemination of images as pictorial signs (which is the contextualization of an image-text combination or 'sign'), and the cultural acceptance or agreement concerning an image and its significance (its contextualization within a specific

cultural field).⁴ This is one of the strengths of semiotics; that it activates a cultural fascination or a cultural viscosity of 'recognition' – the viewer's ability to recognize images or image-text combinations as signs, implies a degree of visual literacy.

It is, however, in its very ability to recognize significant aspects of images that the shortcomings of semiotics as a mode for interpretation lie. Because it is founded on linguistic theories and Structuralist systems for classification, semiotics can be regarded as a mode which designates a cultural process of identification and 'naming', or recognition and contextualization, mainly in terms of discourse. With regard to the interpretation of images, Mitchell (1996:47) asserts: 'In the act of interpreting or describing pictures, even in the fundamental process of recognizing what they represent, language enters into the visual field'.

Such a cultural process, involving the naturalization of cultural and textual codes, has serious implications for the implementation and understanding of images. In fact, as Bryson (1991:61) has said, the concept of *sign* has replaced the understanding of *perception*; he stresses further:

In place of the transcendental comparison between the image and perceptual private worlds, stand the socially generated codes of recognition; and in place of the link, magical and illogical, that is alleged to extend from an outer world of things into recesses of inwardness and subjectivity, stands the link extending from individual to individual as consensual activity, in the *forum* of recognition ... if we consider painting as an art of the sign, which is to say an art of discourse, then painting is coextensive with the flow of signs through both itself and the rest of the social formation. There is no marginalization: painting is bathed in the same circulation of signs which permeates or ventilates the rest of the social structure (Bryson, 1991:65-66).

This 'marginalization' that Bryson speaks of is precisely what I consider the shortcoming of semiotics to be. In recognizing and categorizing individual images as

⁴ British art and visual culture historian, Norman Bryson (1991:70), explains the perception of images as pictorial signs as follows:

A virtue of considering the visual image as sign is that having relocated [the 'graphic' image] within the social domain, inherently and not only as a result of its instrumental placing there by some other agency, it becomes possible to think of the image as discursive work which returns into the society. The [image-maker] assumes the society's codes of recognition, and performs his or her activity within their constraints, but the codes permit the elaboration of new combinations of the sign, further evolution in the discursive formation.

specific pictorial signs (recognition), semiotics may be able to draw images into the cultural realm of socio-political ideologies, but at the same time, it marginalizes the image by suppressing that which constitutes its perceptual 'form' (perception). Bryson (1991:63) describes the 'Perceptualist' account of images as follows:

[The] conception of image-making, with its key terms of *schema*, *observation* and *testing*, can be called the Perceptualist account, because the central transaction concerns the eye, and the accommodations the schema must make to new observations coming into the eye. The viewer, for his or her part, is defined by this perceptualist account as performing an activity where those terms re-appear in more passive guise: the viewer confronting a new image mobilizes the stock of perceptual memories, brings them to the new work for testing, and the visual schemata are in turn modified by the encounter between the new image and the viewer's gaze.

('Schemata' refers to pictorial elements and devices which compose the representation.)

Semiotics overturns the 'perceptualist' account by glancing cursorily over the formal elements and principles of images – the constituents of its formation, or the image-making process – because its main concern is with images which immediately emanate consensual pictorial signs; what counts for the processes and conventions of image-making are regarded by semiotics as mere technicalities and insignificants of the overall process of cultural sign-reception. (In my discussion I refer specifically to the modes of mark making and conditions for the conventions of illusionism to substantiate this accusation.)

The objective of this investigation is to critically examine the cultural implementation of semiotics as a mode for interpreting images. I argue against the general use of semiotics as a predominant model for identifying and understanding significance in images, and propose an alternate, co-operative, interpretative mindset which does not use the institutions of language as the primary foundation for signification. I have named this latter approach 'counter-semiotics'.

Counter-semiotics does not aim to reinstate a 'perceptualist' account of image interpretation; nor is it a mode which works against semiotics, or 'anti'-semiotics. The conception of counter-semiotics is to align semiotic accounts with specific features of image-making that are generally misrecognised as insignificant, and to draw attention

to visual paradoxes in images in order to perform as an adjacent or 'countering' mode for interpretation. Counter-semiotics, as I wish to propose, suggests a kind of mindset which is informed by, and informs, semiotic approaches for image analysis.

Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories ... What is needed, first, is more attention to form in art. If excessive stress on *content* provokes the arrogance of interpretation, more extended and more thorough descriptions of *form* would silence. What is needed is a vocabulary – a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, vocabulary – for forms (Sontag, 1990:10,12).

This thesis has a two-part form, and is structured in such a way as to represent the two sides of an image-text dichotomy. Part One is entitled TEXT and focuses on the establishment and implications of semiotics; specifically in its relation to image analysis. The starting point for the discussion in this part is the development and systemization of language. I look particularly at how semiotics has instigated and infused language systems with other areas of cultural development in order to understand how a society 'reads' and interprets cultural and textual codes.

The first section of Part One looks at how cultural and textual codes are recognized as, and conceded to be, consensual signs. Images make up a large part of the construction and development of our cultural environment and, as a result, they become part of an interconnected system of reading, interpreting, agreement, and eventually, naturalization. Semiotics describes the process of cultural conditioning, which includes the demystification of cultural visual phenomena. This section aims to show how susceptible we are to incorporating visual material into a system of reading and verbalization. For this discussion it is central to refer to the semiotic research of Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, and American logician, Charles Sanders Peirce. Their theories form the basis for the structuring of semiotics. Additionally, I make particular reference to the work and semiotic inquiries of educator, Daniel Chandler, focusing on his views on the structural development of the field of semiotics and his interpretation of the above two theoreticians' work.

The main sections of the study are SEMIOTICS, POSTSTRUCTURAL SEMIOTICS, VISUAL CULTURE, VISUAL SEMIOTICS, COUNTER-SEMIOTICS, and METAPICTURES. Each subsections makes use of a visual example, or more than

one, to aid in the explanation of semiotic terminology and theories aligned with visual interpretation. In the first subsection, *Sign*, specific reference is made to the art historian's, Erwin Panofsky's, three stages of the process of interpretation, and we are introduced to his concept of 'iconology' (the pictorial concept which prefigures the notion of image-text). Attention is given to Peirce's triadic development of the sign, and, in addition, we are introduced to the semiotic conceptions of the French cultural and literary critic, Roland Barthes. Barthes' notions of intra- and inter-text are of particular concern to the discussion of image-text relations.

In section two of Part One, my attention turns to post-structuralist thought and, more importantly, the influence that it has on the development of cultural semiotics. Post-structuralist philosophy stresses the extent to which language has impacted on both the construction of culture and its members, emphasizing that meaning is a product of the communion between the reader and text. A discussion of post-structuralism cannot neglect the conceptions of deconstruction and the decentring of meaning resulting from the work of French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. His and other theorists' work, including that of Barthes and French theorist, Julia Kristeva, will form the basis for a discussion about a key concept which gives insight to the acts of reading and interpretation – intertextuality.

Again, in the subsection entitled *Writing the image*, an image is incorporated to explain the workings of an interpretative framework and its effects – this time Barthes' framework for reading. This framework suggests that interpretation is a productive activity by which the viewer becomes a decisive agent in both the deconstruction (decoding) and production of the meanings of visual messages. The viewer is seen to sustain the role of both observer (viewer) and 'reader' when in the process of interpreting. Along with Barthes' notions of the relationship between viewing, reading, and, in effect, 'writing' images, the discussion also introduces Derrida's ideas around the cultural 'framing' of meaning.

The last section of Part One reflects on the state of a postmodern cultural visibility (with reference to the French philosopher, Jean-Francois Lyotard), and the diverse range of disciplinary activities which have resulted in 'visual culture' studies. Referring largely to ideas of W.J.T. Mitchell, I take a close look at the suggestion for a potential pictorial account of theory – a 'pictorial turn' which re-evaluates how visual paradigms may be utilized to uncover meanings in a variety of visual media.

The concluding subsection of Part One deals wholly with the featured aspect of my investigation, the image-text duality (the subsection is titled *Imagetext*). Supported once again by an image, the subsection evaluates the workings of postmodern images, paying close attention to the image-maker's decisions to affiliate image with text. American image theorist's, Barbara Stafford's, critical response to postmodernism's insistence on an allegorical approach to image interpretation is used as a premise to develop an argument for image-text equivalence. Stafford challenges our reliance on pictorial metaphor and symbolism as ways of inducing significant meaning, by reiterating a call for an appreciation and indulgence of 'visual analogies' which Sontag (1990:13-14) had raised at the beginning of postmodernism:

Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life – its material plenitude, its sheer crowdedness – conjoin to dull our sensory faculties The aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art – and, by means of analogy, our own experience – more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is* even *that it is what it is*, rather than show what it means.

Part One can thus be construed as a study of how images are treated as forms of text. As Mitchell (1986:156) notes: '[Semiotics] treats every graphic image as a text, a coded, intentional, and conventional sign, it threatens to blur the uniqueness of graphic images, and make them part of the seamless web of interpretable objects'.

In Part Two of this study my attention turns to the ontology of images and I look at whether or not an appropriation of semiotics for visual material, 'visual semiotics', has inflicted itself on the constituents of images. Part Two is entitled IMAGE. The aim of this reverse part of the investigation is to both identify and name certain paradoxes of a projected visual semiotics, specifically those that have been recognized and pertain to my own practical work process. Whereas Part One utilizes images by other artists to *summate* the findings of each section, I concentrate exclusively on and *assimilate* examples of my own work into the three discussions of Part Two (I have therefore labelled the closing paragraphs to each of the sections of Part One and Part Two, **Summation** and **Assimilation**, respectively).

The opening discussion of Part Two evolves around the gradual advancement of a 'visual semiotics'. Concentrating especially on the visual semiotic notions of Bal and

Sonesson, I undertake a close investigation of what is meant to constitute a 'visual sign'. Bal's suggestion that the pictorial sign is divided into 'subsemiotic' features (Bal's term for what Bryson calls the 'Perceptualist' account) and 'suprasemiotic' features (the image, wholly as a form of consensual sign) forms the starting point for my discussion of counter-semiotics. Alongside a discussion of Bal's notion of the pictorial sign as cultural 'event', I consider the conceptions of American philosopher, Nelson Goodman, regarding representational schema.

Under the subsection entitled *Thing*, my attention turns once again to the role of the viewer and, more specifically, the condition of his / her visual literacy in light of a 'Perceptualist' account. With reference to a series of miniature paintings (entitled *The Gift*), which makes up part of my body of practical work, I investigate the perceptualist notions of art historian, E.H. Gombrich. I focus mainly on Gombrich's insights concerning the representation or fabrication of pictorial realism through the identification of a key feature of illusionist devices, namely *splendor* (the effect in which a highlight is added to make objects appear more three-dimensional).⁵

The aim, therefore, in the first section of Part Two is to suggest that the distinction and categorization of images involves more than simply aligning visual terms with linguistic semiotic features. In this section I return to some of the fundamental perceptual aspects of image-making in order to create a break between perceptions (and the involved terminology) of images as signs, and understanding images as complex visual matter.

The final two sections of Part Two focus mainly on the three notions which I have identified to propose a counter-semiotic mode. My examination of counter-semiotics underscores two forms of visual paradoxes, and one counter-attack on the charge that graphic mark-making performs a kind of writing. Two of the three counter-semiotic notions which will be discussed derive from theoretical observations made by Elkins. I make extensive reference to Elkins' commentaries, notably from his 1998 book *On Pictures and the Words that Fail Them*, on the ontology of pictures, and his critique of semiotic accounts for image interpretation. The reason for this is that I found his criticism of Bal's and Bryson's views of visual semiotics, and the way in

⁵ Social-semiotic theorists, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996:163), position 'pictorial realism' as the following: 'Each realism has its naturalism, that is, a realism is a definition of what counts as real, a set of criteria for the real, and it will find its expression in the "right", the best, the (most) "natural" form of representing that kind of reality ...'.

which he overturns Derrida's concept of the graphic trace, pertinent to the development of my own argument.

In the second section of Part Two, COUNTER-SEMIOTICS, I initiate my discussion of a counter-mode for interpretation with the interjection of Elkins' idea of *anti-splendor*. This account of counter-semiotics constrains the concept and understanding of conventional *chiaroscuro* (interplay or treatment of light and shadow in representations), whereby dark tones fulfil the function of the lighter areas. *Anti-splendor* is an illogical form of illusionism and bypasses the logic (a perceptual account of the illusion of light-play on the surface of objects) of the convention understood as *splendor*. By undermining the convention of *chiaroscuro*, *anti-splendor* problematizes our understanding of (the semiotic account), and our implementation of (the perceptual account) light and dark relations for form.

In the subsection called ***Drawing the picture***, an argument is developed to counterpose different perceptions regarding mark-making. Here we will read how Elkins (1998:22) protests against Derrida's pre-emption of marks as stable entities of the image: 'Derrida's is a repressive reading, a way of silencing the drawn trace by letting it melt quietly away into writing'. In contrast to Derrida's 'withdrawing' marks, Elkins suggests that marks 'exfoliate' into a number of surfaces which, instead of forging a trace, multiply into over-significant, dense fields. From Elkins' reading of the modes of marking, I identify a second notion which supports a counter-semiotic account of images. I have labelled this occurrence 'transmodulation'. In a similar way to that in which *anti-splendor* proves an illogical understanding of the workings of tonal values, 'transmodulation' reveals an irregular relationship between marks. It suggests that marks are interchangeable and can substitute for each other, leaving the viewer confused as to what effect is supposed to be induced. Elkins (1998:44) observes: 'A mark might be undecidably a part rather than a whole, or a composite rather than a single entity, or even equivalent to another mark'.

In the last section of Part Two, I look at a visual paradox which surfaces from the incongruent paring of figural forms and the juxtaposing of image and text. This pictorial feature is referred to as the 'multistable' aspect of images. I utilize Mitchell's 'metapicture' as a context for the exploitation of the counter-semiotic notion of 'multistability' and, with specific reference to his 'talking' metapicture, use 'metapictures' as a site from which to question the constancy of the semiotic codes for understanding narrative (or the relationship between image and text). Looking at

examples of 'multistable' visual paradoxes from *The Book of Immediate Nonsense* – a component of my practical body of work – I challenge the possibility of attaining narrative codes (these being the *proraitetic*, *hermeneutic*, *semic*, *symbolic*, and *referential* codes) in order to understand the significance of a 'multi-phase' image (which proceeds principally from the aligned meaning of the image and its title).

My theoretical investigation aims at proposing an interpretative approach that is informed by both a semiotic and counter-semiotic account of images. By recalling a number of conventions from the peripheral field of 'Perceptualist' image-study, I assimilate and counter-pose consensual pictorial signs with newly identified visual paradoxes. The contradiction which manifests in *splendor*, called *anti-splendor* (to use one of my examples of counter-semiotic notions), speaks of my decision to use the term counter-semiotics. Counter-semiotics is not 'anti' semiotics; instead, much as *anti-splendor* participates alongside *splendor*, counter-semiotics exists, informs, and functions parallel to semiotics.

Counter-semiotics is a term for a particular condition of the postmodern viewer-society, which signifies a reproach to contemporary visuality and recognition. It is necessary, I believe, that the viewer recognize the possibility of a mode of counter-semiotics that concurs with semiotic institutions, whilst in the act of interpreting, the same way he / she would fluctuate between perceptions of image and text in order to arrive at the significance of a representation.

My theoretical investigation touches on a number of concerns, specifically semiotic ones, related to the fields of literary studies, image-making, narratology, and also cultural theory. And because of semiotic interpolation in all of the above fields, this study will present itself as an interdisciplinary investigation. It should be noted, however, that my intention is primarily to draw attention to misrecognized instances of image-making which would testify to the counter-significance of visual interpretation, rather than fully examine features which are generally coupled with semiotic instances in verbal / visual language – as, for example, the development and implementation of metaphor. The investigation motivates an interest in picture-making, suggesting that features of the 'image' (of both the process and art object) hold the same regard as do elements of 'text'.

PART ONE

TEXT

In part one I explain, following a chronological sequence, how semiotics and the general understanding of signs developed into a predominant methodology for interpreting images. Originating as a set of theories to explain the structural functioning of language, semiotics rapidly assimilated different forms of knowledge regarding the construction of culture into its field of investigation.

Beginning with a discussion of the institution of semiotics, I develop an argument around the impact of language on all aspects of cultural production. We learn that semiotics regards 'language' as the fundamental system of signs, and see how it propagates the construction of language as a blueprint for all cultural phenomena that take part in the production of meaning. Semiotics, as we will learn, turns out to be a methodology which explains how society reads and interprets its various textual and cultural codes. (The word 'read' is used, as it best describes the result of 'looking at', interpretation, and translation (as in the meaning is 'read' by or to someone).)

As for the implications of 'reading' a society and its convened signs, semiotics turns into a theory of reception and consciousness. Signs, which constitute our cultural texts, develop as a product of the reader's absorption and naturalisation of culturally specific phenomena – this is cultural conditioning. From the second section of part one, we shall learn that post-structuralism insists that it is the reader who, based on previously acquired knowledge of the context of a sign, provides a framework for reading and connecting different texts (both visual and verbal).

Highlighted in this part of my investigation is the idea that readers impulsively recognize images as forms of text, making them immediately susceptible to interpretative models such as semiotics. Barbara Stafford (1997:7) protests against such immediate resolution: '... we need to disestablish the view of cognition as dominantly and aggressively linguistic. It is narcissistic tribal compulsion to overemphasize the agency of *logos* and annihilate rival imaginaries'.

As we shall see at the end of this section, it is postmodern visual culture that reasserts the capability of images to function as an equal part of the image-text

dichotomy. Image theorists, such as Stafford and Mitchell, point out a visual crisis of our cultural condition; because our everyday reality is increasingly influenced by images, we need to find a form of analysis which allows for an image literacy that is on par with a literacy of the printed word.

SEMIOLOGICS

Semiotics is a field of study concerned with how we construct meaning and come to understand signs. Its origins lie in the linguistic studies of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, and investigations of logic conducted by the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure's belief, that it was '... possible to conceive of a science which studied the role of signs as part of social life ... [and how that science] would form part of social psychology, and hence of general psychology', formed the foundation of what has become the most widely accepted methodology for analysing texts and social practices (Chandler, 2002:5).¹ Semiotics is a Structuralist approach, concerned with the relation between significant elements. As an analytical method, it utilizes the linguistic model as a point of entry into other social areas.

The assertion of the French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, that 'language is the semiotic system *par excellence*; it cannot but signify, and exists only through signification', describes the mindset of the Structuralist thinker and the tendency to describe everything in terms of language and its structuring (Chandler, 2002:10).

¹ Saussure's analysis of the structure or grammar of language was considered a model for investigating other social fields. His, and other commentators' notions regarding the construction of meaning (for example, Karl Marx – socialism, and Sigmund Freud – psychology) maintained that once structures of individual systems had been studied in their totality, a general relationship between cultural 'systems' could exist; a common deep structure for language could uncover the workings of the human mind (a type of 'integrated whole'). In comparing the similarities and dissimilarities of a system, desired 'neutrals' would emerge. Semiotics then, being a structure in itself, reflects the process or activity in which we create meaning through interrelating social codes and conventions. 'We learn from semiotics that we live in a world of signs and we have no way of understanding anything except through signs and codes into which they are organized.' (Chandler, 2002:14)

Saussure developed a dualistic model for the arbitrary, linguistic sign: prompted by the relation of signifier (form, physical entity) and signified (concept, non-material meaning). The signifier and signified are connected and developed in the mind as associative forms; neither can be present without or before the other. In terms of making meaning, signs should be considered relational, not referential – signs make sense only when seen in relation to other signs. (We will be looking at value in sign systems shortly.)

Structuralism seeks to uncover the implicit structures which exist below the surface of human experience and cultural phenomena, and may be viewed as '[an] attempt to uncover deep structures, unconscious motivations, and underlying causes which account for human actions at a more basic and profound level than do individual conscious decisions ...' (De George, 1972:xii).

The power of language is seen to lie in its feature of double articulation: the ability to create countless meaningful combinations from meaningless units (combining letters to make words, and words to construct sentences – yielding to the grammatical rules of syntax), something which many structuralists see as an impossibility in visual semiotic systems. The combination of abstract and combinatory units (marks and visual elements, such as point, line, plane, position, and colour), as philosophers like Susanne Langer saw it, are capable of articulating form and subsequently meaning (Chandler, 2002:10). But, whereas language has an alphabet, there exists no vocabulary of visual units. In Langer's words:

A symbolism with so many elements, such myriad relationships, cannot be broken up into basic units. It is impossible to find the smallest independent symbol, and recognize identity when the same unit is met in other contexts There is, of course, a technique of picturing objects, but the laws governing this technique cannot properly be called a 'syntax', since there are no items that might be called, metaphorically, the 'words' of portraiture. (Cited in Chandler, 2002:10-11.)

Langer is not dismissive of evaluating and understanding the forms of articulation involved in visual semiotic systems. She suggests, however, that we do not impose linguistic models when interpreting art, the reason being that we might 'misunderstand' its communicative nature. It is her firm belief that visual art resists translation (Chandler, 2002:11).

Our cultural affirmation of language as the primary tool for unfolding meaning greatly affects on our reading and understanding of images. Images act and are treated as combinations of signs, which means their relation as a unitary form is no longer seen as only visual. Through our internalization of the rules of language(s), and in turn, a system for constructing meaning, we comparatively view images as 'significant'; we articulate their 'apparent' meaning. 'Images now signify rather than represent, vaguely intuited stylistic conventions become semiotic structures, and a hunch about

the kinds of meaning people might have attributed to a motif becomes an exercise in the recovery of a cultural code.’ (Potts, 1996:18)

Codes are fundamental for the understanding of meaning in sign systems. They describe societal procedures or conventions that form a framework for our understanding of signs and sign combinations. Without an understanding of these frameworks, readers would not be able to make sense of signs.² As semiotician, Alex Potts (1996:19), explains: ‘A correlation between signifier and signified is established by the complex mediation of the rules or code constituting the “language” to which the sign belongs’. Codes (like grammar or syntax in sentence structuring) are conceived as interpretative devices which pertain to interpretative communities (the linguist’s ‘discourse’ communities) of those who share, and become naturalized to using the same codes.

The interpretation of art as a visual system of signs is no different. It entails the viewer’s understanding of an array of conventions and modes involved in decoding. Already at the point when we label something as an ‘image’, we are in fact calling it a sign and instinctively setting off a process of connecting the concept with linguistic significations surrounding the idea of art-making; ‘... speaking and writing are our dominant media of communication, our understanding of any system of signification is going to be based on our understanding of language’ (Potts, 1996:21). The act of

² Saussure’s *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech) are employed to describe the two sides of an interpretative framework. *Langue* refers to the system of cultural codes (symbolic language) which exists prior to an interpretative community, and *parole* to the way in which the codes are utilized for different interpretative moments. Appropriating the concepts of *langue* and *parole* to other semiotic systems would imply that the distinction not only applies to language, but also ‘between *system* and *usage*, *structure* and *event* and *event* or *code* and *message*’ (Chandler, 2002:12).

‘Message’ is the term that is used to describe a text, as well as the meaning of a text. Text, in the broad sense, refers to anything that can be ‘read’ in order to mean something – in both verbal and visual systems of signs. ‘It is constructed and interpreted with the reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication ... text is the product of a process of representation and “positions” both its makers and its readers.’ (Chandler, 2002:232, 244-245)

The linguistic theorist, Roman Jakobson, explained that linguistic messages possess a combination of the following sub-functions: referential, emotive, imperative, phatic, metalinguistic, and poetic. ‘The message assumes a poetic function ... when it is *ambiguous* and *self-focusing* Semiotically speaking ambiguity must be defined as a mode of violating the rules of the code.’ (Eco, 1976:262) Although these functions are interrelated, one will always dominate the combination and effectively characterize the message.

interpreting can be seen not so much as a representation of the image, as a representation of thinking about the image.³

Our notions surrounding the idea of visible images, in fact, result from our understanding of the word 'idea' which is derived from the Greek verb meaning 'to see' (*eidos*) (Mitchell, 1986:5). Familiarity with a 'resemblance' (either the physical likeness or idea of something) results from our responses being 'unmediated' – as soon as we assign meaning to representations they start alluding to reality.⁴ Representation can therefore be described as something 'symbolic': resemblance is more than just an image that communicates what is resembled in the reader's mind; it is also, as art historian, David Summers (1996:8), explains, 'that through which a meaning not defined by image relation may be apprehended ... [representation] has become wordlike'.⁵ Comparing a resembling sign to a linguistic sign means not only that resembling signs are arbitrary, but that the referent, too (the object or what the sign 'stands for'), functions as a sign.⁶

It then comes as no surprise that semiotics is considered as *the* method to evaluate the process of representation. As a methodology for agreement (within interpretative communities), semiotics can explain why representation primarily functions as communication, and not as 'the *expression* of private images or meanings (which we

³ As Potts (1996:20) puts it: 'Interpretation of an art object involves us in constituting it and significant aspects of it as verbal signs'. He states further (1996:21):

[I]n any reasonable coherent interpretation, the internal logic of a pursuit of meaning from sign to sign, with each successive sign redefining and adding to the previous sign's evocation of the object, determines to a large extent the choice of features of the [image] singled out as significant, as well as the meaning attributed to these.

⁴ 'All texts, however "realistic" they may seem to be, are constructed representations rather than simply transparent "reflections", recordings, transcriptions or reproductions of a pre-existing reality. Whether through "direct" perception or mediated texts, what we experience as realities always involve representational codes.' (Chandler, 2002:239)

⁵ Compare the following statement with the conventional principles *langue* and *parole*: '[R]epresentations are primarily significant not only in terms of what is represented, but also in terms of how it is represented. The what of representation – subject matter – is most significant for what it reveals in having been chosen, and the how, the manner of treatment, reveals the synthesis and schemata' (Summers, 1996:13).

⁶ Saussure pointed out that the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary. 'Neither the sounds nor their written form bears any relation to the thing itself ... Just as the letter "b" bears no relation to the sound we associate with it then also the word used to describe a book bears no relation to the object it represents This divorce between meaning and form is called "duality".' (Crow, 2003:19)

especially associate with art) but rather that which is effected *through the common*' (Summers, 1996:15). Representation undoubtedly involves and reflects the construction of reality, as do signs ... both terms have come to mean 'something which stands for or in place of something else' (Chandler, 2002:239).⁷

Sign

From here on I shall start referring to visual material to substantiate the points of discussion in each section. In this sub-section the point is made that an image is both a visual representation and a visual sign. Based on a cultural agreement of particular social and textual codes, signs allow the viewer to access an image's meaning. We are also introduced to 'iconology', which is a term describing the viewer's process of decoding recognizable symbols and iconographic motifs during the act of interpretation.

Consider the image, *Man in Museum (or You're in the Wrong Movie)*, by the artist David Hockney (see Illustration 1), a painting made in 1962. I have never been in the physical presence of the artwork, but I have 'seen' it; I have looked at it many times as a reproduction in books. The particular digital copy of the painting which I have chosen to present you the reader with, is taken from the book entitled *Hockney's Pictures* – a 2004 publication that celebrates the development of the artist's career.

At once, when I start looking at and reading *Man in Museum* ..., I recognize it as an image (informed by learnt cultural knowledge of such material, as well as its context and conventions), and thus interpretation takes place. Erwin Panofsky recognized that readers enter (limited by their knowledge of cultural decoding – a capacity which could be referred to as visual literacy) three levels or stages during the interpretation process: the 'pre-iconographic', 'iconographic', and 'iconological'.

The initial stage, the 'pre-iconographic', describes how the reader recognizes representational signs (motifs) and identifies these as universal subject matter. The 'pre-iconographic' is a denotative stage. In semiotics we describe the relationship

⁷ 'A sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign.' (Crow, 2003:25)

between the signifier and signified in terms of 'denotation' and 'connotation'. The signified is described as being either a denotative signified, or a connotative signified, because it is seen as the result of the signifier (Chandler, 2002:140). A sign's denotative signifieds describe the literal aspects of the system. In a representational image, as in *Man in Museum ...*, the denotative will be recognized by many cultures at any given time in history – with the exception of 'historical style'.⁸ Our image comprises two visible figures looking in the same direction, as well as a suggestion of another inverted figure (the outline behind the figure on the left). The figure on the left is recognized as a human male in casual attire, while the figure to the right can be described as 'plastic' or manmade. The figures exist in an empty, non-descript environment.

Iconography, which describes figures or symbols through conventional (or secondary) subject matter, is seen as the state of Panofsky's second stage of interpretation, the iconographic; '... connecting artistic motifs with themes or concepts' (Istrabadi, 2003:222). Again, historical context influences a reader's understanding of the image: not only does it describe an event from a specific historical period, but it also takes on a historical form – it is a certain type of image (ours is an illustration of the original painting within the context of contemporary publishing). *Man in Museum ...* obviously does not refer to a historical event. At first it depicts the mundane activity of standing around and observing, up to the point where the reader recognizes and contextualizes the two contrasted figures as a scene describing a museum setting.

W.J.T. Mitchell describes Panofsky's 'iconology' as a science of image analysis which '... contains a suturing of image (icon) with the word (logos)' (1996:48). It is then in the third stage of interpretation, the iconological level, that we see the emergence of language and the interruption of cultural codes.⁹ Interpretation at this

⁸ As the historian Juliet Istrabadi explains it: 'Although identification on this level can generally be achieved through practical experience, accurate assessment of some kinds of representations, realistic versus unrealistic for instance, depends on an awareness of the conditions and principles related to a specific historical style' (2003:222). In the case of *Man in Museum ...* the inverted suggestion of a figure, behind the figure on the left, is an element of historical style. A viewer from the Enlightenment period would read and understand the mark very differently from a 1960s viewer; in the Classical tradition, for example, it might have suggested a spirit.

⁹ The viewer approaches interpretation subjectively: '... in order to account for the uniformity and continuity of cultures, [subjectivity] was expanded to become more or less embracing collective subjectivity. On this view (which is at least implicit in much art historical practice) a work of art "expresses" both personal and collective "points of view"' (Summers 1996:13).

point utilizes language and learnt knowledge (of the history of cultural symptoms and symbols) to describe the image's 'intrinsic meaning or content' (Bann 1996:89). As art historian, Stephen Bann (1996:89), further explains:

At this point, the outward movement, into the social and historical world, is counterbalanced by an inward movement, into the subjectivity of the artist: we are invited to discover how 'those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion' can be 'qualified by one personality and condensed into a work'.

It is possible that the viewer might not be familiar with the work of David Hockney, or the intentions of his portrayal of the human subject, and it is therefore left to the art historian or critic to uncover and explain the symbolical values of the work. 'Panofsky notes that the interpretation of symbolic values is a process of synthesis rather than analysis (as in the first two levels)' (Istrabadi, 2003:223). The 'connotative' signifieds that viewers may share regarding *Man in Museum* ... may include identifying how the artist draws a comparison between organic and manmade, or the individual and society, or even cultural differences. However, the symbolic values and connotations which include the cultural gaze (notion of displacement) and personal gaze (the homosexual gaze in Hockney's case) are neither intrinsic nor easy to trace for all readers.¹⁰

¹⁰ The term 'gaze' falls under the broader category of 'spectatorship'. As a result of the conventional connotations of the word (and its diversity of meanings – 'scrutinize', 'behold', 'inspect'), the gaze and its discourse are situated around issues of power relations, desire, and manipulation. Notions around the gaze are believed to have been introduced into contemporary discourse through formalist theories of painting, and feminist theories of film (refer to Michael Fried's *Art and Objecthood*; 1968, and Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*; 1975). The 'gaze' implies (being an imagined projection) an awareness of the fact that the art object, as is the case with human subjects, is able to gaze and be gazed at. As it falls under the gaze of another, the 'subject' turns into 'object': it internalizes the desire of the other in order to obtain 'self-completion'. 'The returned gaze ... rescues the beheld's sense of self. If you can look back, you cannot be possessed by the gaze of the other. What is proposed ... is a shared gaze. Rather than emphasizing the power of the gazing one to make the one gazed at into an object, the idea suggests responsibility toward the person looking back at one.' (Olin, 1996:217)

The German philosopher, Wilhelm Hegel, feels that, in order to recognize oneself and be able to preserve one's reality, it is necessary to assimilate another's reality by way of desiring: '... desire is only human if one desires not the body but the desire of the other' (Sarup, 1993:18). 'Desire', also, is a continuous process which ensues because of a subject's lack of satisfaction and necessity for identity – a constant negation. The gaze then, also describes an 'object love': '... others will be loved only if they are believed to be capable of completing the subject, desire must be understood as fundamentally narcissistic' (Sarup, 1993:23). >

Man in Museum ..., in the same way it is as a representational image, is also recognized as a sign. Peirce's model for the sign explains how, through interpretation (signification), we draw upon different connotations to understand what a sign refers to outside itself. Other than Saussure's model which is based on the dualistic relation of signifier and signified, Peirce's suggests 'semiosis' in terms of a triadic interaction (Potts, 1996:18-19). Semiosis is a process of meaning transaction that takes place between the form (material entity) of the *sign* (also called the 'representamen' – similar to the signifier), which refers to its *object* (or referent) by way of the 'interpretant' (similar to the signified).¹¹ This triadic model ensures that a sign generates more than just a single binary message – a kind of 'unlimited semiosis'. The interpretant, Potts (1996:19) explains,

... picks up on the reference to an object made by the sign, [and] in turn makes its own reference to the object evoked by the original sign. This means that it becomes another sign, setting up a further triangular relationship between itself as sign, and an object and an interpretant, the nature of the object in this case being inferred from the reference to it made by the original sign. Signs, as soon as they are interpreted as signs, generate other signs, and there are no inherent limits as to how this process can go on.

This implies that the interpretant (signified) constantly shifts. As soon as a concept is formed (relation between interpretant and object to suggest a sign) a new form of sign presents itself with its own interpretant. Thus, the viewer's first association is but a starting point for a chain of associations. Unlimited semiosis describes the process of a 'developed' sign; decoding all the connotative layers of semiosis therefore requires a firm understanding of codes.

The idea of gazing and desiring is something that pertains to all of society, and is greatly determined by cultural codes. 'The use of the term "gaze" is therefore emblematic of the recent attempt to wrest formal discussions of art from the grasp of linguistic theory, to focus on what is visual in a work of art and yet address the wider issue of social communication to which linguistic theory, applied to art, opened the discourse.' (Olin, 1996:209) Hockney's *Man in Museum* ... is a superb example of the consequences of the gaze in that it addresses ideas around 'us looking at art', 'art looking back at us', looking at 'ourselves as others see us' (Hockney's fervour for portraiture explains his own desires as a subject and his search for identity as an artist), and most importantly seeing 'ourselves seeing each other'.

¹¹ Mieke Bal explains the intricacies of Peirce's model as follows: 'The relation between sign and the ground lead [sic] to grammar, whose most commonly studied aspect is syntax. The relation between the sign and object leads to questions of meaning or semantics. The relation between sign and interpretant can be linked to questions of rhetoric as part of pragmatics by virtue of the idea that one thought brings forth another'. (1994:167)

Codes deal with our organization of sign systems, and play an important role in our understanding of messages by correlating signifiers and signifieds. Asserts Chandler (2002:148): 'Codes are not simply "conventions" of communication but rather procedural systems of related conventions which operate in certain domains'. A number of codes function within the system of signs that makes up *Man in Museum* ... Body language, as well as commodity – and behavioural referents are dominant codes in the image. Ranging from the proximity of three figures, to the figural gestures, appearances, fashions, and possibility of role-reversal, all these social codes account for its meaning.

Our ability to connect certain particulars of the image with distinct cultural codes – for example, in *Man in Museum* ... associating the outfit of the figure on the left (commodity code) with casual attire – serves as an example of our habit to categorize. Peirce saw this as a syntactic urge to get to meaning, and consequently created categories for the 'modes of relationship' between the sign's form ('sign vehicle') and the referent (Chandler, 2002:36).¹²

Peirce's 'iconic mode' describes a sign 'which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence' (Peirce cited in Bal, 1994:167). An iconic sign's signifier can be seen as resembling the signified. Both the visible figures in *Man in Museum* ... are iconic: the one resembles a man, and the other an artefact. As a second mode, 'indexical' signs describe a relationship in which the signifier is not arbitrary to the signified, but rather directly associated (either physically or causally, by either observation or inference) (Chandler, 2004:37). Hockney's use of gold leaf on the torso of the artefact assumes an inferred indexicality. And lastly, the 'symbolic' mode is, as described by Peirce (cited in Bal, 1994:167): '... a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that signification'. In such a sign the relationship between the signifier and signified is primarily arbitrary; the signifier does not resemble the signified and would require a previously acquired knowledge of its meaning (for example typographic characters) in order to be decoded. In our image,

¹² To clarify the loosely used 'sign', semioticians developed the term 'sign vehicle'. It is a term that refers to the form of the sign (Saussure's signifier, and Peirce's representamen). Chandler (2002:36) clarifies: '... the signifier or representamen is the form in which the sign appears (such as the spoken or written form of a word), whereas the sign is the whole meaningful ensemble'.

for instance, the ringed collar worn by the figure on the right could conceivably symbolize kingship (particular here to Egyptian iconography).

Notice how the object on the right functions both iconically and symbolically. Such a doubling of characteristics would explain Chandler's choice of the word 'mode' and not 'type': 'mode' better describes the interchangeable relationships and combinatory function of a sign. The three modes make part of a hierarchy in which one will always dominate over the other two. This position is determined entirely by the context in which the sign functions.

Man in Museum ... exists in the context of an illustrated book. It is part of a design or an arrangement of elements that construes a specific order for reading and interpreting. It is juxtaposed with other images and texts to suggest the possibility of comparison (a tension present in the design of the facing pages) and a particular system for reading.¹³ The image is part of a navigational and informational structure that is set up to guide the reader and offer him / her possibilities for constructing meaning.

Not only is *Man in Museum* ... juxtaposed with the image and text to its left, but also the elements on the previous and following spreads. When we turn the page over, we remember the information on the page we have just read – we have visualized the information by making a mental image (the same counts for when we read a novel, in which case only text is involved; in other words we develop signifieds that, in turn, reveal new sign vehicles), immediately comparing these with the new page's information. Particularly in a context such as a picture book, where the juxtaposing of image and text is expected, the reader perceives (as a result of a Western writing-action from left to right) textual elements on the left as the meaning 'before', and those on the right as the meaning 'after'. Chandler points out how Kress and Van Leeuwen relate information on the left and the right in a system to the linguistic concepts of 'the Given' and 'the New', respectively (2002:87). In a similar way, *Man in Museum* ... can also be said to be juxtaposed with elements on the book cover or with the elements making up page number 255 (a random choice) – depending where the reader chooses to turn (*Hockney's Pictures* consists of 368 pages).

¹³ *Man in Museum* ... fills up eight ninths of page number 31, the right-hand page of a double spread. To its left, on the facing page, number 30, sits the image *Colonial Governor* (also a 1962 painting), a text block where the alignment is justified to the right, as well as the chapter heading in the top, left-hand corner which reads: *Problems of Depiction - A Marriage of Styles* (see Illustration 2).

These relations between signs (elements of the double-spread layout which includes *Man in Museum ...*, page 30-31) within the system as a whole (the book, *Hockney's Pictures*) determine what Saussure calls the sign's 'value'. Value, based on the oppositional differences between the signifier and signified of signs is considered as 'negative' determination. As Saussure argues, 'concepts ... are defined not positively, in terms of their content, but *negatively* by contrast with other items in the system. What characterizes each most exactly is *being whatever the others are not*'. (Cited in Chandler, 2002:25.) However, differentiation entails only the internal interactions of a sign. Once the sign is placed in relation to other signs in a system, its value is based on 'distinction' and will then be defined as a 'positive' opposition (Chandler, 2002:25).

Looking now at *Man in Museum ...*, we understand that it functions (both in itself and within the context of the book) as a sign. Decoding it within the context of a book does require a certain degree of knowledge about cultural codes for reading (for example, which caption belongs to what image), but unlike the differential signs within the image itself, the adjunct text opposite it (the paragraph to the left and the title below – see illustration 2 for the layout) is able to appoint meaning to the image far more directly than if it were left unanchored. Roland Barthes introduced the term 'anchorage' to describe textual elements (such as captions or blurbs) which constrain a reading to specific meaning.¹⁴ Hockney's description of *Man in Museum ...*, and also the first part of the title are forms of anchorage. These denotative descriptors literally explain the meaning of the work.¹⁵

You're in the Wrong Movie, the accompanying title for the work, functions differently from the anchored text 'Man in Museum', and although it is read as part of the title it operates independently. The words 'You're in the Wrong Movie' perfectly describe what Barthes saw as a form of 'relay'. The role of relay text, unlike the directional attributes of anchorage, is to supplement the image with information that would assist

¹⁴ 'Anchorage' is a linguistic message which aids the reader in determining specific meaning; it directs the chain of floating signifiers so as to prevent uncertainty. 'The denominative function corresponds exactly to an *anchorage* of all the possible (denoted) meanings of the object by recourse to a nomenclature ... the caption [*Man in Museum ...*] ... helps me to choose *the correct level of perception*, permits me to focus not simply my gaze but also my understanding.' (Barthes, 1977:39) As a principle function, anchorage is ideological.

¹⁵ Part of Hockney's descriptive anchor reads: 'When I went to the Pergamon Museum in Berlin in 1962 with a friend we got separated. Suddenly I caught sight of him next to an Egyptian sculpted figure Both figures were looking the same way, and it amused me that in my first glimpse of them they looked united' (2004:30).

the reader in the process of decoding underlying (connoted) meanings; it acts as a connotative instigator.¹⁶ Connoted meanings differ from one reader to another, and change with every new confrontation and interpretation of the image. The obvious associations that are made from *You're in the Wrong Movie* are questions regarding the perceptions of cultural displacement: Are we our own cultural artefacts? Are movie theatres the modern day museums? In cases (such as essays or articles) where text is greatly ambiguous and figurative, images can function equally as forms of anchorage or relay. It is in 'reading systems' that the possibility for connotative meaning-making through juxtaposed image and text is most dominant.

A book, whether it is a novel, catalogue, picture book, textbook, or an illustrated 'coffee table' book, is a form of 'reading system'. For me this term describes the many approaches we have to consider when confronted with the action of reading – the way in which we interact with the information in order to be able to 'read'. It also encompasses the many mediums which can be seen as entry points or 'vehicles' for reading. There are numerous mediums attaining to this description. However, I am interested in paging systems, as for instance books, printed magazines, electronic magazines, picture books, and other hypermedia such as Websites; motion-reading mediums (such as film) only interest me when in an arrested state – a still image (in film the signifier and signified are almost identical and are therefore considered as maintaining a high degree of modality).¹⁷

The word 'medium' is used in different ways, and describes a number of elements associated with reading systems. It is used to describe forms of communicating (speech and writing), forms of communication (print or broadcasting), as well as the classification of technical forms within the field of communication (illustration, reproduction). The material form of a medium is therefore a 'vehicle' for the

¹⁶ 'When the text has the diegetic value of relay', as Barthes (1977:41) notes, 'the information is more costly, requiring the learning of a digital code (the system of language); when it has a substitute value (anchorage, control), it is the image which detains the informational charge and, the image being analogical, the information is then "lazier"...'.

¹⁷ Modality (also called 'motivation') refers to a 'sense of reality' based on its intensity described by the sign, text, or pictorial style (abstract vs. naturalistic). Defined by the relationship between the sign vehicle and the referent, it is the degree of transparency of reality. A symbolic sign obtains a low sense of modality, being a mode for non-relational meaning transference (figurative speech). Photographic images, conversely, are seen as having a high sense of modality; being indexical signs. Motivated judgements, '... assess what are variously described as the plausibility, reliability, credibility, truth, accuracy or facticity of texts within a given genre as representations of some recognizable reality' (Chandler, 2002:233).

information it holds – a kind of ‘transparent vehicle’, because a reader will always recognise its form (Chandler, 2002:232).¹⁸ A reason for the multiple usages of the word medium, I believe, has to do with the fact that readers are so familiar with its different forms that it becomes neutral; we call so many things medium, because we see it as synonymous with ‘message’.¹⁹ Daniel Chandler (2002:3) writes: ‘Human experience is inherently multisensory, and every representation of experience is subject to the constraints and affordances of the medium involved. Every medium is constrained by the channels that it utilizes’.²⁰

In its context of the printed book, *Man in Museum ...* can be seen as a ‘medium’ in three different ways. As an illustration in a book is it firstly a *printed* form of communication, and secondly, a *visual* form for communicating. Calling it an ‘illustration’ also confirms it as a medium. Not only does the term ‘illustration’ describe an area of specialization within the field of publication design, but it incessantly points to the fact that illustration is a communicative form describing another medium (in this case a painting).

Summation

From the above, it is evident that *Man in Museum ...* can be regarded as comprising a number of forms pertaining to visual semiotics: it is a representation – an image made up of numerous ideological codes (iconological); it is both a singular sign and a sign which is part of a system within a specific context (significant); it is an icon significant because it resembles something that an interpretative community would agree on understanding (even though the figures are not ‘real’); it is an anchoring illustration – supplementary to the accompanying description and caption; and it is

¹⁸ In literary studies the term ‘vehicle’ refers to a figurative secondary subject [golden] which is used to express the ‘tenor’ / literal primary subject [silence]: ‘Silence is golden’ (Chandler, 2002: 127).

¹⁹ See footnote 2.

²⁰ Channel: ‘A sensory mode utilized by a medium (eg. visual, auditory, tactile). Available channel(s) are dictated by the technical features of the medium in which a text appears. The sensory bias of the channel limits the codes for which it is suitable’ (Chandler, 2002:225).

Göran Sonesson (2004:42) says: ‘Channels are agreed upon and determined by “organization categories” ... [they are] the conformation of the configuration occupying the expression plane of the [image]’.

also a medium of visual communication. But most importantly, with regard to the present investigation, it forms part of an image-text dichotomy for a specific reading system – specialist systems that are primarily concerned with the role of the reader.

Structuralist semiotics, as a formal approach, is criticised for not being concerned with the social context of interpretation.²¹ Chandler (2002:210) remarks that ‘... structuralist semiotics does not address processes of production, audience interpretation or authorial intentions. It ignores particular practices, institutional frameworks and the cultural, social economic and political context’. The structuralist’s conception of signification leans too much toward the interpretation of signs as constructions and reflections of reality. Post-structuralism recognizes the crucial role of the ‘subject’: if society is in control of sign-systems, then it is also in control of constructing reality. Therefore a social semiotics, which concerns the study of specialised meaning-making practices – particularly in relation to popular culture, (including narratology, visual culture, and visual communication) – arose from an increasing cultural concern with the role of the reader.

POSTSTRUCTURAL SEMIOTICS

If structuralist semiotics functions as a critique of how we use language and understand reality in terms of conventional codes and signs, post-structuralist semiotics can be viewed as a critique of how language, and the use thereof, informs our reality. One of the fundamental differences between these two lines of thought is that structuralism sees meaning as implicit in the structure of text, while Post-structuralism claims that meaning is a product of the interaction between the reader and text.

The French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, pointed out that there is no separating of the self and society. Just as language serves in the construction of society, so too does it constitute us as human subjects. The idea of the ‘subject’ aids in our understanding of human reality as a construction; ‘a product of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious’, says educator and

²¹ Formalism maintained a strict concern for form, structure and medium. Focusing on the role and construction of language in literature and aesthetic practices, it marked a particular interest in devices such as rhyme and syntax. Formalism evolved into structuralism during the early 1930s, and is associated in particular with the Russian linguist, Roman Jakobson.

sociologist, Madan Sarup (1993:2). Lacan sees language as a precondition for becoming aware of oneself as a conscious being – language is something that determines all knowledge.

Lacan, as does Saussure, sees language as a system of signs that are meaningful only in being different from each other – an arbitrary relationship. It is Lacan's belief that '... meaning emerges only through discourse, as a consequence of displacements along a signifying chain ... the commutability of the signified, upon the capacity of every signified to function in turn as a signifier' (Sarup, 1993:10); this is in line with what Peirce conceived as 'unlimited semiosis'. The post-structuralists' idea of the signifier lies closer to Peirce's conception of meaning transference than that of Saussure's signification. Lacan, as do other post-structuralist philosophers, privileges the signifier over the signified.²²

In the Saussurian tradition signifiers do not exist without their corresponding signifieds, thus seeing the developmental state of language as 'synchronic'. A synchronic analysis ignores the process which precedes the naturalization of a cultural code – it studies phenomena as a moment of complete stasis. Post-structuralism, in rejecting Saussure's assumption of a unified and stable sign, regards the process of signification as always incomplete.²³ Their approach to analysis is therefore, 'diachronical'; studies of cultural phenomena and historicity happen over time, in a constant process of deconstruction. Sarup (1993:59) comments: 'The role of cause or explanation is severely reduced in most post-structuralist texts, since it leads to evolutionist conclusions and works against the purpose of the genealogy of difference'.²⁴

²² 'There would be no final meaning or end to the sliding [the signifying chain] were it not for the existence of so-called "privileged" signifiers that establish at least some stability of meaning.' (Macey, 2003:176)

²³ Lacan saw the signified as something provisional, being a consequence of the 'non-representational' status of language (Sarup, 1993:10). In his view, the first order of meaning (the first signifier and corresponding signified) is pushed down and embedded in our unconscious, and 'stored' as it were, to be retrieved at any other moment for meaning-making. Signification is not 'resolved transference', but rather a continuation of meaning substitution. The unconscious in itself is a language dealing with its own body of signs.

²⁴ The diachronic counter-part of the art 'world' or market is, of course, the 'history' of art: '[a]utonomous in relation to other social practices, it is structured by such categories as tradition, influence, style, and technique, which establish relations of continuity and difference among artists and determine a set of ideal contexts into which artworks can be set' (Mattick, 1996:72).

The idea of 'deconstruction' is generally associated with Jacques Derrida. It can be described as a critique of the systemization of language of which a preset 'grammar' exists (Saussure). Derrida initiates deconstruction to counteract structuralism's insistence on deep structures determining meaning within systems, as well as the naturalization of a sign's meaning.²⁵ Deconstruction is an operation which reveals the many layers of meaning, which for Derrida are in a constant 'process of evolution' (Sim, 2003:97).²⁶ In dealing with the layers attributed to meaning, the post-structuralist turns his / her attention away from the 'central', because it is here where the structure is established. As a disruptive force, deconstruction progresses throughout the entire system and further disorganizes what is perceived as order – its objective being to de-centre (Royle, 2003:25).²⁷

Derrida's description of meaning as a 'process' leads to his conclusion that meaning, in fact, is always deferred. In his mind the signifier and signified never reach each other, and meaning is therefore undecided and incapable of being determined within the structure of the sign (the centre exists outside the structure). 'Signifiers keep transforming into signifieds, and vice versa, and you never arrive at a final signified [a

²⁵ Denaturalization involves the substitution of meaning. Parody can be regarded as a device of denaturalization, by which the conventions of familiar or 'realistic' codes are made unfamiliar through humour and exaggeration. Chandler (2002:227) observes: 'The semiotician seeks to denaturalize signs and codes in order to make more explicit the underlying rules for encoding and decoding them, and often also with the intention of revealing the usually invisible operation of ideological forces'.

The structuralist method to uncover various paradigms (such as grammatical paradigms – verbs and nouns) underlying the textual surface, is called 'paradigmatic analysis'. It involves the analysis of both the positive and negative connotations of all signifiers with particular determination of the existence of thematic paradigms (thematic in being binary opposites, for example male / female) (Chandler, 2002:236).

²⁶ Derrida (1978:19) explains about 'deconstruction', that in

... the consistency of its logic, it attacks not only the internal edifice, both semantic and formal, of philosophemes, but also what would be wrong to assign to it as its external housing, its extrinsic conditions of practice: the historical forms of its pedagogy, the social, economic or political structures of this pedagogical institution. It is because deconstruction interferes with solid structures, 'material' institutions, and not only with discourses of signifying representations, that it is always distinct from an analysis or a 'critique'.

²⁷ '[Deconstruction] encourages a critical questioning of any and all kinds of religious or political discourse that make dogmatic assumptions about the nature of presence and what might be meant by "the end".' (Royle, 2003:35)

'transcendental' signified] which is not a signifier in itself', Sarup (1993:33) states.²⁸ Derrida's notion of deconstruction undermines the semiotician's belief that a sign brings together the referent and its meaning; for him the sign is a structure of difference. 'Language is thus the play of differences which are generated by signifiers which are themselves the product of those differences ... [and] difference is itself endlessly deferred.' (Sarup, 1993:44) Meaning, as an absent presence in the sign, will always be in a constant act of *différance*.

Text and language can therefore not be considered as complete in themselves, as these will always contain traces (evidence of *différance*) of other texts and signs (which never appear as such) (Sarup, 1993:34).²⁹ The 'trace' is a term used by Derrida to describe the complex dynamism of transference between signs. Meaning, being constantly deferred from one context to the next and caught up by being intertwined with numerous traces of other signs, it will never be entirely present.³⁰ For us then to understand and communicate meaning, involves the recognition of interactions between texts; of a familiarity with 'intertextual' reading and signification.

A text can be described as 'intertextual', simply because of its relation to other texts. The term 'intertextuality', introduced to us by Julia Kristeva, defines the interrelated

²⁸ Chandler (2002:245) writes how Derrida argued,

... that dominant ideological discourse relies on the metaphysical illusion of a transcendental signified – an ultimate referent at the heart of a signifying system which is portrayed as 'absolute and irreducible', stable, timeless and transparent – as if it were *independent of* and *prior to* that system. All other signifieds within that signifying system are subordinate to this dominant central signified which is the final meaning to which they point.

²⁹ Part of deconstruction's role is to eradicate the privileging of one part of a binary opposition over the other; for all binary oppositions are seen to be parallel to Saussure's division of language – where *langue* takes precedence over *parole*: '... the drawing of a boundary round the *langue* (setting *parole* to one side); the segmentation of *langue* into units (morphemes, phonemes, and so on); and the mapping of the units in terms of oppositional syntax' (Bal, 1994:173).

³⁰ As the literary theorist, Terry Eagleton, writes:

Nothing is ever fully present in signs. It is an illusion for me to believe that I can ever be fully present to you in what I say or write; because to use signs at all entails my meaning being always somehow dispersed, divided and not quite at one with myself. Not only my meaning, indeed, but I myself: since language is something that I'm made out of, rather than a conventional tool I use, the whole idea that I am a stable unified entity must also be a fiction. (Cited in Sarup 1993:34.)

nature of texts in which both form and content are similar (Chandler, 2002:195).³¹ As Daniel Chandler (2002:231) points out, '[t]exts provide contexts such as genre within which other texts may be created and interpreted'. Roland Barthes embraced the idea of intertextuality as a condition of signification. He notes that different texts, and their diverse meanings, are connected to one another: 'There can be no origin of the meaning of a literary text since its intertextual nature means that it is always comprised of pre-existing textual elements [codes, discourses], a "tissue of quotations"' ³² (Allen, 2003:81). Intertextuality implies that it is the reader him- / herself (again, reliant on a knowledge of textual decoding) who provides the structure for a text's meaning.³³ Post-structuralism turns signification into *signifiance* (the text is in constant production), and shifts the emphasis in regards to meaning-making from the author to the reader: 'the unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination' (Allen, 2003:83).

The introduction of the role of the reader, bringing with it the 'birth of the reader', brought also the 'death of the author'. Once seen as the originator of all meaning in the work, the author served as the anchor of a text's signifiers, reducing the

³¹ Kristeva argues that instead of focusing on the structure of the text, we should concentrate on its structuring. Her idea of text is seen in terms of two axes, which in the event of uniting start sharing codes: the horizontal axis, which describes the linear connection between the author and reader; and the vertical axis on which the interplay of texts occurs. The sharing of codes (existing concepts and conventions) is necessary in order to communicate: the author, like the reader, accesses other texts in order to construct meaning (Chandler, 2002:195 – 196).

³² A text, according to Barthes, does not signify unless the reader re-reads its intertextual threads: '... the quotations a text is made of are anonymous, irrecoverable, and yet already read: they are quotations without quotation marks' (Allen, 2003:83).

³³ Cultural codes emerge from interrelated texts as a result of 'lexia' (an arbitrary unit of reading). The process of deconstruction, involving 'lexias', is described by Barthes (1974:13-14) as follows:

The tutor signifier [the main text; in Barthes' case, *Sarrasine* by Honoré de Balzac] will be cut up into a series of brief, contiguous fragments, which we shall call *lexias*, since they are units of reading. This cutting up, admittedly, will be arbitrary in the extreme; it will imply no methodological responsibility, since it will bear on the signifier, whereas the proposed analysis bears solely on the signified ... it will suffice that the lexia be the best possible space in which we can observe meanings; its dimensions, empirically determined, estimated, will depend on the diversity of connotations, variable according to the moment of the text ... the commentator [Barthes busy deconstructing] traces through the text certain zones of reading, in order to observe therein the migration of meanings, the outcropping of codes, the passage of citations.

performance of meaning by bringing the work into totality.³⁴ For Barthes, the role of the author is to assemble texts which are already written: 'The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them' (cited in Chandler, 2002:196). 'Writing' can therefore be regarded as something which is freed from the author; something which exists only in and through texts. Reading texts becomes a form of re-writing meaning.

Derrida's definition of 'writing' is that it is an 'element of undecidability within every system of communication ... [it] is the name of the structure always already inhibited by the trace [trail of 'floating signifiers']' (Sarup, 1993:41).³⁵ As the reader proceeds in reading (re-writing), he / she inevitably comes upon the traces (marks) of other texts (possessing traces of their own). Texts act as traces and therefore involves all the different contexts in which those traces could possibly function. Text and context cannot be separated, simply because social contexts constitute a framework for decoding which the reader draws upon when interpreting texts. Derrida's 'writing' is a form of mediation, a consolidation of contexts as to result in signification.³⁶ For a text to obtain the concept of 'signification' it would have to be removed (the notion of dislocation) from its perceived context, and act 'differently' as a supplement. 'To describe the effects of what leaves its trace ['supplementation' is an effect of *différence*] without ever itself being either present or absent and thereby to transform the terrain: this would be a way of construing deconstruction,' explains literary theorist, Nicholas Royle (2003:50).

³⁴ The French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault, describes the author as '...the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning' (cited in Allen, 2003:74.).

³⁵ Floating or empty signifiers can be defined as those without a clearly defined signified, because readers appoint different meanings to them. A reader associates different texts and meanings during the event of interpretation. This does not mean that floating signifiers are devoid of signifieds; their status as signifiers implies that correlation with signifieds is a given, even if the concept of the signified is uncertain. In the words of the semiotician, Jonathan Culler: '... the most radical play of the signifier still requires and works through the positing of signifieds' (cited in Chandler, 2002:74).

³⁶ Derrida is convinced that interpretation can only be arrived at from a context. Thought (memory) is always connected to context (as Freud pointed out in *The Interpretation of Dreams*) and visualised as 'logico-temporal' relations. Derrida's notion of writing is based on this idea of Freud: that memory develops as a series from a non-phonetic alphabet (pictograms, ideograms, and rebuses). The unconscious is made up of scattered 'memory-traces', which could be 'energized into consciousness at any later stage, and so affect us' (Sarup, 1993:42). These marks ('memory-traces') are similar to Lacan's 'first meaning signifiers', with the exception that they are in *différence* (see footnote 23).

Deconstruction also applies to the analysis of images, and since they are regarded as signs, images have their own language, texts, and intentions. Derrida's 1978 book, *The Truth in Painting*, deals with the meaning of art. This title, together with our knowledge of Derrida's notion of *différance*, already gives an idea as to what the author's conclusion will be: that truth does not exist in art. Only, it stands outside the work by freeing itself from the contextual frame. 'Questions about truth and meaning in painting become questions about truth and meaning in language, and that leads us into an infinite regress of questions that prevent us from ever establishing a solid base from which to make critical pronouncements.' (Sim, 2003:98)

Writing the image

Images can be deconstructed in the same way as we deconstruct texts. With reference to a visual image – Cy Twombly's *Crimes of Passion II* (see Illustration 3) – we shall consider Barthes' notion that meaning is 'written' whilst reading, and further investigate Derrida's position on image-making.

At a first glance, Twombly's work seems to suggest 'doodled' thoughts. The proximity of the elements in the graphic space and their different forms observably denote a kind of 'notation'.³⁷ His work has on occasion, and for obvious reasons, been labelled 'symbolic graffiti'. As readers of a reproduction of the drawing, once again from a book (*20th Century Art: Museum Ludwig Cologne*), we are indebted to the supplementary anchorage which accompanies the image, and which describes the artist's intentions.

The text describes Twombly's art as reliant on a very distinct, personal, and cryptic symbolic language. The artist's process involves layering large format canvasses with off-white colour paint into which numerous graphic symbols are inscribed (the writer compares Twombly's technique to *sgraffito* – scratching into a wet surface). 'The scriptural signs and traces – scattered apparently chaotically across the surface

³⁷ James Elkins (1999:68) writes: 'The ideal of a perfect "notational system" – an image that functions in a reasonable, systematic and rational way in its dealing with symbols and the world – is behind the informal approaches we all take to works of visual art'. ('Notation' is further discussed under the section entitled 'Visual Semiotics'.)

... seem to float and hover weightlessly within the indeterminate space of the image, and convey no absolutely definable meaning' (1996:723).³⁸

Twombly's drawing perfectly describes what Barthes means by images being a 'double message': '... written [notations] are material objects, and visual images are themselves a kind of writing, inscriptions of intelligibility engraved on the space of the world' (Wiseman, 2003:20). Barthes' account on art is conceived from within a framework for reading images which deals with 'interpretation', the 'third meaning', and 'gesture'. Interpretation applies to both verbal and visual texts, while 'the third meaning' and 'gesture' are associated with visual art (Wiseman, 2003:20-21). The discussion of these concepts is developed systematically below.

Barthes compares 'interpretation', the first aspect of his framework for reading images, to a performance. It is an act which is both productive and recordable. Productive in the sense that it is an interactive ('writerly') form of articulating meaning, opposed to a passive ('readerly') form, in which the reader readily consumes what is given (Wiseman, 2003:21). The 'viewer-reader' (as I shall refer

³⁸ I regard Twombly's marks as evidentiary visualizations of Derrida's *trait* (trace) – marks that are synonymous with writing. Derrida sees the *trait* as an inscription, which being in *différence* (and therefore both present and absent), is unable to be completely read, yet 'makes possible the signification of art as art' (Wolfreys, 2004:84). Derrida (1987:11) describes the *trait* as '... never common, nor even one, with and without itself. Its divisibility founds text, traces and remains'. Barthes calls it the 'tremor of time': '... [found] in the trace left by the artist's hand as it simultaneously writes and erases, and in the appearance of the sign as it simultaneously signifies something and nothing but its own materiality' (Wiseman, 2003:23).

Barthes (1988:167) puts it eloquently in his essay on Twombly's work, *The Wisdom of Art*:

The demiurgic power of the painter is in this, that he makes the materials exist as matter; even if some meaning comes out of the painting, pencil and colour remain as "things", as stubborn substances whose obstinacy in "being there" nothing (no subsequent meaning) can destroy This is an art with a secret, which is in general not that of spreading the substance (charcoal, ink, oils) but of *letting it trail behind*.

This 'trail' is an affirmation of the trace and its supplementary characteristic of suggest other meanings while being drawn. The trace is always 'under erasure', '... never appearing for a first time simply, any *trait* always implies repetition, of withdrawal or retreat, and return or re-markability' (Wolfreys, 2004:87). (It is Derrida's belief that a sign, a mass of empty signifiers, must be read 'under erasure': 'always already inhabited by the trace of another sign which never appears as such' (Sarup, 1993:34).)

In the appearance of the *trait*, lies the immediate *retrait* (a second aspect of the trace): '... not an aftereffect ... It appears, or rather disappears, without delay. I will name it the *withdrawal [retrait] or the eclipse, the differential inappearance of the trait*' (Derrida, 1993:54).

from here on to both the art audience, and the art critic)³⁹ records the interpretation through his / her 'critical' and subjective response to the art object. Interpretation is an 'event' where a playoff between the viewer-reader and the object takes place – both participating as progressive forms (subjects) in the construction of meaning.

Barthes, similar to Panofsky (whose three levels of interpretation we looked at earlier), arrives at three levels for understanding meaning, a result of interpretation. His distinction differs from Panofsky's, because Barthes' is a model concerned with semiotics and is devoted to signs. The first level is that of 'communication' and deals with the viewer-reader's recognition of meaningful referents or information. Twombly's *Crimes of Passion II*, comprising mainly of non-representational line-forms, would strike a viewer-reader as totally ambiguous at first. The majority of singular elements does not seem to point to anything specific; in fact, the only elements that can be regarded as understandable information are the words 'crimes of passion' (drawn two-thirds along the top half of the image), and to its right, the artist's name (which is recognizable, and therefore understood, but in itself as arbitrary as a scribble). Even while the viewer suspects that the marks suggest something outside themselves, he / she will find it a problem to contextualize them singularly.

At a second level, that of 'signification', the viewer-reader associates the image's commonly understood information with conventional meanings or contexts of which he / she has a particular knowledge (Wiseman, 2003:21). Here is where the viewer-reader starts deciphering, or decoding, or 'deconstructing' the apparent codes and signs. The viewer-reader's entry point to decoding the image would be the title, which in the case of *Crimes of Passion* manifests itself in the pictorial space. The words,

³⁹ With the reader's role in the production of meaning becoming instrumental, the art critic's position in turn becomes problematic: 'Traditional criticism, of the kind that tried to arrive at the truth in painting, or at criteria by which this might be determined, can only appear authoritarian and totalitarian to the deconstructionist, who will swerve away from any such activity' (Sim, 2003:98).

On account of viewer-reader's actions, I quote Elkins (1999:84):

Any act of reading relies on a finite number of customs and strategies, and they are often at work in looking. The converse is also true: We look at images in various ways, in various orders, and at different speeds, and those ways of looking often come into play when we read. There are protocols of reading and looking, meaning signs by which we might recognize that we are reading or looking. Any visual artefact mingles the two, and so there is "reading" in every image and "looking" in every text.

'crimes of passion', play a supplementary role – as a form of relay text they supplement in order to initiate connotation – because of the relation to the other graphic marks. Even though numerous paintings and drawings by Twombly are 'untitled', it must be noted that they always function within a body of work that holds an understandable title or theme – Twombly's titles are predominantly linked with literary works.⁴⁰ Barthes (1988:172), in *The Wisdom of Art*, writes that:

[T]he very fact that they [the artworks] have a title, they proffer the bait of a meaning to mankind [In classical painting] analogy in the picture was reduplicated by analogy in the title: the signification was supposed to be exhausted and the figuration exhausted. Now it is not possible, when one sees a painting by Twombly bearing a title, not to have the embryonic reflex of looking for analogy.

A third level of meaning ('the third meaning'), that of 'signifying', can be seen as an extension of the second level of signification. Signifying describes a stage of interpretation where the signifier is extracted from the context and used as a supplementary signifier for connotative meanings – a paradigmatic substitution (Wiseman, 2003:22). The 'third meaning', Barthes' second feature of a framework for reading images, can be delineated in a similar way to Kristeva's explanation of intertextuality (see footnote 31). Barthes says that signs reside in vertical and horizontal strings. While horizontal strings of signs entail syntactic arrangements such as words, sentences, phrases, and scenes (syntagmatic structures), the vertical strings suggest a perpendicular for textual interchange (paradigmatic structures).⁴¹

⁴⁰ 'The title and inscriptions of *Crimes of Passion II* relate to the literary *oeuvre* of Donatien Alphonse François Marquis de Sade (1740 – 1814) and the tortures described therein, which are characterized as sexual obsessions' (Scheps, 1996:722 – 723).

⁴¹ Saussure suggested that meaning arises from differences between signifiers, differences that are either 'syntagmatic' or 'paradigmatic'. Both sets describe the combination and substitution of units within a sign (or system of signs), but paradigmatic combinations are generally regarded as that which talks about 'associative' relationships – they involve differentiation. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic strings, for Barthes, provide the reader with a determined context in which sign can be read and understood - structural forms that organize signs into codes and sub-codes. Chandler (2002:80) compares the relationships: 'Temporally, syntagmatic relations refer intratextually to other signifiers *co-present* within the text, while paradigmatic relations refer intertextually to signifiers which are *absent* from the text.' ('Intratextuality' is used to describe the internal relations of the apparent text within a system of signs. Anchorage and relay are both forms of intra-text.)

The framework for 'context' is thus described either as a 'syntagm' (a horizontal string of signs) or 'paradigm' (a vertical string of signs). In a paradigm, certain signifiers are replaceable with others from the same paradigmatic set (like adjectives) to describe or change the context of a specific text. On an intertextual level, it is possible to exchange entire

'The third meaning, in contrast to signs, is unstable, fugitive and erratic, and as such calls for a vertical reading of the signifier which disjoins it from the horizontal string of signs, the context, in which it appears' (Wiseman, 2003:22).

This relationship between vertical and horizontal strings of text, and the constant intercession of other meanings, explains why poststructuralist thinkers, such as Derrida, emphasize the inseparability of text and context.⁴² It is almost as though syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions set up an interpretative grid for the viewer-reader, part of a matrix of shifting grids which is employed while reading.⁴³

Art historian, Rosalind Krauss (1986:158), in her essay *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, says about artists' utilization of the grid:

[T]he grid's power lies in its capacity to figure forth the material ground of the pictorial object, simultaneously inscribing and depicting it, so that the image of the pictorial surface can be seen to be born out of the organization of pictorial matter.⁴⁴

contexts within a specific paradigm, which then causes the reader to diverge from conventional meanings (Chandler, 2002:99).

Earlier we looked at how Barthes divides a text into separate units, or *lexias* (see footnote 33), as a starting point for semiotic decoding. *Lexias*, subsequent to being identified, are grouped into paradigmatic classes and then classified as syntagmatic relations. Thus 'content' is the result of paradigmatic dimensions within context(s), 'form' that of the syntagmatic dimensions (refer to Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System*, 1967) (Chandler, 2002:75-88).

⁴² Twombly's marks make a superb case for the 'iterable' nature of the *trait*: as a structure for repeatability 'it must carry with it a capacity to be repeated in principle again and again in all sorts of contexts ('no context permits saturation'), at the same time as being in some way singular every time ('no meaning can be determined out of context')' (Royle, 2003:68).

⁴³ *Crimes of Passion*, with regard to pictorial space and spatial relations, can be called a drawing – a succession of marks in pictorial space, and also a form of reading system – a composition of textual elements that is read, as a general action, from left to right or top-left downwards. A similar hierarchy of meaning, as seen in horizontal strings where left and right relate to 'the Given' and 'the New', potentially arises in vertical strings where elements at the top connote positively (associated with rationality, life, and dominant power) over the negative bottom-placed elements (emotion, death, and the subjection to power) – 'orientational metaphors' (Chandler, 2002:88). However, in the case of *Crimes of Passion II*, obvious meaning and habits of reading elements at the top as more important than those at the bottom are silenced by total ambiguity – marks carry predominantly the same weight and, as abstractions, they diminish the possibility for the viewer-reader to conceive of a sequential narrative.

⁴⁴ The 'grid' is something which is synonymous with art and the language of image-making: Krauss claims, '...the actual practice of vanguard art tends to reveal that "originality" is a working assumption that itself emerges from a ground of repetition and recurrence [as is the

Krauss's description of the grid is undoubtedly related to the textual grids of Kristeva and Barthes. Similarly, as a framework for intertextual activity, the pictorial grid provides the viewer-reader with a paradigm for image-making and visual interpretation. Just as a text contains the traces of contextual texts before it, so too do images contain the traces of a pictorial language that has defined its discourse.⁴⁵

Krauss (1986:161) writes of the pictorial grid's supplementary nature:

[It] follows the canvas surface, doubles it. It is a representation of the surface, mapped ... onto the same surface it represents ... [and] prior to it, are all those visual texts through which the bounded plane was collectively organized as a pictorial field ... by repeating, [it] represents. Thus the very ground that the grid is thought to reveal is already riven from within by a process of repetition and representation; it is always already divided and multiple.

The idea of a 'doubled' material space, a deferred space where the trace and its process co-exist, a supplemented space at the border between word and image, is that which Derrida calls the *subjectile*. It describes a space of transmutation for the 'writing' of both the object and subject, and nominates a moment which advocates the 'supplementary':

The subjectile is both 'a substance, and a subject', which 'belongs to the code of painting and designates what is in some way below (*subjectum*)', occupying a liminal place or, more accurately, a taking place, a becoming of the *between*, which it both is and is not: 'between the beneath and the above, it is at once a support and a surface ... everything distinct from form, as well as from meaning and representation, not representable [A]ny address to the subjectile cannot be given in terms of a definition that is

nature of the trace]. One figure, drawn from avant-garde practice in the visual arts, provides an example. This figure is the grid' (1986:158).

⁴⁵ Krauss (1986:161-162) indicates further:

But from *our* perspective, the one from which we see that the signifier cannot be reified; that its objecthood, its quiddity, is only a fiction; that every signifier is itself the transparent signified of an already-given decision to carve it out as the vehicle of a sign – from *this* perspective there is no opacity, but only a transparency that opens onto a dizzying fall into a bottomless system of reduplication. This is the perspective from which the grid that signifies the pictorial surface, by representing it, only succeeds in locating the signifier of another, prior system of grids, which have beyond them, yet another, even earlier system.

merely negative or positive, and therefore partaking of some ontological determination Words, traces, brush strokes, pencil lines: all are projections and supports, movements and elements in a structure allowing for representation, all the while not being that (Wolfreys, 2004:85-86).

Thus, the pictorial grid (as are textual strings), is supplementary to itself while being supportive of the material space. It creates lines and borders of demarcation and limits, but most notably a 'frame'. This frame is unstable in the articulation of its context, for the reason that it is a double border, a border which divides itself by touching both that which is inside and outside of it.

I think that it helps to conceive of the grid as a pictorial 'master-key' (Derrida's *passe-partout*), as something which allows the viewer-reader access to supplemented meanings.⁴⁶ As the framework which constitutes the context of a particular system of signs (a text, or drawing in this case), the pictorial grid is an absolute of the *parergon*. The *parergon*, being itself a concept of *différence*, can no longer be perceived as that which only defines the work (the *ergon*) by enclosing it. Meaning crosses the frame to infiltrate and extract from contexts which exist beyond its borders.⁴⁷ As Derrida (1987:9) puts it in *The Truth in Painting*:

That which it [the *parergon*] puts in place – the instances of the frame, the title, the signature, the legend, etc. – does not stop the *internal* order of

⁴⁶ The *passe-partout*,

...is therefore a condition of possibility for both the visible and the invisible, a *trait* neither completely there or not there, not simply a border but doubled in and of itself. ... [I]t becomes the mark or *trait* on the text, neither inside nor outside the [image, juxtaposed with its title] that, in supporting the text, also doubles itself by performing the function about which it speaks Seeing through the key ... the *passe-partout*, which is also a passport, seeing becomes translated, vision transformed, as the support and the mark become visible in all their destabilizing yet necessary functions that allow the work of art to appear (Wolfreys, 2004:89).

⁴⁷ Bal (1994:175) says the following regarding the cultural framing of an image:

[A]s soon as the idea of a delimiting frame is questioned and the possibility of dynamic semiosis is admitted, the relation opposition must give way to that of non-oppositional difference. The image becomes what it is by being traversed by flows of signification that cut across the boundary, making the image part of a general circulation of signs and codes within the social formation as a whole.

discourse on painting, its works, its commerce, its evaluations, its surplus-values, its speculation, its law, and its hierarchies.

The *parergon* is a word which refers to visual codes of image-making – to styles, indexes, material choices, methods of production, allowance for interaction with the viewer-reader, display, and also forms of reproduction. At a very basic and agreeable level, in writing his name on the canvas, particularly in the case where it is placed in an unconventional position (as in *Crimes of Passion II*), Cy Twombly acknowledges the presence of the *parergon*. He places the title, and his signature, at the same level of meaning as all the other drifting signifiers that are visible in the reading system (the drawing).⁴⁸ Elements of the *parergon* are, just as traces and re-traces, part of a visual language which is unstoppably differed. So it is understandable that Derrida sees image-making as a form of writing, as text within context(s).

As a framework for cultural agreement, as well as decoding, the *parergon* relies on established contexts and fitting codes to correlate multiple texts and meanings. In the broader sense, Chandler suggests that codes correspond to three types of contextual knowledge: a social, textual, and combinatory knowledge (2002:150). A viewer-reader's social knowledge of *Crimes of Passion II* is to contextualize the object as an artefact founded on a worldly understanding about its form, production, and presentation, while his / her textual knowledge frames a context based on recognition of the medium (a painting) and prevalent genres (abstraction). Looking and reading is nothing other than actions of decoding, unearthing textual codes to set up an interpretative framework; the viewer-reader's 'combinatory knowledge' describes an interaction between a social and textual knowledge (contextual modality).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Twombly's drawing *Crimes of Passion II* is as much a reading system as the double-spread layout in *Hockney's Pictures* (Illustration 2). What would be commonly attributed as indicators of context and meaning – the title, signature, format, medium – function similarly as navigational factors, such as a book's page numbers, section headings, captions, format, and page grid. The *parergon*, if viewed in this way, is an extended form of intra-text, which makes allowance for inter-text.

⁴⁹ Daniel Chandler writes that the meanings of texts cannot be defined by only a textual knowledge (2002:158). Dominant codes, or social codes of agreement (for example, verbal language, sub-cultural dialects, global vernaculars, body language, dress codes, and rituals), uphold a far greater field of knowledge than do textual codes (which are information languages, communication mediums, stylistic forms, as well as media and modal codes); social codes tend to constrain textual codes. Textual features (the attributes of genre) which apply to both literary and visual art include narrative; particularly the notion of sequence, personification and stereotyping, subject-matter; setting (space-and-time frame); technique (formal and stylistic conventions); and iconography, which can be seen as a set of motifs or a grouping of textual codes. >

Crimes of Passion II provides the viewer-reader with very little text (other than the title and artist's signature) and therefore also a limited context. Furthermore, unfamiliarity with the work of Marquis de Sade, and consequently Cy Twombly's intentions behind visually appropriating the text, put the viewer-reader in a position where he / she would either have to turn away from encountering 'the third meaning', or read the work from another angle in order to find significance.⁵⁰ This 'other angle' entails approaching interpretation by looking at the formalities of image-making, which of course involves a degree of visual literacy over and above the recognition of perceptual codes.

In order to deconstruct the image, as Barthes suggests with 'text', the viewer-reader must divide it into smaller units which would enable him / her to define contexts. The viewer-reader has no other option but to consider the image in its entirety as a sign, and as a pictorial grid in which spatial relations can be acknowledged and perceptual codes identified. Spatial relationships play a crucial role in the development and understanding of a reading system's components. These relationships can be described as syntagmatic occurrences and refer to the figure-ground participation (positive and negative area relations) in the pictorial space.⁵¹

According to Gestalt psychology, the principles of perceptual organization are proximity, similarity, good continuation, closure, smallness, surroundedness,

A fundamental form of textual codes is 'genre', because it constitutes both content and form. In genre, conventions of 'content' develop from features such as theme and setting, while the text's 'form' results from its structuring and writing style. Genre is seen also to have four 'primary purposes' ('modes of genre') which exposes the discourse of the textual form: 'exposition' (explanation of the principle themes), 'argument' (reasoning to differentiate viewpoints), 'description' and 'narration' (Chandler, 2002:149-160).

⁵⁰ Barthes calls the 'third meaning' that which is obtuse: '... in exceeding the perpendicular, an obtuse angle can seem to open up the field of meaning indefinitely, in excess of the obvious meanings of knowledge and culture. Excessive, the third meaning appears as a supplement that intellection cannot absorb and has ... something to do with disguise and emotion', and is therefore akin to visual art (Wiseman, 2003:22).

⁵¹ The visual concepts of 'figure' (visual elements with a definite contour which are seen to exist as the image's foreground; also 'positive' space) and 'ground' (the background or area surrounding the 'figure' – it is the counter-space; 'negative' space) developed from the Gestalt psychologists' notion that perceptual codes derive from features of human visual perception. Their position on 'form' is that the configuration of visual elements, as an entirety, is what suggests it rather than a summation of individual parts. Gestalt psychology practices a structural understanding of human behaviour, giving preference to 'wholes' over independent units. '[W]e may accept the Gestalt principles while at the same time regarding other aspects of perception as being *learned* and culturally variable rather than innate. The Gestalt principles can be seen as reinforcing the notion that the world is not simply and objectively 'out there' but is constructed in the process of perception.' (Chandler, 2002:151)

symmetry, and *prägnanz* (Chandler, 2002:151). Cy Twombly's work makes a strong case as two-dimensional shapes which both define and defy perceptual codes. Good continuity, closure, and surroundedness are all codes which come into question in *Crimes of Passion II*. The viewer-reader's *prägnanz* (the overarching perceptual principle), a preference for a direct and stable interpretation of a pictorial space, arises from his / her exposure to, and developed awareness of visual arrangements (Chandler, 2002:151).⁵² Instead of developing the pictorial form as a continuous flow of predictable contours (good continuation), as interpretable grouped figures (closure), or as figures at all – if surrounded by other elements (surroundedness; a form of emphasis), Twombly intersperses his marks according to the rule of the 'rare'.⁵³

The notion of the 'rare', as far as I'm concerned, is an important feature for the arrangement of graphic elements within pictorial space. Counter-space (the area which defines the extent of the 'rare') is crucial when reading the overall 'figural tone' or pictorial texture of an image. It functions as a 'supplementary space' which provides the image-maker with the capacity to achieve asymmetric balance, as well as placing emphasis on marks which stand as more significant indicators. The viewer-reader's awareness of the pictorial grid relies a great deal on the relationship and contrast between the pictorial space's marks and the overall 'effect' of the rare.

Barthes writes about four kinds of 'effects' which come to the fore in Twombly's art: the *pragma* (habits of mark-making); the 'inspiration' effect (or force of chance); the aspect of 'surprise'; and 'drama'. Firstly, he refers to Twombly's marks as 'facts': 'What is in question, therefore, is a means of making in all circumstances (in any kind

⁵² Rosalind Krauss simplifies the notion of *prägnanz*:

[T]he 'order' assumed by this assembly of shapes – an order that aligns them simultaneously with each other and with the master 'shape' of the canvas plane, in its own instantaneously felt cohesion – displays the kind of totalizing clarity, or 'hanging-togetherness', that the Gestalt psychologists would call *prägnanz*, or 'good form'. And by this is meant not only that a perceiver grasps the wholeness of a form all at once, but that, once perceived, its *prägnanz* exists in a continuously renewed experience of immediacy ... of the first time perpetuated itself in a form that was not temporal at all. (Bois & Krauss, 1997:134-135)

⁵³ 'The state which is linked to these two movements (the "jeté" and the dispersion), and which is found in all of Twombly's paintings, is the *Rare*. "Rarus" in Latin means: that which has gaps or interstices, sparse, porous, scattered, and this is indeed what space is like in Twombly.' (Barthes, 1988:170) (The 'jeté' is a confident gesture; related to the act of 'throwing' paint.)

of work), matter appear as a fact (*pragma*). In order to do this, Twombly has, not devices ... but at least habits'. (Barthes, 1988:167) The artist's habitual marks give rise to an 'effect', something which for the artist is a response to his / her own visual language and for the viewer-reader a fact about the language of image-making.

These facts stem from a devotion to inspiration, but it is one which adheres to accident and 'chance' – both the artist and the viewer-reader are surprised by the marks. 'We must count as such surprises all the interventions of writing in the field of the canvas: any time Twombly uses a graphic sign, there is a jolt, an unsettling of the naturalness of painting', Barthes (1988:176) observes.⁵⁴ It is here in this 'awakening' of unnaturalness and surprise, that the actions of 'drama' lie. The 'drama' or sensation that is evoked by the event (both the artist's 'process' and the viewer-reader's 'interpretation') is not something that is depicted. It is, instead, brought about by a cultural and textual knowledge, evocating the sensuous; the 'third meaning':

What is represented, in fact, is culture itself, or, as we now say, the inter-text, which is this circulation of earlier (or contemporary) texts in the head (or the hand) of the artist In classical painting, 'what is happening' is the 'subject' of the painting, a subject that is often anecdotal ...; but in Twombly's paintings, the 'subject' is a concept: it is the classical text 'in itself' – a strange concept, it is true, since it is an object of desire, of love, and perhaps of nostalgia ['the third meaning'] In Twombly, the 'subject' is of course what the painting is talking about; but as the subject-object is only a written

⁵⁴ Barthes (1988:176) explains that Twombly's marks are a form of writing:

[T]here are the marks of measurement, the figures, the tiny algorithms, all the things that produce a contradiction between the sovereign uselessness of painting and the utilitarian signs of computing. Then there are paintings where the only event is a handwritten word ... [and] occurring in both types of intervention, the constant 'clumsiness' of the hand ... he lets [the marks] trail as if [they] had been written with the fingertips, not out of disgust or boredom, but in virtue of a fancy that disappoints what is expected from the 'fine hand' of a painter: this phrase was used, in the seventeenth century, about the copyist who had a fine handwriting.

There are few marks that fit the category, as described in the above paragraph by Barthes, in *Crimes of Passion II*. Situated just off the centre, south-east, is an informational diagram of a step (or a stand, a podium) which can be regarded as the only understandable mark of data. Other marks that come close to the description are those that are present right at the top (apart from the numerous scattered numbers all over the canvas, which function in a similar way to the written words, 'Cy Twombly'); the crosses represent a time lapse and a type of counting system, as well as the misshaped heart symbol left of centre.

allusion [in *différence*], the whole weight of the *drama* falls back again on the person producing it: the subject is Twombly himself. (Barthes, 1988:177-178)

It is thus in Twombly's 'effect' that the possibility lies for communicating or signifying. 'An effect,' Barthes explains, 'is therefore not a rhetorical trick: it is a veritable category of sensations, which is defined by this paradox: the unbreakable unity of the impression (of the "message") and the complexity of its causes or elements'. (1988:173-174) All of the effects come into being purely through the force and play of the 'gesture' – Barthes' third feature of a framework for reading images.⁵⁵

Barthes believes that Twombly's mark-making precedes the pictorial grid and that the essence (which is a 'silence') of the event exists as a result of the 'gesture' (1988:180). In Twombly's works, marks of intellection (algorithms, symbols, notational abbreviations – signs that are intended to communicate; for example, the visible heart-shape and 'step' diagram) and gestures (the multiple, palimpsest *sgraffito* markings) co-exist in pictorial space. This collision of meaningful and meaningless (or 'surplus') marks, stirs within the viewer-reader a confusion of signification. The intention of the gesture is to arrest the transposition of syntagmatic units within the system of pictorial signs. This means that Twombly's gestures prohibit the viewer-reader from contextualizing the work, and afford the reading to 'sensation' and 'the third meaning'.⁵⁶

The unusual paring of signs and gestures suggests a 'dialogue' between the counter-forms of pictorial space (figure/ground, text/image); a 'silent' conversation – the traces are whispers – advancing from one interpretation to the next. It follows no apparent connected line of thought and produces no chronological set of contexts, and that means that no viewer-reader's interpretation of *Crimes of Passion II* (even while comprehending the title) will ever be alike. The traces murmur across the

⁵⁵ Writing on 'gesture', educator in philosophy, Mary Wiseman (2003:23), remarks: 'To be gestural the surface marks must be made by hand and must participate in culture's codes. The gesture, which seems always about to be or just to have been performed by an individual in an instant is not stable and general as are the signs that follow language's rules for formation and transformation'.

⁵⁶ With reference to Barthes' 'gesture', Wiseman (2003:24) writes:

The body of any text [its traces], visual or verbal, gives pleasure when its language has two edges: one obedient and conformist, and "another edge, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours), which is never anything but the site of its effect: the place where the death of language is glimpsed".

border of the *parergon*, but a loss of translation over context(s) is foreseeable. Finally, Barthes (1988:180) writes: 'Twombly's art – and in this consists its ethic and its great historical singularity – *does not grasp at anything*; it is situated, it floats and drifts between the desire which, in subtle fashion, guides the hand, and politeness, which is the discreet refusal of any captivating ambition'.

Summation

Crimes of Passion II is both an autonomous, and a communicative sign. Even if considered 'meaningless', Twombly's gestural marks can be thought to possess a communicative value of their own. These marks are significant because they stand independent – yet not entirely detached – from the 'subject', punctuating the viewer-reader's preconceived understanding of both marking / writing and looking / reading. The image's autonomous and communicative features exist and interact as counterparts: 'In the development of these [non-representational] arts, we see the emergence, with greater or less force, of a dialectical antinomy between the function of the autonomous sign and the function of the communicative sign' (Mukarovsky, 1988:5).

Post-structuralist semiotics implements 'deconstruction' to empower a subject's textual knowledge, and in turn 'counters' a social knowledge which presupposes the communicative stature of all signs. Norman Bryson (1988:xviii) describes the interaction between the viewer-reader and the work of art as both a 'perceptualist' account (which refers to the viewer-reader's social knowledge), and an account of 'recognition' (a textual knowledge). He explains their workings as follows:

In place of the transcendental comparison between the image and perceptual private worlds, stand the socially generated codes of recognition; and in place of the link, magical and illogical, that is alleged to extend from an outer world of things into recesses of inwardness and subjectivity, stands the link extending from individual to individual as consensual activity, in the *forum* of recognition. (Bryson, 1988:xxi)

Not only is deconstruction an interpretative mode by which the viewer-reader approaches the visual text with the intention of unlocking its interplaying contexts, but it is also a mental state – an awareness of the 'sheer contingency of both the work of

art and its reception' (Sim, 2003:100).⁵⁷ Deconstruction alludes to the guarantee that an image, and therefore *Crimes of Passion II*, will never have singled-out meanings; a viewer-reader's reception, even his / her consequent interpretation of the same image, will never be repeated and cannot suggest a pattern of unitary agreement.

Deconstruction's role is to cause the visual or verbal text to reflect a consciousness onto the viewing-reading subject, and invite him / her to reconsider his / her position as a construction of reality; being themselves a form of 'inter-text' that 'extends from person to person and across *interindividual space*' (Bryson, 1988:xxi).⁵⁸ The notion of visual deconstruction is to compare the 'reception' of art with the 'interpretation' of text. As Chandler (2002:218) remarks: 'We are thus the *subjects* of our own sign-systems rather than being simply instrumental "users" who are fully in control of them'.

VISUAL CULTURE

The term 'users', as suggested above by Chandler, very appropriately describes the condition of the postmodern subject. The postmodern condition or consciousness talks of the 'subject' in terms of the displaced positions it adopts, in relation to itself

⁵⁷ The relation between the early and late post-structural notion of deconstruction is put as follows:

In line with various late-structuralist ideas such as 'the death of the author', deconstruction is more concerned with the *effect* of the work of art, its ability to create chains of reasoning in the viewer, than the work of art itself It could be argued that deconstruction is an aesthetic which embraces this belief ['a work of art doesn't *mean* anything, it just *is*'], with the qualification that what the work *is*, for deconstruction, is an entry into a network of traces, the unpredictable pattern of which is a practical illustration of the deconstructive world-view (Sim, 2003:100-101).

⁵⁸ The following is from an essay, entitled *On truth – A fiction*, by Umberto Eco (1988:59) – used here to illustrate the idea of 'interindividual' space:

[M]en and words reciprocally educate each other; each increase of man's information involves and is involved by, a corresponding increase of word's information ... the word or sign that the man uses *is* that man himself. For, as the fact that life is a train of thought proves the fact that man is a sign; so, that every thought is an *external* sign proves that man is an external sign. That is to say, man and the external signs are identical ... my language is the sum total of myself.

and to a society.⁵⁹ Such positions are intrinsic in language, in cultural codes. Jean-Francois Lyotard, whose critique of universal thought and theories of post-modernity founded the 'postmodern condition', says of language: 'Knowledge is what makes someone capable of forming not only "good" denotative utterances but also "good" prescriptive and "good" evaluative utterances' (cited Sarup 1993:134). Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* is a report on contemporary social knowledge, focusing on the generation and employment of cultural codes in contemporary societies.⁶⁰ Knowledge is something which is learnt, acquired, and consequently 'used' – a commodity which becomes the foundation for power in a society.⁶¹ 'The irreversible

⁵⁹ 'The "subject" is paradigmatically a *spectator*, the "object" a visual image.' (Mitchell 1994:18-19)

⁶⁰ 'Post-modernity' is the term which is used to describe the diversities of individual and social identities; plural identities or 'polymorphous subject-positions' which developed from a multitude of discourses. Where contemporary societies are moving toward a pluralistic and open democracy, a condition of post-modernity is to progressively reflect a state of ambivalence. 'Postmodernism' refers to the culture of post-modernity: theory of postmodern culture developed as a series of critiques of universal knowledge and serve as an awareness of the contingency underlying the foundations of established cultural fields. Postmodernism is a culture of 'reasoning' (Sarup, 1993:130-131).

⁶¹ 'Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major – perhaps *the* major – stake in the worldwide competition for power.' (Lyotard cited in Malpas, 2003:18.)

Barthes uses the term 'myth' to designate our historically specific knowledge and ideological vision of the world. As a result of conventional utilization and understandings (a mass-cultural condition), cultural object and values (and knowledge thereof) are accepted as indisputable and natural. Ideology describes the naturalization of culturally specific phenomena: 'Ideology... is the process whereby what is historical and created by specific cultures is presented as if it were timeless, universal and thus natural' (Allen, 2003:34). Semiotics brings order to myth, as it allows for a reading and appropriate critique thereof:

Contemporary myth is discontinuous. It is no longer expressed in long fixed narratives but only in 'discourse'; at most it is a *phraseology*, a corpus of phrases (of stereotypes) ... As a type of speech (which was after all the meaning of *muthos*), contemporary myth falls into the province of a semiology; the latter enables the mythical inversion to be 'righted' by breaking up the message into two semantic systems: a connoted system whose signified is ideological ... and a denoted system ... whose function is to naturalize the class proposition by lending it the guarantee of the most "innocent" of natures, that of language ... (Barthes, 1977:165-166).

Barthes (1972:129) calls myth a 'false dilemma': '[It] hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it makes an inflexion'. In a semiological sense, mythology is regarded as that which turns a sign into a signifier for a new signified – a second-order semiological function (connotation). Barthes (1972:129) goes on to say in *Mythologies*: 'The elaboration of a second-order semiological system will enable myth to escape this dilemma: driven to having either to unveil or to liquidate the concept, it will *naturalize* it'. Myth then, for Barthes, is a name describing the process starting from a first-order meaning (denotation) to a second-order structure (connotation), which then goes onto the naturalization of that signification (ideology); myth is a matter / process of conditioning.

change from “knower” to “consumer of knowledge” is the cornerstone of postmodernity. This is the real change which legitimizes postmodernism’ (Appignanesi, 1999:107)

The key to the acquisition of knowledge is ‘perception’, a matter of ‘look and learn’. Our social knowledge, which attends to our textual knowledge, develops as a product from our ‘reading’ of other human subjects and social manners / codes. Reading becomes a form of re-writing culture; it is the deconstruction of the ‘textualization’ of social, scientific, and philosophical fields (Sarup 1993:134). Postmodern culture is thus a visualization of the hybrid texts and meanings which constitute dispersed thought, an intertextual condition.⁶²

Cultural visibility opens the border of the social, as Mitchell explains: ‘The fundamental fact about vision ... is that we use it to look at other people, not at the world. Social, intersubjective encounters, practices of visual recognition, acknowledgement (and their opposite ... mimicry) would then be the starting point for visual culture ...’ (1995:540-545). Mitchell (1994:3) says in the introduction to *Picture Theory*: ‘The difference between a culture of reading and a culture of spectatorship, for instance, is not *only* a formal issue (though it is certainly that); it has implications for the very forms that sociability and subjectivity take, for the kinds of individuals and institutions formed by a culture’.

Mitchell introduced the term ‘visual culture’ in order to describe the ‘interdisciplinary’ nature of iconology (the general study of images across cultural media); it refers to a field of study that focuses on the interaction, conversion, and dialectics between various disciplines dealing with representation.⁶³

⁶² Mitchell (1986:30), describing the postmodern condition, states:

[O]ur signs, and thus our world, are a product of human action and understanding, that although our modes of knowledge and representation may be “arbitrary” and “conventional”, they are the constituents of the forms of life, the practices and traditions within which we must make epistemological, ethical, and political choices It seems clear that knowledge is better understood as a matter of social practices, disputes, and agreements, and not as the property of some particular mode of natural or unmediated representation.

⁶³ It is Mitchell's (1995:540-545) impression that the term ‘interdisciplinary’ emerged ‘in 1970s jargon ... as a code word for politically or theoretically adventurous work (feminism and woman's studies, work in media and mass culture, deconstruction, semiotics, Marxist and psycho-analytic criticism)’. >

Mitchell distinguishes between three types of 'interdisciplinarity': a 'top-down' structure, a 'bottom-up' formation, and 'indiscipline' (an example of 'inside-out'). A 'top-down' interdisciplinarity is comparative and structural in formation, aiming to serve as an all-encompassing discourse or 'conceptual totality' under which all disciplines are communed – such is the character of semiotics: '... to provide a universal, neutral metalanguage for the study of culture' (Mitchell, 1995:540-545).⁶⁴ 'Bottom-up' interdisciplinarity is described by Mitchell (1995:540-545) as 'compulsive and compulsory ... dictated by a specific problem or event'.⁶⁵ These interdisciplinary studies proceed from events occurring in amongst others, the cultural fields of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.

'Bottom-up' interdisciplinarity is 'interdisciplinary' in their approach – they cover a range of overlapping subjects (as listed above) – yet, they also function as

In *Image Music Text*, Barthes (1977:155) writes:

Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins *effectively* ... when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down – perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion – in the interest of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation.

The word 'representation' is used, Mitchell (1994:6) holds, '... as a master-term for this field [visual culture], not because I believe in any general, homogenous, or abstractable concept of representation, but because it has a long tradition in the critique of culture, and it activates a set of linkages between political, semiotic/aesthetic, and even economic notions of "standing or acting for"'.

⁶⁴ In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard uses the term 'metanarratives' in order to explain how social knowledge is organized. A 'metanarrative' (or 'grand narrative') refers to a metalanguage or set of rules which directs the use of other languages. Modernism maintained numerous grand narratives which constitute the development of its society, of which the thinking subject saw itself as a narrator of history. 'Modernism is characterized by the *grand narrative* of the progressive emancipation of a universal subject of history, the proleptically autonomous speaker of a *discourse* of knowledge (Enlightenment), humanity (republican democracy), will (romanticism) or history (Hegel, Marx).' (Readings, 1991:xxxiii) Postmodernism sees a transformation of knowledge, a condition which is characterized by its 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (Malpas, 2003:28). A significant feature of postmodernism is its absorption, a 'pastiche', of internal 'minor' narratives; resisting incorporation into grand narratives through being discontinuous and scattered – as kinds of 'inter-narrative'. Postmodernism thus aims to expose all fields of specialization along with their particular discourses / minor narratives in order to advance the notion of interdisciplinarity.

⁶⁵ The postmodern implication of the term 'event' follows from Lyotard's description of it as '... fact or case that something happens after which nothing will ever be the same again. The event disrupts any pre-existing referential frame within which it might be represented or understood. The eventhood of the event is the radical *singularity* of happening, the "it happens" as distinct from the sense of "what is happening"' (Readings, 1991:xxxi).

'disciplinary', in being discourses which confront the metalanguages which suppress their roles as participators in the construction of culture; '... necessarily disciplinary in their need to carve out professional spaces and mechanisms of collective memory against the institutional forces that tend to squeeze them out or appropriate their energy' (Mitchell, 1995:540-545).⁶⁶ The cultural theorist, Homi Bhabha, tells of postmodernism's interdisciplinary compulsion to interfere in institutional metalanguages:

The enduring political lesson of postmodernism is to urge us to think of social agency without the mastery of sovereignty of an author. And in the indeterminate relationship between actor and author we are served the aesthetic and ethical challenge to live in disjunctive temporal landscapes that lead us to restructure the past, so that the history of the present – of our late modernity and / or postmodernity – can entertain the possibility of the future as an open question, a negotiation with the passions and the pitfalls of freedom (1996:322).

The tendency of 'visual culture' is to act in an 'indisciplinary' manner – which exemplifies Mitchell's 'inside-out' formation of interdisciplinarity. 'Indisciplines' are investigative fields or events which are prized as being disruptive. Organized around theoretical objects, rather than social movements, it is founded on diverse discourses of psychoanalysis, semiotics, linguistics, literary theory, phenomenology, aesthetics, anthropology, art history, and film studies.⁶⁷ Mitchell (1995:540-545) warns: '[Visual culture] is not just the "visual front" of cultural studies'. Once the 'minor-narratives' of popular culture enter the domain of established disciplines such as art history and literary studies, the 'inside-out' effect takes hold:

⁶⁶ The French cultural theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, notes that all human subjects claim a position ('habitus') within a certain field of cultural production (for instance 'visual art'), in which all members adhere to an agreeable or 'legitimate' language: 'To speak is to adopt a style which corresponds to a hierarchy of social groups. In a sense then these different styles / dialects are both classified and classifying by marking those who use them' (Crow, 2003:94). (For a thorough definition of 'institutional' or 'authorised' languages, refer to Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), as well as *Intellectual Field and Creative Project* (1971).)

⁶⁷ The French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze (2004:244-245), claimed that it was the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who proposed an interdisciplinary vision of culture – a 'counter-culture': 'Nietzsche's enterprise is an attempt at uncoding, not in the sense of a relative uncoding which would be decoding of the past, present, or future, but an absolute encoding – to get something through which is not encodable, to mix up all the codes'. This suggests that an enquiry into the cultural must be interdisciplinary (a diachronic approach), with the aim of problemizing codification (denaturalization).

On the one hand, visual culture looks like an 'outside' to art history, opening out the larger field of vernacular images, media, and everyday visual practices in which a 'visual art' tradition is situated, and raising the question of the difference between high and low culture, visual art versus visual culture. On the other hand, visual culture may look like a deep 'inside' to art history's traditional focus on the sensuous and semiotic peculiarity of the visual. Art history has always been necessarily more than a history of works of art; it has always had to rely on more or less well-theorized models of spectatorship, visual pleasure, and social, intersubjective relations in the scopical field Like art history, literary studies encounter visual culture as an 'inside-out' form of interdisciplinarity. The difference is that the visual comes to language as a figure of semiotic otherness – the 'other' medium or form of expression (Mitchell, 1995:540-545).

Visual culture differs from cultural studies by naming a problematic rather than a well-defined theoretical object; it highlights the 'event' and the further possibility of its rupture, before deconstruction reasserts a routine 'method of interpretation'.⁶⁸ Mitchell's 'pictorial turn' is such a case of an 'indisciplinary' event. Countering the American philosopher Richard Rorty's 'linguistic turn', it problematises the notion that knowledge and meaning are effectively 'reducible or explicable on the model of language' (Mitchell, 1995:540-545).⁶⁹ The 'pictorial turn' re-evaluates visual paradigms (visual 'events') which may hold the potential to overturn 'discursive mastery'.⁷⁰ Thus the subject of visual culture, by employing the 'pictorial turn', is to view the relationship between images and discourse as a dialectical image – it

⁶⁸ Mitchell (1995:540-545) explains the distinction as follows: 'Unlike feminism, gender studies, or studies in race and ethnicity, it is not a political movement, not even an academic movement like cultural studies. Visuality, unlike race or gender or class, has no innate politics. Like language, it is a medium in which politics (and identification, desire, and sociability) are conducted.'

⁶⁹ Richard Rorty calls the development of Modern philosophy, and its impulses within various other disciplines of the human sciences, 'the linguistic turn' – a notion which sees society as a text; where '[n]ature and its scientific representations are "discourses"', and 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (Mitchell, 1994:11).

⁷⁰ Mitchell (1994:16) sees the 'pictorial turn' as

... a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. It is the realization that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or "visual literacy" might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality.

replaces the predominant binary opposition (word and image) with the idea of 'imagetext' (Mitchell, 1994:9).⁷¹ Mitchell (1986:43), writing on the relationship between words and images, says it reflects 'within the realm of representation, signification, and communication, the relations we posit between symbols and the world, signs and their meanings.' He explains:

⁷¹ Mitchell describes the imagetext, formerly 'word and image' dichotomy, thus:

'Word and image' is the name of a commonplace distinction between types of representation, a shorthand way of dividing, mapping, and organizing the field of representation. It is also the name of a basic cultural trope, replete with connotations that go beyond merely formal or structural differences The 'differences' between images and language are not merely formal matters: they are, in practice, linked to things like the difference between the (speaking) self and the (seen) other; between telling and showing; between 'hearsay' and 'eyewitness' testimony; between words (heard, quoted, inscribed) and objects or actions (seen, depicted, described); between sensory channels, traditions of representation, and modes of experience [W]e live in a culture of images, a society of the spectacle, a world of semblances and simulacra. (Mitchell, 1994:3, 5)

The idea of a 'simulacrum' is significant to the dichotomy of image and text; it blurs the distinction between the two components which are allied to representation and confirms both word and image as a 'trace' of each other. Postmodernity provided a context for this particular means of subversion, which was for so long (until the advent of postmodern art practice in the early 1960s) considered a threat to the understanding of representation. It translates as 'semblance', but means more than just a copy of the original. A simulacrum is not a useless second order image which propagates from the likeness of its original, it is rather, in itself, a new 'likeness'. A 'copy' is a resembling image, whereas a simulacrum suggests an image which functions outside resemblance (Camille, 1996:31-33).

Deleuze proposed the simulacrum as a likeness that is disconnected from the copy:

It harbors a positive power which denies *the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction*. At least two divergent series are internalized in the simulacrum – neither can be assigned as the original, neither as the copy There is no longer any privileged point of view except that of the object common to all points of view. There is no possible hierarchy, no second, no third The same and the similar no longer have an essence except as *simulated*, that is as expressing the functioning of the simulacrum. (Cited in Camille, 1996:33.)

Deleuze therefore understands simulacrum as an image of difference; that it internalizes dissimilarity by functioning outside of resemblance. This particular 'position' of an image of simulacrum is defined by its singularity, '... not a general form ... simulacrum is always based in the abyss, in the formless, in chaos' – simulacra exemplifies the 'event' (Lawlor, 2003:68). The simulacrum is an image of difference: it is different from the original (singularity), different in form with every repetition, and different in signifying (the simulacrum defines itself through repetition – by 'becoming', rather than 'being'). '[T]he simulacrum ... could be defined by informality. The simulacrum can never solely be defined as formless since it is a repeatable image. The diffraction therefore must occur in the *relation* between formlessness and formality [T]he relation cannot be one of homogeneity; it must be a relation of difference in itself.' (Lawlor, 2003:70)

We imagine the gulf between words and images to be as wide as the one between words and things, between (in the larger sense) culture and nature. The image is the sign that pretends not to be a sign, masquerading as (or, for the believer, actually achieving) natural immediacy and presence. The word is its 'other', the artificial, arbitrary production of human will that disrupts natural presence by introducing unnatural elements into the world – time, consciousness, history, and the alienating intervention of symbolic mediation. Versions of this gap reappear in the distinctions we apply to each type of sign in its own turn. (Mitchell, 1986:43)

Imagetext

'Imagetext' deals with the irregular relationship between verbal (literature, discourse, audition, as well as reading) and visual institutions (visual arts, media, display, and spectacles). Defining their differences is not as easy as noting that we see the one and hear the other; the nature of a viewer-reader implies that images, too, are read, and that the visual appearance of text could in fact be 'looked' at as an image (the 'tone' of type setting, a 'word pattern'). A definition of the image/text trope thus relies on an understanding of methods for interpretative analysis – a negotiation between concepts of semiotics, aesthetics, and the social – something to make the viewer-reader recognise and coordinate signs for what they stand for (Mitchell, 1996:47-56).⁷² Imagetext finds itself beyond comparison (of word and image), and accommodates the 'heterogeneity of representational structures within the field of the visible and readable' (Mitchell, 1994:88).

I wish now to turn my attention to an image by the montage artist, John Baldessari, called *The Beast Must* (see illustration 4), in order to substantiate some of the points which will be made in this section on 'imagetext'. *The Beast Must* was produced in

⁷² 'Visual culture' moves outside the traditional, modernist distinctions between image and text – theories which describe the relational problem in terms of a time / space, or nature / convention difference – referring to the dichotomy as a relationship between the iconic and the symbolic, or the single- and the double-articulated. Visual Culture is an 'image-text' enquiry.

The commonplace of modern studies of images, in fact, is that they must be understood as a kind of language; instead of providing a transparent window on the world, images are now regarded as the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparency concealing an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification (Mitchell, 1986:8).

2004 and exemplifies Baldessari's approach to image-making since the early 1970s, which involves the juxtaposing of found imagery (most notably stills from American feature films) and textual elements (under which I include his use of typographic and symbolic 'characters' – his trademark being geometric shapes). The writer Johanna Burton (2005:170) describes his body of work as an interrogation of popular visual culture that is fuelled by cultural codes – by word and image: 'Plucking such persistent anomalies from the gorged stream of free-flowing *stuff*, Baldessari's delight has consistently been in highlighting the communicative haziness immanent to every seemingly straightforward sign'.⁷³ Baldessari's images are noteworthy as examples of 'imagetext': they incorporate a symbolic language which alludes to text without using words (not counting the artist's earliest works). *The Beast Must* is both an appropriation of an image (a movie still) and text (the filmic text) – a subversion of its original context, exemplifying contemporary image-making practice. This image

⁷³ Baldessari is an appropriation artist, who utilizes found imagery from mass media fields such as television, magazines, and for the most part movies. The artist's appropriation happens not by default, but is rather a 'considered' process of image-selection and juxtaposing. If the choice and combination of images and text (or geometrical forms) seems random or accidental to the viewer, Baldessari will instead affirm that he 'plan[s] it to look accidental' (Politi, 2004:81). In fact it should seem obvious that the decision, for instance to place a *blue, circle, over a man's, face*, is determined and not haphazard.

Baldessari's visual messages strongly resonate the power of symbolic form, which is the foundation of visual language / communication. Although not immediately associated with language or writing, the geometric shapes which are ever present in all his work are syntactically arranged in order to suggest 'sentences' or dialogue. Joanna Burton (2005:170), writing on Baldessari's art, goes further in explaining: '... such "writing" was later affected by the artist's signature dots, which seemed to serve as punctuation marks (sometimes rather tautologically effacing faces [as is seen in *The Beast Must*]). Those rebus-like works prompted a kind of spontaneous word association, whereby viewers tried to "sound out" what they saw. While not wholly resistant – every one of Baldessari's works is chock-full of internal rhymes – there is ultimately no cracking the code.' It is almost as though Baldessari creates, instead of speech bubbles, communication gaps (the empty colour shapes) which come to signify the type of conversation at play in the image.

The viewer-reader bases his / her interpretation, as a process of 'decoding', on the understanding of the medium's communicative codes (I build the description of the image around my own knowledge of photographic and filmic codes), allowing him / her to recognize *The Beast Must*, a still from a movie; a staged event of a particular moment from a narrative (though I am unfamiliar with the movie from which this image was taken). The image depicts a 'hold-up' scene which takes place in, what seems to me, a drawing room or a reception room of an old mansion. Four characters are present in the frame, of which three are disfigured by flat, coloured shapes. The title of the work makes reference to the orange figure, filling most of the pictorial space left-of-centre, whose shape signifies that of a monster or beast. The narrative arising from this still-scene will unquestionably differ for every viewer-reader, which is the delight of Baldessari's 'dialogue games' (I suspect it would be disappointing if the viewer-reader were to recognize the original context of the image and base his / her interpretation on that known outcome). If, however, the image were read as a visual message or sentence (as Burton suggests), as a kind of integrated subtitle, and the viewer-reader were to accept the blue dot as the message's 'full-stop', the outcome in most cases would probably read: *The Beast Must ... die*.

brings to the surface the uneasy question with which visual culture is currently faced: is our visual reality indeed nonindexical?

Postmodernism proclaims a cultural visibility which is established by 'iconicity'. 'It is no longer a question of imitation, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself. ... Illusion is no longer possible because the real is no longer possible.' (Baudrillard cited in Camille, 1996:38.) The index has disappeared as a result of simulacra.⁷⁴ 'Nonindexicality' thus poses the problem of *what* is still regarded as visually 'real' and whether or not the postmodern viewer-reader finds it necessary to think or read 'analogically'.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Baldessari's image is essentially a photograph (an indexical sign which constitutes a message without a code; photographs are motivated signs because of their analogical quality – see footnote 17), but, because of the iconic attributes (it is necessary to separate each – *The, Beast, Must*) its indexical modality is contested. His introduction of 'unmotivated' signs (the flat coloured silhouettes and shapes which suggest reading symbols) are not the only features which orientate the photographic still towards functioning mainly as iconic; there are also stylistic and technical aspects which aid in this respect (saturation and tonal quality of the film still's colours, as well as the format of the shot – not widescreen). Mitchell (1986:80) makes reference to Ernst Gombrich's, definition of the nature-convention distinction (motivation): '... pictorial representation ... is a complex process involving stylized "schemata", a vocabulary of conventional forms that must be manipulated in their own terms before any "matching" [correspondence] to visible appearance can occur'.

Such 'schemata' can be identified with Roland Barthes' two elements of photographs: the *studium* and *punctum*. The former describes the element of the photograph which is obvious and coded, while the latter refers to the indexical sign's idiosyncratic, obtuse 'third meaning' (see footnote 50) (Wiseman, 2003:22). (For more on Barthes' notion of 'obtuse meaning', refer to *Camera Lucida* (1980).)

In terms of Baldessari's photomontage accessing simulacra:

Contemporary artists, with their increasingly visible debt to the surrealist marvellous and to the tradition of the fantasmagoric uncanny in photography, are constantly revealing that the concept of the simulacrum is capable of reacting to and shaping ideas and not just repeating them in a self-indulgent play of Baudrillardian mirrors [A]rtistic productions of the past decade [are] related to this turn away from external representation towards the realm of felt experience, simulating not an illusion of the real but affirming the whole realm of 'sensation' ... (Camille, 1996:41).

⁷⁵ Before postmodernism overturned all understanding of 'resemblance' (through visual simulacra), the sign-type seen to be most difficult to assimilate was the 'icon'; 'An object resembles itself to the maximum degree but rarely represents itself; resemblance, unlike representation is reflexive' (Goodman, 1969:4). Umberto Eco says: '... *iconism is not a single phenomenon*, nor indeed a uniquely semiotic one. It is a collection of phenomena bundled together under an all-purpose label *It is the very notion of the sign which is untenable* and which makes the derived notion of "iconic sign" so puzzling'. (Cited in Mitchell, 1986:57.) (The linguistic theorist, Jonathan Culler, also regards the 'icon' as a concern of philosophical theory rather than a semiotic problem – refer to his *Structuralist Poetics*, 1975.)

Baudrillard suggests that the postmodern passes beyond representational forms of icon, image, and symbol, where hermeneutic truth is finally

Barbara Stafford (1999:2) describes analogy as 'born of the human desire to achieve union with that which one does not possess, it is also a passionate process marked by fluid oscillations'. It is precisely this dynamic within a particular dichotomy, the relentless move or cross-over from meaning to confusion (and back again), which describes the functioning of 'imagetext'.⁷⁶ The unremitting, transference between meanings that we understand and those we do not, fuels the counter-dynamics underlying any representative system and interpretative mode.⁷⁷

In dealing with a transaction or transference between text and image, we are confronted with a form of reading.⁷⁸ To draw an analogy means to reason from parallel ends / opposite sides and enable a correspondence. It is during a moment of translation that similarity, and meaning as a result, manifests between counter-parts. Language is seen as the area in which analogy predominantly functions, and analogy depends on the conventional use of figures of speech to be of any value in the process of making meaning.⁷⁹ Someone like Stafford (1999:3), however, proposes

determined in the mirror of 'nature'. He urges us to engage with an aesthetic and cultural space where the real and the imaginary are confounded in the same operational totality ... [involving] a kind of subliminal perception, a kind of sixth sense for faker, montage, scenarios (Bhabha, 1996:311)

⁷⁶ 'Imagetext' is comparable to analogy: 'As imaginative *insight*, it recognizes in something unfamiliar, alien, something familiar; a correspondence, not a comparison. When people make analogies, either they perceive some aspects of two different structures as similar or they perceive one situation in terms of another' (Stafford, 1996:208).

⁷⁷ In her book, *Visual Analogy: consciousness as the art of connecting*, Barbara Stafford refers to Georg Simmel's essay *Flirtation*, and uses this term 'flirting' to describe a connection between 'having and not having' (visual analogy):

Perceiving the lack of something – whether physical, emotional, spiritual, or intellectual – inspires us to search for an approximating resemblance to fill its place Denial and accommodation, retreat and advance, absence and presence – just like the teasing interplay of the flirt's alternative tactics – mark the *capriccio* dynamics of analogy's jumps from antithesis to synthesis and then back again (1999:2).

⁷⁸ 'Visual culture' is a form of awareness about the nature of representation, as well as the implications of 'reading' analogously:

Perhaps the redemption of the imagination lies in the fact that we create much of our world out of the dialogue between verbal and pictorial representations, and that our task is not to renounce this dialogue in favour of the direct assault on nature but to see that nature already informs both sides of the conversation (Mitchell, 1986:46).

⁷⁹ Semiotics as a whole challenges the idea of literal representation and interpretation. The structuralist notion of the mechanics of a sign is that signifiers determine whether a representation appears literal or figurative, while the signifieds denote (literally) or connote (laterally) meaning when signs are interpreted. This makes sense in terms of what the

that '... both the propositional and the participatory varieties of analogy are inherently visual', and makes the claim '... that the visual arts are singularly suited to provide explanatory power for the nature and function of the analogical procedure'.

The best way to describe a visual analogy would be: '... the vision of ordered relationships articulated as similarity in difference' (Stafford 1999:9). As a form of dialectics, it creates the possibility for bridging the gap between what we think we know and what we would like to know; a mental picture or visualization of the unknown. Knowledge, we believe, is a result of the exploitation and understanding of abstractions. However, as Stafford protests, visual analogy should not be considered a device that we use to make singular connections, appoint meaning, and ultimately

'linguistic turn' of literary theory believes to be the purpose of rhetorical forms: that language never functions as a neutral medium, and through our choice of words we determine the outcome, and consequently meaning, of our realities. Discourse is always rhetorical (Chandler, 2002:124). Even if the language in question is a visual form of communication, such as body language, it remains important that 'form' not be separated from 'content'. Abstract concepts, like for instance, 'love' or 'melancholy', have no singular form to denote their meaning, and are therefore signified through connotative signs that employ figures of speech, or tropes.

Figures of speech are substitutions, and differ from each other depending on the type of substitution made. The role, for example, of the signifier in a metaphorical sign, is to substitute its denotative signified with a different signified. Figurative speech, and most notably metaphors, enable us to understand something in terms of something else, or as Daniel Chandler (2002:127) puts it: '... metaphor expresses an abstraction in terms of a well-defined model'. This well-defined model is another way of describing what is known in literary terms as the secondary subject or vehicle (see footnote 16). Only through resemblance and familiarity can the vehicle suggest the meaning of an expression or primary subject. If a metaphor does not resemble something which is familiar or conditioned, or if its signifying function becomes habit, it no longer acts as figurative speech ('dead metaphors'). 'It is important that the implications of the metaphors we employ or accept are made *explicit* and the way in which they structure our thought and even our action are better understood.' (Sarup, 1993:50)

Chandler (2002:233) writes: 'In semiotic terms, a metaphor involves one signified acting as a signifier referring to a rather different signifier. Since metaphors apparently disregard "literal" or denotative resemblance they can be seen as symbolic as well as iconic'. Visual metaphors also involve the function of 'meaning transference' between unrelated concepts, where qualities of one sign are transferred to another. Symbolic in nature, as well as varying from culture to culture, metaphors are conventional and utilized as 'clusters' for figurative expression. Their abundant use implies that all metaphors eventually turn habitual and convert to cultural myths.

A culture of the visual, as is postmodernism, cannot avoid the employment of rhetorical tropes to aid in shaping its reality. Derrida firmly believed that language cannot be removed from 'metaphoricity' (which draws attention to both similarity and difference); it works through tropes and figures to create fiction: 'Language works by means of transference from one kind of reality to another and is thus essentially metaphorical' (Sarup, 1993:47). Deconstruction, as its nature of displacement would suggest, stresses the complexity of metaphor by highlighting the 'difference' at work in signification. Metaphors have the ability to disrupt the logic of an argument, and in doing so promote unexpected analogies (Sarup, 1993:51).

accept as a means for solving / making meaningful something – it is not inherent in language regimes. Analogy is a form of exchange: '[A] metamorphic and metaphoric for weaving discordant particulars into a partial concordance, spur[ring] the imagination to discover similarities and dissimilarities' (Stafford, 1999:9).

The purpose of visual analogy is to reciprocate by means of resemblance; it is a case of making associations. The question is whether a postmodern consciousness at all requires, if everything is to some extent already connected (supplemented, and read intertextually), such a need to develop mental categories?⁸⁰ Stafford (1999:178) affirms: '... unlike the interpretative extremes typical of postmodern deconstructionism, the classical theory of analogy does not claim that, for the healthy mind, everything means almost anything or necessarily possesses a similarity to everything else'.

Postmodernism has deemed analogy's reciprocation superfluous, and has instead opted for an ambiguous approach to making connections and visualizing society.⁸¹ The nature of the postmodern image is to emphasize inconsequential repetition, transform reality into images, as well as transform content into style / convention (Sarup 1993:130-133). Ambiguous connections, which cloud our intuition when

⁸⁰ Of 'intertextuality', and subsequently appropriation, Mieke Bal (1994:200-201) says:

The term *intertextuality* ... refers to the ready-made quality of linguistics – and, one can add, visual – signs, that a writer or image-maker finds available in the earlier texts that a culture has produced The concept of intertextuality ... implies precisely that: the sign taken over, because it is a sign, comes with a meaning. Not that the later artist necessarily endorses that meaning; but she will inevitably have to deal with it: reject or reverse it, ironize it, or simply, often unawares, insert it in the new text.

⁸¹ Postmodern art functions ambiguously by contravening conventional ways of expressing and reading. Much like Lyotard, Umberto Eco (1989: xi) sees ambiguity as a result of the 'event'. Primarily dependent on 'organic form' (achieved through conscious changes made to amorphous matter), ambiguity questions the reader's involvement in interpretation; it insists that reading should not be restricted to a single interpretation, and is found during stages of violation of visual codes. The purpose of organic form is to reveal a type of knowledge regarding the representation of the world. (Refer to Eco's *The Open Work*, 1989, for more on the topics of 'open work' and 'organic form'.) On the account of ambiguity in postmodern art, art historian, Sean Connor (1997:96-97), writes:

One of the signs of this openness to that which lies beyond the self-absorbed work, is the unabashed return to representation, symbolism, connotation, and all the other forms of referentiality [P]ostmodernist allegory does not allow us to be sure of what the main story is, nor what the underlying myth may be that it alludes to.

visualizing, are what Stafford refers to as 'disanalogy', or as allegory.⁸² She explains: 'I call this massive cultural implosion ... allegory, to indicate its literary origins within a negative hermeneutics'. (Stafford 1999:3)

Even though analogy and allegory both function as methods to relate parts to wholes, as well as the visible to the invisible, they are still distinguishable. Allegory falls under the category of rhetorical devices, including forms of irony, enigma, and mystery.⁸³ It has a misleading nature: because of its inability to function indexically, it describes something completely different from what was originally intended; it is an overstatement as a result of 'overcoding'.⁸⁴ Allegory is affirmed by displacement, and

⁸² 'Without a sophisticated theory of analogy, there is only the negative dialectics of difference, ending in the unbreachable impasse of pretended assimilation or the self-enclosed insistence on absolute identity with no possibility for meaningful communication.' (Stafford 1999:51)

⁸³ Mitchell (1986:43) writes the following on allegory: 'A picture may articulate abstract ideas by means of allegorical imagery, a practice which... approaches the notational procedures of writing systems'.

⁸⁴ In his book, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Eco explains that the entire series of stylistic and rhetorical rules which operates in language consists of forms of 'overcoding' – 'all iconological entities are the result of overcoding' (1976:134). The idea of overcoding, however, is best explained in terms of Barthes' 'three messages': the 'linguistic message', 'coded iconic' or denotative message, and the 'non-coded iconic' or connoted message (also, see Barthes' 'framework for reading' under the section *Writing the image*).

In order to understand a linguistic message, a reader is required to have knowledge of the language in which it is offered, since it may contain a second-order signifier (such as dialogue in a speech bubble). The movie-still image in Baldessari's *The Beast Must*, is on its own a non-coded (undercoded) iconic message which functions on the level of denotation (a highly motivated indexical sign). Baldessari's subversives (the juxtaposed, colour cut-out shapes), however, steer the image toward being a coded iconic message – the image is now unmotivated, and the viewer-reader must insist on his / her cultural knowledge of shape and colour symbolism in order to decode *The Beast Must* (not many viewers will associate the blue dot with a 'full-stop').

Codification is a process (similar to 'myth') by which conventions are established – we understand codes as being both historically and socially progressive. Eco (1979:135-136) defines codification as follows:

[U]ndercoding may be defined as the operation by means of which in the absence of reliable pre-established rules, certain macroscopic portions of certain texts are provisionally assumed to be pertinent units of a code in formation, even though the combinational rules governing the more basic compositional items of the expression, along with the corresponding content-units, remain unknown [O]vercoding proceeds *from existing codes to more analytical sub-codes* while undercoding proceeds *from non-existent codes to potential codes*.

(An example of overcoding is the décor of *The Beast Must*'s setting, of undercoding, Cy Twombly's 'scribbles'.)

delimits the possibility of similarity between the sign and referent. In refusing potential asymmetric relations, as Stafford explains it, allegory must be regarded as heightened 'disanalogy': '... instead of focusing on characteristics that two or more items share, [allegory] insists on what they do not share' (1999:63).⁸⁵

The German literary and cultural critic, Walter Benjamin, describes allegory as a label given to something that has been deprived of its function (and therefore meaning) once the allegorist removes and isolates it from the context of reality. These meaningless fragments, pooled in a sort of 'allegorist library', can be selected, and paired, to create new meaning. This of course is posited meaning, as the original context of the fragments no longer has effect.⁸⁶ Benjamin also associates the characteristics of allegory with the idea of montage, knowing that the reader connects the process of recombining image fragments – to create a new image with different meanings – with post-modernity's idea of the 'fragmentation of reality' (Sarup 1993:147-148).

Analogy, on the other hand, is located in the same category as simile, conclusively labelled as a strategy for distinction.⁸⁷ Regarding it as a feature of visualization, Stafford writes:

In contrast to the intrinsic textuality and nonrepresentational abstractness of allegory ... analogy is a demonstrative or evidentiary practice – putting the visible into relationship with the invisible and manifesting the effect of that momentary unison. From the iconophilic perspective, the earthly or natural image establishes a temporary resemblance with a hidden mystery that one

⁸⁵ Allegory, as a device for making associations, turns not only into a metaphysical problem in Western philosophy (to bridge 'being' and 'non-being'), but also a question of cultural perspectives: 'The allegorical turn is closely allied to the spread of cynicism, the ironization of social conventions from top to bottom that intensified during and after the Enlightenment' (Stafford 1999:71).

⁸⁶ Posited meaning, or a re-contextualization is a result of 'myth' – a second order of signification (see footnote 57). Its operation of reinvention (of first meaning to a second designated meaning), makes 'myth' easily replaceable with the idea of 'appropriation'. Appropriation, in visual art, refers to the artist's incorporation of pre-existing images and texts into his / her own work, with the purpose of creating a new sign / myth. In combination with allegory, appropriation '... locates both in the person of the maker and the receiver [It] can be perception itself, the response to things seen, or even memory, the mind's reconstruction of the past' (Nelson, 1996:118, 120).

⁸⁷ Of similes, Stafford (1999:61) writes: 'The capacity to generalize to new objects from those already encountered is based on perceiving common traits and matching them to a shared category'.

cannot otherwise see. All of analogy's simile-generating figures are thus incarnational. They materialize, display, and disseminate an enigma that escapes words (1999:23-24).

From the above description of visual analogy, it becomes obvious that Stafford views analogy as a kind of uncanny force that is capable of defining and uniting divides. She also calls analogy a 'key feature of discernment', a form of perceptual judgement which directly influences our understanding or experiencing of intangible sensations.⁸⁸ 'Analogy's efficacy consists not simply in communicating what already exists but, like consciousness, in visibly bringing forth what, in fact, it communicates.' (Stafford, 1999:175)

The figural trope, the features of which lie closest to the definition of 'visual analogy', is metonymy. Whereas metaphor is associated with non-relation, the function of metonymy is to relate closely associated signifieds – to form indexical relations.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Such a statement irrefutably connects with ideas around the 'sublime'. The possibility of visualizing and describing emotions, experiences, the 'unpresentable', or the essence of a thing is something which preoccupies theories about art in Jean-Francois Lyotard's writing. His concept of the sublime derives from the philosopher's, Immanuel Kant's, theories of aesthetics. Kant's aesthetic experience is separated into 'beauty' and the 'sublime', as linguist, Simon Malpas, summarises: 'Beauty is a feeling or harmony between oneself and that object: it appears perfectly shaped for one's perception and generates a sense of well being. With the sublime, the response is more complex. One is simultaneously attracted and repelled by the object, enthralled by it and also horrified' (2003:46). Lyotard's view of postmodern art is that it testifies to the 'sublime', presenting the unpresentable. It is art that disrupts established artistic structures (of content and modes of presentation), and undermines the traditional role of the viewer-reader (think, for instance, of forms such as performance art) (Malpas, 2003:49-50). The literary theorist, Bill Readings (1991:74), frames Postmodern art as follows:

[It] does not seek a truth at all but seeks to testify to an event to which no truth can be assigned, that cannot be made the object of a conceptual representation [P]ostmodernism seeks to testify to the event without recourse to the concept that would reduce its eventhood to unity and fixity.

⁸⁹ Daniel Chandler (2002:130) finds the following description of metonymy the clearest: '... metonymy is *the evocation of the whole by a connection*. It consists in using for the name of a thing or a relationship, an attribute, a suggested sense, or closely related, such as effect for cause ... the imputed relationship being that of *contiguity*'. The indexicality of metonyms suggests that they are directly connected to reality (degrees of modality), while iconicity and symbolism are features usually associated with metaphor and the transpositioning of connoted meanings (Chandler, 2002:132).

A second term which creeps up during discussions of connections made by 'parts-to-whole', is synecdoche, understood as sufficiently part of a signifier to indicate its entire signified:

While indexical relations in general reflect the closest link which a signifier can be seen as having with a signified, the *part-whole* relations of synecdoche reflects the most direct link of all. That which is seen as forming

The outline of the orange figure in *The Beast Must* is precisely such a metonymical feature. Not only does the viewer-reader connect its ragged-looking outline and pointed extensions to the typical delineation of monsters or a 'big, hairy beast', but he / she also understands the shape to represent what the title implies in terms of its size-relation to the other symbols – it is *the* part which points to the narrative. The different use of colour, and its relation to the particular symbol-shapes which they form, again, has metaphorical implementation, because colours carry varied cultural symbolic values.

Indexicality, which functions as or through metonymy, reasserts the role of the author / image-maker. Regarding his / her position in the signifying chain, Mieke Bal writes:

What the author-function enables is the closure of the chain ... but by the 'shape of convergence' that constitutes metonymic accounts. The idea of contextual factors that eventually converge and terminate in the artwork is what produces the 'author' here: an usher gathering in the various causal strands or chains, before the work. The author is needed not to open the work but to close it (1994:156).

Bal goes further, explaining that, for metonymy to be narratable (and by this she means understandable / significant, because the figures of metonymy, although contiguous, can also associate endlessly) it requires two moments: that of 'inauguration' and that of 'closure'. Inauguration refers to the essential function of the narrator-viewer-reader, who recognizes metonymic features, and so starts to decode the message / translate the narrative. Closure, as we have just learnt, is a decision made by the image-maker (author); closure implies the end of the narrative even before inauguration takes place. John Baldessari's decisions about line and colour values ascribe to the idea of closure; those choices undoubtedly affect the outcome of the viewer-reader's interpretation, and these include aspects that form part of the work's contextual framing.

part of a larger whole to which it refers is connected *existentially* to what is signified – as an integral part of its being (Chandler, 2002:133).

Because both metonymy and synecdoche are features of contiguity, the two terms are subsumed as the same thing. If we consider reading *The Beast Must* as a linguistic message (as suggested in footnote 70), then the blue 'full-stop' dot functions as a form of synecdoche; as a part (a reading-symbol) which refers to the whole (a 'sentence' of the narrative's dialogue) – it suggests a line of speech.

As we saw earlier (under *Writing the Image*), an image's title is considered part of the components which describe its context. My feeling about an image's title is that it constitutes the most deliberate metonymic figure of the entire narrative or signifying chain. I am referring specifically to its function as an aspect of the image, as a system of signs; not to its position as a sign vehicle – for which it can also work metaphorically. A work's title is compliant with its *parergon* (the contextual framing) and functions either as anchorage or relay, being a form of intra-text. The title, *The Beast Must*, inaugurates (I am presuming that, for most people, a title is the initial entry point into the work) the visual discourse, giving way to intertextual / associative activity.⁹⁰

Baldessari's exclusion, or 'erasure', of pictorial detail emphasizes the fact that his works deal with the 'presence of absence' – the reminiscence of a 'trace'; either of a person, an object, or a conversation.⁹¹ It is almost as though the absence of his characters better confers their identities, and hints at underlying narratives. In revealing this implicitness to the viewer-reader, Baldessari is in effect 'drawing' into visibility the narrative's inter-text. The emptiness of the cut-out shapes infers the vastness of their significance.

In the end, Baldessari's subversives function both allegorically and analogically. The symbolic attributes of their forms, particularly the colour, affirm their role as metaphors for the identities of the characters on which they are imposed (he is 'blue in the face' and she, 'green with envy'). Each colour's analogical contribution is specific to the message which is construed in the characters' relationship (the story will end, full-stop, in a cold-blooded manner), yet, simultaneously, allegorically

⁹⁰ I should like to point out that I am not giving precedence to the meanings generated from a title over that of an image, and I am completely aware of the fact that metonymic action can take form in a reverse manner – where the image itself functions as an inaugurator. I agree with the conceptual artist, Maurizio Cattelan, when he says: 'The hierarchical relationship between the title and work is never clear: which generates which is never a given – when interpreted, this conjunction is always displaced' (Bonami, 2003:50). My own practical work is an example of such inaugural interchange; the relationship between the image and the title will be discussed in Part Two.

⁹¹ Baldessari says the following of the psychology of absence:

You're left wanting to know things like, "What do their faces look like?" ... if there's something psychological about that, it's that there's a human need to edit one's surroundings. For example, we're in a hotel room: I like that lamp; I don't like that chair. If I eliminated all those things I don't like, I'd have a room of my favourite things, but I'd still feel the absence of what I'd eliminated. It's about human attention. (Baldessari & Blake, 2004:163)

'outside itself' (who then is really the monster; is she envious of death, or is she just a 'neutral' bystander?).

Summation

It is difficult not to confuse analogy with allegory, or allegory with analogy when interpreting contemporary images. Both these forms of connection arrive at similar destinations: the connection of disassociated elements and the creation of new meaning – the exception being that allegory points out differences and analogy, similarities. Postmodernism, as evidence of the allegorical tradition's high point, is not interested in uncovering similarities. It sources differences and creates problems in order to prevent singular truths; allegory's proliferation in turn-of-the-century art is thus unsurprising. Stafford's (1996:202-203) appeal to revitalize 'indexicality' is met without dissension:

Today, not only has similarity vanished from the academic, cultural, and social spectrum in the single-minded drive to reify separateness, but the very concept has become eclipsed by postmodernism's embrace of a "logic of decay" [I]f dialectics was intended as a form of discovery used to open up questions that had not previously been conceptualized, the one area to which its adherents have not been open is the mind's positive tendency to discover affinities.

Can visual culture, reasserting the value of indexical communication, both investigate and advance the different approaches which viewer-readers take to 'reading' images, and thus allow us to investigate notions regarding our cultural position on visual literacy? 'Nonindexicality' demonstrates our inability / laziness to make visual analogies. 'Visual culture' resides in a time of information technology and mass media communication, when it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate images and words. However, Mitchell's suggestion regarding 'picturing theory', even though image/text still only functions as a subdiscipline of representation studies, has opened up a field of investigation which approaches the interpretation of images in terms of 'applied iconology'.

The relationship between image and text should be an open dialogue, but 'without either element collapsing into the other' (Brent Plate, 1997:103). In Baldessari's words:

One of the things that compels me is I can't prioritize a word over an image. It's that constant state of not being able to pick or to say that this is more important than that. They're both important. I think it's that struggle that animates a lot of what I do, that a word and an image are equally important. (Baldessari & Blake, 2004:164)

DEDUCTIONS

In relation to the 'textualization' of a society, semiotics is regarded as a theory of subjectivity. These theories, which are grounded in differentiation, aim at positing the relationships between individual and social construction, as well as the relationship between subjectivity and interpretation.⁹² Semiotic studies, in relation to image-text differences, are indisputably concerned with the function and decoding of ideologies for cultural visibility.⁹³ From a semiotic perspective, Bal (1994:189-190) states:

[I]deologies are codes that suggest or even impose particular interpretations which they present as 'natural' or otherwise inevitable Representation is not neutral because it offers ideological positions from which to interpret the world around us. When looking is constantly represented as an exercise of power and domination, then it will be practiced as such. This is why ideological coding is such a pernicious mechanism.

⁹² On semiotics as a theory of subjectivity, Bal (1994:193-194) says:

In a Peircean view, the production and reception of signs are basically a similar activity with a similar result: both receiver (interpreter, reader or viewer) and producer form interpretants ... interpretants are new meanings resulting from the signs on the basis of one's *habit*. And habits, precisely, are formed in social life. 'The individual's habit as asemiotic production is both the result and the condition of the social production of meaning' Thus, not only is experience a legitimate basis of interpretation, it is the only possible one.

⁹³ Mitchell (1986:156) strongly believes that '[semiotics] treats every graphic image as a text, a coded, intentional, and conventional sign, it threatens to blur the uniqueness of graphic images, and make them part of the seamless web of interpretable objects'.

Semiotics shows us that images are signs; they are representative modes made available for repeatability. Images, like text, support the feature of 'intertextuality' – inter-connecting meanings through paradigmatic shifts, and functioning as part of a plural, interpretative field.

The use of semiotics as a methodological approach to analyse images has in recent years been given a warm reception from the interpretative field. Barthes notes about semiotic theories for interpretation: '... [semiotics] will not teach us what meaning must be definitely attributed to a work; it will not provide or even discover a meaning but will describe the logic according to which meanings are engendered'. (Cited in Bal, 1994:159.)

For Bal the role of semiotics is an important one, as it does not primarily aid in the interpretation of images. Its objective is, in fact, to expose the 'conventions and conceptual operations that shape what viewers do' – it teaches the viewer-reader how to distinguish between that which belongs to linguistics and that which does not, and which aspects of the image's production constitute its cultural framing (Bal, 1994:159).⁹⁴

Mitchell's 'picture theory' must also be accepted as an approach for understanding contemporary visuality. Not only does it hold implications for the significance of visual culture, but also for those disciplinary activities which are involved in visual interpretation, for example, reading and visual literacy. 'Picture theory' serves as motivation for images: Mitchell demotes language's privileging status, and with 'imagetext' intends to place both parts (image and text) on the same level.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ On 'framing', Bal (1994:194) goes further to say:

Framing is something active, something people do, not a static and fixed condition out of which art emerges as if automatically A dynamic view of the sign, including the signs that constitute visual art and the discourses about it, can help to de-naturalize the exclusions that have resulted from those particular framings, as well as conversely, using framings to counter these exclusions without falling back into positivistic truth claims.

⁹⁵ 'This terminological economy [imagetext] is partly a result of my conviction that we already have an overabundance of metalanguages for representation and that no "neutral" or "scientific" vocabulary (semiotics, linguistics, discourse analysis) can transcend or master the field of representation.' (Mitchell, 1994:417)

PART TWO

IMAGE

Part Two of this thesis is a continuation of the discussion of the relationship between image and text. While the first part has demonstrated why semiotics has become the principle theory for the interpretation of images, the discussion that follows proposes notions which challenge such a perspective. Concentrating primarily on the constituents that decide the 'nature' of images, we shall discover that images are as much reflexive of themselves as they are of the visual culture that produces them.

The first part of my investigation developed a view of semiotics in a sequential fashion; the second part will present a number of dispersed notions regarding the self-knowledge of images in a somewhat interrupted manner. I have chosen to follow such a course in order to accommodate the three distinct components of my practical body of work. In order to assimilate these works into the discussion, I have selected three specific features which apply to the process of making a painting or drawing or visual narrative: the first feature concerns devices relating to 'illusionism'; the second deals with particularities (or modes) of mark-making; and the third deals with the image's ability to 'talk'.

My discussion starts with an introduction to the concept of an independent 'visual semiotics' which presupposes an alignment of visual production and cultural construction. Following from the particular points of views of two theorists, Mieke Bal and Göran Sonesson, regarding the categorization of images as 'visual signs', I argue that the constituents which they deem 'insignificant' (formal aspects and particulars of the image-making process) are, in fact, the features which define an image, as well as its predetermined context.

From the subsection entitled *Thing* onwards, my aim will be to identify and group these constituents under the concept of 'counter-semiotics'. Three main areas of representation, limited by semiotic theories for image-making, will be revealed and examined in order to substantiate such a mode of interpretation ('counter-semiotics'). These areas are methods used to create the illusion of three-dimensionality and its associated formal devices (*splendor*), graphic marks associated with Derrida's *trait*, and visual codes that are implemented for understanding narratives. This part of my

investigation aims to highlight the fact that pictures are difficult to interpret and what is perceived as a cultural 'visual literacy' is uncertain. As Stafford (1997:7) notes:

Semiotic, poststructuralist, and deconstructivist translations of the pictorial can be equally self-protective and unidirectional. Typically, these interpretative systems do not allow the 'reader' of the depiction to be changed or gain insight through an avenue of expression different from the literariness of the criticism. Derrida's perverse praise of blindness provides a case in point. Claiming that drawing is inadequate to render the 'sufferings of sight,' he extols the superiority of writing 'without seeing'.

VISUAL SEMIOTICS

Let me start by saying that there are no clearly defined theories which constitute a 'visual semiotics', and that in most cases (which we shall soon learn about) such attempts use structural methodologies for linguistics as their investigative foundation. Of the studies that have made the most notable attempts at outlining 'pictorial language', I introduce only briefly the notions of Nelson Goodman, Ernst Gombrich, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, and Göran Sonesson. My intention here is to show that the 'apparent' impact that semiotics has had on image analysis must be understood as an appropriation of its linguistic function, and that ultimately, semiotics as a methodological classification cannot be used exclusively.

To this point, I have used the word 'image' as the overall term for what we understand and describe as visual objects and texts. However, I should like from now on to substitute it with the word 'picture'. This switch may seem unnecessary, as the greater part of this discussion revolves around the *image*-text dichotomy, but for me the word 'picture' stands in closer relation to my feelings about image-making practices, and for the most part, it distances 'art-on-paper' from visual forms, such as advertising and other mass media message-mediums.⁹⁶ Moreover, the word 'picture' has a sense of the immediate indignation of a confrontational response towards the

⁹⁶ 'Picture' is thus aligned with visual recognition, 'image' with visual reception: '*Image* is fraught with issues of the propagation and reception of light rays, and it normally belongs to the discourse of vision' (Elkins, 1999:82). I assign my own art or ways of picture-making – which are drawing, miniature painting, and pencil or ink illustrations – to the realm of 'art-on-paper'.

idea of image constantly being partnered with text; 'picture-text' is unheard of. 'Picture' no longer accepts the affiliation suggested in the image-text combination, and insists on being scrutinized independently. And finally, because of Elkins' claim that, 'picture' may just be closer to 'pure visuality' than 'image'. This recognizes that the contemporary concept of images is conflicted with notions around textuality. He explains further:

There is a deep set affinity between common uses of the word *picture* and the notion that there is such a thing as a purely visual artefact, independent of writing or other symbolic means of communication. In historical writing it is unusual to encounter a discussion of such a pure object, but the ideal of a perfectly visual image is ubiquitous. The word-image dichotomy ... is an instance of this sense of *picture*: without a reasonably pure kind of visuality to set against writing, the dichotomy itself would be in trouble. (1999:54-55)

Elkins notes that pictures maintain a certain 'duality' in terms of their communicative, expressive and signification values. In terms of the translation of a picture, 'duality' explains the understanding of 'picture' as a conjuncture of both 'purely visual' (where 'image', or the interpretation thereof, comes undone from associations with writing or semiotic translation), and 'visual sign' (in possessing an 'articulated internal structure of signs', the image poses the possibility of being 'read' – as discussed in Part One) (Elkins, 1999:55). Barthes is an example of a theorist who approaches image analysis in this manner, ensuring a reading in which duality comes into play (see 'interpretation' and 'third meaning' in the section entitled 'Writing the Image').

Let us focus for the moment on the concept of pictures as 'visual signs' by looking at two theorists who argue such a stance for representations – they are Mieke Bal and Göran Sonesson. Bal's interest in understanding pictures as signs, projects from her writing about pictorial narrative codes and her fascination with picture contexts (for example, history museums; refer to *Looking In: The Art of Viewing*, 1994). Her first attempt to connect pictures with signs appears in *Semiotics and Art History*, an article featured in *Art Bulletin* in 1991, co-authored by Norman Bryson. 'Visual semiotics', according to their understanding, is a 'transdisciplinary theory' (which Bal later changes to 'suprasemiotic' theory), confined to the particularities of cultural framing –

of 'contexts' (Bal, 1994:143-144).⁹⁷ In *Semiotics and Art History*, Bal and Bryson quote Jonathan Culler:

Since the phenomena criticism deals with are signs, forms with socially constituted meanings, one might try to think not of context but of the framing of signs: how are signs constituted (framed) by various discursive practices, institutional arrangements, systems of value, semiotic mechanisms? (Cited in Bal, 1994:141.)

In Bal's view, semiosis is the process which describes the particular 'movement' of signs from one cultural context to another – afflicting the 'combinatory knowledge' of social and textual codes (see footnote 49).⁹⁸ To think of semiosis as a process, '... is to conceive the sign *not as a thing but as an event*, the issue not being to delimit and isolate the one sign from other signs, but to trace the possible emergence of the sign in a concrete situation, as an event in the world' (Bal, 1994:177). 'Sign-events' insist on an interpretative behaviour which is culturally framed, procured on the basis of 'the fundamental polysemy of signs and the subsequent very possibility of dissemination' (Bal, 1994:203).⁹⁹

⁹⁷ *Semiotics and Art History* was republished, in its entirety, as the third part of Bal's 1994 book *On Meaning-making: Essays in Semiotics*, page 137-203.

Visual and verbal contexts intervene: Norman Bryson associates the plurality of reading and signification with the polysemy of desire. Bryson regards reading, as Bal (2003:63) explains it, as 'the messy but also hierarchical mixture of discourses that is constitutive of visuality', explaining that text (also visual text) has a 'hunger' or desire to move from one context / picture to the next'. (2003:62-66) (Refer to Bryson's *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (1990), *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation* (1991), and *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (1993), for a thorough consideration of his attention to semiotics.)

⁹⁸ On the repeatability of signs, Bal (1994:149) comments:

They enter into a plurality of contexts; works of art are constituted by different viewers in different ways at different times and places. The production of signs entails a fundamental split between the enunciation and the enunciated: not only between the person, the subject of enunciation, and what is enunciated, but between the circumstances of enunciation and what is enunciated, which can never coincide The idea of convergence, of causal chains moving towards the work of art, should, in the perspective of semiotics, be supplemented by another shape: that of lines of signification opening from the work of art, in the permanent diffraction of reception.

⁹⁹ 'Derrida's concept of dissemination is the most radical endorsement of the view that no interpretation can be privileged over any other', writes Bal (1994:202).

More specifically, for the discussion here on visual semiotics, Bal divides the features of pictures and picture-making into three classes: there is the visual / semiotic sign (those that are properly called signs, for example, in Baldessari's *The Beast Must*, the green and orange symbol-shapes, and the entire film-still photograph); visual 'subsemiotics'; and 'suprasemiotic' or 'holistic' signs.

Although no implicit meaning is usually attributed to them, 'subsemiotic' features play an informative role in advancing the viewer-reader's interpretation of the work. They include formal devices such as 'stylistic variation, light and dark, composition, or mere technical aspects like brushstrokes, paint thickness, and lines' (Bal cited in Elkins, 1998:4). I attribute the features of 'subsemiotics', based on Bal's description thereof, to the particular visual sign-making process (or individual form of expression) of every artist.¹⁰⁰ 'Subsemiotic' units are not signs, says Bal: 'At one extreme there are the subsemiotic technical aspects of the works of art [T]hey all contribute to the construction of signs, ... [but] are not, a priori, signs in themselves; not any more than in a literary text sheer ink on a page, mere punctuation marks, and syntactic structures are' (1991:400).¹⁰¹ And she (1991:401) elaborates:

[T]he compound sign will be subdivided into discrete units, and this division will become a gesture at best either of articulation or of slicing up, delimiting, what adds up to the whole. This subdivision is held more acceptable for verbal than for visual art; indeed, the distinction between the two is often based on the very assumption that verbal works are composed of discrete units whereas visual works are 'dense'.

¹⁰⁰ I regard the blue dot in Baldessari's *The Beast Must* as a 'subsemiotic' entity – recognized as a geometric symbol with a particular or conventional form, it carries no meaning (other than 'round'), unless it is placed in relation to other elements which would ascribe value to it (we learnt that the blue dot comes to denote a 'full-stop' for a suggested dialogue between the symbol-shapes in the scene of *The Beast Must* (see footnote 72)). Baldessari's dot features routinely in his pictures. Assuming that the viewer-reader understands it as a reading-symbol (full-stop), and only so because of its function in Baldessari's entire body of work, it turns from a 'subsemiotic' feature into meaningful 'sign'.

¹⁰¹ 'Subsemiotics' may seem to suggest a form of visual 'phoneme'. Sonesson (2005:48) clarifies:

For a long time ... semioticians tried to demonstrate the existence of some kind of minimal unit of pictorial meaning, sometimes termed *iconeme*, which was supposed to have no meaning of its own, but served to discriminate the meaning of larger wholes, just as phonemes do in relation to words or morphemes. Eco (1968) ... who was an early proponent of this conception, even went so far... as to suggest the existence of something similar to a *double articulation*

The idea of referring to a picture as something which is 'dense', issues from the American philosopher, Nelson Goodman. He distinguishes between symbolic schemes and symbolic systems. As interpreted by Charles Nussbaum: 'A *scheme* is a syntax-governed class of symbols, [while] a *system* is a symbolic scheme that is semantically interpreted', concluding that 'writing' is a form of scheme, and 'image' a type of system (2003:144-145).¹⁰² Goodman clarifies his distinction by opposing linguistic denotation, or 'description' (again aligned with writing or 'scheme'), with pictorial denotation – or 'representation' (Nussbaum, 2003:145). Bal (1994:178) describes Goodman's 'representation' as 'the result of the particular form of notation that pictures use (the notation of pictures, as opposed to that of schematic diagrams, being "dense" and "replete")'.¹⁰³

In his description of Goodman's theories, Nussbaum makes it clear that symbolism in visual art is not at all notational (neither syntactically, nor semantically), which goes against what Bal says (2003:146). We must, however, remember that Bal does not regard the kind of features which allude to 'notation' to be symbolic or significant – in her case notation functions more like 'subsemiotics'. From what Mitchell says about it, I assume that density is associated with the 'holistic' aspects of the pictorial sign (writing is a form of a 'differentiated symbol system'):

The image is syntactically and semantically dense in that no mark may be isolated as a unique, distinctive character (like a letter or an alphabet), nor can it be assigned a unique reference Its meaning depends rather on its relation with all the other marks in a dense, continuous field A differentiated symbol system, by contrast, is not dense and continuous, but works by gaps and discontinuities (1986:67).

¹⁰² Charles Nussbaum, associate professor of philosophy at the University of Texas at Arlington, has published papers on the philosophy of mind, aesthetics and the history of modern philosophy (Murray, 2003:xv).

¹⁰³ Goodman uses the word 'marks' as the singular term which refers to all visible elements, units, or gestures from which the criteria of 'notation' is developed. Furthermore, marks can only be understood once we are able to assign them to a type of 'character' (Elkins, 1999:69). Cy Twombly's marks are perfect examples of things in which we try and find recognizable forms: the scribble (mark) has meaning only once it is recognized as a character (for example a 'step-diagram', as we saw in footnote 53). 'Notation' is used to refer to the correspondence between marks and characters (a syntactical relation, which is the first criterion), as well as the correspondence between characters and what they denote – their 'compliance' (a semantic relation; second criterion) (Elkins, 1999:69).

Bal's exposition of subsemiotics brings us back to the question whether pictures hold the ability to function according to the feature of double articulation in language (as discussed in Part One). Her statement, '[subsemiotics] are not, a priori, signs in themselves', affirms a disbelief in such a possibility (1991:400). Only 'suprasemiotic' or 'holistic' signs uphold all the features which culminate in forming the picture sign; the latter is the means by which the picture becomes meaningful and 'contextualized' ('culturally framed', to put it simply). And once contextualized, the picture sign presents a conflation of visual and verbal signs. At such a point, the viewer-reader is presented with an opportunity to deconstruct the picture (Bal, 1991:400-401).

If 'suprasemiotics' is regarded as Bal's name for deconstruction, it must be noted that her outlook differs completely from the Derridean implementation.¹⁰⁴ Deconstruction is not limitless or multi-contextual, as Derrida would assert; rather, it occurs within a personal or contained contextual 'field'. Assessing Bal's approach to deconstruction, Bryson (2003:17-18) says:

Works of art cannot, Bal argues, signify indefinitely in all directions, for the reason that it is *particular* viewers who activate their potential, in their specific circumstances. Meaning-making is an activity that always occurs within a pre-existing social field, and power relations: the social frame does not 'surround' but is *part* of the work, working inside it The meaning of a work of art does not ... reside in the work itself but rather in the specific performances that take place in the work's 'field': rather than a property the work has, meaning is an event or an enactment.

Semiotics, for Bal, is a theory of spectatorship, and her visual investigations are acute to the causality of pictures – how they turn into pictorial signs ('suprasemiotics'). Pictures need to be articulated as signs of the *present*; they need not reject the effects of the past, but pertain, first of all, to the contemporary field of

¹⁰⁴ Of Goodman's position on deconstruction, Mitchell (1994:349-350) states:

Although Goodman is generally critical of deconstruction, which he sees as an unlimited relativism, incapable of discerning rightness, he recognizes it as part of the context which enables his own work. Irrealism overturns 'dogma', 'prevailing faith', 'myth', and 'ideology', yet it also participates in a new, emergent consensus. It provides, we may say, both a cognitive revelation and a new set of habitual conventions and commonplaces.

But 'irrealism' (of which 'density' and 'repleteness' make part), warns Mitchell (1994:350), will similarly absorb deconstruction: 'Insofar as irrealism "supplants" realism, the answer is clearly no. Like realism, irrealism must overturn superstition and ideology, provide stable cognitive and symbolic categories, and offer revelations of new understanding.'

visual culture: 'Rather than being a relay conveying an intention from artist to viewer, the work is thus an occasion for a performance in the "field" of its meaning – where no single performance is "capable of actualizing or totalizing all of the work's semantic potential"' (Bal cited in Bryson, 2003:16). Even while being reflective of their past-held meaning, all pictures are of the present and attribute to a process of re-contextualization.

There are other theorists who also regard the development of pictorial semiotics, and semiosis in general, as an incomplete process. Göran Sonesson (2004:28) believes that visual semiotics found its way into the cultural context by way of perceptual psychology, and that 'pictorial semiotics is concerned with the *place of pictures* within the process making [of] the human being ... as well as with the position taken by pictures in different historical given societies'.¹⁰⁵ Sonesson's (2004:42-43) final definition of pictorial semiotics holds:

Pictorial semiotics, then, could well be conceived as that particular branch of semiotics which is concerned to determine in which way the picture sign is similar and different from other signs and meanings, in particular as far as its relationship to other iconic and / or visual meanings are [sic] concerned; and which is also called upon to analyse the systematic ways in which signs which are pictures may yet differ from each other, thus, for instance, as to construction, socially intended effects, channels of circulation, and configurational kinds.

As we see, Sonesson also foregrounds the problem of iconicity. His simplification of Peirce's 'icon' reads: '[A]n icon is a sign in which the "thing" serving as expression in

¹⁰⁵ Of the relation between perceptual psychology and pictures, Sonesson claims that pictures result from thinking 'visually' or 'pictorially', which runs deeper than it is suggested by Gestalt psychology:

[The] graphic act, by means of which figures are created on surfaces (giving rise to writing as well as pictures) is a specific type of cognitive operation, a dual kind, which could more in particular be called a semiotic operation: one which requires us to separate clearly that by means of which the thinking is done from that about which something is thought (2004:72).

And he adds:

I emphasize the basically perceptual nature of the picture sign, and expound some of the consequences of this observation, invoking the testimony of contemporary perceptual psychology, and of philosophical and phenomenological theories of perception. (Sonesson, 2004:52)

one respect or another is similar to, or shares properties with, another “thing”, which serves as its content’ (Sonesson, 2005b:7). Sonesson understands iconicity, but also the modes of indexicality and symbolism, as the ‘ground’ for the formation of a sign – in effect, what Saussure proposes in his ‘sign-form’ (see footnote 12). ‘Rather than being simply a “potential sign-vehicle”’, he states ‘the ground would then be a potential sign [T]he iconicity of the signs is not independent of their character: on the contrary, it is a precondition’. (Sonesson, 2005b:11, 22) This, I believe, is also the precondition highlighting the problem of iconicity.

Based on this ‘character’ of the icon, and the notion that pictures are essentially not conventional (because they have a principle ‘ground’ for being created), Sonesson finds it necessary to distinguish between two types of iconicity. The first type, ‘primary iconicity’, ‘found mainly in pictures ... is the perception of similarity between the item serving as expression and the item serving as content, which is one of the conditions for the postulation of the sign character of the sign’; and ‘secondary iconicity’, which ‘is our knowledge about the sign character which first permits us to discover the similarity between the two items involved’ (Sonesson, 2004:46). ‘Primary iconicity’ is easily associable with Bal’s ‘subsemiotics’, as both these forms of classification ascribe to the ‘ground’ on which the sign is formed, and ‘suprasemiotics’ connects with ‘secondary iconicity’.

Sonesson’s focus lies with ‘secondary iconicity’. While he accepts that the ‘ground’ (‘primary iconicity’) for iconicity may afford a potential ‘sign’, he argues (like Bal) against the possibility of the sign-form subdividing into meaningful units. Pictures, being icons, are intended for categorization: ‘the interpretation of pictures supposes the identification of general categories, both in pictures and the perceptual world. And there can only be categories that may be correlated to the extent that the world and the picture are susceptible of segmentation’ (Sonesson, 2005:50).¹⁰⁶

The easiest way to delimit such categories of iconicity is to adopt (and this is Sonesson’s suggestion) philosopher, Edmund Husserl’s, reasoning regarding pictorial consciousness:

¹⁰⁶ ‘Pictorial semiotics ... must determine the specificity of pictures, within the general domain of iconic signs, not just offer models for the analysis of particular pictures.’ (Sonesson, 2005:60)

Pictorial consciousness puts three instances into relation: the *picture thing* (originally the 'physical picture'), the *picture object*, and the *picture subject* When the picture is said to be lopsided, this concerns the picture thing ['subsemiotics']; but when we complain about the failure of the photograph to resemble the person photographed, it is the picture object [the 'holistic' sign] that is incriminated (Sonesson, 2005:54).¹⁰⁷

Both Bal's 'suprasemiotics' and Sonesson's 'secondary iconicity', afford pictures to the realms or 'fields' (to use Bal's term) of cultural 'consciousness' (categorization of picture types), and the process of re-contextualizing them as instances / signs of the present (Sonesson calls this 'resemanticisation') (Sonesson, 2005:41-60).¹⁰⁸

It is at this point that I wish to start focusing exclusively on the contingency of pictures and picture properties. The constituents of pictures which will be discussed from here onwards all find their origins and roles in categories such as Bal's 'subsemiotics' and Bryson's 'perceptualist account'.¹⁰⁹ My intention is to recognise a certain number of features from the cast of image-making processes, which are generally eradicated from visual or narrative semiotics (such are illusionist effects and mark-making), and afford them the position or function of a 'code' (I use the word code here, only to

¹⁰⁷ 'Picture subject' refers to the process / effect by which the referent of the picture is transposed to the 'picture object', a process of re-contextualization in other words.

¹⁰⁸ Sonesson (2005:60) explains 'resemanticisation':

Unlike both the first and second articulation in verbal language ... pictures gain their meaning from a process I called resemanticisation: the projection back from the whole to the parts of a globally constituted meaning, at the level of expression as well as that of content. But resemanticisation is only an effect of something more fundamental: the specific functioning of the distinct instances making up the picture sign: the picture thing, the picture object, the picture subject, and the picture referent. Between them, there are different relations of iconicity – and thus different possibilities of transformation.

¹⁰⁹ A further explanation of the 'perceptualist account', as given by Bryson (1991:62-63), reads as follows:

Painting is viewed *principally* as the mimesis of perception, modified by a schema It is almost natural for us to think of painting as in some sense, if not completely, the record of perception, perception which ... is variously conditioned by the previous representations of perceptions that comes to the artist from his or her tradition The painter perceives and the viewer re-perceives, and the form which unites them is a line of communication from one pole, replete with perception, the painter's vision, to the other pole, the viewer's gaze, eager for perception.

imply which area of semiotics I intend to oppose).¹¹⁰ The word which I instigate as the name for these misrecognised features, as we shall soon learn, is picture 'proposition'.

Thing

From this sub-section onwards, I shall turn to my own practical work in order to further discuss ideas around the 'picture-thing'. I welcome the idea of calling a picture property (such as the quality of a brushstroke) a 'thing', because, by recognizing a picture's 'thingliness', and this is the contention of this thesis, I feel that the viewer-reader acquaints him- / herself better with, and grasps the more clearly the 'difficulties' of what makes a picture.

The question about the significance of brushstrokes comes ... out of a deeply logocentric view in which everything representational is seen as belonging to the same unified, homogeneous representational system (language, or painting) and ... at the same time, by a deep seated paradox, not everything in that representational system is given the same, or even any, attention. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996:231)

'Thingliness', as suggested by the philosopher Martin Heidegger, is something that must be taken into account by the viewer-reader in order to have an adequate understanding of pictures – to know them (Pattison, 2000:86). Effectively we are returning to Elkins' discussion about the 'duality' of the picture; only now we shall be concentrating on the understanding of it as something 'purely visual', focusing on the

¹¹⁰ An exception in this instance would be the notion of 'inscription' by social semioticians, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen:

We ... maintain that 'painting' involves a multiplicity of signifying systems, and that the means and processes of inscription (eg. applying paint to a canvas with a brush) constitute one such system among the many which make a 'painting' Inscription is a *semiotic* resource, one among the many available to the makers of images. This is borne out of the fact that the means and processes of inscription can be changed while other aspects of the production of an image are held constant (1996:230).

'pictureness' or 'thingliness' of its properties.¹¹¹ Heidegger proposed three conceptions of the thing, and although all three accounts are necessary for describing 'things' in a philosophical tradition, I will only concentrate on the first concept – the thing as a bearer of properties.¹¹² My discussion of picture properties will proceed with reference to one of the larger parts of my practical body of work, which is a series of miniature gouache paintings entitled *The Gift* (see Illustration 5 for a selection of four picture-paintings, which have been chosen as examples for this discussion).

Heidegger says that, above all, the thing (the picture) is the bearer of properties; of material and formal aspects which determine its name ('picture-thing'). The viewer-reader is able to categorize or 'name' the thing only once he / she understands the relationship between the thing's properties and the process which is involved in realizing its form (Pattison, 2000:86). In recognizing the thing as a particular form (for instance as a 'drawing' or 'painting'), the viewer-reader is at once contextualizing it.

Form is not regarded as something that, as it were, grows out of the matter or co-originate with it. Form is what is imposed or impressed upon matter for a specific end or purpose. When we are confronted with a thing ... the material element is subordinate to the form, which, in turn, is subordinate to the use to which the thing is to be put (Pattison, 2000:91)

¹¹¹ Paul Gorner (2003, 161-162), an educator in philosophy, narrows Heidegger's 'thing' down to the following:

There is a sense in which works of art are clearly *things*; they can be put somewhere, moved about. The tendency has been to overlook this *thingly* character of art. The *thingly* character of art has been regarded as simply a substructure on which the real work of art rests. From this point of view, the thingly is in principle dispensable. For Heidegger, by contrast, it belongs to the essence of the work of art.

¹¹² Gorner (2003:162) summarizes Heidegger's three conceptions: [F]irst, the conception of the thing as the bearer of properties (on which I am concentrating for a discussion of 'subsemiotics'); second, the thing as a result of assorted sensations (relevant for the discussion of the picture-thing contextualized as a picture-sign – 'suprasemiotics'); and, third, the thing as formed matter.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:238) give their opinion on the connection between materiality and cultural visuality: 'Interest in the materiality of representation and representational practices reflects wider social and cultural concerns with questions of substance and materiality in a world in which the concrete becomes abstract, the material immaterial, the substantial insubstantial and reality "virtual".'

In addition to Heidegger's conception of picture properties, I also want to make use of the philosopher's, Ludwig Wittgenstein's, term 'proposition', instead of using device or process-action, to further the discussion. P.B. Lewis (2003:270), an educator in philosophy, gives an account of Wittgenstein's 'proposition':

A proposition is a picture of reality in that it presents a possible state of affairs: to understand the proposition is to know how things are in the world if it is true – the proposition is true if the presented state of affairs exists, otherwise it is false. What propositions cannot picture is logical form, that which they have in common with reality and which makes it possible for them to picture states of affairs. Logical form is displayed or expressed, not represented, by propositions: it is shown rather than said.

Pictures sustain a number of propositions which are, in light of Heidegger's conception of the picture thing, revealed to us through the workings of the picture's properties. Take, for example, the picture *Something from a Movie* (Illustration 6). The viewer-reader recognizes that the thing is a painting because of its medium (closer investigation will allow it the classification of 'gouache painting'), and when taking the size of the work into account, he / she can further categorize it as an illustration or miniature painting (when in its framed format). 'Propositions' realize from a knowledge of both the picture-medium and pictorial devices – in order to interpret the picture-thing the viewer-reader must be acquainted with these different propositions.

Painting propositions, as we can gather, are akin to the devices or perceptual constituents of picture-things. In a conventional sense, 'visual literacy' could afford the following propositions to *Something from a Movie*: intentional distortion (of both natural forms and perspective), reversal of figure and ground, use of non-local colour, colour 'washing', and dragging (describing the action in which the paint is applied by 'pulling' it across the picture surface). Picture propositions are 'related to one another in a determinate way', stated Wittgenstein; without them, the picture-thing is indeterminable (cited in Elkins, 1999:62).¹¹³

¹¹³ 'In this reading, when Wittgenstein says a picture's elements "are related to one another in a determinate way," he means "in a way that can be determined," or "in a way that is the case," rather than "in a distinct or precise way".' (Elkins, 1999:62)

The Gift is a body of pictures which was conceived from a personal investigation of narrative, and more specifically, the boundaries between representation and abstraction – that which would infer narrative. Ultimately, my intention in *The Gift* is to spur an immediate response to 'significance', from both myself and the viewer-reader, as a result of recognizing motivated picture properties – the pictorial 'realism'.¹¹⁴ What *The Gift* proposes is a reconsideration or re-contextualization of 'realism' – of degrees of motivation and, as art historian E.H. Gombrich calls it, '*splendor*' (the effect in which a highlight is added to make objects appear more three-dimensional) (Elkins, 1998:53).¹¹⁵ Nelson Goodman (1969:39) states:

That a picture looks like nature often means only that it looks the way nature is usually painted. Again, what will deceive me into supporting that an object of a given kind is before me depends upon what I have noticed about such objects, and this in turn is affected by the way I am used to seeing them depicted. Resemblance and deceptiveness, far from being constant and independent sources and criteria of representational practice are in some degree products of it.

Gombrich's investigations focus predominantly on the development of realism as a visual fabrication, and in *Art and Illusion* (1960), he looks specifically at the degree to which pictures represent or denote objects of the world. His conclusion in this book is that a picture presents a false perceptual belief of represented objects (cited in

¹¹⁴ I agree with Elkins (1998:48) when he says: 'Even in late modernism or postmodernism, when realism seems beside the point, it remains the invisible centre, the gravitational attractor that directs all the surrounding discourse'.

Of pictorial realism, Goodman (1969:38) explains the following:

Realism is a matter not of any constant or absolute relationship between a picture and its object but of a relationship between the system of representation employed in the picture and the standard system Realistic representation ... depends not upon imitation or illusion of information but upon inculcation. Almost any picture may represent almost anything; that is, given picture and object there is usually a system of representation, a plan of correlation, under which the picture represents the object If representation is a matter of choice and correctness a matter of information, realism is a matter of habit.

¹¹⁵ *Splendor*, as described by Elkins, is a 'language of light and lustre': '[I]t could equally well be imagined as an epochal discovery, a trade secret, a trick, or even an incommunicable knack' (1998:54). 'In the canonical instance, a figure was composed of a contour, an area of dark hatching representing shade (the *umbra*), an area of blank paper denoting the light side (the *lumen*), and, because the papers were usually toned to a middle value, areas of white chalk within the *lumen* marking the highlights (*splendors*).' (1998:59)

Elkins, 1998:50).¹¹⁶ Moreover, he is reported as stating: 'The artist will be attracted by motifs which can be rendered in his idiom [and] will therefore tend to see what he paints rather to paint what he sees' (Gombrich cited in Istrabadi, 2003:137).¹¹⁷ A good example of this in my own work is the introduction and repetition of a shape which denotes an obelus-rock or volcano (see Illustration 7).¹¹⁸ This 'shape' features in a number of *The Gift's* pictures, and is instilled to characterize the series' process as a narrative (similar to Baldessari's 'full-stop' for instance).

In Gombrich's view 'representation' (also 'illusion') has two meanings: it 'substitutes' (by way of illusionist trick, for example, in *Sunday* (Illustration 7), thick, flat brush marks become a substitute for the 'solidity' of the volcano surface); and it 'portrays' (as degrees of motivation – introducing a mirror-reflection of the volcano advocates realism – an 'absent' sea).¹¹⁹ 'Substitution (under which *splendor* is grouped)', suggests Elkins (1998:54), 'has two essential properties without which it ceases to be a way of accounting for realism: it creates a history of 'simplifications' and 'manifold observations' based on a single phenomenon; and that single phenomenon is an 'instance' of the gradual accumulation that constitutes realism'.

Something from a Movie (see Illustration 6) is a representation of the ocean as seen from the inside of a cave. As an illusion informed by nature, it relies on the conditions of *splendor* to activate significant motifs (the effect of reflectivity on the ocean's surface is achieved singularly through the addition of a flick of light (the *splendor*) in

¹¹⁶ Gombrich (1980:45), in one respect, would amend the artist's formulation:

What a painter inquires into is not the nature of the physical world but the nature of our reactions to it. He is not concerned with causes but with the mechanisms of terrain effects. His is a psychological problem that of conjuring up a convincing image despite the fact that not one individual shade corresponds to what we call reality.

¹¹⁷ This statement is very true of my own picture-making process, for the simple reason that none of my pictures materializes from the reliance on source material or a definite referent; this excludes pictures in which material items such as particular dress / historical objects are sourced in order to substantiate the description of a particular character – as in my nonsense drawings (discussed at the end of Part Two).

¹¹⁸ Obelus, translated from Greek, means a pointed pillar. Its current name is afforded to a typographic reference symbol, shaped like a dagger (†) (Thompson, 1996:611).

¹¹⁹ '[T]he very process of perception is based on the same rhythm that we [find] governing the process of representation: the rhythm of schema and correction. It is a rhythm which presupposes constant activity on our part in making guesses and modifying them in the light of our experience.' (Gombrich, 1980:231)

the surface area of the *lumen* – the light blue area which suggests the sea). The effect of *splendor* is learnt or gained from a tradition and rhetoric of picture-making practice, suggests Elkins: 'The general approach is built on simple and sensible ideas: that artists draw on one another's methods; that realism is a collective effort; and that it takes time to find acceptable pictorial equivalents for natural objects' (1998:53).

Art historians suggest that picture-making is a learnt process, which results from practising with, and implementation of, 'inaugural' traits and tricks (visual 'mannerisms' as I shall refer to them from here on).¹²⁰ My treatment of visual mannerisms is no different from that of other picture-makers, and I implement many devices which are widely recognized. While I can identify and 'name' the mannerisms I favour, those which are consciously employed while making pictures, I cannot explain how they became part of and foster my own 'mannerist glossary'.¹²¹

[A] painting is not only a painting but also the representation of an idea about painting. That is one reason there is so little contradiction now between abstract and representational painting: In both cases, the painting is not there to represent the image; the image exists in order to represent the painting (that is the painting's idea of painting) Today's painting succeeds

¹²⁰ 'Art has a history precisely because the methods of constructing an acceptable image have to be developed and have to be learnt.' (Gombrich cited in Elkins, 1998:53.) And similarly: 'Realism "depends upon how stereotyped the mode of representation is, upon how commonplace the labels, and their uses have become"' (Goodman cited in Mitchell, 1994:351).

¹²¹ Apart from the major (predominantly Western-oriented) pictorial devices which we afford to representation – like perspective, cropping, value gradation, etc. – there are those individual mannerisms which cannot be named, even though the picture-maker recognizes them as individual traits. The succession of horizontal marks (a mannerism which falls in line with what Gombrich refers to as the 'etc. principle') which I use to denote water surfaces (a recognizable trait of other artists as well, notably David Hockney and Edward Gorey; and even Piet Mondrian) is an example of such a mannerism or 'inter-texture' (see *With Flair*, Illustration 8) (Elkins, 1998:55).

Gombrich (1980:284) says the following about artistic mannerisms:

I believe there are two conditions which account for [the] success in the illusion of life [/character] which can do without any illusion of reality: one is the experience of generations of artists with the effect of pictures, another the willingness of the public to accept the grotesque and simplified partly because its lack of elaboration guarantees the absence of contradictory clues.

by coming to terms with its own gratuitousness. In this sense, it generally can be called Mannerist. (Schwabsky, 2002:8)

In terms of the narrative itself, or rather the content of the picture-paintings, neither specific text nor story, nor particular event (nor certainly any personal history) is present, or told. The pictures, or 'scenes', as mentioned before, stand rather as still moments or still 'lives', representative of the process involved in the creation of 'picture-making narratives'.¹²² Seen and read together, *The Gift* offers the viewer-reader a 'sequence of propositions' which serve as an entry point for manifold interpretations.

Assimilation

The moment of potential breakdown, when the work faces us as a mute ponderous object, a presence that commands our attention but makes no definite sense, is important, not just as the point of entry into the play of signification. It also gives substance to the work's significance by momentarily stalling the process of semiotic creativity, disrupting the flow of interpretative associations, and creating the possibility for more unmanageable responses that really do compel us to take note of the work. (Potts, 1996:27)

A Disaster: Milky Lane Birthday Party (from here on *Milky Lane*) (Illustration 9) may be precisely the kind of picture-thing that Potts describes above. It is difficult to translate what is happening in this picture. Even when presented with the title, many viewer-readers may still encounter difficulty in making connotations while reading the picture-paintings. This difficulty arrives from the variety of knowledge-positions held by the viewer-readers – their different degrees of visual literacy. The picture's 'thing-

¹²² In light of what I mentioned earlier about this body of pictures being an experimental and experiential development of 'painting', I regard the involved 'process' as a kind of developing narrative.

A picture such as *With Flair* is a 'still-life', and to go by what Bryson suggests of still-life propositions, it is a narrative in the second order (Bal, 2003:65). Bryson regards the 'still-life' as 'the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest', which is to say that it 'trains' the viewer-reader not immediately to label narrative as singular actions of individual persons (where 'allegory' is abundant) (cited in Bal, 2003:64). *With Flair* is thus an analogy for the countless narratives of a still-life, '[a] depiction of those things which lack importance, the unassuming base of life that "importance" constantly overlooks' (Bryson cited in Bal, 2003:65).

ness' is encapsulated in its proposition: instead of drawing analogies with things outside itself, its properties relentlessly claim significance in attending to itself. Referring to painting in general, Potts (1996:24) says: 'In trying to determine "what" we so plainly see, this "what" inevitably becomes something other than the inert physical datum before our eyes. So the painting operates as an intriguing kind of sign'.

The only way in which to gain some understanding, from an image such as *Milky Lane*, would be not to disregard the properties that afford it its name – 'picture'. As this section has suggested, the distinction and categorization of pictures involve more than simply aligning visual terms with linguistic semiotic features. Even though Bal's 'subsemiotics' recognize the criticality for the developmental process of visual signs, their process still only functions as a methodological safety net for those moments when pictures becomes difficult to read or 'innarratable'. 'Semiotic analysis has been particularly concerned', says Potts (1996:24), 'to show how any worthwhile modern art will confound accepted processes of visual signification and articulate a significance that as it were arises out of the failure to signify'.

COUNTER-SEMIOTICS

Counter-semiotics, an amalgamation of Elkins' (1998:1) 'antisemiotics' and Bal's 'subsemiotics', is a term which I assimilate into discussions regarding the interpretation of pictures (particularly my own).¹²³ Primarily derived from Elkins' account of non-semiotic components in pictures, counter-semiotics necessitates a reconsideration of the relationship between significant and 'meaningless' marks, and anti-realism (or *anti-splendor*) versus naturalism – both of which will be discussed in this section. Attending to the interactions of the syntactic properties of pictures, Elkins develops Bal's 'subsemiotics' into theories which work against determinate discourses for visual semiotics.¹²⁴ Counter-semiotics therefore reinstates the

¹²³ The full development of Elkins' 'antisemiotics' can be found in *On Pictures and the Words that Fail Them* (1998). However, a large part of his work will be referred to in this section.

¹²⁴ Elkins (1998:13) sources Bal and Bryson's *Semiotics and Art History* as one such an instigating text:

Semiotics has traditionally made furtive attacks on the problems of pictures, with hasty retreats into more linguistic fields such as the interpretation of pictorial symbols or the analysis of sign language. There is no such thing as a well-articulated concept of a visual sign that does not depend immediately

properties of pictures which semiotics so plainly dismisses. According to Elkins (1998:4-5):

[S]emiotic art history sometimes depends on surpressing the semiotic nature of marks in order to proceed with readings that hinge on narrative In semiotics, graphic marks somehow build to make signs, but are not signs in themselves. They are 'technical', irrelevant, or irrecoverable, and in the strict sense meaningless.

Elkins' investigation can be regarded as an act of destabilization of Western perceptions about picture-making.¹²⁵ Among those perceptions, his greatest concern lies with 'marks', the operational components of pictures, and how their functioning informs the nature of pictures. Summing up, Elkins (1998:13-14) says:

What is at stake here is nothing less than the pictorial nature of pictures: their nature as pictures, and what we want to count as an adequate description of a picture in given context. The way out of the impasse of visual semiotics, I think, is not to refine the linguistic analogy but to take a close, patient look at marks and try to say what really happens in pictures.¹²⁶

To begin the discussion on counter-semiotics, I want to return to one of my miniature paintings, *Sunday* (Illustration 7), and interject the idea of *anti-splendor*. Elkins (1998:61) notes that in some cases, the marks of *splendor* function in the reverse;

and explicitly on linguistic models. Visual semiotics, as it appears in texts such as 'Semiotics and Art History', is an account of visual narratives and not a full theory of the semiotic nature of pictures.

¹²⁵ Elkins (1998:5) questions a purely semiotic account of pictures:

Despite its claims to be neutral between linguistic and other sign systems, semiotics slights the meaning of marks, bringing visual narratives unpleasantly close to written ones ... semiotics shrinks the notion of what a picture is, assimilating pictures to texts and overlooking their painted strangeness. Semiotics makes pictures too easy: I want pictures to be harder to look at and harder to describe, so that we cannot get as quickly from the slurry of marks to ordely historical meanings.

¹²⁶ The French semiotician, Anne Hénault, also appeals to us to invest in 'looking':

The eye must come back to a genuine perception and avoid seizing upon the would-be figures of content, which might be verbalized at once. On the contrary, one must forget that this photograph shows a railway, or a female torso, which language would call units of meaning; this is the prerequisite for... allowing perceptions to appear for which verbal automatism makes no provision. (Cited in Elkins, 1998:13.)

which is to say that dark areas (shadows or *tonos*) take in the place of the lightest areas of / or the complete *lumen*. In *Sunday* the shadow which is cast by the volcano-island (its reflection in the 'sea' surrounding it) functions as a reverse form of *splendor*, because no highlights are used to bring about the illusion of a reflection – it is *anti-splendor*. In Elkins' (1998:61) words: '[I]t accents the place where light meets dark, just as the *splendor* – which may not be drawn at all – would set off a portion of light very close by'.

Elkins (1999:62) says the substitution of light for dark is a 'trade-off between *chiaroscuro* (intensified play between areas of shadow and light) and *disegno*', and that '[w]ith this kind of manipulation the dark contours do not simply articulate and accent a comprehensible schema of values: they threaten to undermine the basic syntax of *chiaroscuro* itself'.¹²⁷ In the case of *Sunday*, *chiaroscuro* is slight (only between the colour of the volcano's surface and the background colour which shows through) and there is no light area to measure dark values against. Using only one colour to amplify the illusion of a reflection is doubtlessly a 'trick', but a form of *anti-splendor* none the less. *Anti-splendor* is a form of counter-semiotics, because it constrains certain concepts of realism in representations – as, for instance, *chiaroscuro*.

[A]nti-splendor is unpredictably a way of undermining naturalism as well as contributing to it: it is not an 'isolated' discovery but it is closely linked to other elements of picture-making that are not exclusively naturalistic ... this interrelatedness, which I find is widely operative in drawing, is a strong argument against theories of pictorial realism that works by enumerating discoveries Tricks, I think, are the higher-level names for practices in marking that are themselves fluid, inconsistent, and self-contradictory. (Elkins, 1998:65)

Anti-splendor is an illogical form of illusionism; functioning within a naturalistic setting, it bypasses the logic of the convention understood as *splendor*. To draw this relationship into the bigger scheme of 'image-text', *splendor* forms part of semiotics

¹²⁷ Design historian, Clive Ashwin (1989:199-200), gives an etymological reflection of *disegno*: 'The German *Zeichen*, meaning *sign*, gives us *zeichnen* for the verb to *draw*, that is to *make signs*. Similar connections can be seen in the Italian *segno* (sign), *disegno* (drawing, design) and *disegnatore* (designer). The English *drawing* takes its form from the action of pulling, which is characteristic of so much drawing activity' Elkins, in this instance, is associating *chiaroscuro* with a learnt convention of drawing (the word is also used in literature to describes contrast), and *disegno* with a form of drawing which fuses both learnt convention and ingenuity.

because it is, particularly as a Western method to create the illusion of light-play on objects, a device which is agreed upon by the history of the art world.

The contradiction of *splendor* supports the conceptualization and implementation of 'counter-semiotics'. As a misrecognized aspect of picture propositions, it allows us to supplant sustained semiotic image-making features. Counter-semiotics is coupled with a semiotic mode for recognition, and causes to surface reduced and misrecognized properties that are significant to the culminated reading of picture-signs – stressing that the picture-sign does not stand without the picture-thing. Instead of naming a counter-mode for interpretation 'anti' semiotic, the viewer-reader must come to realize that, much as *anti-splendor* functions alongside *splendor*, counter-semiotics co-exists in order to ascertain what pictorial semiotics tries to teach us.

Drawing the picture

Of the decisive properties of pictures which enable counter-semiotics to manifest itself, 'marks' are the most significant. The act of drawing quintessentially involves making marks, and putting into practice what one understands of the principles of organizing elements in a pictorial space. 'Its variety, moreover,' says art historian Henri Focillon 'is extreme: ink, wash, lead pencil, charcoal ... chalk, crayon, whether singly or in combination, all constitute so many distinct traits, so many distinct languages' (cited in Lee, 1999:32). The discussion of this property's involvement and propositional inventions in pictures will take place in conjunction with my own ideas around the practice and process of drawing. My body of drawings, which is entitled *Staged Disasters*, will aid as visual examples when it becomes necessary to demonstrate specifics of Elkins' 'modes of mark-making'.

It might be best to describe, as Clive Ashwin does, drawing as a 'pansemic' proposition – as something which holds the possibility for unlimited combinations (which applies to the picture-maker) and interpretations (which are left to the viewer-reader) (1989:203). My own drawings can be seen in light of 'pansemics': rather than being a denotative or figurative form of representation, I make allowance for abstraction and non-figuration precisely because the idea of a 'pansemic' allows *drawing* as a way of connecting or mediating, and as a proposition for recognition

(semiotics) and misrecognition (counter-semiotics).¹²⁸ Art critic, Pamela Lee, expanding on drawing, claims it 'has always occupied an ambivalent role within the historiography of art, regarded as both foundational and peripheral, central and marginal ...' (1999:31). She continues:

[T]he institutional status of drawing as a whole compares unfavourably to the genre it would ostensibly give rise to, perhaps because of this very relation to the other arts, characterized as at once germinal and parasitic. If, say, the drawing is a preparatory sketch for a work of art, it can in no way approximate the visual plenitude of the completed work. If, on the other hand, the drawing takes after a work of art, it functions as a simulacrum twice removed from its original source. In both cases the drawing takes on the status of either trace or leftover – a clue as to its formation or a reminder left behind. (Lee, 1999:31)

Elkins' account of the non-semiotic features of pictures starts, appropriately, with mark-making. Those marks that come under attention are not only those repeated in grouped areas (a texture) or those which together form 'figures', but mainly individual marks and accidental marks which are read as part of the picture (rubblings and fingerprints, and also stains). They are the marks or traces to which art historian, Pamela Lee, refers in the above passage.

To substantiate his argument, and present another constituent of 'non-semiotics', Elkins contests Derrida's conviction regarding the *trait*: 'Even if drawing is, as they say, mimetic, that is, reproductive, figurative, representative ... the *trait* must proceed in the night. It escapes the field of vision' (Derrida, cited in Elkins, 1999:19). Derrida, Elkins claims, contradicts the actuality of graphic marks by turning these into a 'logic'

¹²⁸ Elkins' (1998:18) indignation is with the viewer-reader's misrecognition of non-semiotic properties:

To speak *only* of what must exist in spite of the marks against which it struggles – only of the figure, the represented thing – is to capitulate to a concept of pictures that imagines a gap between marks and signs, and that the way to come to terms with it is to omit both the gap and everything that comes before it. To elide the crucial moments of darkness, when the picture, in all its incomprehensible, non-linguistic opacity, confronts us as something *illegible*, is to hope that pictures can deliquesce into sense.

and a form of writing.¹²⁹ Thus he confronts Derrida's conceptions:

The *trait*, the 'linear limit' [mark], is 'in no way *ideal* or *intelligible*,' nor is it '*sensible*': it is a kind of original, unavoidable 'graphic blindness' ... a renunciation of any particularized, constrained act of seeing ... that general motion culminates in ... '*the rhetoric of the trait*,' meaning more precisely the *withdrawal of the rhetoric of the trait*, the motion that also enables ... writing. ... The drawn trace is imagined as if from a distance or abstractly, so that it appears to fade, to deliquesce or 'retreat,' yielding its unstable 'rhetoric' in favour of what are taken to be the irreducible properties of written traces. Derrida's is a repressive reading, a way of silencing the drawn trace by letting it melt quietly away into writing. (1998:21-22)

By interrogating their specific nature, their 'ontology', Elkins proceeds to argue that marks are stable properties of inquiry – not 'withdrawals'; '[a] picture would not be composed of marks and surfaces, but of imbricated marks ... spawn[ing] a cacophony of compromises' (1998:25). The results of my own drawing process will help in delineating Elkins' findings.

The drawing called *Stellenbosch* (Illustration 10) features an arresting, elliptical area of dense, dark markings; *anti-splendor* is not at work in this field. Analogous to a bubble or void, it seems almost as though the black 'hole' is suffocating or engulfing the marks which are bound to its right side. In no way can an area of mark-making, as it appears here in *Stellenbosch*, be comparable to Derrida's 'logic' of withdrawal. I would suggest rather that these, in line with what Elkins (1998:26) says, are growing: '[a] mark becomes a surface, or two surfaces, or many surfaces, when it is crossed by a second mark, or it remains a mark; and the conceivable combinations of mark-making proceed from those two options'.

¹²⁹ Derrida's explanation of the motion of the *trait* – its perceived *différance* – is presented in the following:

For is it not the withdrawal (*retrait*) of the line – that which draws the line back, draws it again (*retire*), at the moment when the *trait* is drawn, when it draws away (*se tire*) – that which grants speech? And at the same time forbids separating drawing from the discursive murmur whose trembling transfixes it? (Cited in Elkins, 1998:21.)

For a full account of Derrida's notion of the graphic trace, refer to *The Truth in Painting* (1987) and *Memoirs of the Blind, the Self-portrait and Other Ruins* (1993).

Thus, as the first mark is drawn the pictorial space also divides into surfaces; a surface to either side it. And every additional mark that it is drawn on or merged with the picture, divides it into additional 'surfaces'. Mark making is far from a procedure of retraction; instead it is a process of layering and 'repletion'. Marks 'exfoliate', says Elkins (1998:26): '... drawing attention to their boundaries, so that the boundaries become outlines in their own right: and when that happens, the boundaries themselves can be perceived as marks, turning both the original mark and the original surface into surfaces'.

The notion of 'boundaries' is crucial to the discussion of 'exfoliation'. If marks had no form of definition (a border outlining its shape in other words), the whole concept of 'mark' would become impractical and the name itself discredited; as a result only 'surfaces' and an understanding of 'surface-making' would persist. Therefore Elkins (1998:28) compensates by suggesting that boundaries, too, are subject to exfoliation: '[T]he act of making a mark also turns the surface into a mark, so the surface is perceived not as an infinite or undifferentiated surface but as a region with definite boundaries, and therefore ultimately a mark'.

To illustrate the above using a different example: the area that is recognized as the sea in *Love at First Sight* (Illustration 11) is comprised only of horizontal lines (the entire line counts as a mark, as individually they were executed in a single motion). At certain points in the lines, their borders touch or cross into each other. If we were to take 'exfoliation' into account, we could anticipate that each line would constitute a surface and, subsequently, all together the marks (lines) would form a large ground of many surfaces – a 'field'. The boundaries of each of the marks would then draw our attention to the inverse surfaces on which they border; these emergent counter-spaces (the negative surface-areas) between each of the lines also count as marks. 'Marking', as it may, these counter-spaces, 'makes us more sharply aware of the forms it bounds, turning them into fields, and therefore finally into marks. In effect, mark making turns surfaces into marks' (Elkins, 1998:28). Elkins, moreover, states:

The *ontological instability of the mark* is a double and conflicting condition: on the one hand, each mark exfoliates into fields and endlessly generates new marks out of its edges, so that the mark itself is fugitive, lost in a sea of fields; on the other hand, each mark coalesces its surrounding surface into fields and finally into marks, so that the surface is fugitive and hardens everywhere into a landscape of marks. Unlike written signs, drawn and

painted marks are insecurely linked to their grounds, and the same is true at the level of the figure – a fact that has to be suspended in order to get on with art historical interpretations that treat figures as if they were signs detachable from their grounds. (1998:43).

I propose to look at one other understanding of the modes of mark-making outlined by Elkins. It relates directly to the ontology of marks, and concentrates on specific types of mark-combinations which individuate the various 'fields' of the pictorial space. I call this the 'transmodulation' of marks. Occurring within the workings of the triad of *lumen*, *umbra*, and *splendor*, it 'also taunt[s] the promise of visual semiotics by masquerading as the interplay of three disjunct signifiers' (Elkins, 1998:44).

In *A Little Weight on My Shoulder* (Illustration 12), the conventional workings of the triad of *lumen*, *umbra*, and *splendor*, are most noticeable in the 'field' situated top-centre of the picture (it is a representation of the bottom part of an earlobe). In this the surface contours are generated by way of contrasting light (*lumen*) and shade (*umbra*); a dash of light (the *splendor*) suggests the brightest point on the edge of the lobe, which is also the highest field in the surface-hierarchy of the picture. The contours of this specific field make sense to the viewer-reader, because he / she understands the conventions which are involved in modelling three-dimensional forms using light and dark marks. Yet again, Elkins (1998:40) challenges such a view:

[E]ach region is also the site of its own 'subtle variations,' so that every *lumen* is also either part of, comprised of, or equivalent to *splendor* and *umbra*. There are no distinct marks where each is a composite of others or a fragment of some larger unity that would be a mark.¹³⁰

The paradox that 'transmodulation' supposes is that all marks are interchangeable or easily displaced, that they feature as individual parts rather than a whole, or, that they function as a composite instead of a single entity (Elkins, 1998:44). *Anti-splendor* serves as an example of the theory of 'transmodulation' in full effect. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:238) explain: '[I]nscription comprises the interrelated semiotic resources of surface, substance and tools of inscription. Each has its own

¹³⁰ Elkins (1998:44) concludes that: 'When marks are swirled into washes, or scumbled into larger areas, or smudged into continuous gradations, they lose their disjointness but not the *idea* of disjunction. That play between hierarchical *lumen*, *umbra*, and *splendor*, on the one hand, and stepless change, on the other, is also part of the way marks carry meaning.'

semiotic effects, and in their interaction they produce complex effects of meaning'. (For 'inscription', I read the action of mark-making; where the authors refer to 'semiotic effects', add, counter-semiotics (as proven).)

Even though Elkins' account of non-semiotic features may seem like an extreme, even daunting understanding of pictures for the typical viewer-reader, it does challenge the general view that graphic marks count only as rudiments of the picture-making and meaning-making process. In fact, Elkins' perception is that the workings of marks are among the least understood aspects of picture-making:

If graphic marks are undecidably meaningless and meaningful, unstructured and linguistic, potentially systematic and repeatedly self-defeating, 'shimmering' on the verge of incoherence even in the simplest naturalistic pictures, then it is difficult to see how they can be counted among the rudiments of pictures (1998:125).

In order to understand pictures and picture-making processes, the viewer-reader must force him- / herself to attend to the non-semiotic attributes thereof. To turn impulsively to semiotics will count against the viewer-reader's interpretation of the picture and restrict potential alternative meanings. Marks must therefore be conceded to the realm of counter-semiotics, simultaneously instigating both sign (obvious meaning) and non-sign (misrecognized meaning). Says Elkins (1998:46):

By omitting marks, or herding them into broad categories of 'surface', 'gesture', or 'handling', art historical accounts of all sorts make it possible to leap from the recalcitrant, 'meaningless' smears and blotches of a picture to the stories it seems to embody. But once it is possible to be historically and analytically specific about graphic marks, it becomes harder to justify that kind of omission, and therefore harder to think and write about pictures.

Assimilation

This section has looked at the possibility of a counter-semiotics, a way of recognizing features of picture-making that challenges a general semiotic stance to pictorial representation. Seen in the light of interpretation, counter-semiotics proceeds in concurrence with semiotic analysis. Counter-semiotics is not oppositional to semiotics; instead it informs our general decisions regarding picture-making

processes and subjugates accepted pictorial codes, as for instance *chiaroscuro*, in order to advance visual literacy.

Parts of pictures are disorderly, unpredictably irrational, inconsistently incoherent, and ill suited to stories of symbols or visual narratives; we tend to ignore those aspects in favour of readily retrievable meanings. But those abandoned elements are *what pictures are*, and they are among the most conceptually and linguistically challenging objects of inquiry. (Elkins, 1998:xviii)

Counter-semiotics confronts the perceptions and semiotic institutions held by the 'visually literate' community. Fusing features of picture-making ('subsemiotics') with features of meaning-making (semiotics) will allow for a form of interpretation which shifts between supportive countering parts – in particular image and text. By exposing themselves to, and advocating counter-semiotics, both the picture-maker and viewer-reader uphold a certain responsibility to the nature of pictures. '[R]epresentation is a form, an act of taking responsibility; it is itself a *response* ... an answering echo to a previous presentation or representation. Responsibility', Mitchell claims (1994:421), 'cannot exist apart from representation'.

METAPICTURES

In this last section I shall draw Mitchell's notion of 'metapictures' into the discussion, to totalize the understanding of visual semiotics and the nature of pictures. Metapictures, proposes Mitchell (1994:35), are self-reflexive: they refer to themselves, other pictures, and also to pictures that explain what pictures are.¹³¹ Mitchell's theory differs from other conceptions of pictorial self-reflection, in that his investigation covers a much larger and more diverse context of picture-making – his

¹³¹ In postmodernism it is even suggested that pictures are 'self-analytical'; not only directed at the medium but also at the determining conditions of the work:

To say 'the work of art is self-analytic' is ... to say that it consists in the crises it goes through, that it is punctuated by moments of breakthrough or 'revelation,' which require that one question one's conception of who one is or how one has invested oneself in it. It is to say that a work is constituted through those events that arrest the self-evidence of one's identity and that open other possibilities that retroactively reinterpret it (Rajchman cited in Mitchell, 1994:36).

spectrum encompasses pictures from all areas of visual culture.¹³² His aim with regard to 'metapictures' is

... not to derive a model for pictorial self-reference from art or language, but to see if pictures provide their own metalanguage. I want to experiment with the notion that pictures might be capable of reflection on themselves, capable of providing a second-order discourse that tells us – or at least shows us – something about pictures. (1994:38)

My own discussion of metapictures will take place centring around *The Book of Immediate Nonsense* (from here on called *BOIN*), which is the third component of my body of practical work. *BOIN* was originally conceived as a form of informal storytelling (a visual diary of sorts), as a type of escapism from the constraints of developing characters and visual storylines for existing narratives. Comprising mainly of 'single-scene narratives', as I like to call them, *BOIN* is a collection of pictures and anecdotes dealing with fictional characters and their perception of / response to existence. (See Illustration 13 for a selection of pictures from *BOIN*.)

There are five ways in which a picture functions as self-referential, says Mitchell, as a metapicture: by describing itself as 'picture', by referring to other pictures, by functioning in a 'dialectical' way, by being a meta-metapicture, and by 'talking'. 'Metapictures are pictures that show themselves in order to *know* themselves: they stage the self-knowledge of pictures.' (Mitchell, 1994:48)

The first type of metapicture is one which is evidently about itself and about picture-making: *It's Called a Job* (Illustration 14) describes the world and a culture of pictures through the evocation of a character who draws or acts out narratives. The actor's job (like the picture-maker's) is to 'sketch' a picture of reality, to describe a 'world that is not merely represented by pictures, but actually constituted and brought into being by picture-making' (Mitchell, 1994:41).

¹³² Mitchell (1994:48-49) sees metapictures as a 'hypericon':

Most notably, perhaps, is their ability to move across the boundaries of popular and professional discourses. The metapicture is a piece of movable cultural apparatus, one which may serve a marginal role as illustrative device or a central role as a kind of summary image ... a 'hypericon' that encapsulates an entire episteme, a theory of knowledge.

A second metapicture is one which refers to other pictures, as well as the history of picture-making, in order to function in a 'generically' self-referential way; '[I]t exemplifies the sort of picture that represents pictures as a class, the picture about pictures' (Mitchell, 1994:56). I have chosen the picture *Saturday Afternoon* (Illustration 15) to describe this type of metapicture. Similar to *It's Called a Job*, the picture that we have just looked at, *Saturday Afternoon* does not literally show how pictures are made or delineate operations around picture-making at a certain stage in history. It depicts instead how pictures are perceived throughout history and how a subject's identity may be disclosed through his / her particular response to pictures: 'The observer's identity may emerge in a dialogue with specific cultural stereotypes ... that carry a whole set of explicitly ideological associations' (Mitchell, 1994:48). *Saturday Afternoon* is a humorous account of the way in which viewer-readers interact with and interpret picture-things, and it reflects on other kinds of metapictures which also deal with such a relationship – for example, Hockney's *Man in Museum* ... (Illustration 1), a scene of interpretation and perception.

Many of the characters that appear in *BOIN* are conjoined humans and animals (see Illustrations 14, 16, and 17).¹³³ Such examples of visual paradoxes, in which faces appear to be or are replaced by masks (or the heads of animals), are sometimes referred to as images of 'multistability'. Mitchell (1994:45) refers to these as: '[P]ictures whose primary function is to illustrate the co-existence of contrary or simply different readings in the single image'. *Heavy Burden* (Illustration 16) is an example of a multistable picture. This kind of metapicture does not essentially refer to itself, but elicits from the viewer-reader a self-knowledge of pictures or ways in which he / she 'pictures' him- / herself – it is a form of contextual self-reference (the picture acts as a mirror), and as the author, Mitchell, states:

The ambiguity of their [the pictures] referentiality produces a kind of secondary effect of auto-reference to the drawing as drawing, an invitation to the spectator to return with fascination to the mysterious object whose

¹³³ Of the connection between humans and animals, Mitchell (citing Gombrich, 1994:334) has the following to say:

As figures in scenes of visual exchange, animals have a special, almost magical relation with humanity. Animals can see what we see; they can look us in the eye across a gulf unbridged by language: "a power is ascribed to the animal, comparable with human power, but never coinciding with it. The animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas, are specifically addressed to man".

identity seems so mutable and yet so absolutely singular and definite (1994:56).

All pictures are in some ways metapictures, because they function as 'mediums' which draw attention to the self-understanding of the viewer-reader's own 'image'. 'This destabilization of identity is to some extent a phenomenological issue, a transaction between pictures and observers activated by the internal structural effects of multistability ... the switching of aspects, the display of pictorial paradoxes and forms of nonsense.' (Mitchell, 1994:57)

Meta-metapictures emphasize the multistability function of pictures. They amplify the 'effect of interpellation' by drawing the viewer-reader into a perceptual throw-about or game of 'addressing'; the meta-metapictures 'enfold the observer as object for the "gaze" of the picture' (Mitchell, 1994:75). I think the picture entitled *Self Portrait* (see Illustration 17) serves as a good example of what a meta-metapicture might constitute. Even though the figure in the picture does not directly look at the viewer-reader, he captures our attention – addressing us by baring his nose at the side of the pamphlet / menu – and entices us to learn his identity and the identity of the image on the inside of the 'picture' that he is looking at. The title does not imply that the figure in the picture is a portrait of myself, the artist; instead, it is a self portrait of each and every viewer-reader caught in the interpolating act of looking at *Self Portrait*. By mirroring what the figure in the picture is doing, it is the viewer-reader who, in turn, is portrayed in the picture.

The metapicture is not a subgenre in the field of fine arts but a fundamental potentiality inherent in pictorial representation as such: it is the place where pictures reveal and 'know' themselves, where they reflect on the intersections of visuality, language, and similitude, where they engage in speculation and theorizing on their own nature and history. (Mitchell, 1994:82)

Immediate Nonsense

This subsection will deal with Mitchell's proposed 'talking' metapicture, entwined in a discussion about fundamental aspects of 'nonsense' pictures. Because the genre of nonsense 'believes in the *centrality of language*', and because it is a compulsion of my practical work, it is essential for our discussion on the relationship between image

and text (Lecerclé, 1994:68). Jean-Jacques Lecerclé (1994:3) writes in the introduction to his book, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature*:¹³⁴

The deep-seated need for meaning, which nonsense texts deliberately frustrate in order to whet it, will be accounted for in terms of the non-transparency of language, of the incapacity of natural languages reasonably to fulfil their allotted task of expression and communication. Nonsense both supports the myth of an informative and communicative language and deeply subverts it – exposes it as a myth in the pejorative sense (thereby acquiring mythical force in the positive sense).

Using the artist's, René Magritte's, famed picture, *Les Trahison des Images* (see Illustration 19), which holds the line of text '*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*' (translating as 'this is not a pipe'), Mitchell explains how pictures turn attention to themselves by 'talking' to the viewer-reader. The picture communicates by means of dialogue / text which is incorporated into the actual picture space – literally becoming an example of image-text. Foucault describes Magritte's picture as the perfect example of the 'calligram': a composite which brings shape and text as close together as possible; 'normally defined as a poem in which the words are arranged in the shape of the object they describe' (Macey, 2003:116).¹³⁵

Magritte's painting is a *representation* of the object. The juxtaposed line of text, which also clarifies why the picture's title refers to the 'treason' of images, emphasises the paradox of the icon, that it is an illusion of a pipe and not the real object. A 'talking' metapicture, of course, uses text or dialogue to better explain what the contents of the picture are trying to say about the nature of pictures or picture-making. '[A] metapicture', Mitchell (1994:65) explains, 'that depends on the "insertion of the picture into a discourse on vision and representation", is here internalized within the frame. We might want to object that this isn't really a metapicture, not really *pictorial* self-reference, in that it "cheats" by using words to achieve self-reference'.

¹³⁴ Lecerclé is Professor English at the University of Paris; the author of *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass* and *The Violence of Language*.

¹³⁵ Mitchell (1994:70) says: 'The calligram is a figure of knowledge as power, aiming at a utopia of representation in which "things" are trapped in a "double cipher", an alliance between the shapes and meanings of words'.

I feel that most pictures 'talk' to their viewer-readers, even though many are not necessarily metapictures. If the picture-maker titles his / her work, he / she immediately instigates a dialogue between the picture and words. Even if no text is visible on the picture, a dedicated title automatically serves as a form of intra-text, giving the picture a voice.¹³⁶ But this does not mean that the words or title will correspond to what is happening in the picture. Most, if not all, of the pictures in *BOIN* stand apart from the meaning of their accompanying title (or visible words). 'The proposition', says Mitchell (1994:66), 'which seems to deny the authority of the image winds up having its own authority called into question, not only by the picture, but by something internal to the conventions of language'. What I would suggest is that the relationship between the picture and its title then also be regarded as 'multistable'. We have already seen instances of this tension in pictures such as *Self Portrait*, *Heavy Burden*, and *Saturday Afternoon*.

Metapictures elicit, not just a double vision, but a double voice, and a double relation between language and visual experience. If every picture only makes sense inside a discursive frame, an 'outside' of descriptive, interpretative language, metapictures call into question the relation of language to image as an inside-outside structure. (Mitchell, 1994:68)

Another manner in which the picture 'talks' to its viewer-reader, or to itself, is through its constituent characters. States Lecerle (1994:71) of texts, and I include the nonsense picture in this case:

Characters like to listen to the sound of their own voices, and also to reflect on what they say and how they say it The result is that nonsense, not a mimetic genre, does not construct characters, but rather presents eccentricities, more often than not quirks of language. What the texts construct are speech situations, usually ones in which something goes wrong, and the phrase 'rules of exchange' must be taken in its military acceptance.

¹³⁶ Some of the defining characteristics of intertextuality, by way of the relationship between the intra-text and picture, are 'reflexivity' (as in the case of *Heavy Burden*); 'alteration' (in pictures where intra-text functions as a form of relay and disjoints itself from the picture, for example, *Self Portrait*); and 'explicitness' (if the title or other intra-text functions as anchorage, as is the in the case of *Serge has a Shopping Problem* (see Illustration 18)). A full discussion of the characteristics of intertextuality can be found in Chandler's *Semiotics: The Basics* (2002:205).

The bird-lady from *Heavy Burden* talks to the viewer-reader by means of her body-language, and under normal circumstance the viewer-reader will turn to his / her knowledge of visual narrative codes to understand what the character is trying to communicate through such expressions (this is to say that he / she is unable to make a connection between the title and what is depicted). Barthes outlined five narrative codes which aid the viewer-reader in making sense of a narrative sequence or scene (I shall look at Bal's (1994:195) version of Barthes' narrative theory to discuss these codes).

The first is the 'proairetic' code: Jonathan Culler sees it as a narrative version of the iconographic level of interpretation, 'a series of models of action that help readers place details in plot sequences: because we have stereotyped models of "falling in love," or "kidnapping," or "undertaking a perilous mission," we can tentatively place and organize the details as we read' (cited in Bal, 1994:195). Secondly, the 'hermeneutic' code: because it presupposes obscurity or an 'enigma', it induces the viewer-reader to seek details in the scene which will help him / her interpret the narrative. 'Semic' codes introduce cultural stereotypes or 'background information' to the characters which help the viewer-reader orientate figures in the narrative (class, gender, ethnicity, age, etc.), while 'symbolic' codes allow the viewer-reader to interpret the narrative scene's symbolism (for example, facial expressions that connote love, loneliness, or hostility). The last code utilized for narrative interpretation is the 'referential' code, by which cultural information or knowledge allows the viewer-reader to identify specific characters, historical movements or specific rituals. All five narrative codes form part of a semiotic interpretation of pictures, and imply that a viewer-reader is able to narrate stories simply by understanding a sequence of pictures or actions (Bal, 1994:194-195). As Bal (1994:195) concludes: 'Together, these (and other) codes produce a "narrative", as a satisfying interpretation of the image in which every detail receives a place. This narrative is empathetically produced by the reader to deal with the image; it produces the story through the processing of a strange image into a familiar mindset'.

Nonsense pictures, however, work according to the strategy of subversion. They undermine the semiotic codes for narrative interpretation by advocating a sense of 'multistability'. Key features of 'nonsense art' (both nonsense literature and illustration) are the juxtaposing of incongruous objects (an animal-like head attached to a human body), and complete exaggeration. These features are meant to confront the viewer-reader's means of interpretation.

The viewer-reader may encounter difficulty in interpreting a picture such as *Heavy Burden* if he / she were to rely solely on semiotic narrative codes. Because the picture is a 'singular scene narrative', it demands that the viewer-reader access a singular moment, and not a series or sequence of events ('proraitic' codes) which would give a clue as to the circumstance of the character. The 'hermeneutic' code may be the viewer-reader's best point of entry to uncover the significance of the picture: the bird-lady's specific body language, primarily her hand touching her chest, is the sole gesture effecting what the title of the picture suggests. 'Semic' codes are eradicated as a result of the character's multistability, and even while the character's identity ('bird') might hold different symbolic values for certain viewer-readers, 'symbolic' codes are too ambiguous to direct the intentions of the picture. This character's secret is nothing short of obscure, and she may even seem mundane, to the viewer-reader. She makes no explicit comment or cultural-political statement and is certainly not a recognizable figure, which implies the dismissal of a 'referential' code.

What I am trying to show is that a viewer-reader may not always be able to interpret a picture based on his / her knowledge of pictorial or narrative codes. Some pictures choose to refer to themselves; either by attending to the process which brought them into being or justifying their independent nature through extreme juxtapositioning ('multistability'). Particularly in cases where the viewer-reader is confronted with extreme cases of exaggeration and disjuncture, such as 'nonsense pictures', his / her interpretation will have to follow a course of interpellation. This means, allowing that the picture holds a label or title, the viewer-reader will have to source significance by drawing analogies between both 'image' (the picture contents), and text (the title). It is not enough to understand a picture such as *Heavy Burden* by adopting solely a semiotic approach (recognizing signs and decoding them to uncover meaning) for interpretation. Alone, the title could never attempt to expose the secret of the bird-lady or make allowance for the viewer-reader to see him- / herself reflected in a picture. Moreover, were the bird-lady imagined on her own, we would never know that she is carrying a heavy burden.

Assimilation

In this section my aim has been to use Mitchell's concept of a 'metapicture' to propose that a picture not only represents things outside of itself, but also functions

self-reflexively. Having considered the possible types of metapictures, and learnt about probable 'multistabilities' (to which I assign the connection between the picture and its title) or visual paradoxes that pictures present, my conclusion about the nature of a picture is that it will never completely reveal its self-knowledge. Such a determinate, of course, impacts heavily on the interrelation between image and text, but as Foucault assures us:

[T]he relation of language [/ text] to painting [/ picture] is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax (cited in Mitchell, 1994:64).

The workings of the relationship between image and text manifest most prominently where a juxtaposing of picture and text is explicit. 'Talking' metapictures best exemplify the relationship between the counterparts of the image-text dichotomy. It has been my aim in creating *The Book of Immediate Nonsense* to make a pictorial environment for 'talking' pictures; a space where a vacillating conversation between pictures and the viewer-reader (as well as between the single picture and itself) can take place, which is to challenge our general conception of implementing narrative codes to read stories (which proceeds principally from an aligned meaning of picture and title).

DEDUCTIONS

Pictures are those images taken to be constituted by the in-built vacillation, contradiction, paradox, or uncertainty of 'saying' and 'showing'. Something in them is linguistic, propositional, systematic, or otherwise semiotic. The rest, as Wittgenstein famously said, is 'silence' [Pictures] might or might not resemble the world. But once it is taken so, it becomes the subject of conflicting interpretations, as viewers try to decide between seeing and interpreting. (Elkins, 1999:81)

The above description by Elkins perfectly exemplifies the peculiar character of pictures. They play an important role in the visualization of contemporary consciousness, in the way in which we construct messages to communicate ideas or express feelings. Thus it should come as no surprise that Mitchell suggested a 'pictorial turn'. A postmodern society 'pictures' both worldly and self-knowledge: it would thus be ill-advised of the present-day viewer-reader to ignore *any* of the participatory aspects of picture-making and picture-reading.

In part two of my investigation I have literally tried to re-establish the conception of making a 'visual analogy'. By lifting out determinate features which induce visual paradoxes, I have shown my recognition of an indexical relationship between pictures and their particulars. Uncovering these relationships or connections means that I acknowledge (put into practice when making my own pictures) a particular mindset – one which is not driven solely by thoughts around disjunction or inter-text.

'Counter-semiotics' is the name I attribute to this particular kind of mindset. Just as in creating a picture I have to fluctuate between perceptions of image and text in order to come to its significance, in the act of interpreting a picture I have to make allowance for the possibility of a mode of counter-semiotics to concur with semiotic intuitions. The art critic, William Dickhoff (2000:52), states:

The politics of the picture ... takes place in the constellation of the colours and forms to a picture language, for which the canvas acts as a stage. That which speaks as content from within the formal structures of a picture is still what decides the truth of the picture. Painting perhaps derives its fundamental necessity from just this occasionally hermetic morality of form that takes up the lines of a probable possibility for painting.

REFLECTION

The closing pages of my investigation will be used to reflect on and draw together the deductions of the chosen semiotic concerns dealt with in TEXT (Part One) and IMAGE (Part Two). In order to substantiate the presence of a 'counter-semiotics' and to motivate the co-existence and cross-supplementation of semiotics and counter-semiotics, the two parts of this thesis will be joined here and its discussions matched; the investigation thus far has demanded that the reader make his / her own connections between analogous constituents.

This investigation has proven to be primarily concerned with the idea of a 'visual semiotics', more particularly with how pictorial decoding is conventionalized, or appropriated, by methodologies for linguistic analysis. In order to focus on, if but a few, of the misrecognized features of image-making and it's the processes it involves, I have chosen to use the word 'picture' to distance myself from the numerous expectations which might have arisen from using simply 'image' or 'image-text' conjoined. (An example of such would be hand-lettered typography, which could easily be referred to as text or image, or also image-text; it is less likely that such a design / illustration would be called a picture.)

Two forms of representation have come to the fore for discussion in this investigation: the 'picture-sign', and the 'picture-thing'. Picture-signs, as Mieke Bal has suggested, play a crucial role in the construction and delineation of cultural semiosis – the process whereby visual signs transfer or transpose from one cultural context to another. Such a process, fixed by cultural framing, follows from the categorization and contextualization of signs and sign-meanings (which Bal calls 'sign events'). A picture-sign, thus, constitutes a context or genre; significant because of its longstanding relation to other fields of knowledge.

As a perspective, it helps to consider a work of visual art as an object whose relevance derives from the processes in which it functions. Thus it takes art out of its formalist and autonomist idealization and takes the work as dynamic. Simultaneously semiotics also privileges meaning and the ways in which meaning is produced, considering aspects and details as signs rather than material elements only. (Bal, 1994:74)

The picture-thing represents the inherent attributes of pictures which are akin to the picture-making process and distinguishable visual devices and modes – generally seen as something pertaining to the medium (for example the reason gouache is used instead of acrylic paint) or a perceptual concept (for instance *chiaroscuro*). I made use again of Bal's terminology to further distinguish the two forms of representation: those aspects of the picture which would allude directly to its material form and elements, its 'thingliness', part of what she regards as a subsemiotics, whereas the visual sign in its entirety, once it enters the cultural sphere as a significant object or contextual marker – a conflation of both verbal and visual signs – turns holistic or suprasemiotic.

These terms have been positioned in the structure of the argument in the following way: Part One served as an introduction to the historic advancement of sign theory and its relation to the visual interpretation. The three sections of Part One – Semiotics, Poststructural semiotics, and Visual Culture – formulate mainly how 'text' has become part of understanding representations. Concepts including iconism, indexicality, and intertextuality, have been conflated and utilized in contemporary theory of representation and visual culture studies (a development which Part One revises), in order to abridge, simplify for that matter, I believe, the relation between cultural fields of knowledge. TEXT looked at the cultural framing and contextualization of visual signs, particularly at how textual knowledge informed and developed a way of reading and categorizing pictorial signs – transposing them as suprasemiotic events.

Visual semiotics from Part Two, in effect, precedes the post-structuralist and visual culture sections of Part One. The perceptualist account of representation, which dominated thoughts around the significance of pictures before the interjection of postmodern tendencies, described an interpretative attitude which coincides with Bal's concept of the 'subsemiotic'. IMAGE is seen to have dealt with such a presidential state of the pictorial sign. This is the picture-making process and the devices and methods accustomed to certain image-mediums – I concentrated on drawing and painting. Thus, suprasemiotics was assigned to the picture-sign, and subsemiotics designated to the picture-thing.

A key aspect of the state between subsemiotics and suprasemiotics is the idea of intertextuality. Derrida's deconstruction incorporates a form of inter-text activity which plays on, and is determined by, the sign itself. This means that intertextuality is

dependent on the viewer-reader's level of interaction with the text / picture-sign, as well as his / her textual knowledge of what the codes connote. Bal's view of deconstruction, based on the constant re-contextualization of suprasemiotic signs, is that semiosis and the uncovering of sign-meaning both start and end with the viewer-reader. Seen as a holistic process, interpretation (or re-contextualization) is an interpersonal activity, whereby the suprasemiotic sign functions according to a cultural knowledge. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:6) describe interpersonal reaction to the picture-sign as follows:

Interest guides the reaction of what is seen as the criterial aspects of the object, and this criterial aspect is then regarded as adequately or sufficiently representative of the object in the given context [I]t is never the 'whole object' but only ever its criterial aspects which are represented.

The idea of intertextuality applies also to my intentions for the delivery of counter-semiotics. But my use thereof is situated closer to the interrelations of picture propositions, rather than sign-activity – intertextuality for the picture-thing involves the cross-relation of subsemiotic activities. Counter-semiotics is, for instance, more concerned with similarities between, or the transformation ('transmodulation') of, graphic marks in pictures, than it is with the representational style or picture genre. Just as an individual's textual knowledge develops from his / her familiarity and usage of signs, so a viewer-reader's personal / collective 'visual literacy' of picture propositions advances with the recognition and implementation thereof. What this theoretical investigation has shown is that both such 'knowledges' (textual and visual) reside in, and are bound to, a particular context and the processes involved in signifying such. Heidegger (cited in Pattison 2000:99) maintains:

[T]he art-work does not predetermine the world in the way that ... mathematics does. In 'setting-up' a world, the art-work is not imposing a projective enframing. Rather, it allows the world to come to appearance – not, of course, as 'mere' appearance but as the shining-forth, the phenomenization of what, in truth, it is.

My interest is to show that in a similar fashion to the process of semiosis – which is to identify signs, followed by contextualization and re-contextualization of these – picture propositions enable the viewer-reader to understand the process which led to the development of pictorial signs and the picture-making decisions that inaugurate a

context in which the picture will be interpreted; the focus here has been on subsemiotic attributes.

Three picture propositions were identified in order to demonstrate the inversion of accepted semiotic pictorial conventions, and suggest a common ground for counter-semiotics. In the next few paragraphs I shall recapitulate the product of the discussed counter-semiotic stances – *anti-splendor*, exfoliation, and ‘multistability’ – in relation to their associative semiotic counterparts.

Anti-splendor confronts the viewer-reader’s perception of pictorial devices, more specifically *chiaroscuro*, for naturalism. By performing the role which is generally assigned to ‘highlights’ (*splendor*), *anti-splendor* undermines the function and general acceptance that the illusion of three-dimensional form is generated through the juxtapositioning of light and dark tonal areas. This form of counter-semiotics then questions our conviction that a natural form is constituted through the relationship of highlights and shadows. This means that, effectively, *anti-splendor* challenges semiotic indexicality – a shadow being an index for naturalism. The first act of counter-semiotics is to uncover misrecognised effects caused by reverse implications of pictorial conventions that are utilized to create an illusion of the real.

Exfoliation names an event in which marks gradually turn the entire pictorial space into a ground for the interaction between abstraction and figuration. Mark-making is a pansemic process: it constitutes the interaction of two dissimilar activities (such as figure-ground, open and closed form, or representational and non-representational) with the intention of showing both parties’ supplementary nature – this would be a way of describing the ‘transmodulation’ of a mark. Here the iconicity of the picture-sign comes into question, whereby the viewer-reader’s expected reading of his / her interaction is overturned and negated by mismatch – marks do a variety of things to affirm that significance originates right from the start of the image-making process, not necessarily only once it is recognized and contextualized. Marks are, therefore, independent of the need to become a sign. Through their subtle variation and transformation, marks demonstrate that it is due partly to the picture-thing (which the viewer-reader misreads as singularly a picture-sign) that a picture attends to its internal politics and is self-reflexive. Drawing is a pansemic process: it mediates between the different processes which visualize significant form and picture activity – conjoining the aspectual workings of pictorial semiotics and counter-semiotics.

The sustainability of a proposed singular 'visual semiotics', finally, was shown to be suspect by the 'multistable' occurrences / relational paradoxes in pictures. Focusing specifically on the relationship between the picture and its label (which is decisive for conclusions regarding the picture's context), I suggest that it is mainly through the juxtaposing of incongruous forms, and opposed narratives, that a picture enables itself to attract attention to the qualities that make it a picture and cause it to function intertextually; to become a metapicture (counter-semiotics supports the Derridean conception of the internality of inter-text activity). In combining an unrelated title with what is denoted in the picture – or eliciting a double picture – the viewer-reader will not only be required to draw analogies between the given visual (picture) and textual (title) propositions, but also he / she will be presented with a situation in which to counter-pose narrative codes to interpret the significance of both. Nonsense pictures showed us that pictorial semiotic narrative codes are easily overturned, and that a course of 'interpellation' will have to be followed to make sense of what is pictured.

These three pictorial propositions have acted as mediators for the interplay of text and image / semiotic notions for pictures and counter-semiotics. Their inauguration and implementation have not been to simply reinstate notions that are aligned with a marginalized 'perceptual theory', even though the basis for their investigation concerns particulars and processes for picture-making; and we have seen that certain features maintain a semiotic assimilation – as for instance, *chiaroscuro*. This elect group of counter-semiotic conceptions – *anti-splendor*, *exfoliation*, and 'multistability' – has also elucidated the idea of the visual analogy: through the equalization of the processes of subsemiotics (picture-making) and suprasemiotics (picture contextualization), counter-semiotics simultaneously discovers similarity and dissimilarity in pictures. It does what Stafford (1999:23) feels a form of visual analogy intends, putting 'the visible into relationship with the invisible and manifesting the effect of that momentary unison'.

There are undoubtedly many other pictorial occurrences which would pertain to a counter-semiotic explanation of pictures. It is my hope that this investigation will form part of an inquiry into the discovery of significant pictorial misrecognitions, and that it will trigger a return interest in the implementation of constantly marginalized pictorial conceptions; these have in this study proven in fact to be the vehicles for counter-activities of pictures. The motivation behind my inquest into a 'renewed viewer-reader condition' – an interpretative approach which accepts the coupling of, and conversatorial nature of semiotics and counter-semiotics – is encapsulated in a

remark made by Stafford (1999:205): 'Juxtaposing the strange with the beautiful or putting the distant into play with the familiar uncannily describes the visionary coincidence of opposites occurring when the viewer confronts a cabinet of curiosities'. And pictures are for me 'cabinets', or rather, 'things' filled with curiosities.

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15. **Michael Taylor**, *Saturday Afternoon*. 2005. Pencil on paper, 7.425 x 5.25 cm.
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1. David Hockney, *Man in Museum (or You're in the Wrong Movie)*. 1962.
Oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm. (Hockney, 2004:31.)

Problems of Depiction A Marriage of Styles



30

Colonial Governor 1962

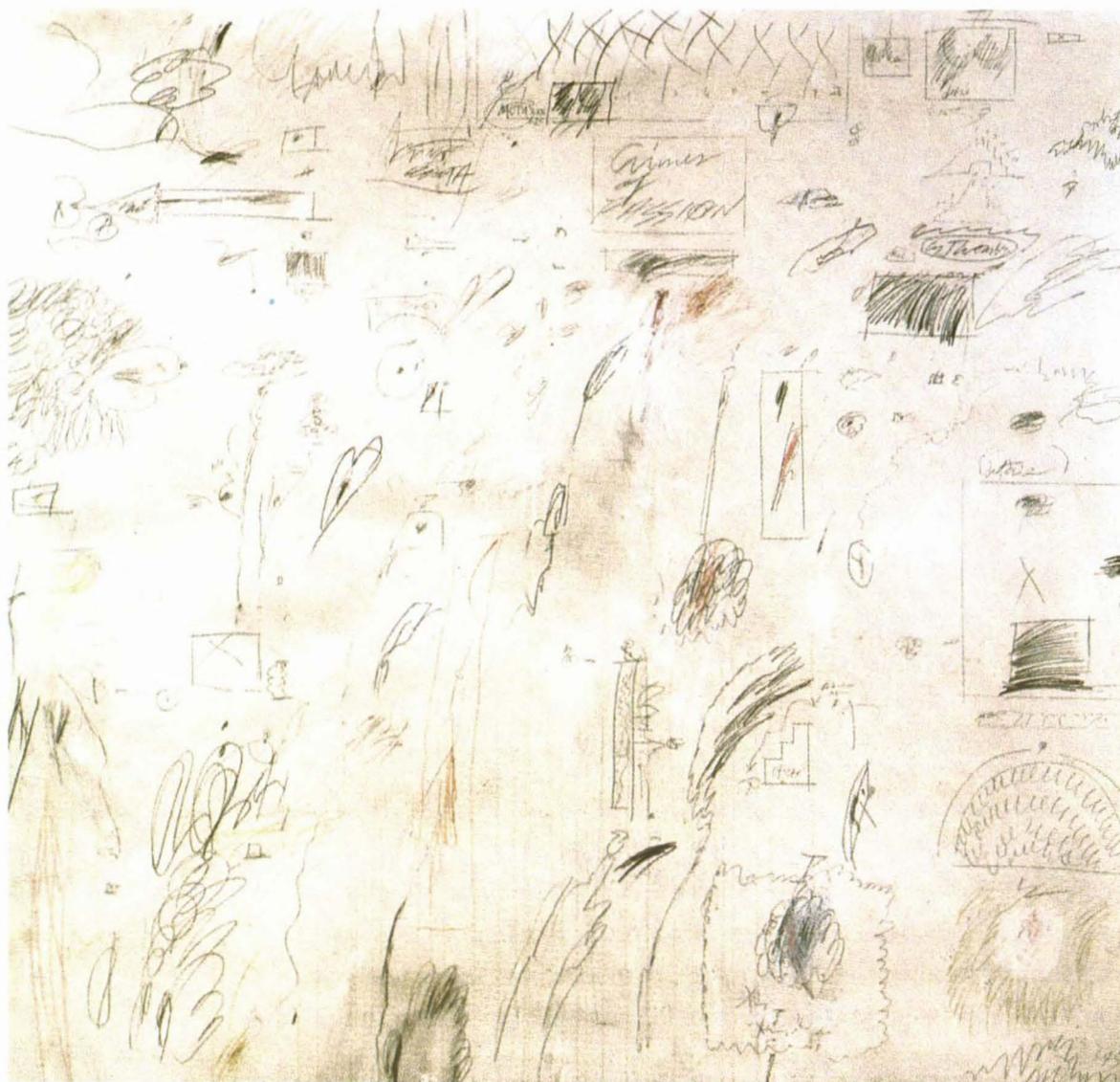
'Man in a Museum has the same theme as the Marriage pictures (pages 24 and 25) ... When I went to the Pergamon Museum in Berlin in 1962 with a friend we got separated. Suddenly I caught sight of him standing next to an Egyptian sculptured figure... Both figures were looking the same way and it amused me that in my first glimpse of them they looked united.'



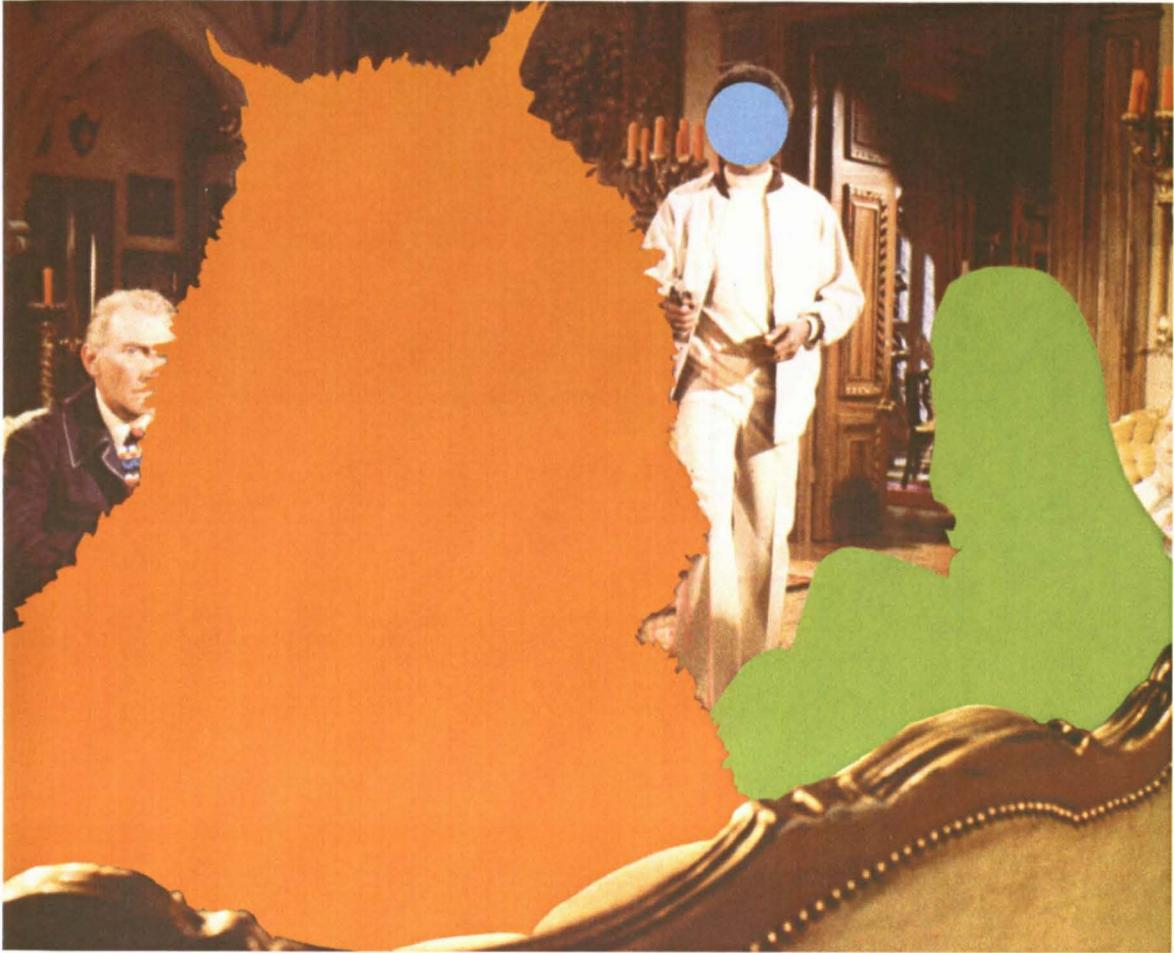
Man in a Museum (or You're in the Wrong Move) 1962

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2. Double-spread layout from Hockney's Pictures. 2004. London: Thames and Hudson. P30-31.



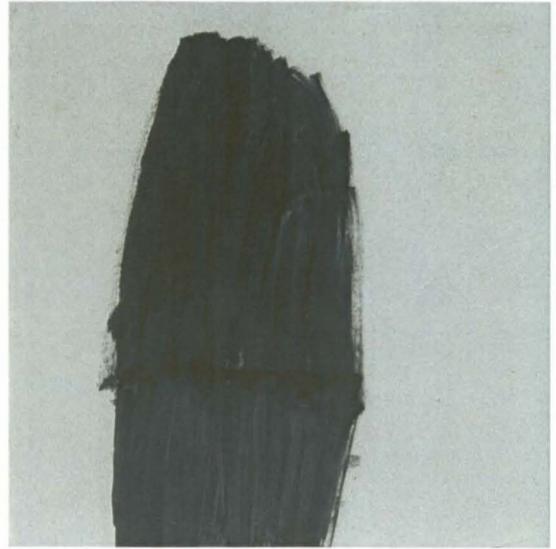
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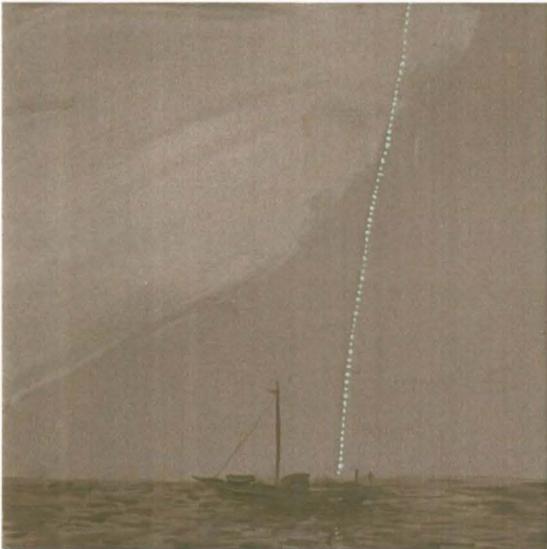
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(Something from a Movie)



(Sunday)



(With Flair)

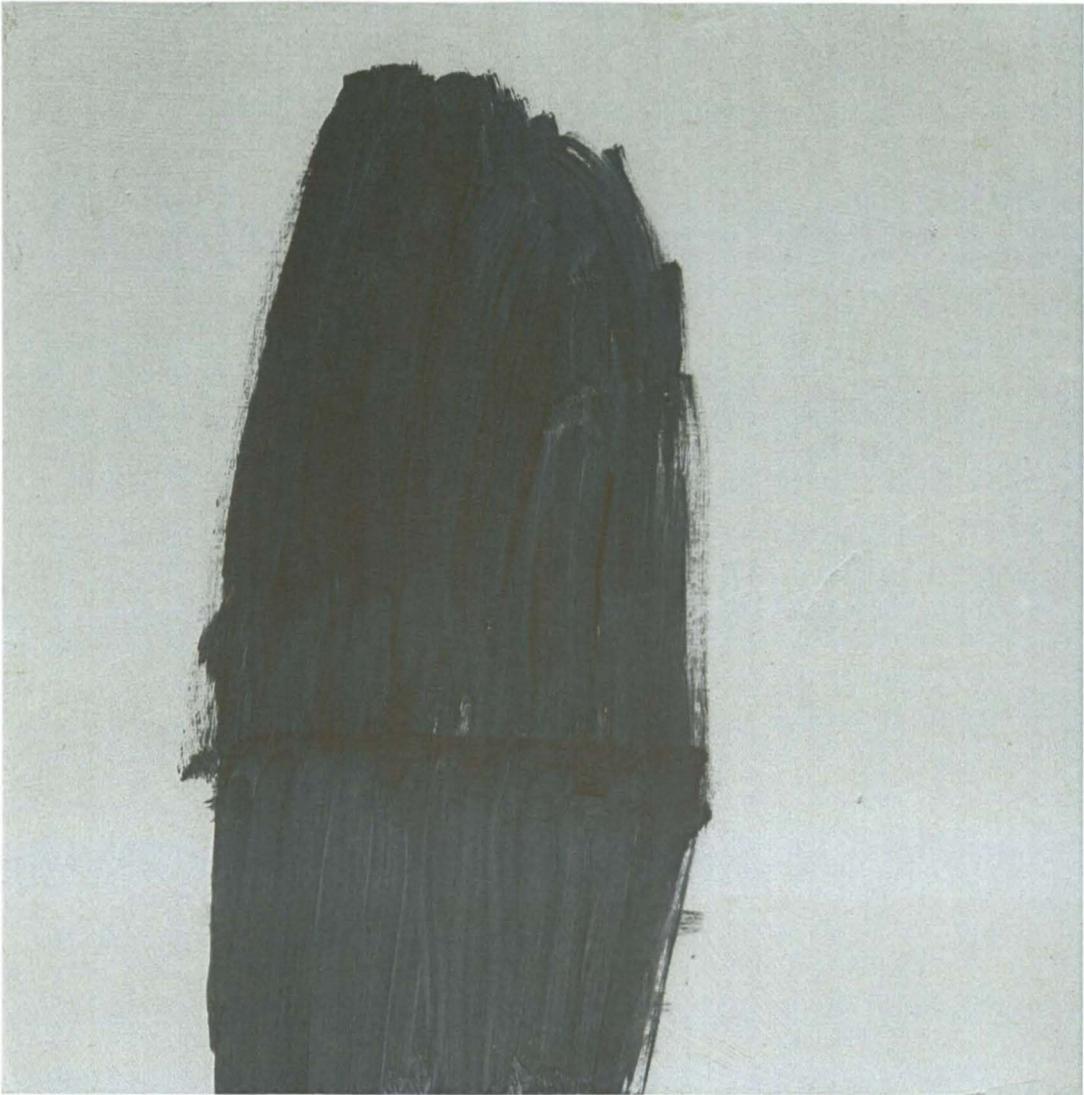


(A Disaster: Milky Lane Birthday Party)

5. Michael Taylor, selection of four miniature paintings from the series *The Gift*. 2004.



6. Michael Taylor, *Something from a Movie*. 2004. Gouache on card, 15 x 15 cm.



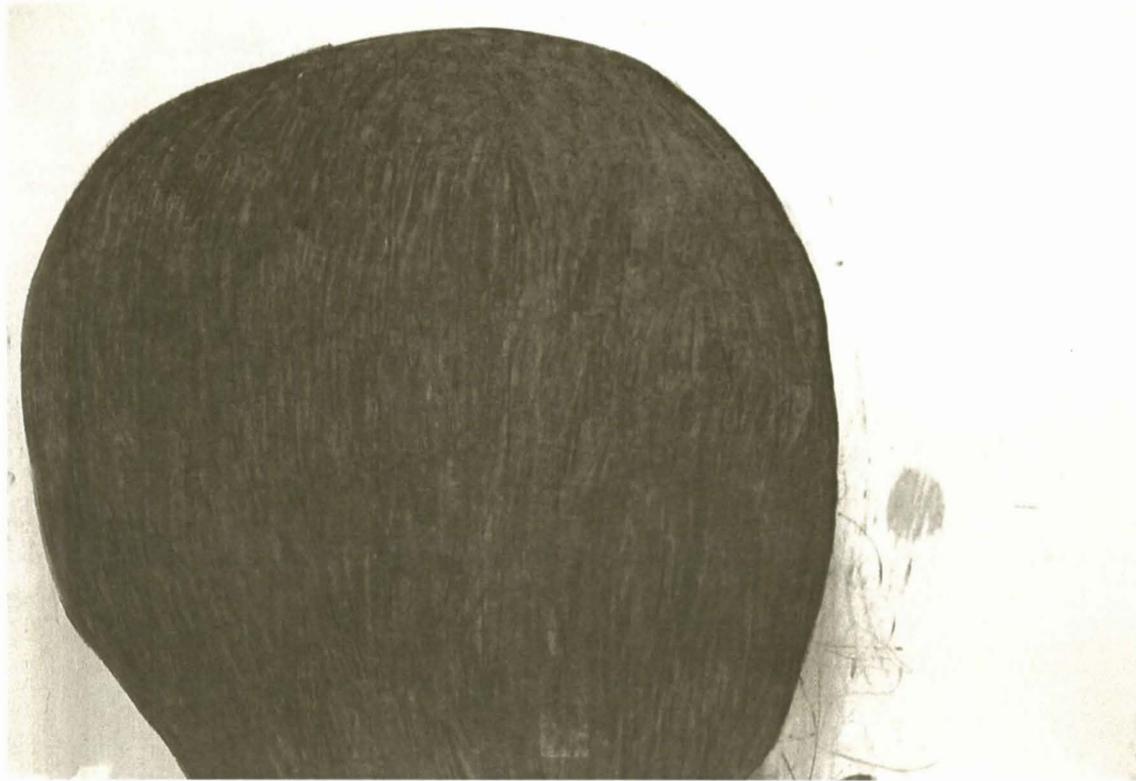
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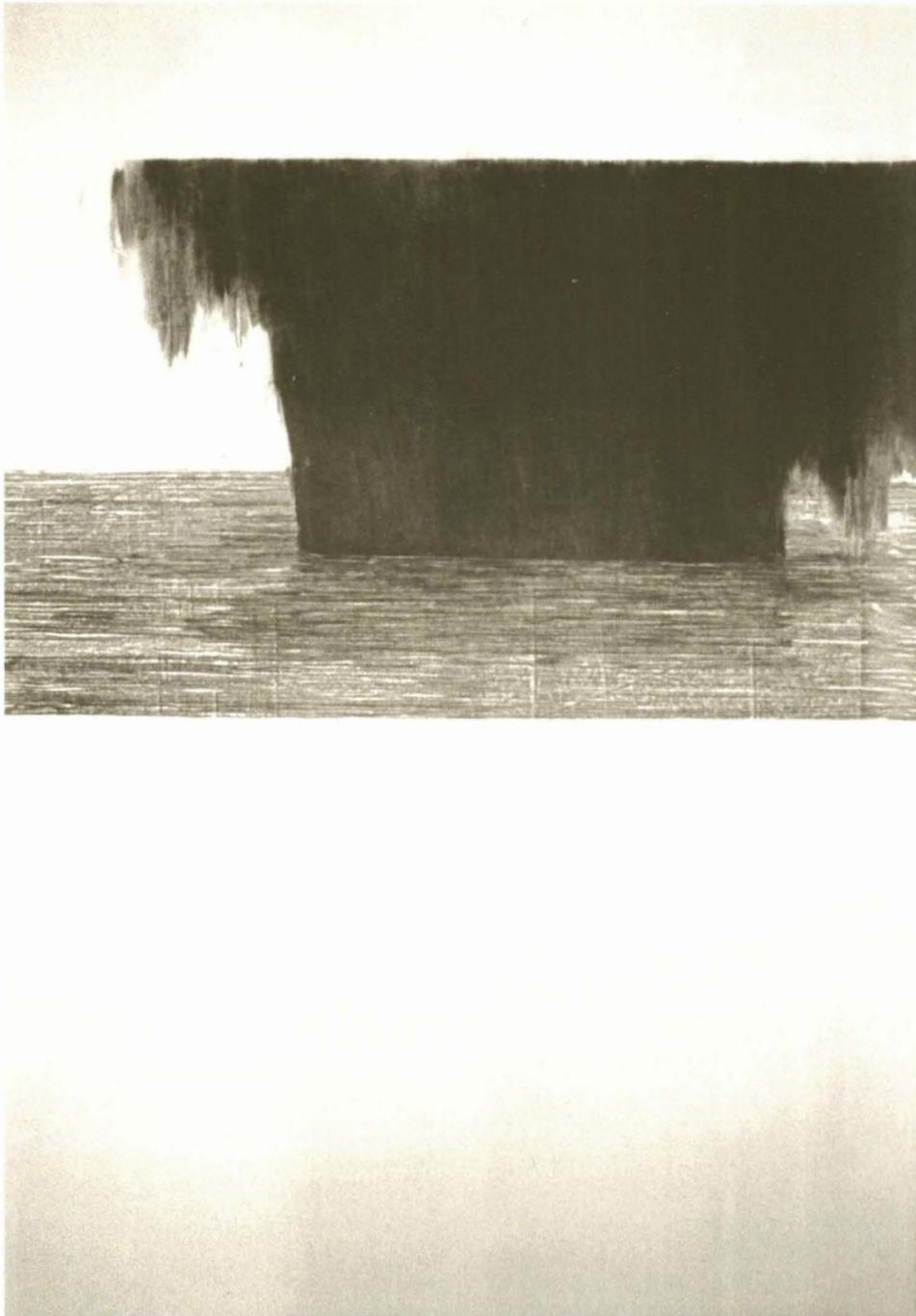
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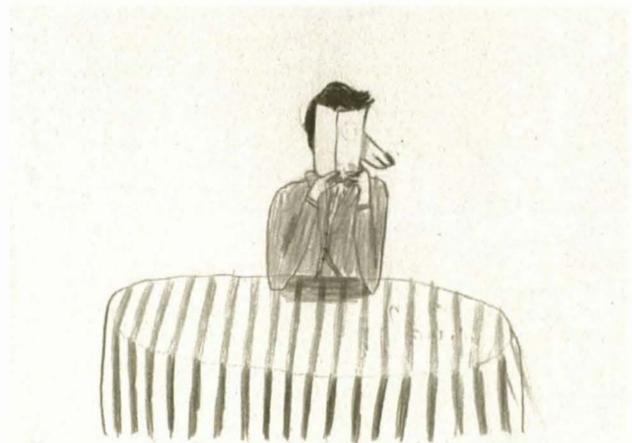
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(Heavy Burden)



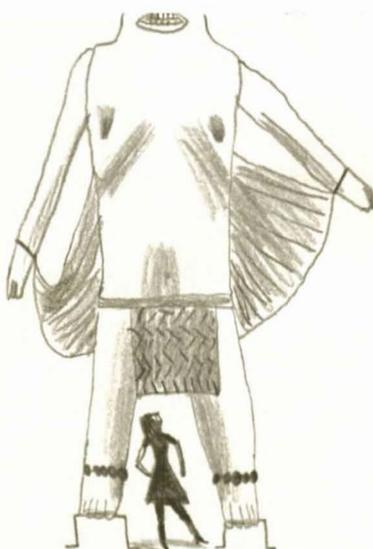
(Self Portrait)



(It's Called a Job)



(Serge has a Shopping Problem)

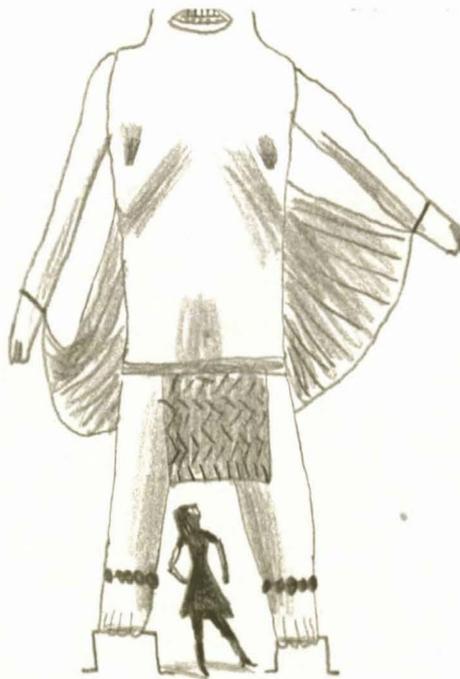


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serge has a shopping problem

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