University of Southern Queensland

Disrupted Meaning:

A study of subverting logic through artists'

books

A Dissertation submitted by

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Abstract

This dissertation will discuss artists' books as a form of visual arts practice that has been developed primarily since the 1960s. Works associated with this term can be distinguished from books in general and even books containing works of art, in that artists' books are works of art in and of themselves. In particular, this dissertation will focus on non-narrative, nonlinear or disrupted artists' books that require alternate or reinvented methods of reception and interpretation as they put forward different experiences to those of traditional books. In order to approach this focus from a theoretical perspective, which is currently lacking in existing literature on artists' books, there are four key areas that will be examined, as they will provide the context for the examination of non-narrative artists' books.

The first is an account of artists' books in general, where a brief history and various conceptual and material approaches related to their practice will be outlined. Secondly, modes of narrative communication conducted both through books and in society in general will be discussed. This is important for the dissertation because it will outline related book and narrative conventions that the particular works in question will be shown to depart from. The third field that will be considered concerns aesthetic debates. In order to situate non-narrative artists' books in these debates, the presence of an illogical signifier or non-narrative occurrence in a visual work will be explored as a potential aesthetic element. The fourth field to be examined addresses the processes and effects related to non-narrative ordering in literary, film and visual works in general. Once the aforementioned areas have been addressed, specific nonlinear or disrupted artists' books will be discussed. This discussion will be carried out in terms of content, structure, reader role and experience and alternate methods of comprehension that may be required, so that the various ways in which such works depart from traditional books can be considered and responded to. Through these considerations, this dissertation will identify the potential relevance and functions of non-narrative book works as a mode of contemporary art practice.

The dissertation does not seek to examine overt structures of meaning, but to investigate disruptive or illogical spaces that arise within a work. This is the gap in existing literature that will be filled, thereby providing a theoretical basis for the viewing and discussion of non-narrative artists' books.

Certification of Dissertation

I certify that the ideas, discussions, interpretations and conclusions presented in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award.

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Candidate

Endorsement

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Principal Supervisor

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Chapter One

Introduction

This dissertation is concerned with the interruption of narrative structures found in visual works, in particular, artists' books. It will investigate disruptive gaps that can arise within a work, rather than external aspects such as the politics of aesthetics and cultural theory. A theoretical account of this disruptive or non-narrative space in an artist's book is lacking in existing literature and as such, the research will address this gap. It will do so by considering existing theories on spoken, written and visual narratives in general, how such systems can be interrupted and the different modes of interpretation and response a non-narrative work may require from the viewer. These key points will form the context in which artists' books will be considered. This is important in that it will reveal new applications for existing literature and in doing so, will consider the theoretical implications of a disruptive gap within an artist's book.

Regarding the function of narrative works in terms of the facilitation of communication and the development of understanding, this dissertation will approach potential applications of non-narrative, disrupted or incomplete works and forms of information. The research aims to investigate the term 'narrative' as referring to a kind of closed system, where events or ideas are ordered in a way that can be regarded as logical.[1] Such systems may be verbal, written, gestural or visual, communicated by means of objects such as works of art, and can therefore be located in forms of communal interaction such as speaking and acting, or transferred and preserved by means such as written, typed or electronic text, audio and visual recording and pictorial representation. By any means of communication or representation, a coherent narrative presents all or most of its components in an informative manner. That is, upon the experience of each event, occurrence or visual component, the viewing or experiencing subject progressively gains knowledge of an overall idea, message or intention.

In a narrative system, there should be minimal or no contradictory material or significant gaps in information for the comprehension of that narrative. As such, intelligible exchanges of material can readily occur. A visual work that conforms to a linear narrative structure or a logical organisation of visual signs presents a string of intelligible and related events or ideas to the viewer. These individual signs can be read to form a coherent whole by concealing any gaps in understanding that may occur. This can be related to human experience in general, where the formation of narratives can be understood as a processing of thoughts whereby attempts are made to create meaning and give structure to that experience.[2]

Before discussing specific examples of non-narrative artists' books, this dissertation will address at some length, philosophical debates concerning how

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[1] D. Polkinghorne 1988, *Narrative, Knowing and the Human Sciences,* State University of New York Press, Albany.
[2] Polkinghorne.

society reads, sees and understands language, including visual language. This approach is necessary because it will give an account of how narratives and instances of meaningful experience are generally formed, which then provides a basis for departure where artists' books can be investigated. In this dissertation, artist's book practices are identified as emerging predominately during the 1960s. This point in history can also be flagged by the breakdown of narrative in other forms of visual culture including neo-avant-garde practices. As such, it can be noted that a departure from narrative conventions is not specific to artists' books, but can be witnessed in other forms of visual practice occurring simultaneously.

The research will focus on visual works, in particular, artists' books, that have some meaningful grounding or narrative structure, yet present a break in this kind of framework. By maintaining some link to narrative organisation and related book traditions, these works can be viewed as critiques or reinventions of an existing mode of practice, rather than models for an entirely new one. Non-narrative books are disruptive due to the existing traditions they refer to, yet do not fulfill. Artists' books can be considered in this context, because they refer to traditional book conventions, where convention suggests the presence of some form of narrative, yet forge unexpected breaks. These breaks, or interruptions, refer to some form of nonsense space or illogical development; an occurrence that cannot be anticipated, or does not appear to belong in its allocated place. As a result, it stands out to a viewer, making the 'reader' a viewer of something enigmatic that disrupts the narrative implications contained in the overall work, rather than contributing to the reading of the work as text.

In this dissertation, artists' books are considered as works that have a high potential to disrupt logic, due to the narrative conventions they inevitably refer to. Such works are contextualised in this manner in order to investigate alternate functions associated with these works and new ways in which they may be received or experienced by a viewing subject. This dissertation intends to expand the theoretical context for non-narrative artists' books that is presently lacking. In order to provide this context that is lacking, the dissertation will need to engage in a broader theoretical discussion involving several artistic media, which can then be extended to include artists' books.

Prior to any discussion and analysis of non-narrative practices however, the function of the narrative model in society must first be examined. Processes of interpretation and understanding related to the narrative ordering of clear communication can be discussed in terms of hermeneutics, in particular, German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Hermeneutics can be understood as originating with 'the development of a theoretical framework to govern and direct (biblical) exegetical practice'.[3] During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries however, the term was used to designate processes of interpretation of textual matter in general.[4]

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[3] J. Malpas ed. E. N. Zalta 2009, 'Hans-Georg Gadamer', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 27 July 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/gadamer/>.
[4] Malpas ed. Zalta.

In the 1920s, German philosopher Martin Heidegger constructed a reinterpretation of hermeneutics where he sought to investigate the potential applications of this field of study beyond that of textual analysis. As such, he used the term to describe 'that by means of which the investigation of the basic structure of (...) existence is to be pursued'.[5] Heidegger does not focus on one interpretative theory or scientific method, but rather on 'the self-disclosure of the structure of understanding'.[6] For Heidegger, hermeneutics did not so much relate to cognitive enquiries as forms of intuition. He viewed understanding as a key ability related to the role of each human and their place in the world. 'Understanding is not primarily the reconstruction of the meaning of an expression (...); it always entails the projecting, and self-projecting, of a possibility of (one's) own existence'.[7]

From this historical discourse, Gadamer developed his 'philosophical hermeneutics', through which he sought to provide 'an account of the nature of understanding in its universality'.[8] He refers to interpretation in terms of prior understanding coupled with an interaction or dialogue with the object.[9] For Gadamer, 'the question is not what we do or what we should do, but what happens beyond our willing and doing'.[10] Here, understanding is not entirely the role of the viewer or reader, but is largely associated with the content of the object. This can be likened to the act of reading a book, which involves physical and psychological interactions with the object. This prompts the integration of the viewer's prior understanding and the stimuli they are presently confronted with, resulting in an overall interpretation.

The integration of prior knowledge and present stimuli is a process that is embedded in 'humanity'[11], and Western society carries a preconceived understanding of the form of the book itself; how it should be handled or read, and what an audience should expect to take from the experience of reading it. Both fiction and non-fiction books traditionally present sequences of information necessary to the construction of a coherent whole. Examples of this include linear stories, as well as descriptions, diagrams or images that present additional information or aid understanding. From a semiotic perspective, words or visual elements within a sequence can be viewed as signs.

According to Swiss linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure, each sign can be understood as comprising an acoustic image (signifier) and the object or

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[5] Malpas ed. Zalta.

[6] Malpas ed. Zalta.

[7] *Hermeneutics: Heidegger's Hermeneutics of Existence,* viewed 28 November 2012, <http://science.jrank.org/pages/9616/Hermeneutics-Heidegger-s-Hermeneutics-Existence.html>.

[8] Malpas ed. Zalta.

[9] H. Gadamer trans. R. Coltman 2000, *The Beginning of Philosophy,* The Continuum Publishing Company, New York.

[10] H. Gadamer trans/ed. D. E. Linge 2008, *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* University of California Press, Los Angeles/London, pg. xi.

[11] Derrida discusses 'humanity' in terms of 'the name of the being to which transcendental *telos*, determined as Idea (in the Kantian sense), or as Reason, is announced. It is man as *rational animal* which, in its most classical metaphysical determination, designates the place of deployment of teleological reason; that is, history. For Husserl as for Hegel, reason is history and there is no history except that of reason'. J. Derrida 1969, 'The Ends of Man', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* Vol. 30, No. 1, pg. 43.

concept assigned to this image (signified).[12] Together these represent a coded whole, the sign, that is then decoded in the context of other signs. This is how it can be given meaning. Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology* will focus on discussing logical communication systems and instances of narrative ordering, such as the coherent integration of signs. An illogical sign then, or rather, a signifier without an apparent signified is considered problematic to this system. It can give the impression of incorrect, incomplete or misplaced information, which, if significant, may act to render a work or area within a work unintelligible.

It should be noted, however, that alternative critiques of the concept of the sign have been presented since Saussure's theory was developed. One such position can be observed in the text *Of Grammatology,* 1982 by French post-structuralist Jacques Derrida. In this text, Derrida addresses aspects of linguistic theory and the related field of semiotics. He raises Saussure's contribution to the theory of the sign by referring to a summary provided by Russian-American linguist and literary theorist Roman Jakobson. Jakobson states that 'language is a system of signs and linguistics is part and parcel of the science of signs, or *semiotics*', 'every linguistic unit (…) involves (two) aspects, one sensible and the other intelligible' – the signifier and the signified.[13] Moreover, he states that 'these two constituents of a linguistic sign (and of (any) sign in general) necessarily suppose and require each other'.[14] We can then consider, that the signifier and signified may not be 'distinguished simply as the two faces of one and the same leaf', as they were for Saussure.[15] Derrida proposes that to the 'metaphysico-theological roots (of the concept of the sign,) many other hidden sediments cling'.[16] Saussure's theory promotes a kind of fixedness, where language designates a series of ideas that are connected to sound-images. Derrida, however, seeks to argue that any one phonetic signifier has multiple potential and varied values. This variability relates to a play of signification that is hinted at in Saussure's theory through his account of arbitrary signs, but it is not dealt with at length.

Derrida also discusses notions of fixedness and totality that are associated with the book. He states that 'the idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing'.[17] Derrida's use of the term 'writing', like 'language', refers to aspects such as 'action, movement, thought, reflection, consciousness, unconsciousness, experience (and) affectivity', but, unlike language, the term writing is also used 'to designate not only the physical gestures of literal pictographic or ideaographic inscription, but also the totality of what makes it possible'.[18] The scope of writing continues beyond that of the book, which is ultimately governed by a teleological end. Derrida argues against

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[12] F. Saussure ed. C. Bally & A. Sechehaye trans. W. Baskin 1959, *Course In General Linguistics,* The Philosophical Library Inc., New York.

[13] R. Jakobson in J. Derrida trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 1982, *Of Grammatology,* 5th edn, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, pg. 13.

[14] Jakobson in Derrida, pg. 13.

[15] J. Derrida trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 1982, *Of Grammatology,* 5th edn, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, pg. 11.

[16] Derrida, pg. 13.

[17] Derrida, pg. 18.

[18] Derrida, pg. 9.

the assumption of what he refers to as a 'transcendental signified': a concrete, external truth such as truth itself, humanity or God. Related to this rejection, Derrida conceives of an end or limitation to the book, or the notion of a self-enclosed idea or truth. The book sets up the suggestion of containment, but, for Derrida, there exists something outside this perceived finality that connects with all textuality. This is not a final or transcendental signified, nor any signified at all, because it refers to processes that are iterative and beyond containment.

This 'end of the book' is an end to the abovementioned self-enclosed idea or truth, one what seemingly exists apart from processes of 'dissemination' or 'iteration' that act outside of it. Derrida recognises this division as an impossibility, and thus refers to these processes that act upon the reception of any text. Here, dissemination refers to a kind of dispersion of meaning where closure is ultimately unattainable. Iteration relates to the interpretation of texts, which can be carried out again and again, and thus can occur in many different contexts. These are endless, and negate the idea of a conclusive understanding of a text, and, of the existence of an external truth to which information can be compared. As previously mentioned, this theory concerns itself with the iteration of signification, which offers alternatives to Saussure's conception of the sign. Derrida's theory, however, will be regarded as largely outside the scope of this dissertation as it refers primarily to a sense of play rather than the potential for disruption.

In addition to the investigation of linguistic theory and related aspects of semiotics in regards to the field of non-narrative works, forms of disruption brought about by the creation of a nonsense space within an otherwise logical structure can be seen as an aesthetic element. It must first be established that this is not because it constitutes part of a conceptually unified or formally harmonious whole, or progressive narrative sequence as may be important within a Hegelian system for example, but rather, it can be viewed as an element that induces the free play of cognitive faculties discussed under a Kantian approach. German philosophers G. W. F. Hegel and Immanuel Kant can be considered the two seminal philosophers on aesthetic theory since the late eighteenth century, and are still discussed and debated in recent theory. In order to demonstrate this, American philosopher Robert B. Pippin's account of the application of Hegel's theory to forms of 20th Century Abstract art will be examined. English art critic Diarmuid Costello's suggestions about potential contemporary applications of Kantian aesthetics will also be discussed.

With reference to this historical debate and more recent interpretations of both Kant's and Hegel's theories, this dissertation will consider a non-narrative space or insertion within a work of art as an aesthetic element. In order to form a conceptually logical progression of ideas, towards the inclusion of non-narrative works in a discussion of aesthetics, these theories will be examined against chronological order. Hegel's historical narrative of the progression of thought will therefore be discussed first, and will be followed by an account of Kant's 'free play' of imagination and understanding which occurs in an aesthetic judgement. The following will provide a brief summary of the historical debate between Kant and Hegel, while Chapter Five *Aesthetics and Art History* will

examine the debate at length with reference to potential contemporary applications.

Hegel's aesthetic theory referred to a kind of movement of human thought towards consciousness of the Divine. At each stage that this task was undertaken, humanity could gain greater access to the Absolute Spirit or God; first through nature, then art, religion and ultimately, philosophy. Art was regarded as having the capacity to provide a sensuous representation of Spirit. Considering human subjects as self-conscious beings, manifestations of reason, Hegel referred to art as being able to give expression to the understanding of the self by seeking to embody the 'freedom of spirit'.[19] Hegel claimed that the highest function of both art, which has already been reached according to this theory, and 'the revealed religion of Christianity' was to bring 'the divine to human consciousness'.[20] It should be noted however, that although art is viewed as already having served this highest function, it is still able to be produced, yet after this point it becomes self-reflective.

Hegel states that fine art 'only achieves its highest task when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy, and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the Divine Nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind'.[21] In Hegel's aesthetic theory, art objects are to be regarded as beautiful if they speak of a truth or ideal of freedom, thereby serving its function in the historical progression of thought.[22] Here, a narrative account of history is constructed. This system does not refer to judgements of subjectivity, and does not allow for disagreement, but refers to an already defined stage in the progression of 'human thought and activity'.[23]

A nonsense space or illogical element does not necessarily refer to the progressive narrative outlined in Hegel's theory, but is better understood through Kantian aesthetics. For Kant, beauty is not an objective property but a judgment about an object that produces an effect, to 'set our understanding and imagination in 'free play' with one another'.[24] Kant states that a beautiful object must involve the cognitive faculties of '*imagination* for bringing together the manifold of intuition, and *understanding* for the unity of the concept uniting the representations'.[25] These faculties assume a state of free play, because neither is able to wholly subsume the other. Judgments about beauty, for Kant, do not necessarily exclude, but are not defined by, and do not depend on, historical conditions or conceptual content. Here, an aesthetic judgment about that which is considered beautiful is non-instrumental and subjective. Even so, these judgments are fixed objectively by means of social consensus. Not every

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[19] S. Houlgate ed. E. N. Zalta 2010, 'Hegel's Aesthetics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 28 June 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/hegel-aesthetics/>.

[20] D. James 2007, *Hegel: A Guide for the Perplexed,* Continuum International Publishing Group, London/New York, pg. 78.

[21] G. W. F. Hegel trans. B. Bosanquet ed. M. Inwood 2004, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics,* Penguin Books, London.

[22] Houlgate.

[23] James.

[24] Houlgate.

[25] I. Kant trans. J. C. Meredith ed. N. Walker 2008, *The Critique of Judgement,* Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York.

individual within a society must agree that an object is beautiful, however, a sense of consensus that alludes to acceptance and communicability allows for such judgments of taste to occur.[26]

Unlike Hegel's more rigid, yet all-encompassing system, Kant's conception of aesthetics allows for disagreement. Furthermore, it does not refer to a historical narrative that has already reached its highest point, but instead, involves an indeterminate sense of understanding. This allows for the presence of the unknown, which need not necessarily be resolved. Here, the aesthetic judgement does not refer to a unification of materiality or ideas, but the capacity to bring about a certain pleasure through the 'play of sensory forms'.[27] In this way, these judgments involve a kind of aesthetic feeling rather than informed historical or conceptual value.

Areas of Kantian aesthetics have, in recent decades, most recognisably been addressed by the art criticism of American art critic Clement Greenberg. For this reason, Kant has received negative criticism. The following will briefly outline key problems associated with this account, which will be further discussed throughout the dissertation, and determine the necessity of drawing on a broader, historical Kantian approach. Greenberg's interpretation of Kantian aesthetics 'is object-centered and involves knowledge of the artwork as a significant development of artistic tradition'.[28] While appealing to aspects of Kantian aesthetics, Greenberg formed a modernist theory of aesthetics. A foundation of Modernism, according to Greenberg, was 'medium-specificity' which describes 'the self-reflective investigation of the constraints of a specific medium through the ongoing practice of the discipline in question'.[29]

Furthermore, Greenberg 'sought to align specific arts (...) with specific senses'.[30] While still a subjective judgment based on feeling, a judgment manifested in 'feeling occasioned by objects impacting casually on the sense organs' is closer to the agreeable than the beautiful, and as such, can be viewed as a misreading of Kant.[31] This research will therefore draw on a broadly Kantian approach which 'is grounded fundamentally on an interplay between the aesthetic object and our perceptual faculties', rather than adopt a Greenbergian reading of Kant's aesthetics.[32] A seemingly illogical element within a visual work can be referred to as a source of tension between preconceived understanding and imagination, that is, concepts and intuited particulars.

This dissertation will demonstrate that artists' books can provide a good example of such tension. They are able to do so by staging clearly defined departures from the presupposed narrative conventions of the book object,

[26] L. Williams 2010, Lecture Notes: Aesthetics and Enlightenment, lecture from HUSO 2252, RMIT University, Melbourne, 12 March 2010.
[27] T. Ross ed. B. Hinderliter, et. al. 2009, *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics,* Duke University Press, Durham/London, pp. 91 – 92.
[28] P. Crowther 1984, 'Kant and Greenberg's Varieties of Aesthetic Formalism', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Vol. 42, No. 4, pg. 445.
[29] D. Costello 2007, 'Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Vol. 65, No. 2, pg. 218.
[30] Costello, pg. 221.
[31] Costello, pg. 221.
[32] Crowther.

while simultaneously referring to these conventions to varying degrees. The book works discussed in Chapter Three, *A Brief Historical Survey of Artists' Books,* will give some grounding to the practice of artists' books in general, and Chapters Four *Semiotics and Narratology,* Chapter Five *Aesthetics and Art History* and Chapter Six *Art and Language* will discuss theories of narrative and non-narrative reception and interpretation. The specific non-narrative works to be discussed at length in Chapter Seven, *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books,* refer to some material or conceptual aspect of the traditional book, allowing for any disruption to be perceived as especially jarring. Such works undermine the viewer's preconceived understanding in relation to the book and, consequently, a departure from habitual or learned modes of reading and viewing is required.

A non-narrative form of disruption can be seen as a point of frustration because as previously discussed, Western culture and human culture in general are largely narrative based. This can be investigated by observing a societal reliance on forms of narratives including myths of creation, destiny and purpose through both processes of presentation and interpretive tendencies. Such tendencies are demonstrated when a viewer or reader is confronted with a string of images, ideas or events and they automatically attempt to form links between the narrative and a nonsense space or spaces of indeterminate signification. This process of integration and attempted understanding can be regarded as a common reaction when the human subject encounters something that is unknown or out of place. The 'need to make a coherent, conscious scene out of seemingly disparate elements' is a tendency that is embedded in consciousness itself.[33] This is a process essential to perceiving forms of meaning or understanding. By attempting to create links between separate and seemingly unrelated elements, the viewer seeks a coherent whole and plays an active part in filling in areas of logic or reason.

In works that require active participation, a shift in the role of the reader or viewer can be witnessed. Against the claim that the viewer is passive, French philosopher Jacques Ranciere investigates their role as conceptually or physically active. By assuming some level of control over the meaning of the work, the viewer exchanges a kind of passive spectatorship for some form of participatory role. As the knowledge, experiences and tendencies of each viewing subject are highly varied, the introduction of a participatory role for the viewer generally also introduces a simultaneous sense of indeterminacy. These works, at once, provide the viewer with more control, yet less conceptual certainty as they rely on individual engagement rather than strictly prescribed content or sequence. In order to overcome any frustration associated with the absent or withheld content in these works, the viewer may seek some means of self-reflection or sensuous experience beyond that able to be provided by a conventional narrative object.

Ranciere approaches contemporary roles of the viewer or spectator in his text *The Emancipated Spectator*, 2009. In relation to traditional theatre, he identifies

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[33] G. M. Edelman & G. Tononi 2001, *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination,* Penguin Books, London, pg. 26**.**

the role of the spectator as necessary, yet carrying negative connotations due to its apparent separation 'from both the capacity to know and the power to act'.[34] He states that in accounts from 'the accusers, being a spectator is a bad thing for two reasons: First, viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals' and 'second, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive'.[35] For Ranciere, however, the viewer is not passive, and the role of the spectator is not a negative one.

In order to do away with the negative connotations attached to the passive, uninvolved spectator, there needs to be a theatre with no spectators. This does not mean that the presence of the viewing subjects needs to be removed, but only that they may take on a different role. For Ranciere, the theatre is one 'where the passive optical relationship implied by the very term is subjected to a different relationship' that can be referred to by another term – drama.[36] This term refers to the happenings on stage, and can be used to designate action and involvement. This new theatre requires that 'those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images', and that they undergo a conversion to become 'active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs'.[37]

Ranciere identifies two central expressions of the 'drama' he contests. The first asks for distance while the second relies on the collapse of distance. Pertaining to the first, referring to Aristotle, he states that 'the spectator must be roused from the stupefaction of spectators enthralled by appearances and won over by the empathy that makes them identify with the characters on the stage'.[38] The viewer may be presented with peculiar or unexpected stimuli, and be required to derive logic or reason from this. A problem or situation that requires a character's authority or decision-making may also present itself.   In this situation, the viewers may seek to devise a potential course of action in identification with their own circumstances or condition. In relation to the second expression, which is claimed by the 'accusers' or critics of viewing and which in principle conflicts with the first, he states that 'the reasoning distance (…) must itself be abolished'.[39] Here, the viewer does not engage in calm contemplation or observation over what is presented to them. Rather, they 'must be dispossessed of this illusory mastery, drawn into the magic circle of theatrical action where (they) will exchange the privilege of rational observer for that of the being in possession of all (their) vital energies'.[40] This is a sensory rather than a rational expression. We may witness some productions or works that transition between both expressions, or some that draw on one or the other. It must be noted that the observation of the active engagement of the spectator need not be limited to the medium of theatre, but can be located in forms of visual practice.

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[34] J. Ranciere 2009, *The Emancipated Spectator,* Verso, London/New York, pg. 2.
[35] Ranciere, pg. 2.
[36] Ranciere, pg. 3.
[37] Ranciere, pg. 4.
[38] Ranciere, pg. 4.
[39] Ranciere, pg. 4.
[40] Ranciere, pg. 4.

Ranciere discusses examples of visual art that engage the active spectator in Chapter Three of *The Emancipated Spectator,* titled 'Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community'. In this chapter, he states that 'many contemporary artists no longer set out to create works of art. Instead, they want to get out of the museum and induce alterations in the space of everyday life, generating new forms of relations'.[41] It should be noted, that Ranciere regards both active social communication and passive modern autonomy as articulations of what our senses pick up. The process of approaching autonomy or everyday life can be discussed in terms of different ways of ordering or narrativising the same sensible world. With this in mind, he refers to a work titled *I and Us,* 2002 which was proposed by a group of French artists called *Campement Urbain* (Urban Encampment). This project proposed an engagement with the people living on the outskirts of Paris in the most violent and underprivileged suburbs. Ranciere states that 'much of what we read or hear about the 'crisis in the suburbs' deals with the destruction of the 'social bond' produced by mass individualism, and the need to re-create it'.[42] In this way, *I and Us* can be considered paradoxical, as it does not propose any such end. On the contrary, it seeks to investigate a space of solitude, fragility and meditation. The space created was to 'be dedicated to a specific end – solitude – meaning that it would be conceived and established as a place that could only be occupied by one person at a time'.[43] The paradox introduced by this artwork is one of being 'apart together'. Ranciere states that 'the community of sensation seemed to resolve the paradox of the 'apart together' by equating the 'individual' production of art with the fabric of collective life', however, 'the solid end-product of the activity' is nonetheless located 'between a voice of human division and a melody of cosmic – inhuman – harmony'.[44] Rather than divided from one another, these are different approaches that share the sensible. Works such as *I and Us* demonstrate that art which attempts to integrate itself into everyday life is also intimately connected with what is generally viewed as the opposite; the passive, or autonomous.
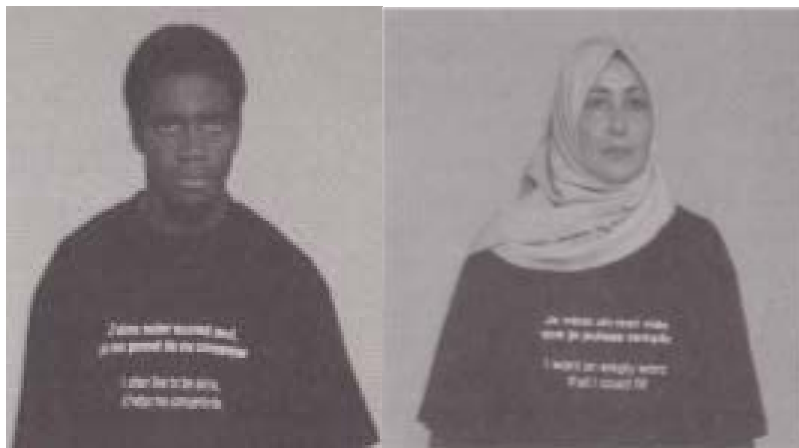
Fig. 1

[41] Ranciere, pg. 53.
[42] Ranciere, pg. 53.
[43] Ranciere, pg. 53.
[44] Ranciere, pg. 57.

This project also involved a film component (fig. 1) [45], where residents from the abovementioned suburbs were asked to reflect on the concept of solitude in relation to their own self. This act of reflection takes the resolved form of a single sentence printed in French followed by the translation in English on a t-shirt that the reflecting subject then wears in front of the camera. Ranciere includes two still images from this project in his text. The first shows a man whose shirt reads 'I often like to be alone, it helps me concentrate'; the second depicts a woman who presents the assertion, 'I want an empty word that I could fill'. In both cases, the text is attached to the identity of an unnamed individual.

Despite the subject of the artwork, which implies isolation and solitude, it requires the active engagement of the spectator or participant in order to facilitate its existence. Ranciere states that 'what the artist does is to weave together a new sensory fabric by wresting percepts and affects from the perceptions and affections that make up the fabric of ordinary experience' and that 'weaving this new fabric means creating a form of common expression or a form of expression of the community'.[46] In the case of *I and Us,* the role of the artists as described in the passage above is not just carried out by the collective who designed the project. Instead, a group of selected spectators can simultaneously be regarded as participants; they become active components of the work as a form of expression, yet remain simultaneously apart from one another. In such cases, 'the solitude of the artwork is a false solitude: it is an intertwining or twisting together of sensations', as is a 'human collective'.[47] Again, this refers to Ranciere's opposition to the division between autonomy and heteronomy, or art and life. These are not to be seen as divided, but as different approaches to narrativising what is received by the senses.

These works negate the idea of the passive spectator, as they require the involvement of multiple subjects in order to play out, yet they also maintain a kind of separation as an act of art. In the context of this dissertation, the consideration of the spectator or viewer as an active component of the work itself is one way in which non-narrative artists' books can be considered and responded to. Ranciere states that 'emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; (…) when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions'.[48] The disrupted logic of the artists' books in question is still active in this sense, though it does not dictate a fixed conclusion or a prescribed order of viewing.

In his text *The Aesthetic Unconscious,* 2009 however, Ranciere does give an account of one form of division that may occur in a work of art. Here, he refers to two separate and opposing elements called the 'logos' and the 'pathos' of the work, which together form an 'aesthetic regime'.[49] In this theory, the logos refers to the narrative within a work, the readily intelligible material. The pathos, however, designates a space of non-meaning, or something that is inconsistent or illogical in the context of the rest of the work. This is one way in

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[45] Image unnamed. Cited in [45] J. Ranciere 2009, *The Emancipated Spectator,* Verso, London/New York.
[46] Ranciere, pg. 56.
[47] Ranciere, pg. 56.
[48] Ranciere, pg. 13.
[49] J. Ranciere trans. D. Keates & J. Swenson 2009, *The Aesthetic Unconscious,* Polity Press, Cambridge.

which a disruption within a visual work may be examined, which is a discussion that will be further developed throughout Chapter Six *Art and Language*.

Ranciere approached the role of the reader or viewer through his discussions of the spectator, which is a point that is also raised in French literary critic and semiotician Roland Barthes' essay *The Death of the Author,* 1968. In this essay he seeks to refocus the aims of classic literary criticism, which referred solely to the writer, in order to focus primarily on the reader. It is writing itself that brings about a kind of destruction. Barthes states that 'writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost'.[50] The very beginning of writing therefore coincides with the death of the Author. Barthes further states that this is brought about 'as soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the practice of the symbol itself'.[51] In this theory, the Author is distinguished from the modern scriptor, where the former 'is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers (and) lives for it', and the latter 'is born simultaneously with the text (and) is no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing'.[52] The latter always refers to an act in the present, apart from any historical or future implications. In this act, writing becomes based on performance rather than representation.

When referring to a text in general, Barthes proposes that it 'is made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody (and) contestation'.[53] Here, Barthes broadly reflects Derrida's concept of the iteration of texts, or their potential to be repeated in countless ways and different contexts. Despite the occurrence of this multiplicity, there is a singular space where it is ultimately focused – the reader. For Barthes, 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination', the reader, or 'that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which a written text is constituted'.[54] Although this theory draws attention to the presence of a reader, it will not be considered a primary focus of this dissertation. This is because in Barthes' theory, the viewer assumes the role of recipient, rather than active contributor.

In this dissertation, the need for the viewer to assume the role of contributor will be considered one key way in which the narrative of a work can be regarded as fractured, disrupted or incomplete. Artists' books that adhere to this form of practice create a space of indeterminate content that varies between viewers. Although they will become the focus of this dissertation, artists' books are not the only medium to explore a sense of indeterminacy in relation to narratives or coherent, sequential content. As such, other forms of art, film and literary practice that explore similar concerns will first be discussed. A focus on narrative conventions through art practice can be observed through various movements. This is commonly a focus within works

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[50] R. Barthes trans. S. Heath 1977, *Image Music Text,* Hill and Wang, New York, pg. 142.
[51] Barthes, pg. 142.
[52] Barthes, pg. 145.
[53] Barthes, pg. 148.
[54] Barthes, pg. 148.

such as those of Symbolic art, History Painting and Realism from the 16th to 19th Century.

Fig. 2   Fig. 3

Works associated with these genres are often categorised by the presence of a moral, message, story or depiction of a coherent scene. Realism in works of art such as French artist Jean-Francois Millet's *The Gleaners,* 1857 (fig. 2) presented imagery that closely represented actual scenes, objects or environments. Symbolism, as shown in French artist Paul Gauguin's *Vision After the Sermon,* 1888 (fig. 3) rejected these intentions in favour of a metaphorical or metaphysical approach. In both instances however, the pictorial elements within each work could generally be unified under a common representation, function or intention. Although works of Realism and Symbolism have different intentions, they both tend to create some kind of logical narrative.   The signifiers within these works function as individual aspects of a unified whole, and act to establish or reinforce the viewer's understanding with little or no resistance, as the individual cues within such works are readily incorporated into a coherent image or narrative.

Fig. 4

Contrary to this, the development of 20th Century Modernist art movements Dadaism, Surrealism and Abstraction introduced nonsensical or mute signifiers. Artists involved with Dadaism actively embraced and sought to depict seemingly flawed or incomplete logic within their works, which is shown in *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany,* 1919 (fig. 4) by German artist Hannah Hoch. This can be seen as a kind of revolt against the societal 'logic' of the time, which the Dadaists saw as a catalyst for World War I and the related widespread physical and emotional consequences. Works associated with this movement were often presented in the form of collages that incorporated fragments of newspapers and other texts or images referring to people, places and machines. These appeared to be so far removed from their original and supposedly logical context that they were rendered essentially incoherent to a viewer.

Fig. 5

The Surrealists, on the other hand, focused on internal rather than external influences. This can be seen in Spanish artist Salvador Dali's *The Accomodations of Desire,* 1929 (fig. 5). They turned their attention to depicting unconscious stimuli, such as dreams, which can be viewed as somehow familiar yet ultimately irrational or inconceivable. Surrealists often used unrecognisable imagery, or recognisable imagery and objects configured in misleading or illogical situations and combinations. These works can be seen as removed or beyond the scope of accepted logic or understanding that is relied upon in our conscious lives.

Fig. 6

Modern abstract art, including works such as Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky's *On White 2,* 1923 (fig. 6) also went beyond that which is easily able to be recognised and directly related to. This form of abstraction presented spaces of non-meaning through autonomy, a withdrawal from social structures of meaning. The removal of art from life also removes a sense of the work being easily related to by a viewer. This may also result in the removal of the viewer's ability to readily form an understanding and derive meaning from a work.

In order to examine changing trends in relation to the book form and narrative content, the abovementioned works can be located in the context of other forms of contemporary practice that reveal similar concerns. Nonlinear or fragmented works derived from traditionally sequential and coherent models have not only gained prominence within artist's book practices, but also within film art and commercial films. Contemporary film works that break from narrative traditions have been the focus of various studies, publications and collections since the late twentieth century.
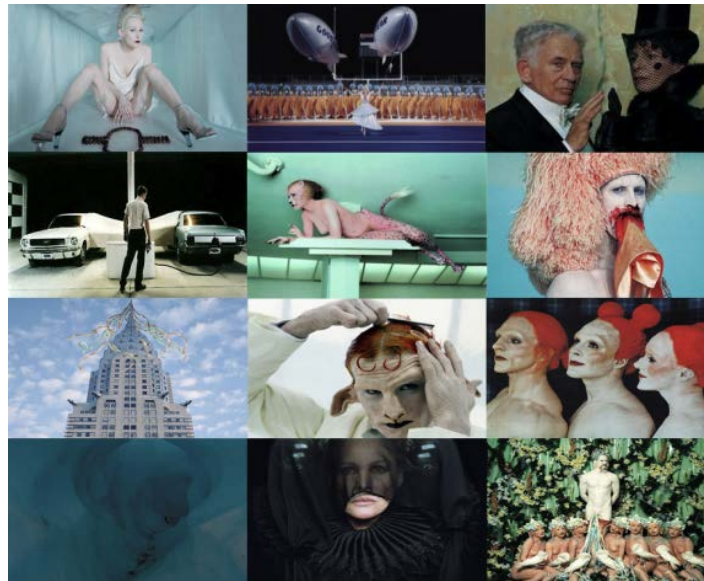
Fig. 7

A key example of film art that departs from conventional narrative and linear sequence is American artist Matthew Barney's *CREMASTER* cycle, 1994 – 2002 (fig. 7) which consisted of a series of five films that were released out of sequence. The films represent different stages within the formation of a masculine sexual identity: from an indiscernible state through forms of resistance and uncertainty to the assigned gender. Not only do these stages occur in a non-linear order, but these films also use a complex form of symbolism that resists immediate comprehension.

This dissertation will briefly draw on non-narrative films and literary works to investigate comparative models to the book works. Non-narrative still works will also be discussed, although commercial film works bear the closest resemblance to artists' books. This is because both mediums necessarily involve sequence, or the creation of a timed experience and are conventionally linear. While alternate works of film have been the focus of various collections, exhibitions, philosophical enquiries and forms of critical analysis, similar book works have received a much narrower focus. They have been exhibited, published and catalogued, but investigations into their departures from narrative conventions and the potential significance of these are limited. This research will focus on the artist's book as a particularly effective platform for interrupting the logic of a linear sequence through altered temporality, interrupted flow or other visual or conceptual methods of disrupting narrative. With a departure from linearity or logic, the viewer is then required to seek alternate ways to perceive or identify with the work. Artists who operate within this field may identify with the notion that a linear narrative is a fabrication, and although perceived as logical, cannot generally be applied to real-life experience.[55]

Processes involved with the disruption of a sequential work are not just limited to works of film art, but can also be located in commercial and cinematic films

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[55] D. Aitken ed. N. Daniel 2006, *Broken Screen: Expanding the Image, Breaking the Narrative,* Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York.

including *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* 2004 and *Stranger than Fiction,* 2006. In such examples, factors such as emotional fragility, uncertainty, concealed information and unstable existences relating to the characters and plot may be revealed through methods such as nonlinear sequence, multiple perspectives and a sense of undermined reality. In any circumstance, such films require modes of interpretation outside that involved with observing linear sequence. This dissertation will investigate various interpretive and sensuous approaches that lie outside conventional narrative ordering through an investigation of written and visual works.

Postmodern literature has explored aspects of disrupted narrative through concepts such as choose-your-own-story and hypertext fictions. Choose-your-own-story texts operate on a system whereby a limited amount of information is provided. The reader is prompted to choose from a list of options that dictate what happens next, they then turn to the page designated to this choice. Despite the apparent presence of creative freedom for the reader, these choices are not infinite; they exist as a limited series of options that are predefined by the author, not created in isolation. Such texts can be considered nonlinear, or contrary to traditional narratives, because they present no fixed or certain storyline. This is demonstrated in the *Choose Your Own Adventure* book series, which consisted of volumes written by different authors and published by Bantam Books between 1979 and 1998. When reading these books, the reader assumes the role of a protagonist. When key decisions involving how the plot will progress arise, the reader is instructed to turn to a designated page for one possible course of action, and to others for alternatives. The multiple storylines contained in the work showed various and potentially contradictory events, rather than separate aspects of a unified whole. Several courses of action and ultimate conclusions that follow on from these storylines exist within the object.

Hypertext fiction relies on a similar system to choose-your-own-story texts, yet replaces the book with digital means where the reader is required to navigate their way through the story lines by selecting and clicking on links. These are examples of fractured narratives because, owing to multiple stories and nonlinear ordering, they cannot be read as conventional texts. These postmodern forms of disruption in the context of art involve a surplus or reconstruction of meaning, rather than a disruption through reader choice.

Analogous to examples of hypertext is Lev Manovich's account of the database. Manovich asserts that 'many new media objects do not tell stories', nor do they 'have any development, thematically, formally or otherwise, which would organise their elements into a sequence', but rather 'they are collections of individual items, where every item has the same significance as any other'.[56] Manovich regards the database of the computer age, particularly evident in forms of 'new media', as congruous with the narrative of the modern age; both refer to the structure of information.[57] This can be noted in the instance of a web page, where information can be added and revised periodically. Manovich

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[56] L. Manovich 1999, 'Database as Symbolic Form', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies,* Vol. 5, No. 2, pg. 80, viewed 19 March 2014,
<http://con.sagepub.com/content/5/2/80>.
[57] Manovich.

states that where 'new elements are being added over time, the result is a collection, not a story'.[58] Here, information is organised according to a database model, rather than a singular, sequential narrative.

To distinguish database from narrative, Manovich states that the 'database represents the world as a list of items which it refuses to order', while the 'narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items'.[59] As such, he regards database and narrative as 'natural enemies' that compete 'for the same territory of human culture, each (claiming) an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world'.[60] Where the narrative organises information into a sequences for the observing subject, the database calls for the consideration of separate elements that are grouped together, but are not ordered sequentially. While the database accounts for a cultural shift away from the narrative in some instances, it is outside the main focus of this dissertation – non-narrative artists' books. These books cannot be considered entirely in terms of narrative or in terms of database. The visual and conceptual content put forward by non-narrative artists' books does not proceed in a logical, narrative order. This content does, however, generally conform to some form of sequence imposed by the constraints of the physical book object or, in the case of works with an interchangeable order, the notion that they are to be treated as books. Such works bring about a disruption in the viewer's understanding through the implication of a narrative that is not sustained throughout the work.

While existing literature has much to say about pre-modern, modern and postmodern works that deal with disrupted forms of narrative, research on similar focuses within the practice of artists' books remains somewhat scant and piecemeal. Central sources of literature on the contemporary artist's book can generally be seen as focusing on either one of two key areas. The first is the location of a exhaustive, conclusive definition for the term 'artists' books'. As the field of artists' books can be considered highly varied and constantly evolving, this task proves difficult or is largely avoided. The second is related to the artist's book in a digital age. With the increasing societal reliance on and demand for electronic books and resources and, subsequently, the decreasing popularity of the printed text, theorists may try to locate a place for artists' books in the twenty-first century. Generally, the question of if the artists' books must or should be digitalised, in keeping with current technology, is subject for debate. Another common concern is if artists' books have the capacity to bring new value to the hardcopy book as art object. This dissertation does not propose to locate a solution for either of these common fields of discussion. Instead, it will both locate and further develop a critical, theoretical context for the consideration of a narrow field of artists' books – those that are engaged in the disruption or negation of the narrative as a conventional method of constructing or deriving meaning.

In order to approach works that lie outside conventional ordering, as previously mentioned, more traditional visual narratives must first be examined. The

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[58] Manovich, pg. 82.
[59] Manovich, pg. 85.
[60] Manovich, pg. 85.

resistance or disruption to linear sequence that can be brought about by the insertion of a nonsensical or non-signifying element in an otherwise meaningful visual space can then be discussed as a form of departure from both narrative and book conventions. In addition to the identification of these departures, the research will deal with the conscious sensory engagement of the viewer. To conduct a theoretical discussion about non-narrative artists' books, and the disruptions they can bring about in a real space, literature relating to narrative structure and its alternatives must first be identified in order to locate a relevant context for this discussion. The subsequent information presented throughout this dissertation will establish this context, by drawing on historical and contemporary literature, as well as specific artworks that can be analysed in relation to these.

Chapter Three *A Brief Historical Survey of Artists' Books* will outline the artist's book as a means of artistic practice, which can be discussed in its contemporary form by drawing on examples from the 1960s onwards. Despite the emergence and prominence of the artist's book in its current role at this time, key historical precursors to this medium will also be discussed in order to locate the relevance of this changed form of book practice. Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology* will then locate processes of narrative ordering as inherent in society and traditional book works, essential to the presentation of readily discernible information. In order to do so, it will draw on both scientific and literary theories that locate narrative tendencies as essential to culture in an ongoing search for meaning and coherence. This research also locates visual narratives in the same sphere as those derived from linguistics, and will therefore draw on existing literature that refers to the meaningful qualities of the image, and suggest ways in which it can be logically read.

Chapter Five *Aesthetics and Art History* will then enter into a discussion about a disruptive or nonsense element and its potential place in aesthetic theory. In this chapter, the analysis of historical aesthetic models is necessary as they form the basis for ongoing contemporary debate. This chapter will appeal to Immanuel Kant's free play of the cognitive faculties over G. W. F. Hegel's progressive and resolved narrative of the development of thought. With reference to specific movements and artworks, Chapter Six *Art and Language* will then draw on elements of visual language and the potential significance of operating within a nonlinear or non-narrative structure. Works relying on some form of difficulty embedded in an otherwise coherent narrative and experiences that lie outside immediate or achievable comprehension will be focused on in order to refer to relevant practices in other media that can be likened to the artists' books in question. A key aspect within this area is film-based works because, like books, films conventionally involve a sequential, linear, timed experience.

Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books* will then refer directly to artists' books. Works that present strong ties to both narrative and book conventions will be identified first, followed by those that stage varying degrees of conceptual and material departures from these formats. Throughout this final chapter, ways in which these works may function outside of narrative conventions will be identified. These discussions will establish alternate means

of deriving a sensuous or conceptual experience in response to a book object, where not all elements presented need be readily or ultimately conceivable.

As previously stated, this dissertation is interested in disruptive gaps that occur within a work, particularly an artist's book. The theoretical discussion of such illogical points that subvert or disrupt the narrative of a book work addresses a lack in existing literature. In order to fill this gap, the dissertation will draw on general theories about narratives and their role in facilitating forms of understanding, or rendering ideas and experiences meaningful. Literature and works of various mediums that show a departure from narrative structures will be investigated in terms of the alternate forms of experience they can provide. The dissertation will ultimately show how non-narrative artists' books can be incorporated into an existing theoretical framework and as such, will suggest potential roles and experiences they may put forward for the reader or viewer.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

A number of texts, such as American art theorist and cultural critic Johanna Drucker's *A Century of Artists' Books, 2004* and American art theorist Betty Bright's *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960 – 1980,* 2005 have dealt with artists' books as part of a historical and contemporary survey. These texts reference historical predecessors to the artist's book, changing trends in the material and conceptual production of such works and the cultural influences surrounding their production. While such texts discuss a wide range of artists who utilise the book form as an integral part of their practice, they do not attempt to theoretically discuss the artists' books that disrupt logic or coherence through a departure from both book and narrative conventions. No text has specifically isolated and theorised the disruption of narratives through artists' book practices as this dissertation intends to.

The practice of creating non-narrative artists' books can be discussed in relation to narrative theory, aesthetic theory, historical and contemporary art practice, literary trends, artists' books and books in general. With this in mind, this section will identify and briefly summarise relevant sources related to the field of non-narrative book practice. Selected relevant literature will be referred to in this review, and will be further discussed and analysed in the dissertation itself.

Studies on narrative theory and modes of ordering in Western culture have been carried out for centuries. An early example of this is shown in Scottish philosopher David Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* 1748, where he seeks to locate potential origins of forms of knowing that are frequently carried and exchanged by means of narrative ordering. A key point raised in this text is the critique of cause and effect, which Hume regards as a product of convention and habit rather than an inherent process in the viewing subject. More recent contributions to the study of narratives identified in this dissertation show a combination of inherent actions and conscious methods that work towards forms of meaning-making.

In attempting to consider ways in which images can be read or narrativised through a discussion of visual works or aesthetics, the key historical contributors to such debates can be considered. In this dissertation, the two central figures to be identified and discussed are G. W. F. Hegel and Immanuel Kant. Although against chronology, these aesthetic theorists will be addressed in the abovementioned order so as to provide a logically constructed transition between the consideration of a strict narrative and the allowance for some disruptions or spaces of non-meaning to occur. The first key source of literature in this field to be examined is G. W. F. Hegel's *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics,* 1835, which is derived from a set of lectures originally delivered during the 1820s. Hegel's aesthetic theory reflects a kind of historical narrative towards a certain end. In this theory, beauty is shown through access to the Divine. At the lowest level, this is realised through nature, then more accurately through art, then religion and, ultimately, philosophy. Hegel states that fine art

> 'only achieves its highest task when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy, and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the Divine Nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind'.[61]

For Hegel, art has already reached its highest function with Classicism. After this, works of Romanticism are produced, but are not regarded as vehicles for Spirit. In this instance, the production of art has continued, but can be considered more cerebral. Hegel assigns it to part of his overall narrative so that it can be dispensed with. He refers to an 'end' of art, which does not mean that art can no longer be produced, but that it no longer serves as the highest point of access to the Divine. At this point, art becomes self-reflective.

More recent theorists may seek to identify ways in which this theory can be applied to recent forms of art. In the text *What Was Abstract Art? From the Point of View of Hegel,* 2002, Robert B. Pippin seeks to extend Hegel's historical narrative, focusing on its potential application to works of modern Abstract art. Although Pippin acknowledges that Hegel would not have imagined the practice of Abstract art in terms of its material and compositional components, he states that 'Hegel seemed to have foreseen the shift in the modernist understanding of artistic experience, away from the sensuous and beautiful and towards the conceptual and reflexive'.[62] Non-representational works, such as those of modern Abstract art, can be viewed as capable of becoming self-reflective, of presenting areas of sensible meaning to one's self-consciousness. Here, formal aspects of a work that may otherwise have been taken as a given construct forms of meaning attached to the concept of painting itself.

Where Hegel's system can be viewed as synonymous with singular narrative, Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory can be discussed in terms of its allowance for difficult, disagreeable or indiscernible occurrences in a visual work. Kant's *Critique of Judgement,* 1790, puts forward an account of four kinds of judgements that one may make about an object such as a work of art; the 'agreeable', the 'good', the 'sublime' or the 'beautiful'. In the context of this dissertation, it is judgements about sublimity and beauty that will be discussed at length. For Kant, the sublime refers to indeterminate reason. It may be categorised as 'mathematical' or 'dynamical', both involving a simultaneous sense of pleasure and pain, and the superiority of reason over nature. In the case of the former, nature refers to the subject's imagination. If something, such as vast mountain ranges, can be conceived of but never viewed in its entirety due to its physical scale, it can be considered mathematically sublime. While this form of sublimity refers to scale, the dynamically sublime refers to power. An example of the latter is a powerful storm where the subject might recognise potential danger, yet judge themselves apart from this in a position of safety. In both cases, judgements of the sublime involve some element or occurrence that can never be wholly comprehended or known by the experiencing subject. Kant states that

> 'the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which, although no

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[61] G. W. F. Hegel trans B. Bosanquet 2004, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics,* Penguin Books, London, Pg. 9.
[62] R. Pippin 2002, 'What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)', *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 29, No. 1, pg. 5.

adequate presentation of them is possible, may be aroused and called to mind
by that very inadequacy itself which does not admit of sensuous
presentation'.[63]

In these judgements, reason plays a superior role over nature. It turns the unknowable experience into a theory, it narrativises it, and thus assigns some form of understanding to it.

While Kant locates the sublime in experiences of nature rather than in works of art, theories such as those put forward in French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* 1984, locate the sublime in art rather than nature. Examples of this may be located in works such as those of colour field painting, where expansive areas of colour are presented to the viewer. Many instances of this form of practice are intended to be viewed from a short distance, enhancing the abovementioned effect of sublimity and rendering the entire experience as a whole unknowable to the viewer at any singular point in time.

For Kant, however, it is judgements of beauty that can be considered most applicable to artworks that reveal non-narrative or non-sequential structures. These judgements will, therefore, be considered as a key interest to this dissertation. For an object, or work of art, to be regarded as displaying 'dependent' beauty in a judgement of taste, it must produce a sense of 'free play' in the viewing subject's mind. This state occurs between the cognitive faculties of understanding and imagination, where neither must subsume the other. Kant states that

'the enlivening of both faculties (imagination and understanding) to an
indeterminate, but yet (...) harmonious activity, such as belongs to cognition
generally, is the sensation whose universal communicability is postulated by
the judgement of taste'.[64]

This is an ongoing play, or kind of essential limitation, that refers to an indeterminate understanding. Kant's theory does not put forward a narrative system such as Hegel's, but proposes a kind of effect that may be brought about by art, including works that reveal a non-narrative sequence or indiscernible element.

Regarding a Kantian approach to contemporary aesthetics, Diarmuid Costello presents an argument to retrieve Kant's original aesthetic theory in the article *Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory,* 2007. In this article, Costello seeks to salvage Kant's theory from the perceived misreading of Clement Greenberg. In addition to this, Costello highlights the key way in which he believes Kant's theory may be viewed as applicable to contemporary works of art. Here, he refers to Kant's free play couplet between imagination and understanding. Costello draws attention to the fact that Kant did not, at any stage, restrict this effect to works of representational art. He put forward no definite specifications as to the content or composition of the work. Costello states that 'there is nothing in (Kant's) account of aesthetic ideas that *requires* art to be representational', but that 'all Kant's account requires is that

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[63] I. Kant trans. J. Creed Meredith 2008, *Critique of Judgement,* Oxford University Press, Oxford/ New York, pg. 76.
[64] Kant, pg. 50.

works of art expand ideas in imaginatively complex ways'.[65]   As such, it can be argued that any work that brings about such an effect may be analysed in terms of a broadly Kantian approach.

The act of communicating, its potential for facilitating the formation of narratives and ways in which this may be interrupted are addressed in American scientist and mathematician Warren Weaver's *Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication,* 1949. Weaver states that he uses the term communication 'in a very broad sense to include all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another', which 'involves not only written and oral speech, but also music, the pictorial arts, the theatre, the ballet, and in fact all human behavior'.[66] In this text, communication and its capacity to facilitate narrative meaning is identified, yet Weaver also focuses on potential problems and complications with communicative practices. Such problems can occur in relation to technical complications, semantic issues or the question of effectiveness. These levels concern the accuracy with which information is transmitted from sender to receiver, the similarity between the sender's intended meaning and the receiver's interpreted meaning, and if this interpreted meaning fulfills the receiver's desired conduct respectively. A complication at any level can render communicative acts ineffective or even nonsensical. Generally, such complications can be brought about by the presence or introduction of 'noise'. This can be regarded as information that is unintended by the sender, and unrelated to the intended message, yet nonetheless influential towards the receiver. Weaver's account of communication and the ways in which it can be understood as problematic can be seen as relating to the concerns a viewing subject may experience when interpreting a non-narrative work.

The investigation of areas of narrative and non-narrative visual works can be discussed in terms of semiotic theory. A seminal text is Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics,* 1959. In this text, Saussure refers to the structure of language in terms of the composition of a series of singular linguistic signs. He states that

> 'the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not a material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses'.[67]

In this theory, each sign is comprised of two parts; the 'signifier' that refers to the sound-image given to a certain concept, and the 'signified' that refers to the concept itself. The meaning of each sign is only fixed by convention or social consensus, and can only be determined by examining its place in relation to other signs. As such, a sign can be misunderstood if it does not conform to a particular social consensus, and a singular sign or entire sequence can be

[65] D. Costello 2007, 'Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Vol. 65, No. 2, pg. 226.

[66] W. Weaver 1949, *Recent Contributions to The Mathematical Theory of Communication,* viewed 26 March 2013, <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic933672.files/Weaver%20Recent%20 Contributions%20to%20the%20Mathematical%20Theory%20of%Communication.pdf>, pg. 2.

[67] F. Saussure ed. C. Bally & A. Sechehaye trans. W. Baskin 1959, *Course in General Linguistics,* The Philosophical Library Inc., New York, pg. 66.

regarded as unintelligible if it cannot be understood in the context of the other signs presented in conjunction to it.

A critique of Saussure's conception of the sign and its role within language and intelligible communication is presented in Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology,* 1967. In this text, Derrida refers to a play of signification that does not occur in Saussure's theory. Here, the common characteristics and roles ascribed to practices of both speech and writing are examined. Derrida considers that, traditionally, speech is regarded as having a more direct access to thought as it occurs, while writing was further removed as a revision and organisation of the spoken word. He states that this

> 'secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects all signifieds in general, affects them always already, the moment they *enter the game.* There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language. The advent of writing is the advent of this play; today such a play is coming into its own, effacing the limit starting from which one has thought to regulate the circulation of signs, drawing along with it all the reassuring signifieds, reducing all the strongholds, all the out-of-bounds shelters that watched over the field of language'.[68]

Derrida's concept of play undermines the notion of fixedness associated with language. In this theory, language is unstable. There is no fixed meaning, or infinitely constant relationship between signifier and signified. Furthermore, Derrida considers that meaning is not brought about by the correspondence of a signifier and signified to each other alone, but also depends on other signifiers.

In his text *Narrative, Knowing and the Human Sciences,* 1988 American psychologist Donald Polkinghorne approaches narrative practices in terms of their specific functions within and subsequent relevance to human experience. Polkinghorne regards narrative products and forms of communication and ordering as the primary ways in which human experience can be rendered intelligible or meaningful. He states that narrative meaning 'principally works to draw together human actions and the event that affect human beings', and that this meaning is created 'by noting the contributions that actions and events make to a particular outcome and then (configuring) these parts into a whole episode'.[69] As such, there are modes of organisation that are designated by narrative practice. In the construction of a narrative, the information to be presented can be regarded as meaningful through its organisation into a sequential or otherwise logical order. Through these processes, it can be shared between and understood by multiple subjects. Further than this, for Polkinghorne, narrative ordering can be viewed as a kind of default mode for presenting a meaningful account of events, images, signs or texts; one that is shared throughout human societies.

American narrative theorist H. Porter Abbott's text *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative,* 2008 provides a background for the contemporary field of narrative enquiry. This text explores narrative practices and structures with emphasis on their key functions in human society. Porter Abbott states that

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[68] J. Derrida trans. G. C. Spivak 1982, *Of Grammatology,* 5th edn, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, pg. 7.

[69] D. Polkinghorne 1988, *Narrative, Knowing and the Human Sciences,* State University of New York Press, Albany, pg. 6.

'simply put, narrative is *the representation of an event or series of events*'.[70] Here, the use of the term 'event' implies an action, which is necessary in the formation of a narrative. In this text, he identifies two major uses for the term narrative. The first is '*compact and definable'*, which refers to the narrative as a smaller unit, as a 'building block for longer narrative structures'.[71] The second is described as '*loose and generally recognizable',* which relates to 'the longer structures that we call narratives even though they may contain much non-narrative material'.[72] Even so, they must contain some overall coherence to be called narratives. Porter Abbott assigns this term not just to systems of logically organised individual events or elements in products of literature or the arts, but also in most areas of everyday life. This text approaches key concerns such as how a narrative may be constructed and identified, ways in which it may function in society, how it can be exchanged or communicated, and how it may undergo changes throughout history in response to changed societal needs and modes of interaction. In this text, Porter Abbott suggests that narratives can be presented through many different means such as written and spoken word, gestural interaction and visual composition. Through any medium, the central function of a narrative is to render information and stimuli intelligible.

Other theorists approach the investigation of narrative theory by assigning a set of requirements or components to the idea of a narrative. It should be recognised, that the theories addressing this area of interest are varied, reflecting the many different ways in which narratives are manifested in cultures. This dissertation briefly addresses two different approaches to the breakdown of individual narrative components in order to provide some indication about how narrative may be conceptualised. The first approach to be examined is outlined in American narrative theorist Rick Altman's *A Theory of Narrative,* 2008. In this text, Altman focuses on narratives that are formed by spoken or written words, which can be understood as the most conventional and direct way to do so. Altman provides a definition for the term 'narrative' that relies on the presence of three interrelated areas. He states that

> *'Narrative material* encompasses the minimal textual characteristics necessary to produce narrative. *Narrational activity* involves the presence of a narrating instance capable of presenting and organizing the narrative material. *Narrative drive* designates a reading practice required for narrative material and narrational activity to surface in the interpretive process'.[73]

These three components describe what produces the narrative, the instance where it occurs and the point at which it is interpreted respectively. One important allowance described by Altman is that a narrative reading need not only occur from the presentation of wholly conclusive stimuli. That is, the viewing subject is able to construct a narrative from limited or incomplete stimuli, provided enough logical links are put forward.

The second approach is based on the theory communicated in Dutch cultural theorist and semiotician Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative,* 1985. Bal's theory can be viewed as more inclusive than Altman's

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[70] H. Porter Abbott 2008, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative,* 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, New York/Cambridge, pg. 13.

[71] Porter Abbott, pg. 14.

[72] Porter Abbott, pg. 14.

[73] R. Altman 2009, *A Theory of Narrative,* Columbia University Press, New York, pg. 10.

abovementioned position, as it readily includes visual narratives. She states that 'there is no reason to limit narratological analysis to linguistic texts only'.[74] For Bal, any narrative, including those formed by images, achieves the following: 'the concept of focalization (that) refers to the story represented and the concept of narrator to its (material) representation'.[75] In this text, Bal refers to the narrative potential of texts in general, which are finite, ordered compositions of signs that need not be divided between the categorisation of linguistic *or visual*, both are valid sources of potential narratives. Like Altman, her theory also involves three components that should be observed in a narrative: text, story and fabula. These refer to medium, content and the related events or stimuli that are depicted. For Bal, if a logical story showing progressive or related developments can be observed within a linguistic or visual text, it can be regarded as a narrative text.

Bal is also a key contributor to discussions of the narrative potential of semiotic studies. Theories of semiotics need not be confined to spoken or written signs, but can also refer to images. Concerning visual works, or the visual composition of signs, it must be recognised that in some accounts, there need not be any acknowledged space of non-meaning. Bal is an example of a theorist who, through her accounts of semiotic practice, places any purposeful or incidental visual signs or marks into the categories of meaningful or potentially meaningful sources. In doing so, she reduces or attempts to eliminate the 'noise' of the narrative, to use Weaver's term. This approach can be witnessed in such literature as Bal's article *Semiotic Elements in Academic Practice,* 1996. In this text, Bal argues that even when a visual element can be readily described as non-narrative, or lacking in or void of meaning, it can still be regarded as 'subsemiotic'. This element is not to be considered 'non-semiotic, let alone 'visual babble', but (…) *potentially* semiotic, on the condition that it is being processed as such'.[76] The term subsemiotic, for Bal, can be applied to any singular visual element. It describes an instance where such an element can be considered semiotic or inscribed with meaning if it is viewed in this way.

Contrary to this approach, theories such as those constructed by American art critic and historian James Elkins, who allows for spaces of difficulty or irresolvable conflict, can be considered. This is demonstrated in works such as Elkins' article *What Do We Want Pictures to Be? Reply to Mieke Bal,* 1996. It is Elkins' view that not all visual marks need to be assigned some degree of meaning. He suggests that a visual composition may include some aspect or area of essential difficulty or non-meaning. In this system, if meaning is hastily assigned to every mark, the viewer may abandon this essential difficulty, or cause for sustained desire or interest in discovering the image and simultaneously, qualities of the self. Elkins states that he is interested in 'trying not to practice the kinds of interpretation that explain marks by revealing them as signs', as he argues that 'the longer (the subject) can hold out against the impulse to find narrative meaning, the more aware (they) become of the picture

[74] M. Bal 2009, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative,* 3rd edn, University of Toronto Press, Toronto/Buffalo/London, pg. 165.
[75] Bal, pg. 165.
[76] M. Bal 1996, 'Semiotic Elements in Academic Practices', *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 22, No. 3, pg. 576.

itself and of the workings of the desire to find words'.[77]   Here, Elkins gives an indication as to how non-narrative elements or areas of non-meaning may take on a functional role in a work of art.

In order to investigate semiotic processes and their relation to, and effect on, the human psyche, Bulgarian-French philosopher Julia Kristeva refers to a hybrid field of enquiry that she terms 'semanalysis' in her text *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* 1980.   Semanalysis refers to an analytical practice that draws on the fields of semiotics and psychoanalysis.   Kristeva regards this practice as being aimed at describing 'the signifying phenomenon, or signifying phenomena, while analyzing, criticizing, and dissolving (the notions of) 'phenomenon', 'meaning', and 'signifier''.[78]   In this text, Kristeva refers to the structure of the psyche in terms of Jacques Lacan's conception of its 'Real', 'Imaginary' and 'Symbolic' functions.   In this account, that which is considered semiotic is regarded as occurring prior to subjectivity and linguistic signification.   One function of semiotic processes is to prepare the pre-lingual subject for their entry into signification, which corresponds to the Symbolic register of the psyche and the derivation of meaning.   Furthermore, in this account of meaning-making processes, Kristeva also acknowledges elements or occurrences that may resist these processes. This relates to the notion of the impossibility of indefinite understanding or sustained coherence.   Rather than seek to obtain an impossible state, we can then engage elements of desire as a method for responding to the unknown.   It is the desire to know an object or concept that keeps the experiencing subject engaged with it.

An alternative approach to the discussion of the experiencing subject's attempts to derive meaning from encountered stimuli can be provided through the consideration of a scientific perspective.   In *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination,* 2001 American biologist Gerald M. Edelman and Italian-American neuroscientist and psychiatrist Giulio Tononi undertake an investigation of human consciousness and its inherent processes and functions.   They locate processes of seeking and constructing meaning, and related tendencies of narrative ordering as embedded in human consciousness, rather than simply acquired socially or culturally.   Here, the need to seek logic and perform acts of ordering to render stimuli and thoughts coherent is considered an automatic response.   Edelman and Tononi state that 'the need to make a coherent, conscious scene out of seemingly disparate elements is seen at all levels and in all modalities of consciousness'.[79]   This relates to inherent processes of narrative ordering that can be viewed as a condition of consciousness itself.   As a result, 'conscious states are stable and coherent enough to assure that we can recognize the world around us in terms of meaningful scenes, allowing us to make choices as well as plans'.[80]   Although from a scientific perspective, rather than exclusively related to the arts, discussing this approach is important in that

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[77] J. Elkins 1996, 'What Do We Want Pictures to Be? Reply to Mieke Bal', *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 22, No. 3, pg. 591.
[78] J. Kristeva ed. L. S. Roudiez trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine & L.S. Roudiez 1992, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* Blackwell Publishers, UK & USA, pg. vii.
[79] G. M. Edelman & G. Tononi 2001, *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination,* Penguin Books, England, pg. 26.
[80] Edelman & Tononi, pg. 27.

it supports the idea that there is an unintended or automatic yet constantly present role of the viewing subject in the interpretation of any stimuli.

Roland Barthes also constructs a narrative theory, but further investigates ways in which it may be disrupted. An example of his approach to narrative ordering and the related attainment of understanding or meaning can be located in the text *Image Music Text,* 1977. Barthes, like Bal, makes the point that narratives need not just be considered products of spoken or written language, although such occurrences can be viewed as more conventional. For Barthes, narratives can also be carried by means of still or moving images, gestures, or any combination of such methods. In addition to this implied versatility, Barthes also discusses the universality of narrative. He locates its presence and widespread practice in every historical and present culture. He states that 'it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative' and, as such, it can be described as 'international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself'.[81] It should be noted, however, that while the formation of narratives is a common practice throughout human history, there exists conventions and codes that allow individual instances to be highly varied. An example of this is the practice of different spoken and written languages that are unable to be readily communicated between cultures. Languages, however, can be learned, and thereby rendered intelligible.

Barthes also approaches the notion of an unintelligible or disruptive element that cannot be learned or reconciled under the practice of singular narrative ordering. In relation to the particular field of photography, Barthes refers to a kind of duality between the known content or narrative within a work, and the unknown or absent narrative. He raises the notion of the separate but related concepts of 'studium' and 'punctum' that may be observed in a visual work. In his text *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* 1981, the studium refers to the narrative within the work, the prominent meaning that is explored by the viewer. He states that 'to recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them'.[82] The punctum however, refers to an element that punctuates the scene: 'it is (the) element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces (the viewer)'.[83] It exists apart from the studium, and as such, either contests or does not contribute anything towards the narrative present in the work.

In the text *The Aesthetic Unconscious,* 2009 Jacques Ranciere also investigates a similar duality through his identification of the separate elements 'logos' and 'pathos', which together constitute an 'aesthetic regime'. For Ranciere, the logos refers to meaning, or what is made readily intelligible within a work. The pathos, however, designates an area where the absence of meaning in relation to the rest of the work occurs. In order to overcome the space of non-meaning, the viewer must observe potential relations between both areas. This is a task

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[81] R. Barthes trans. S. Heath 1977, *Image Music Text,* Hill and Wang, New York, pg. 79.
[82] R. Barthes trans. R. Howard 1981, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* Vintage Books, London, pp. 27 – 28.
[83] Barthes, pg. 26.

that is not always attainable. In one instance, Ranciere refers to 'the *pathos* of knowledge' in terms of

> 'the maniacal, relentless determination to know what it would be better not to know, the furor that prevents understanding, the refusal to recognize the truth in the form in which it presents itself, the catastrophe of unsustainable knowing, a knowing that obliges one to withdraw from the world of visibility'.[84]

In some works, there exists an ever-present difficulty or sense of lack that may nonetheless encourage the continuous development of imagination or the processing of thought.

The discussions of narrative theories, aesthetics and semiotics included in this review will now be considered in relation to artists' books, particularly those that reveal a non-narrative focus, in the dissertation as a whole. As such, literature on books and artists' books will also be considered. The form of the book has been consistently understood as synonymous with narrative practice, both historically and currently. English cultural and literary theorists David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery draw attention to this point in their text *An Introduction to Book History*, 2005. This text implies that the traditional codex book is readily adaptable to narrative content. For example, according to Western conventions, the pages in a book are read or viewed sequentially from top to bottom, left to right. The reader carries certain expectations of the object; how it should be read and handled, and how it should inform or entertain in a readily logical and interpretable manner. If the text or image contained within such an object do not conform to coherent progressions or the ongoing attainment of meaning, they are rendered jarring or indiscernible to the reader. It is such non-narrative works that will be considered the primary focus of this dissertation.

In relation to the specific area of artists' books, Johanna Drucker's *A Century of Artists' Books,* 2004 will be considered a key source of literature in this field. Drucker states that

> 'artists' books appear in every major movement in art and literature and have provided a unique means of realizing works with all of the many avant-garde, experimental, and independent groups whose contributions have defined the shape of 20th-century artistic activity. At the same time, artists' books have developed as a separate field, with a history that is only partially related to that of mainstream art'.[85]

Drucker's text gives an account of historical instances of the inclusion of art in the form of the book, occurring since the fifteenth century. These include works such as those produced by practitioners including William Blake and William Morris, as well as works created under the livre d'ariste. The historical works drawn on in Drucker's text all contribute to the development of the artist's book in the late twentieth century, whether it be through the incorporation of, and increased reliance on, the image within the book, or other instances of unconventional content or composition. Drucker makes the important distinction, however, that these historical works fall short of what can truly be termed an artist's book. The key qualification she makes towards the use of this

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[84] J. Ranciere trans. D. Keates & J. Swenson 2009, *The Aesthetic Unconscious,* Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 18 – 19.

[85] J. Drucker 2004, *A Century of Artists' Books,* Granary Books, New York, pg. 1.

term is that it does not just imply the inclusion of art in the form of the book, but that the book object in question must function as an artwork in and of itself – the book becomes another medium that facilitates individual art practice. This describes a form of practice that has gained prominence during and since the 1960s. Throughout *A Century of Artists' Books,* Drucker conducts a survey of key conceptual and material elements that have occurred in such book works, including a section that describes works that reflect both narrative and non-narrative concerns directly.

Other sources that extend and reinforce Drucker's historical and contemporary survey can be examined, such as Betty Bright's *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960 – 1980,* 2005. Bright states that

> 'an artist's book is a book made by an artist. To create it, an artist either executes each step of a book's production or works closely with others to give form to a vision. But mere artistic involvement does not make an artist's book. Every aspect of the book – from content to materials to format – must respond to the intent of the artist and cohere into a work that is set in motion with a reader's touch'.[86]

The title of this text implies a very narrow focus, but the actual content of the work details a wide and varied history of book practices from many locations before reaching its implied focus. Bright refers to a similar point in book history as Drucker, and seeks to emphasise three key developments: the fine press book, the deluxe book and the bookwork.   This text presents the historical progression towards the artist's book of the late twentieth century in detail, before approaching the key decades (1960 – 1980) in relation to its emergence throughout America in particular. With regards to this focus, Bright gives attention to external influences surrounding the development of book works, such as factors relating to prominent art movements and other social influences. As such, this text gives a greater indication of the changed role of the book object in a changed society.

Both Drucker's and Bright's texts put forward an account of historical influences that progress towards a contemporary conception of the artist's book and its related practice.   Moreover, we can seek to investigate texts that focus exclusively on contemporary works that can be called artists' books.   This dissertation will principally draw on works such as those described in *Masters: Book Arts,* 2011 edited by Julie Hale and Beth Sweet and *The Book as Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts,* 2007 edited by Krystyna Wasserman.   The former contains a selection of contemporary artists' books with no particular restrictions or qualifications about their origin or content. The latter, however, includes only works produced by women that are held in a specific collection.   In both cases, a secondary account of artist's book techniques and practices in conjunction with specific artist's statements is put forward. By following this combined approach, we can observe the functions of each work from a secondary perspective and in the wider context of general art practice, and also in relation to each artist's individual intentions. This is an important aspect in that it provides access to accounts of the potential need for the changed role of the book object. Most of these artists' statements give some indication of the book's potential as an object of art. Some give expression to

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[86] B. Bright 2005, *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960 – 1980,* Granary Books, New York, pg. 3.

the notion of a changed form of experience, outside that obtained through the experience of linear or narrative ordering. It is these accounts that will become a central focus of this dissertation.

The existing literature is lacking a theoretical context for the examination of non-narrative artists' books. The dissertation intends to fill this gap by drawing on aspects of aesthetic theory, semiotics, narrative and non-narrative theories and examples of different artistic media that are engaged in similar practices. In doing so, the dissertation will form this broader context that has been lacking in order to form a basis for the discussion of a non-narrative or disruptive gap in an artist's book.

Chapter Three

A Brief Historical Survey of Artists' Books

3.1 Chapter outline

The term 'artist's book' can be regarded as highly ambiguous and malleable. Due to the highly varied and continuously evolving content and materials associated with its related forms of practice, it has eluded a concrete, inclusive definition since its conception. Johanna Drucker states however, that although disputed, the term can be discussed under a 'definition that draws on historical traditions of book production and conception now part of the current wide field of practice'.[87] It is for this reason that the present chapter will provide an account of historical precursors to the contemporary artist's book, as well as conduct a survey of works produced since the mid-twentieth century that can be termed artists' books. Drucker's definition states that 'an artists' book is any work of original art created in the book format', and therefore implies that the work 'does not exist in any other form, is not a reproduction of a pre-existing work, and is created as a book as the first instantiation and expression of a project'.[88] Therefore, it must be viewed as a work of art in itself, not as a kind of container for the documentation of other existing works.

This dissertation will consider Drucker's definition as a broad basis for the discussion of artists' books, though it is acknowledged that such a definition is limited in regards to categorising the wide and varied implications suggested by this field of practice. For example, it does not outline any specifications for works that may be included by some theories yet rejected by others, such as works that refer to notions of the book, yet do not directly represent its form. This can be seen in digital works, works with a variable order and those that have a highly sculptural form. In some accounts, such works can be discussed under the field of artists' books because they reflect similar intentions and creative or interpretive processes. In other accounts however, they may be immediately excluded on a strictly formal basis. Furthermore, this definition puts forward no qualifications as to the quantities or ratios of text and image that should be present, if at all. This dissertation will place emphasis on the notion of the book as an object of art and the facilitation of art practice within such objects. Material, compositional and conceptual elements will be considered in addition to, and as a component of, the abovementioned focus. This approach is necessary in order to distinguish the works in question from conventional books, and in doing so, refer to alternate roles of the object as a work of art.

The following will identify the key points that will be addressed in this chapter. Initially, an account of historical precursors that can be associated with contemporary conceptions of artists' books will be provided. Further than artistic intentions, this discussion will establish various physical and conceptual distinctions that can be made between artists' books, their historical

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[87] J. Drucker, 'Artist's book', *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online,* Oxford University Press, viewed 18 October 2012, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/subscriber/article/grove/art/T2220480>.
[88] Drucker.

foundations and books in general. Following this, artists' books created since the 1960s will be examined. Although works produced prior to this period will be briefly discussed, they will be regarded as historical precursors to artists' books, as this term has been widely used to designate the book as a work of art in and of itself since the 1960s. In these practices, the book object is viewed as a medium of art, where its material, physical form and conceptual content reflects the artist's individual practice. Examples of various book works will be provided in order to demonstrate different ways in which this practice may be applied. At this point, so as to provide a general overview of artists' book practices, individual works will not be placed into the categories of narrative and non-narrative works and analysed accordingly, although some will lend themselves readily to this approach. This is a task that will be undertaken in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*; after all relevant fields surrounding this topic have been introduced and examined.

This chapter aims to provide a context for the consideration of artist's book practices, including a historical basis for their development where books developed by artists, or containing artworks, can be traced back several centuries, although they may not wholly or directly serve the term 'artist's book'. This highly malleable term has gained prominence in art practice since the 1960s. Although the term has no strict definition, general trends and characteristics can be identified in relation to it in order to set the artist's book as object apart from other similar objects and practices. Importantly, the artist's book must be distinguished from the book that compiles a collection of an artist's or several artists' works. The former should act as an artwork in itself, while the latter is a collection of separate works where the form of the book as a container is largely incidental.

Another factor that should be considered is the visual content of the book. In many artists' books, the pictorial components of the work either constitute the entire object or can be considered dominant. In some cases however, the artist's book may be entirely textual. Such works generally utilise the text as artistic medium, through methods such as the formation of creative prose or experimental typographical configurations. While some definitions of the term artist's book require the object to bear close resemblance to the traditional book structure, negating the possibility of a highly sculptural object or installation, this dissertation will approach this field of practice in regards to a wider range of conceptual and material understandings of the term. Even so, there must be some constraints in place in order to determine the relevance of the inclusion of a particular work in the discussions put forward in this dissertation.

This chapter will discuss historical examples of creative and visual books in order to refer to various influences relevant to artists' books. Examples of contemporary book works discussed throughout this chapter will include formally traditional book objects such as those bound in the traditional codex form, as well as those that involve significant structural changes, even to the point of forming a hybrid or converted object including works where the pages unfold like an accordion, and others that resemble a geometric puzzle. The works discussed here are intended to provide a basis for the consideration of the wide-ranging practice of producing contemporary artists' books. Chapter

Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books* however, will deal exclusively with works that refer to traditional narrative characteristics of the book yet forge departures from the viewer's expectations of the object and its content. This is important in that the viewer's prior understanding and expectations form a basis for departure from more traditional book objects, which can be brought about through the disruption or negation of conventional narrative structure.

3.2 Precursors to Artists' Books

In her text *A Century of Artists' Books,* 2004, Johanna Drucker implies that from as early as the fifteenth century, various 'printers, typographers and publishers were acutely aware of the book as a form and displayed this awareness through their productions'.[89] Such works involve precision, technical skill, informed composition and concentrated forethought, and as such, inform aspects of contemporary book practice to varied degrees. She states that

> 'one can draw on their formal virtues, their innovative or compelling solutions to technical or design problems, and their aesthetic resolution of relations between elements of the text, image, printing technology, paper, binding as well as their substantive content'.[90]

Although we may seek to discuss similar elements relating to contemporary, post-war artists' books, historical precursors to this form cannot properly be referred to under the same term. Here, we must draw the distinction between 'a work by an artist self-conscious about the book form' and 'a highly artistic book'.[91] The latter may contain forms of art, but is not an artwork in itself. Even so, such works can be considered in terms of their material or compositional similarities to contemporary works and as such, can be discussed in terms of the historical development within the pages of a book, to the book as art in itself.
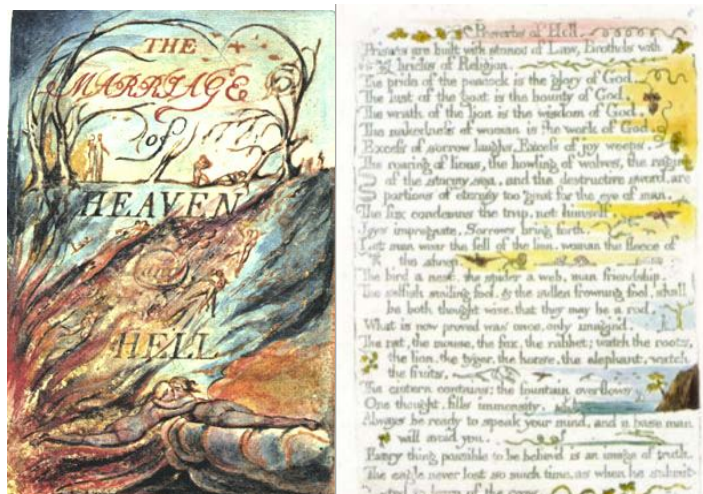
Fig. 8

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[89] J. Drucker 2004, *A Century of Artists' Books,* Granary Books, New York, pg. 21.
[90] Drucker, pg. 21.
[91] Drucker, pg. 21.

The following will discuss selected artists and movements that can be viewed as historical foundations of key aspects of the contemporary artist's book. English poet and illustrator William Blake can be regarded as one of the earliest practitioners associated with some contemporary conceptions of the artists' book. Blake practiced poetry, painting and printmaking, and sought to integrate these in the form of the book. An example of this is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* 1790 – 93 (fig. 8). This text was initially published as a compilation of handcrafted pages, printed with etched plates and then hand coloured. The plates themselves contained combinations of prose, poetry and artwork. These pages allude to traditional presentations of biblical prophecies yet form a satirical approach to both religion and morality. Blake reveals a connection with or belief in God, but seeks to locate misunderstandings and contradictions in the Bible, as well as inadequacies associated with organised religions. One example can be seen in the plate 'Proverbs of hell', 1790 - 93 where he asserts that the 'nakedness of woman is the work of God. Joys impregnate' and 'brothels are built with bricks of religion'.[92] Here, Blake describes characteristics of man, which he regards as being assigned by God, yet condemned by religion. By referring to such inconsistences, Blake undermines accepted religious content in favour of presenting a personal and potentially controversial perspective. In doing so, he stages a subtle break from traditional intentions of the book object.

The remaining content of the book approaches established religious practice with similar cynicism as the abovementioned example. It is not the specific content of the work that is of key interest to this dissertation however, but the artist's intention to produce a wholly or predominately self-directed, cross-disciplinary work that is of interest to his individual formal and conceptual concerns. In this way, Blake's works can be considered apart from other book works at the time. Not only did each page combine image with text, but each component is derived from Blake's practice. As such, the presence of the image is not merely an afterthought, nor does it necessarily act to clarify elements of the text or simply illustrate them. It is this kind of conceptual expression that acts to set Blake's works apart from other book objects of the time, but also may be witnessed in contemporary artists' books. It should be noted however, that works such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* can be considered as containing works of art and creative writing, but cannot be considered a wholly unified, singular artwork. Instead, it serves as a collection of prose that is predominately illustrated in a decorative sense. Here, the book is the container for visual works that are employed to further the intentions of the prose; the object is not primarily a work of visual art in itself. As such, it is not to be considered an 'artist's book' in the contemporary sense.

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[92] W. Blake 1790 – 93, 'Proverbs of hell' in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*

Fig. 9

Almost a century after Blake's book works were produced, European poet, illustrator and book designer William Morris also engaged with highly decorative and visual methods of producing fine press books. In 1891, Morris established the Kelmscott Press, where he 'produced books that asserted an emphatic graphic and material presence'.[93] An example of this is *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer,* 1896 (fig. 9), which is bound in white pigskin leather and presents small printed text, adorned with elaborate woodcuts. These do not just illustrate the text, but intricately detailed imagery is used to frame both the illustrations and the passages of text. This imagery is highly decorative, and does not act to reinforce the textual content of the work or convey any particular visual meaning. The imagery is primarily organic, revealing complex, intertwined arrangements of branches, flowers and leaves. This form of organic decoration can also be seen surrounding and incorporated into the first letter of each paragraph. These letters are enlarged and serve more of a compositional function than that of a simple, printed text. In this way, Morris departs from the simple functionality of the letter as a unit of communication and instead, utilises it as a visual element. Where Morris may have considered that literature, poetry and books in general deserved or even required elaborate visual decoration and embellishment as a method of celebrating the content and form, it could also be considered that such adornment detracted from intended functions of the book.

In 1934, some time after Morris' death, Holbrook Jackson stated that Morris' books had 'become models of what a book should not be… (they) are overdressed. They ask you to look at them rather than to read them'.[94/95]

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[93] B. Bright 2005, *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960 – 1980,* Granary Books, New York, pg. 19.

[94] H. Jackson in B. Bright 2005, *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960 – 1980,* Granary Books, New York, pg. 20.

[95] When considering a work that asks you to look at it rather than read it, we can refer to Adolf Loos' critique of ornament. He states that '*the evolution of culture* is synonymous with the removal of ornament

Morris himself, however, would have contested this, as he believed that one's experience of a book object should be both linguistic and visual. In response to critiques posed towards him during his lifetime, Morris stated that:

> 'You may say that you don't care for this result, that you wish to read literature and to look at pictures; and that so long as the modern book gives you these pleasures you ask no more of it. Well, I can understand that, but you must pardon me if I say that your interest in books in that case is literary only, and not artistic, and that implies, I think, a partial crippling of the faculties; a misfortune which no one should be proud of'.[96]

Here, Morris conceives of the potential multifaceted functions of the book that lie outside the constraints of more traditional works and publications. This open inclusion and even emphasis on the artistic elements of the book object is one key aspect that is central to the production of contemporary artists' books. Unlike these however, such historical works acted as the container for visual decoration, rather than an actual art object. They were decorative for the sake of visual embellishment, rather than the development of a particular art practice.
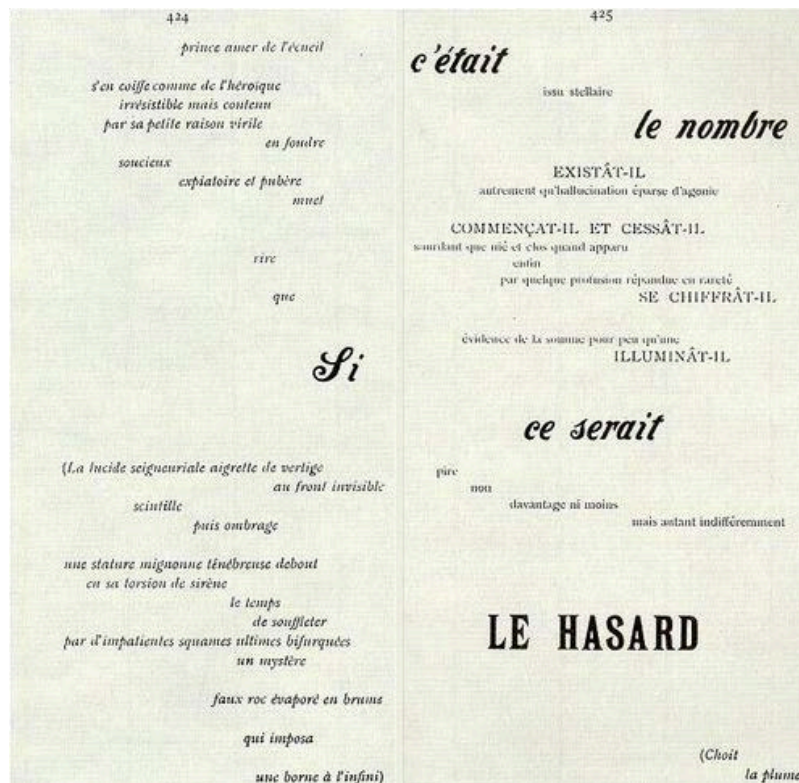
Fig. 10

Also practicing during the late nineteenth century, French poet and critic Stéphane Mallarmé can be viewed as another key book artist who produced works that could not be categorised under traditional conventions at the time. Mallarmé utilised methods of unconventional typography and composition

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from utilitarian objects'. For Loos, ornamental practice can no longer be linked with culture, but rather marks its degeneration.
A. Loos 1908, *Ornament and crime,* viewed 6 September 2013, <www.gwu.edu/~art/Temporary_SL/177 /pdfs/Loos.pdf>, pg. 20.
[96] W. Morris in B. Bright 2005, *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960 – 1980,* Granary Books, New York, pg. 20.

within the traditional codex book in order to investigate the spiritual potential of the object. He sought

> 'to write poetry that evoked a reality based not on objective observation but on his private imaginings, full of emotion and possibility. His essay(s) portrayed the page as a living thing where meaning could be affected by type size, style, and placement'.[97]

These design-based concerns become evident in his work *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard,* 1897 (fig.10), which translates to *A throw of the dice will never abolish chance*. This work was originally published in the magazine *Cosmopolis: A Literary Review*, and was not included in a more traditional book object until some time after Mallarmé's death. In both instances, the work was included as part of a seemingly sequential object, yet it formed compositional departures from more traditional passages or configurations of text. Both the title and visual arrangement of the work imply a kind of spontaneity, where the content is not defined or restricted by margins, columns or consistent spacing.

This reconsideration of formal aspects was considered somewhat radical at the time, because by staging these departures, Mallarmé called 'to remove cultural assumptions about the look of books, and to re-present the book as a 'spiritual instrument' of pure thought, whose pages pulse as if from a breathing, mysterious interaction between mark and space'.[98] In such examples, the book does not provide objective information but aspects of an emotive, personal exploration of text and the book. Such a function directs the focus of the object towards the intentions of artistic practice and, simultaneously, away from those of the traditional book object. This is due to a departure from factual and objective information, in the interest of emotive visual composition. As Mallarmé admits, however, the aforementioned form of the book is not self-consciously a work of visual art, but rather literature. Due to this, it must only be viewed as a precursor to artist book practices that employ similar techniques or conceptual focuses, but do so from the standpoint of visual art practice.

Another form of practice that is commonly regarded as a precursor of contemporary artists' books is the livre d'artiste. The term itself means artist's book, but to avoid confusion with the contemporary artist's book, it can now be used to designate works that adopt similar formatting to the traditional livre d'artiste.[99] The form was initiated in France in the 1890s by a group of publishers including Parisian art dealer Ambroise Vollard. The works commonly involved the telling of a classic or well-known tale, which was then illustrated by an artist or group of artists. For theorists such as Johanna Drucker, this lack of conceptual originality and participation on behalf of the artist or artists involved causes the works associated with the livre d'artiste to be distinguished from those that are considered contemporary artists' books.[100] While the predetermined story and rigid format present in these productions negates the possibility of a work that is entirely the artist's, the livre d'artiste is significant in its incorporation of the image into the book.

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[97] Bright, pg. 35.
[98] Bright, pg. 35.
[99] J. Rossman 2010, 'A Brief History of Artists' Books', *Art Library Special Collections,* Yale University Library, viewed 9 October 2012, <http://www.library.yale.edu/arts/specialcollections/abhistory.html>.
[100] P. D. Verheyen 1998, 'Development of the Artist's Book', *Book Arts Web,* viewed 10 October 2012, <http://www.philobiblon.com/DevArtistsBook.shtml>.
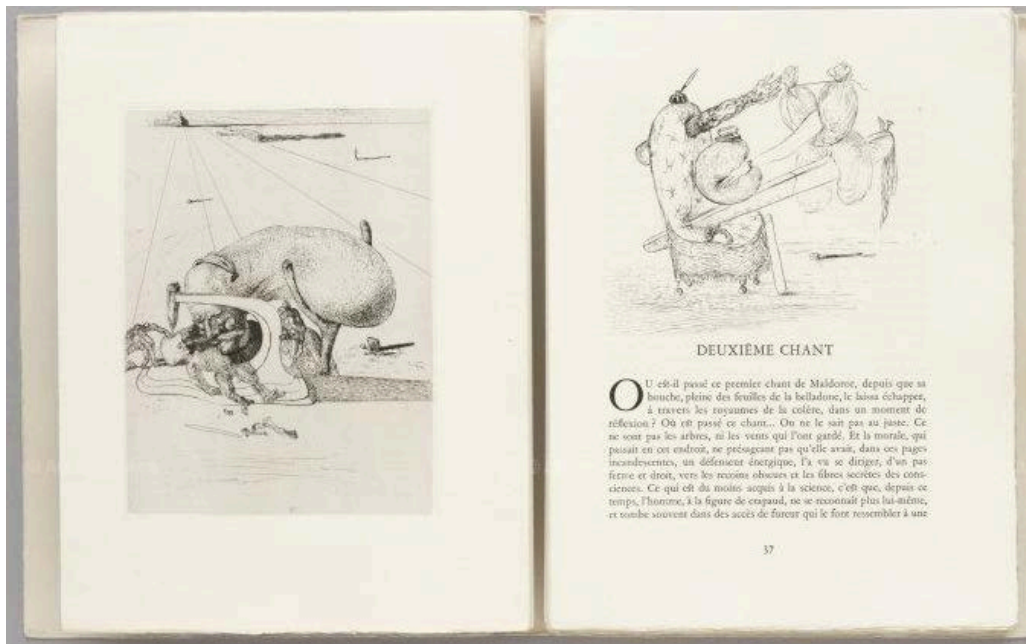
Fig. 11

An example of this form of the livre d'artiste is Salvador Dali's *Les Chants de Maldoror,* 1934 (fig. 11). This work can be described as an illustrated book, where the artist's role is to provide a visual component for an existing text. In this example, Dali illustrates a text written by Comte de Lautréamont in 1869. The original text can be described as 'a nightmarish tale of an unrepentantly evil protagonist' that is 'filled with scenes of violence, perversion, and blasphemy'.[101] In keeping with the interests of his Surrealist practice, Dali relied on a stream-of-consciousness process to access areas of the psyche that are linked to hallucinations, neurotic behaviour and delusions.[102] Dali did not directly illustrate the content of the text, but aspects of his own psyche that then became linked to the text due to their presence within it. The sinister and unstable nature of both image and text are compiled in a singular volume, but this neither belongs to the author nor artist entirely. We can consider this mode of production in a discussion of the historical development of artists' books because here we can witness the image within the book gain similar status to the text. The livre d'artiste can therefore be considered in terms of a material and visual progression towards the contemporary artist's book, if not a conceptual one.

Throughout the twentieth century, the process of including art in books began to turn increasingly towards the production of books *as art*. These works are identified as artists' books, and began to emerge in their contemporary context in Europe after World War II and in America in the early 1960s. Prior to this, early conceptions of the book as art can be located particularly during the 1910s under the Russian avant garde and in French Dadaist practices of the 1920s.[103] Russian Futurism can be understood 'as a period of artistic rupture, the rupture

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[101] D. Wye 2004, *Artists and Prints: Masterworks from The Museum of Modern Art,* The Museum of Modern Art, New York, pg. 98.
[102] D. Wye.
[103] J. Rossman.

of established genres and verse forms as well as of the integrity of the medium', where 'categories such as 'prose' and 'verse', and (more importantly) 'art' and 'life' were questioned'.[104] The form of the book has ties to the abovementioned aspects of life and expression, and was, therefore, no exemption from the intentions of artistic rupture.
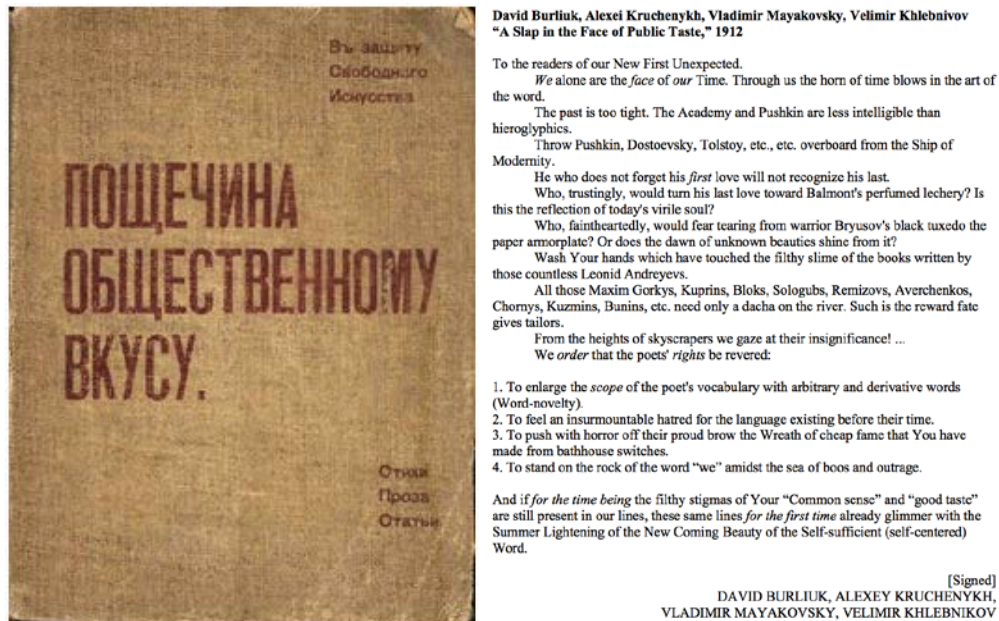
Fig. 12

One example of artistic rupture in the book form is *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste,* 1912 (fig. 12), which is a collaborative book project by Russian Futurists David Burliuk, Alexei Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Velimir Khlebnikov. This work was hand printed and roughly bound from coarse and inexpensive materials. The book forms a kind of Futurist manifesto, where the participants collaborated in the form of artistic prose. The text refers to, and seeks to challenge, the denied rights of the artist and poet, their submissive roles in society and the rigid expectations they were to meet. It is summarised forcefully, with the statement

> 'and if *for the time being* the filthy stigmas of Your 'common sense' and 'good taste' are still present in our lines, these same lines *for the first time* already glimmer with the Summer Lightening of the New Coming Beauty of the self-sufficient (self-centered) word'.[105]

In contrast to the more subtle rejections of established society and practice put forward by William Blake more than a century earlier, this text forms a blatant critique of the existing functions of prose and art, and the form of the book as a vehicle for both. Further than this conceptual independence, books such as this began to introduce elements of participation and practice-driven collaboration, as well as alternate forms of materiality. The construction of books out of readily accessible and inexpensive materials allowed for a wider circulation of book objects and increased practice within this field.

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[104] Z. Laskewicz 1991, *The Russian Futurist Vision,* viewed 10 October 2012,
<http://www.nachtschimmen.eu/zachar/writer/9103_RFV.htm>.
[105] D. Burliuk, A. Kruchenykh, V.Mayakovsky & V. Khlebnikov 1912, *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste.*
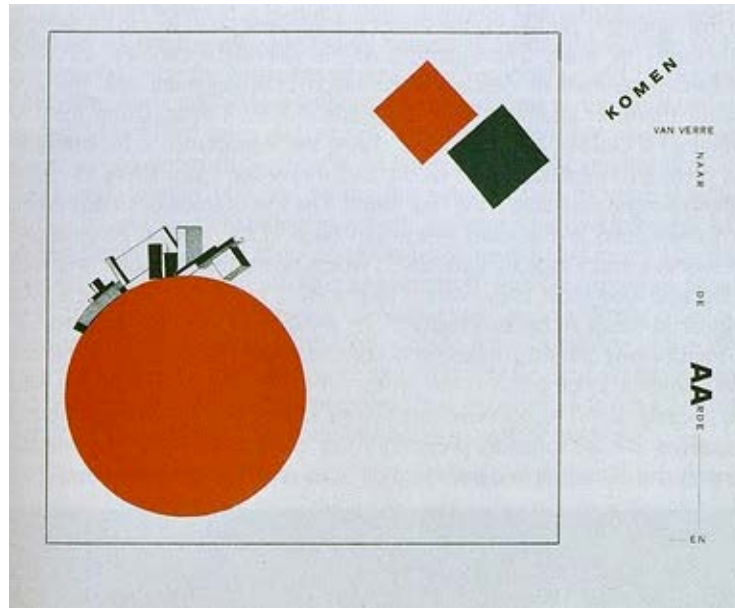
Fig. 13

Similar intentions and processes to *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* can be located in the book art practices of early avant-garde artists. This period reacted to a kind of problematic societal logic present at the time. Regarding such 'logic' as corrupt and harmful, the artists involved turned to areas of nonsense and disrupted logic as an alternative. An example a book work produced during this period is *Pro dva kvadrata. Suprematicheskii skaz v6-ti postroikakh (Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions),* 1922 (fig. 13) by Russian avant-garde artist El Lissitzky. The book contains limited text, and is predominately comprised of red and black geometric configurations. In his role as book artist, Lissitzky does not seek to simply fill in the pages of the book with imagery or text but to construct 'the book by visually programming the total project'.[106] Such works are considered in terms of the composition of the entire object, as well as the contents of each page and page spread. Here, we can witness the book as another medium to facilitate the artist's practice, rather than contain it.

Like other works associated with this period, *Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions* is ambiguous in its content and as a result, it encourages multiple readings. The work is presented as a 'children's book about a black square and a red square that fly to earth from afar'.[107] For Lissitzky however, these constructions implied more than a simple child's story. 'They symbolised the superiority of the new Soviet order (the red square) over the old (the black square)'.[108] This approach refers to the personal stance of the artist, as 'he aligned himself with Russian Constructivist principles and sought to move Suprematism's abstract language into the service of the new social and

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[106] P. Meggs 1998, *A History of Graphic Design,* John Wiley and Sons, New York, pg. 265.
[107] *Pro dva kvadrata. Suprematicheskii skaz v6-ti postroikakh (Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions)* 2008, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, viewed 10 October 2012,
<http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=11113>.
[108] *Pro dva kvadrata. Suprematicheskii skaz v6-ti postroikakh (Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions).*

political order'.[109]   The artist approaches political and societal concerns, yet does this in an abstract and non-representational manner. Here, many of the conceptual and visual components of the book are derived from the artist's individual practice and manifested in this medium. This is contrary to the book's previous role in representing existing literature or societal conditions as a readily interpretable narrative of events.   As such, a departure from traditional modes of composition and communication is staged.

Fig. 14

Books and other book-like objects created in various early twentieth century avant-garde movements display similar individual practice-orientated qualities. This can be seen in works such as French-American artist Marcel Duchamp's *La Mariée muse à nu par ses célibataires meme*, 1934 (fig. 14), which translates to *The Large Glass or The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors Even*, but is commonly referred to as 'The Green Box'. The work is presented as a boxed book, where the box acts as the cover or container for the loose pages and information inside.   These pages refer to and become part of a larger, continuous work by the same name.   Drucker states that this work 'is a paradigmatic example of conceptual and process art from the early part of he century by an artist of unsurpassed inventive imagination', engaging 'numerous calculations and manipulations of philosophical and representational material'.[110] This boxed book maps Duchamp's thought processes throughout the ongoing production of the larger external work.

Duchamp's boxes were produced in an edition of 320, each containing colour plates, notes, photographs and facsimiles.   Although this approaches commercial acts of reproduction, Duchamp copied this material by hand in a kind of lengthy, obsessive act. In doing so, the artist becomes repeatedly immersed in his own thought processes and creative practice and the book (as object) becomes a means of facilitating an artistic practice in general, yet it still

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[109] *Pro dva kvadrata. Suprematicheskii skaz v6-ti postroikakh (Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions).*
[110] Drucker, pg. 98.

refers to an outside work. In addition to the content of the work and the physical processes involved with its reproduction, this object can further be regarded as unconventional in relation to its formal take on the book. As the pages are not fixed, the work implies a sense of uncertainty and incomplete construction. The viewer cannot be certain about the intended sequence of the work, nor that it has met a prescribed end. Even though such implications do not conform to traditional conceptions of the book, they present the artist's practice as a continuous and revisable act.

The individual, practice-based characteristics seen in works such as Duchamp's *Green Box* also become increasingly prominent in book practices towards the later half of the twentieth century. At this time, the term 'artist's book' exclusively designates a particular form of artistic practice, where the entire book is considered a work in itself. Just prior to this, in a publication titled *Books for Our Time,* 1951, Marshall Lee stated:

> 'The book designer of today conceives of the book as an extra-dimensional form existing in time as well as space. The various parts are not merely consecutive but continuous, and their relative position in time is considered in the design. The unprinted area of a page is conceived as a space, rather than as background or frame. The whole area becomes a dynamic composition in which every square inch functions, whether covered or not. In such a composition no part can be altered without necessitating a revision of the whole'.[111]

At this stage in history, we can identify an increasing trend towards the consideration of the book object as a composed whole, rather than a collection of informative fragments presented throughout the book. The book need no longer act as a container for written passages or illustrations, which were conventionally confined to set margins and consistent layout. Instead, every part of each page, the covers, shape, construction methods, material qualities and conceptual content are considered as parts of the processes that determine the overall visual effect and function of the work.

3.3 Artists' books since the 1960s

Works that may be considered artists' books in a contemporary context, although highly varied, all facilitate the development of the conceptual and visual interests of the practitioner who creates them. Many artists' books rely on traditional binding methods, and follow a narrative or progressively informative structure. Many objects that are considered artists' books nonetheless depart from the traditional format or content of the book, even if they maintain some form of structural convention. Many works show some characteristics of traditional book structure and content, while some begin to present departures from this form through methods such as a reliance on images, fractured progression, unconventional form or unusual content.

Both narrative and non-narrative artists' books refer to multiple fields, and can be discussed in terms of the book as well as art. As such, they cannot be considered as a mere product of either. When viewed as works of art, these objects can be considered in terms of content, the artist's general practice and influences and, consequently, the significance of the medium of the book.

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[111] M. Lee in B. Bright 2005, *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960 – 1980,* Granary Books, New York, pg. 77.

Generally, this significance can be located in terms of prescribed duration, sequence and coherence. The act of reading in a forward progression readily lends itself to sequential content, where ideas or images gradually provide additional information towards a common thread or end. Such intentions can be fulfilled through a coherent progression towards an end, but if this sequence is disrupted or contradicted, juxtaposition between the presupposed object and its actual content can occur. In this situation, alternate means of communicating with a reader may be explored. This particular quality will be discussed in detail throughout Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*, while this chapter will focus on a more general and wide-ranging description of artists' books.
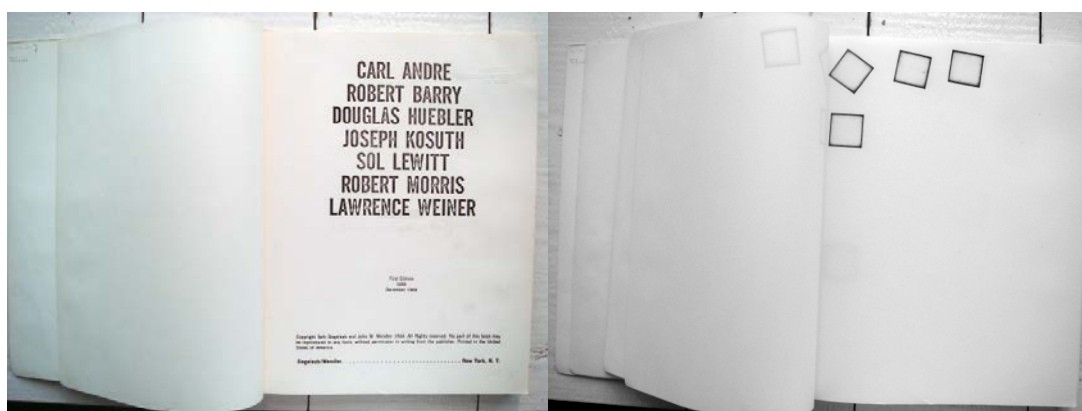
Fig. 15

Various forms of book works and artist's book practices that can be identified throughout the 1960s and into the twenty-first century will now be discussed. One important engagement with early artists' books is that of Conceptualism. Betty Bright suggests that one can 'argue that books (readily) offered a framework that held Conceptualism's sequential progressions'.[112] An example of this can be seen in *The Xerox Book,* 1968 (fig.15), a collaborative book project that was curated and edited by Seth Siegelaub and John Wendler. Seven American artists were invited to contribute work to the book: Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and Lawrence Weiner. The only clear specifications put forward for the artists contributing to this project were that they were to make twenty-five pages, and that these pages were to somehow engage or refer to the medium of the photocopier.

Through the utilisation of seemingly basic configurations of elements such as line and tone, these artists staged an investigation of formal qualities. Bright states that *'(The) Xerox Book* diverts (the reading processes associated with the ordinary book) into a conceptual byway, where one encounters language but not narrative, imagery but not illustration, in contents that are typically self-referential and inscrutable'.[113] The work approaches several qualities that can be considered prominent in, or new to, early models of contemporary artist's book practices. The first is the idea of collaborative practice; all of the artists

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[112] Bright, pg. 121.
[113] Bright, pg. 122.

are working within a singular, unified object to serve a common theme. Furthermore, the creation of a book object to facilitate a focused or specialised practice is often considered central in order to distinguish the artist's book from a book object that includes artworks. Related to this point, is the transition of the book as a form of documenting other artworks, to the notion of the book as an artwork wholly in and of itself. Objects such as *The Xerox Book* also mapped important departures from conventional means of gallery exhibition.

Fig. 16

Revisions and critiques of the book object and gallery conventions, forged predominately during the 1960s, are also reflected in works that approach the book as performance or the book as environment or installation. Such works deal with the notion of the viewing subject's conceptual and physical interaction with the work, a situation that turns the viewer into a participant. This can be witnessed in works such as *The Big Book,* 1967-69 (fig. 16) by American artist Alison Knowles. This book object was constructed to be larger than human scale: measuring eight feet high and four feet wide, and comprising eight 'pages' bound by a spine made of galvanised steel. Each page-spread housed a constructed, home-like environment or space. The content and objects contained within these spaces included a cooktop, toilet, typewriter, light, vacuum and various screenprints and paintings lining the 'pages' themselves.

The Big Book also contained a significant audio component. Sounds recorded during the manual construction of the work play repeatedly throughout the duration of the piece. Bright states that 'this womblike environment could incubate a writer as the writer wrote about being in a book while caught in the mirror or a mirror of a book'.[114] As such, this work stages a reinvention of the book object, particularly in relation to its function, and the place and role of the viewer in relation to this object. In this work, the book object does not act as a source of rigid prescribed meaning or guided activity, but encourages participation from the viewer, beyond that of uninvolved spectatorship. This is a recurring interest in many artist's book practices, the reader or viewer is encouraged to reinterpret traditional methods of viewing and comprehending a

[114] Bright, pg. 132.

book object, and may become an active participant in carrying out the work and its intended activity. This is a process that will be further discussed in relation to selected artists' books in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*.

As Mallarmé was interested in demonstrating in the late nineteenth century, the reconsideration and reinvention of reading processes can be brought about within the constraints of a more traditional book object itself. This practice is also utilised in the production of contemporary artists' books. Johanna Drucker states that while 'the self-conscious use of literary conventions increases the readers' awareness that there are such conventions and that they help structure meaning', 'the visual elements of the page structure are more elusive in their meaning'.[115]   Conventionally, visual elements such as margins, columns and spaces between sections can be viewed as areas of non-meaning. They are put forward in order to provide visual legibility and clarity to the textual content of the work. They are expected, yet are of no consequence to the meaning of the work, and as such, are unlikely to be acknowledged.[116]   In an artist's book however, such areas of the page can forego conventional passivity and 'become points of focus for the investment of meaning'.[117]
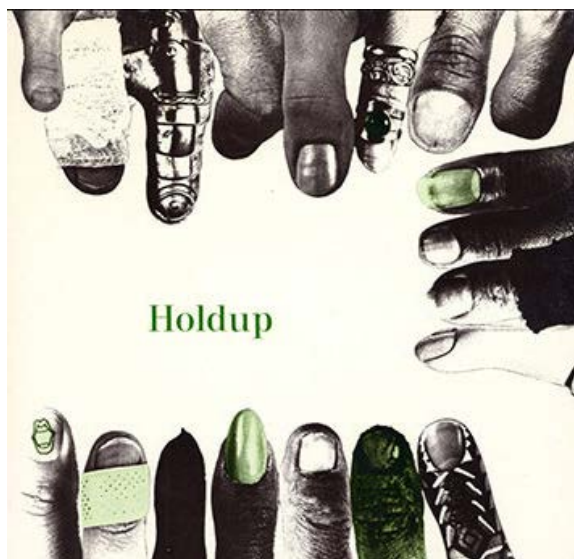
Fig. 17

Drucker provides an example of the unconventional use of formatting by discussing a collaborative book project titled *Holdup,* 1980 (fig. 17) by American artists Emmett Williams and Keith Godard, in which 'the margin of the page becomes a dramatic space'.[118]   Images implying the presence of different people's fingers intrude in the margins of the work where the viewing subject's

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[115] Drucker, pg. 168.
[116] Kant called these parerga, and suggested that they were 'only and adjunct, and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object'. Derrida critiqued this notion of parerga as a form of mere, inessential ornamentation. While he viewed parerga as extrinsic to the work, he also suggested that it provides a space of reflection for what is within the work.
I. Kant in S. Whatling 2006, *Constructing the secondary standpoint – paratexts and parerga of the Conway,* viewed 7 September 2013, <http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/researchforum/projects/archaeologies-stand/whatling03/>.
[117] Drucker, pg. 168.
[118] Drucker, pg. 168.

actual fingers might rest during the act of reading. The fingers presented show varied amounts of detail and have distinctive qualities; some are merely outlines while others are shadows, some are ragged and poorly groomed while others are neat and adorned with jewellery. These images are predominately photographic, and are black and white with green additions, such as rings and tattoos.

In *Holdup*, small areas of green text are placed near the fingertips of each implied character, providing brief statements or phrases relating to the images. Examples of this include 'please turn the page', 'squeak squeak', 'I don't', 'Oh I see! Or do I?', and 'z-z-z-z-z-z-z'.[119] These may not just be seen as general statements, but ambiguous references to the acts of reading among various individuals. Unlike a conventional text, this work encourages viewing directed from the margin inwards, and the negative space occurs primarily in the center of the page spread. As such, the areas of the page that would have conventionally been unoccupied become the subject of the work. They require acknowledgement, encouraging the reader to perform a self-conscious examination of reading processes and the nature of their physical contact with the book object.
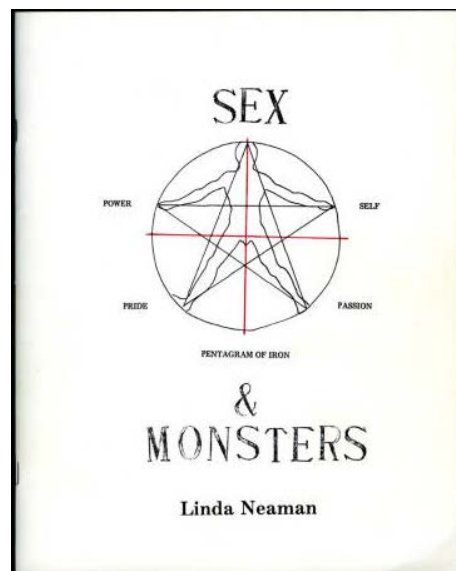
Fig. 18

The artist's book did not only seek to respond to or promote changed methods of reading or alternate ways of constructing a book object, but to relate to aspects of positive or negative societal change. This can be observed in American artist Linda Neaman's *Sex and Monsters,* c. 1980 (fig. 18). This work approaches 'the theme of sexual behaviour and social prohibitions or phobias', with a particular focus on revealing 'the ways in which eroticism is demonised and sexual repression internalised and turned into anger or other destructive emotions'.[120] Visually, the pages present themselves as ambiguous and disjointed collections of photographs, drawings, diagrams, hand-drawn text and typed prose. These approach aspects of fear, violence and negativity, negative

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[119] K. Godard & E. Williams 1980, *Holdup.*
[120] Drucker, pg. 303.

feminine power and biological, emotional and social forms of sexuality. As Drucker points out, this work 'resembles a workbook, its large black and white pages and its page by page treatment of themes gives it a self-help or instructional-pamphlet look'.[121] In this way, the artist refers to both a conventional method of binding, and to visual compositions that are reminiscent of known or conventional texts.

The content of *Sex and Monsters*, however, could be considered unconventional in relation to traditional book conventions. While the historical notion of the book can be viewed as one traditional method of presenting information or facilitating communication, such content was largely censored by the publishers of the works in accordance with political, cultural or religious convention. One key factor that contributed to a departure from these traditions is the invention of alternate and cheaper methods of both printing in general, and book production. When the act of producing a book object became increasingly accessible to artists, individuals and small groups in addition to influential majorities within society as a result of Gutenberg's invention of the mechanical printing press, the provocative and controversial potential of such objects increased, along with the production of books as object of art in general. In response to an increased accessibility to modes of producing books, many artists who produced artists' books frequently adopted the potential for a lack of externally controlled or conventionally accepted content.

Fig. 19

The departure from book conventions is not just staged in relation to content, but also physical form. Performance or installation-based book objects demonstrate this on a grand scale, but physical disruptions can also occur within the constraints of a smaller, seemingly traditional book work. An example of this is American artist Keith Smith's *Swimmer,* 1986 (fig. 19), which is constructed in an accordion-style format. This work has two defined covers and several pages and therefore, from an external perspective, it presents itself as a somewhat conventional book object. The pages contained in this work can, however, be viewed either separately and consecutively, or all at once in a continuous, unfolded form. Drucker states that 'accordion books have the advantage of creating a seamless continuous surface which is also broken up into discrete, page-like units', thus allowing 'the work to have the uninterrupted flow of a scroll while also functioning as a book whose pages and openings can be accessed at any point in the sequence'.[122] When assuming the layout of the

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[121] Drucker, pg. 303.
[122] Drucker, pg. 140.

former, Smith's *Swimmer* portrays movement through the progressive depictions of a male 'swimmer' drifting over the unfolded page.

There is minimal text present in *Swimmer*, but phrases such as 'my nights are spent swimming, hovering closely to the floor' suggest that in this work, 'swimming' may actually refer to 'dreaming' or unconscious thought-patterns.[123] The simple, outlined imagery appears to reinforce this – the figure appears to be slumped, tossing and turning, rather than carrying out defined swim strokes or any form of voluntary exercise. The viewer is able to get an entire sense of the figure's ongoing movement almost immediately, as they are able to view all of the pages at once as if they were one large page. This quality is not traditionally associated with the book form, but is able to form an alternate means of representation throughout the production of many artists' books.
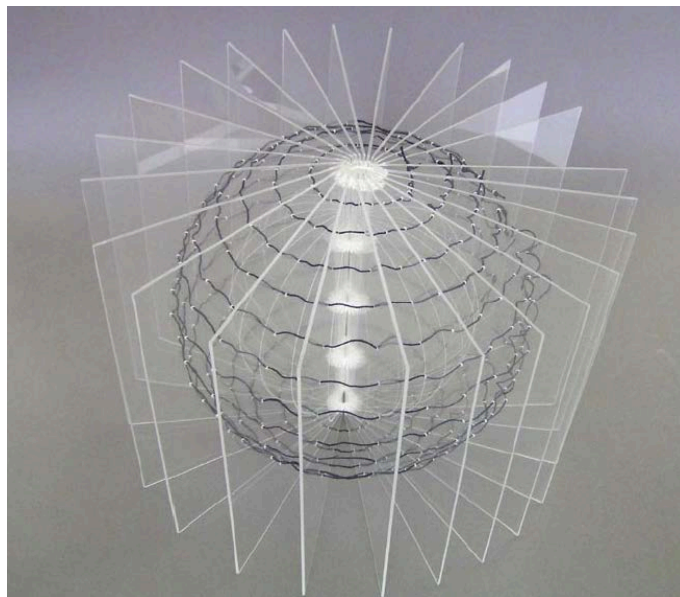
Fig. 20

Books, such as *Swimmer,* that stage a reinvention of physical form, may simultaneously refer to traditional notions of the work as a malleable and moveable object and source of information, while also presenting it as a kind of sculptural object in space. Similar visual effects as those revealed by the unfolded accordion-style work may be viewed in book objects that utilise transparent materials such as Australian artist Adéle Outteridge's *Saturn,* 1997 (fig. 20). Outteridge describes one key quality of her transparent works as their ability to render 'all of the pages (…) visible simultaneously. (As such), the image or text appears to be suspended in space'.[124]

Saturn was constructed from punctured and engraved pieces of acrylic sheet that form the 'pages' of the work, which are held together by means of coptic binding. This method of binding does not involve the construction of a closed spine that acts to conceal the stitched binding and firmly affix cover to cover in a

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[123] K. Smith 1986, *Swimmer.*
[124] A. Outteridge in J. Hale & B. Sweet (eds.) 2011, *Masters: Book Arts,* Lark Crafts: Sterling Publishing, New York, pg. 139.

rigid setting. There need not be any glue or other fixatives used in this process, as it can be achieved by stitching alone. Stitching forms the spine and thread is a highly malleable material, so as a result, the pages can be spread out in a full 360° format. When the work is displayed in this configuration, the engravings on the pages form an inner three-dimensional sphere while areas of dark linen thread woven through these same pages form an outer sphere. Due to the transparency of the materials used, all pages of the work and their contents can be viewed at once both when the book is in a closed or an open position. Only when the pages are fully opened in a circular manner however, can the object reveal the implication of two further objects suspended in space. In producing this work, the artist considered not just the content of the pages, but the book object's role in a physical space.
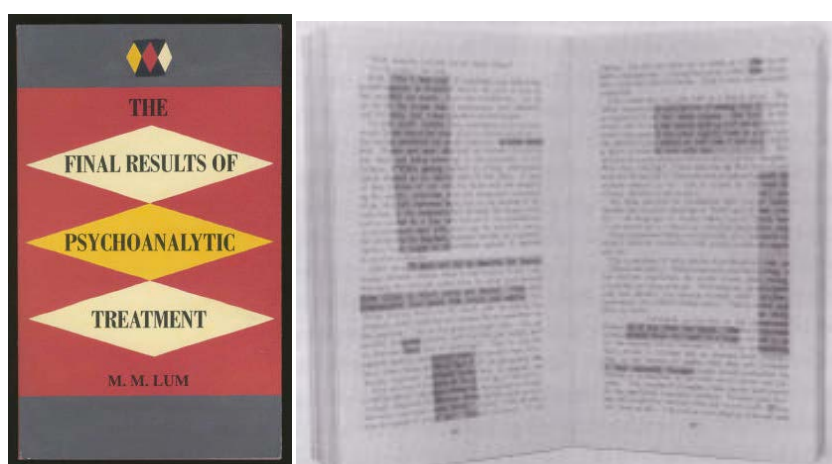
Fig. 21

Another technique found in many artist's book practices is the utilisation and manipulation of an existing text. This is particularly evident in the case of altered books, such as American artist Mary Lum's *The Final Results of Psychoanalytic Treatment,* 1991 (fig. 21). This book is made up of reworked areas of original text by Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. The revisions carried out by Lum are subtle and minimal, imposed by methods of highlighting, making cuts in the pages and over-printing areas of text. Drucker states that within this work, 'barely noticeable interventions disrupt the regularity of text like neurotic symptoms which never achieve their own coherence as or within the work'.[125] Throughout these processes, the work indirectly addresses its original content by subtle visual means. The artist has staged a reinvention of an existing book object in order to provide additional and alternate implications for the work. This new work provides some access to the original content, which references psychoanalytic practices as addressing the unconscious, ambiguous and largely inaccessible content of the human psyche. The visual components of the work present themselves as similarly coded and potentially irreconcilable. Alternate means of depicting information or creating a feeling in the viewer, outside that of directly outlined textual instruction, are explored in such works.

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[125] Drucker, pg. 113.

Fig. 22

The ongoing investigation of reading processes, book structures and various communicative acts brought about by the book object can also be located in the twenty-first century. In addition to an increased reliance on visual means within the book, therefore departing from conventional text-based works, the incorporation of textural and three-dimensional elements into the pages of a work continuously refocuses the viewer's attention and interrupts traditional reading processes. A work that utilises such techniques is American artist Heidi Kyle's *Fold-Out Geometry,* 2003 (fig. 22). It explores the artist's interests in 'the mechanism of the fold' and 'ways in which a flat sheet of paper can be transformed into a three-dimensional object'.[126]

Fold-Out Geometry unfolds to reveal a map-like object, which contains further moveable elements within its 'pages'. These elements are constructed from partially adhered paper configurations that are reminiscent of envelopes and moveable geometrical objects. Because these elements are not fixed, the viewer or participant is encouraged to attempt different methods of folding them along the implied lines, until they construct the three-dimensional object or a number of other sculptural configurations. This form of encouraged interaction with selected elements in the pages is not consistent with more traditional, linear and textual methods of reading. The viewer is held up at particular points, and must sustain not only a conceptual but a physical engagement with the work. Each visual, conceptual and physical obstacle commands interpretation and participation from the reader, they must then systematically incorporate each experience into their understanding of the overall object.

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[126] H. Kyle in J. Hale & B. Sweet (eds.) 2011, *Masters: Book Arts,* Lark Crafts: Sterling Publishing, New York, pp. 124 – 125.

Fig. 23

The changed physical and conceptual qualities of the book object in regards to narrative interruption will be discussed further throughout Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books,* where it will be shown that such changes interrupt or deter conventional reading processes. The interpretive quality required by the viewer that relates to these material and conceptual alterations is increased when the book object becomes closely reminiscent of another moveable object. American artist Linda Smith's *Inside Chance,* 2000 (fig. 23) refers simultaneously to characteristics of a book, a die and a magic cube. The entire object is made up of eight smaller cubes that are anchored to each other at various points, but are also able to move around each other to form twenty-six different configurations. The surfaces of these cubes contain lines from a poem by Alberto Rios. This written work can only be viewed in its original context when the larger cube, or die, is inverted. When the viewer begins to move the pieces of the work in different directions, the 'surfaces connect and break away in unexpected ways, rearranging the text into various configurations, with each manipulation conveying a different meaning'.[127] Although the text is written in a linear manner, it does not always flow logically in its designated arrangement. In this work, the artist reveals an interest in contradiction and chance. She states that 'the book is square and round at the same time; it opens in a line but circles around and around'.[128] The element of chance introduces another form of disruption to traditional modes of reading, further than the hybrid implications of the book object as sculpture. Although the text flows best in certain configurations, there is no fixed order to this work and therefore, no clearly designated method for interpretation. As such, it reflects the concepts of chance meetings, external influences, and the potential flexibility of the implied book.

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[127] L. Smith in K. Wasserman (ed.) 2007, *The Book as Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts,* Princeton Architectural Press, New York, pg. 179.
[128] L. Smith, pg. 179.
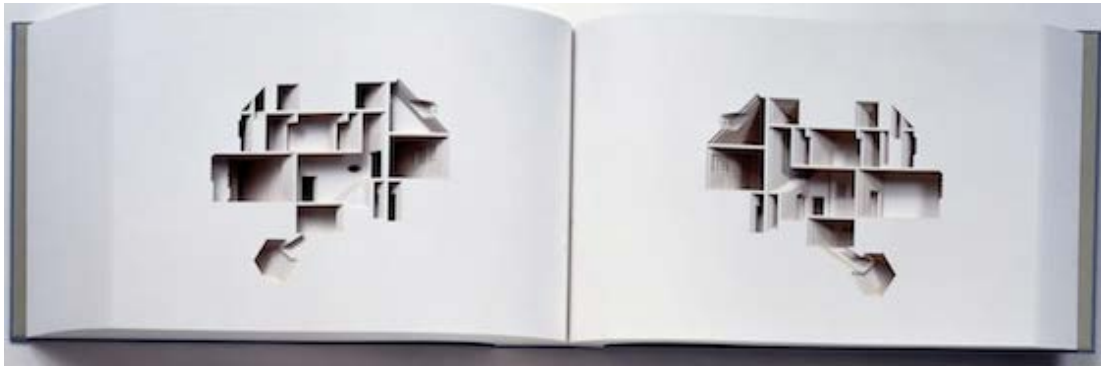
Fig. 24

As demonstrated in works such as *Inside Chance,* artists' books can be frequently associated with multi-disciplinary practice. A further example of this is Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson's *Your House,* 2006 (fig. 24), which also forms a hybrid object between book and sculpture. The pages of this book contain no imagery or text, but have been laser-cut to form a progressive interior model of the artist's own home. As the viewer turns the pages of the work, they slowly reveal more of the interior, thereby increasing their spatial awareness of the object and the larger environment it depicts. Each page reveals a cross-section of the house, and when several pages are viewed simultaneously through the cuts in the pages preceding them it gives the impression that the building is being viewed on an angle, as the vertical lines of the cross-sections do not line up directly on top of one another. In reference to Johanna Drucker's assertion that artists' books must act as artworks in and of themselves, we can recognise that 'the book as a medium is not used simply as a prop or vessel here; it becomes an integral part of the work'.[129] Furthermore, it can be viewed as 'a new way to think about the medium and its potential for a gradual, step-by-step experience of space'.[130] As such, this work cannot simply be considered a sculpture in which the medium is only incidental. The pages of the book become central to the movement and progression through space necessary to the ongoing experience of the work.

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[129] P. Sloman (ed.) 2011, *Book Art: Iconic Sculptures and Installations Made from Books,* Gestalten, Berlin, pg. 52.

[130] P. Sloman, pg. 52.

Fig. 25

Contemporary practitioners may also investigate alternate roles of the book by transforming it into another functional object entirely. Finnish artist Janna Syvänoja transforms pages of found books into pieces of jewellery that reflect organic shapes. An example of this process can be seen in her work *Brooch,* 2009 (fig. 25). Syvänoja states that

> 'by curving each slice of paper around the steel wire, one by one, one after another, it is as if the piece grows into shape by itself. This way the character of wood, paper's original material, is preserved in the piece – as is its association with the whole organic world, the way it builds itself, being in constant change, travelling in time'.[131]

Through this process, the pages are returned to a formal, organic function, after serving a conceptually informative one. These works access part of an information-saturated society, and transform books into objects of concealment and adornment. In doing so, Syvänoja investigates a new function for the material book, outside any traditional applications.

3.4 Chapter summary

Throughout this chapter, various potential functions and characteristics of the artist's book in historical and contemporary practices have been identified. Historically, developing trends towards the use of the traditional book object as a vehicle for more unconventional content can be witnessed. This can refer to the inclusion or reliance on forms of imagery within the book, or to departures from known literature or societally agreeable prose in relation to religious, political or social majorities. Once cheaper, more accessible means of producing books became readily available and more commonly utilised, texts that directly served personal interests or creative practices became more prominent, as can be seen through the book works created during the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. These historical instances of departure from book conventions can be understood as culminating in the 'artists' books' of the early 1960s transitioning into a contemporary context.

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[131] J. Syvänoja in P. Sloman (ed.) 2011, *Book Art: Iconic Sculptures and Installations Made from Books,* Gestalten, Berlin, pg. 52.

As this chapter has identified, many examples of these works have remaining ties to book and narrative conventions. This can be seen through traditional binding, the construction of a resolved story or, in more loosely based examples, constant adherence to a central theme or repeated action. Artists' books can be distinguished from traditional books however, in that they serve to further the artist's individual, creative practice, rather than to contain a fictitious or non-fictitious literary work or image unrelated to art practice. Artists' books tend to reveal narrow content that is not for the purpose of reference material nor does it function as a novel. These examples often promote some common, logical tendencies, in that they construct coherent ideas or progressions, and present no serious or lasting complication to the central focus of the work. Exceptions to such logical or harmonious works will be discussed in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*, where examples of disrupted or non-narrative artists' books and ways in which a viewer can engage with and respond to them will be examined. It can also be noted, that the book object's departure from material, conceptual or process-based traditions becomes increasingly evident as the book approaches other methods of practice such as sculpture, performance or installation. As the viewer or participant deals with these hybrid objects, they must reinvent methods of handling and interpreting the work as they differ from single, conventional books. Many of these works do not actively resist the presentation of meaning, but rather seek alternate means of communication outside that of clearly defined textual prose.

Where this chapter has provided a historical and contemporary context for the development and practice of artists' books, Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology* will discuss narrative theory. It will identify the role of narrative ordering in spoken, written or visual texts as one of meaning-making and rendering an experience, or sequence of events, logical. Particular focus will be given to narrative works of visual art in order to demonstrate different modes of pictorial storytelling. Chapter Four will discuss narrative structures in Western social formations. The following chapters will refer to this basis as a point for departure where non-narrative works can be discussed.

Chapter Four

Semiotics and Narratology

4.1 Chapter outline

The following chapter will investigate the concept of narrative structure and ordering as a tendency that is deeply embedded in both historical and contemporary societies. This will include discussions of the fundamental qualities and effects of a narrative, how it manifests itself in 'humanity' and products thereof and, in particular, how artworks and visual objects may lend themselves to the term. Once methods for identifying and discussing narratives are established, elements or works that are problematic to such systems, in particular, non-narrative or disrupted artists' books, and visual or literary work in general can then be located and discussed.

As outlined in Chapter Three *A Brief Historical Survey of Artists' Books*, the incorporation of both image and text into the form of the book witnessed throughout its history has contributed to the contemporary notion of artist's book practices. In these contemporary practices, the production of a book object acts to serve the artistic practice of an individual or group, independent of existing rule, or literature or strict conventions in regards to content or formal and material construction. Although many characteristics of the traditional textual book may be abandoned in the creation of the book as art, references to narrative or implied meaning often still remain. These may be inherent in the object itself as a product created by the artist, or they may simply relate to the expectations of the viewer in regards to their preconceived ideas about the book as a source of coherent meaning. In order to understand the tendencies towards narrative ordering, representation and reading that an artist or viewer may possess, and consequently the disruption of narrative convention, and the various functions of narrative in society must be examined.

The following chapter will explore the concepts of narratives, constructed meaning or assumed coherence. These will initially be located in culture itself, and then discussed in terms of their communicability through objects such as the book. Objects such as these will be regarded as displaying a necessity for processes of meaning making, identified by human subjects then made concrete and communicable to other subjects by means of the object. A key focus of the following discussion of narratives and narrative objects will be on the image in general and its potential to facilitate narrative readings, with reference to historical means of storytelling or meaning-making through works of art. The derivation of meaning from a visual source may occur readily, for example, when the image illustrates an existing story or event directly. This chapter will further show that such an outcome can be brought about by more ambiguous means, including the presentation of fragments that require an active engagement from the reader or viewer in order to be rendered logical. Works that conform to these logical processes will be discussed, providing a basis for the consideration of non-narrative or disruptive works to be considered throughout other areas of the dissertation. Although aspects of language, both spoken and written, may be regarded as the most direct method of staging narrative communication, this

dissertation is primarily concerned with the similar practices and effects that can be achieved through images or visual sequences.

In this chapter, the formation of narrative will be explored as a process for organising past experiences, and memories together with present stimuli into a logical frame. This will be observed based on the abandonment of metaphysical claims of the fundamental nature of being in favour of focusing on forms of knowing or understanding that are brought about through the construction of linear sequence and the rationalisation, or rejection of, seemingly disparate elements. This can be viewed in relation to the state of consciousness itself, which holds the capacity to integrate various forms of stimuli. There can be no uniform method of perception and comprehension between individuals, as experiences, memories, knowledge and even languages and dialects are highly variable. What may be perceived as comprehendible or logical to each subject differs to some degree depending on each subject's learned or imposed methods of interpretation and understanding, as well as their prior knowledge of similar information or stimuli to that which they are currently presented with. Although shared culture may account for some similarities in interpretive response, variations may still occur as a product of individual experience within a given culture.

In order to investigate aspects of this experience in general, different models of the term 'narrative' will be discussed, with emphasis on meaningful readings of incomplete sources as well as non-linguistic signs. The capacity for words and images to act as separate spheres of representation, that are nonetheless capable of interacting with each other and reinforcing meaning, will be identified. These processes relate to the historical progression of visual storytelling from methods of secondary representation, or images that function to reinforce written text or known narrative, to images that act as a primary source of narrative in themselves. Both of these approaches can be located in book works throughout Western history, from the illustrated book to the book as an artwork in and of itself. Where articulated language can be considered a central form of communication, the book is often associated with recording or facilitating similar ways of exchanging stories. When the image is made a primary component of the book, as it is in many artists' books, it can sometimes adhere to modes of visual communication that can be likened to spoken or written narrative. In other cases, an alternate form of the book or composition of visual elements may introduce the need for different or less straightforward methods of interpretation.

This chapter will refer to more traditional functions of logical narrative and its interpretation. It will provide a basis for the concept of narrative structure to be considered in regards to its articulation, with reference to the presuppositions and expected conventions associated with the book form, as well as other visual means. The subsequent chapters will utilise this as a basis for investigating a departure from narrative conventions, as well as alternate methods of deriving meaning that can be employed when confronted with seemingly illogical linguistic and visual signs. In order to identify the function of narrative in society, this chapter will initially focus on the inherent 'human' tendencies and social conditions that create the perceived necessity of narrative ordering. H.

Porter Abbott's general conception of the term 'narrative' will initially be examined as an introductory context for the practice of logical or meaningful ordering of information in society. Donald Polkinghorne's discussion of narrative as a primary mode of ordering through which experience is made meaningful will then be examined.

It will be noted that some theories, such as Derrida's, critique this notion of ordering. Potential models of narrative structure and historical and contemporary examples relating to visual culture will then be examined as they represent ways in which human subjects render their experiences and interactions meaningful. By referring to David Hume's account of the human subject and ways in which ideas are constructed, a basis for the consideration of knowing and subsequent communication will be formed. This is centered on ideas about how one might come to experience forms of knowledge and how this can be constructed into a logical system of ideas. The role of logic or narrative in a society and how it may be exchanged between multiple subjects will then be addressed with reference to the theoretical work of Johanna Drucker, Roland Barthes and French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. These approaches will establish the practice of narrative ordering as heavily embedded in culture, for the primary purpose of shared communicable experience. The potential origins of these tendencies will be located as a product of immediate consciousness itself, rather than an entirely learned or planned ability. Here, Gerald Edelman and Guilio Tononi identify the conscious yet automatic processes of integrating present stimuli with existing knowledge and expectations as inherent processes for the experiencing subject.

In this dissertation, narrative ordering will be regarded as a common condition shared between different individuals in social or cultural groups. It then follows that the actual execution of specific narratives will also be considered highly varied. To form a basic idea of how the key components of a narrative can be identified and discussed, the theories of Rick Altman and Mieke Bal will be examined because they discuss seminal yet differing points about the structure and role of narratives in society. The former will give an indication of how a more rigid and language-based model can be used, in some instances, to determine what may or may not be considered a narrative. The latter, however, can be considered a more flexible system where images play a key role. In Bal's account, a collection of signs that can be reconciled into a coherent whole may constitute a narrative text or object. With the inclusion of images in mind, historical grounding for the comparison between visual elements and text, as well as their potential functional similarities, will be referred to through a discussion of the tradition expressed by the Latin phrase 'ut pictura poesis' ('as is painting, so is poetry'). In order to view this debate in a more contemporary context, this chapter will then refer to American cultural theorist W. J. T. Mitchell's consideration of an artificial dichotomy between image and text. This point attempts to locate similar capabilities in the two modes of expression for the purpose of communication and the derivation of meaning.

Considering the image as a source of meaning, a historical survey of visual narratives will be constructed with reference to works associated with Medieval art, History Painting, Realism, Modernism and Postmodernism. These

movements and the works produced under them set a foundation for the consideration of contemporary visual storytelling occurring both through more conventional means of representation, as well as alternate means that rely on inter-personal interaction such as forms of community art. Such works, produced primarily during the latter part of the twentieth century, do not provide strict guidelines for narrative reception, but they can facilitate constructed environments where sequential activity or logical communication can occur, creating a 'community' from assembled individuals. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of the book object in Western conventions, with particular emphasis on how it commonly forms strong ties to narrative experience through both textual and visual means. This point will be revisited in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*, as models of traditional or narrative instances of the book form create a point of departure where cases of disrupted sequence or logic may occur. Accepted notions of narrative and the book particularly in Western culture, will be shown in subsequent chapters to allow for a degree of interruption or illogical content if departures from these notions are forged within the physical constraints of an outwardly comparable object.

4.2 What is narrative?

The term 'narrative' is generally accepted as being synonymous with structured meaning and modes of communication. H. Porter Abbott suggests that, through various methods of spoken, textual or visual representation, a narrative can commonly be identified if some account 'of an event or series of events' is present.[132] To fulfill the intentions of narrative organisation, the event or events represented are structured so that they may be understood as intelligible. Individual aspects should link to one another, increasing the listener's, reader's or viewer's understanding of the situation presented. A logical structure of events, ideas and occurrences is formed in order to allow information to be transferred easily between individuals or groups. Despite the intentions involved in processes of creating an ordered experience, information is not always transferred in a linear manner from speaker to listener, writer to reader, actor to audience or artist to viewer. While many narratives fulfill the objectives of logical ordering by appearing seamless, easy to understand or difficult to contest, others reveal spaces of incoherence or non-meaning through ambiguous gestures, images, sequences, and language. For a narrative reading to take place, any significant ambiguity must be ignored or eliminated and the listener, reader or viewer must be presented with enough comprehendible cues as to satisfy their attempts to find order and meaning. In this way, the term 'narrative' need not only apply to a designated process of ordering, but can refer to an object, text or conversation that is resolved in a state of overall coherence. In this way, a narrative can be regarded in terms of the practice or achievement of meaning-making processes that facilitate communication, present in every human culture.

Further than simply being present in every culture, Donald Polkinghorne regards narrative as the primary way in which human experience can be made

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[132] H.P. Abbott 2008, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative,* 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/New York, pg. 13.

meaningful.[133]   As previously outlined, the term 'narrative' refers to the organisation or ordering of events, images, signs or, more generally, texts. These are commonly transferred through speech, but also recorded by means of written or illustrated texts and objects such as the book. These processes of recording can be viewed as particularly important, as they hold the capacity to convey meaning and information to many subjects, and for prolonged periods. They remain unchanged when passed between subjects, though each subject may carry out different means of interpretation in response to them. Even so, if the object presents primarily legible and coherent cues, the viewer is likely to organise these into a narrative order or account. Processes of organisation, for the intention of identifying a narrative structure, can be seen through the anchoring of isolated elements, fixing them in an order that can be understood as logical. In other words, they can be read.

4.3 Language and meaning

When considering the role of narrative in society, it should be acknowledged that Jacques Derrida disputes kinds of ordering, or 'logocentrism', in Western philosophy. The term 'logocentrism' refers to a 'fundamental (way) of thinking' in this tradition, one that 'emphasises the privileged role that *logos,* or speech, has been accorded'.[134]   The logocentrisn of this philosophy refers to the view that one can grasp a reality that 'is signified, pointed to, described by language as a signifier'.[135]   For Derrida, such philosophical traditions need to be 'deconstructed'. Here, he seeks to 'reverse (the) existing oppositions' between speech and writing.[136] The existing philosophy he critiques is one in which 'spoken words are the symbols of mental experience (and) written words are the symbol of that already existing symbol'.[137] According to this position, writing is considered as further removed from thought and the formation of meaning in general.

In contrast to this tradition, Derrida asserts 'that writing-in-general (…) may be the origin of speech and that it is only through the violence of hierarchy, not through any sort of worthiness, that speech is often privileged as an immediate and more accurate representation of communication'.[138] For Derrida, speech and writing do not exist in opposition to each other; but rather, they are both different forms of writing. In addition to this, writing is not regarded as lesser than speech, but it 'supplements speech' in order to fill in a lack.[139] In this theory, language is not fixed, 'words not only have many different meanings and uses, but words (*signifiers*) themselves do not simply correspond with their

[133] D. Polkinghorne 1998, *Narrative, Knowing and the Human Sciences,* State University of New York Press, Albany.

[134] J. Reynolds 2010, 'Jaques Derrida (1930 – 2004)', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 23 March 2013, <www.iep.utm.edu/derrida>.

[135] A. Harrison-Barbet (ed.), *Philosophical Connections: Derrida,* viewed 25 March 2013, <http://www.philosophos.com/philosophical_connections/profile_130.html>.

[136] Reynolds.

[137] Reynolds.

[138] J. E. Goodspeed-Chadwick 2006, 'Derrida's Deconstruction of Logocentrism: Implications for Trauma Studies', *reconstruction: studies in contemporary culture,* viewed 25 March 2013, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/062/godspeed.shtml>.

[139] E. Akintola Hubbard, 'Notes on Deconstruction: Claude Levi Strauss's 'A Writing Lesson' and Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology, Anthro 1795: Language and Politics in Latin America,* viewed 25 March 2013, <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic146051.files/Derrida_Overview.doc>.

definitional meanings (*word-concepts* or *signifieds*)'.[140] Language, then, can be regarded as unstable, and the concept of the text can be considered in terms of the deferral of meaning. Here, we can refer to Derrida's term 'différance', which denotes the differing and deferring of meaning. This term eludes a concrete definition, as its applications are circumstantial.   For Derrida however, 'différance is typical of what is involved in arche-writing[141] and this generalised notion of writing that breaks down the entire logic of the sign'.[142] In this theory, the fixed meaning of the sign as a component of language is critiqued. The role of the sign as a literal representation of something, either actually or potentially present, 'is rendered impossible by arche-writing, which insists that the signs always refer to yet more signs ad infinitum, and that there is no ultimate referent or foundation'.[143] While Derrida's difference is useful in critiquing language as it were for Saussure, or any notion of a transcendental signified, it is not ultimately useful to the discussion of artists' books put forward in this dissertation. This is because, as previously stated, the dissertation is not looking at external points that fix and determine the text, but rather illogical or disruptive gaps that occur within a work.

4.4 Narrative practices in human culture

It is now the task of this chapter to examine the function of narrative practices. The tendency to place aside or integrate seemingly unrelated material in order to create a narrative sequence emerges from aspects of human nature and methods of processing information and ideas. In relation to perception and comprehension, David Hume constructs a kind of 'empirical experimental science of human nature' that involves a rejection of metaphysics and the related search for 'ultimate original principles'.[144] It should be recognised, that Hume's approach and the conclusions he draws have been the subject of continued critique. Hume's ultimate original principles can be regarded as responsible for 'governing human nature'.[145] Where metaphysicians claimed to be able 'to draw conclusions about the ultimate nature of reality', Hume rejected this as an impossibility, and proposed that one could only properly investigate human nature when attempts to explain these 'ultimate original principles' are abandoned.[146]

While he does not seek to explain 'ultimate original principles', Hume does seek to describe a certain set of 'original principles' that are inherently human and can be revealed through the observation of past and present experiences.[147] The observation of these experiences forms the basis of an empirical inquiry into

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[140] Akintola Hubbard.

[141] For Derrida, writing never attains definitive meaning. As such, he examines the notion of writing in reference to the term 'arche-writing'. Jack Reynolds states that this term 'refers to a more generalised notion of writing that insists that the breach that the written introduces between what is intended to be conveyed and what is actually conveyed, is typical of an originary breech that afflicts everything one might wish to keep sacrosanct, including the notion of self-presence'.
Reynolds.

[142] Reynolds.

[143] Reynolds.

[144] W. E. Morris ed. E. N. Zalta 2011, 'David Hume', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 1 August 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/hume/>.

[145] Morris ed. Zalta

[146] Morris ed. Zalta

[147] Morris ed. Zalta

human nature, where events and their effects may be regarded as highly circumstantial. In relation to experience in general, these principles can be given a kind of logic when the impressions they are ultimately derived from are investigated. Hume refers to what is encompassed by thought, our 'perceptions', as being derived from 'sensation' or 'reflection'.[148] These perceptions, belonging to the mind, are divided by their varying degrees of force, where 'ideas' come from more active 'impressions'.[149] Hume clarifies his concept of 'impressions' by stating that the term is used to designate 'all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will'.[150] Furthermore, he makes the important distinction that 'impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements above mentioned'.[151] In relation to one's search for coherence, logic, or 'coherent cognitive content', can be perceived if a larger concept or idea can be traced back to its 'original impressions'.[152]

The process of tracing an idea back to a set of impressions attempts to locate the origins of ideas or knowing in the individual as well as shared culture, but Hume further investigates the frequently interrelated nature of ideas. He describes the 'three principles of connexion', 'resemblance, contiguity and cause and effect', as processes of association that occur automatically in the human mind.[153] Hume seeks to provide examples of each of these principles. He states that resemblance can be explained by situations such as when 'a picture naturally leads our thoughts to the original', contiguity may be witnessed upon 'the mention of one apartment in a building (which) naturally introduces an enquiry or discourse concerning the others', and cause and effect can be demonstrated 'if we think of a wound, (and) we can scarcely forbear reflecting on the pain which follows it'.[154] These refer primarily to processes of recollection, association and combined sensation and reflection respectively. Cause and effect is considered the primary principle, and also the only one that refers to a function beyond that of recollection or immediate sensory perception.[155] This function links past and present experiences with future predictions or expectations, therefore extending beyond knowledge derived from the memory or senses.[156]

Associations based on cause and effect are independent of reason, but are formed in relation to experience.[157] Hume theorises that 'the knowledge of (the) relation (between cause and effect) is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori;* but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other'.[158] If a constant relationship is observed between action and result, object and meaning or

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[148] Morris ed. Zalta
[149] Morris ed. Zalta
[150] D. Hume 2004, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* Dover Publications, Inc., Mineola/New York, pg. 9.
[151] Hume, pg. 9.
[152] Morris ed. Zalta
[153] Morris ed. Zalta
[154] Hume, pg. 13.
[155] Morris ed. Zalta
[156] Morris ed. Zalta
[157] Morris ed. Zalta
[158] Hume, pg. 15.

separate events in a sequence, then this relationship is perceived as likely or even immediate. Where, for Hume, cause and effect are not derived from reason, it can be referred to under the principle of 'custom'. This term is employed to 'point out a principle of human nature, which is universally acknowledged, and which is well known by its effects'.[159] The cause and effect system is fallible, in that if the constant relationship established changes or can no longer be observed, it fails to be given coherence. Despite this, these processes of association refer to automatic attempts to form logical organisation and narrative sequence. They are practiced tendencies whereby 'human' subjects attempt to assume logical experience, which can either be sustained or negated by actual experience. Practices based on cause and effect are brought about by customs and habits, and are not a condition of nature. As such, these processes can be subjected to ongoing forms of revision.

One central critique of Hume's theory concerning causality is that provided by Immanuel Kant. Hume and Kant agreed on the contribution of the mind to the principle of cause and effect, rather than it being consistent with sensation. Where Hume drew attention to accounts of experience however, Kant referred to the abovementioned principle in terms of the kind of reasoning Hume had rejected. Kant theorised that both the principle of cause and effect, and the concept of necessity implied by Hume's 'necessary connexion', 'arise from precisely the operations of our understanding – and, indeed, they arise entirely a priori as pure concepts or categories of the understanding'.[160] For Hume, causality was something that could be observed. For Kant however, causality is something we know a priori, it forms part of the way in which we comprehend the world, it is brought to our experiences.

Kant suggests that our concept of causality allows us to distinguish a world or existence external to ourselves. In knowing this concept, we can then distinguish between acts and effects brought about by ourselves, and those belonging to an external reality. Though differing in origin and conclusion, Kant's approach can be applied to forms of narrative investigation. The processes of understanding or knowing something, and in turn distinguishing it from something else, relate to the logical ordering and categorisation of ideas and events.

When seeking to rationalise or render coherent aspects of internal and external reality, the individual, as well as the group that individual belongs to, can be referred to. Johanna Drucker describes one function of 'personal and collective narratives' as serving to 'render coherent the inexplicable and random features of lived experience'.[161] Particular cues are worked into a meaningful frame through external processes such as receiving information and experiences and internal processes such as interpreting and comprehending the external stimuli. As such, engaging in narrative discourse can be considered a 'distinctive human trait' that is exercised on a day-to-day basis.[162] This is a trait that relates to how

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[159] Hume, pg. 26.
[160] G. De Pierris & M. Friedman ed. E. N. Zalta 2008, 'Kant and Hume on Causality', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 13 November 2012,
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/kant-hume-causality>.
[161] J. Drucker 1999, 'Experimental Narrative and Artists' Books, *The Journal of Artists' Books,* pg. 3.
[162] Abbott, pg. 1.

humans receive, process and respond to information and events. Such processes can be considered important in rendering an individual's experience meaningful, but can also be considered central to intelligible communication between multiple subjects.

Roland Barthes affirms the notion that narratives are a condition of human society, indicating that they are embedded in culture, and are 'able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances'.[163] These are all components of communication in general. Barthes also draws attention to the universality of narrative; it is and has been present in every culture.[164]

Paul Ricoeur also approached aspects of narrative ordering, in particular, to defend its potential to represent human experience in relation to time. He points out that time can be viewed in two different but related ways, both of which are experienced in linear succession. The first is called 'cosmological time', which is 'expressed in the metaphor of the 'river of time'', and the second is 'phenomenological time', which is 'experienced in terms of the past, present and future'.[165] From these, Ricoeur develops the concept of 'human time', which integrates both of these experiences. Kim Atkins gives the example that 'to say 'today is my birthday' is to immediately invoke both orders of time: a chronological date to which is anchored the phenomenological concept of 'birthday''.[166] As such, these experiences are not to be seen in opposition. On the contrary, Ricoeur argues that in the order of time, 'phenomenological time presupposes the succession characteristic of cosmological time'.[167] This order is not variable. For Ricoeur, the only suitable way to assign 'a composite temporal framework' to 'any philosophical (system) for understanding human existence' is to employ a narrative model.[168]

The way in which the narrative model can be applied to the human experience of time can be described by three separate stages of interpretation. These stages are called 'mimesis1', 'mimesis2' and 'mimesis3'.[169] 'Mimesis1 describes the way in which the field of human acting is always already prefigured with certain basic competencies'.[170] It involves the ability to engage in the 'semantics of action' (which include questions such as who, where, how and why), the understanding of symbols and the presence of a structure assigned so that the narrative may be followed. Mimesis2 is then concerned with the configuration of these aspects. This is carried out by a 'mediating function' that is referred to by the term 'emplotment'.[171] This function 'configures events, agents and objects and renders those individual elements meaningful as part of a larger whole'.[172] The final stage, mimesis3, then acts to give a fictitious narrative a

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[163] R. Barthes trans. S. Heath 1977, *Image Music Text*, Hill and Wang, New York, pg. 79.
[164] Barthes
[165] K. Atkins 2005, 'Paul Ricoeur (1913 – 2005)', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 23 March 2013, <www.iep.utm.edu/ricoeur/#H5>.
[166] Atkins.
[167] Atkins.
[168] Atkins.
[169] Atkins.
[170] Atkins.
[171] Atkins.
[172] Atkins.

context in lived experience. Here, the need for reading as well as writing to carry out and sustain the story is recognised. Atkins states that, once our 'life stories' have been read, 'they are taken as one's own and integrated into one's identity and self-understanding'.[173] These stages refer to the prefiguration, configuration and refiguration of the narrative respectively. As a whole, 'the concern of narrative is coherence and structure, not the creation of a particular kind of experience'.[174] This can, however, be viewed as an effective method of representing aspects of a universal human experience over a length of time.

The ongoing, widespread applications of forms of narrative ordering throughout all human societies implies an inherent dependence on such processes for the purpose of understanding, documentation, effective communication and the formation and maintenance of identity. As such, visual or written texts that can be read, or statements that are understandable and therefore able to be responded to, can be viewed as facilitating important processes whereby individuals relate to one another and form communal groups. These processes place the subject in a state where they can be described as being 'intrinsically related to others' and in doing so, existing within a network of meanings.[175] In the vicinity of other humans, one cannot help but interact and communicate on some level with the beings around them, even if that form of communication is not directly reciprocated. Even the act of ignoring some form of contact reveals or communicates an intent. This interaction is not only carried out by spoken conversation or physical contact, but can also be achieved through subtle gestures.

The term 'communication' is derived from the Latin term 'communicare, meaning to impart, share or make common'.[176] The term denotes sharing between a group, and is also linked to the terms 'community' and 'meaning'.[177] These group interactions often aid an individual's own understanding and form relations between multiple persons, for example, as 'a flow of experiences, actions (or) events'.[178] These can be considered narrative interactions if they form meaning; if a conversation can be understood, if one action produces a logical reaction and if separate instances in general occur as part of a related progression. It is through narrative structuring that information is often regarded as being made more intelligible, or transferable between individuals and groups. This does not always refer to an act in the present, as narrative objects can exist for various lengths of time, thereby providing historical documentation. Due to this, a narrative can be imparted on different individuals again and again, long after its original conception. This can occur if it has undergone sufficient means of recording.

As previously discussed, the formation of individual identities and their inclusion in forms of shared narratives is a practice that is inherent in any

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[173] Atkins.
[174] Atkins.
[175] R. Stevens (ed.) 1996, *Understanding the Self,* SAGE Publications Ltd & The Open University, London/California/New Delhi, pg. 16.
[176] J. D. Peters 1999, *Speaking into the Air: A history of the idea of communication,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pg. 7.
[177] Peters, pg. 7.
[178] Stevens, pg. 23.

human society. Without a shared narrative, society would be impossible. Such traits can be considered as simultaneously learned and automatic. In reference to the suggestions put forward by the latter, it may be necessary to investigate automatic processes of consciousness and related interpretive acts. This is because, if an act is carried out without being taught and it is absent of clear provocation, it may be considered inherent to the subject or culture that imparts it.

Gerald M. Edelman and Guilio Tononi describe the need to consider, understand and seek coherence as embedded in human consciousness itself.[179] Modes of ordering that may lend themselves readily to narrative structures can be understood as central to processes of receiving and interpreting information in a logical manner. This information takes the form of anything that is received by the senses; by sight, hearing, smell, taste or touch. Edelman and Tononi view the capacity to not only receive sensory information, but to attempt to place it into some meaningful framework or content as a key function of consciousness that is present at the initial point of consciousness itself. Here, that which is considered the 'primary consciousness' is associated with the automatic ability to form an 'integrated mental scene' at a given present.[180] This scene relies on both the presence of external stimuli and the receiver's ability to integrate new information with existing memories and established understanding.

4.5 Potential complications to narrative reading

One problem the brain may encounter during this meaning-making process of integration is that the external stimuli, or signals from one's environment, can be ambiguous; they can require a particular context or they may not necessarily fit within any preconceived notions of their significance.[181] This creates a process where internal and external stimuli fail to merge and form an overall coherence. Such an occurrence represents a failure to construct narrative meaning, a result that both automatic and intentional conscious processes will act to avoid. In addition to this, Edelman and Tononi acknowledge that a 'person cannot be aware of two mutually incoherent scenes or objects at the same time'.[182] These scenes or objects, however, can be encountered and considered in quick succession. A person is therefore capable of recognising and responding to unexpected associations.[183] This capability relates to the attempt to derive reason from incoherent or non-narrative stimuli and, ultimately, to the potential mediation or rejection of such material. Such a response may involve filling in gaps that may become apparent, reconsidering current knowledge or avoiding illogical aspects by considering them as outside of the relevant information. This flexibility and inclination to either integrate or put aside incoherent aspects where possible relates to the mediation of non-linearity and the subsequent tendency to assume narrative order.

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[179] G. M. Edelman & G. Tononi 2001, *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination*, Penguin Books, London.
[180] Edelman & Tononi, pg. 78.
[181] Edelman & Tononi, pg. 94.
[182] Edelman & Tononi, pg. 147.
[183] Edelman & Tononi
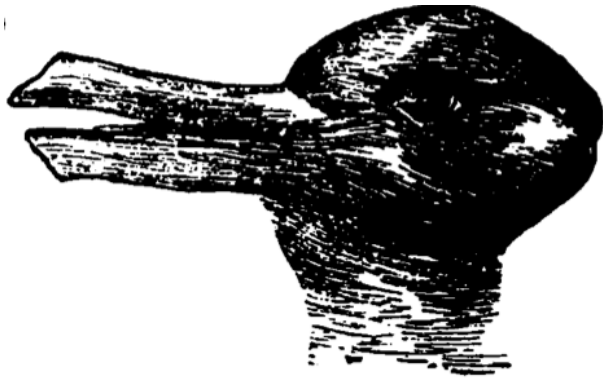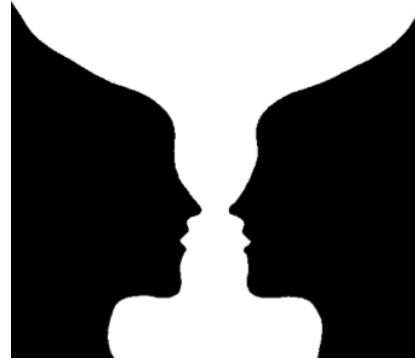
Fig. 26	Fig. 27

In relation to the impossibility of viewing two mutually incoherent images simultaneously that was proposed above, aspects of gestalt theory can be discussed. This theory relates to visual perception, and was first developed by a group of German psychologists in the 1920s. These psychologists sought 'to systematically study perceptual organisation'.[184] The basic principle of this theory can be described with reference to either of the two common images shown above (fig. 26 and fig. 27).[185] The first was presented to colleagues by American psychologist Joseph Jastrow in 1900; it depicts a duck for some viewers and a rabbit for others. The second image was developed by Danish psychologist and phenomenologist Edgar Rubin in 1915; it whose either a vase or the profiles of two faces turned towards each other. In both examples, 'the human mind makes the image into a picture *of something*', 'but no one sees just lines or a bunch of parts'.[186] From this, it can be theorised that such images 'must appear *as* something or other to human minds that are simultaneously perceiving and making it'.[187] In addition to this, a viewing subject is often able to recognise the contrary image once they are told it can be perceived. Even so, this is still a case of one or the other. A viewer can switch between the recognition of a duck or a rabbit, a vase or two profiles, but they can never view both possibilities simultaneously.

4.6 Narrative tendencies in the experiencing subject

In examples of images used for the demonstration of gestalt theory, one solution is always traded for another in order to perceive a singular, coherent image at any one time. In other cases, the potential value or meaning associated with information or events may be rejected by the experiencing subject on grounds other than their ability to ascertain collective or sequential logic in a given context. The subject may attempt to assess the information as objective or subjective, that is, whether it can be proven by fact or if it is the product of opinion alone. This assessment can be considered particularly relevant in the

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[184] *Gestalt Theory of Visual Perception,* viewed 22 March 2013,
<www.users.totalise.co.uk/~kbroom/Lectures/gestalt.htm>.
[185] Both images are unnamed in V. Bruce, P. R. Green & M. A. Georgeson 1996, 'Chapter 6: Perceptual Organisation', *Visual Perception,* Psychology Press, UK, viewed 20 November 2013,
<http://www.cns.nyu.edu/~vessel/courses/NeuralAesthetics/Readings/06_Mar_1/bruce_ch6_sm.pdf>.
[186] A. Briggle 2013, 'Duck, Rabbit, Gas Well: A Gestalt Theory of the Fracking Debate', *Science Progress,* viewed 22 March 2013, <scienceprogress.org/2013/01/duck-rabbit-gas-well/>.
[187] Briggle.

case that the information threatens to alter an individual's established world or moral view. Subjective information may lack credibility, especially when it threatens to alter an individual's established position on a given topic. In such instances, individual subjects or groups construct their own meaningful identities based on the narrative coherence, which also necessarily involves the rejection of aspects that are disruptive to that narrative.

In this narrative, there must be some process or set of common tendencies that the sequence adheres to so that a kind of logic is formed. Such a process may be likened to the structure of a language, as it acts to facilitate communication and meaning. Roland Barthes states that the 'language of narrative [...] recognises an articulation and an integration, a form and a meaning'.[188] He suggests that 'form in narrative is marked essentially by two governing forces: the dispersion of signs throughout the story and the insertion of unpredictable expansions among them'.[189] While these expansions may appear to create paths for divergence, it is a function of narrative or the act of narrative reading to attempt to absorb these areas as part of a coherent whole.

4.7 Myth and narrative

In *Mythologies,* 1957 Roland Barthes explores many different aspects of everyday life, as well as literature and art, in terms of their potential meaning or signification. Here, the narratives Barthes draws on are attached to the myth of the objects or events he discusses. He states that 'myth is a system of communication, (...) it is a message' and in addition to this, 'it is a mode of signification, a form'.[190] Barthes also uses the term 'speech' in relation to the concept of myth, however, he clarifies this point by suggesting that this does not necessarily refer to the spoken word, but may also be written or represented by visual means. Barthes refers to the term 'myth' in relation to its connections with communication and narrative. He states that

> 'mythical speech is made up of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance'.[191]

The myth is the revision or reworking of existing content. Barthes explains that the system of myth 'is constructed from a semiologial chain which existed before it: it *is a second-order semiological system*'.[192] The 'sign' in the first system, or the totality of the concept and its related image, assumes the role of signifier, or concept alone, in the second system. In this way, the myth 'distorts' the original content, but it does not hide anything. 'Myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion'.[193] It commands the consideration of information at hand, apart from any implications put forward by memory, context, or anything else that is external to the immediate situation. Barthes argues that myth

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[188] R. Barthes & L. Duisit 1975, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', *New Literary History,* vol. 6, no. 2, pg. 266.
[189] Barthes & Duisit, pg. 266.
[190] R. Barthes trans. A. Lavers 1993, *Mythologies,* Vintage, London, pg. 109.
[191] Barthes trans. Lavers, pg. 110.
[192] Barthes trans. Lavers, pg. 114.
[193] Barthes trans. Lavers, pg. 129.

'abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves'.[194]

In this theory, the formation of an additional system or narrative is not considered disruptive, as each is to be understood in isolation. As such, isolated information can be discussed in terms of the clarification of an event or its narration, everything presented can be viewed as it appears.

4.8 Different uses of the term 'narrative'

Although narrative discourse is prevalent within any human society, through myths and other everyday stories, its characteristics and constraints can be considered malleable. The term 'narrative' is subject to revision and adaptation according to the given context. Reflecting the constant changing of human society, the acceptance of a particular narrative may not be sustained indefinitely. In order to demonstrate this potential instability, we may refer to the ability of scientific discovery to undermine aspects of religious faith, or even of scientific discovery to undermine previously accepted and potentially outdated scientific 'fact'. How one may identify, construct or read a narrative is similarly revisable. While many different narrative theories and models have been developed, they are subject to reinterpretation according to the context and form of the narrative presented, and also to the specific society and the stage in history at which they occur. For example, while some communicative characteristics or functions may remain constant, the particulars of spoken, written or visual structures differ.

The following discussion will give a brief account of two methods by which a reader or viewer may identify and engage with a narrative sequence or object. The first presents a more structured and rigid approach, best suited to the analysis of sequences relating to forms of language, such as spoken and written word. This account can be considered more traditional, adhering to a defined system like linguistics. The second example can be regarded as more ambiguous; it readily invites the inclusion of objects or images that are not commonly understood as texts. As such, the second approach may be understood as malleable, as it encourages the practice of 'reading' things other than written texts.

The first theory to be discussed is outlined by Rick Altman, who creates a general theory of narrative structure that he divides into three components: material, activity and drive.[195] 'Narrative material' designates what is present that produces the narrative, 'narrational activity' describes the instance whereby the material is presented and organised and 'narrative drive' refers to an interpretative practice that reveals the material and activity.[196] This drive refers to a tendency to form logical readings that may be based on sources such as 'personal interests, professional mandates, or social expectations'.[197]

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[194] Barthes trans. Lavers, pg. 143.
[195] R. Altman 2008, *A Theory of Narrative,* Columbia University Press, New York.
[196] Altman
[197] Altman

Altman's definition implies that a narrative is never fully contained within a text, but also relies on the reader's willingness to perceive narratives, so that it can be viewed as a logical sequence. Further than this, Altman distinguishes between two uses for the term 'narrative'. One follows a more traditional notion of the term that designates a text with a beginning, middle and end; a narrative sequence in its entirety.[198] The other is a less common use, which refers to 'a type of material that is easily recognisable, even in small chunks'.[199] This can be seen as a relevant use for the term 'narrative' as the subject is able to identify potential sequences from limited cues.[200] These definitions can, however, be understood as conflicting with each other, as one requires an overall story while the other refers to an isolated moment. For this reason, Altman concludes that both uses for the term must be recognised, but occur separately. Either occurrence may correctly be termed narrative.

Altman's account of the varying potentialities of a narrative relates to overall difficulties in forming a conclusive model that is able to refer to any text or sensory information. Even considering the abovementioned specifications put forward by Altman, there can be no singular, correct model. Although Altman's central model requires that a narrative should involve material, activity and drive, thus providing basic constraints, he also suggests the inclusion of partial information. This indicates that the narrative relies on more than just its physical or audible form. The reader or experiencing subject also plays a key role in unifying the information present, which can occur in different ways depending on the interpretive approach taken. A narrative is not something that can simply be presented, it must also be received.

The variable process involved with forms of identifying and interpreting meaningful information becomes even more flexible when images undergo consideration. Mieke Bal is a cultural theorist who focuses primarily on methods of meaning-making, especially those brought about by the interpretation of signs or the study of semiotics. Like Altman, Bal also considers what constitutes a narrative structure or object through the development of an inclusive theoretical approach. She refers to a 'narrative system' where any number of 'narrative texts can be described using the finite number of concepts contained within (this) system'.[201] This approach relates to a systematic reading of narrative texts, and therefore, implies some defined framework. When questioning the 'corpus of narrative texts', Bal acknowledges that these texts are defined by a set of boundaries that are nonetheless flexible due to the individual or group who assigns them.[202]

For some, a 'narrative text' refers to a purely linguistic structure. However, if the term 'text' is more broadly interpreted as it is in Bal's system, a 'non-linguistic sign system', or 'visual image', can be employed.[203] For Bal, 'a text is a finite, structured whole composed of signs'; these signs 'can be linguistic units',

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[198] Altman

[199] Altman, pg. 17.

[200] Altman

[201] M. Bal 2009, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative,* 3rd edn, University of Toronto Press, Toronto/Buffalo/London, pg. 3.

[202] Bal, pg. 3.

[203] Bal, pg. 4.

but can also include signs 'such as cinematic shots and sequences, or painted dots, lines and blots'.[204] The finite nature of the text does not refer to its potential effects or meanings, but to its material confinements such as the canvas, the physical form of a sculpture or object, the duration of a film or the pages of a book. When analysing a narrative system, Bal refers to a theory based on three definitions: narrative text, story and fabula. Here, a 'narrative text' is one in which a subject conveys a story through a particular medium (whether it be linguistic or visual); the 'story' refers to the content of the work, to the way in which the fabula (the series of 'related events that are caused or experienced by actors') is depicted.[205] As long as the presence of these elements can somehow be located in a text, object or situation, it can be submitted to narrative analysis.

Altman and Bal provide just two examples of a commonly theorised practice. The brief accounts of these theories addressed in this dissertation are intended to provide an indication of the variability of narrative theory. Unlike Altman's narrative model, Bal's specifically includes images as potential sources of these ordered and meaningful structures. Altman, however, does draw attention to the narrative fragment, explaining that even a section of an overall structure can be considered narrative if it presents enough perceivable cues to the reader (or viewer). This is an occurrence that can be considered prevalent within the singular, still image. The term 'narrative' can be assigned to works that convey some kind of story, or present elements that are perceived as part of a coherent whole. The term can be more readily assigned to linguistic practices, including forms of written and spoken word.

Works of art that incorporate both image and text, or rely on images alone, are inherently more ambiguous than solely textual works because, despite variations involved with different languages and dialects, there are conventions that designate the correct use of written and spoken language. The key function of images however, is subject to context as the visual may be employed as a means of producing realistic representation, to convey emotion or to refer to a potentially complex or abstract idea. In any case, the range of visual techniques and mediums that may be employed is highly variable and does not conform to any strict rules or structure. Roland Barthes also suggests that both linguists and viewers in general may conceive 'of the image as an area of resistance to meaning'.[206] This is a notion that will be revisited in Chapters Four and Five. The following examples however, will critique such conceptions and discuss ways in which the image may undergo a logical, sequential reading. They will seek to demonstrate that when examining the history of visual arts practices, tendencies and similarities become increasingly apparent.

4.9 Ut pictura poesis

A key idea in relation to the historical comparison of art and literature, and therefore, the ability for images to act as narratives in the same or a similar way as words, is the Latin phrase 'ut pictura poesis' ('as is painting, so is poetry'),

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[204] Bal, pg. 5.

[205] Bal, pg. 5.

[206] R. Barthes trans. S. Heath 1977, *Image Music Text,* Hill and Wang, New York, pg. 32.

which was coined by Roman lyric poet Horace in his publication *Ars poetica*, c. 19 – 18 BC.[207] Horace was not the only historical figure to recognise or draw on potential parallels between painting and poetry, or more generally, visuals and words, but his particular doctrine set a central precedent for the ongoing criticism of these two modes of expression. Christopher Braider states that 'ut pictura poesis' is a 'tag (that) appears in virtually every treatise on art or poetry from the early Renaissance to the close of the Enlightenment'.[208] Horace's writings present the poet and artist with a similar capacity to express and stimulate the imagination. In relation to reception, he draws on the idea that poetry should be treated in a similar way to painting, 'which exhibits not merely a detailed style that requires close scrutiny, but also a broad, impressionistic style that will not please unless viewed from a distance'.[209] Horace implies that poetry should be approached as painting is. In this case, the necessity of considering individual elements as well as a broader conceptual or visual element is important when making a judgement.

4.10 Purity and medium-specificity

'Ut pictura poesis' draws on proposed similarities and common functions of painting and poetry, their capability to provide a multifaceted experience, harness imagination and stimulate the visualisation of an event or series of events. A notably critical view of such comparisons was presented in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laokoon*, 1766. While previous critics may have entered into debates about the superiority of one form of representation over the other, Lessing critiques the theory behind each medium as a suitable basis for comparison. In *Laokoon*, poetry is regarded as indicative of time, while painting is related to space; 'poetry addresses the ear and is played out successively in time while painting speaks to the eye and everything is laid out in one space'.[210] Lessing indicates that a border exists between time and space, and although minor transgressions can be considered inevitable, active efforts should be made to reinforce the separate nature of these spheres in order to avoid confusion between media.[211]

This issue was also a key focus for Clement Greenberg in his 1940 essay *Towards a Newer Laocoon.* The concept of purity in relation to the individual arts surfaces throughout Greenberg's theoretical work. In the abovementioned essay, he states that 'purity in art consists in the acceptance, willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art'.[212] These should not be denied, nor should any attempts be made to avoid or overcome them. For Greenberg, there can be such thing as a dominant form of art that can bring about a kind of confusion, as 'the subservient ones are perverted and distorted; they are forced to deny their own nature in an effort to attain the effects of the

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[207] C. Braider ed. G.P. Norton 1999, 'The paradoxical sisterhood: 'ut pictura poesis'.', *Cambridge Histories Online: The Renaissance,* <http://histories.cambridge.org/extract?id=chol9780521300087 _CHOL9780521300087A018>.

[208] C. Braider.

[209] R. W. Lee, 'Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting', *Art Bulletin,* Vol. 22, No. 4, pg. 199.

[210] J. Harvey, 2002, *ut pictura poesis,* The University of Chicago, <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mitchell/glossary2004/utpicturapoesis.htm>.

[211] J. Harvey.

[212] C. Greenberg ed. J. O'Brian 1986, *Clement Greenberg The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume I Perceptions and Judgments 1939 – 1944,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, pg. 32.

dominant art'.[213]   Although he acknowledges Lessing's earlier contributions to this study where he 'recognized the presence of a practical as well as a theoretical confusion with the arts', Greenberg states that Lessing 'saw its ill effects exclusively in terms of literature'.[214]   Greenberg seeks to redirect this focus, in order to reveal painting's submission to traits of literature. In order to do this, he refers to Romanticism in particular. He describes the intentions of this movement in terms of the presentation of feeling; 'to preserve the immediacy of the feeling it was even more necessary than before, when art was imitation rather than communication, to suppress the role of the medium'.[215] The medium was viewed as a distraction from the intentions of the work, albeit an unavoidable one.

When complications with the medium occur, Greenberg suggests that one form of art may seek to take refuge in the effects of a different form. With this in mind, he states that 'painting is the most susceptible to evasions of this sort, and painting suffered the most at the hands of the Romantics'.[216]   Following this, Greenberg saw works of the avant-garde as seeking to abandon the ideological focus of art, and to depart from the dominant influence of literature. This was carried out by an increased 'emphasis on form, and it also involved the assertion of the arts as independent vocations, disciplines and crafts, absolutely autonomous, and entitled to respect for their own sakes, and not merely as vessels of communication'.[217]   For Greenberg, 'it is by virtue of its medium that each art is unique and strictly itself'.[218]   It is this purity that is approached by avant-garde practices such as those of Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism.[219]   The medium itself is not ignored or contested, but becomes the focus and intention of the work.
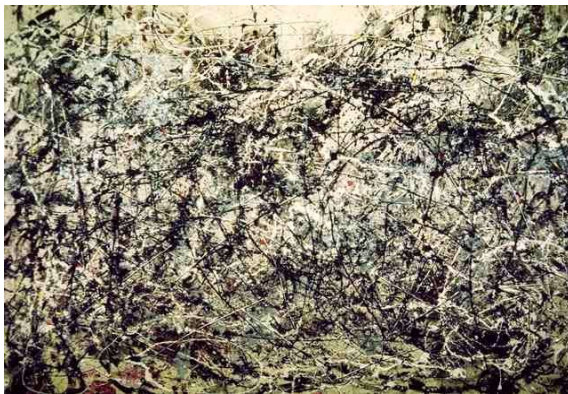
Fig. 28   Fig. 29

[213] Greenberg, pg. 24.
[214] Greenberg, pg. 25.
[215] Greenberg, pg. 26.
[216] Greenberg, pg. 26.
[217] Greenberg, pg. 28.
[218] Greenberg, pg. 32.
[219] Greenberg's essay *'American-Type' Painting* (1955) discussed the development of Abstract Expressionism. While he suggests the inaccuracy of the term 'Abstract Expressionism', we, like Greenberg generally, refer to the accepted term.
Art Critics Comparison: Clement Greenberg vs. Harold Rosenberg, viewed 7 September 2013, <http://www.theartstory.org/print_wide.html?file=http://www.theartstory.org/critics-greenberg-rosenberg.htm>.

Greenberg discussed works such as those of American artist Jackson Pollock and Dutch-American artist Willem de Kooning which refer not to things external to the work, but to painting itself. Examples of this include Pollock's *Number One,* 1948 (fig. 28) and de Kooning's *Composition,* 1955 (fig. 29). *Number One* is an example of one of Pollock's drip paintings, where the paint was literally dripped and poured over the surface of the canvas. The paint maintains the qualities of its application; it does not appear constrained by a rigidly guided hand or applied by means of the brush or other devices. *Composition,* on the other hand, retains the texture ascribed to the paint through a brushwork application. Both works, for Greenberg, refer to the medium itself through reinforcing the painterly qualities of the paint and the flatness of the canvas.

4.11 Hybridity in the arts

More recently, in his text *Iconology*, 1987 W. J. T. Mitchell sets out to argue that the dichotomy that exists between image and text, or medium of the work, in regards to the representation of space and time respectively is an artificial one.[220] Mitchell indicates that the differences between these modes of production are, for the most part, superficial, and at the core of both image and text 'points of contact or transference' can be observed.[221] He sets out to consider words and images as different and separate forms, but outlines their ability 'to intermingle and mutually transgress each other's territory', thus forming hybrid mediums.[222] For Mitchell, the preservation of each medium as a separate sphere is futile. The interaction of words and images is not only inevitable, but each has the capacity to reinforce the other, and as such, these occurrences need not necessarily be avoided. Mitchell recognises 'that meaning is not specific to the medium', and therefore, it is unnecessary to attempt to sustain an ultimately unattainable pure medium.[223]

With the passing of Greenberg's influence, the focus shifted from purity to what English-American art theorist Dick Higgins referred to as 'intermedia'. This is a term that can be used to describe artistic practices and works produced that occur *between* clearly defined media. Higgins suggested that this form of practice occurs in opposition to Renaissance social thought, which was mirrored in 'the concept of the separation between media' and social classes alike.[224] In 1965, he stated that 'the social problems that characterize our time (…) no longer allow a compartmentalized approach', and that we are headed towards 'a classless society, (in) which separation into rigid categories is absolutely irrelevant'.[225] Higgins locates the potential for dialogue in works in those that do not occur under a medium that can be classified readily. He identifies intermedia practices in works such as those that utilise ready-made objects and collage, where artists 'began to include increasingly incongruous objects in their work'.[226] In addition to this, events such as 'happenings' can be

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[220] R. Blocksome, *Ut Pictura Poesis: Word and Image in Early Modernism*, viewed 30 April 2012, <www.koed.hu/vocation/rebecca.pdf>.
[221] R. Blocksome, pg. 159.
[222] R. Blocksome, pg. 161.
[223] R. Blocksome, pg. 161.
[224] D. Higgins & H. Higgins 2001, 'Intermedia', *Leonardo,* Vol. 34, No. 1, pg. 49.
[225] Higgins & Higgins, pg. 49.
[226] Higgins & Higgins, pg. 49.

discussed in relation to the idea of intermedia practice. Higgins refers particularly to American artist Allan Kaprow, who sought to involve the spectator in his works and in '1958, he began to include live people as part of the collage', a practice that became prevalent with happenings and later participatory art.[227]

Fig. 30

Kaprow's first happening was titled *18 Happenings in 6 Parts,* 1959 (fig. 30) and was presented at the Reuben Gallery in New York. This work was scripted, and required participants to become part of the work in order to be carried out. Apart from the specific instructions provided to each participant, Kaprow also gave the following general description and instruction:

> 'The performance is divided into six parts... Each part contains three happenings which occur at once. The beginning and end of each will be signaled by a bell. At the end of the performance two strokes of the bell will be heard... There will be no applause after each set, but you may applaud after the sixth set if you wish'.[228]

18 Happenings in 6 Parts does not refer to a specific medium but lies somewhere between, and refers to both, art and performance. It critiques the notion of the division between artwork and viewers whereby the viewer becomes a participant in the work rather than remain independent. Here, a link between environment and participant is established as both contribute to the formation of the work.

Higgins himself engaged with hybrid practices, where the 'performance-audience separation' was removed and the 'structural elements' of 'time and sequence' were systematically replaced with change.[229] The lack of a confined medium brought about a new sense of dialogue in art practice. 'The use of intermedia (can be viewed as) more or less universal throughout the fine arts, since continuity rather than categorization is the hallmark of our new

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[227] Higgins & Higgins, pg. 50.
[228] A. Kaprow in P. Schimmel 1998, 'Leap into the Void: Performance and the Object', *Out of Actions: between performance and the object, 1949 – 1979,* The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, New York/London, pg. 61, viewed 8 September 2013, <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/18-happenings-in-6-parts/>.
[229] Higgins & Higgins, pg. 50.

mentality'.[230]   While such works cannot be so clearly categorised as those belonging to pure mediums, they provide a new possibility for interaction, communication and flexible practice. This hybrid approach to facilitating communication and constructing meaning can be commonly located in contemporary art practice, including the production of artists' books.   The following discussion will identify key historical examples of visual narratives, which will be regarded in terms of forming a basis for an account of contemporary approaches to narrative art in general.

4.12 The image as a secondary narrative

As discussed above, the act of storytelling can be facilitated through the presentation of images, text or a hybrid approach. Historically, a key way in which a visual work can be considered a narrative is when it presents a secondary depiction of existing literature; of a story that is already known and is simply being retold visually. With the development of such styles as Genre Painting and Realism, visual works began to refer not to works of literature, but to everyday experiences and common social and cultural experiences. Both of these approaches involve the visual image functioning as a representation of an existing or accepted story or condition, where sequences or timed experiences are compressed into a single frame or representation.

Art produced between the late Roman era and the early fifteenth century can be generally regarded as occurring during the Middle Ages.[231] This covers a span of roughly 1,000 years. Michael Norris indicates that the reign of Roman emperor Constantine I (the Great), from 312 – 37, can be considered a valid starting point for the transition between classical and medieval societies in Europe.[232] Medieval art focused on new technical standards, often manifested in figurative and decorative imagery, primarily conveyed by means of painting, sculpture, mosaic, stained glass and tapestry. Much of the work produced during this period was both highly decorative and narrative-based, as they often referred to existing manuscripts such as biblical stories or royal chronicles. Other common subjects of medieval art include accepted or preferred activities within society, such as the act of pilgrimage, creating music, hunting or feasting. These acitivities may also be considered forms of narratives in that they refer to logical, sequential activities that are carried out in everyday life.

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[230] Higgins & Higgins, pg. 50.
[231] M. Norris 2005, *Medieval Art: A Resource for Educators,* The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
[232] M. Norris, pg. 11.

Fig. 31

An example of narrative medieval art that is not centered on everyday life, but reveals more religious modes of storytelling is *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1507 (fig. 31) by the Circle of the Strassburger Werkstattgemeinschaft. This circle referred to an association of German glass painters who produced stylistic representations of existing literature, primarily produced during the fifteenth century.[233] *The Adoration of the Magi* is a slightly later example that demonstrates the use of stained glass to incorporate illustrated stories into functional spaces such as windows, which was a common practice throughout medieval art. The depicted story in this work takes place in the biblical account of the events following the birth of Jesus. Here, the Virgin Mary holds the baby Jesus on her lap as he is presented with gifts by the three wisemen. The work disregards realistic representation in favour of a highly decorative approach. The background has little depth, the colours are rich and vibrant; each face is individualised but not particularly expressive. The patterns on the garments are intricate and the figures are elongated to reflect the shape of the overall window. Such elements fulfill decorative intentions; yet despite their distance from reality, do not act to hinder the work's storytelling potential.

In becoming more expressive and vibrant than reality, and exaggerating selected elements over others, *The Adoration of the Magi* is able to draw emotive responses and place emphasis on key components of the narrative at hand. The work also implies a sense of divine representation through that which is humanly impossible; the newly born child sits up and interacts with his adorers, and both Jesus and Mary are decorated with halos. This work depicts the dual function of adornment and storytelling that was prominent in many works of medieval art. These aspects are further implied by the work's decorative yet

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[233] *Circle of the Strassburger Werkstattgemeinschaft: The Adoration of the Magi,* 1996, in Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, viewed 27 April 2012, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1996.262>.

practical function as a window. Many artworks from this time were integrated into forms of architecture, commonly embedded in churches, as windows, tapestries, wall paintings or carved into the structures themselves. Scenes like *The Adoration of the Magi* can be regarded as moments in an overall story. This is because they illustrate individual events in other existing pieces of literature. Viewers could walk around the building and see separate scenes from a known story illustrated as part of the architecture, slowly gaining more of the story as they proceed around the building.

Fig. 32

This form of tradition has been carried through to many contemporary church institutions, although by smaller and less decorative means. An example of this shown in the Catholic faith is the depiction of the Stations of the Cross. An example of this is the *Stations of the Cross*, 2004 (fig. 32) by Spanish artist Veronica de Nogales Leprevost and Canadian artist Edwin Timothy Dam, which are displayed at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Austin, Texas. Sometimes occurring as part of the architecture itself, but often as small paintings, carvings or prints that are hung on the wall, these stations depict fourteen moments between the condemnation of Jesus to the point he was laid in his tomb. Some representations include an additional station illustrating the resurrection of Jesus. In either case, the use of a site of architecture as a container for progressive narratives is carried forward from such traditions as those discussed above.

Architectural and decorative storytelling is not the only important method by which the historical presentation of narrative was carried out, nor the only method that should be mentioned in the formation of a basis for the consideration of contemporary visual stories. Another example was History Painting, which as a whole was primarily narrative based. The subjects of these works range from ancient historical events to classic myths, illustrated

literature and religious stories.[234]   One method of depicting visual stories observed particularly during the Renaissance is brought about by the practice of depicting continuous narratives, or works that show more than one event from an overall narrative in a single visual space.[235]   Works that approach storytelling in this way show 'a number of actions occurring at different moments but involving the same characters […] presented together in a single unified space'.[236]
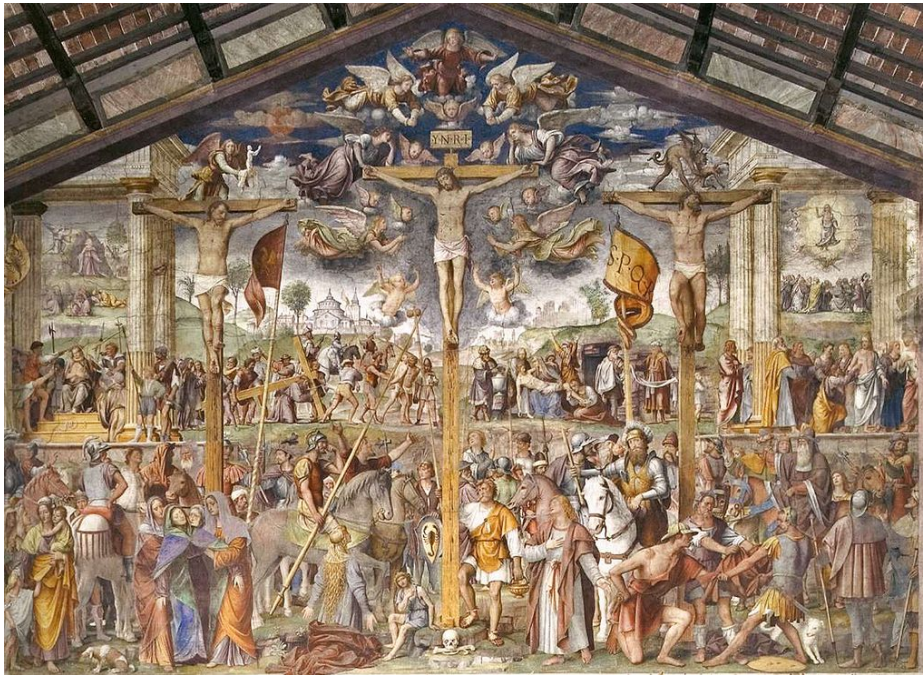
Fig. 33

This is demonstrated throughout Italian artist Bernardino Luini's fresco *Crucifixion,* c. 1530 (fig. 33) in the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, Lugano, Switzerland.[237]   Initially, and if considered apart from the literature it depicts, the work appears to represent a chaotic but singular battle scene where many different characters interact. Their interactions are staged around scenes of violence, death, prayer, journey and resurrection. This image, however, does not create a new story, it illustrates religious stories that were already well established in literature and society.

Crucifixion does not just depict one suspended moment within the original text; instead it maps a series of events occurring over a length of time. This becomes evident as, on closer inspection, the same characters can be identified at several points throughout the image as the events progress. As this is a visual depiction of a story that is told traditionally by linguistic means, the viewer must then tell the story by reading the image. This process can be carried out by the linking of individual visual components or signifiers in an order that is consistent with the

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[234] 'History Painting' 2011, *Tate Online: Glossary*, viewed 26 July 2011,
<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=134>
[235] L. Andrews 1995, *Story and Space in Renaissance Art: The Rebirth of Continuous Narrative,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/New York.
[236] Andrews, pg. 3.
[237] Andrews, pg. 71.

original text. Moreover, the image should act as a sufficient source of storytelling for those who are unable to interpret the written source. In many cases, religious paintings and objects of pre-modern art were used to communicate stories and morals to an uneducated or foreign public, especially those who cannot read or those who speak a different language to that presented in the original text.

In the center of the image, Christ appears nailed to a crucifix in between two thieves who hang either side of him. At the foot of the cross a scene of commotion arises, reflecting a division between support and sorrow surrounding the events of the crucifixion. On the next level of the work, the figures appear smaller and further removed from the central scene. Here the viewer can recognise some of the same characters in different situations, the most recognisable being Christ himself. Events leading up to the crucifixion are depicted to the left of the central image; Christ is shown wearing a crown of thorns and then struggling to carry his own cross to the scene of his death. The right side of the image shows events occurring after the crucifixion; Christ's empty tomb is discovered. These images focus on his resurrection and ascension into heaven. In this example, the viewer witnesses a story played out over several days and centered around one character through a series of events compressed into a single space. On one hand, this work shows an faithful representation of the literature, the characters and events are shown without contradiction to the literary source of the narrative. On the other hand, the image presents an impossible scene that privileges methods of storytelling over realistic depiction.

Fig. 34

Another common example of visual narration is found in the form of the triptych, which has often been related, though not confined to, History Painting. The triptych refers to a work made up of three parts, both materially and conceptually. *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, c. 1504 (fig. 34) by Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch presents a larger narrative divided between three individual panels that join together to form a story. As a whole, the symbolic work 'depicts the history of the world and the progression of sin' through figures, creatures

and environments that are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar.[238] The left panel depicts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, with reference to the original sin.[239]

The central panel presents the resultant progression to a scene of fantasy and desire that appears enticing, yet potentially dangerous in its absurdity. This reflects the deceptive pleasure involved in sinful acts. Initially the images appear bright, colourful and attractive, but on closer inspection they appear unnatural and even threatening. The central panel contains images with inconsistent scale or manipulated reality; birds are larger than humans, creatures with multiple limbs, unnatural environments emerge, hybrid creatures, sea creatures on the land or in the sky and trees suspended in the air are shown. The right panel shows consequence through a sinister, hellish landscape that becomes increasingly removed from a recognisable environment. In this panel, the scale of the figures and limbs becomes even more inconsistent, figures emerge from large, severed body parts, creatures are feeding off one another and the overall scene depicts violence, death and turmoil. Once again, this is a work based on biblical subject matter with recognisable characters (Adam and Eve), but is further removed from realistic representation by telling an expressive and fantastical story for the purpose of an emotional and moral response.

So far, the examples discussed in this chapter reject forms of realistic representation in favour of emotive storytelling, but it should be recognised that realism in art also employs aspects of narrative. The objectives of realism can be seen through many periods and styles of art, but was a particular focus during the mid to late 19th century as demonstrated in French artist Alphonse Legros' *Le Repas des Pauvres,* 1877 (fig. 35).[240] The realist *intends* to objectively represent elements of their social and everyday world through artistic means.[241] Despite such works of art being merely a depiction of the subject represented, viewers are able to gain information about how this subject may act or appear in their station of life or class. This may include information about colour, scale, composition, implied movement and any other aspect that can be confined to a visual field. Such processes of representation can be regarded as inherently narrative driven as they rely on the presentation of singular signifying units that form a coded message. This can be understood as a linear progression from reality to realistic representation, where social reality is apparently seamlessly joined to represented reality.

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[238] *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, viewed 7 February 2012,
<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/bosch/delight/>.
[239] *The Garden of Earthly Delights*
[240] J. H. Rubin 2011, 'Realism', *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online*, viewed 26 July 2011
<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T070996>.
[241] Rubin

Fig. 35

Le Repas des Pauvres reflects the artistic concerns of 19th century Realism. The title of the work can be translated as 'the meal of the poor'.[242] The image reflects a kind of quaint and sombre gathering, consistent with the everyday life of the 'lower class' or under-privileged. Three figures are seated at a table in a dark room; the scene is presented as absent of decoration or festivity. In addition to the background, the spacing between figures and their seemingly sombre and focused activity implies that this meal is out of necessity, not merely an occasion for socialisation or any other form of enjoyment for its own sake. This is a feeling that is reinforced by the waiter's worn clothes and the minimal amount of food on the table. The work serves as a reflection of everyday life, apparently represented as they were perceived, absent of glorification, moral or subjective depiction. The realist seeks to portray a subject that is close to life, both in appearance and overall mood. In this work, the mood is conveyed largely through atmospheric means; muted tones, reduced light and lack of embellishment. The overall depiction, the act of having a meal, is a situation that is easily recognisable to a general audience who may recall their own similar experiences. This is essentially a narrative recollection as it calls for little resistance to understanding.

It should be noted, however, that although this image reflects the everyday life of some, it may be viewed as somewhat inconceivable or foreign to others such as those belonging to a different class. As such, the perception of a logical narrative cannot be regarded as universal. The freedom involved with the reading of a narrative is limited by the constraints of individual experience and cultural background, as well as varying abilities of language and comprehension. These constraints can paradoxically act as the framework that allows the narrative to form. For example, if there was no indication of time or spoken, written or visual language, it would be difficult to perceive any kind of story or

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[242] 'Realism' 2011, *Tate Online: Glossary*, viewed 2 August 2011,
<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=240>

logic, both as a fragment or in its entirety. Narrative reading requires some degree of process and ordering. Furthermore, the interpretations of the viewer do not necessarily reflect the intentions of the author. This relates to the different abovementioned abilities and methods of comprehension. Although terms and objects may share common meanings and physical manifestations, their significance and other potentialities are variable based on the viewer's prior knowledge.

4.13 Reception theory

The role of the viewer, or reader, can be regarded as a key component of the formation of narratives, and can be discussed in terms of reception theory. This theory addresses a field of literary criticism, and was primarily developed during the late 1960s and early 1970s at the University of Constance in Germany, with key contributions by theorists Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser.[243] This approach shifts the focus from that of traditional modes of literary criticism, which turn their attention to 'the production of texts or a close examination of texts themselves', to the analysis of 'the reading and reception of literary texts'.[244] As such, this form of criticism incorporates a key role for the reader, which can, in turn, be applied to similar activities carried out by the viewer in the case of visual stories.

Iser's practice within the field of reception theory is based on the critique of two key notions, 'that literature mirrors an external reality or that it forms another reality'.[245] For Iser, however, the reality of the text does *not* consist of a reaction to the outside world, but to an entirely created world within the text that may, to some degree, refer to an external reality. He further implies that the reader's response differs between the outside world and the one that can be established by text. The former can be considered 'real', or 'anchored in reality', while the latter is seen as 'fictional' and occurring 'in the reading process'.[246] In light of this distinction, Iser constructs a key concern: 'the internal structure of literary works'.[247] He refers to the notion of 'schematised views or aspects', which 'gradually constitute the object, simultaneously supplying the reader with a concrete form to contemplate'.[248] The presence of such aspects provides a degree of both determinacy and indeterminacy, as they provide an object with definitive particulars, but can never wholly define the object. Iser draws attention to a gap that can be brought about by the dual nature of these aspects. This can be referred to as 'indeterminacy', which causes the reader to try 'to connect or bridge the schematised aspects'.[249] Texts can therefore be viewed as encouraging forms of interaction with the reader. The first is the creation of a prescribed direction for reading, where the text presents enough schematised material to direct the reader's attention to a general or quite specific idea or

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[243] R. Holub ed. R. Selden 1995, 'Reception Theory: School of Constance', *From Formalism to Poststructuralism,* Cambridge University Press, viewed 21 July 2012 <http://histories.cambridge.org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/uid=11788/pdf_handler?search_scope=global&id=chol978052130031_CHOL9780521300131A013&advanced=0>.
[244] Holub, pg. 319.
[245] Holub, pg. 328.
[246] Holub, pg. 328.
[247] Holub, pg. 329.
[248] Holub, pg. 329.
[249] Holub, pg. 329.

sequence. The second form of interaction requires the viewer to assume more than an observational role. In this instance, they must actively participate in the elimination or filling in of any gaps that may occur.

For Iser, phenomenological theory also assumes a key role in the process of reading, and in the context of this dissertation, can similarly be related to viewing practices. In order to describe the reader's interaction with a text, Iser constructs the concept of the 'wandering viewpoint'.[250] This term denotes 'the presence of the reader in the text, and it enables him to grasp the text from the 'inside', rather than externally'.[251] The concept of the wandering viewpoint is involved in processes that are necessary to comprehend the work of art, or, the area in between that which is given by the author and that which is produced by the reader.[252] The wandering viewpoint involves processes of 'protention' and 'retention' which arise upon the act of reading successive sentences; 'the reader continuously project(s) expectations which may be fulfilled or disappointed (and) at the same time, (their) reading is conditioned by foregoing sentences and concretisations'.[253] The dialectic that exists between protention and retention determines the subject's reading and as such, 'it acquires the status of an event and can give us the impression of a real occurrence'.[254] In this instance, the reading process assimilates general experience. Iser further implies that 'ultimately the reading process involves a dialectical process of self-realisation and change: by filling in the gaps in the text, we simultaneously reconstruct ourselves'.[255] In order to carry out the reading process, the subject must assume the role of interpreter towards the information present, and author, in carrying out the function of bridging any gaps that become apparent. If we relate this to the process of viewing an image, the observer may seek logical ways of unifying individual visual signifiers.

Another key aspect of Iser's work is his account of communication theory in which the concept of the blank once again plays a central role. The blank for Iser is a similar idea to the nonsense space within an otherwise narrative work referred to in this dissertation. While the nonsense space is disruptive, Iser narrativises the blank thus assigning it a different role. Simply, the blank 'connects various segments in a text'.[256] However, Iser also assigns a more complex role to the blank. He theorises that the connection of segments through the blank creates 'a field of vision for the reader' where 'one segment must become dominant, while the others recede temporarily in importance'.[257] This function can be viewed as bringing about the resolution or elimination of a blank. The blank therefore 'relates (...) suspended connectability' and contributes to the 'course of interaction by organising the reader's participation in meaning production'.[258] The nonsense space or disrupted logic of artists' books discussed in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*

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[250] Holub, pg. 332.
[251] Holub, pg. 332.
[252] Holub, pg. 332.
[253] Holub, pg. 332.
[254] Holub, pg. 332.
[255] Holub, pg. 332.
[256] Holub, pg. 333.
[257] Holub, pg. 333.
[258] Holub, pg. 333.

will contest this understanding of the blank, or the practice of hastily assigning meaning to all aspects of a text or work.

Iser also refers to the paradigmatic way in which readers relate to the text. He implies that 'through filling in blanks on the syntagmatic level the reader acquires a perspective from which previously held opinions are rendered obsolete or invalid' and this brings about 'negation', or, 'a dynamic blank on the paradigmatic axis in the reading process'.[259] Texts should therefore seek to reveal the negation of certain elements, and as a result, instigate a search for meaning that is not wholly apparent, but is implied. A structure of blanks and negations can be located in the 'absence between the words or below the surface' and can be regarded as 'an unformulated subtext'.[260] Through three central components, negativity acts as the key aspect involved in the communication of texts. These components are form, content and perspective. In regards to form, negativity acts to organise 'the blanks and negations perceived by the reader'.[261] Related to content, it 'acts as a mediator between representation and reception, initiating the formulation of the unformulated'.[262] On the level of perspective, negativity 'assists us in disengaging ourselves temporarily from the daily lives we live so that we might assimilate the views of others to our own'.[263] Through each aspect of his theory, Iser draws critical focus away from rigid textual structure and seeks to analyse the object in terms of the reader's response to and interaction with it.

It should be restated that although the discussion of reception theory carried out in this chapter relates directly to the field of linguistics, viewer response can also be considered when referring to the reading or analysis of visual works. While this function may be present in the more traditional models of visual narratives previously discussed, it becomes increasingly adaptable to works that show unconventional modes of communication and especially works that encourage both a conceptual and physical engagement with the viewer. A shift begins to occur, particularly in Modernism, from realistic representation to modes of non-representation. When this occurs, the viewer is required to carry out a greater interpretive role in order to assign relevance to potentially ambiguous pictorial elements. A reliance on the active response of the viewer then becomes increasingly evident through Postmodern and contemporary practices that may be more open-ended or require heightened interpretation.

4.14 Narratives in art in the 20th and 21st centuries

Cubism is one movement that can be referred to under the general term of 'Modernism'. Movements contained under this term often focused on the self-reflective development of visual techniques and culture. These were generally based on some form of rejection of representational art. Here, the necessity for realistic imagery negated various factors such as emotional responses, movement and alternate viewpoints or compositions. In many cases, the production of representational art could not allow the artist to produce the

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[259] Holub, pg. 333.
[260] Holub, pg. 334.
[261] Holub, pg. 334.
[262] Holub, pg. 334.
[263] Holub, pg. 334.

depth of expression or emotional response that they may have intended. Modernism was not identified by a single method or intention, but can be viewed as encompassing a 'wide-ranging complex of ideas and modes of representation ranging from over-arching beliefs in progress to theories of the rise of abstract painting'.[264] Even so, Modernism contained a number of distinct art movements, each claiming a different method of visual communication, often brought about by means of non-representational imagery.

As forms of reception theory imply, narratives do not always rely on methods of realism, in the sense that they may not necessarily represent events or situations in the way that they occur in the world. Some narratives that are initiated by visual works may require a expanded interpretive role from the viewer. This can be seen in works associated with modernist abstraction, including 'the highly abstracted forms of representational art seen in Cubism, Orphism, Futurism and Expressionism'.[265] Abstraction can be viewed 'as a withdrawal from depiction', although this does not necessarily refer to the depiction of an object or figure in its visual entirety, but rather to the representation of how they would occur in nature.[266] Artists associated with Cubism displayed this rejection of 'the inherent concept that art should copy nature, or that they should adopt the traditional techniques of perspective, modeling and foreshortening'.[267]

Fig. 36

An example of this is *Artillery*, 1911 (fig. 36) by French artist Roger de La Fresnaye. Like many other works associated with Cubism, the majority of elements within this work remain vaguely discernible, although flattened to reinforce the two-dimensionality of the canvas and thereby reduced to basic

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[264] N. Mirzoeff 1998, 'What is Visual Culture?', in N. Mirzoeff (ed.) *The Visual Culture Reader,* Routledge, London, pg. 4.
[265] R. Baldwin 1999, *Abstraction as a Modern Language for Art Replacing History, Genre, Politics and Landscape,* viewed 10 April 2012, <www.socialhistoryofart.com/…>.
[266] G. Bell 2011, *Depiction and Painting: A Theory and History of Art,* viewed 10 April 2012, <http://www.depictionandpainting.net/PDFs/Ch%2011.pdf>, pg. 115.
[267] S. Rewald 2004, 'Cubism', *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History,* The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, viewed 10 April 2012, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cube/hd_cube.htm>.

configurations of lines, shapes and colours. Within this composition, a viewer can locate evidence of soldiers travelling on horses and in a carriage past a band playing instruments and flying the French flag. Although the figures have no distinct features or expressions and the overall form of individual elements could be viewed as partial and incomplete, the image still suggests movement and narrative. This is communicated by the interaction between and movement of the figures, such as the soldier to the left of the painting waving towards the band, the position and physical contact of the instruments to the band members and the suspended front leg of the white horse. The lines that represent the spokes of the carriage wheels are similarly manifested in what appears to be a kind of mapping of the soldiers' present and future positions, outlining a journey that is being undertaken. This painting carries out modes of storytelling by the visual means of presenting objects and figures in reduced and basic forms. The elements remain discernible, but do not clearly reflect their appearance in the world. Such works therefore require some degree of reliance on the viewer's interpretive role. In addition, the viewer must act to bridge the gap between known representation and a heavily stylised approach.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, is often referred to in terms of the rejection or inversion of Modernism. Under these changed intentions, there is no elite, self-conscious form of 'high art' that is distanced from types of 'mass culture'.[268] Postmodern art did not seek to present a kind of model of representation, however it did seek to include popular culture in the realm of art, therefore closing the gap between different forms of visual culture. Similar to nineteenth century Realism, Postmodern artworks form ties with everyday life, facilitating meaning or narrative readings through recognisable imagery.

Fig. 37

This approach can be seen in works such as *Retroactive 1*, 1964 (fig. 37) by American artist Robert Rauschenberg. This work combines different images

[268] J. Storey 2004, 'Postmodernism and Popular Culture', in S. Sim (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader,* Routledge, London, pg. 133.

that were prominent in media outlets such as newspapers and television broadcasts during the 1960s. The central image is of John F. Kennedy speaking at a news conference and a fragment of this central image is also repeated to the left, which may suggest a society saturated in such images at this stage in history. Other media fragments and blocks of colour, including the prominent image of an astronaut attached to a parachute, surround these aspects. Rauschenberg states that 'a picture is more like the real world when it's made out of the real world'.[269] He utilised imagery that was part of existing cultural narratives. Although the visuals within this work may appear to be from unrelated events, they make reference to a common culture and stage in history. In this instance, many viewers can refer to their own memories or to a documented collective history of media culture in order to recall key stories surrounding this decade, for example, the death of John F. Kennedy and the first time man walked on the moon. In this way, works such as *Retroactive 1* present a selection of cues from which the viewer can recall a historical narrative. Like the religious or mythological paintings of the Renaissance, however, these works produce secondary narratives. They reflect events that have occurred in the world, or stories that have already been told elsewhere collected within one field of viewing and experience.

Fig. 38

This kind of relation can also be realised through works that not only reflect societal conditions, but actively seek to critique them. This is shown through political or activist works, such as those by the feminist group Guerilla Girls. The group is made up of anonymous artists, activists, critics, performers and curators who originally formed in New York in 1985, but have since established chapters all over the world.[270] The group is focused on locating facts and statistics that reveal instances of race or gender-based discrimination within art institutions, productions and events. An example of this is *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?*, 1989 (fig. 38). This poster combines various elements that are identifiable to an everyday audience by means of text and photographic imagery. The text reads 'do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections

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[269] R. Rauschenberg in S. Hapgood 1994, *Neo-Dada Redefining Art 1958-62,* The American Federation of Arts & Universe Publishing, New York, pg. 18.

[270] C. Gerber, 'Guerilla Girls', *Oxford Art Online,* viewed 21 July 2012, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/subscriber/article/grove/art/T2021709>.

are women, but 85% of the nudes are female'. Here, the work directly and abruptly addresses the specific institution it intends to critique by presenting statistics related to the female's role as both artist and object in the late 20th Century.

The figure depicted in *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?* contains the head of a gorilla, which can be seen in many works by the group as it serves to conceal their individual identities. This image is then used to cover the face of a person whose body serves to represent an idealised female nude. This composition presents itself as unusual and humorous, which is a tactic commonly employed by the Guerilla Girls to draw attention to the politics of representation. The bright colours, bold text and billboard dimensions of the work assist this function. Once the viewers are engaged with the image, they are met with the content of the text. This addresses issues of gender politics in a Western society, and aims to increase the viewer's understanding of a social issue. In doing so, the collective, societal knowledge, or the viewer's own narrative of thought, is further developed. The value of this new information can, however, be contested due to the interests and concerns of each individual in that society. It can be recognised, that although the value of information can be contested, its logical progression and subsequent coherence remains constant. The information presented is seemingly valid, yet it encourages a further processing of thought in order to establish a logical context for what is presented.

Forms of Identity art, including those that address a collective identity such as gender, can further be considered as relevant to a discussion about the construction of visual narratives as these works reference the story, or some narrative account of, an individual's or group's life and culture. This form of practice can be located at several historical points, including but not limited to both works of modern and postmodern practices. Significant grounding for this form of practice can be located during the period following World War I and preceding World War II. In various locations during this period, individuals were readily persecuted or exiled on the grounds of their race, gender or beliefs associated with religion and politics. As such, the identities of individuals were molded, to varying degrees, by forceful societal influence.   Many artists practicing between the World Wars responded to this situation through addressing perceived inadequacies and injustices of their social conditions.
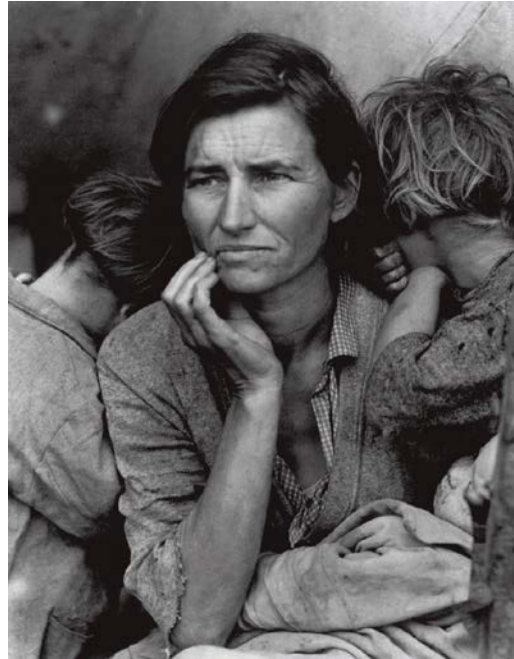
Fig. 39

An example of this is American photographer Dorothea Lange's photograph *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California*, 1936 (fig. 39). This work was created during the Great Depression (1929 – 39) in America. The subject depicted is a thirty-two year old Native American woman called Florence Owens Thompson, who was originally from Oklahoma.[271] She is presented as worn and ragged, of a low working class status and is enclosed by the two children huddled around her. This seemingly bleak image is further enforced by the title of the work. Like most migrant individuals at the time, it can be assumed that the subject has migrated out of necessity or will for survival, not for enjoyment or discovery. Moreover, her status as a mother suggests that she has assumed the role of provider, yet appears to be struggling to do so. This struggle becomes apparent through her expression of hopelessness and when considering that the children have their heads buried at her sides. Such factors that can be assumed from the visual content of the work and the title, and are supported in subsequent interviews with and statements from the artist. Lange confirms that the woman was a single mother to many children, and that she worked in an agricultural role.[272] The family had access to minimal sustenance, the current crop had frozen leaving no chance to obtain an income and the tires from the car has been sold for food, leaving no chance for relocation.[273] In this work, the story of an individual and her family is revealed, but it also accesses 'the larger community identity and its social concerns'.[274] It references a common shared condition, that of the struggling lower classes, through the depiction of a singular subject.

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[271] 'Exploring Contexts: Migrant Mother', *American Women: Prints and Photographs Division,* The Library of Congress, viewed 19 October 2012,
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhttml/awpnp6/migrant_mother.html>.
[272] 'Lesson One: Identity', *Oxford Art Online,* viewed 18 October 2012,
<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/public/page/lessons/mai_6_1>.
[273] 'Lesson One: Identity'.
[274] 'Lesson One: Identity'.

Kinds of personal narratives that nonetheless refer to collective conditions can also be located in contemporary practices. This can be seen in works such as those produced by African American artist Kara Walker. Walker constructs a range of different narratives within her works, generally referring to the central themes of power, race, desire and history. Walker states that most of her works 'have to do with exchanges of power (and) attempts to steal power away from others'.[275] Collectively, her practice refers to various situations in which individuals or groups may stage a struggle for power, whether it be 'physical, emotional, personal, racial, sexual (or) historical' power.[276] Each of these separate struggles may simultaneously refer to an individual as well as entire groups, cultures or societies that the individual may belong to. In regards to visual presentation, many of Walker's works are installation-based, and comprise the flat-black silhouettes of figures and environments. In these pieces, every character is black, so 'the racial status assigned to (them) is (only) visible through stereotype and caricature'.[277] Walker states that blackness is 'a very loaded subject, a very loaded thing to be – all about forbidden passions and desires, and all about a history that's still living, very present…' and although this subject is of personal interest to the artist, she makes it known that she's 'not really about blackness, per se, but about blackness and whiteness, and what they mean and how they interact with one another and what power is all about'.[278]

Fig. 40

A work that demonstrates this is *Slavery! Slavery! Presenting a GRAND and LIFELIKE Panoramic Journey into Picturesque Slavery or Life at 'Ol' Virginny's Hole' (Sketches from Plantation Life) See the Peculiar Institution as never before! All cut from black paper by the able hand of Kara Elizabeth Walker an*

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[275] K. Walker 2003, interview in *Art 21: Art in the 21st Century,* television series, PBS.

[276] 'Introduction to Themes', *The Art of Kara Walker,* Walker Art Center, viewed 18 October 2012, <http://learn.walkerart.org/karawalker/Main/IntroductionToThemes>.

[277] 'Representing Race', *The Art of Kara Walker,* Walker Art Center, viewed 18 October 2012, <http://learn.walkerart.org/karawalker/Main/RepresentingRace>.

[278] K. Walker 1999, 'Kara Walker', *Conversations with Contemporary Artists,* Museum of Modern Art, New York, viewed 18 October 2012, <http://www.moma.org/interactives/projects/1999/conversations/kw_f.html>.

Emancipated Negress and leader of her cause, 1997 (fig. 40). This work compiles numerous black silhouettes, composed in an 85 foot-long scene that is adhered to a circular exhibition space forming a panoramic installation. The scenes created depict those derived from the times and events surrounding the Civil War, focusing on those set in the Antebellum South. These refer to a period in history that 'is often considered the pinnacle of Southern aristocracy', even though the wealth obtained by the flourishing plantations can be viewed as largely brought about by the slaves who ran them.[279] In this work, the characters are arranged in ways that imply smaller narratives and movement; some characters face each other as if in conversation, others are reaching, peering, falling, travelling in vehicles or enacting other forms of activity that make them appear either passive, threatening or submissive. Walker states that she is 'interested in the continuity of conflict, the creation of racist narratives, or nationalist narratives, or whatever narratives people use to construct a group identity and to keep themselves whole'.[280] In this work, she approaches the identity of both a personal and collective history but, importantly, does so from the perspective of humor, exaggeration and the use of stereotypes entwined with cultural history. This alludes to the notion of manipulated historical records, as well as the flexibility of narratives based on the variety and position or perspective of their interpreters. This flexibility is further communicated through the construction of the work itself. It forms a circle, so there is no clearly defined beginning, middle and end, yet the presence of a story or collection of stories is implied. Here, the viewer may begin to recount a tale from any point, integrating the visual stimuli at hand with a personal or learned history.

Contemporary artists such as Walker produce more ambiguous or disconnected visual cues that nonetheless encourage narrative readings. Often, this reflects the storytelling intentions of the artist; otherwise, narrative readings can occur as a result of the depiction of familiar imagery, objects and events. This approach coincides with the consideration of visual images as stories in and of themselves, which only refer to the information presented at hand, not to literary or societal stories that have already been played out in their entirety. This cannot occur if the image simply illustrates an existing story or situation, as demonstrated by works such as those reflecting the concerns of History Painting or Realism from the 16th to the 19th century. Images are capable of stirring memories and subsequent forms of imagination, for example, if a figure, object, composition or even colour is somehow recognisable to a viewer. This is a driving factor in the interpretation of an image as a source of narrative.

Practices related to the formation and reception of narratives can be located in works of Conceptual art from the 1960s and 70s, insofar as the processing of thoughts and ideas can be regarded as essential to the construction of meaning. Marcel Duchamp's interest in the conceptual content of the artwork over the retinal content is revealed through the progressive abstraction demonstrated throughout his practice. The artist's 'passage through abstraction involves the

[279] B. O'Sullivan & S. Askew, *Slavery in the Antebellum South,* viewed 20 October 2012,
<http://www2.coloradocollege.edu/dept/hy/hy243ruiz/research/antebellum.html>.
[280] K. Walker in D. D'Arcy 2006, 'The Eye of the Storm', *Modern Painters,* pg. 59, viewed 18 October 2012,
<http://learn.walkerart.org/karawalker/Main/Narrative>.

speculative goal of getting away from 'the physical aspect of painting' by putting 'painting once again to the service of the mind'.[281]   Duchamp claims that, in recent history,

> 'it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error. The retinal shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral.   If I had the chance to take an antiretinal attitude, it unfortunately hasn't changed much; our whole century is completely retinal, except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat. And still, they didn't go so far!'.[282]

Fig. 41

In regards to Duchamp's practice, *Fountain*, 1917 (fig. 41) can be understood as an important marker in this turn towards art with a conceptual focus. This work challenged and confronted viewers both within the general public and those from avant-garde practices at the time. *Fountain* shows the use of a readymade object, the urinal, as an object in an art context. It is signed and presented in a gallery as a work of art. This piece performs a blatant severance with understood notions of craftsmanship, ownership and the consideration of the art object in general. As such, the work draws primarily on concepts. By utilising the readymade, it further distances itself from the retina and addresses the mind. *Fountain* brought about discussions of the critique of autonomous art, the integration of art and everyday life and the potential failure of such intentions due to the work's ultimate role within an art institution. Despite the outcome of such discussions, it is the idea of the work that facilitates conceptual debate. The physical work itself is secondary, and could have been any number or other identical objects. The object requires activation through conceptual reflection.

Where Duchamp's works can be considered important precursors to Conceptual art, a clearly defined period for the widespread development of this form of practice is difficult to establish.   Historically, it can be seen as reaching

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[281] M. Duchamp in D. Judovitz 1995, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit,* University of California Press, Berkeley, viewed 18 October 2012, <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft3w1005ft/>.
[282] M. Duchamp in D. Judovitz.

prominence between 1966 and 1972, but can also be philosophically located in practices surrounding this timeframe.[283] These practices are categorised by a shift in focus from the art object to the idea of the work. British art theorist Elisabeth Schellekens states that 'most conceptual art actively sets out to be controversial in so far as it seeks to challenge and probe us about what we tend to take as given in the domain of art'.[284] A key feature of conceptual art that is favoured by Joseph Kosuth is the notion of art as idea. Drawing on Marcel Duchamp's emphasis on the conceptual over the retinal, this notion describes the way in which this form of art 'proclaims itself to be an art of the mind rather than the senses', therefore locating 'the artwork at the level of ideas rather than that of objects'.[285] As such, the work becomes 'about intelligent inquiry and reflection rather than beauty and aesthetic pleasure'.[286] The practice of art as idea calls for three significant considerations. Schellekens identifies these as involving the changed role of the artist to 'thinker rather than object-maker', the questioning of how the viewer must 'perceive, engage and appreciate artworks' and the blurring of possible distinctions 'between the domain of art and the realm of thought'.[287]

Through the abovementioned considerations, conceptual art sought to distance art from modernist thought and practice. Schellekens states that

> 'in contrast to modernism, (…) conceptual art set itself, from its very beginning, a distinctively analytic agenda by proposing to revise the kind of thing an artwork can be in order to qualify as such'.[288]

It is through this appeal to the mind that conceptual artists sought to distance themselves from sensory information and draw focus to ideas. Schellekens divides these ideas into the following categories: the self-reflexive 'critique of the purpose of art and the role of the artist', 'a commentary on socio-political events or states of affairs' and the representation of 'ideas traditionally tackled by philosophy'.[289] It should be noted that while early conceptual artists saw aesthetics as irrelevant, Schellekens asserts that

> 'aesthetic value (…) can be allowed for in conceptual art as long as the aesthetic qualities in question are ascribed to the *idea* at the heart of the conceptual artwork rather than the vehicular medium through which that idea is represented'.[290]

Even so, for Schellekens, the abovementioned medium does have some significance. Contrary to the assertions of early conceptual artists, she states that 'the vehicular medium influences our appreciation and understanding of the conceptual artwork in a way that affects the value that the work may have'.[291] This suggests that although conceptual art stages a departure from the medium and thus privileges the idea, the former may in fact enhance the latter. The medium aids the formation of meaning in the work.

[283] E. Schellekens ed. E. N. Zalta 2009, 'Conceptual Art', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 21 July 2012, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/conceptual-art/>.
[284] Schellekens.
[285] Schellekens.
[286] Schellekens.
[287] Schellekens.
[288] E. Schellekens in P. Goldie & E. Schellekens (eds) 2007, *Philosophy and Conceptual Art,* Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, pg. 72.
[289] Schellekens, pg. 73.
[290] Schellekens, pg. 90.
[291] Schellekens, pg. 90.

In the context of this dissertation, focus must be drawn to the potential narrative or meaning-making qualities put forward by works of conceptual art, rather than to the investigation of its intentions and their validity in practice. By appealing to the mind, conceptual art sought to engage with its viewers in a different manner to previous visual practices. The potential narrative in such works may lie in the construction of intelligible thought patterns, rather than the clearly defined formation of a beginning, middle and end contained in an overall sequence. Kosuth said that we should 'question the nature of art' in general, not that of specific media.[292] His was an analytic approach to art; the works did not refer to life but only to art itself.

Fig. 42

A work that demonstrates art as idea is Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*, 1965 (fig. 42). The work is composed of three separate components; a black and white photograph of a chair, a physical chair object and a dictionary definition of the term 'chair'. The work raises queries about how the object can be described if all three components serve this supposed descriptive function and furthermore, it questions how they can then be considered different. Kosuth describes his engagement with conceptual art as being interested in 'a working out, a thinking out, of all aspects of the concept 'art''.[293] Furthermore, he explains that 'fundamental to this idea of art is the understanding of the linguistic nature of all art propositions, be they past or present, and regardless of the elements used in their construction'.[294] This work asks the viewer to call to mind the processes inherent in decoding and identifying with works of art.

Similar to the meaning-making practices outlined earlier in this chapter, *One and Three Chairs* calls to mind the conscious act of rendering information logical. The viewer must discern which element can be considered the most relevant, if any, or they may seek to establish a potential function for each inclusion. For example, while each aspect may in some way be descriptive of a chair, the chair itself may be understood as its object, the image as its

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[292] J. Kosuth ed. G. Guercio 1991, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966 – 1990,* Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA, pg. 18.
[293] J. Kosuth in 'The Collection: Joseph Kosuth' 2010, *The Museum of Modern Art,* New York, viewed 21 July 2012, <http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A3228& page_number=1&template_id=1&sort_order=1>.
[294] Kosuth.

representation, and the definition as its linguistic expression. All three relate to each other, not to an external story. Kosuth stated that 'what (art) *means* to you beyond its specific physicalness is another issue, an issue related to language'.[295] Therefore, it should be noted that as an object of art, *One and Three Chairs* is not consistent with any narrative of life, but refers only to art itself.

Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* approaches the understanding of a single idea or concept. Other forms of contemporary art attempt to describe entire stories. Contemporary visual storytelling may not be considered straightforward in that images are inherently more ambiguous than written or spoken language. This is because spoken and written language can be understood as more direct, it is able to not only describe a scene or event but also give greater clarity to the history and implications surrounding it. Furthermore, if an image is not to act as a secondary representation of literature or any other existing source, there is no other reference point for the current context of the image or the events surrounding it. Images can present a narrative structure by providing prompts for the viewer, relying on their own, individual storytelling tendencies. Here, the original intentions of the artist can become secondary to the viewer's interpretation, which is constituted by the integration of external stimuli with previous understanding in order to perceive something intelligible.
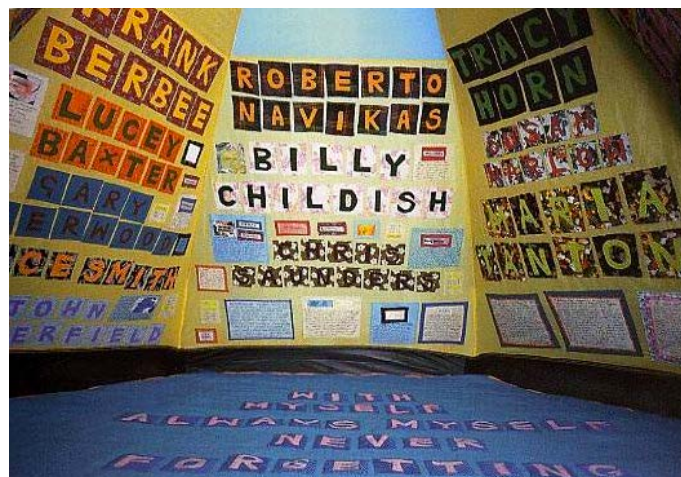
Fig. 43

The incorporation of some degree of text into a visual work may impose a common theme on the images, or it may serve as a singular and potentially vague reference point, which nonetheless indicates that the work is something to be interpreted or read. English artist Tracey Emin's *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963 – 1995*, 1995 (fig. 43) is a textual work that is presented through the visual methods of applique, installation and the readymade object. The work is constructed from a blue tent containing a light, a mattress and appliqued text outlining the names of more than one hundred people or other entities she has slept with between the time she was born and when the artwork was produced. Lynn Barber states that Emin's 'art is not a record of emotion, but the hot stew of emotion as it comes fresh from the heart – anger,

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[295] J. Kosuth ed. G. Guercio 1991, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966 – 1990*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA, pg. 11.

pain, confusion, desolation, occasionally happiness – always with the implicit question "What is going on here?"'.[296]

Emin creates works that the viewer must search, slowly piecing together an overall story that may not be immediately apparent from initial contact. For example, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* 1963 – 1995 is not necessarily explicitly sexual or exhibitionistic, although it may initially appear to be. In this case, the phrase 'slept with' is a general and potentially ambiguous expression, as it is not in every circumstance employed to refer to sexual acts. The names or descriptions included in the work do include lovers, but also the artist's other relationships such as her twin brother, other family members, childhood toys, platonic friends and even her two unnamed, aborted foetuses; anyone she has physically shared a bed with, in any context. Although the work does not designate a rigid order of viewing, it encourages an audience to become surrounded in a space, picking out isolated cues and information and stringing them together within a common theme. By outlining the content as a temporal experience, the artist suggests a chronology, which can be viewed as an ordered way to perceive a narrative structure that is documented over time.

Fig. 44

While Emin assumes the role of the central character in a series of separate but related events, English artist Gillian Wearing presents fragments of many stories in her work *Signs that say what you want them to say and not signs that say what someone else wants you to say*, 1992 – 93 (fig. 44). This work involved the artist approaching strangers in public, providing them with a blank piece of white paper and a thick black pen, asking them to write anything at all on the paper and finally recording the product using photography. The final work is presented as a series of images that reveal something about each subject depicted. The content of the written text covers a diverse range of subjects such as wealth, society, sexuality, anxiety, mental illness and even humour. Wearing states that the work 'leaves a lot to the imagination (…) it doesn't say: this is a

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[296] L. Barber 2001, 'Just Be Yourself – and Wear a Low Top', *Parkett 63,* viewed 19 March 2012, <http://www.parkettart.com/library/63/pdf/emin.pdf>, pg. 26.

story, completely, and this is my take on it'.[297]   Each photograph within this series is an example of a fragment that presents enough narrative cues to facilitate the act of storytelling.

The viewer recognises that each photograph contains the image of at least one person, indicating that each image represents a different but existing identity. Each subject depicted is holding up a piece of paper, revealing a small section of his or her thoughts, beliefs, values or experiences. Finally, each person was approached for this project during their everyday activities and as a result, each environment is different and may provide clues about the subject's lifestyle. These three aspects prompt the viewer to attempt to fill in the gaps and create some kind of story or coherence by means of questions such as 'who?', 'why?', 'what?' and 'where?'. By encouraging thoughtful interactions with an audience, Wearing also encourages numerous potential stories that are ultimately based on the perceptions, memories, prior knowledge and expectations of the audience. The viewer may identify with the perceived information presented in the work, or they may imagine and acknowledge an alternate or contrasting existence to their own.

Fig. 45

As outlined by earlier, abstract movements, visual storytelling is not always brought about by realistic or recognisable imagery. A visual narrative can also be implied by the use of a consistent style and similar imagery. American artist Trenton Doyle Hancock focuses on storytelling through images and fragmented text.   His subject matter combines memories of his childhood with simultaneously developing stories about fictional characters. *Painter and Loid Struggle for Soul Control*, 2001 (fig. 45) is an example of Doyle Hancock's fragmented, multilayered works. The imagery is reminiscent of a kind of forest where figures, limbs, creatures and repeated patterns and text emerge from the trees. The image presents a hybrid presence of text and images and subsequent familiarity, and abstract or unidentifiable areas that represent a concept or

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[297] G. Wearing interviewed by B. Judd 1997, 'Gillian Wearing', *postmedia.net*, viewed 19 March 2012, <http://www.postmedia.net/999/wearing.htm>.

action within the artist's overall story. Narrative intentions and operations are central to this work as they are viewed as the aspect that allows information to become transferable.[298] Doyle Hancock approaches images or objects, associated with art or everyday life, in terms of their concealed or potential stories.[299]

Painter and Loid Struggle for Soul Control represents a particular moment within an overall body of work. 'Painter' and 'Loid' are recurring characters, or 'energies', in Doyle Hancock's works.[300] Painter is motherly, physically colourful and conceptually emotional; she conveys 'hope and tolerance', a layer within the work that represents a forward momentum towards future events.[301] Loid, on the other hand, is black or white; he is regarded as a fatherly character who presents no range of colour or emotion.[302] He 'can convey something you fully understand or can be totally abstract; it's what language has the capability of doing – either including or excluding you'.[303] Yet language can be learned, it can be rendered logical. The narrative in this work emerges based on associations formed by the reader in response to the disjointed cues presented. Although the imagery is somewhat unusual, no one element appears to be inconsistent. This assists the viewer in the assumption that this is a work with an inherent story, transferred through a visual language, which has to be identified and interpreted.

Works that distribute unusual cues throughout more recognisable elements can be viewed in other areas of contemporary practice, including some artists' books. American artist Raymond Pettibon's practice also relies on images combined with a significant textual component, and he commonly produces two-dimensional works, book objects and installations. Pettibon deals with a wide range of subjects, yet he also depicts repeated characters and concepts that act to reveal areas of continuity in his sequences or arrangements. One method of exhibition commonly used by the artist is the presentation of a collection of separate works on a single wall, or within the same room or gallery. The works are grouped together in random clusters, often revealing a high volume of separate narratives that occur simultaneously. He does not rely on the constraints of personal viewpoints or singular narrative when grouping the works together, each individual piece encourages associations and stories to be formed.

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[298] S. Sollins 2003, *Art 21: Art in the Twenty-first Century 2,* Harry N. Abrams Inc., New York.
[299] Sollins
[300] Sollins, pg. 27.
[301] Sollins, pg. 27.
[302] Sollins
[303] Sollins pg. 27.
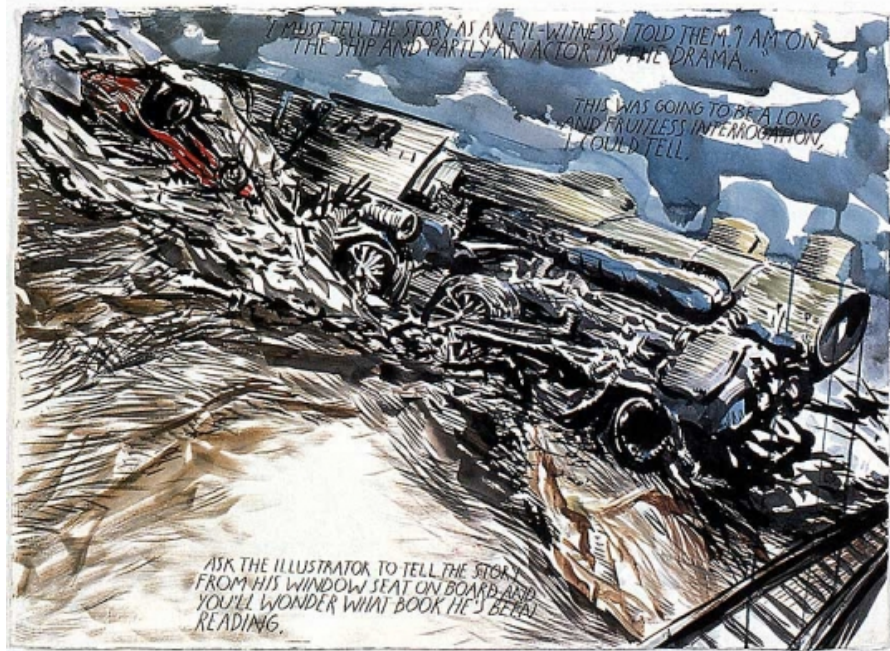
Fig. 46

One example is Pettibon's *No title (I must tell)*, 2002 (fig. 46) which depicts a train that has been derailed and is plummeting down a hill. The image draws on notions of movement and escape that the artist likens to running away to join the circus.[304] The text incorporated into the work alludes to the narration of a series of events through references to a 'story', 'witness', 'actor', 'drama', 'interrogation' and 'illustrator', yet it refrains from providing a rigid storyline.[305] Pettibon considers this kind of seemingly vague and disjointed text as not disparate, but 'improvisational', for the purpose of depicting a story that is beyond that of straightforward representation.[306] The viewers must play an active role in linking and elaborating the visual cues presented in order to facilitate the act of storytelling. These actions are necessary, as an entire, conclusive sequence or narrative is not made immediately evident.

[304] Sollins, pg. 156.
[305] Sollins, pg. 156.
[306] Sollins, pg. 156.

Fig. 47

The act of storytelling relies on some form of communication involving the human subject, either between multiple subjects, subject and object or subject and concept. In relation to art practice, works that initiate communication need not only occur by means of art objects, but can be facilitated by constructed spaces. An example of this is *Food*, 1971-73 (fig. 47) by American artist Gordon Matta-Clark, who collaborated with Caroline Gooden and any other artist or participant who entered the space.[307]   Here, the work refers to what was essentially a restaurant space in SoHo, New York. Matta-Clark and other artists and participants frequently cooked and served food, although unlike a conventional restaurant, it was not run for profit and did not encourage segregation between private groups. Participants were encouraged to cook, eat or carry conversation. The work called into question ideas of ownership, the idea of the art exhibition and the art space or gallery and the division of subject and object or concept.

Unlike the historical narrative works mentioned, works such as *Food* require active engagement and communication from its viewers. This removed their status as viewers of a work and made them a part of the work itself, essential to its existence. A visual work that communicates an idea or set of ideas to a viewer generally becomes a source of internal contemplation, where this external stimuli are ordered and comprehended in relation to existing knowledge and memories. Furthermore, works such as *Food* require an internal and external engagement. The work must not only be experienced and comprehended from an external perspective by a viewer, but also responded to in a manner that is internal to the work so that it may fulfil its communicative functions.

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[307] K. Bubmann & M. Müller (eds.) 2000, *Food*, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst & Kulturgeschichte Münster, Köln, viewed 8 May 2012, <http://www.publiccollectors.org/FOOD.pdf>.

The practice of creating an art environment that requires a meaningful engagement with its spectators in order to be sustained can also be observed through the community art of relational aesthetics. French theorist and curator Nicolas Bourriaud's text *Relational Aesthetics,* 2002 attempts to locate a relevant theoretical context for contemporary practices, particularly those of the 1990s, which he sees as being unable to be fully comprehended on a basis of historical concerns. Bourriaud states that 'the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realties, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist'.[308] The theory of relational aesthetics involves the judgement of artworks based on 'the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt', however, this theory must be distinguished as one of form rather than art, as it does not prescribe a designated beginning and end.[309] Bourriaud states that the term 'form' refers to 'a coherent unit, a structure which shows the typical features of a world', but that artworks have no exclusive claim over, the unit 'is merely a subset in the overall series of existing forms'.[310] The form of a work is derived from 'a negotiation with the intelligible', and through which 'the artist embarks upon a dialogue'.[311] Artistic practice itself is then manifested in the creation of 'relations between consciousness', and each work 'is a proposal to live in a shared world'.[312]

A contemporary artist that Bourriaud refers to throughout his text is Thai artist Rirkit Tiravanija, who has been involved in the production of various participatory art environments.   One form of communal spaces that he investigates are those associated with the preparation and consumption of food. One of these makeshift spaces was constructed for the *Aperto 93*, 1993[313] at the Venice Biennale. In this instance, a large bowl of water is left boiling in the midst of randomly placed camping gear and stacks of cardboard boxes filled with dehydrated Chinese soups. Viewers are invited to add the water to the soup and eat it, as well as rearrange and position themselves within the created environment. Works of this nature can be discussed in terms of the conditions and methods involved with the acts of preparation and consumption. Bourriaud, however, approaches the work in terms of its proposed sociability. He begins by drawing attention to the work's ability to evade a particular definition; it does not entirely conform to the term 'sculpture', 'installation', 'performance' or 'social activism'.[314]

Aperto 93 combines aspects of all of sculpture, installation, performance and social activism, but importantly, acts as a participatory space for spectators and facilitates instances of communication between the participant and the other elements of the work. Participants occupy a common space, and use shared materials to perform an activity that is generally private or carried out in

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[308] N. Bourriaud trans. S. Pleasance & F. Woods 2002, *Relational Aesthetics,* les presses du reel, France, pg. 13.
[309] Bourriaud, pg. 112.
[310] Bourriaud, pg. 19.
[311] Bourriaud, pg. 22.
[312] Bourriaud, pg. 22.
[313] Bourriaud discusses this work in *Relational Aesthetics,* but does not provide an image. I was unable to source an image of the specific work.
[314] Bourriaud, pg. 25.

selected company. This demonstrates an instance of imposed communication between human subjects, which, like spontaneous communication, facilitates meaning. The participants must also approach the contents of the space in an ordered manner so as to engage with them in a functional way underpinned by social conventions. Where viewers may derive meaning by modes of narrative ordering in works such as the previously mentioned examples of visual storytelling, they may seek a meaningful experience from a participatory environment such as this by engaging in communication and utilising the functionality of the space, which has been organised into a meaningful space by the artist.

British art theorist Claire Bishop approaches similar practices and concerns. Throughout her theoretical practice, she explores works of art that facilitate social activity and participation and related inter-subjective narratives and forms of meaning. In her article, *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents,* she engages with what she describes as a 'recent surge of artistic interest in collectivity, collaboration and direct engagement with specific social constituencies'.[315] Such practices generally operate under the interest of societal engagement, communication and a focus on everyday trends or conditions. For Bishop, 'the best collaborative practices of the past ten years address (the) contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention, and reflect on this antinomy both in the structure of the work *and* in the conditions of its reception'.[316]

The concerns of autonomous practice relate to notions of independence and self-governing situations, whereas socially intervening practices may seek methods of merging together art and life. In the presence of such paradoxical intentions, or 'antinomies', one may consider that any work that stages forms of interpersonal communication has the potential to facilitate narrative activity, conversation or interactions, yet it may also be rendered unclear, difficult, fragmented or contradictory. Such an end will be furthered discussed in Chapter Six *Art and Language*, however, if the abovementioned forms of practice outlined by theorists such as Bourriaud and Bishop succeed, in any case, they facilitate a conversational, relational or otherwise collaborative activity. From the perspective of narrative theory, we can recognise that such works have the potential to bring about logical communication and related narratives, though there is no defined structure that necessitates this end, but rather a set of parameters set by the artist to facilitate a shared social activity that is meaningful.

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[315] C. Bishop 2006, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum,* viewed 25 February 2013, <danm.ucsc.edu/media/events/2009/collaboration/readings/bishop_collaboration.pdf>, pg. 178.
[316] Bishop, pg. 183.

Fig. 48

Conversational and communal art practices can still be regarded as a key focus within contemporary art events, such as the 2012 Sydney Biennale. An example of this is Taiwanese artist Lee Mingwei's *The Mending Project*, 2012 (fig. 48). The work involves the artist sitting at a table in the middle of a largely unoccupied gallery space, where the walls are lined with hundreds of multi-coloured spools of thread. The artist must then wait for spectators, or rather, participants, who must act to facilitate the content and completion of the work. Mingwei requests that visitors to the space bring an item of their own, torn, tattered or generally over-loved clothing. Then, in the presence of the viewer, he proceeds to mend the item of clothing provided. This does not become a silent, singular performance. As payment for the services provided, each visitor must engage in conversation with the artist, or become the subject for his own amusement, for the duration of the mending act. Once mended, the clothes were displayed in another part of the gallery for the duration of the Biennale, rather than be immediately returned to the participant.

The Mending Project approaches narratives of everyday tasks, and also those of a conversational nature. Bringing one's clothing to a worker for them to be mended in exchange for payment is a logical, everyday act, however this work stages several unusual departures from this act that encourage the participant to pay more attention to the sequence of their actions. These departures include the consideration of this act as a performative work of art, the viewer's direct engagement with the production of the work and the manipulation of its course, and the concept of communicative payment. In this example, communication is one of the key factors that drives the work – it facilitates the artist's actions and gives the viewer a participatory presence in the space.

4.15 The book as a narrative object

While forms of two-dimensional compositions and aspects of participatory or environmental practice have been discussed, another object that has consistently aided communication and meaning-making processes between

human subjects as well as subject and work that must be examined is the book. The form of the book can be viewed both historically and presently as synonymous with acts of storytelling and ordered narrative. In relation to the more traditional functions of the book, David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery discuss its traditional object and narrative structure in terms of being largely significant in both a historical and contemporary context.[317] Like spoken language, the traditional codex form of the book has an expected content and structure, as well as assumed methods of handling, interpreting and responding to it. In language, these interactions take the form of listening, perceiving and responding, in order to carry out a conversation in a logical manner and within a certain timeframe. In a conventional Western book, bound in a codex format, the reader engages in a sequence contained within the pages, which are viewed from left to right. This process involves both the immediate comprehension of language and the progressive construction of overall meaning. In some cases, this may also involve the comprehension of images. In a more traditional text, any images present are incorporated simply to further describe the text, or to give it a visual form, but not to offer an alternate position or become the central source of information.

4.16 Artists' books, sequence and narrative disruption

Similar to contemporary visual narratives in general, artists' books produced since the 1960s may employ alternate means of telling stories and creating understandable material for a viewer. In response, the viewing subject must engage in different methods of interpreting the work as an art object, rather than a more conventional book. Some artists' books may adhere to narrative sequence or at least provide information towards the progressive understanding of a common theme. Such examples present no significant resistance to the viewer's comprehension.

Chapter Three *A Brief History of Artists' Books* has provided a basis for the consideration of books in general in Western society, as well as those objects that may be considered artists' books. A central focus of the chapter was on ways in which we might distinguish artists' books from other book objects, primarily, due to their function as artworks in and of themselves. Some examples of book works that assume narrative tendencies will then be identified in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*, in order for them to be considered as a counterpoint to works that disrupt sequence or logic. Such disruptive works will then be discussed with particular focus on the various ways in which an artist can stage a single or set of conceptual or physical interruptions within the form of the book. For the book to be regarded as a non-narrative object, its capacity to present indiscernible, jarring or out-of-context material must outweigh the perceivable content or signs that can be worked into a coherent sequence or object.

Roland Barthes states that the 'reality of a sequence does not lie in the natural order of actions that make it up, but in the logic that is unfolded, exposed and finally confirmed, in the midst of the sequence'.[318] Furthermore, a sequence

[317] D. Finkelstein & A. McCleery 2005, *An Introduction to Book History,* Routledge, Great Britain/New York.
[318] Barthes & Duisit, pg. 271.

relies on its ability to outgrow repetition. The reader is driven by the ongoing discovery of further meaning; 'it is a striving towards a higher order of relation'.[319] This refers to how a text or object may sustain an engagement with the viewing subject. The subject is driven by the incomplete sequence, where they may constantly form further relations and develop increased understanding. This relies on each component having the ability to present new information that is comprehendible in the context of the preceding elements. This may have been the case with examples of traditional book objects, but as the book approaches art, its logical and clearly determined method for interpretation becomes more ambiguous. Works that stage a deliberate disruption to or departure from narrative structure in particular may no longer conform to modes of traditional, sequential comprehension. As such, Chapter Seven will seek to investigate ways in which these works may be interpreted and, in some way, regarded as meaningful.

4.17 Chapter Summary

Although this chapter has established that an image or set of images can be considered a valid means for the presentation of a narrative, it must also be restated that such a method is still regarded as inherently more ambiguous - and thus open for individual interpretation - than linguistic structures. Furthermore, it is important that we distinguish our approach to the book as art from historical conceptions of artistic value within the book or within a narrative visual work in general. Mieke Bal states that historically, the narratives associated with visual art were often secondary, they represented or illustrated a story or concept that was already in existence. These images were used to illustrate literary narratives, or they could be considered in relation to iconographic traditions by depicting 'well-known biblical and historical narratives'.[320] Inasmuch as such works tell a story and can be considered as a narrative, their ability to do so is often legitimated by how well they reflect or illustrate their original source. These works have intended connotations, and do not encourage open interpretation or multiple readings. Therefore, Bal suggests that 'the analysis of visual images as narrative in and of themselves can do justice to an aspect of images and their effect that neither iconography nor other art historical practices can quite articulate'.[321] This is to be considered a key perspective within this dissertation both in the context of visual narratives and works that forge deliberate or incidental departures from these.

As briefly demonstrated in this chapter, many contemporary artworks encourage an increased level of participation from the viewer. This refers to the formation of participatory or interactive environments, or even to works that allow the viewer to recall their own experiences as part of the viewing process. The ambiguous nature of images that are independent from words as a source of rigid meaning allows for potential flexibility. As such, they may be considered as somehow meaningful or communicable in a wider range of contexts, and to a broader set of recipients.

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[319] Barthes & Duisit, pg. 271.
[320] M. Bal 2009, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative,* 3rd edn, University of Toronto Press, Toronto/Buffalo/London, pg. 165.
[321] Bal, pg. 166.

By considering visual images as independent sources of narratives, the potential realm of meaning is widened, and alternate ways to understand or perceive this are sought. English art theorist and writer Emma Cocker states that 'less the visual translation of a given 'story', contemporary art practices elude such literal 'readings' by offering individual, idiosyncratic or impenetrable glimpses of an altogether different narrative order; where the 'story' remains oblique or partial, ambiguous or unclear, hidden or somehow undeclared'.[322] This can be viewed through the contemporary visual narratives identified in this chapter. Alternate forms of narrative order can occur due to the way in which sensory information is presented, the depiction of partial or fragmented elements of a larger story or situation or the tendency to invite the viewer's participation either literally or by encouraging recollections of their own experience. In any case, each of these approaches seeks to increase the involvement of its audience. This is in contrast to more traditional text-based stories, or images that illustrate an existing text, because beyond the element of spectatorship, these can be regarded as largely uninvolved. The consideration of alternate and participatory modes of engaging with artists' books will be developed throughout Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books.* Alternate roles of reception and engagement for the viewing subject will be examines in order to demonstrate the different experiences from that of the traditional book such works may bring about.

In regards to the forming of a basis for the consideration of alternate approaches to narrative ordering and reception, this chapter has constructed an investigation into the role of narrative structure as a method of facilitating communication. Not only is it embedded in consciousness, but is manifested in modes of expression from articulated language and written text to visual sign systems or structures. A key focus of this chapter has been the ways in which visual works can perform narrative functions, from the secondary representation of existing literature to works that form stories in and of themselves. Artists' books have been identified as a central medium in the discussion of narrative works. These objects have the potential to act as the common ground between communicative traditions and more ambiguous or loosely coded content. The ability for viewers to place aside or integrate spaces of indeterminate signification depends on the volume of seemingly logical cues present, as well as the viewer's prior understanding. If the work fails to submit to traditional modes of narrative reading, alternate methods of understanding may need to be employed in order for the object or narrative to avoid being regarded as meaningless.

Chapter Five *Aesthetics and Art History* will now attempt to locate a place for disrupted visual narratives, or otherwise coherent works that are interrupted by a nonsense space, within aesthetic debates. The discussion will be framed around two key contributors to this field, Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel. Kant and Hegel put forward seminal points towards discussions of aesthetics, and are still engaged with in contemporary works and debates. Key secondary texts will then provide support for these primary sources. Kant's concept of

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[322] Cocker, E 2008, *Hidden Narratives,* viewed 2 February 2012,
<http://www.axisweb.org/dlFull.aspx?ESSAYID=112>.

aesthetic judgements will be examined, with particular reference to his concept of beauty. Here, that which can be considered beautiful need not necessarily fulfill all criteria for conventional, formal beauty, but should stimulate a kind of free play between imagination and understanding in the viewer. Hegel, on the other hand, discussed aesthetics in terms of a historical progression towards accessing the Divine. For Hegel, art had reached its highest function during the Renaissance, with that function then being taken over by religion and ultimately philosophy. After this stage, art still exists but in a changed form, it becomes self-reflective. The following chapter will examine these conceptions of aesthetic value in relation to visual works that present potentially incoherent spaces or cues within an otherwise unified work as they represent the points of disruption that can occur in artists' books.

Chapter Five

Aesthetics and Art History

5.1 Chapter outline

As outlined in Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology*, a search for understanding and rationalisation is not just confined to written and spoken communication, but is embedded in art practice. Narrative sequences and their implications can be located in various visual practices presently and throughout 20th Century Western art history. Chapter Four has identified key examples of such works that present either a primary or secondary depiction of a story, event or society. A primary depiction occurs in works that create an independent narrative, apart from existing literature or established societal practices or conditions. When investigating examples of contemporary works, the practice of using visual means to create narratives in and of themselves becomes prevalent. The latter, however, refers primarily to historical examples of visual storytelling, where forms of illustration were used to reinforce narratives already existing in the form of written or spoken language. The secondary depiction of a narrative through visual means can also refer to the illustration of an existing society. Through either approach, these practices are centered on the construction of meaning and the viewing subject's search for coherence. These meaningful or logic-based traditions refer to typical methods of reading, or to the level of understanding that a viewer may seek from a work.

This chapter will locate potential theoretical applications for nonlinear or disrupted narratives in the field of aesthetics. The points of departure from the more coherent or seemingly rational examples discussed in Chapter Four may not immediately adhere to typical conceptions of beauty or aesthetic value. Even so, aspects of aesthetic theory that refer to some unknown element, essential difficulty or sense of play may be viewed as a potential basis for the consideration of seemingly illogical components that occur in an otherwise narrative structure. The term 'aesthetic' carries implications of 'a kind of object, a kind of judgement, a kind of attitude, a kind of experience, and a kind of value'.[323] Collectively, these refer to an experience brought about by means of visual presentation and reception. As such, discussions related to this field of enquiry provide access to the various functions of visual practice and the experience of its products.

This chapter will examine the theoretical positions of two key philosophers in the field of aesthetics, G.W.F. Hegel and Immanuel Kant. For the interests of this dissertation, it is necessary to approach these theories in a manner contrary to their historical, chronological development. Hegel's aesthetics as a historically developing narrative or progression will therefore be discussed first, with Kant's system then offered in theoretical contrast. This order is necessary to develop links between narrative thought in the first instance and a progression to other alternatives, such as the artists' books in question. The debate between Kant and Hegel's positions outlines a basis for the further consideration of

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[323] J. Shelley ed. E. N. Zalta 2012, 'The Concept of the Aesthetic', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 5 August 2012, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/aesthetic-concept/>.

visual works. Hegel's system does not seek to acknowledge forms of indeterminacy, but to construct a kind of historical narrative that proceeds toward a certain end.

After discussing Hegel's theory, this chapter will identify potential difficulties or inadequacies that may exist in a strictly rigid or narrative system, and then proceed to discuss Kant's theory as a possible alternative. Kant's aesthetic theory will be discussed in terms of the four kinds of judgements the viewing subject may construct about a work of art; judgements about the agreeable, the good, the sublime and the beautiful. Here, a key focus will be on a necessary indeterminacy in understanding brought about by a judgement of beauty. It should be noted that Kant's theoretical work will be discussed at a greater length and in more depth than Hegel's. This is necessary not only because his theory will be considered more applicable to responding to a disruptive gap in an artist's book, but also because some in-depth discussion is required in order to overturn prejudice and poor understanding of Kant after Greenberg.

It should be noted, that the two fields addressed in this chapter, aesthetics and art history, are often viewed in opposition to each other. American philosopher and artist Robert Gero states that 'in general, theorists are divided by whether they count aesthetic encounters with artworks to be logically independent of their theoretical properties or necessarily constrained by them'.[324] In the latter claim, 'theory and practice are logically implicated in the artwork itself'.[325] From a subjectivist point of view, however, this claim is contested and it is suggested that

> 'aesthetic encounters with artworks involve immediate, noninferential sensory responses that are refined by sustained contemplation alone and not by appeal to such extraphenomenal factors as facts about art theory, art practice, or art history'.[326]

Following this point, this chapter can conceive of further grounding for the notion of aesthetic encounters as a disruptive force towards an overall narrative, or construction of an art history.

The following will introduce the key points to be discussed in this chapter. Firstly, it will approach Hegel's aesthetic theory in relation to his concept of beauty as being derived from the superiority of the human mind over nature and from access to the Divine. Hegel's understanding of fine art as one stage in a progressive narrative of thought will then be examined. Here, fine art is understood as following nature, but preceding both religion and ultimately philosophy in functioning to access the Divine at the highest level. This order is then related to Hegel's notion of the end of art, which can be comprehended as the point where it has served its highest purpose, after which it can become self-reflective. In order to consider how Hegel's theory may be extended and regarded as applicable to areas of modern and contemporary art, the theoretical reflections of Robert B. Pippin will then be discussed. In relation to Pippin's

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[324] R. Gero in J. Elkins (ed.) 2006, *Art History Versus Aesthetics,* Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, New York/London, pg. 4.

[325] Gero, pg. 3.

[326] Gero, pg. 3.

argument, works of Abstract art like those he refers to will be analysed in order to provide an extension of the theory to more recent practices.

This chapter will then focus on a discussion of Kant's publication *The Critique of Judgement,* 1790.[327] This text describes judgements about the 'agreeable', the 'good', the 'sublime' and the 'beautiful'.[328] This chapter will describe that which is considered sublime both in a 'mathematical' and a 'dynamic' sense.[329] It will then show that while Kant only properly located experiences of the sublime in nature, Jean-Francois Lyotard found it applicable to works of art. In relation to Kant's conception of beauty, a particular focus will be placed on his notion of the 'free play between imagination and understanding' to show that an aesthetic judgement need not conceive of a determinate end.[330] Although Kant spoke primarily in terms of nature, some comments he made specifically about art will then be outlined. Following this, the key points of both theoretical approaches will be compared so as to form a context for the consideration of non-narrative or disrupted visual works in art in relation to narrative theory. In order to do so, Diarmuid Costello's approach to the contemporary application of Kantian aesthetics will be discussed. This involves the rejection of Clement Greenberg's supposed misreading of Kant. Following this, Marília Librandi-Rocha's conception of aesthetic experience will be raised in relation to the suspension of meaning. This will be considered analogous to Kant's aesthetic regarding the free play of cognitive faculties.

The discussions conducted throughout this chapter will consider potential applications for key historical points in the development of aesthetic theory in a contemporary context. Although the references to and examples of works of visual art discussed by these theorists are from historical periods, we can identify points of potential theoretical relevance within a more contemporary context.   For example, neither theorist witnessed the conversion and progression of forms of more traditional art and representational imagery to products of postmodern and contemporary art. Although many of the artworks or movements mentioned in this dissertation were created after these aesthetic theories had been developed, their possible relations to changed forms of artistic practice can be considered.   This investigation and approach is important because these key positions are still debated in contemporary aesthetic theory, as will be shown in this chapter through a discussion of Robert B. Pippin's application of Hegel's theory to modern Abstract art and Diarmuid Costello's discussion of the potential ongoing relevance of Kant's aesthetic. With this in mind, potential aesthetic value in visual works that reveal an interruption or departure from conventional logic or expectations will be addressed. In such works, some form of indeterminacy can be considered more prevalent than the presence or need for linearity or coherence. Both Hegel's and Kant's theories will be assessed in order to attempt to locate the encounter

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[327] It might seem counter-intuitive to put Kant after Hegel when in fact Hegel's philosophy is largely a response to Kant, but the order of discussion follows the central point of the dissertation, that is, that disruptions to narratives or spaces of non-meaning in an artist's book can be discussed in terms of aesthetics. This approach does not adhere to Hegel's theory, but can be derived from Kant.
[328] I. Kant trans. J. C. Meredith ed. N. Walker 2008, *The Critique of Judgement,* Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York.
[329] Kant.
[330] Kant.

of disrupted narrative or non-signifying visual elements as an aesthetic experience.

5.2 Hegel's theory of aesthetics

In Hegel's theory, narrative order, logical development and the superiority of the human mind over nature are privileged. Hegel saw the mind not only in terms of reflection, but also as a means of uniting the sensible and the conceptual for the purpose of historicising fine art. In Hegel's account of aesthetics, the function of art is considered to be higher than that of nature. This is because art is a product of the mind, which speaks of intellect and freedom rather than necessity. For example, 'a natural existence such as the sun is indifferent, it is not free or self-conscious, while if we consider it in its necessary connection with other things we are not regarding it by itself or for its own sake, and therefore (it is) not as beautiful'.[331] Here, any argument about the superiority of nature as a product of divine will is met with the claim that the human subject is also a product of the divine, but is also capable of thought and reflection. Hegel states that 'mind, and mind only, is capable of truth, and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in this higher element and as created thereby'.[332]

In addition, judgements about the beautiful, for Hegel, are not disinterested as they are for Kant. In his theory, the meaning and concept attached to a work of art is integral to its role and reading. The discussion of a universal consensus of taste is not entered into under this system. Hegel justifies this approach on the grounds of 'ideas of beauty (being) so endlessly various (and) something particular' and as such, 'there can be no universal laws of beauty and of taste'.[333] While aesthetic judgements cannot be considered universal, there are numerous roles that a work of art or object of aesthetic reflection can carry out. Gary Shapiro discusses Hegel's suggestion that one role of art is to lead us to try and form intelligible links between the intentions of the artist and the interpretations of the viewer.[334] This points us towards the consideration of conceptual content and its proposed role in aesthetics, which was only considered a part of dependent, not free, beauty for Kant but was viewed as a key source of beauty in general by Hegel. His theory can be viewed with reference to the art object as a means of accessing and facilitating a kind of progression of throught.

The main function of art according to Hegel was not strictly concerned with formal aesthetic, but how the work could increase understanding, thus emphasising one side of Kant's 'free play' couplet, which encompasses the interaction of both understanding (concepts) *and* imagination.[335] Fine art, as

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[331] G. W. F. Hegel trans. B. Bosanquet ed. M. Inwood 2004, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics,* Penguin Books, London, pg. 4.

[332] Hegel, pg. 4.

[333] Hegel, pg. 8.

[334] G. Shapiro 1974, 'Intention and Interpretation in Art: A Semiotic Analysis', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Critiscism,* Vol. 33, No. 1, Blackwell Publishing, USA.

[335] S. Houlgate ed. E. N. Zalta 2010, 'Hegel's Aesthetics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 28 June 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entires/hegel-aesthetics/>.

generated from the mind, can be considered 'the first middle term of reconciliation between pure thought and what is external, sensuous, and transitory, between nature with its finite actuality and the infinite freedom of the reason that comprehends'.[336] Furthermore, Hegel states that 'genuine reality is only to be found beyond the immediacy of feeling and of external objects'.[337] Where Kant recognises aspects of our experience and existence that we cannot come to know or fully comprehend, Hegel refers to the supremacy of the mind. Here, products of the mind are able to elevate thought and knowledge in order for the subject to gain access to Spirit.

For Hegel, fine art 'achieves its highest task when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy, and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the Divine Nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind'.[338] Art is able to represent high ideas of Absolute Spirit in 'sensuous forms'; it can therefore act to bring these ideas 'nearer to the character of natural phenomena, to the senses, and to feeling'.[339] Richard Eldridge refers to Hegel's 'Absolute Spirit' as 'the union of collective, human rational activity at a historical moment with its proper object, that is, with the forms of social and individual life at a given moment (when) that rational activity is essentially devoted to understanding, justifying and sustaining'.[340] Beauty was, for Hegel, tied to the individual and changing persuasions of society throughout history and was therefore not to be considered a fixed property. He acknowledges that 'every work belongs to its age, to its nation, and to its environment, and depends upon particular historical (interests) and other ideas and aims'.[341] Therefore, although Hegel's account of the beautiful in art is largely concept driven, the criterion that must be met has developed with regards to the changing needs of society. Throughout the course of external changes in society, 'we find distinguished as the elements of the beautiful something inward, a content, and something outer which has that content as its significance; the inner shows itself in the outer and gives itself to be known by its means, inasmuch as the outer points away from itself to the inner'.[342] Hegel's dialectic refers to the movement of Spirit, where each stage in this progression sought to reconcile the contradictions and difficulties present in the previous one.

The integrating of past events or stages into a kind of narrative order relating to world and art histories, and the overcoming of past complications, puts forward certain specifications about Hegel's theory. He provides three predicates about what is to be considered a work of fine art; that it is not a 'natural product, but (is) brought to pass by means of human activity'; it is 'to be more or less borrowed from the sensuous and addressed to man's sense' and it is 'to contain an end'.[343] This third qualification implies the necessity of resolution, and in

[336] Hegel, pg. 10.
[337] Hegel, pg. 10.
[338] Hegel, pg. 9.
[339] Hegel, pg. 9.
[340] R. Eldridge in A. Giovannelli (ed.) 2012, 'Chapter 6: G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831)', *Aesthetics: The Key Thinkers,* Continuum International Publishing Group, London/New York
[341] Hegel, pg. 18.
[342] Hegel, pg. 23.
[343] Hegel, pg. 30.

doing so, simultaneously excludes the ongoing play between cognitive faculties. Hegel does present a case for formal beauty in art, which can be seen in examples such as representations of the ideal Greek profile, where formal beauty reveals itself through the seamless continuation from forehead to nose that would not be evident in a more angular specimen.[344] But, as previously mentioned, the key aspect in Hegel's account of beautiful art is not related primarily to form but content. Here, 'the content is the Idea, or absolute reason, as self-knowing spirit'.[345] Therefore, 'the content of truly beautiful art is in one respect the divine' which, as Hegel argues, 'comes to consciousness of itself only in and through finite human beings'.[346] This alludes to a progressive attainment of knowledge directed towards a prescribed end.

5.2.1 The progression of fine art

Hegel refers to the progression of fine art and its capacity to facilitate access to the divine in relation to three historical stages: Symbolic, Classical and Romantic art. In the first stage, the Symbolic form of art, 'the abstract Idea has its outward shape external to itself in natural sensuous matter, with which the process of shaping begins, and from which, (in the capacity of) outward expression, it is inseparable'.[347] Here, natural objects do not undergo any significant changes, although they are 'invested with the substantial Idea as their significance' and as a result 'they receive the vocation of expressing it'.[348] At this early stage the Idea in artistic representation remains largely abstract, for example, depictions of animals as hybrids with human figures may be used to outline status or other characteristics of the subjects depicted. Approaches based on such concepts can be seen in ancient Egyptian and Indian art in particular, through the depiction of 'animal-headed gods and monstrous demons and heroes' whose 'form is distorted in an attempt to accommodate the transcendent power of the Idea'.[349] In these examples, access to the Idea is indirect, and can be considered defective in two ways. The first is, as Hegel states, concerned with how the 'Idea' in Symbolic art 'only enters into consciousness in abstract determinateness and indeterminateness'; the second is that 'this must always make the conformity of shape to import defective, and in its turn merely abstract'.[350] At the point where the access to the Idea through the first stage of art can be realised as defective, it becomes the task of the second stage of art to overcome these difficulties. It should be noted however, that Hegel's use of the term 'abstract' throughout his theory does not reflect its other common or colloquial uses. He employs the term to instead refer to 'abstraction from dependence on sensual immediacy', a tendency that is considered central to Kant's theory.[351] As such, for Hegel, the 'abstract' refers more to what we might otherwise consider 'concrete' in reference to the object and the facilitation of progressive meaning.

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[344] Houlgate.
[345] Houlgate.
[346] Houlgate.
[347] Hegel, pg. 82.
[348] Hegel, pg. 82.
[349] *Hegel,* viewed 25 May 2012, <http://www.rowan.edu/open/philosop/clowney/aesthetics/ philos_artists_onart/hegel.htm>.
[350] Hegel, pg. 84.
[351] R. Pippin 2005, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath,* Cambridge University Press, New York, pg. 304.

Hegel considered Classical art to be the second form of art responsible for carrying out the task of overcoming the abovementioned difficulties. This form is viewed as 'the first to afford the production and intuition of the completed Ideal', through 'the free and adequate embodiment of the Idea', in order 'to establish it as a realised fact'.[352] This can be seen through the interests and intentions of Classical Greek sculpture. In these works, gods are represented as idealised human figures. David James states that 'because the Greeks conceived of the divine in terms of a set of individual gods with human attributes, (they were) thus able to adequately express this conception of the divine in a particular sensory form, that is to say, in human form'.[353] Even so, it must be recognised that these works performed a function beyond that of sensuous experience. The divine does not appeal to the senses alone, but must be conceived of in the mind.

Hegel states that 'the human form is employed in the Classical type of art not as mere sensuous existence, but exclusively as the existence and physical form corresponding to mind, and is therefore exempt from all the deficiencies of what is merely sensuous, and from the contingent finiteness of phenomenal existence'.[354] From this stage, it becomes evident that one must be simultaneously conscious of religious content as well as its potential representation through artistic means. Even with the height of sensuous embodiment evident at this stage, Hegel draws attention to a certain limitation in relation to Classical art and the access it provides to the divine. Here, he does not refer to abstract formal aspects of the work itself, as were seen as problematic in Symbolic art, but to the limited sphere of art as a whole. He states that 'this limitation consists in the fact that art as such takes for its object Mind – the conception of which is infinite concrete universality – in the shape of sensuous concreteness, and in the Classical phase sets up the perfect amalgamation of spiritual and sensuous existence as a conformity of the two'.[355] The difficulty associated with this amalgamation consists in the attempt to convey an infinite concept by means of a finite object. Hegel refers to mind as 'the infinite subjectivity of the Idea, which, as absolute inwardness, is not capable of finding free expansion in its true nature on condition of remaining transposed into a bodily medium as the existence appropriate to it'.[356]

The third form of art, Romantic art, then acts to break down the amalgamation between the spiritual and the sensuous that was constructed by the classical form of art. Following this, the Romantic form of art revisits the key concerns of Symbolic art by referring, 'though in a higher phase, to that difference and antagonism of two aspects which was left unvanquished'.[357] The Romantic form shifts the focus of art production from depictions of the unification of the human and the divine, which Classical art demonstrated through representations of Greek gods as idealised human forms. Romantic art appeals to a higher conception of spirit, where it must not find its existence through corporeal form,

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352 Hegel, pg. 84.
353 D. James 2007, *Hegel: A Guide for the Perplexed,* Continuum International Publishing Group, London/New York, pg. 80.
354 Hegel, pg. 85.
355 Hegel, pg. 85.
356 Hegel 85 – 86.
357 Hegel, pg. 85.

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but through self-consciousness and self-knowledge. Hegel locates Romantic art as coinciding with Christianity and its claims of the truth of God as spirit. He states that 'Christianity brings God before our intelligence as spirit, or mind – not as particularised individual spirit, but as absolute, in spirit and in truth'.[358] In this case, the 'sensuousness of imagination' is abandoned for 'intellectual inwardness'; 'the unity of the human and divine nature (becomes) a conscious unity, only to be realised by spiritual knowledge and in spirit'.[359] Robert Pippin describes Hegel's use of the term divine as complicated, due to the fact that he does not confine issues related to it 'to explicitly religious art of the classical Greek, Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, and early modern periods'.[360] Instead, all art can be viewed in terms of its attempted access to the divine. Hegel locates a form of divinity in man, who seeks to honor God by his created objects. These objects are therefore able to provide greater access to the divine than objects of nature.

5.2.2 The end of art

At the point where a state of intellectual inwardness has been reached, society has been reached, society has progressed beyond the need to seek access to Spirit in material form. In this context, Hegel discusses the end of art. This 'end' does not imply that modes of artistic production and exhibition cease, but rather refers to a point where art can no longer fulfill its 'highest vocation'.[361] Hegel saw art's greatest purpose as meeting 'man's rational need to lift the inner and outer world into his spiritual consciousness as an object in which he recognises again his own self'.[362] Man

> 'satisfies the need of this spiritual freedom when he makes all that exists explicit for himself within, and in a corresponding way realises this his explicit self without, evoking thereby, in this reduplication of himself, what is in him into vision and into knowledge for his own mind and for that of others'.[363]

Romantic art reaches a point where self-understanding can be gained through the convergence of religious themes and scenes that reveal depictions of human existence.[364] At this stage in Hegel's historical narrative, the works do not suggest a concrete depiction of the divine, but seek to encourage the attainment of self-consciousness within the mind. The highest function of art ends because society no longer seeks the same means of self-understanding from works of art.[365] Where the spirit's ultimate needs, according to Hegel, can no longer be met by art alone, art becomes an 'object of intellectual consideration'.[366]

5.3 Modern and contemporary applications of Hegel's theory

Robert B. Pippin investigates potential extensions and reinterpretations of Hegel's theory, so that it may be applied to various movements of modern and

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[358] Hegel, pg. 87.
[359] Hegel, pg. 87.
[360] Pippin, pg. 288.
[361] Hegel in A. C. Danto 1999, *Hegel's End of Art Thesis,* viewed 2 July 2011
<http://www.rae.com.pt/Danto%20hegel%20end%20art.pdf>, pg. 1.
[362] Hegel in Danto, pg. 1.
[363] Hegel, pg. 36.
[364] Houlgate.
[365] A. C. Danto 1999, *Hegel's End of Art Thesis,* viewed 2 July 2011
<http://www.rae.com.pt/Danto%20hegel %20end%20art.pdf>.
[366] Danto, pg. 2.

contemporary art. This approach is presented in such published works as in Chapter Thirteen of his text *The Persistence of Subjectivity,* 2005, which is titled 'What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)'. In this chapter, he begins by addressing the emergence, and widespread acceptance, of 20th Century Abstract art as a puzzling occurence within the historical progression of art practice. He states that the way in which nonfigurative art was embraced in both the art world and society in general 'provokes understandable questions about both social and cultural history, as well as about the history of art' and as a result, 'the endlessly disputed category of modernism itself and its eventual fate seems at issue'.[367] Pippin suggests that this transition from the painting to its object, and the heightened reliance on conceptualism, can be discussed in terms of Hegel's historical narrative, as art turns to self-consciousness after its highest function is served. For Pippin, the emergence of Abstract art encourages an extension of Hegel's narrative. He states that Abstract art's deliberate rejection of representational art

> 'involves some sort of implicit claim that the conditions of the very intelligibility of what Hegel calls the 'highest' philosophical issues have changed, such that traditional, image-based art is no longer as important a vehicle of meaning for us now, given how we have come to understand ourselves, have come to understand understanding'.[368]

Once humans no longer wholly required means of direct representation in order to derive aspects of self-reflection and understanding, other modes could be investigated in place of this.

Pippin returns to Hegel's theory about the functions of art after Romantic art. He states that, for Hegel, artists today 'have liberated themselves from fixed or required subject matter from any non-aesthetically prescribed determinate content'.[369] He then puts forward the important qualification, that although Hegel spoke about freedom from convention, Abstract art would not likely have been something he could have imagined nor advocated. The inclusion of Abstract art in a Hegelian form of analysis is therefore subject to contemporary interpretation and revision. Even so, Pippin, states that 'Hegel seemed to have foreseen the shift in the modernist understanding of artistic experience, away from the sensuous and beautiful and toward the conceptual and reflexive'.[370] He then questions the inadequacy of representational art, and how it came to be regarded as such. If this rejection is to be approached from a Hegelian perspective, Pippin asserts that we must investigate four peculiarities in Hegel's theory of aesthetics.

The first involves Hegel's references to the divine, which he discusses in regards to all art. This widespread application of the term 'divine' can be viewed in terms of the potential complications it causes. For Hegel, the use of this term is not just confined to discussions of religious art, but encompasses any subject matter, to varied degrees. Pippin states that here, 'art (…) is treated as a vehicle for the self-education of (the) human being about itself, (and) ultimately about what it means to be a free, self-determining being, and (…) Hegel calls *that*

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[367] Pippin, pg. 279.
[368] Pippin, pg. 280.
[369] Pippin, pg. 284.
[370] Pippin, pg. 285.

dimension of aesthetic meaning 'divine''.[371] This theory can be summarised in the following statement: 'for Hegel, artistic activity is not about representing divinity but about *expressing* divinity and even *becoming* divine'.[372] As previously mentioned, he theorises that divinity can be located in 'man', and that God is more honored by the products of the spirit than anything that exists in nature. This links to the second perceived peculiarity in Hegel's aesthetic theory, that he does not locate significance or meaning in the beauty of nature. He views nature as devoid of spirit. Representations of nature through art, however, do not have the same effect. Pippin states that, for Hegel, 'when a natural object or event is portrayed aesthetically, it acquires a distinct sort of meaning, what it is within and for a human community, that it would not have had just as such an object itself'.[373] As such, we may attempt to search for meaning in man-made reproductions of nature, but not in nature itself. Moreover, Hegel regarded fine art not as a rejection of nature and its inadequacies, but as a form of liberation from its limitations.

The third peculiarity involves Hegel's concept of the historical narrative of thought. He is regarded as one of the earliest philosophers to consider that artworks and movements could, and indeed should, be regarded as belonging to and serving a particular time. Pippin states that here, 'time could itself be understood comprehensively as an integrated whole (or) a point of view', and that 'this premise contributes as well (…) to the thesis that art cannot matter for us now as it used to, the representational art has become, with respect to the highest things, a 'thing of the past''.[374] Representational art that serves a clearly defined or strict concept can no longer function at the highest level, but it could do so in the past. Related to this is Hegel's conception of modern nature. This term refers to a certain condition, to a world he regards as being 'unheroic', and 'not much of a subject for the divinising or at least idealising transformations of aesthetic portrayal at all'.[375] If what is to be represented is no longer worthy of these approaches of aesthetic portrayal, art may seek non-representational means of approaching self-consciousness. Pippin describes the fourth and final peculiarity as involving

> 'the basic reason why Hegel opposed the grandiose hopes of many of his contemporaries for a renewal of monumental, culturally important transformative art, and claimed instead that in a certain (world-historical) respect, art (or what we would now regard as premodernist art) had become for us a thing of the past'.[376]

This position relates to an evolving society, both thought-based and socially, that cannot return to previous modes of production and obtain the same effect they once did. It then follows, that Hegel's progressive but not recurring narrative of thought can be extended to aspects of modernism and beyond. Pippin states that 'Hegel's narrative of an expanding critical self-consciousness (…) fits the modernist refusal to take for granted what a painting or art was, what writing or being an artist was'.[377] Here, art must be regarded as reflective

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[371] Pippin, pg. 288.
[372] Pippin, pg. 288.
[373] Pippin, pg. 289.
[374] Pippin, pg. 293.
[375] Pippin, pg. 295.
[376] Pippin, pg. 296.
[377] Pippin, pg. 298.

of its particular stage in history and the related collective thought of that time. In this way, the spirit of the time is 'not just to be lived out, but itself aesthetically thematised'.[378]   In doing so, we may seek to overcome the limitations of representational art. For Hegel, these involved the inadequate expression of subjective experience and therefore, the inadequate expression of society at the time.[379]

Throughout these discussions of the four perceived peculiarities in Hegel's theory of aesthetics, Pippin approaches the potential applications of this theory in relation to modernism, and abstract art in particular. He suggests that

> 'it becomes historically possible, in the extended post-Kantian aftermath that Hegel's narrative relies on, for a sensible take on (...) individual and independent components *to make sense* as a painting, a material 'image', a new way of capturing the mind-world relation (...), because and only because a lot of other aspects of political, religious, and philosophical life have come to make sense, to succeed in involving a norm, in analogous, interconnected new ways, too'.[380]

In this theory, the 'individual and independent components' he refers to can include formal aspects such as shape, line or a sense of density or weight or anything that may come to constitute the work's objecthood itself. At the point in history where modernism occurs, the works produced need not reflect sensible meaning, but meaning may be attributed to the very concept of painting. Works of abstraction may be understood as thematising components of 'sensible meaning' and in doing so, these aspects are brought into self-consciousness when they may have otherwise been taken as a given; these works 'present the materiality of such components in their conceptual significance'.[381] This becomes a kind of norm; it can be regarded in terms of the modern functions of the mind and approaches towards self-understanding. This can then be viewed, from a Hegelian perspective, in terms of a new importance of nonrepresentational art, leaving representational art in its highest function as a thing of the past.

5.4 Abstract art in terms of Hegel

As outlined, Pippin views Hegel's end-of-art thesis in terms of its potential links to non-representational art, such as Abstract art, occurring throughout Modernism and beyond. Here, works by artists such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko are not considered to be mere depictions of the art material as its actual object nor as aesthetic works. Instead, they undertake the function of bringing aspects of sensible meaning into the view of one's self-consciousness. These are aspects 'that we traditionally would not see and understand as such, would treat as given'.[382]   In this way, works such as those of Abstract art approach the components of sensible meaning in terms of their material presence, thereby rendering them conceptually significant.[383]

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[378] Pippin, pg. 299.
[379] Pippin, pg. 299.
[380] Pippin, pp. 303 – 304.
[381] Pippin, pg. 305.
[382] Pippin, pg. 305.
[383] It can be noted, that unlike Pippin, other theorists have sought to emphasise the non-conceptual or Kantian formal aspects of such works.

Fig. 49

Fig. 50

In regards to the former approach undertaken by Pippin, focusing on the conceptual, reflexive interpretation of Abstract art, works such as *Number 30 (Autumn Rhythm),* 1950 (fig. 49) by Jackson Pollock and *Red and Orange*, 1955 (fig. 50) by American artist Mark Rothko can be discussed. Both are large scale painted works on canvas. Pollock's work contains splashes of black, white and neutral paint applied to a neutral background by means of loaded brushes, sticks, turkey-basters and paint poured freely from the tin. The culmination of these processes results in the appearance of heavily tangled, nonlinear lines, drips and organic shapes. Rothko's work however, reveals a very different compositional approach. It is composed of large fields of colour in similar, warm tones. When installed, 'as a result of the shimmering and flickering light (of the gallery) and the pulsating colours that project and recede, Rothko's large canvases produce an impression of constant motion (where) the intense colour

and bold form impact transcends the sum of its individual components'.[384] The expansive and simplistic, repetitious, non-figurative qualities of both works can be viewed in terms of a shifted focus, from the experience and analysis of the work and its components, to that of the viewer in a state of self-consciousness in relation to the act and experience of viewing. In response to this work, the spectators may draw on an awareness of their own body in a created space. They may also make attempts to focus on any singular part of the expansive, encompassing works. In addition to this, the spectator may assess the different effects their changed physical position can have on their position within and reception of the work. The lack of representational subject matter also generates a reflective response to such an absence of expected content.

Hegel's historical system or narrative, whereby art has already fulfilled its highest function, refers to art as performing just one stage in the movement of thought. After art has fulfilled its highest vocation, Hegel claims that this task is then taken over by religion, specifically, by Christianity. David James explains that the 'Christian religion reveals the divine to human consciousness in a form that Hegel considers to be both essentially different from and more adequate than the form of intuition' involved with any aesthetic mediation of the divine.[385] Here, the divine is largely removed from sensible form, though still referred to with reference to human form in some capacity and placed in the sphere of the mind. This is not yet the highest form of self-conscious spirit in this system, as it is only through philosophy that this state can be obtained.

5.5 Kant's theory of aesthetics

The notion of a progressive, historical narrative that we may locate in Hegel's theory and all subsequent extensions thereof sits in contrast to Immanuel Kant's conception of aesthetics. Kant's theoretical work involved three central critiques, the *Critique of Pure Reason,* 1781 the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788 and the *Critique of Judgement,* 1790*.* When referring to works of art, it is Kant's third critique the *Critique of Judgement*, which presents an account of aesthetic theory that has been continuously applied to the reception and function of art. Kant's work presents itself as 'an attempt to formulate a comprehensive system targeting not only objects and subjects of experience in general, but also the relation between them'.[386] His aesthetic theory investigates the 'psychological process that leads to a reflective act of judging'.[387] This act can be viewed as a structured inquiry into a method 'of perception, contemplation and assessment'.[388] For Kant, aesthetics is a kind of investigation into the workings of the human subject's 'mind, and their epistemological reach into the external world'.[389] This is not just a cognitive experience, but one that refers to what we may come to know by means of vision, through the play of our cognitive faculties, as well as where the limitations of what we may come to know lie.

[384] B. Clearwater, 'Rothko, Mark', *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online,* viewed 18 October 2012,
<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/ezproxy.usq.edu.au/subscriber/article/grove/art/T074108>.
[385] James, pg. 81.
[386] E. Schellekens in A. Giovannelli (ed.) 2012, 'Chapter 5: Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804)', *Aesthetics: The Key Thinkers,* Continuum International Publishing Group, London/New York, pg. 61.
[387] Schellekens, pg. 61.
[388] Schellekens, pg. 61.
[389] Schellekens, pg. 62.

5.5.1 The agreeable

In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant identifies four different kinds of judgements, those about what can be considered agreeable, good, sublime or beautiful. The agreeable denotes a highly subjective judgement about that 'which the senses find pleasing in sensation'; the judging subject finds enjoyment upon the immediate encounter with the agreeable object.[390] This is an entirely sensory form of judgement that is produced by the individual human subject, regardless of whether it is validated by other subjects or not. That which is considered agreeable can only be 'what pleases (the judging subject) immediately', and in this case, 'everyone has his own taste', which is derived from the senses.[391] These individual senses can be influenced by past experiences and personal preferences. For example, when a judgement is made about that which is agreeable, the subject expresses an interest and a sense of delight in the object. Kant regards this as 'evident from the fact that through sensation it provokes a desire for similar objects, consequently the delight presupposes, not the simple judgement about it, but the bearing its existence has upon my state so far as it is affected by such an object'.[392] From this analysis, Kant concludes that the agreeable cannot merely be denoted by that which 'pleases', but by that which 'gratifies'.[393]

5.5.2 The good

The agreeable depends on an object insofar as it can produce sensory gratification in the subject's mind. In order to judge an object as good, however, the object must 'by means of reason (commend) itself by its mere concept'.[394] The judging subject must be aware of what the object is at all times, they must know its intended function or purpose. If it can be seen as fulfilling its own concepts, then it may be deemed good.[395] Kant enforces an important distinction between the agreeable and the good, stating that 'the agreeable, which (...) represents the object solely in relation to the senses, must first be brought under principles of reason through the concept of an end, to be, as an object of will, called good'.[396] The question of recognising a object that is only immediately pleasing, as opposed to one that may sustain pleasure indefinitely, is raised when constructing a judgement about the good. Something that is viewed as agreeable must always please immediately, without any consideration as to if this will be a lasting pleasure, and as such, 'agreeableness is enjoyment'.[397] The good, however, must please in both ways, 'it is good absolutely and from every point of view'.[398] Kant gives the example of a meal that stimulates the sense of taste that we may find enjoyable, and therefore agreeable, but which cannot be considered good 'because, while it immediately

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[390] I. Kant trans. J. C. Meredith ed. N. Walker 2008, *The Critique of Judgement,* Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, pg. 37.

[391] Kant, pg. 39, 44.

[392] Kant, pg. 38.

[393] Kant, pg. 38.

[394] Kant, pg. 39.

[395] Much ethical practice today, including the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija, can be understood in this way. It is conceptually driven and ethically based and as such, can be judged as good.

[396] Kant, pg. 39.

[397] Kant, pg. 40.

[398] Kant, pg. 40.

satisfies the senses, it is mediately displeasing due to reason that looks ahead to the consequences'.[399] Where the agreeable is interested in the object for its sensory gratification, the good must also employ reason to assess if the delight caused by the object is sustained throughout its functionality for an intended purpose. In both cases, the judgement conceives of an end, and cannot be considered disinterested.

5.5.3 The sublime

A third form of judgement that Kant refers to applies to what we may deem sublime, which, like judgements of beauty, are disinterested and involve feelings of pleasure that claim universal validity. It should be noted, that while some mention of judgements of beauty, which can be considered a central focus of Kant's critique, will be made with reference to discussions of the sublime, judgements about the beautiful will not be examined at length until later in this chapter. At this point, their potential application to non-narrative or disrupted visual works will be identified and discussed. Unlike the agreeable and the good, reflective judgements about beauty and sublimity 'agree in not presupposing either a judgement of the senses or a logically determining judgement'.[400] A sublime experience can be viewed in terms of consisting 'in a feeling of the superiority of our own power of reason (...) over nature'.[401] Nevertheless, both beauty and sublimity refer to a kind of indeterminacy, where beauty has no determinate understanding and sublimity has no determinate reason. As will be established, unlike judgements of beauty, judgements of the sublime also involve feelings of pain associated with the subject's recognition of his own limitations. A judgement about the sublime speaks more to reason than physical form, for even though we may have grounds to call an object beautiful, we cannot properly call one sublime. Instead, Kant supposes that 'all we can say is that the object lends itself to the presentation of a sublimity discoverable in the mind'.[402] For Kant, the sublime has no sensuous form, but can be spoken of in relation to reason, which cannot be adequately represented. The sublime is concerned with an effect or process within the mind rather than the qualities of the object that may stir such an experience.

Kant refers to two kinds of sublimity; the mathematically sublime which refers primarily to scale, and the dynamically sublime which refers primarily to power. In both accounts, we may realise a superiority of reason over nature. For that which is considered mathematically sublime, nature refers to imagination as the 'natural capacity required for sensory apprehension'.[403] The superiority of reason over nature becomes evident when the viewing subject experiences something large enough to overwhelm the imagination, which resists methods of reasoning and ultimately prevents comprehension.[404] For example, this experience may be stirred when viewing a vast horizon comprised of mountains and other landforms. It is seemingly infinite, because it ends only so far as our own sight cannot view it any further. Our own abilities provide the limiting

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[399] Kant, pp. 39-40.
[400] Kant, pg. 75.
[401] Ginsborg.
[402] Kant, pg. 76.
[403] Ginsborg.
[404] Ginsborg.

constraints of this experience. As a result, we cannot fully comprehend its magnitude by means of our senses; in particular, we notice the inadequacy of our sight. As such, Kant views the sublime as 'the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses'.[405] Here, it is the rational deliberation over the limitations of the senses that makes the experience comprehendible. The ability for one's reason to transcend and comprehend the incomplete experience relates to the recognition of the mind's own finite abilities, not to the entire potential scope of the experience itself.

Where the mathematically sublime refers to magnitude, the dynamically sublime holds a greater propensity for fear. We may experience this form of sublimity if we are to recognise the might of nature as fearful, yet remain in a position of safety ourselves. Kant suggests that 'we may look upon an object as fearful, and yet not be afraid of it, if, that is, our judgement takes the form of our simply picturing to ourselves the case of our wishing to offer some resistance to it, and recognising that all such resistance would be quite futile'.[406] In this case, we recognise nature's greatness over our own physical powerlessness, yet we can view the superiority of our own reason as it judges us apart from nature and therefore apart from any real danger. In this situation, nature is 'called sublime merely because it elevates the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can come to feel the sublimity of its own vocation even over nature'.[407] In both cases, mathematical and dynamic, sublimity implies a kind of limitlessness. As such, Kant does not locate the sublime in works of art, or properly in objects of nature, as it consists of an experience in the mind. Sublimity involves something that is by magnitude, or power, ultimately incomprehensible to the subject's senses. Therefore, for Kant, objects of art cannot properly be called sublime. Subsequent theories have, however, referred to the sublime experience brought about by art, with reference to art objects that present as similarly incomprehensible in relation to Kant's theory.

5.5.3.1 Lyotard on sublimity

Jean-Francois Lyotard for example, in his text *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* 1984 locates the sublime in art rather than nature. He considered modern aesthetics in terms of a nostalgic sublime, allowing 'the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents', but where the form 'continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure'.[408] He describes the postmodern, however, as 'that which (…) puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself' and 'searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable'.[409] Within such an experience, we seek to 'invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented'.[410] This is a task that Lyotard claims will not 'effect the last reconciliation between language games', and that their totality and unification could only come from a kind of

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[405] Kant, pg. 81.
[406] Kant, pg. 91.
[407] Kant, pg. 92.
[408] J. Lyotard trans G. Bennington & B. Massumi 1984, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pg. 81.
[409] Lyotard, pg. 81.
[410] Lyotard, pg. 81.

'transcendental illusion', one that may result in terror.[411]   This is the kind of terror shown throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the 'reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience'.[412]   This terror, for Lyotard, threatens a postmodern society if appeasement is sought through 'the realisation of the fantasy to seize reality'.[413]   It is therefore Lyotard's recommendation that the unpresentable, should not be submitted to unification or totality.

It should be recognised, that many key inclusions in Lyotard's account of postmodernism might be referred to under the term of modernism in other historical accounts of art practice. Lyotard's concept of the postmodern draws primary focus to 'the experimentation of the avant-garde'.[414]   For Lyotard, the postmodern must act as 'the spirit of experimentation that drives modernism into ever-changing forms; (…) the disruptive force that unsettles accepted rules for reception and meaning'.[415]   Where postmodernism can be seen as potentially disruptive or promoting experimentation through products of art and thought in general, modernism can be viewed in terms of the work's arrival at an acceptable norm. Therefore, regardless of where a work is located in history, it must sustain an unsettling quality to remain postmodern and not be absorbed under the category of modernism, where it lacks the ability to challenge its spectators. The other qualification Lyotard puts forward towards the concept of postmodern avant-garde art is that it 'never entirely loses its ability to disturb', which in turn relates 'to the feeling of the sublime'.[416]   With reference to the unpresentable, Australian philosopher Ashley Woodward states that 'modern art presents the fact that there is an unpresentable, while postmodern art attempts to present the unpresentable'.[417]   He describes this as 'a paradoxical task', which 'arouses in the viewer the mixture of pleasure and pain that is the sublime'.[418]

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[411] Lyotard, pg. 81.
[412] Lyotard, pp. 81 – 82.
[413] Lyotard, pg. 82.
[414] A. Woodward 2005, 'Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924 – 1998)', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 22 August 2012, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/lyotard/#H9>.
[415] Woodward.
[416] Woodward.
[417] Woodward.
[418] Woodward.
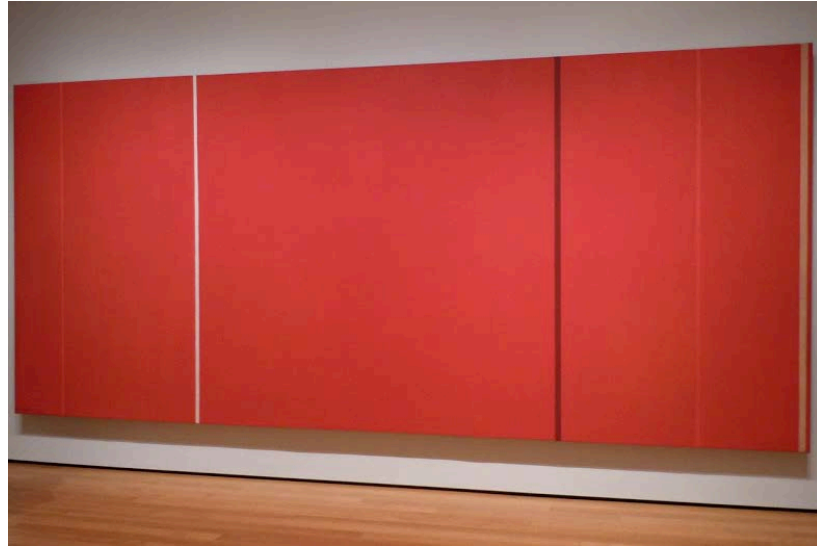
Fig. 51

Lyotard views the work of American artist Barnett Newman as central to his conception of the postmodern avant-garde. An example of this is Newman's work *Vir Heroicus Sublimis,* 1950 – 51 (fig. 43), which translates from Latin to 'man, heroic, sublime'. The work depicts a large-scale field of colour. It measures 242.2 x 541.7 cm, and when displayed, is accompanied by directions as to how it should be viewed. When first exhibited in 1951 in New York, it was labeled by a notice that read: 'There is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance'.[419] This mode of viewing has the capacity to immerse the spectator in a mass of seemingly endless colour. Depending on their position in front of the work, the viewer may only be able to see the work itself, and only partially, as there may not be anything else visible even in their peripheral vision to suggest their presence in another environment. Newman saw a spiritual component to his works, and actively sought to approach feelings of the sublime. Lyotard regarded him as successful in doing so, and believed that Newman achieved access to sublime experiences through his paintings 'by making his viewers feel that something profound and important is going on in his works, but without being able to identify what this is'.[420]

In response to such works, Lyotard demonstrates potential applications of the sublime that lie beyond its original context, to works of art created during the mid-to-late twentieth century. It should be noted, however, that discussions of the sublime lend themselves readily to only a small portion of works created during and after this period. With reference to contemporary narratives, and in particular, their disruption, forms of hypertext fiction can perhaps be located in such discussions. When experiencing a work of hypertext fiction we can potentially conceive of the vastness of its content, although this exists only as an idea and not as experience or concrete form. We can, at no one point, have access to its entirety. The sublime is a broad concept and as such, will not be considered a relevant basis for the discussion of non-linear and disrupted

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[419] 'Barnett Newman: Vir Heroicus Sublimis' 2010, *The Museum of Modern Art,* viewed 22 August 2012, <http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79250>.
[420] Woodward.

artists' books presented in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*. Works such as Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* can be discussed in terms of the sublime because it *implies* something that exists beyond what is presented. This is a suggestion of something further, whereas a nonsense space or disruptive element within an artist's book refers to something that is missing, incomplete or out of context in the work itself.

A nonsense space or point of disruption does not suggest the existence of something beyond the object; when referring to non-narrative artists' books, it is discussions about beauty rather than sublimity that can be considered more applicable. The book is generally framed by some form of cover, container or two ends, and given that scale is applicable to some degree to both forms of the sublime, such an object cannot properly display these qualities.[421] An unknown disruption in an otherwise physically accessible space may refer to the viewer's indeterminate understanding, rather than reason. Kant distinguished understanding from reason as an entirely separate faculty, where the former is the faculty of rules, and the latter is that of principles. As such, understanding carries finite implications, whereas reason relates more to the infinite. The narrative within the artist's book can be viewed as a finite set of rules resulting in the logical comprehension of the work. A break from this convention may either disrupt or suspend the viewer's understanding. The following will discuss Kant's theory about judgements of beauty, which necessarily involve indeterminate understanding. Following this, some specific clarifications Kant makes regarding judgements about art rather than those about nature will be outlined. From this, both Hegel's and Kant's theories will be compared in order to locate a relevant position for the discussion of non-narrative works.

5.5.4 The beautiful

Kant examines a fourth and final kind of judgement about an object or visual experience that causes delight, the beautiful. He clarifies the key difference between the agreeable, beautiful and good by saying that 'the agreeable is what gratifies us; the beautiful what simply pleases us; the good what is esteemed (approved)'.[422] To discern what is beautiful, judgements of taste must be discussed. This component of Kant's aesthetic theory, primarily applied in terms of nature, forms a basis for the ongoing critique of fine art. Kant states that 'taste is the faculty of judging an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion apart from any interest', and that 'the object of such a delight is called beautiful'.[423] It must be recognised that here the form of judgement is not derived from general cognition or logic, but is described as aesthetic. This refers to a judgement 'whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective'.[424]

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[421] Book objects cannot properly display sublime qualities, unless it were some form of poststructural sublime where the fixed center of the text is repudiated and the text becomes 'what it is not'.
H. J. Silverman 1990, *The Textual Sublime: Deconstruction and its Differences,* State University of New York Press, New York, pg. xviii.
[422] Kant, pg. 41.
[423] Kant, pg. 42.
[424] Kant, pg. 42.

Although Kant recognises that even sensory representations can be objective, he also identifies pleasure and displeasure as exempt from this capability. He considers that each of these feelings 'denotes nothing in the object, but is a feeling which the subject has of itself and of the manner in which it is affected by the representation'.[425] Unlike judgements about the agreeable or good, this form of judgement is disinterested. It does not refer to specifications about the object itself, or to a certain end, but instead reflects the subject's response to a given object. Judgements of beauty put forward the mere suggestion of purpose, which is important when considering a disruption brought about through a nonsense space within an artist's book: the concept and the image are in free play. Judgements about beauty are non-determinative because the particular is given, to which the universal must be found. In a conceptually driven narrative however, this is reversed.

The significance of the subjective response demonstrated in a judgement about the beautiful will be shown below, but for now it should simply be noted, that for Kant, even though judgements of taste are based on subjective grounds, they must also claim an objective sense of universal validity. He states that 'where anyone is conscious that his delight in an object is with him independent of interest, it is inevitable that he should judge the object as one containing a ground of delight for all human beings'.[426] Unlike the agreeable, judgements about the beautiful are not substantiated on personal grounds; 'the judging subject feels himself completely free in respect of the liking which he accords to the object, he can find as reason for his delight no personal conditions to which his own subjective self might alone be party'.[427] Therefore, under Kant's system, if the judging subject does not conform to this universal consensus, he is said to be lacking taste while the object of delight is not called into question.

In the case of the agreeable, it is valid to distinguish between the senses of individual subjects. With the beautiful however, Kant asserts that this would negate the very idea of taste, therefore implying that there is 'no aesthetic judgement capable of making a rightful claim upon the assent of everyone'.[428] A sense of universal consensus forms the basis for the occurrence of these judgements of taste. Judgements about the good can also be discussed in terms of consensus, with reference to the supposed function and purpose of an object. The good is immediately distinguished from the beautiful however, because it depends on the object being good in itself or good for something and as such does not lend itself to any form of disinterested judgement, but rather practical judgement.

It must be recognised that a strict definition for the characteristics of a beautiful object is not made possible, as judgements of taste do not refer to specifications about the object, rules for its production or the fulfillment of a prescribed function. It can be observed, that judgements of taste, as opposed to agreeable pleasure, allow for disagreement. This can be attributed to the condition of subjectivity, which cannot be considered a property of the object. As these

[425] Kant, pg. 35.
[426] Kant, pg. 42.
[427] Kant, pg. 43.
[428] Kant, pg. 44.

judgements must be based on subjectivity, for Kant, one's understanding of a work must be set in 'free play' with their imagination in order for that work to be perceived as beautiful.[429] Therefore, the value associated with an object or work of art does not refer to any particular rules about conceptual content that determine the viewer's response. Instead, value is attached to the experience of the work in terms of the engagement of the senses and the potential effect this has on the viewer's ability to recall knowledge and imagine beyond this existing information.[430]

Elisabeth Schellekens reinforces this point by suggesting that Kant's 'aesthetic judgements must (…) always be based on first-hand perceptual experience and cannot be reduced to any kind of regulated or inferential process'.[431] In addition, she provides an account of how cognitive judgements in general, and Kant's aesthetic judgements in particular, differ. She refers to the specific instance of encountering a rose. With reference to cognitive judgements in general, 'the imagination offers us the perceptual impression of a rose even though we are not yet in a position to categorise or grasp it as such', that is, our encounter of the object is so far independent of a particular label or concept.[432] It is then the role of the understanding to provide these; 'the understanding thus "subsumes" the imagination's sense-impression under the suitable "determinate concept" thereby rendering the cognitive judgement fully intelligible'.[433] This describes a meaning-making process that resolves itself upon the arrival of a certain end, like narratives will a determined end, as we will see below. Aesthetic judgements are quite different in this respect, as beauty cannot be held to a determinate concept, nor demand a rule following response from the subject.

When forming a judgement about the beautiful, the judging subject does not focus on the object but the experience of beauty itself. In these judgements, 'the understanding is unable to categorise our perceptual impression as beautiful, since there is no such concept for the understanding to apply to the sense-impression presented by the imagination'.[434] As beauty is not a determinate concept, the role of the understanding previously outlined in relation to cognitive judgements in general cannot be carried out entirely. Here, the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding are set into a state of 'free play' where neither must subsume the other. This state 'is pleasurable precisely (by) virtue of its freedom, and is what serves as ground for the aesthetic judgement'.[435] For Kant, because beauty does not presuppose any concept, judgements of taste must refer to the 'free play of imagination and understanding' previously discussed, as well as the state of mind associated with this play.[436] Furthermore, we must consider that if an object brings about

[429] S. Houlgate in Kelly, M (ed.) 1998, 'Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich', *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics,* viewed 7 February 2011 <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0255>.
[430] H. Ginsborg ed. E. N. Zalta 2008, 'Kant's Aesthetics and Teleogy', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 28 June 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/kant-aesthetics/>.
[431] Schellekens, pg. 65.
[432] Schellekens, pg. 64.
[433] Schellekens, pg. 64.
[434] Schellekens, pg. 64.
[435] Schellekens, pg. 64.
[436] Kant, pg. 49.

pleasure through the harmonious play of our cognitive faculties, we can also consider its claim to universality. Although there can be no definitive universally shared judgement, as disagreements may occur, we can assume the universal communicability of our mental state before the object we judge as beautiful.

5.5.5 Purposiveness without purpose

Kant also speaks of aesthetic judgements in terms of the 'purposiveness' that can be ascribed to them. Objective purposiveness cannot be formed, as these judgements do not involve any interest in or use for what the object actually is, or how it should function. A subjective purposiveness can, however, be located in such judgements, or 'purposiveness without purpose', which can be felt through the play between imagination and understanding.[437] Kant states that 'purposiveness (…) may exist apart from a purpose, in so far as we do not locate the causes of this form in a will, but yet are able to render the explanation of its possibility intelligible to ourselves by deriving it from a will'.[438] A work of fine art is produced with intention, but the actual objective purpose does not present itself. The art object appears natural to its spectators, yet it is essentially a fabrication, or purposive arrangement of form and content. He explains that we can observe it at least 'with respect to form, and trace it in objects – though by reflection only – without resting it on an end'.[439] Objects that we may judge as beautiful can therefore have a 'form of finality', as the purposiveness we ascribe to their form relates to the object only so far as it has the capacity to set our cognitive faculties in free play with one another.[440] An object of art must possess a physical end, but this need not restrict the ongoing play between cognitive faculties.

5.5.6 Nature and fine art

As nature is to be considered the central focus of Kant's critique, his theories were not primarily been discussed with reference to art. He did, however, refer directly to forms of art, although they were secondary to examples of nature. Kant states that 'it is only production through freedom, i.e. through an act of will that places reason at the basis of its action, that should be termed art'.[441] This process is not to be confused with the recognition of the mind's limitations when comprehending a judgement about the sublime. In the case of the production of a work of art, one's rationality pertains to the intentions located in the work. The viewer does not acknowledge that the work lies outside their ability to wholly know or comprehend it, but rather, that it is a product of human intention.

Art can be termed aesthetic if it refers to a feeling of pleasure and as such, it can either be judged in terms of the agreeable or as fine art. For Kant, the term agreeable can be assigned to a work of art 'where the end of the art is that the pleasure should accompany the representations considered as mere

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[437] Schellekens, pg. 67.
[438] Kant, pg. 52.
[439] Kant, pg. 52.
[440] Schellekens, pg. 68.
[441] Kant, pg. 132.

sensations'.[442] Fine art differs, in that the pleasure should accompany the representations 'considered as modes of cognition'.[443] When judging an object of art as agreeable, we do so on the basis that the object is for simple enjoyment. To regard a representation as fine art, Kant indicates that it is considered 'intrinsically purposive' and 'has the effect of advancing the culture of the mental powers in the interests of social communication', though it does so without an end or actual objective purpose.[444] A representation that can be regarded as fine art has a material end, in that it is manifested in an object, but this end does not apply to a play of cognitive faculties brought about by the object.

Like judgements about nature, aesthetic judgements about art involve a 'universal communicability of pleasure' based on the distinction that this pleasure must not be the product of mere sensation, but of reflection.[445] In this way, artworks can be judged as beautiful if the judging subject maintains this standard of 'reflective judgement and not bodily sensation'.[446] Beauty, in relation to nature or art, must be that 'which pleases in the mere judging of it'.[447] This excludes impressions derived from mere sensation or from the validation of a prescribed concept. Judgements of beauty can be referred to as 'free' or 'dependent', where taste is either 'pure' or 'impure'.[448] In the case of the former, the object pleases for itself and does not require the recognition or fulfillment of a concept. It does, however, permit indeterminate concepts that act in harmony with the imagination through free play. The latter, on the other hand, allows for the recognition of an object in terms of what it is, for example, in the case of architecture. Judgements about the beautiful are necessarily disinterested, however, the viewing subject's existing knowledge and ability to recall past experiences may prove problematic to this qualification. These must be placed aside in order to judge an object as beautiful; it is beautiful 'apart from' rather than as a product of its conceptual content.[449] Although we may recognise an object, and therefore be aware of its use, we must form a reflective judgement based on the play of our cognitive faculties, rather than the fulfillment of an objective end. In this way, products of human activity or creation can be considered beautiful, only this prescribed beauty must be distinguished as dependent.

Kant also makes reference to the conditions under which a work of fine art is produced. 'Fine art is the art of genius', and as a kind of productive faculty attributed to the artist, 'genius is the innate mental aptitude through which nature gives the rule to art'.[450] A judgement about a work of fine art that has been deemed beautiful cannot be based on 'any rule that has a concept for its determining ground'.[451] As a result, fine art itself cannot produce a rule by

[442] Kant, pg. 134.
[443] Kant, pg. 134.
[444] Kant, pg. 135.
[445] Kant, pg. 135.
[446] Kant, pg. 135.
[447] Kant, pp. 135 – 136.
[448] Schellekens, pg. 69.
[449] It should be noted, that Kant does accept concepts in 'free play' with imagination. An object is beautiful apart from *determine* concepts, not concepts altogether.
[450] Kant, pg. 136.
[451] Kant, pg. 136.

which a product is constructed. However, a rule must precede an object in order for it to be termed art and as a result, this role is assumed by the 'nature in the individual (...) by virtue of the harmony of his faculties'.[452] Kant further explains that genius manifests itself in originality, not imitation, and that it is something that is possessed, not learned. As such, it is not transferable or communicable; a subject can observe a work of genius from another, but one author cannot convey a method or concept that will allow another to produce a similar effect. The notion of works of genius sits in contrast to that of contemporary conceptual art and appropriation. In the case of conceptual art, the concept is the work. It acts as a method of construction or reception, therefore rendering the individual artist insignificant.[453] Here, the role of artist or maker can be assumed by anyone. Artists of genius, however, can be described as 'those who can adequately express ideas in such a way as to animate our imagination and understanding without thereby relying on rules or other restrictions'.[454] This has the effect of engaging the judging subject in a kind of sustained pleasure through the ongoing play between the cognitive faculties.

5.6 Hegel after Kant

The central counterpoint to Kant's account of aesthetics is that of G.W.F. Hegel, which has previously been discussed in this chapter. We can now draw attention to Hegel's departures from Kant's conception of aesthetics. Contrary to Kant's conception of the beautiful in relation to the limitations of understanding, and Lyotard's acceptance of the unpresentable in art, Hegel's approach to aesthetics favours unification and a historical progression towards a certain end or identity. Hegel considered Kant's theoretical work as an important basis for his own aesthetic theory. He ultimately concedes that, although providing a background for further development, aspects of Kant's theory were incomplete and should be considered unsuccessful. In his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics,* originally delivered in Berlin during the 1820s, he addresses key aspects of Kant's aesthetics directly. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, Kant's aesthetic theory contained areas that revealed the human subject's limitations. This can be seen in the partial ability of reason made apparent in the presence of sublimity, or the limited function of understanding in relation to the beautiful, as well as the subsequent ongoing play between this limited faculty and the imagination.

Such elements that could not be wholly comprehended by the subject's mind were considered problematic for Hegel. He observes that when met with 'the fixed antithesis of subjective thought and objective things, of the abstract universality and the sensuous individuality of the will', Kant propounded 'the unity merely in the form of subjective ideas of the reason to which no adequate reality could be shown to correspond'.[455] Furthermore, the 'essential nature' of the abovementioned antithesis 'was not for (Kant) knowable by thought, and

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[452] Kant, pg. 137.
[453] However artists such as Joseph Kosuth claimed that if the artist says an object or idea is art, it is art.
[454] Schellekens, pg. 69.
[455] G. W. F. Hegel trans. B. Bosanquet ed. M. Inwood 2004, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics,* Penguin Books, London, pp. 62 – 63.

whose practical accomplishment remained a mere ought deferred to infinity'.[456] In light of these perceived inadequacies, Hegel acknowledges that while 'Kant no doubt brought the reconciled contradiction within the range of our ideas', he nonetheless failed 'in scientifically unfolding its genuine essence (and) presenting it as the true and sole reality'.[457] Where Kant's theory allows for difficulties, partiality and aspects of the unknowable, Hegel's approach is centered around the progressive ability of thought towards a prescribed end.

Through the consideration of these historical counter positions, we can seek to locate a basis for the discussion of nonlinear or disrupted narratives in art. In Hegel's account of aesthetics, focus is drawn to a progression of thought towards the knowable, rather than an ever-present absence. Here, we must consider all art in terms of its attempts to access the Divine. This is a task that, according to Hegel, has been achieved to varying degrees throughout history. At the lowest level, nature served this purpose, followed by art, religion and, ultimately, philosophy. It should be noted, that this approach locates a degree of divinity in 'man' and his understanding. It should also be recognised that after art has performed its highest function, one that is then given over to religion, it does not cease to exist. At this point, art becomes self-reflective. It serves another aspect of knowing or understanding. For Kant, however, rather than the construction of a historical narrative, 'aesthetic experience involved precisely a kind of inconceivability, together, nonetheless, with some intimation of harmony and meaning'.[458] The inconceivable aspect in this theory relates to our understanding, which is not wholly determinate in a judgement of taste. This kind of judgement refers to beauty, and requires that the viewing subject's cognitive faculties, imagination and understanding, be set in a kind of harmonious play with one another. This play is sustained indefinitely, and neither faculty must subsume the other.

5.7 Greenberg's misuse of Kant

As initially outlined in the Introduction, while this dissertation is interested in potential contemporary applications of Kantian aesthetics, Clement Greenberg's approach to Kant will be regarded as a misreading and therefore not applicable to forms of contemporary Kantian analysis. This problematic approach is addressed by Diarmuid Costello, who criticises Greenberg's interpretation of Kant, but also seeks to provide an indication about how Kant's theory of art may be retrieved for contemporary discussions. He begins by identifying the dominant role of aesthetic theory since the 1980s as one of absence, reflecting a tendency to 'believe that the historical and conceptual limits of aesthetic theory have been breached by the internal development of art after modernism'.[459] Costello suggests that art theorists may form this belief in response to Greenberg's recourse to Kantian aesthetics. This controversial approach becomes particularly evident in Greenberg's works from the late 1960s, where he struggled to render modernist aesthetics relevant to the emergence of

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[456] Hegel, pg. 63.
[457] Hegel, pg. 63.
[458] Pippin, pg. 293.
[459] D. Costello 2007, 'Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* vol. 65, no. 2, pg. 217.

postmodern practices. He regarded such practices in terms of 'the rejection of taste as an adequate basis for the appreciation and understanding of art'.[460] For Greenberg, the aesthetic value gauged through judgements of taste was heightened in modernism.

In this article, Greenberg develops his concept of 'medium-specificity'; 'the self-reflexive investigation of the constraints of a *specific* medium through the ongoing practice of the discipline in question'.[461] This links to his belief that 'modernist painting (can be conceived) as an investigation into the essential nature of painting'.[462] Costello regards Greenberg's formation 'of this equation between aesthetic value and medium-specificity' as problematic, because in relation to subsequent theories, 'the conceptual space (revealed by this equation) appeared not to permit (...) being a postmodern aesthete or an anti-aesthetic modernist'.[463] Instead, it allowed for one to assume the perspective of modernist aesthete, such as Michael Fried, or anti-aesthetic postmodernist, such as Rosalind Krauss. Neither of the abovementioned approaches acts to breach the 'conceptual cornerstone' of modernist theory, which can be viewed as Greenberg's equation involving aesthetic value and medium-specificity.[464] With this is mind, Costello then seeks to more closely examine Greenberg's aesthetic theory and his claim to Kant in particular. This investigation serves to establish whether the anti-aesthetic and anti-Kantian theoretical approach embraced by art theorists particularly since the 1980s was warranted.

The first problem Costello flags is Greenberg's inability to distinguish between Kant's concept of 'free' and 'dependent' beauty. Greenberg proceeds to employ Kant's free beauty, or, beauty without conceptual constraints, to create a basis for his theory of artistic value. In doing so, he neglects the essential constraint an artwork functions under – the limitation imposed by its need to fulfil a conceptual end as a work of art. As such, under a Kantian system, works of art must be distinguished as revealing dependent beauty, but Greenberg fails to address this distinction. Costello further states that 'Greenberg tends to empiricise and psychologise Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement', and this causes further problems to his theory.[465] Greenberg attempts to illustrate the objectivity and universality of taste by providing an account of past taste. Costello regards this as problematic as there can be no guarantee that past conditions will prove consistent in the future. Furthermore, Greenberg reveals a 'tendency to conflate the Kantian criterion of 'disinterest' as a necessary condition on aesthetic judgement with his own, psychologistic, conception of 'aesthetic distance''.[466] Costello points out that this approach may be detrimental to what otherwise may have proven persuasive in Greenberg's own theory, his concept of medium-specificity. Costello states that 'if aesthetic experience were really as voluntaristic as (...) merely *adopting* a distancing

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[460] Costello, pg. 217.
[461] Costello, pg. 218.
[462] Costello, pg. 218.
[463] Costello, pg. 218.
[464] Costello, pg. 220.
[465] Costello, pg. 221.
[466] Costello, pg. 221.

frame of mind toward an object, the nature of that object itself would fall away as a significant determinant on aesthetic judgement'.[467]

As such, in Greenberg's attempt to approach concept of Kant's disinterest through a theory of aesthetic distance, his focuses on the medium and the object are undermined. When Greenberg attempted to align the arts with the senses, he was forced to do so by conceiving 'the intuition of works of art in terms of discrete sensory inputs'.[468] In doing so, he refers to judgements based on sense, rather than on reflection as it were for Kant. As Greenberg's notion of medium-specificity is 'based on an attempt to align an essentially empiricist notion of cognitively uninflected sensation', Costello regards its conceptual grounding as closer to the theories of Hume than Kant.[469] These problematic aspects constitute what Costello regards as a tendency whereby contemporary theorists may reject Kantian aesthetics based on Greenberg's interpretation. This tendency can be said to be grounded on a misreading, and as such, the contemporary rejection of Kantian aesthetics could be ill-founded.

Costello observes the effect Greenberg's 'distorted' and 'partial' account of Kantian aesthetics, in many cases, has on forms of contemporary art theory. He states that 'despite the fact that Kant's account of aesthetic judgement is routinely dismissed for its formalism in art theory, one seldom finds reference to what Kant himself had to say about how his own account applies to works of art'.[470/471] This is a tendency that is carried out in contemporary formalist critiques such as those formed by Arthur C. Danto, but also in more sympathetic Kantian accounts, such as those by Thierry de Duve. With this in mind, Costello seeks to conclude his article with suggestions for how aspects of Kant's original theory of art can be retrieved and viewed as applicable to contemporary debates. He points out that for Kant, an artwork had the capacity to give expression to 'aesthetic ideas', which is what may be considered 'distinctive about both the content of works of art and the way they present that content'.[472]

Artworks may present concepts that are able to be located in experience, only to a certain completeness that is beyond experience, or conversely, they may approach ideas themselves that are beyond experience. In regards to the ways in which art presents its content, Costello states that 'aesthetic ideas indirectly present what cannot be presented directly, and furthermore, they 'might be said to achieve the impossible: they allow works of art to present rational ideas in determinate sensuous form'.[473] Costello addresses these tendencies by referring to the example of freedom; aesthetic ideas can express the *idea* of freedom directly, they can provide it with sensuous form.

The presentation of such ideas is not constrained to sensible form, and can occasion Kant's free play of the cognitive faculties. Costello summarises that which 'Kant concretely says about what this play of imagination and

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[467] Costello, pg. 221.
[468] Costello, pg. 221.
[469] Costello, pg. 221.
[470] Costello, pg. 222.
[471] It is for this reason, the dissertation will give a more nuanced account of Kant's theory of aesthetics.
[472] Costello, pg. 224.
[473] Costello, pg. 225.

understanding occasioned by aesthetic ideas consists in (as suggesting) a kind of free-wheeling, associative play in which the imagination moves freely and swiftly from one partial presentation of a concept to another'.[474] Therefore, the presentation of these ideas, as opposed to that of simple concepts, acts to stimulate the imagination, and in turn to facilitate increased thought. In relation to Kant's specific theory of art, Costello highlights the important feature attributed to judgements of beauty in created works, that art objects '*indirectly embody ideas in sensuous form* by bringing their 'aesthetic attributes' together in a unified form'.[475] What must be flagged in such a theory of art is that Kant does not provide any specifications that state that a work must be representational in order to facilitate the abovementioned play. Costello states that 'all Kant's account requires is that works of art expand ideas in imaginatively complex ways'.[476] This is not necessarily an attribute that must be confined to forms of representational art, and, in this way, Kant's theory of art may prove applicable in a contemporary context.

5.8 Contemporary aesthetic experience

In recent theory, Marília Librandi-Rocha has discussed aesthetic experience from a contemporary perspective. She does not refer directly to Kant, but discusses notions of chaos and suspended meaning in an aesthetic experience that can be likened to the space in which the free play of cognitive faculties occurs. Librandi-Rocha bases her discussion on Luiz Costa Lima's conception of aesthetic experience which suggests 'the provisional suspension of the semantic empire'.[477] We submit to this semantic empire in everyday life, in order conduct ourselves in a meaningful or narrative manner. Librandi-Rocha states that 'it is necessary for us to understand the messages that we are constantly receiving and sending in order for life to function and to avoid chaos'.[478] She then points out that for an aesthetic experience to occur, 'it is vital that, for a moment – just a moment – a little bit of chaos sets in and a small crisis occurs'.[479] This is the point of semantic suspension outlined by Costa Lima, and is a simultaneous point of suspension of communication and meaning. This 'aesthetic experience thus generates a crisis because it shows us the limits of reason and how an experience can bring about penetration into something that reason does not allow us to comprehend'.[480] This form of disruption is consistent with Kant's free play of imagination and understanding and therefore, is applicable to the artists' books that the dissertation is interested in.

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[474] Costello, pg. 225.
[475] Costello, pg. 226.
[476] Costello, pg. 226.
[477] L. Costa Lima in M. Librandi-Rocha 2013, 'Becoming Natives of Literature: Towards an Ontology of the Mimetic Game (Lévi Strauss, Costa Lima, Viveiros de Castro, and the Nambikwara Art Lesson), *Culture, Theory and Critique,* Vol. 54, No. 2, viewed 21 August 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2013. 782679>, pg. 177.
[478] M. Librandi-Rocha 2013, 'Becoming Natives of Literature: Towards an Ontology of the Mimetic Game (Lévi Strauss, Costa Lima, Viveiros de Castro, and the Nambikwara Art Lesson), *Culture, Theory and Critique,* Vol. 54, No. 2, viewed 21 August 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2013. 782679>, pg. 177.
[479] Librandi-Rocha, pg. 177.
[480] Librandi-Rocha, pg. 177.

5.9 Aesthetics and disrupted narrative

In order to discuss instances of disrupted narrative in terms of a Kantian or Hegelian approach, the concept of intellectual intuition should be examined, because it considers both sensory and thought-based experience. For Kant, intellectual intuition 'supplies an object without sensory assistance', and thus 'amounts to an object simply by thinking of it'.[481] In this system, there is a distinction between sensation and thought. The former refers to an automatic and passive process, where material or information exists prior to signification and is received by sensation. The latter is an active process; it involves the mediation of sensation through concepts. These concepts are the product of thought, not sensation. Thinking processes, which relate to an individual's faculty of reason, are responsible for the formation of organised systems of information and logical narratives. For Hegel, however, sensation and thought do not occur separately. Thought processes do not rely on pre-existing sense particulars. Here, the experiencing subject receives sensory information that is already part of consciousness.

Hegel views that which occurs as that which is possible; the actual and the possible are conflated. There is nothing that cannot be known by thought or reason, nothing that exists prior to or apart from higher forms of thought, such as that of philosophy. With this is mind, it can be shown that Hegel's focus on the totality of reason relates to the fulfillment of narrative ordering, where occurrences can be accounted for by logic. In Kant's system, however, there are intuited particulars that exist prior to thought and may not necessarily be activated by concepts. In this case, where there is no absolute, total knowing, and there is always something prior to and apart from thought, disrupted or incomplete narratives can occur. There can be no final, conclusive state of knowing for the human subject and as such, they can recognise limitations or gaps in their thinking and subsequent understanding. These gaps are both the source of irritation and fascination that can persist in certain works.

5.10 Chapter summary

This leads us to consider that there is further potential grounding in Kant's conception of indeterminate understanding as a perpetual state brought about by judgements of taste. Although the visual works produced surrounding the time of this conception sit in contrast to the contemporary works in question, the historical acknowledgement of the unknown can be considered relevant to contemporary art. Under a general Kantian approach, we can argue that what is not known may not need to be discovered, and it may be the very element that brings about a kind of sustained interest in and engagement with the work.[482]

Moreover, through examining Kant's theory, we can conceive of aesthetic experience in general as disruptive to art historical narratives. This theory puts forward a kind of indeterminacy in the place of conclusive understanding. Toni

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[481] T. Arnold 2010, 'Michael Inwood: A Hegel Dictionary', *Hyponoetics Glossary,* viewed 31 March 2013, <www.hyponoesis.org/Glossary/Definition/Intu_G>.
[482] In fact, as Rex Butler has argued, there is nothing to discover prior to our engagement with the work of art.
For example, see R. Butler 2005, *Slavoj Zizek: Live Theory,* Continuum International Press, London.

Ross states that 'Kantian aesthetic experience foregrounds the material and experiential conditions of conceptualizing procedures by disrupting cognition's mastery over the material world'.[483] Here, the totality of conceptual reasoning is obstructed. Instead, 'aesthetic judgment (…) responds to the sensual, material and preconceptual structures of experience that cognitive activity tends to repress in the search for generalizing laws and concepts'.[484] In this account, aesthetic judgements necessarily oppose the coherent totality of cognitive content, including that content in relation to art historical narratives.

For Kant, works of art that provide an aesthetic experience involve a kind of partiality. Robert Gero describes such works, in terms of Kant's aesthetics, as 'an imaginative array of representations, "a multiplicity of partial representations", what he calls "aesthetic ideas" that "strain" to approximate an objective presentation of a rational idea'.[485] These ideas call to mind attempts to consider or represent that which is outside of human experience, or 'what is mysterious and ineluctable within it'.[486] Although aesthetic judgements are not determinate, as judgements of the good for example, they do involve cognitive acts. Gero states that 'aesthetic appreciation (for Kant) is the entertaining of indeterminate and partial concepts that never coalesce into one privileged, conceptual "closure"'.[487] Here, we can refer to the free play of imagination and understanding that is brought about by a judgement of beauty: neither faculty must subsume the other. This play 'stimulates intellectual pleasure when it somehow satisfies the spectator in spite of resisting crystallization into a fixed or definite thought'.[488] For Kant, an aesthetic experience must disrupt the totality of narrative thought to some degree; it 'both invites and eludes interpretation'.[489] As such, the Kantian aesthetic presupposes a function for the disruption of narrative, coherence or the totality of thought or knowing. This function lies in the play between cognitive faculties, which is pleasurable despite the sustained indeterminacy that causes it.

Chapter Six *Art and Language* will approach various theoretical positions that assign a functional purpose to the occurrence of disrupted narrative or meaning, yet do not necessarily seek to know it entirely. This will lead to suggestions about experiences that a disruption to logic or coherence can provide that the known, or assumption of totalised meaning, cannot. In order to conduct these discussions, Chapter Six will also outline practices whereby the visual composition is perceived as a language and is interpreted as such. We can then identify difficulties with these systems, such as elements that occur outside[490] the reach of linear interpretation. When identified, we can investigate alternate yet meaningful ways in which to acknowledge and experience narrative disruptions. One method of engaging with a narrative disruption that will be

[483] T. Ross in B. Hinderliter, W. Kaizen, V. Maimon, J. Mansoor & S. McCormick (eds.) 2009, *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics,* Duke University Press, Durham/London, pg. 91.
[484] Ross, pg. 91.
[485] R. Gero in J. Elkins (ed.) 2006, *Art History Versus Aesthetics,* Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, New York/London, pg. 5.
[486] Gero, pg. 5.
[487] Gero, pg. 5.
[488] Gero, pg. 5.
[489] Gero, pg. 5.
[490] For Kant, the real is outside our categories. For the later Lacan, it is inside. For Derrida, the disruption is not real, but linguistic.

discussed in Chapter Six is through the Lacanian reading of Freud's concept of desire. This approach follows a discussion of Kant because the Kantian aesthetic position is compatible with French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's reading of desire. As Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has noted recently, 'desire is Kantian'.[491]

The following chapters will examine forms of unconventional response, engagement or experience that is unable to be facilitated by a clearly defined narrative. This will provide the basis for a discussion of non-narrative or disrupted artists' books. Throughout Chapter Six *Art and Language*, visual works and literary works that reveal such intentions will be examined. These works will provide a context for the consideration and analysis of specific artists' books that will be carried out in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books* because they demonstrate similar forms of disruption. The visual and literary works to be discussed all disrupt convention or expectation in some way, and therefore facilitate alternate forms of reception and engagement from the reader or viewer.

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[491] S. Žižek 2012, *Less Than Nothing,* Verso, London, pg. 465.

Chapter Six

Art and Language

6.1 Chapter outline

Where Chapter Five *Aesthetics and Art History* sought to locate narrative disruptions as an aesthetic element, this chapter will explore other theoretical and practical applications of nonlinear or non-narrative visual works in order to form a theoretical context for their examination in the following chapter. With this in mind, aspects of visual language and modes of communication that are facilitated by artistic practice will be discussed. To form a basis for this discussion, meaning making processes that form a link between sensory stimuli and constructed understanding will be identified. Once basic systems for meaningful or narrative interpretations of visual objects or artworks have been identified, this chapter will then discuss alternatives to instances of assumed totality, identity thinking and largely coherent processes through the consideration of works of visual art, film and literature. Here, focus will be given to movements or particular works of art that critique notions of linearity, narrative or logic. Throughout this review of art practice and reception, various theoretical positions will be examined as they provide suggestions as to how such works can be responded to and experienced. These will offer suggestions about alternate ways in which non-narrative or disrupted works can be engaged with and interpreted.

While this chapter approaches similar theoretical fields and interests to Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology*, it does this in order to consider potential complications that may occur in the transmission of ideas, stories or information, rather than to refer to wholly or largely successful narrative models. Unlike Chapter Four however, this chapter will focus on problematic or ambiguous works, suggesting ways in which one might interpret them, as well as investigating the changed role of a work if its entire content, or aspects within this, are ultimately unknowable, or cannot be reconciled into a narrative frame. With this in mind, this chapter will firstly return to the discussion of semiotics that was introduced in Chapter Four. In this instance, focus will be given to the way in which the arbitrary relationship between the components that comprise the sign, can account for ambiguity in the reception of information. The universal understanding of language as essential to effective communication will then be established. In relation to this, different problems that may occur during this process will be addressed. Following the discussion of these problems, an account of hermeneutics will be given in order to describe instances whereby the viewing subject is required to take on an active role in the derivation of meaning. Although similar practices were identified in Chapter Four, this chapter will approach them from the perspective of resistance, ambiguity, different viewer responses and spaces of persistent difficulty or frustration against logic. This approach is necessary in order to critique claims that language theory has made about interpretation and in doing so, to demonstrate how artist' books, unlike conventional books, disrupt reading processes

Reading or, in some instances, viewing as an activity for deriving narrative is a process attempted by many semioticians. In relation to this, the chapter will provide an account of a narrative semiotic approach to visual works, where meaning is assigned to every mark, whether purposeful or incidental. A contradictory approach will then be presented. Here, it is acknowledged that an image may contain a source of essential difficulty that need not be expunged by the hasty assumption of meaning. It will be suggested that one possible outcome of an unknown component is for it to prove traumatic or frustrating and thus results in a persistent sense of lack. The attainment of meaning would eliminate a sense of lack, but this does not always occur. It will then be suggested that the human psyche relies on an ever-present lack in order to drive the process of discovery and analysis forward. In this case, lack is responded to by desire. With this in mind, this chapter will then provide examples of artworks that have some non-narrative qualities or unresolvable components. It will do so in order to contest claims about interpretation identified in Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology*, and to create a broader context for the consideration of non-narrative or disrupted book works.

Works of Surrealism and Dadaism will be discussed in relation to their common tendency to reveal the simultaneous presence of the known and unknown, the latter presenting itself as problematic to coherent narrative readings. Postmodernism as a movement in the arts which favours ambiguity and fragmentation will then be examined. Many of these works present themselves as potential sources of narratives, but this is made problematic in the situation where a narrative is implied but not sustained, as the expectations of the viewer are no longer met. Following this, theories about visual works that have a central narrative, but also contain an element that appears misplaced, contradictory or otherwise disruptive will be examined. Finally, this chapter will enter into a discussion about works that necessarily involve sequence such as films, video clips, novels and short stories that do not adhere to traditional narrative models. Moreover, it will provide suggestions about the alternative roles such works may fulfil. Examining different mediums that also facilitate non-narrative practices is important in considering a wider context in which to locate the artists' books in question. Considering potential alternative roles that such works may serve gives an indication of how a reader or viewer may approach artists' books that employ similar characteristics, and also points to the kind of experience such works may facilitate.

While identifying these major points, this chapter will also draw on a range of other theories and artworks that acknowledge or depend on some sense of nonlinearity or narrative disruption in order to carry out further discussion. Stationary, two-dimensional works will initially be examined, and this will lead to a discussion of general non-narrative trends in film art as well as commercial, cinematic films, and similar practices that are discussed in written texts. The nonlinear, non-narrative or otherwise disrupted film or text is particularly relevant in relation to the disrupted or non-sequential artists' books with similar qualities that will be identified and discussed more extensively in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*. The abovementioned films and texts can be considered significant because, like books themselves, they involve a prescribed sequence and narrative progression and imply a

physically and conceptually known experience. As such, these mediums possess similar capacities for the construction of narrative, as well as the basis for potentially jarring content or prominent departures from this structure. These are discussed because they can be considered analogous to examples of non-narrative artists' books. Films, works of literature and artists' books all carry some implication of expected sequence or narrative and any significant disruption to this can prove jarring, or even bring about a sustained fascination with the work.

6.2 Potential complications of language and communication

As outlined in Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology*, when investigating how one person can relate to another, language as a primary means of communication and understanding requires discussion.   In this form of communication, the role of the visual sign in the articulation and comprehension of language will be discussed. Ferdinand de Saussure regards language as being comprised of singular elements that he refers to as linguistic signs. [492]   These elements do not just describe instances of written or spoken word alone, but require a conceptual and material grounding. As such, this element, or 'linguistic sign' refers to more than just the designation of a word to a material object; instead it describes the unity of a 'concept' and a 'sound-image'. [493] Saussure assigns the terms 'signified' to the concept and 'signifier' to the sound-image. [494] The association between signifier and signified is not fixed, and is considered arbitrary, which allows for variations and developmental trends in language. [495]   The relationship between signifier and signified is assigned based on a cultural choice, or societal consensus. The meaning of the unified sign, comprised of both the signifier and signified, is only determined based on its place within a structure of other signs. This accounts for cases of ambiguous meaning, which can only be determined based on context. While the association of signifier to signified is an arbitrary one, convention fixes these parts of the sign and thus narrative structure arises.

The unified linguistic sign refers to the inseparable concept and articulated object that form a single unit of communicable language.   This act of communication is brought about by the assumption of mutual understanding and adherence to convention between subjects. Communication theory is one method by which this act can be examined. This seeks to provide methods of addressing and investigating communicative acts by means of the mathematical analysis of information.   In Warren Weaver's *Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication,* 1949, he sets out to define the term 'communication' as a broad and inclusive occurrence. He states that the term must refer to 'all human behaviour', in order to 'include all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another' and, furthermore, may even refer to ways by 'which one mechanism (…) affects another mechanism'. [496] In addition to

[492] F. Saussure ed. C. Bally & A. Sechehaye trans. W. Baskin 1959, *Course In General Linguistics,* The Philosophical Library Inc., New York.
[493] Saussure, pg. 66.
[494] Saussure, pg. 67.
[495] Saussure.
[496] W. Weaver 1949, *Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication,* viewed 4 November 2012,

identifying communication as a means for the transferral of information that is deeply embedded in society, this theory seeks to ascertain potential complications or problems involved with these processes.

Weaver identifies complications in communicative processes as occurring on three levels. Level A involves technical problems, which 'are concerned with the accuracy of transference from sender to receiver of sets of symbols', 'or of a continuously varying signal', 'or of a continuously varying two-dimensional pattern'.[497] These can be demonstrated by methods such as written texts, messages transmitted by radio and television programs respectively. Level B refers to semantic problems, which 'are concerned with the identity, or satisfactorily close approximation, in the interpretation of meaning by the receiver, as compared with the intended meaning of the sender'.[498] This relates to how precisely the symbols chosen convey an intended message that is provided by the sender and interpreted by the receiver. Level C refers to the problems associated with effectiveness, which 'are concerned with the success with which the meaning conveyed to the receiver leads to the desired conduct on his part', and which 'involves aesthetic considerations in the case of the fine arts'.[499]

At each level, one must consider the information to be communicated in terms of its accuracy, capacity to facilitate the sender's intended meaning or ability to provide a desired result in the receiver. Weaver clarifies this point however, by suggesting that in the context of communication theory, the term 'information' is not to be viewed as synonymous with the term 'meaning'. He states that 'in fact, two messages, one of which is heavily loaded with meaning and the other of which is pure nonsense, can be exactly equivalent, from the present viewpoint as regards information'.[500] From this perspective, information must be viewed in terms of the collective stimuli present, not just the readily conceivable or wholly coherent content. Furthermore, information can be regarded as 'a measure of one's freedom of choice when one selects a message'.[501] The greater the quantity of information presented, especially that from sources external to the sender, the greater the allowance for such a freedom of choice, which may result in seemingly ineffective communication. This potential for discrepancies relates to the concept of semantic noise and its negation of transparent communication, which can be discussed in relation to a non-narrative or non-signifying element present in an otherwise coherent work. Weaver claims that

> 'if noise is introduced (in an act of communication), then the received message contains certain distortions, certain errors, certain extraneous material, that would certainly lead one to say that the received message exhibits, because of the effects of the noise, an increased uncertainty'.[502]

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic933672.files/Weaver%20Recent%20Contributions%20to%20the%20Mathematical%20Theory%20of%20Communication>.
[497] Weaver.
[498] Weaver.
[499] Weaver.
[500] Weaver.
[501] Weaver.
[502] Weaver.

Furthermore, 'semantic noise' imposes 'into the signal the perturbations or distortions of meaning which are not intended by the source but which inescapably affect the destination'.[503] As a result, in order to carry out wholly effective communicative acts, or for a received message to deliver the sender's direct intentions, one must separate the purposeful information from the noise. This, however, can be understood as a theoretical rather than a practical solution. Most communication occurs in the presence of varying degrees of noise, which can be regarded as decidedly increased in relation to the more ambiguous nature of visual information as opposed to the more clearly defined constraints of spoken and written language. In these cases, semantic noise can be viewed as inseparable from, yet irreconcilable with, intended information, therefore introducing some degree of chance and variability to the interpretations of the viewer.

6.3 Hermeneutics

Alternative and complementary to linguistic and communication-based theories that have been developed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we can consider the practice of hermeneutics as serving the need to derive meaning in society. Historically, forms of understanding facilitated by the reception and interpretation of texts can be discussed through this field. Here, the focus is not on each individual element and its separate components, but on more general trends and conditions. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term 'hermeneutics' was used to designate 'a theory of textual interpretation', which acted as a generic set of interpretive practices for a given situation.[504] This system refers to a method that is based on a predefined actions rather than individual situations.

During the 1920s, Martin Heidegger regarded hermeneutics in terms of meaning-making processes, or, as an 'investigation of the basic structures of (…) existence'.[505] At this stage in the historical development of hermeneutics, this kind of method-based form of interpretation was confined to the notion that 'to understand anything at all, we must already find ourselves "in" the world "along with" that which is to be understood'.[506] Taking this into account, yet seeking to reject aspects of a somewhat rigid and therefore limiting theory, Hans-Georg Gadamer refers to a philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer's theory rejects a strict set of rules regarding the development of understanding, and he does not view objects or individuals as uninvolved subjects for simple observation.[507] For Gadamer, there can be 'no absolute "objective" interpretation of a text, work (of) art, or (…) whole culture'.[508] This includes interpretive methods based on reason, appeal to intent or 'cultural reconstruction'.[509] Equally, there can be no subjective consensus by which experience is wholly verified. Gadamer does not

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[503] Weaver.

[504] J. Malpas 2009, 'Hans-Georg Gadamer', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* viewed 27 July 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer>.

[505] Malpas.

[506] Malpas.

[507] H. Gadamer trans. R. Coltman 2000, *The Beginning of Philosophy,* The Continuum Publishing Company, New York.

[508] A. Harrison-Barbet (ed.), *Philosophical Connections: Gadamer,* viewed 8 June 2012, <http://www.philosophos.com/philosophical_connections/profile_109.html>.

[509] Harrison-Barbet.

completely disregard method, but stresses its limitations, and therefore seeks to emphasise 'understanding as a dialogic, practical, situated activity'.[510] There can be no fixed rule by which understanding is obtained, but, in seeking to achieve this task, a subject must refer to specific modes of experience where they do not assume the role of an observer, but an active participant in the derivation of meaning.

6.4 The fold

Physical engagements and alterations that can be made to an artwork by a viewer or participant call to mind the conceptual implications of the fold outlined by German mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and later engaged by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in his text *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque,* 1993. For Deleuze, experiencing the Baroque was experiencing the fold, in relation to changed physicality, conceptual doubling or curving, altered perspective and forms of subjectivity. In the translator's foreword to this text, Tom Conley provides a list of some examples that may constitute things folded within and beyond this period. These include

> 'draperies, tresses, tessellated fabrics, ornate costumes; dermal surfaces of the body (…); domestic architecture that bends upper and lower levels together (…); novels that invaginate their narratives or develop infinite possibilities of serial form; harmonics that orchestrate vastly different rhythms and tempos; (…) (and) styles and iconographies of painting that hide shapely figures in ruffles and billows of fabric, or that lead the eye to confuse different orders of space and surface'.[511]

Under the notion of the fold in contemporary aesthetics, any single unit can be regarded as being comprised of folds of time and space. The world itself can be regarded as existing in a state of perpetual movement or becoming, brought about through the existence of an infinite series of folds. Furthermore, as processes of folding are able to turn elements of the outside inside, this concept also conveys aspects of subjectivity. Related self-reflective activities may require reinvented or new folds in order to be carried out in changed external circumstances. We can conceive of the fold in general, both in a physical and conceptual sense, as disruptive to linear ordering or narrative models. This is because it does not proceed in a straightforward manner; it involves redirection, doubling, concealment and reflection, all of which may act to deter ordered, linear progression. When information is not set out in a defined, sequential manner, the viewer may attempt to undertake additional roles of unfolding or discovery. While Leibniz' account of the fold introduces one theoretical approach that may encompass non-narrative works, it is not ultimately useful in accounting for the disruptions brought about in artists' books. The fold describes an instance whereby something is folding over on itself, concealing and overlapping. This is different to a blank area, blind spot, gap or nonsense space within an artist's books, which is a disruption of the real rather than the symbolic.

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[510] Malpas.

[511] T. Conley in G. Deleuse trans. T. Conley 1993, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque,* The Athlone Press Ltd, London, pp xi – xii.

6.5 Semiotic theory

The notion of a disrupted or redirected logic or narrative, and the potential role of the viewer, can also be seen as a subject for consideration within some accounts of semiotic theory. Visual works need not only be considered in terms of their general, meaningful implications, but can be broken down into separate signifying elements and discussed in terms of semiotics. This is not a purely observational or uninvolved act on behalf of the viewer, as the interpretive processes of decoding and linking individual elements become central to the attainment of meaning. An overall work can be considered in terms of a breakdown of individual elements that are contained within the whole, and that can create coherence if placed in a logical sequence or composition. American philosopher Gary Shapiro discusses these elements in terms of semiotic theory, referring to the interpreting of signs, either knowingly or by habit, as an attempt to perceive something intelligible.[512] Attempting to read a series of signs reflects a kind of openness in terms of meaning, as the viewer must individually interpret each element and its relationships to other elements. This openness refers to further reading, rather than its disruption. However, reading and understanding can only be sustained if each sign can be regarded as meaningful in its broader context.

6.5.1 Bal and visual meaning

As previously mentioned in Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology*, Mieke Bal is an example of a semiotician who places any purposeful or incidental marks within a visual work into the realm of meaning, therefore eliminating spaces of indeterminacy or conflict. This chapter, however, will suggest ways in which this approach may be considered problematic. Bal argues that even an apparently 'non-narrative' and 'meaningless' blot can be considered as 'subsemiotic'.[513] The term 'subsemiotic' refers to an element within a work that has the potential to become semiotic, if it is considered as such.[514] In this system, even a seemingly ambiguous or non-signifying aspect can be prescribed with some degree of meaning. Every element of a composition under Bal's system is regarded as potentially meaningful, rather than potentially disruptive. Each aspect can therefore offer additional or entirely new information or implications to a scene of other more readily interpretable signs, but not accommodate a visual disruption to meaning itself.

Bal demonstrates how a semiotic analysis can be applied to visual works through a critique of French-American artist Louise Bourgeois' sculptural 'spiders'. Bourgeois' practice is one is located in contemporary culture. For Bal, present culture is saturated in narrativity.[515] Audiences seek sequential or meaningful information, and may play a role in the organisation of individual visual, textual or spoken cues. Bal investigates how visual works, such as those

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[512] Shapiro.

[513] M. Bal 1996, 'Semiotic Elements in Academic Practices', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 22. No. 3, pg. 566

[514] Bal.

[515] M. Bal, 1999, 'Narrative inside out: Louise Bourgeois' Spider as Theoretical Object', *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Oxford University Press.

created by Bourgeois, which seemingly oppose linear narrative, are capable of forming stories and meaning.[516]
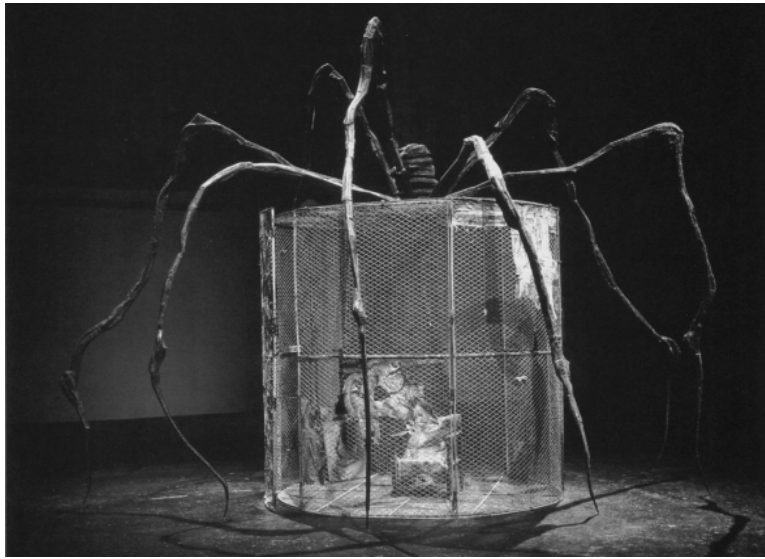
Fig. 52

Bal considers works such as Bourgeois' *Spider*, 1997 (fig. 52) in terms of their individual signifiers and the narratives they have the potential to create. In works such as this, the audience draws on stories or narratives constructed by memory and occasionally, subsequent forms of imagination. Bal states that 'memories are found objects that we routinely integrate into narrative frames derived from the cultural stock available to us'.[517] This refers to the human tendency of ordering; of attempting to forge links between past experiences or knowledge and events or objects currently at hand. The process of trying to link individual objects or signs within a single work can be considered a condition of subjectivity, as it refers to a search for logic or meaning; to something required to navigate our lives, regardless of the specific narrative or the specific culture. Although this process does not describe the notion of conventional narrative, it still speaks of attempts to forge meaningful ideas or sequences.

Alternatively, if Bal's claims of 'subsemiotic' elements within the work are rejected, *Spider* could be read in terms of narrative resistance. Bal's system represents a highly inclusive model of potential narrative or meaning and in doing so, it provides grounds for debate. For example, the overall form of *Spider* encourages viewers to circle the work, therefore encountering issues of temporality as the whole work cannot be taken in at once. Even so, this is not an example of fixed temporal experience. There is no clearly defined beginning or end, and as a result, the viewer is met with an ambiguous sequence. The actual presence of intended sequence or progression itself can be questioned here, as order may only be created by the audience's own viewing processes. This can then be regarded as an imposed or even artificial order; it cannot be experienced as constant between individual subjects. Furthermore, the work does not adhere to conventional methods of organising a visual narrative in space. It is not a unified, two-dimensional image or a singular sculpture. Even

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[516] Bal.
[517] Bal, pg. 110.

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in terms of an installation work, the individual objects incorporated do not present as immediately or explicitly relatable. In addition to the large spider sculpture, there is also a wire framework and smaller images and objects that imply the presence of a personal collection or documentation. The individual aspects are seemingly, yet not necessarily, related to each other.

It must also be noted that *Spider* is a large-scale work, which is specific to this form of experiencing in that it requires time and sequence to view it entirely, yet it does not encourage a clearly defined order for viewing. In addition to its sculptural qualities, the scale of the work encourages multifaceted modes of viewing outside of conventional sequence, such as self-paced and self-directed exploration. As such, the audience may become fixed on some areas while neglecting others and similarly, some areas may appear relatable while others seem quite abstract. This lack of consistent form and fixed order may obscure the presence and function of narrative, suggesting the resistance of a comprehensive overall reading.

6.5.2 Elkin's critique of Bal

James Elkins reinforces such a counterpoint to Bal's claims of the ability to include seemingly illegible marks into an immediate or even potential realm of meaning.[518] He questions the practice of readily working even the least promising marks into a meaningful frame; whether it is an implication, partial or whole narrative.[519] Under Elkins' account, not all purposeful or incidental components need to be rendered coherent in order to investigate potential meaning within a work. Rather than explaining the presence of marks by interpreting them as signs, Elkins embraces the difficulties associated with unexplained elements and therefore essentially incoherent pictorial compositions. His view is that the longer we can resist the urge to locate or construct narrative meaning at every turn, the more we are able to come to know the picture itself and our own desires.[520] By hastily assigning meaning to every mark, the viewer may pass over the essential difficulty of the image, and attain a form of mastery over it. They may do so upon abandoning forms of desire, which sustain an interest in and discovery of the image. This process may reflect not only on the work, but the viewing individual. A sense of lack or disruption reveals a simultaneous sense of desire that can be highly varied between subjects. The nonlinear or disrupted work may provide grounds for the self-examination of the individual, an experience that is not readily implied by a wholly conclusive work.

6.6 Desire, trauma and lack

Not all theories look at ambiguity or spaces of indeterminacy in terms of the potentially positive notion of desire. These absent or disruptive signs can, alternatively, be seen as withholding meaning, which may bring about traumatic longing. Italian semiotician and cultural theorist Teresa de Lauretis addresses ambiguous signs that potentially lie outside the realm of meaning by discussing

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[518] J. Elkins 1996, 'What Do We Want Pictures to Be? Reply to Mieke Bal', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 590 - 602.
[519] Elkins.
[520] Elkins, pg. 591.

Roland Barthes' notion of uncertain signs.[521] This notion refers to signifiers that are 'floating' and must in some way be fixed by narrative structuring in order to avoid the 'traumatic suspension of meaning'.[522] Lauretis describes the function of narrative in this process in terms of reaffirming 'the stable, familiar ground of referential meaning'.[523] Incomplete or illogical aspects within a singular work may act to contest this, as they cannot be grounded or fixed within a coherent string of events. As a result, the viewer or reader experiences a lack, or certain kind of trauma in the presence of a narrative that is implied but not fulfilled.

6.6.1 Sign distortions

As discussed above, a narrative work implies a kind of totality, which, if not fulfilled, can bring about distortion in the object and subsequent frustration in the subject. Related to this idea, French linguist Charles Bally identifies the occurrence of 'sign distortions' that arise within a language when the 'linear (logical) order [of signs] is disturbed'.[524] He uses the term 'dystaxie' (dystaxy) to refer to such occurrences which can occur if the sign becomes 'fractured, (a process whereby) its signified is distributed among several signifiers separated from each other, none of which can be understood by itself'.[525] This occurrence refers to a disruption between parts of the sign, but can also be likened to instances staged in narrative sequence in general. For example, when referring to a work where units make sense within their given sequence, but not necessarily when considered in isolation.

When a sign can no longer be located in its logical place or order, it can be said to have undergone distortion. 'Because (this process) is based on a relation, often a distant one, and because it mobilises a sort of implicit trust in one's intellective memory, distortion is a purely logical phenomenon, and as such, it constantly substitutes meaning for the pure and simple facsimile of narrated events'.[526] Distortion can also be brought about by means of suspense, which performs a 'communicative function' by keeping the reader or viewer engaged in an open sequence.[527] 'Suspense is the intelligible made problematic; by representing order in its fragility, it achieves the very idea of language'.[528] The reader or viewer remains engaged in a suspenseful sequence due to a desire and the subsequent search for points of meaning that are being withheld. For the duration of the work, the indication of logical development and conclusion acts as a kind of drive for the forward progression of reading or viewing. This indication, however, may not always be fulfilled upon the completion of the abovementioned acts and, in these cases, the presence of desire recognises a seemingly unresolvable lack.

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[521] T. de Lauretis 2008, 'Nightwood and the 'Terror of Uncertain Signs'', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 34, No. S2, The University of Chicago Press, USA, pp. S117 - S129.
[522] de Lauretis, pg. 117.
[523] de Lauretis, pg. 117.
[524] R. Barthes & L. Duisit 1975, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', *New Literary History,* vol. 6, no. 2, pg. 266.
[525] Barthes & Duisit, pg. 266.
[526] Barthes & Duisit, pg. 267.
[527] Barthes & Duisit, pg. 267.
[528] Barthes & Duisit, pg. 268.

6.6.2 The functions of the psyche

The significance of forming a means of understanding, locating meaning or tracing a coherent system of ideas, and thus eliminating a sense of lack, can be considered in relation to resultant experience. When seeking clarity and logic, the subject sets out to arrive at an end or resolution, thus fulfilling a need or desire for interpretation. This need, however, can only be partially fulfilled, as the subject cannot arrive at a resolution that can be sustained indefinitely. In relation to this notion, Slavoj Žižek refers to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, focusing on the exploration of human experience in terms of the psyche and its Real, Imaginary and Symbolic functions.[529] In this theory, the Real denotes 'that which resists representation'; it precedes and exists apart from methods of coherence and is therefore unable to be symbolised.[530] The Imaginary refers to the 'internalised image of (the) ideal, whole, self and is situated around the notion of (imaginary) coherence rather than fragmentation'.[531]

When referring to modes of communication that are carried out through spoken, written or visual language however, it is the Symbolic function of the psyche that carries out a key role. The notions of language and signs are related to the Symbolic, which can be seen as a space of meaning that is nonetheless incomplete due to the continuous need for further interpretation. This approaches the notion of limitations and impossibility, in terms of the subject coming to know all that exists external to its own being. The need for further interpretation is constantly revisited upon the experience of language or signs that have not been previously encountered. The subject must constantly reassess the extent of their own understanding; they are in fact, the gap in the text. This is central to why the fold, hermeneutic and semiotic theories are not entirely applicable to the consideration of non-narrative artists' books, and must instead be discussed in order to establish the validity of alternate and non-narrative modes of interpretation in general. Within artists' books a disruption to the real, not symbolic, occurs.

6.6.3 Semanalysis

In an attempt to investigate the processes and effects of reading signs in relation to the psyche, Julia Kristeva explores external sign systems in conversation with elements of the human psyche, and outlines a kind of hybridity between semiotics and psychoanalysis. She refers to this hybrid field of enquiry as 'semanalysis'.[532] Here, that which is considered semiotic is associated with a 'pre-linguistic phase', a stage that Lacan regards as occurring before subjectivity.[533] The human subject receives sensory information before they have the capacity to carry out acts of definition and categorisation related to it. Kristeva describes a function of semiotic processes as preparing the pre-lingual

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[529] S. Žižek 2007, *How to Read Lacan,* W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York.
[530] A. Loos 2002, *Symbolic, Real, Imaginary,* The University of Chicago, viewed 8 June 2012, <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/symbolicrealimaginary.htm>.
[531] Loos.
[532] J. Kristeva ed. L. S. Roudiez trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine & L. S. Roudiez 1980, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* Columbia University Press, New York, pg. 18.
[533] L. A. Hitchcock 2008, *Theory for Classics: A Student's Guide,* Routledge, New York/London, pg. 152.

subject for an entry into signification, the Symbolic, which she describes as an 'inevitable' attribute of meaning.[534] This coincides with the development of language as a meaning-making process in relation to external experience, as well as the subsequent communicability of ideas and concepts. In Kristeva's account of semanalysis, the semiotic cannot be 'entirely constrained' by the symbolic; 'it perpetually infiltrates the symbolic construction of meaning'.[535] A semanalytic approach not only focuses on Symbolic or signifying processes by which texts construct meaning, but also what is present that acts to 'resist' or 'undermine' this process.[536] In doing so, this system acknowledges that there are complications that exist within the constraints of language and comprehension, therefore implying the impossibility of sustained coherence.

6.6.4 Desire

Upon recognising the impossibility of sustained coherence, methods for responding to cases of displacement or incoherence can be investigated. For Lacan, areas of incomplete or absent meaning within a narrative structure are responded to by desire. As briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, desire relies on an absence, and is considered as a kind of driving force that acts to keep viewers involved in the work as they seek to attain or deduce information that will eliminate blank spaces or ambiguity.[537] This concept of desire can be linked to Kantian aesthetics, through a sustained free play of imagination and understanding. The viewing subject routinely places external stimuli into a system of signification, adhering to processes of language and comprehension. When encountering a potentially illogical or ambiguous object or sign, integrating it into a coherent whole would eliminate desire, at least for a while. It is only when one submits themselves to this object as it appears that they can sustain the desire to interpret.[538] This can be viewed as a necessary condition of existence, as the consideration of an object or experience as wholly coherent would eliminate the need for communication and ongoing processes of signification. Analogous to this, Žižek states that 'Materialism means that the reality I see is never 'whole' – not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it'.[539] The corollary of this blind spot is the nonsense space or gap that generates the subject's desire for completion. The completion of the object means for the subject his or her own completion, even if this is an impossible meeting with the Real. The completion would mean the death of the subject of desire.

6.6.5 Dream sequences

With reference to the functions of the psyche, nonlinear progressions that are capable of generating and sustaining forms of desire can be likened to those of dream sequences. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sigmund Freud explored the significance of the dream and other forms of unconscious workings through his contributions to the field of

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[534] Kristeva, pg. 134.
[535] Hitchcock, pg. 152.
[536] Hitchcock, pg. 152.
[537] T. McGowan 2007, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan,* State University of New York Press, Albany.
[538] McGowan.
[539] S. Žižek 2006, *The Parallax View,* MIT Press, Cambridge, pg. 17.

psychoanalysis.[540] Initially, Freud regarded the unconscious, the area of the psyche where all basic instincts and dream experiences manifest themselves, as a 'hypnoid' state of mind that is a continuation of consciousness.[541] After 1895, however, he started writing on a revised theory. At this point, he began to consider the unconscious as 'dynamically repressed from consciousness'.[542] In either account, consciousness and unconsciousness occur simultaneously from shared sources. Elements from both states can filter through to the other, but it is the workings of the unconscious that pose a greater means for discussion in relation to unpredictable sequence and absences in signification.

When recognised, even partially, in a conscious state, elements of the unconscious can undergo representative processes such as those related to art practice. Freud believed that art could stir past experiences, which if given 'traumatic meaning' could lead to their repression.[543] In other instances, this repression could be lifted through artistic practice, and the human psyche analysed. For either purpose or effect, Freud saw the artist as a particularly neurotic subject. This is largely because, although Freud considered the repression of trauma, anxieties and ambitious or erotic fantasies as general human conditions, he also implied that artists seek the particular relief of making these experiences concrete through their material practice.

Freud regards the translation of aspects of dream experience into art objects as a form of 'secondary revision'.[544] This form of revision refers to a process whereby the 'sleeping hallucination' is converted into a memory of the dream, where some gaps or areas of nonsense may be done away with in favour of presenting the experience as some form of coherent whole.[545] Freud describes this process as somehow disguising the primary development of the sleeping hallucination by means of 'condensation, displacement, pictorial arrangement and secondary revision', all of which are governed by the experience of an external, conscious reality.[546] Within this approach, a linear translation from unconscious experience to conscious representation is unable to occur, because the experience has already been subjected to some form of conscious rationalisation. Works reflecting this process may attempt to engage viewers in a visual discussion of personal, disjointed and unconscious experiences. In doing so, they refer to the shared experience of dreaming in its individual and highly varied occurrences.

6.6.6 The uncanny

Unconscious experiences and works derived from these can be seen as relating to the 'uncanny', which Freud refers to as a kind of effect that we can get from art.[547] The uncanny describes an instance that presents itself as simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. The subject may experience dissonance between what

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[540] J. Sayers 2007, *Freud's Art: Psychoanalysis Retold,* Routledge, London/New York, pg. 16.
[541] Sayers, pg. 10.
[542] Sayers, pg. 10.
[543] Sayers, pg. 10.
[544] Sayers, pg. 16.
[545] Sayers, pg. 16.
[546] Sayers, pg. 16.
[547] A. Woodward 2010, Lecture Notes: Psychoanalytic Theory 1 & 2, lectures from HUSO 2252, RMIT, Melbourne, 22 March & 29 March 2010.

is known and what appears strange. This experience does not speak of narrative ordering and subsequent understanding, but can appear unsettling or jarring. The uncanny representations that relate to Freudian theory, shown particularly through works of Surrealism, generally point the viewer in a direction other than immediate conscious experience – toward reflective representations of the unconscious. Although similar subject matter may be identified in some artist's books, this is not the primary focus of this dissertation. The inclusion of other modes of logical or linear disruption, such as visual works of Surrealism however, present a basis for alternate functions of visual works in relation to human experience, other than that of communicating a narrative and in this way, can be considered relevant to this dissertation. The nonlinear or fragmented artists' books to be discussed in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative artists' books* present another form of non-narrative practice, where a disruption in a real space from a material object occurs. This form of disruption, however different, has its artistic roots in early twentieth century avant-garde practices.

6.6.7 Surrealism

Surrealism designates a twentieth century movement concerned with giving expression to the realm of dreams, a process that forms a dialogue and certain convergence between the human conscious and unconscious.[548] Through this implied dialogue, the products of this movement approach a kind of language of the unconscious. French Surrealist and poet Andre Breton, a key instigator and contributor to the Surrealist movement, described the visual and written products of Surrealist activity as being 'only so many springboards for the mind of the listener'.[549] This implies a key role for the individual and varied interpretation of multiple subjects. Janet Sayers further discusses the intentions of Surrealism through a Lacanian frame, with particular attention to its methods of attempting to channel the functioning of thought, absent of organisation, convention or moral.[550] Artistic by-products of the psyche, produced through Surrealist activity, could engage other human subjects in a seductive manner, inviting them to lose themselves 'in identification with what (the artist) show(s) us to desire and see'.[551]

The ambiguity involved with depicting something as immediately illogical as dreamlike sequences or environments can lead the viewer to identify, through areas of the representation, aspects of their own experience. Consequently, the viewer may become more engaged with the work upon searching for further elements of familiarity or personal narrative, which is a process that occurs outside of more conventional modes of viewing or interpretation. Even so, the non-narrative qualities generally seen in Surrealist works differ from the insertion of a disruptive gap. Surrealist works often refer to the unconscious, which may contain a sense of unfamiliarity that is nonetheless consistent across the work, therefore introducing some simultaneous sense of familiarity. A

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[548] M. A. Caws (ed.) 2004, *Surrealism*, Phaidon Press Ltd, London/New York.
[549] A. Breton in M. A. Caws (ed.) 2004, *Surrealism*, Phaidon Press Ltd, London/New York, pg. 14.
[550] Sayers.
[551] Sayers, pg. 81.

nonsense space, however, is not consistent with the overall work and as such, can prove jarring for a viewer.

Fig. 53

French Surrealist Yves Tanguy demonstrates a simultaneous sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity in his works through the depiction of environments made up of unusual or ambiguous elements. Tanguy was interested in the depiction of dreamlike imagery through his painted works, such as *The Satin Tuning Fork,* 1940 (fig. 53). This work depicts an imaginary landscape comprised of indiscernible objects and figures. [552] The shapes, colours, pictorial arrangements and title of the work contain a sense of familiarity due to the recognisable individual concepts, figure-like objects and horizon line, yet such logical components appear strange and incoherent in their given context. The horizon is that of a non-existent landscape, and the figures do not wholly reflect traditional conceptions of humans, animals or functional inanimate objects. Works such as these do not lend themselves directly to linear interpretation, but they provide a kind of platform for the recollection of memories or the imagination of scenarios beyond those that are presented.

Most Surrealist work does not conform to narrative conventions, but unlike artists' books, there is generally no single disruptive element that obstructs overall coherence. Although dream experiences are highly varied between subjects, they may share similar yet largely indiscernible characteristics. Viewers draw on elements that are recognisable, or even vaguely reminiscent of their own experiences. From such cues, viewers make attempts to locate individual elements and their imagined function or significance into a

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[552] 'Yves Tanguy: The Satin Tuning Fork' 2006, *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History,* The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, viewed 25 September 2011, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1999.363.80>.

meaningful context. As such, these works potentially encourage an imaginative journey beyond sublimated reality, rather than disrupt that reality in the present. Any investigation put forward towards forms of unconscious activity provides a basis for potential meaning outside that of linear narratives to be considered, but may not offer the same disruptive force as objects in reality.

Fig. 54

The Son of Man, 1964 (fig. 54) by Belgian Surrealist René Magritte is another example of a work that departs from the intentions of logical narrative. Magritte juxtaposes two incompatible objects, a man and an apple, as if somehow equivalent as two components of the same existence. In this painting a man is depicted standing upright, his body appears stiff and his hands are partially clenched. He is dressed in a clean and well-kept black suit and a matching bowler's hat. Directly in front of the man's face is a green apple. He is not holding it, it is not growing from a tree or resting on anything and there are no signs of strain or distortion in the man's neck, chin or cheeks to suggest that he is biting it. The apple appears to be suspended in the air in front of the face, or else, it appears to be the face itself. The viewer recognises this as an impossibility, this is not a face, and therefore it must be concealing something. The apple appears larger than a regular apple, which reinforces the notion of intentional concealment over any natural function. Magritte describes the presence of the apple in the composition as serving to conceal 'the visible but hidden, the face of the person'.[553] He then explains that 'there is an interest in that which is hidden and which the visible does not show us'; this can act as a form of conflict, 'between the visible that is hidden and the visible that is present'.[554] This visible but hidden element is analogous to artists' books that reveal a disruptive gap, but not to other parts of Surrealism.

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[553] R. Magritte in 'Magritte's Later Years Gallery', *Matteson Art,* viewed 11 March 2012,
<http://www.mattesonart.com/1961-1967-later-years.aspx?skin>.
[554] Magritte.

As previously stated, the visual components within this work are recognisable when isolated; the man, presumably the artist himself, and the apple. Randa Dubnick states that 'using only familiar objects and traditional perspective, (Magritte) arbitrarily juxtaposes unlike objects'.[555] The use of recognisable imagery in an unconventional manner is likely to stir any number of potential readings amongst viewers. For example, the title *The Son of Man* coupled with the image of an apple may seem to allude to aspects of the biblical story of Adam as the first man and the act that induces him into sin, although the artist does not overtly detail this. Even if this painting was considered a representation of this or any other story, the work still remains about the hidden aspect, the area that cannot be seen and therefore properly comprehended by a viewer. There is a persistent sense of lack, brought about by implied absence, which cannot be overcome. Once again, this particular Surrealist work, unlike Surrealism in general, refers to similar material and conceptual concerns as some of the artists' books in question.

6.6.8 Dada

Where the Surrealists drew on the internal influence of dreams and aspects of psychoanalytic theory for inspiration, the Dadaists can be seen as reacting to external influences. Dadaism in general saw not only an acceptance of incomplete or illogical works, but also the active intention to produce them. Beginning in Zurich during World I, the Dada movement responded to a kind of societal 'logic' at the time.[556] Participants involved with this movement revolted against the shared logic they saw as resulting in the horror and carnage associated with the war. Amongst the widespread conflict, conventional artistic modes of representation were disregarded by the Dadaists on the grounds of being trivial or even futile. Traditional depictions of aristocracy and power were abandoned, reflecting attitudes in society at the time. Similarly, depictions of religion, faith or simple everyday narratives could not have held the same significance in a society facing the reality of continuous uncertainty and turmoil. Instead, the Dadaists frequently utilised text and collage to present works that may appear essentially illogical, yet present themselves as disparate fragments that may be viewed as separate components of a perceivable society. The Dadaist nonsense was political and therefore acquired meaning as a political critique, just as Surrealism in general gained some form of meaning as a continuation from unconscious workings. While such examples disrupt conventional visual narration, they still show some sense of consistency that differs from a disruptive gap in an artist's book.

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[555] R. Dubnick 1980, 'Metaphor and Metonymy in the Paintings of René Magritte', *Contemporary Literature,* Vol. 21, No. 3, pg. 409.

[556] 'Dada', *Tate Collection Glossary,* viewed 20 October 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=81>.

Fig. 55

One example associated with Dadaism is Hannah Hoch's *Weltrevolution,* 1920 (fig. 55). In this work, Hoch addresses the hypocrisy and corrupt moral 'of the Weimar Republic through techniques of disorientation, negation and disjunction'.[557]   This collage combines newspaper clippings and other found images reflecting ambiguous figures, machines, texts, military subjects, animals and severed limbs. In this way, the work reveals inherent ties to society both conceptually and through the use of found materials. Through these ambiguous and fragmented references, the work engages with its audience in a critical way, forming 'a decisive rupture with traditional bourgeois modes of expression'.[558]

Fig. 56

A disruption to accepted logic or convention can also be witnessed in Marcel Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages,* 1913 – 14 (fig. 56). Duchamp's work is based on the following premise: 'If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane twisting as it pleases, (it) creates a new image of the unit of length'.[559] Duchamp claims to have followed

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[557] 'Weltrevolution', *The Met Museum Online,* viewed 20 October 2011,
<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collection/search-the-collections/190016952>.
[558] 'Weltrevolution'.
[559] M. Duchamp, *3 Standard Stoppages,* The Museum of Modern Art, viewed 14 September 2012,
<http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78990>.

this method, where three one meter length strings were dropped from a height of one meter onto three canvases. The strings were then adhered to the canvases, which were cut to the shape of the arbitrary curves that were formed. This process acts to create 'new units of measure that retain the length of the meter but undermine its rational basis'.[560] Duchamp stated that that 'in itself (*3 Standard Stoppages*) was not an important work of art, but for me it opened the way – the way to escape from those traditional methods of expression long associated with art'.[561] It does this by approaching a certain convention, or absolute standard, the meter, as a seemingly fixed unit of measurement.

Moreover, in *3 Standard Stoppages* Duchamp undermines his own protocol. This action is unacknowledged by records of verbal or written statements, yet remains visibly evident. Upon close inspection of the work, it can be revealed that the path of the fallen string was not entirely random, as it can be seen sewn through two anchor points at its ends.[562] Due to this, the piece of string had to already have been designated a beginning and end point, before it was released. In addition to these prescribed aspects of composition, the immediately concealed sections of the string that are located behind the canvas add length and as such, the strings were, in the first place, longer than one meter. In this instance, the concrete concept put forward is undermined by its changed application. Absent of resolution or narrative convention, works such as this use modes of visual and thematic disruption to appeal to a society in a similar state of unrest.

6.5.9 The neo-avant-garde

The Surrealist and Dadaist works discussed in this chapter can be viewed as part of the historical avant-garde. The emergence of artists' books in the 1960s however, coincides with neo-avant-garde practices. The neo-avant-garde points to a breakdown of narrative in visual culture surrounding the widespread expansion of artists' book practices. American art critic and historian Hal Foster discusses the emergence of the neo-avant-garde in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century,* 1996. Foster asserts that the neo-avant-garde activates the intentions of the historical avant-garde – it brings out the significance of its historical counterpart. For Foster, the neo-avant-garde emerged as a 'traumatic encounter' and subsequent return of the Real.[563] He states that

> 'avant-garde work is never historically effective of fully significant in its initial moments. It cannot be because it is traumatic – a hole in the symbolic order of its time that is not prepared for it, that cannot receive it, at least not immediately, at least not without structural change'.[564]

[560] *3 Standard Stoppages,* 2006, The Museum of Modern Art, viewed 14 September 2012,
<http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78990>.
[561] M. Duchamp in R. Shearer and S. Gould 1999, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages,* More Truly a "Stoppage" (An Invisible Mending) Than We Ever Realized', *tout-fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal,* Issue 1, Vol. 1, viewed 14 September 2012,
<http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_1/News/stoppages.html>.
[562] Shearer and Gould.
[563] H. Foster 1996, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century,* The MIT Press, Cambridge/London.
[564] Foster, pg. 29.

Here, the emergence of the neo-avant-garde in the 1960s represents the return of repressed trauma.

Foster discusses the work of American artist Andy Warhol, in particular, his *Death in America* series from the 1960s. this series included works such as *White Burning Car III, Suicide, Electric Chair, Green Car Crash* and *Ambulance Disaster,* 1963. Each of these images addressed traumatic subject matter – death, violence, disfiguration – but this is not the kind of trauma Foster locates in the works. As Warhol himself intended, the repetition of a traumatic image causes it to lose its significance and the viewer to become accustomed to the subject to some degree. Warhol stated that 'when you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect'.[565] Foster recognises this as a Freudian function of repetition: 'to repeat a traumatic event (in actions, in dreams, in images) in order to integrate it into a psychic economy, a symbolic order', however, he also locates the production of a kind of trauma in Warhol's works.[566] Foster asserts that

> 'the Warhol repetitions not only *re*produce traumatic effects; they also *produce* them. Somehow in these repetitions, then, several contradictory things occur at the same time: a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect *and* a producing of it'.[567]

The production of trauma in these works, for Foster, does not occur in the original trauma of the subject matter, but in the technical inconsistencies formed during the work's production.

Fig. 57

Foster discusses Warhol's *Ambulance Disaster,* 1963 (fig. 57) as a specific example that demonstrates the simultaneous defense and production of trauma that is evident in some works of art. He states that

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[565] A. Warhol in H. Foster 1996, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century,* The MIT Press, Cambridge/London, pg. 131.
[566] Foster, pg. 131.
[567] Foster, pg. 132.

'the real, Lacan puns, is *trou*matic, and I noted that the tear in *Ambulance Disaster* is such a hole (*trou*) for me, though what loss is figured there I cannot say. Through these pokes or pops we seem to almost touch the real, which the repetition of the images at once distances and rushes towards us'.[568]

This hole can refer to a blot caused by a tear in the screen the image was printed with, a smear, a gap in the image or any other indiscernible aspect brought about through the technical processes involved in the reproduction of the image. Foster discusses this aspect of trauma in terms of Barthes' 'punctum': an element that stands out from the narrative of the work and 'pricks' the viewer.[569] This notion was briefly outlined in the Literature Review, and will be further discussed later in this chapter. It should be noted, that this dissertation does not seek to conduct a survey of avant-garde practices, nor does it seek to suggest that artists' books are specifically a neo-avant-garde development. The inclusion of Foster's theory here outlines parallel practices to artists' books, and points to an analogous breakdown of narrative and to aspects of trauma that can be brought about by visual works. It offers a possible explanation for the 'return' of artists' books at this time.

6.7 Disrupted narrative in art

Many of the artworks discussed throughout this chapter have brought about forms of disruption through the unlikely or unexpected composition of intelligible elements. Furthermore, the insertion of unknown elements can bring about similar disruptive effects. Austrian art historian E. H. Gombrich discusses seemingly foreign elements or undecidable intentions in terms of a kind of saturation of non-meaning. He suggests that an image cannot be interpreted or read if all of its components appear foreign. First, he identifies the impossibility of an entirely new or unrecognisable art practice. To demonstrate this, Gombrich refers to Ernst Kris, who states that 'art is not produced in an empty space' and 'no artist is independent of predecessors and models'.[570] Much less can a viewer act or perceive independently of their memories and knowledge. Gombrich refers to a 'psychology of perception', where we may identify our mental images as being 'composed of sense data derived from vision and from memories of touch and movement'.[571] It is not the role of the artist to erase this knowledge, but rather to present different degrees of perceivable cues to the viewer as a framework for interpretation.

Although the artist may seek 'to create things in their own right', the work must then undergo processes whereby it is matched to the existing visible world.[572] 'All culture and all communication depend on the interplay between expectation and observation'; elements within an artwork that meet a viewer's expectations, or 'mental set', are easily identified as representations of the existing world.[573] This is where an artwork may become divided between elements that fulfil expectation, and others that may be seen as an illusion. Once this illusion has

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[568] Foster, pg. 136.
[569] R. Barthes trans. R. Howard 1981, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Hill & Wang, New York.
[570] E. H. Gombrich 2002, *Art and Illusion: A study in the psychology of pictorial representation,* 6th edn, Phaidon Press Ltd, London/New York, pg. 25.
[571] Gombrich, pg. 13.
[572] Gomrich, pg. 99.
[573] Gombrich, pg. 53.

been learned, however, it may begin to feed into our expectations.[574] Gombrich further explains that an 'incomplete painting can arouse the beholder's imagination and project what is not there'.[575] This relies on both the presence of a gap within the image and the viewer's ability to fill it. Related to this process, the viewer's 'mental set' may refer to their ability or willingness to form projections on an incomplete or ambiguous visual work. In this way, 'reading an image' implies a process of 'testing it for its potentialities', discovering what may be inferred by the visual cues that are present.[576]

Works that are considered pictorial narratives may present visual cues that can readily be integrated into a narrative, and therefore meaningful, frame. The coherence of a work, or the seamless integration of individual cues involved with its viewing, can be disrupted by even one isolated element embedded in an image. Such works are closer to the artists' books to be discussed in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*, there is an illogical or disruptive element within the work that the viewer must then respond to. Once a disruptive element is brought to the viewer's attention, it cannot be overlooked. It must either present alternate considerations from the prominent storyline, or resist integration as a point of difference or even frustration.

Fig. 58

Narrative disruption within a single image can be seen in works such as German artist Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors,* 1533 (fig. 58). This work can be likened to the previously discussed Surrealist work *The Son of Man,* as it contains elements that are potentially contradictory or jarring within an otherwise conventional scene. This image initially appears to be a somewhat conventional depiction of two powerful men. The men, Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve, appear glorified; wealthy, knowledgeable and youthful.[577] They are depicted as well groomed and their material possessions shown refer to an

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[574] Gombrich.
[575] Gombrich, pg. 174.
[576] Gombrich, pg. 190.
[577] *The Ambassadors,* viewed 7 March 2012, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/hans-holbein-the-younger-the-ambassadors>.

interest and expertise in areas of culture, science, religion and general knowledge and discovery.[578] On closer inspection of this work however, the viewer is confronted with a strange stain in the foreground of the image that appears unnatural. This unusual element interrupts the coherence of the overall scene, as the viewer may struggle to perceive or interpret the intended function, its presence and the subsequent meaning that is put forward. When further examined, it can then be discovered that this is not just an incidental blur. When it is viewed from a certain point from the right side of the work, the stain forms the clear image of a skull. This image may act as a reminder of the men's mortality, indicating that despite their fortune and status, the men are still only human and therefore will eventually experience death.[579] This element is not only a visual disruption within the image, but also a conceptual one. Once realised, this skull acts as a constant reminder of an inevitable end, unable to be avoided by any degree of knowledge or wealth.

Although relying on different mediums and conceptual intentions, Postmodernism was also a period where narrative conventions were critiqued, and potentially reworked or done away with in favour of ambiguity or fragmentation. Jean-Francois Lyotard addresses the 'condition of knowledge' that is evident in a postmodern society, drawing particular attention to the questioning of narratives.[580] He discusses narrative knowledge as being comprised of both 'denotative statements' and knowing.[581] This knowing may account for how a society acts, communicates and understands. Lyotard states that 'narratives allow the society in which they are told, on one hand, to define its criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within it'.[582] In relation to a postmodern society, Lyotard forms a particular critique of 'grand' or 'metanarratives'.[583] James Smith describes Lyotard's use of these terms as referring to a modernist condition, to 'stories that not only tell a grand story but also claim to be able to legitimate or prove the story's claim by an appeal to universal reason'.[584] These narratives claim singular possibilities, and do not acknowledge difficulties, limitations or alternate endings.

While modernism sought to locate and present examples of universal reason as meaning-making processes related to historical occurrences, postmodernism in general rejected this in favour of alternate perception and partial or multiple solutions.[585] Such approaches reveal the intent to disrupt or alter forms of narrative. In a postmodern society where certain claims could no longer be singularly legitimated, Lyotard was critical about the validity of metanarratives.

[578] *The Ambassadors.*
[579] *The Ambassadors.*
[580] J. Lyotard trans. G. Bennington & B. Massumi 1979, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* University of Minnesota Press, USA pg. xxiii.
[581] Lyotard, pg. 18.
[582] Lyotard, pg. 20.
[583] A. Blunden (ed.) 2011, 'Grand Narrative', *Encyclopedia of Marxism: Glossary of Terms*, viewed 19 July 2011 <http://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/g/r.htm>.
[584] J. K. A. Smith 2006, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault to Church*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, pg. 65.
[585] T. Sherwood 2009, *Lyotard's Postmodern Critique of Metanarratives and the Proper Christian Response*, viewed 19 July 2011 <http://tomsherwood.wordpress.com/2009/07/20/lyotards-postmodern-critique-of-metanarratives-and-the-proper-christian-response/>.

Artists who were involved with Postmodernism derived alternate means of presenting ideas and concepts, and often practiced conversational methods of staging creative work. Here, the works formed may present themselves as more ambiguous, or open for individual interpretation.

Fig. 59

Works associated with postmodernity often involved fragmentation, repetition and temporality as central modes of establishing meaning. An example provided by American art theorist Douglas Crimp in his essay *Pictures,* 1979 is the work of American photographer Cindy Sherman, such as *Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978 (fig. 59). The work does appear to be a fragment, yet it does not act as a fragment of a seemingly perceivable whole.[586] Crimp states that the work's 'sense of narrative is one of its simultaneous presence and absence, a narrative ambience stated but not fulfilled'.[587] This describes a kind of reinvented visual narrativity, resulting in a departure from an emphasis on linear sequence generally found in films and, to some degree, even fragments thereof. *Untitled Film Still #21* is just one example of an extensive and varied collection of Sherman's 'film stills', however, this term is potentially misleading. An audience generally understands the term 'film still' as describing a screenshot taken from a film, therefore isolating a singular moment in a progression of moving images. This work, however, is not actually derived from any film or collection of sequential images; it is a photographic still created in isolation, not as part of a film as such. Even so, when viewing this work, spectators may hold the impression that they are looking at 'a female heroine from a movie (they) feel (they) must have seen'.[588] In this particular work, Sherman's character appears to be a young, career-orientated woman located in a large city. Her face shows some confusion, concern or apprehension, as if she is new to the city or the career she is undertaking.

A key aspect about *Untitled Film Still #21*, and Sherman's practice in general, that should be recognised is that 'Sherman herself played all of the roles or,

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[586] D. Crimp 1979, 'Pictures', *October*, Vol. 8, The MIT Press, pp. 75 - 88.
[587] Crimp, pg. 80.
[588] 'Untitled Film Still #21: Cindy Sherman', *MoMA Highlights,* The Museum of Modern Art, New York, pg. 295, viewed 14 September 2012, <http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=56618>.

more precisely, played all of the actresses playing all of the roles'.[589] We are not just witnessing a fiction, but the fictitious account of a separate implied fiction. This process recalls a society saturated in movie culture, where the expectations of the still as a component of the overall moving image becomes prominent. This suspended conceptual quality opens up an interpretive role for the viewer. A gap is created, thus turning the viewer into an active contributor in creating a perceived direction and conclusion for the work. This is one way in which a non-narrative artist's book may be responded to. The image may not exist as a part of a sequence yet, but it assumes the presence of an audience and therefore the potential for imagined sequence. This kind of work is largely open-ended; there is no certain conclusion or fact to be reached or learned by the viewer. Although resisting narrative conventions, Crimp's postmodern interpretation of photographic works focuses on the fragment or incomplete whole, thus serving as context for considering artists' books. This dissertation aims to address the issue of disruption through some form of internal blind spot or space of confusion or material disruption.

Fig. 60

Analogous to the form of disruption seen in Magritte's *The Son of Man* and Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors,* contemporary photographic work *Cats and Watermelons,* 1992 (fig. 60) by Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco introduces illogical elements into an otherwise coherent scene. *Cats and Watermelons* shows a pile of whole watermelons displayed in a supermarket, which the artist has placed tins of cat food on top of. Eleven watermelons towards the top of the pile have a single tin of cat food on them. The work was carried out in a regular supermarket, and then documented as a photograph. Here, both the presence of watermelons and cat food in the store can be considered logical, but their configuration within the work is not. The presence of the tins atop the fruit is unexpected and disrupted in the given context.

6.7.1 Studium and punctum

In the context of photography, references to unexpected or disruptive content can be found in Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida,* where he refers to the duality

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[589] 'Untitled Film Still #21: Cindy Sherman'.

between understanding and confusion within a single work in terms of the related concepts 'studium' and 'punctum'.[590] The 'studium' refers to the inherent narrative within the work that the viewer will consciously seek to explore.[591] This includes expressions, events and other elements that work together to form an overall idea or scene. The 'punctum' however, refers to the element that punctuates the scene. Barthes refers to this element as a detail that stands out from the rest of the image and 'pricks' the viewer.[592] It stands out to a viewer and does not accentuate or explain aspects of the original idea; rather it is likely to appear illogical in its given context.[593] Such an element draws further attention to the work as a whole; the viewer begins to search for links or relationships that are not immediately apparent, as these may account for the presence of this certain break in the overall narrative or studium. In the presence of a punctum however, attempts to perceive a harmonious whole fall short, as this element continues to stand out and 'prick' the viewer. While Barthes locates a dichotomy in works of photography exclusively, we can also seek to locate this kind of visual disruption in pictorial works in general.

6.7.2 Logos and pathos

Referring to similar occurrences as Barthes' studium and punctum, Jacques Rancière also investigates a kind of duality that can manifest itself within the work of art more generally, which can be understood within a system that he refers to as the 'aesthetic regime'.[594] This regime is made up of the individual elements 'logos' and 'pathos'. 'Logos' refers to the area of reason or consideration, the narrative within the work that forms an intelligible structure, whereas 'pathos' opposes this. 'Pathos' designates an absence of meaning, including aspects that may be considered a result of unconscious influences.[595] In order to form an understanding of the work, the viewer must interpret the 'relationship between the apparent and the concealed'.[596] In doing so however, the viewer already assumes that these elements do, indeed, relate. They may expect that understanding is attainable and therefore, any apparent absence of meaning will serve an ultimate purpose and can be overcome.

6.7.3 Hidden meaning as a disruption to narrative

This chapter has so far discussed theories that focus on a search for potential meaning or a complete absence of meaning. These are, however, not the only sources capable of bringing about a disruption to the dominant narrative within a work. Australian art critic and theorist Rex Butler discusses another form of disruption, one that refers to a presence that manifests itself separately from work's accepted narrative. Butler implies the possibility of a hidden meaning, or a certain 'in-joke', in his essay *The Rise and Fall of the Smile*.[597] This does not

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[590] R. Barthes trans. R. Howard 1981, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Hill & Wang, New York, pg. 26.
[591] Barthes.
[592] Barthes, pg. 47.
[593] Barthes.
[594] J. Rancière trans. D. Keates & J. Swenson 2009, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, Polity Press, Great Britain.
[595] O. Hulatt 2010, 'The Aesthetic Unconscious', *Marx and Philosophy Review of Books*, viewed 9 May 2011 <http://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviewofbooks/reviews/2010/150>.
[596] Hulatt.
[597] R. Butler 2002, *A Secret History of Australian Art*, Fine Art Publishing Pty Ltd, Sydney, pg. 11.

refer to an absence, but an unusual or seemingly illogical presence or implication that occurs simultaneously with the central narrative. A primary example referred to by Butler is the ambiguous notion of the pop icon Madonna, an image that raises debate about intention. The central focus of this recurring debate is the question of whether Madonna is the epitome of female stereotypes, or if she forms a critique of them.[598] In the case of the latter, she has the potential to critique something while remaining immersed in it. Butler refers to this kind of sensibility as 'camp'. This is a sensibility that can be traced back centuries, and describes the act of mimicking a mainstream society while subtly attenuating it. [599]

Fig. 61

Andy Warhol is a key figure in this discussion; Butler draws attention to the work *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1961 – 62 (fig. 61) in relation to the critique of the art commodity versus the representation of it.[600] The work forms a visual representation of mass culture, but by placing such images in a fine art context, it implies a conceptual critique of the very content it depicts. This question of intention and function sets in motion a process whereby the viewer may not initially interpret the works as serious, but as a response to their apparent status and attention from an audience, the viewer may begin to attribute forms of meaning to them anyway.[601] This raises questions about meaning itself: does the work actually have a hidden meaning or does it only exist as the viewer's own creation? As Butler notes, Kant suggests that in the end, the viewers see the work as a reflection of themselves, but only once they have decided that there is another intention or hidden meaning present.[602] In such examples, the viewer is confronted with an apparent narrative of meaning and, simultaneously, one that is implied or concealed. Where modernist works used an indiscernible aspect of the work to draw the viewer in, postmodernist works such as these become *about* this ambiguous aspect. The undecidable intention

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[598] Butler.
[599] Butler, pg. 12.
[600] Butler, pg. 12.
[601] Butler.
[602] Butler, pg. 16.

behind the ambiguity of these works becomes the subject matter of the works, rather than an indication of something other than the obvious.

6.8 Sequence and disrupted narrative in film and literature

While the discussions put forward throughout this chapter primarily address disruptions to still, or singular, visual narratives, those that occur within a sequence, such as film art, must also be considered. Alternatives to singular, linear narratives in relation to works that deal primarily with sequence are approached in American artist Doug Aitken's publication *Broken Screen* (2006). This book contains conversations between Aitken and twenty-six artists whose works question the value and significance of a linear narrative model. The text emphasises subjective responses associated with these works, as well as the conscious intentions of the artists who create them. The majority of the artists involved in this collection are primarily associated with the production of film art, which, due to the forward motion of film progression, has similar ties to narrative formation as the traditional codex book form. Works of this nature are therefore capable of examining alternative forms of narrative or breaking with narrative convention altogether in a similar way.

The artists included in *Broken Screen* either seek to establish or coincidently achieve a 'landscape of fragmentation' within their works.[603] Recurring ways in which this is realised include multiple, *overlapping* or intersecting story lines, altered or broken perception and disjointed text or imagery. Both the artists and the author of the text make suggestions about what the potential outcomes of working with fractured narrative could be. A central idea that is reflected throughout *Broken Screen* is that a non-narrative work could be considered closer to human experience, which is by no means linear. The dissertation will seek to show that this is a valid basis for the consideration of nonlinear artists' books, and this field can be critiqued from a theoretical perspective, independent of the intentions of the artists that Aitken focuses on. In these cases, the viewer must engage with the work in a much less straightforward manner than would be required to perceive a strictly linear work. An overall reading relies on the convergence of facts, implications, memories, assumptions and personal experience.

The presence of nonlinear or non-narrative sequences in films is not just limited to works of film art, but can also be located in some theatrical or otherwise commercial releases. Alternatives to traditional narratives told by means of moving images can be seen as increasingly prominent and widely accessible since the late twentieth century. Narrative disruption through this medium may be instated by the representation of an altered or unstable reality, blurred boundaries between author, actor and spectator and the presentation of events out of chronological order. The following will discuss *The Truman Show, Dark City, Stranger Than Fiction* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* as examples of commercial films that resist the notion of conventional narrative logic and structure, or otherwise critique it by implication.

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[603] D. Aitken ed. N. Daniel 2006, *Broken Screen: Expanding the Image, Breaking the Narrative,* Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York, pg. 6.

The Truman Show, 1998 approaches the notion of constructed reality, which may be perceived as actual reality, as it is for the protagonist Truman Burbank. This 'reality' is a fabrication, a narrative constructed for the viewer by Hollywood. The film is centred around Burbank, a mild-tempered salesperson living on Seahaven Island. Initially, his life appears simple yet comfortable, he has a loving wife, friendly neighbours, secure job and strikingly pleasant demeanour. Such a lifestyle can perhaps be regarded as 'too good to be true', and this assumption is indeed revealed to be the case. Throughout this film, Burbank's entire life as part of a fabricated, controlled reality becomes evident to the viewer. Burbank is revealed as the star of a twenty-four-hour reality television show, a role known by all the other characters in the film except him. He was given up at birth to grow up on an island enclosed by a dome, where all the people surrounding him, even his 'family', are actors and much of his experience is scripted. The island itself is cut off physically from the rest of the world and actual reality, and the happenings from inside its confines are broadcast to the entire world.

Throughout the course of this film, Burbank experiences some illogical disruptions to the narrative space constructed for him by the producers of the show. These include a stage light falling from the sky, rain falling in a small area focused only on Burbank and his character catching a glimpse of his supposedly dead father in a crowd. The death of this character was staged in a manner critical to Burbank's sheltered existence and confinement to the island – his father drowned in the ocean when he was a boy, leaving him with a fear of open water. Despite this, viewers witness him become increasingly restless in his rut, and thus he begins to strike conversations with his wife and close friend about travel and relocation. When these mentions are passed off as some kind of foolish whim, or fleeting phase, Burbank becomes suspicious and makes active attempts to leave the island. As these attempts become more forceful, they are combatted in less subtle manners by the producers of the show, to the point where the entire cast is seeking to locate and restrain him. He reaches a stage where he locates the edge of the dome, and speaks directly to the producer of the show. At this point, he must choose between life within a largely constructed and controlled reality, or the uncertainty associated with 'actual' reality.

During *The Truman Show*, we can witness the implications of an altered or unstable reality. It does not follow conventional methods of construction, where the viewers witness actors playing out a story. In this film, the presence of a third layer of activity is implied: the viewers witness actors playing actors in a different story, where only the protagonist is presented as unaware of this additional layer. The presence of this third component draws the viewer's attention towards the act of viewing itself. In relation to a more conventional film format, this act is participated in, while remaining largely unacknowledged. *The Truman Show* raises the notion that the watcher is simultaneously being watched, which disrupts the singular notion of the spectator. Furthermore, the film focuses on the variable notion of perceived reality. This is approached by the presentation of the same situation or condition from multiple perspectives, controlled by some and experienced by others. This calls into question the role and extent of any individual's free will. The disruption to conventional

narrative in this film is not just a product of the malfunctioning of the set or the multiple perspectives, but is largely due to an instability in reality and choice that is revealed. Yet, despite this, Burbank's decision to leave the platonic dome shows the film's rationality and assumption that there is a real world outside somewhere, beyond the totalising structure, a 'language game' not subject to language games.

Similar structural components to *The Truman Show* can be located in the film *Dark City,* 1998. This film approaches a kind of indeterminacy in relation to the human condition by means of science fiction. In *Dark City,* what it is to be considered inherently human cannot be reduced to established concept or rule, nor can it be wholly governed by external sources. We can simultaneously view this film as further removed from reality due to its basis in science fiction, yet further involved with the psychological and meaningful needs of the individual human subject. In the particular case depicted, the individual is John Murdoch, who is introduced to the audience in a state of deep confusion. He wakes in a hotel, only to find he has no recollection of his past or identity, and that the only other person in the hotel room is a murdered woman. Murdoch flees the scene in order to seek information, and soon discovers that he has a wife, has been missing for weeks and is wanted for the murders of several prostitutes. The viewers and the character Murdoch both gradually uncover more information about an ancient race called 'the strangers', whose existence predates light. Like the island in an enclosed dome in *The Truman Show,* the city in this film is cut off from any external life. It is suspended in space, and is manipulated by the strangers.

In *Dark City,* every night at midnight, the strangers conduct a process called 'tuning' where they alter the physical landscape of the city, as well as the lives, actions and memories of individual human subjects. Murdoch soon discovers not only the existence of the strangers, but also that he has developed some degree of their abilities through evolutionary means and is therefore immune to their tuning. In this case, the knowledge he gains is only slightly constructive, and largely debilitating. The negativity associated with the information he gains relates to feelings of isolation, helplessness and confusion, all of which are derived from disruptions to an existence that was previously meaningful.

The strangers carry out their tuning in an attempt to study and understand humanity through experimental means. They create many lives for each human subject, and observe whether the alteration of memories and circumstances has any strong or measurable effect on the individual's beliefs, values and mannerisms. Throughout this film however, we can assume that the notion of a fabricated past and present is ultimately unable to construct a predicted future. Unlike *The Truman Show, Dark City* does not present a sense of totality, or a wholly resolved conclusion. This does not only lie in the reference to an inexplicable human condition, but can also be located in the specifics of the protagonist's individual life. Although Murdoch is ultimately able to gain control of the city, freeing it from the strangers, he still has no sense of origin. The film implies that no one in the city has any memory of where they originated from, and that each person has already lived many lives, none of which are truly their own. This film also refers to instabilities; to those of the

mind, knowledge, purpose and meaning, which are, collectively, disruptive to the attainment of progressive understanding and narrative closure. Although some sense of a clear summary is presented at the end of the film, the key issues raised remain largely unresolved. Murdoch gains control of the city, and intends to make positive changes. This, however, does not eliminate the presence of a higher power and its influence on free will, nor does it reveal the origins of the inhabitants of the city, or return them to where they once belonged.

Approaching the notion of an unstable reality is one method of staging a disruption to narrative meaning through film; another method is to examine the structural conventions of the narrative itself. A film that depicts the disturbance of formal processes of constructing narrative understanding is *Stranger Than Fiction,* 2006. In this film, the viewer witnesses two storylines unfold simultaneously. The first story details the process involved with a writer struggling to produce a long overdue novel, and the second illustrates the content of the novel itself. The story that the author is progressively constructing is centred around a business man, Harold Crick, who is presented as obsessive compulsive, awkward and somewhat emotionless. The viewer witnesses Crick's sudden new awareness of a female voice that begins to narrate his life. This voice details every aspect of his physical and psychological activity, yet appears unable to hear or interact with him. Crick fears he is going mad, but upon receiving no helpful information from any health professionals, he seeks advice from a literary professor who is practiced in the field of narrative study. Together, Crick and the professor undergo some tests and observations to ascertain what kind of novel it is and who is constructing it, and therefore predict what is likely to happen. Crick comes to the realisation that although he existed prior to, and continues to exist apart from the narrator when her voice is not present, he is not ultimately in control of his own fate. When the narrator refers to Crick's immanent demise, he seeks to track her down in order to prolong his newfound relationship and interest in life in general. Although Crick's story comes to a predominately positive conclusion where he is injured rather than killed after the narrator is confronted with the reality of her fictional character, this film can be considered disruptive to conventional narrative and filmic logic. Generally, the narrator is an unseen, unheard and unacknowledged presence. Any interaction between character and narrator opens up additional possibilities and gives the impression that the story is not fixed, and can be manipulated.

The final nonlinear film to be discussed, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* 2004 undermines both conceptions of reality and conventional narrative structure. This film is based on the concept of the alteration and erasure of memories, or personal narratives that organise one's life into a meaningful story. The central characters in this film are Joel Barish, a withdrawn, sullen man and Clementine Kruczynski, a free-spirited, flighty and somewhat irresponsible girl. In the beginning of the film, the viewers witness the couple meet, and are able to sense their inexplicable attraction to each other, despite opposing personalities. The film proceeds to show scenes of a familiar relationship between the pair – fights, discussions about the future, love scenes. While these may initially be regarded as glimpses into the future, set out in no

particular order, they are actually revealed to be memories. After a fight, Kruczynski undergoes an experimental neurological procedure in order to alter her memory and erase any recollections of Barish. Once he finds out, he seeks to undergo the same procedure. In order to so this, he must remove any trace of Kruczynski from his apartment and present the objects he gathers to the doctors responsible for conducting the process. Once received, they go through the objects one by one and digitally map Barish's neurological responses to each of them.

Later that night, when Barish is asleep, the doctors enter his home and fit him with a device designed to track down and erase each of the previously mapped signifiers in his mind. This becomes increasingly complicated when Barish finds himself in a suspended state between consciousness and unconsciousness. He is aware of the process that is going on, but is unable to wake and stop it. Upon reflection, he does not want to go through with the procedure, and makes attempts to resist it. To do so, he takes memories of Kruczynski and merges them with other memories where they don't belong, hence creating 'memories' that never occurred. This is ultimately ineffective, and he wakes with no recollection of her. This film creates a nonlinear sense of time and sequence, which is disruptive to the act of viewing. The viewer is either unable to, or has difficulty, placing scenes and events in a logical order. Further than this, it also implies a kind of fragility in relation to the mind, experience and perceived reality. Collectively, it presents a nonlinear account of a fictional, lived experience that questions the validity of what is known or remembered.

Fig. 62

It is not just works of film art and feature films that have this capacity for narrative disturbance. We can also refer to video clips for songs that involve some sense of narrative, generally related to the lyrics of the song or occurring parallel to them. One example of unfulfilled desire as a result of disrupted meaning is shown in the video clip for English band Radiohead's *Just*, 1995 (fig. 62). In this clip, the images and subtitles run parallel to the song lyrics, and serve as the dominant narrative in the work. The video depicts a man in a suit walking down a street and coming to a halt outside a building, presumably the same building where Radiohead are playing in a small apartment. Soon after the man is shown arriving, he is revealed lying down in the middle of the

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pavement. The following scenes detail his interactions with passers by. Another man in a suit is shown tripping over him, and the subtitles read 'Jesus, I'm sorry. I didn't see you there. Are you okay?' 'Yes'. The second man then comes to the conclusion that the subject has been drinking, which he denies. The other man then becomes impatient. The subtitles read 'Why are you lying in the middle of the pavement? You could have broken my neck!'. Then, with concern, he reaches forward to offer help when the man on the ground exclaims 'Don't touch me!'.

Gradually, a larger group of onlookers arrive and begin to pose similar questions as the original spectator, one member of the crowd theorises about the subject's potential mental illness. A man from the crowd leans down and the text reads 'Why are you lying down? Why won't you tell me what's wrong?', to which the subject responds, 'Look, I can't tell you... it wouldn't be right'. At this point, a woman calls to a nearby police officer for assistance. When he approaches, the man on the ground once again exclaims, 'Don't touch me!'. He is questioned again about his motives, yet maintains that the crowd does not want to know. One man appears particularly frustrated, as the subtitle reads, 'You don't think there's any point right? That we're all going to die here? Is that what you think?'. The subject responds with a simple 'No'. After further prodding and frustrated urges from the crowd, he obliges. The text reads, 'Yes I'll tell you. I'll tell you why I'm lying here... but God forgive me... and God help us all... because you don't know what you ask of me'. As he begins to detail his reasons to the impatient crowd, the subtitles disappear and the camera cuts away from his face frequently, making lip reading impossible.

Through the progression of scenes and images in this clip, glimpses of the band playing are shown, which departs from the simultaneous narrative present. This, however, is not a significant disruption in itself, as the depiction of the band in a music clip is not unconventional or unexpected. The presence of the band members themselves cannot, however, be considered the dominant imagery in this video clip. Furthermore, the spectator's attention is drawn away from the lyrical and musical content of the song itself as they seek to gather more information about the unfolding narrative in the video. None of the words in the abovementioned conversation are audible; they occur as a silent interaction that is understood through subtitles and lip movements. This encourages further focus from the viewer, as they must comprehend a written and visual text that is different to the audible words. This reveals a gap between visual, audible and written texts. Although the changing scenes and references to simultaneous occurrences may complicate logical reception, the main source of disruption in this clip is the gap in the story that demands reasoning. After the subject lets the crowd surrounding him know why he is lying on the pavement, a conversation that is withheld from the viewer, the entire crowd is then shown in a similar state – lying strewn all over the pavement. This is not a story that lacks a conclusion, but rather a key event that renders the conclusion logical. The gap in the story refers to a space where information exists, yet is concealed. In this way, the viewer's desire to seek coherence in relation to an unusual situation is not fulfilled, which serves as a source of lasting frustration and incomplete logic.

It can further be observed, that artistic or commercial works carried by means of the moving image are not the only examples that bare resemblance to non-narrative artist's book. Illogical, indeterminate or disrupted elements can also be located in more traditional examples of the book or literature in general. An example of this is Irish novelist Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman*, 1766 which forms a critique of conventional narrative, processes of reading and the nature of the book in general. Originally, this text was released in nine volumes, but can now be found compiled into a singular object. This dissertation refers specifically to this singular, compiled text. The content of the book, as the title suggests, concerns the biographical details of the character Tristram Shandy. Although the author sets out to discuss the birth of the protagonist at the beginning, this event does not actually occur until the fourth volume. The content preceeding this event instead discusses events and characters from before Shandy's own existence. These early installments detail the character, interests and actions of various family members and incidental persons. The actual content of the work, however, is secondary to the way in which it is written and arranged throughout the pages of the book. The events detailed do not always proceed in chronological order, and separate stories are rarely told without digression. As the pages proceed, more and more separate stories and characters are introduced, making it increasingly difficult for the reader to bring together any overall coherence.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman can be described as 'thoroughly performative, not so much a story but an extended act of and mediation on story-telling'.[604] Furthermore, 'Sterne's narrative logic is one which favours the endless free play, the infinite possibilities of writing over the exigencies of plot, the logic of cause and effect and the desire for closure'.[605] Readers remain engaged with the text with the implication that resolutions to various segments and, consequently, the entire object will be provided. Ultimately, fulfilled coherence is withheld through the omission of details, fractured written sequence and countless digressions. It is not just the linguistic aspects of the book that cause a disruption to narrative sequence and reading processes, but the visual content of selected pages as well. For example, the presence of a black page may mark the death of a character and encourage a pause for contemplation. At another point in the book a page is left completely blank for the readers own thoughts and contributions. Such an inclusion puts forward the implication that not all elements of the text are fixed, and that some are the product of each individual reader. Forming a further departure from conventional acts of reading, some entire chapters are also intentionally misplaced, encouraging the reader to proceed back and forward within the text in order to attempt to locate intelligible links between stimuli. The non-narrative text does not conform to conventional reading processes, but can be regarded in terms of sustained exploration. The work engages the reader by providing enough information to draw on the desire for an ultimately conclusive object. A desire, nonetheless, that is never wholly fulfilled.

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[604] C. Keep, T. McLaughlin & R. Parmar 2000, 'Tristram Shandy', *The Electronic Labyrinth,* viewed 19 October 2012, <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu.elab/hfl0259.html>.
[605] C. Keep, T. McLaughlin & R. Parmar.

A desire to obtain an overall coherence that is ultimately withheld can also be witnessed in *Bartleby, the Scrivener,* 1853 by American writer Herman Melville. The story is constructed from the first-person point of view of the narrator, a lawyer who is approximately sixty years old and who, despite going into some detail about his business and personal disposition, is not identified by name. The account of events and circumstances provided by the narrator is logical. He describes a business where he employs three individuals: Two law-copyists referred to as Turkey and Nippers, and a junior office assistant called Ginger Nut. Each character has their quirks and professional difficulties, but ultimately, they function together quite successfully. At one point during the story, due to increased demand, the narrator has cause to hire another employee. After initially being hinted at as the focus of this written account, this is the point where Bartleby is formally introduced. At first he is presented as only mildly peculiar – he keeps to his small, designated quarters, makes no sound and works long hours without stopping to eat, apart from the cakes brought to him daily by Ginger Nut. Several days into his employment, Bartleby is asked to partake in the revision of a copied document. Quietly but surely, he responds that he would 'prefer not to'. Confronted with the definite response, but realising that it was nonetheless delivered with no apparent malice or ill-temper, the narrator places his concerns aside for the present and goes about his business.

Similar events continue to occur, any task outside that of straightforward copying Bartleby politely refuses, stating repeatedly that he would prefer not to. He also begins to take extended periods of time during the work day and devote them to standing still in his confined quarters and staring. One Sunday, the only day on which the business does not operate, the narrator decides to call past the office on this way to another engagement. When he arrives, he is startled to find that the lock to the door has been jammed from the inside. The narrator is then confronted with Bartleby's voice, stating that he is currently indisposed, and that after a couple trips around the block, he should be ready to open the door. Inexplicably, the narrator obliges, confused by Bartleby's increasing peculiarity and mystery. Once the narrator is able to enter the building, Bartleby is nowhere to be found, yet evidence to support that he has been living there is discovered. At this point, the narrator feels a strong sense of empathy for Bartleby's perceived condition. He assumes that this condition is one of loneliness, isolation and hopelessness. Bartleby's next peculiar turn occurs when he stops copying altogether, and claims this is a permanent choice. He now serves no functional purpose, yet wishes to remain in his position unchanged. He would prefer not to provide any details of his origin or family, to work or accept charity or, importantly, to move on from the small quarters where he has taken up residence. At one point, the narrator resigns himself to the possibility that Bartleby's presence could be the will of a higher power, one that is intentionally kept unknown to him. After this presence causes some humiliation from the narrator's peers, he decides that Bartleby cannot remain. After several attempts at initially subtle then strongly worded conversation, the narrator moves his business, yet Bartleby remains. The next inhabitants of the building deal with his same obscure stubbornness, and end up having him taken to prison. When the narrator calls to visit, Bartleby is quite adamant that he does not wish to talk. He refuses all food, and in the end, wastes away there. As

a kind of afterthought, the narrator then refers to a rumor he heard after Bartleby's death. This rumour implies that in his previous job, Bartleby was responsible for sorting 'dead' or undeliverable, mail, which may have had a profound effect on his psyche, or so the narrator theorises. He may have been left in a state of hopelessness.

Bartleby can be likened to the previously discussed video clip for Radiohead's song *Just*. Both depict events in a linear order, but there is a constant, irresolvable frustration in each that is not even brought to determinate reason upon the conclusion of the narrative. In the case of Bartleby, we are left with only speculation as to the cause of his peculiar manner. This is primarily fuelled by the narrators last afterthought to Bartleby's life, which refers only to rumors and assumptions. The narrator implies that Bartleby's psyche has perhaps been damaged, that he had resigned himself to hopelessness after an extended exposure to the 'dead' letters. This suggestion does not serve to alter Bartleby's condition in any manner, but to provide the comfort of perceived logic or reason for the narrator. The reader may attempt similar processes, and either identify with the notion put forward by the narrator, or seek to deduce an alternative. In either case, any reasoning is still put down to speculation, as the content of the work does not provide enough information for any definitive coherence to be made apparent. The reason behind Bartleby's condition, if any exists, remains concealed.

Non-narrative or disruptive techniques can also be located in examples contemporary literature. This can be seen in American writer Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 2005.[606] This story takes place surrounding the terrorist attacks of New York on September 11, 2001. It focuses on the experiences of one central character in particular, a young boy called Oskar Schell, who lost his father to these attacks. Many of the chapters in this book are written from the perspective of this child, while others come from an unidentified source who is later revealed to be his estranged grandfather. Other segments throughout the books are also derived from different sources, including newspaper articles and letters. It is implied that Oskar carries some form of autism spectrum disorder, though this has not been formally diagnosed. This is immediately hinted at, however, and is sustained throughout the text. Due to this implied condition, Oskar becomes extremely fixated on decided tasks, while simultaneously being prone to distraction, digression and overthinking the potential consequences of his actions.

The central task Oskar sets himself during this story is to find the lock for a key that he discovered in his dad's belongings, some months after his death. The key was found located in an envelope marked 'Black', presumably referring to the surname of the owner of the lock. Oskar then researches and lists all people with the surname Black in the surrounding areas, and spends all of his spare time going on self-directed missions to approach each of them about his late father and the mysterious key. These visits create tangents in themselves, each Black has a story, and each story told facilitates Oskar's tendency to explore disorganised and often misguided thought patterns. Amongst these stories, the

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[606] It should be noted, however, that this dissertation will refer specifically to the 2011 film tie-in edition of this text, published by Penguin Books.

reader also witnesses fragments from the grandfather, dated many decades before the present time in the text and reminiscent of letters or diary entries. The inclusion of such elements acts as a chronological disruption, as the text continuously jumps back to different moments in the past and then to events in the present. It is revealed that the character of the grandfather in unable, or unwilling, to speak. In order to communicate, he either holds up the text 'Yes' or 'No' that is tattooed to his palms, or writes on a small notepad. Some pages of this book reflect this act - containing only a single word or phrase. For example, pages 19-27 read: 'I want two rolls; and I wouldn't say no to something sweet; I'm sorry, this is the smallest I've got; start spreading the news...; The regular, please; Thankyou, but I'm about to burst; I'm not sure, but it's late; Help; Ha ha ha!'.[607] Here, the reader can speculate about the locations and situations of the man, but any suggestion remains inconclusive.

Like *Tristram Shandy,* this text does not just stage written and conceptual disruptions, but employs visual methods as well analogous to the way some artists' books contain visual disruptions throughout their pages. Various pages from Oskar's own journals and pictorial collections are seen scattered throughout the text.   These can be understood as just as fragmented and unfocused as the character's thought and speech patterns revealed throughout the text. Some pages include words or passages that are circled and underlined in red, reflecting a common practice of the late father carried out when he was reading a newspaper article or text of interest. These underlined fragments often acted as clues for the various quests and adventures he would design for Oskar to embark on. Throughout the text, other words or passages are marked with crosses as if edited by a sensor. On pages where Oskar is recounting conversations he heard through a wall, disparate fragments of text appear scattered over the page in order to reflect the aspects he heard clearly. Other pages are entirely covered in random sequences of number and exclamation points.

At a particularly tense and emotive moment in the story, from pages 280-284, the lettering becomes closer and closer until it begins to overlap, it is rendered unreadable and becomes almost entirely black. The final pages of the book depict sequential images of an individual falling out of tower on September 11 2001, only they are reversed. When flipped through in quick succession, these pages depict a person who is seemingly flying from the direction of the ground and back towards the tower. These visual interruptions negate conventional reading processes, and may even act to deter the reader from the multiple stories that are unfolding in the written text. Although the story does reach a conclusion, a lock is found for the key, many other unresolved situations, queries or conversations are identified along the way. Due to this, the text tends to raise more questions than it resolves, and can be regarded as somewhat unsettling, rather than wholly conclusive or resolved.

6.9 Chapter summary

Throughout this chapter, visual language, methods of perceiving a logical structure of visual signifiers and elements that may disrupt this system have

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[607] J. Safran Foer 2011, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,* Penguin Books, London/New York, pp. 19 – 27.

been discussed in order to provide a context for considering the narrative implications of artists' books. In some instances, a point of departure from conventional linear meaning can be considered important to other aspects of human experience, outside conscious ordering and interaction. For example, partial, fractured or unresolved works are able to provide greater access to unconscious experiences, the inaccessible and ambiguous aspects of the mind and the presence of multiple perspectives related to a singular situation. They can also draw the viewer's attention to otherwise passive or unnoticed processes, such as the acts of reading, ordering and seeking coherence. This redirects some of the reader's attention away from the work itself and focuses it back on the viewer. In this way, nonlinear or disrupted works are capable of forming a kind of conversation with their spectators, and the experience of viewing becomes more interactive.

In relation to visual and textual mediums, both two-dimensional and three-dimensional still works as well as film and literary works were examined. It is films and written texts such as these that can be most closely related to the artists' books to be examined in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*. These mediums all have their conventional basis in narrative structures, as they rely on a prescribed sequence and the progressive attainment of meaning. This is assisted by defined sequence and prescribed viewing methods. Any disruption or departure within a seemingly logical or unified work undermines reading practices and the viewing processes associated with rational text, and calls for alternate methods of interpretation.

The following chapter will utilise the context of non-narrative visual, filmic and written works given in this chapter to discuss disruptive or non-narrative examples of artists' books as these works also break with the conventional associations with sequential narrative or coherence. In order to do so, a brief account of primarily narrative artists' books that represent more traditional roles of the book will initially be provided as a point for departure. Following this, examples of disruptive gaps to the materiality of the book, its conceptual content, reading processes and viewer engagement will be discussed in order to demonstrate various ways in which convention is disrupted through non-narrative artists' books. Throughout this discussion, ways of engaging with or responding to such gaps will be identified as this will give an indication of the alternate forms of experience that these books provide.

Chapter Seven

Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books

7.1 Chapter outline

This chapter will draw on the theoretical framework outlined in the preceding chapters in order to discuss examples of artists' books. Where Chapter Three *A Brief History of Artists' Books* sought to provide a basis for the general discussion of book works both historically and in a contemporary context, this chapter will focus specifically on narrative and non-narrative instances of artists' books. A brief account of narrative artists' books will first be given in order to shown how such works can be discussed in terms of visual storytelling, even if, as works of art, they depart from some more traditional book conventions. In contrast, works that reveal complete breaks from narrative structures will then be discussed. The inclusion of such works in a wider theoretical context addresses a gap in existing literature. As such, this chapter will examine different forms of artists' books that contain some illogical element or nonsense space and provide suggestions about how such works can be engaged with and what kind of experience this may bring to a viewer.

Before discussing narrative and non-narrative artists' books, a brief overview of the topics discussed so far will be provided in order to summarise the historical and theoretical context within which the artists' books in question will be located and analysed. Chapter Three *A Brief History of Artists' Books* has provided a description of the term 'artists' books in general, as well as an account of key historical precursors to this form of practice. Furthermore, it established the key qualification that, although an artist's book may reflect many different concepts and be created using a wide range of materials, the book object in and of itself must be used to facilitate an artist's individual practice in order to properly adhere to the term. Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology* then investigated aspects of narrative ordering, a process that is prevalent in the traditional book object, as well as in methods of meaningful communication in general. As such, it was established that the use of the narrative in Western culture is a key way in which experience, information and phenomena can be rendered logical. It was also theorised that in addition to written and spoken material, an image or set of images could be considered as a potential source of narrative. This can occur when the image presents an existing story or situation directly, or even through the presentation of more ambiguous fragments that require the viewer to take on an active role in the formation of logic.

Following this, Chapter Five *Aesthetics and Art History* discussed the potential inclusion of ambiguous, disrupted or even non-narrative visual works in the field of aesthetics. After examining two key theorists associated with this field, G. W. F. Hegel and Immanuel Kant, it was concluded that such works could be discussed in terms of Kant's concept of the 'free play' of cognitive faculties. Here, an image could be considered beautiful if it brings about a play between 'imagination' and 'understanding', where neither must subsume the other and where conceptual resolution is suspended. This can be likened to instances

whereby a sense of ambiguity persists in a visual work, where the presence of an unknown element withholds understanding in its entirety. Related to this, Chapter Six *Art and Language* investigated other theoretical approaches to the study of incomplete or disrupted narratives and linguistic theory more generally. In order to do so, it engaged similar fields to those discussed in Chapter Four, but with the intention of demonstrating cases where narratives cannot be constructed or sustained.

Since the 1960s in particular, works referring to conceptual or material book traditions, yet produced as works of art, can generally be considered artists' books.[608] Many of these works refer not only to traditional characteristics of the book, but to narrative conventions, or coherent sequential ordering. This chapter will briefly discuss how largely coherent or linear narratives can be constructed by means of the artist's book. Such logical structures can be created by textual or visual means, or some combination of the two. Furthermore, they can, although they do not necessarily need to, be facilitated by the codex form of the book. After various conceptions of the narrative artist's book are identified, works that stage departures from these coherent narrative models will also be discussed. These works will be linked to the nonlinear and non-narrative film and literary works discussed in Chapter Six *Art and Language*. Non-narrative artists' books will be linked to the film and literary works previously discussed in that they all put forward implications of sequence and presupposed narrative, yet this is not sustained due to a disruptive element or elements.

This chapter will firstly investigate the fundamental qualities of the book and its traditional implications such as coherent sequence and overall narrative. In addition to this, ways in which departures from, or disruptions to, traditional narratives in the book are brought about will be examined. In order to do so, the traditions they depart from must first be identified. Here, examples of artists' books that follow some form of narrative structure as text, images or a combination of the two will be discussed. This chapter will then present specific examples of conceptual, compositional and material interruptions in artists' books. These occur by means such as illogical text, interchangeable fragments, nonlinear sequence, multiple and intersecting storylines, the need for an unconventional physical engagement, sculptural components, missing contents, hybrid objects, multilayered compositions, hidden information or the suggestion of hidden information, altered material from an existing source, a lack of fixed binding and the use of books as smaller units for large sculptural or installation works. Throughout this chapter, the potential functions of various forms of non-narrative artists' books will be discussed.

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[608] **As identified in this dissertation, many artists' books created during and since the 1960s show ties to narrative traditions, however, many also provide a platform for the departure from linear storytelling or traditional modes of meaning-making. It can be noted that other practices surrounding this time were also flagged by a withdrawal from meaning or the absence of narrative, such as the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s as discussed in Chapter Six, or post-structuralism of the 1970s and 80s. The post-structuralists suggested that an art historical framework was arbitrary and as such, 'post-structuralism makes it possible to take as the unit of discourse neither the life of an artist nor the history of a culture or period style'.**
D. Carrier, 'Post-Structuralism', *Oxford Art Online,* viewed 2 April 2014,
<http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/subscriber/article/grove/art/T069009>.

7.2 Narrative sequence and potential disruptions

Films, novels, short stories and book objects in general commonly share the characteristics of sequence, temporality and some form of overall narrative. They are often produced for one or more of the following purposes: entertainment, persuasion or education. Written text, visual compositions and combinations or variations of both are able to carry out these functions. This is particularly evident when examining narrative-based artists' books, which are not confined to rigid conceptual or material conventions and can therefore convey their story or intent by wide and diverse means. Alternate works that are produced with similar materials or methods to conventional films and books, yet stage a departure from logical or linear progression, can be considered particularly jarring.   This is due to the viewer's prior experience of and subsequent expectations toward such mediums. Artists' books containing an area of disruption or non-signifying element can be likened to the film and written works discussed in Chapter Six *Art and Language* in that they refer to traditional narrative structures, yet use these as a basis for the reinvention of the medium and its functions. This chapter will seek to outline, through a discussion of artists' books, various ways in which narrative reading can be disrupted. It will also investigate the effect that these disruptions may have on modes of viewing.

7.3 Book conventions

Johanna Drucker states that 'finitude and sequence are two fundamental structural elements of a book'.[609]   Although these are essentially limitations regarding both the physical object and the expansion of content, finitude and sequence are characteristics that are synonymous with both traditional book structure and narrative sequence. They are the characteristics that outline the basis of the object, and that give indications as to how it should be read and interpreted. The element of finitude relates to the expectation of a summary, or to a point where the reader has obtained enough related information to perceive a coherent work.   Throughout this process, there is generally no significant difficulties or questions left unanswered. A meaningful summary is supported by the logical progression of text or images throughout the pages. There are various practices relating to sequence that promote narrative development or meaning in relation to the book form. According to Western conventions, the book is arranged in portrait format and bound on the left hand side. In this system, it is assumed that the contents of the pages flow from left to right and top to bottom, and can be read accordingly. Like language itself, this format is a culturally designed and conforms to accepted conventions that allows for forms of communication to be intelligible.

Sequence in the book form generally promotes linearity and the forward progression of related ideas or events. In other cases however, such as the format of reference books, the 'sequence is designed as a system of order rather than to promote linear movement – sequence participates in the distribution of elements into an organised system where location helps provide access'.[610]

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[609] J. Drucker 2004, *A Century of Artists' Books,* Granary Books, New York, pg. 257.
[610] Drucker, pg. 258.

This approach does not require the reader to read from beginning to end, but allows for the selection of relevant information. This is achieved by means of ordering, generally by alphabet or subject matter. Within these smaller sections, the reader once again comes to rely on linear sequence, even if it is only carried for a few sentences or paragraphs.

7.4 The internet

In a contemporary context, this may be related to the Internet and the search engines contained within it, which are treated as reference sources. On one hand, this is more focused and direct than traditional books, in that one can search for any inclusion in overall content rather than selected sections in an index. Meaningful sources for any individual are made increasingly accessible from what can be located by searches alone through the information retained when conducting searches. This kind of memory directs a search, and biases local information as well as information based on prior searches. Even so, the entire content accessible through the Internet is simultaneously inconceivable, as the content can never be received in its entirety. Due to its seemingly infinite masses of information, only some of which can be distinguished as relevant or even factual, the surplus of narrative present cannot be reconciled into a coherent whole.

Once located and isolated, information can be read logically. If searched effectively, very specific information can be sourced quickly. If carried out ineffectively, this method of conducting searches can reveal irrelevant information and, furthermore, present its content as ultimately incoherent due to its seemingly infinite and varied nature. Examples of narratives or non-narratives that can be located on the Internet will not be considered relevant to this dissertation, as they are not derived from a material source, or from any source that is able to be comprehended in its entirety. The overall format is already too far removed from logical and defined sequence to locate any significant breaks with narrative or coherence as may be possible in the film and book works referred to in this dissertation.

In order to form significant disruptions or departures from logic or narrative, the object or information in question may reference conventional practices involving some form of sequence or progressive attainment of information towards a prescribed end. This can occur to various degrees, from a mere reference to the material concept of a book, to the inclusion of some narrative that is then departed from or disrupted in some way. Some engagement with preconceptions of sequence or narrative within the book object allows any departure to prove largely contradictory to logical conventions.

7.5 Artists' books and sequence

Johanna Drucker engages in an exploration of sequence with specific reference to the artist's book.[611] In her text *The Century of Artists' Books*, she draws on examples of book works that depict narratives, non-narratives and some convergence of the two. This account provides documentation of selected

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[611] Drucker.

precursors to this practice as well as the different forms, processes, concepts and mediums that may be involved with the production and exhibition of artists' books. Where Drucker constructs a kind of survey of various approaches to the medium, this dissertation seeks to focus on and critically engage with the specific area of disrupted narratives, a subject raised by Drucker but not substantially explored. These will be approached by viewing them as a kind of counterpoint to a more conventional basis of linear, logical or coherent structures. Drucker identifies examples of such works that include a traditional codex form promoting the logical progression of image or text; flip books that reveal rapid linear movement, and comic books which reduce events into selected scenes occurring in a sequence. Beyond these examples, forms of meaning may also be readily derived from less conventional means such as works that are made up of loose pages with instructions on how they should be laid out or ordered.

7.6 Narrative artists' books

An example of a book work discussed by Drucker that can be identified as a work that relies on narrative structure is *Dark Shadow,* 1974 (fig. 63) by Italian artist Gilbert Prousch and English artist George Passmore, two artists who formed the collaborative duo, Gilbert and George.
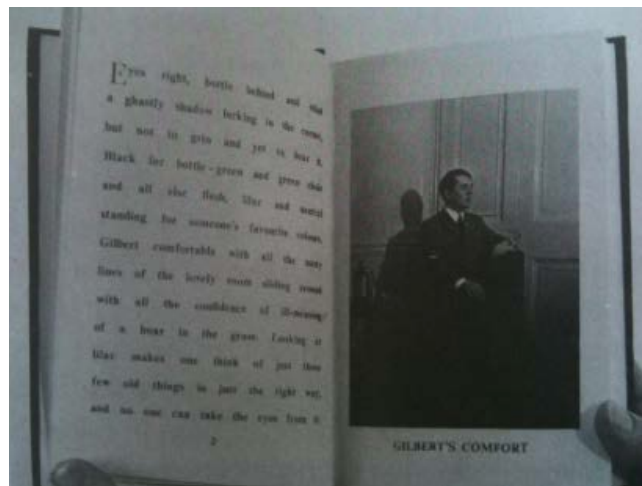

Fig. 63

This work assumes simple linear formatting by incorporating typed prose and a supporting image into each page spread. The left page contains the text, which is characterised by its simple font, large lettering and line spacing, all of which are consistent throughout the work. On the right page is a black and white photographic image that gives a visual representation of the subject of the written text. The text facing the image describes it literally, outlining the domestic settings, colours, shadows, surroundings, mood and stance of the figures as well as occasional subjective insights. The text is limited, as each section is constructed to fit within a single page while adhering to the consistent typeface and line spacing. Drucker describes how, in this example, succinct prose narrative contributes to the pace of the book.[612] This flow is assisted by the linear relationship between image and text, the reader does not experience

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[612] Drucker.

conflict between written and illustrated narrative. There are no particularly strange, complex or illogical elements present that act to slow the pace of reading or encourage the viewer to contemplate a single page spread for any elongated period of time.
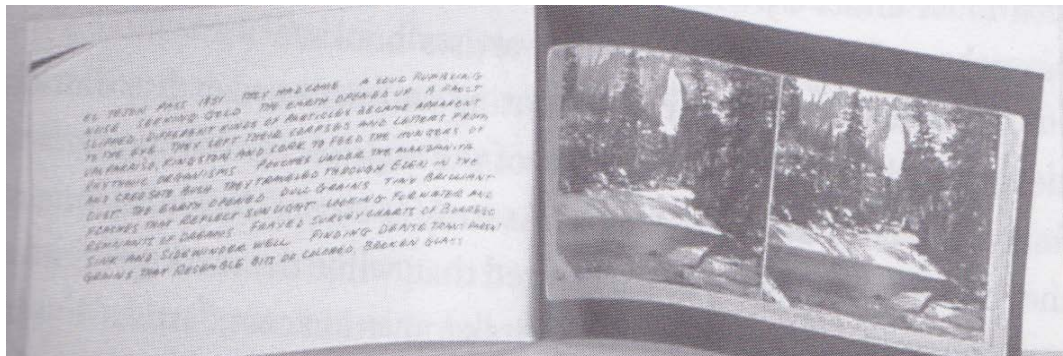

Fig. 64

A meaningful or coherent reading of the book object can also be derived from primarily pictorial elements that address a singular theme. This is demonstrated through works such as *The Fall,* 1976 (fig. 64) by American artist Michelle Stuart, which was published as an edition by the organisation 'Printed Matter'.[613] Utilising similar formatting to *Dark Shadow*, *The Fall* compiles images and text within each page spread. The right side includes a set of two photographic images while the left reveals a section of handwritten text. Each singular image is part of a set of two photographs taken by a twin lens camera.[614] As a result, the set may appear identical at first glance, but on closer inspection, the viewer witnesses a subtle shift in position where each image reveals slightly more or less of either side of the scene. These images depict organic movement and subtle shifting of a grand environment, and although each page reveals a different site, they are all conceptually linked through the mapping of similar natural phenomenon.[615] To the left of each set of images, the artist constructs a fictitious record of the history and development of each site's various inhabitants such as 'the voices of early settlers (and) stories of animal, vegetable and mineral inhabitants of the region'.[616] In this way, the work presents itself as a collection of short stories developed under a common theme.

The Fall maintains ties to established expectations of the book object both in form and content: it was printed as a multiple, it is bound on the left hand side enforcing Western conventions and the text forms linear relationships to the images. By assimilating these conventions, this work encourages its audience to approach it as a book object to be handled and read, rather than an art object alone that is to be experienced from a distance. This work does not primarily resist the formal or narrative functions associated with the book object. Rather it presents some unconventional aspects, such as handwritten text and a heavy reliance on imagery, as a written and illustrated set of stories that encourage understanding or the construction of meaning.

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[613] B. Bright 2005, *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960 – 1980,* Granary Books, New York, pg. 199.
[614] Bright.
[615] Bright.
[616] Bright, pg. 199.

Fig. 65

One example of visual sequence in an artist's book is seen in American artist Edward Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations,* 1963. Ruscha can be viewed as a key figure in the development of artists' books in the early 1960s, and *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* marked the beginning of the development of his work from paintings, prints and drawings to photographic book works.[617] Clive Phillpot states that in this work, 'Ruscha constructed a linear sequence of nondescript photographic images to document the gas stations that punctuated U.S. Route 40 between Los Angeles, where he lived, and Oklahoma City, where he grew up'.[618] The work adheres to the traditional codex format and presents twenty-six photographs of gasoline stations that are captioned with their brand and location. This work maps a geographical progression between two points, creating a travel-based narrative. The images act as markers for documented movement, beginning and ending at two chosen locations. This implied movement is further supported by the way in which the conventional book object is handled – the pages are turned to reveal the sequence. The fragments of an urban landscape presented draw on the viewing subject's recollection either of the same journey, or any trip where similar landmarks are encountered. In this way, the work acts as a record of the artist's documentation and observation, yet also prompts the viewer to extend the narrative, or recall their own experiences and stories derived from these.

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[617] C. Lauf & C. Phillpot 1998, *Artist/Author: Contemporary Artists' Books,* Distributed Art Publishers Inc. & The American Federation of Arts, New York.

[618] C. Phillpot in C. Lauf & C. Phillpot 1998, *Artist/Author: Contemporary Artists' Books,* Distributed Art Publishers Inc. & The American Federation of Arts, New York, pg. 33.
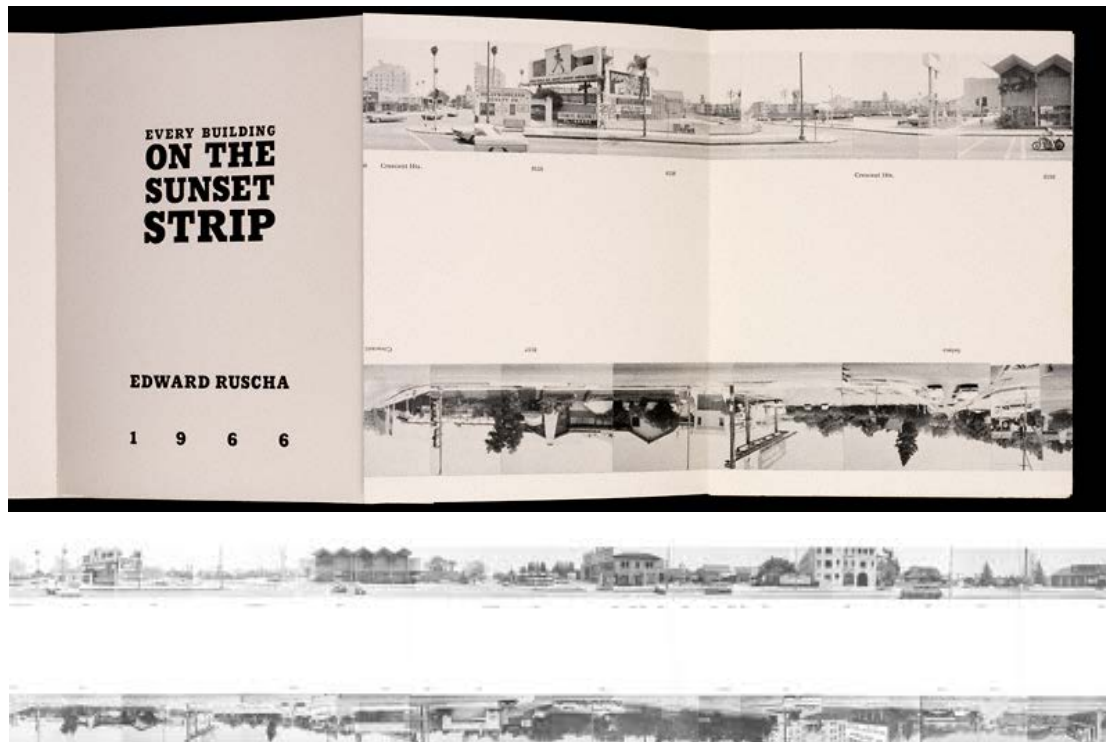
Fig. 66

Another primary example of a linear, logical progression of images demonstrated through an artist's book is Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip,* 1966 (fig. 66). Although further distanced from some formal conventions of the book object, this work, like *Twentysix Gasoline Stations,* encourages narrativisation and viewer interpretation. The work uses alternate means of binding and relies on images as the central source of information. In this work, the text acts only to label the image in terms of its location but provides no information regarding its physical qualities or conceptual implications. This is an accordion-style book that compiles photographs of each building on the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles, taken by the artist from the distance of a moving vehicle. [619] The buildings are represented consecutively by a line of photographs along the top and bottom of the pages, reflecting the two-sided nature of the street.

When the book is unfolded and laid out flat, it forms one continuous page measuring 27 feet.[620] In this extended configuration, the viewer is presented with two seemingly unlimited progressions of images that are labeled by their street numbers. This labeling reinforces a sense of cartographic sequence, which is implied by the mapping of images. The narrative that can be found in this work refers to the documentation of movement and the observation of one's surroundings. These are direct representations of a common, existing act and therefore, the images encourage linear progression and do not resist the overall comprehension of the work. This book object can be logically interpreted from either direction, which is unusual in the context of the book,

[619] *Every Building on the Sunset Strip,* viewed 20 February 2012,
<http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/190048771>.
[620] *Every Building on the Sunset Strip.*

but which assimilates the act of travelling down a physical street in life. Here, the beginning of the movement, and therefore, the sequence or story, depends on where the viewer is standing. While the work does imply content beyond that which is presented, for example, a further cartographic progression, this is not inconceivable or disruptive to the central concept presented.

Narrative artists' books need not only conform to a logical progression within the codex form, or a concertina book revealing a continuous string of imagery. The book form can also act as a kind of container for many, potentially unrelated, stories that can be united under a common interest or predisposition. This can be likened to reference books that contain small sections of separate but nonetheless understandable information, or coffee table books that present different instances of the same person, fashion, animal, event or situation.

Fig. 67

Self-Portraits My Ass, 1998 (fig. 67) is a book work by Raymond Pettibon that serves as a kind of folio or collection of individual drawings and stories. Similar to the way in which Pettibon arranges clusters of narrative fragments in an exhibition space, as discussed in Chapter Six *Art and Language*, each page of this book reveals a new portrait and a section of text. The text does not flow from page to page and the characters are constantly changing, which suggests that each page, or page spread, can be considered an independent work and therefore as an individual moment in a separate story.

Like Pettibon's train works, these portraits allude to stories without being blatant. Some pages include only a sentence or two describing the subject's general character, while others include a paragraph or more about the subject at a particular time or in response to an event. The codex form of the book implies the presence of an inherent narrative, as well as a rigid, ordered framework. The suggestion that there are stories attached to these pages is further implied by the presence of or reference to a face on each page. A face can be seen as synonymous with identity, experience and the capacity to communicate. Each page encourages the act of storytelling, even if they do not do so in the manner of a conventional book, where the pages would be more likely to proceed in a linear manner.

7.7 Non-narrative artists' books

Although they assume different formal and conceptual interests, *Dark Shadow, The Fall, Every Building on the Sunset Strip* and *Self-Portraits My Ass* all refer to the book object, visual practice and narrative conventions in some way. Alternatives to the narrative structures discussed above may reinvent aspects of form, conceal information or neglect linear progression partially or entirely. Methods of interrupting or omitting narratives in the form of the book are primarily related to either concept or physical structure. Conceptual interruptions include illogical text, nonlinear sequence, multiple storylines and intersecting storylines. These conceptual disruptions are not necessarily specific to the book medium. Modes of disrupting the physical act of reading, on the other hand, are specific to this form and to the viewer's prior experiences of it. These may include alternate modes of construction, multilayered elements, concealed information, loose or interchangeable pages or interactive pages. Examples related to either a conceptual or physical approach to negating conventional logic form a basis for the disruption of narrative within the production and reading of artists' books. From this point, the artists' books discussed in this chapter will refer to non-narrative elements or disruptions rather than logical tendencies of the book and its content.

7.7.1 Conceptual disruption

Conceptual interruptions, or gaps in logical or expected content, brought about through examples of illogical text can be depicted within a more traditional book form. American artist David Schulz' *Variations of a Fall,* 2002 (fig. 66) presents sections of seemingly logical text that is nonetheless rendered illogical with reference to the other content of the book.

Fig. 68

The work refers to a recurring dream where the subject imagines and visualises that they are falling through space. Schulz states that 'evincing three variations of the dream, the book references Dante's Divine Comedy via levels of dream experience, ie. hell, purgatory, and heaven, and in doing so considers our perception of the nature of death as a critical aspect of our identity'.[621] Each page spread contains an arrangement of photographic images on the right and unrelated text on the left. The text is made up of vague descriptions, hazy

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[621] D. Schulz, *Project Statement,* Artists' Books Online,
<http://www.artistsbooksonline.org/works/voaf.xml>.

stories and largely unfocused personal musings. The photographs combine images of textually unidentified characters with environmental or urban scenes that tend to imply grandeur and power, while others refer to instability. Both forms of images, as well as the text, point to fragmented aspects of human experience that cannot be entirely unified within *Variations of a Fall*.

The information in the book presents itself as recognisable yet incomplete. Some of the stories involve recollections of close calls, others describe digging into the earth; stories that the artist describes as calling 'to mind relationships that challenge individual choices with a universal animating force that minimises differences between humans and worms to the point of consciousness alone'.[622] The content of the pages puts forward questions about reality, experience and the subject's control over the direction of both. Although the material qualities of the work meet conventional expectations, the conceptual content fails to create a logical progression throughout the pages, and to reach a wholly unified conclusion. Many aspects of the work remain discernible, but are ultimately unable to be ordered within a singular, meaningful sequence. As a result, they negate the expectations of a linear, conclusive progression that the viewing subject may bring to the experience of the book object.

7.7.2 Fragmented content

Works that employ unusual arrangements of text alone can challenge similar expectations. Logical text can ultimately be regarded as illogical if unrelated fragments are fixed together in a certain order, however, this can also be achieved by the presentation of fragments with an interchangeable order. American artist Allison Cooke Brown's *Teatimes,* 2005 (fig. 69) is essentially a boxed book where loose pages, made of teabags, are held in a larger container.

Fig. 69

This container is constructed with reference to both artists' books and everyday objects. It is covered in silk and has a bone clasp to keep the cover closed, and

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622 Schulz.

as such, the object refers to ways in which a more conventional book cover may be constructed. The inside is lined with paper and one sheet must be turned to reveal the 'pages', which relates to the appearance of the end pages in a more traditional book. The 'pages' containing the handwritten textual content of the work derived from her personal journal, however, are made out of dismantled tea bags that are still attached to their original branded tabs. At this point, the viewer may recognise the container as referring to the formal conventions of the original tea box rather than or in addition to that of a book, yet constructed from fine art materials.

When considering the visual composition of *Teatimes,* the artist notes that 'there is a distinct contrast between the bags' exteriors, with their bright red commercial labels and declarative statements, and the unwrapped interiors, with handwritten personal musings'.[623] The work presents small sections of logical text that can nonetheless be viewed as disparate or illogical in their wider context. This form of coherence is one that is implied but not fulfilled, and is further supported by the physical form of the book. As such, both a physical and conceptual disruption occurs. When the viewer comes to read this handwritten text, each fragment presents itself as a piece that may be integrated into some overall, coherent story. The 'pages' each refer to the artist's daily practice of consuming tea while documenting aspects of her life in a journal.[624] In *Teatimes,* each 'page' contains only a fragment of the wider content documented in her personal journal. Furthermore, there are no dates listed on the pages, and they often begin and end part way through a sentence. The pages do not flow logically between one another, so even though the reader can continue to gather information about the subject, gaps in the recollection become increasingly apparent. Although the viewer may attempt to fill these gaps with information from other pages or aspects of their own experience and expectations, the gaps present are as numerous as the pages.

The inclusion of loose pages encourages the viewer to rearrange the content and seek the most logical links, which in turn interrupts the timing and sequence involved with the act of reading. The partial content that is ultimately revealed does not constitute an object of whole or linear narrative. The use of everyday items as components of a book is disruptive in itself, as the viewer's expectations of how to handle the object become confused by an assumed dual function. This function is simultaneously that of the book and the tea bags it has been constructed from. In such cases, the reader or viewer must reinvent their mode of physical engagement with the work, as the artist has done, in order to consider its revised function. This material disruption furthers the conceptual gaps present that are brought about by the implication of missing content.

7.7.3 Nonlinear sequence or development

Related to the conceptual content of illogical text is the fixed nonlinear and non-narrative sequence of text, images or any combination of the two. American artist Ruth Laxson's *[Ho + Go] = It,* 1986 (fig. 70) presents itself as a kind of

[623] A. Cooke Brown in K. Wasserman (ed.) 2007, *The Book as Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts,* Princeton Architectural Press, New York, pg. 63.
[624] Cooke Brown.

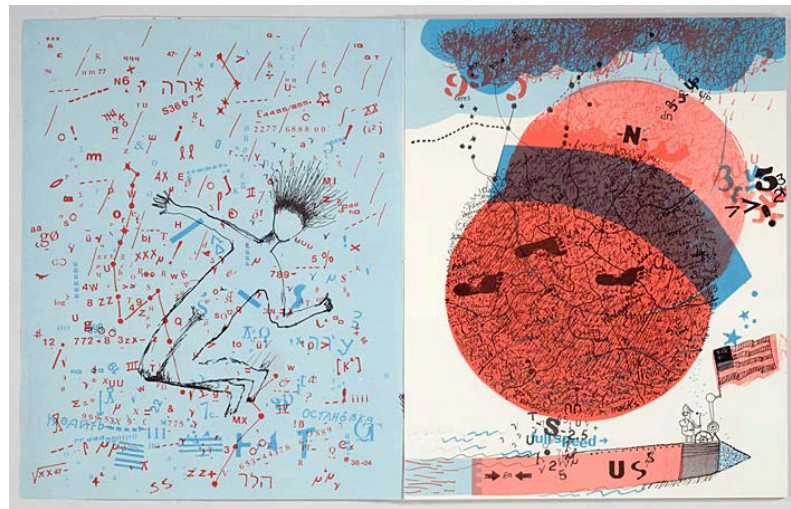visual and textual collage that is constructed through the pages of a conventionally bound book object.

Fig. 70

The content of the pages refers to Quantum physics, notions of everyday experience and the micro and macro realities.[625] The references made to Quantum Theory made throughout this work set a basis for the development of non-narrative or nonlinear occurrences, as it is a theory based on the indeterminate nature of reality at the subatomic level. Five key ideas can be located within this theory: 'energy is not continuous, but comes in small but discrete units; the elementary particles behave both like particles *and* like waves; the movement of these particles is inherently random; it is *physically impossible* to know both the *position* and the *momentum* of a particle at the same time. The more precisely one is known, the less precise the measurement of the other is, (and), the atomic world is *nothing* like the world we live in'.[626] By employing aspects of, and references to this theory, the artist alludes to a constant state of flux and indeterminacy.

Laxson describes the work as being 'based on the scientific assumption that all matter is in motion', an assumption that she interprets, alluding to Heraclitus, as having physical grounding in that the subject 'can't step twice in the same river; (they) can't even step in, because while (they) are stepping in, it is changing'.[627] Under this scientific approach, 'this book works on the premise that interaction is the only reality'.[628] As such, the work becomes more about immediacy than the eventual and coherent sum of timed, sequential experience.

Visually, the pages present combinations of block colour, implied texture, scientific symbols, images and equations, logical statements, illogical textual fragments, arrows, letters, shapes, patterns, realistic imagery and heavily stylised imagery. There are aspects of this work that suggest the presence of a

[625] R. Laxson in K. Wasserman (ed.) 2007, *The Book as Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts,* Princeton Architectural Press, New York.

[626] J. Gribbin, R. P. Feynman, R. Leighton & M. Sands in *What is Quantum Physics?,* viewed 11 October 2012, <http://library.thinkquest.org/3487/qp.html>.

[627] Laxson, pg. 101.

[628] Laxson, pg. 101.

narrative or coded meaning that is yet to be interpreted. These include the method of binding which encourages the pages to be viewed sequentially according to Western conventions, as well as aspects of visual continuity such as the consistency of the colours used, further implying inherent relations between seemingly disparate compositions. Despite these points of implied narrative, the work ultimately and primarily assumes characteristics of a nonlinear sequence.

The term sequence can be used in this case as the pages must progress in a prescribed order that is set by the object's own binding. The pages may be turned in a linear motion, however the actual content of the pages cannot be considered linear because both the visual and textual information appears highly varied and fragmented. Within a single page, there is no defined viewing order. Some elements are crowded, overlapping and indiscernible, therefore encouraging a longer contemplation time than the sections that are sparse or entirely blank, which disrupts traditional, more constant, reading processes associated with the book. In addition to the limited meaning that can be readily derived from the pages and the interrupted and inconsistent flow of content, the work also implies the presence of hidden information. Through the persistent use of scientific references and notation, the everyday viewer may develop the notion that part of the logic of the object is concealed by the limitations in their own knowledge. This reveals a multiplicity of potential readings, none of which are directly or wholly facilitated by the content presented by the artist.

7.7.4 Multiple storylines

The disruptive technique of forming multiple storylines is further demonstrated through American artist Tate Shaw's *String Lessons,* 2002 (fig. 71).
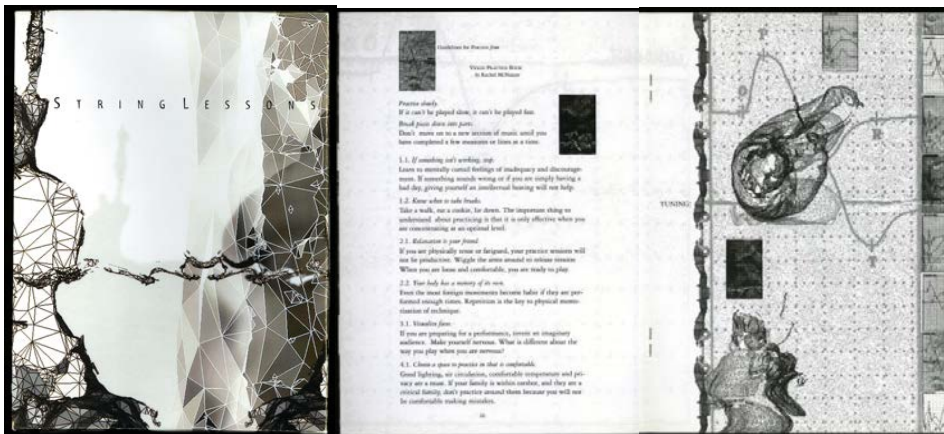
Fig. 71

The work puts forward multiple and intersecting storylines that present different perspectives of four subjects engaged in a shared activity. The book relies on four positions to piece together information about a violin instructor. The positions belong to musicians in a quartet – violin 1, violin 2, viola and cello. Each is accompanied by implied dialogue that was influenced by the discussions between student and teacher in the private music lessons carried out by Shaw's

partner at the time, Rachel McNassor.[629] Shaw observed certain physical and audible qualities of McNassor's daily recollections. He noted 'her change of intonation, vocal rhythm, and manner of gesticulation'.[630]   Using dialogue derived from these experiences Shaw constructs detailed, interwoven and performance-based stories.

In *String Lessons,* the text is dispersed between combinations of black and white and colour[631] drawings, diagrams, photocopies and photographs that are all directly or loosely related to the abovementioned instruments. The artist states that 'the reader, in my mind, (is) the performer putting the narrative together from these various different 'instruments''.[632]   The stories in this work are simultaneously present and incomplete, where the extent of a specific viewer's conceptual participation determines the level of coherence that can be attained from the work. Although much of the visual and textual content of this work refers to similar acts of performing, it is nonetheless presented in the form of fragments that may require interpretive practices outside that of straightforward reading. These practices necessarily involve an increased role for imagination, which is different for each individual and is only guided by the object to a certain degree.

Fig. 72

In an artists' book object, various storylines about different subject matter can intersect under a common theme or interest. Although this kind of unification is seemingly conducive to the construction of narrative, the introduction of many

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[629] T. Shaw, *Project Statement,* Artists' Books Online, viewed 11 October 2012,
<http://www.artistsbooksonline.org/works/sles.xml>.
[630] Shaw.
[631] The presence of colour itself within a work can be seen as a disruption. Walter Benjamin conceives of colour as non-systematic; only occurring as a perceptual phenomenon. He states that painterly colour 'arises as a simple phenomenon in the imagination, but its purity is distorted by its existence in space and this is the origin of light and shade'. Something is then formed 'between pure imagination and creation, and (here,) painterly colours have their existence'. As such, they are not a product of logical contemplation and execution, and their harmony 'exists only in perception'.
W. Benjamin in D. Batchelor (ed.) 2008, *Colour: Documents of Contemporary Art,* Whitechapel and The MIT Press, London/Cambridge/Massachusetts, pg. 65.
[632] Shaw.

positions can prove a source of irritation rather than proving informative. American artist Susan Goethel Campbell's *After the Deluge,* 2002 (fig. 72) presents sixteen imagined perspectives of a shared temporal experience. The work attempts to outline different animal species, in the context of their place and function within an early twenty-first century environment.[633] The content used throughout the pages is based on information from newspaper clippings that address 'human encroachment on animal habitats'.[634] Even though the work is derived from a set of narrative sources, its final presentation reveals only selected fragments of the original literature. Each page consists of a small section of text on the left side and a combination of text and imagery on the right. Within this composition, the viewer witnesses a clearly etched image of the animal in question, surrounded by areas of prominent text, faint remnants of text, partial prose and imagery and areas of torn articles. As such, each character or subject is implied, but their position and story is not explicitly carried out.

Although *After the Deluge* refers to various positions at a shared stage in history, it makes reference to sixteen different accounts or narratives. This multiplicity of content interrupts the linearity of a singular development. In this case, the viewer must seek ways to not only integrate the individual positions into a coherent frame, but they must first derive some meaningful conception of each separate account as it appears independently. Due to the fragmented or faded areas of text and imagery present, the task of forming a coherent reading requires the rejection or resolution of any significant gaps in information which can only be achieved through an active engagement by the viewer.

7.7.5 Unconventional form

Other artists' books may require an increased engagement with the viewer in order to reveal their content, further than the linear movement involved with reading a more traditional book. An example of this is American artist Sarah Bryant's *The Index,* 2006 (fig. 73) as it shows three central areas of resistance to the material properties of the conventional book object.

Fig. 73

[633] K. Wasserman (ed.) 2007, *The Book as Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts,* Princeton Architectural Press, New York.

[634] S. Goethel Campbell in K. Wasserman (ed.) 2007, *The Book as Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts,* Princeton Architectural Press, New York, pg. 53.

In the first instance, the implied cover of the work is in fact its container, and must be separated from the work entirely in order for the pages to be properly examined. Secondly, the actual book object is revealed to have no spine, neither sewn nor closed. This increases the object's potential for reconfiguration, which is generally highly restricted by the book's attached cover and closed spine. Finally, the book requires unfolding, rather than a page-turning motion. When it is unfolded in full, it forms one large image made up of twenty-seven smaller pages. The backs of these pages are blank, and are concealed both when the book is in folded form, and when it is laid out flat to reveal the full image. The 'pages' are actually made up of one long, continuous sheet containing several cuts so that it may be folded back on itself to give the illusion of multiple pages when in a closed position. The image revealed when the pages are viewed in full is that of a human skeleton predominately printed in green, with a yellow silhouette around it, the shape of which suggests that it belongs to a woman due to the long hair and curvy body. The spectator is able to view this work in two ways. The pages may be turned sequentially in folded form, where they present themselves as unordered fragments of an overall idea. If viewed in its unfolded form, however, the experience of the object becomes less like that of a book and more like that of a map or chart. The former method creates a content-based disruption, while the latter questions traditional form and physical viewing processes.
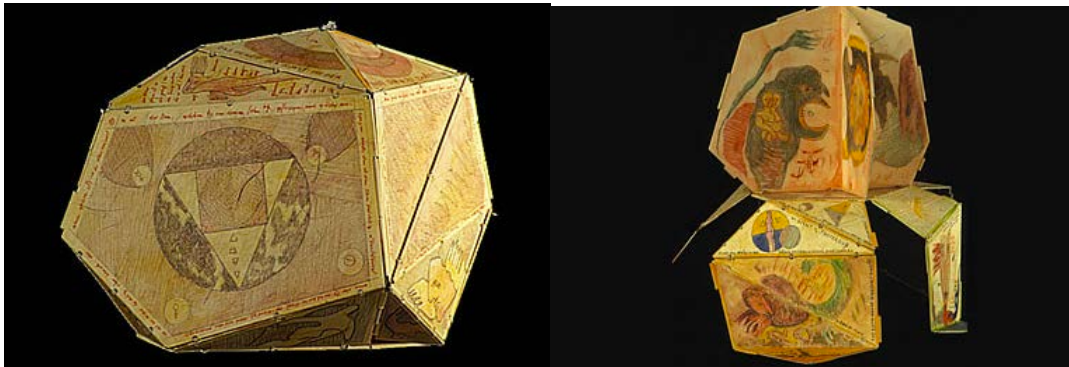

Fig. 74

Such material disruptions can also be viewed in sculptural artists' books, such as *The Philosopher's Stone,* 1993 (fig. 74) by American artist Daniel Kelm. All of the 'pages' contained in this work are of different dimensions, and when closed they form a hollow, sealed object with several concealed chambers inside. As implied by the title and the shape of the work, this object is reminiscent of some kind of precious stone. The pages are unfolded at irregular angles, and both sides of each page, or section, contain visual or written content, or some combination of both. Kelm states that 'the deep, expressive traits of a binding are to be found not just on its surface, but in its form, material and movement. When these integrally support the text and imagery of a book, a synergistic quality results'.[635] Here he refers to a unified effect, capable of being greater than that which can be brought about by a more conventional book object. The content of the pages combines rough sketches, hasty handwritten notes and

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[635] D. Kelm in J. Hale & B. Sweet (eds.) 2011, *Masters: Book Arts,* Lark Crafts: Sterling Publishing, New York, pg. 308.

carefully plotted diagrams. In this way, it is reminiscent of a collection of travel or research notes. This implies a sense of exploration and discovery, which is furthered by the physical processes required to 'read' this object. The work is held together by pins, which can be removed when unfolding it to reveal its additional content. Again, this book object does not require the straightforward motion of turning pages, but encourages dismantling, rotating and moving the components in various directions. The kind of exploration involved with the viewing processes necessary for 'reading' this object mirrors its suggested content, and simultaneously forges departures from preconceived notions of the physical book.

7.7.6 Sculptural books

Canadian artist Guy Laramée produces book works, or hand-carved book sculptures that facilitate an altogether different experience than instances of inter-human communication and exchange that conventionally occur by means of the book. Works such as *Official Report,* 2010 (fig. 75) depicts a form that is reminiscent of natural landscapes, yet constructed from found, man-made book objects.

Fig. 75

In this work, the artist has removed areas of the cover and text block to produce the appearance of tessellated cliff-faces. Laramée seeks to connect with areas of imagination rather than learned knowledge towards the physical and spiritual qualities of the natural environment. He states that natural landscapes can be regarded as being 'untouched by concepts' and therefore intending to say 'nothing in particular'.[636]   He further states, 'if anything, landscape tells us something about ourselves, about our place in the world'.[637]   In *Official Report,*

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[636] G. Laramée in P. Sloman (ed) 2011, *Book Art: Iconic Sculptures and Installations Made from Books,* Gestalten, Berlin, pg. 24.
[637] Laramée in Sloman, pg. 24.

the landscape depicted can be simultaneously viewed as one that is vaguely recognisable as a landscape, yet does not actually exist beyond being an art object.

Through the depiction of ambiguous form, the artist intends to encourage spontaneity and intuitive experience, rather than a predefined and strictly guided process of discovery. In doing so, the work becomes subject to varied individual interpretation, which is guided by each subject's previous experiences, memories and imagination. Moreover, the material elements and physical structure of this work also resist conventional reading processes. This sculptural book object was derived from a logical text, which is only partially in tact in the final work. Areas of the original object have been progressively reduced in order to reveal an imagined landscape. This process simultaneously builds a clearer depiction of natural forms while reducing the coherent content of the text itself. Furthermore, these two functions of the book object cannot operate at the same time, they cannot be visually sustained simultaneously. The work is either a landscape sculpture comprised of masses of concealed information, or a book with incomplete content. In both cases, the object suggests missing contents or another role for the viewer, outside that of reading a more traditional book.
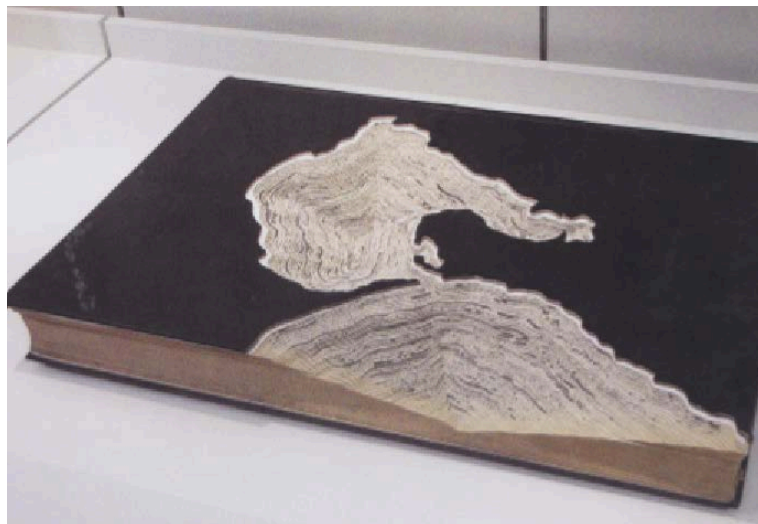
Fig. 76

A similar approach can be located in book works by Australian artist Nicholas Jones, such as *The Victorian Australian,* 2009 (fig. 76). Jones' works are based on sets of lines and shapes outlined on and cut into the cover of a book, and then echoed on an increasingly smaller scale throughout its pages. When viewed in a closed position, *The Victorian Australian* reveals narrow fragments of many pages simultaneously. Like *Official Report,* this work also guides the viewer away from traditional reading processes and towards an ambiguous and individual practice of self-reflection. Jones relates his works to the practice of instilling a new function into the book object while allowing it to remain reminiscent of its past. This occurs as a part of a greater development of material and form, which Jones traces 'from trees to wood pulp, to paper, to books; and then through the process of metamorphosis to the array of different

manifestations which are (his) works. And then of course to dust; completing the cycle'.[638]

Although, for Jones, this conversion of existing texts into objects of art acts as one stage in an overall development or narrative, the processes he conducts and the subsequent products he renders, interfere with conventional notions of the book. Instead of, or in conjunction with, carrying out forms of observation about the text, Jones cuts through the layers, one page at a time, to create something apart from and unintended by the original work. In addition to the unconventional way in which the artist uses the original book object, the reader or viewer must then alter their contact with the work accordingly. The book now exists in a changed form – it feels, looks and reads differently. The original content of the object has been partially removed; leaving both physical and conceptual gaps that cannot be recovered by narrativization but rather introduces a platform for self-reflective response.

7.7.7 Interactive content

Unconventional modes of construction can also occur in created book objects that adhere to conventional modes of binding. For example, Sarah Bryant shows a subtle reinterpretation of the book form, from single-layered pages to multilayered and interactive elements, through works such as *Cutaway,* 2007 (fig. 77).

Fig. 77

Bryant states that her 'books are usually connected to the idea of hidden information' and as such, they utilise 'imagery relevant to this theme, including anatomical charts and cross sections, as well as structural elements such as layered pages that force the viewer to actively explore the book'.[639] Initially, *Cutaway* may appear to observe narrative methods, such as being arranged in a

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[638] N. Jones in P. Sloman (ed) 2011, *Book Art: Iconic Sculptures and Installations Made from Books,* Gestalten, Berlin, pg. 94.

[639] S. Bryant in J. Hale & B. Sweet (eds.) 2011, *Masters: Book Arts,* Lark Crafts: Sterling Publishing, New York, pg. 75.

traditional codex form and assuming the format of a reference book, with each page containing an image labeled with text that acts to reinforce the viewer's understanding. Despite these aspects, which generally assist the formulation of narrative sequence, the work has the potential to lie outside the constraints of straightforward linear progression. The idea of hidden information encourages the viewer to pause and interact with the pages, rather than simply turning them sequentially. The removable areas of the object aid this interaction. These areas encourage not only the physical act of turning the pages, but other forms of both physical interaction and conceptual engagement with the pages as well, which disrupts material and conceptual conventions of the book. The reader could potentially alter the arrangement and order of the inserts and in doing so, change their context or render them illogical. In this way, *Cutaway* approaches and subtly revises conventional modes of reading and presenting information by means of the book.

7.7.8 Concealed or missing information

Where Bryant utilises the notion of hidden information that has the potential to be recovered, artists such as English artist Alexander Korzer-Robinson present suggestions of concealed information that the viewer cannot uncover. This can be seen in works such as *Hummingbirds of the Sea,* c. 21st Century (fig. 78).
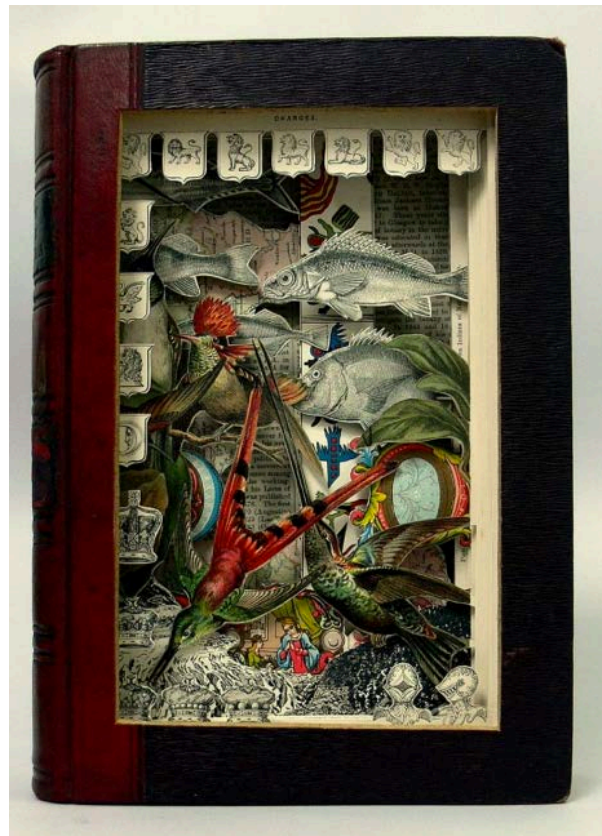

Fig. 78

The work is formed by methods of altering an encyclopedia and using found images within the pages to construct a new visual composition. As both the imagery and the title of the work imply, the key visual focus is on the birds that appear in colour, and the fish that appear in black and white. Although these

are dominant within the composition, the viewer may also locate other images and text that depict maps, text, flora, decorative letters, lions, reductive painting and a crown. The pictorial arrangement of the work alone gives the impression of an impossible scene, where the sea life is not only shown as dwelling above the birds, but there is no particular reference to an actual sea, earth or sky to give the creatures an environment or context to exist in. Instead, they appear as part of a collection of recorded information where each piece is overlapping or partial, so no single element is able to reveal an entire sense of their being. The process involved with the making of the work furthers this impression. The object itself is an encyclopedia with a large section of the cover removed. Areas of the pages are also removed in order to reveal only a narrow context from selected pages. The book is then fixed in a closed position, so that even the pages that remain can no longer be revealed. Due to previous experience with similar objects however, the viewer is likely to expect that information is being withheld as a result of the way in which the object has been constructed. As such, this object disrupts traditional practices of reading by converting the book object into a kind of fixed sculpture that acts to conceal much of the information attainable from the original object.

Fig. 79

In a similar way to Korzer-Robinson, American artist Brian Dettmer also works with altered books and concealed information, but often incorporates multiple books into a single object. For example, *Double Day,* 2009 (fig. 79) is a work comprised of ten altered encyclopedias. Like Korzer-Robinson, Dettmer alters the existing texts by removing areas of the text block, then fixing the pages in a sculptural manner so that information from various points in the book is revealed simultaneously. This forms a kind of suspended glimpse of the original linear product; the information is out of context and only partial. In such works, that which the viewer can assume has been concealed is the contents of a number of volumes where the text and images may have orignially been read as coherent or meaningful in their entirety. Dettmer describes his intentions as to 'alter physical forms of information and shift preconceived functions' and in

doing so, reveal 'new and unexpected roles (that) emerge in each book'.[640] Within this reinvention, the expectations of the viewer towards the original object can no longer be met. Therefore, the viewer must seek alternate ways of interpreting the work, outside that of linear comprehension. The process of attempting to integrate disparate phenomena into a meaningful frame could provide some sense of coherence or resolution for the viewer to varying degrees, based on their willingness to carry out an interpretive role as well as their capacity for storytelling. Even so, the viewer may also recall characteristics of the original object whereby the separate elements do not necessarily relate to each other. Rather than following a narrative throughout the entire text, these books assume a reference format. Such a format is generally arranged alphabetically, chronologically or by subject. In each case, the story, or linear progression of information, is only sustained for short segments. As such, this object reveals only fragments of various entries where the original content is not wholly revealed and the remaining cues do not act to form overall coherence.

7.7.9 Moveable content

While the limited physical and conceptual interaction between book object and viewer facilitated by these works can act as disruptive, works without a fixed order can also be problematic to logical sequence. This can be seen in Peter Beaman and Elizabeth Whitely's *Deck of Cards,* 1989 (fig. 80), which implies narrative practices and conventions while ultimately failing to sustain them.

Fig. 80

The work is made up of large, loose cards that are packaged together. Each of the cards has repeated imagery on one side and unique text on the other. The text on the cards revolves around a central group of characters; some fragments specifically assign speech or actions to a chosen character, others remain ambiguous. As a result, there are many different stories and relations that could occur, but none can be viewed as a fixed or intended reading.

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[640] B. Dettmer in J. Hale & B. Sweet (eds.) 2011, *Masters: Book Arts,* Lark Crafts: Sterling Publishing, New York, pg. 29.

Johanna Drucker describes this work as relying on 'narrative conventions (the idea of unified place, time, action and characteristics) as a way for (its) parts to be read in relation to each other'.[641] Furthermore, these can be seen as 'hypertext before the computer – works whose potential for linking and branching is structured into the way the blocks of prose break and offer possibilities for recombining'.[642] This work contains potential narratives, but cannot be perceived as completely linear since its ordering remains ambiguous, and can constantly be reconstructed. The implied story or stories present within the work lack a solid foundation, and can be continuously revised in favour of stronger links between developments or alternate progressions. These processes of constant revision and the heightened role of the viewer undermine conventional reading practices. As such, they question the intentions of the artists involved; yet present little grounds for resolution.

7.7.10 Hybrid media

Material aspects that encourage or require further interaction than that facilitated by the viewing of more traditional book objects can also be located in works with some degree of fixed components and order. This can be seen in book objects such as American artist Sandra Jackman's *On a Darkling Plain,* 2000 (fig. 79).

Fig. 81

The work is an altered book that relies almost entirely on imagery, but also incorporates an element of sound other than that brought about by the viewer's physical contact with the object. There is a radio attached to the book's cover that emits sounds of static.[643] These noises alone indicate some sort of

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[641] Drucker, pg. 278.
[642] Drucker, pg. 279.
[643] Wasserman.

disturbance, for example, as caused by a bad connection or poor tuning and which results in broken communication. The pages themselves contain many folded and layered elements whereby 'the action (depicted) unfolds with pop-ups and paper engineered to display the drama of destruction'.[644] In this work, the destruction in question refers to that of war through methods of human and mechanical conflict.

On a Darkling Plain references sustained warfare throughout various parts of the world in both a historical and present context. In this way, it engages with ongoing social issues, with no foreseeable resolution. This kind of suspended action resists forms of narrative sequence as no wholly determined conclusion is hinted or arrived at. The contents of the pages are heavily layered, and a toy helicopter has been attached to the front cover so that it appears to be hovering over each page spread. Some of the layers are fixed to create a pop-up effect, others can be unfolded and some remain firmly attached to the pages. In any case, the imagery appears fragmented, torn, broken, chaotic, overloaded and the colours used are consistently dull and lifeless. Overall, the work negates traditional forms of narrative not only by prolonging the viewer's experience of the object, but also by engaging with additional physical interactions and an ultimately unresolvable content.
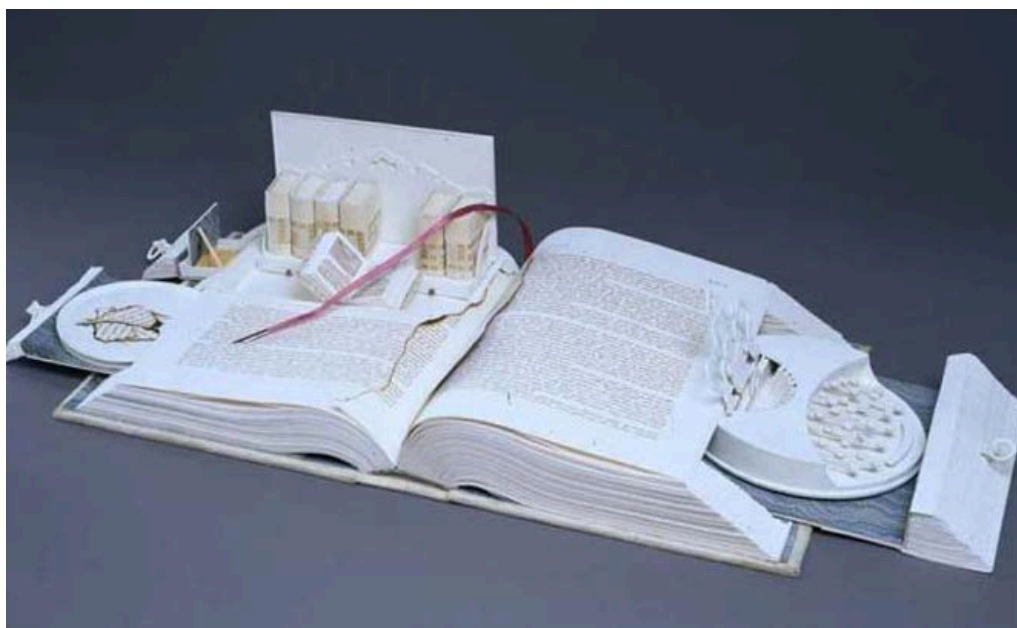
Fig. 82

A disruption brought about by both a conceptual and physical negation of conventional modes of narrative and meaning-making processes can also be seen in the work *Swiss Army Book,* 1990 (fig. 82) by American artist M. L. Van Nice. The artist states that 'it is a volume both of knowledge and of tools necessary for the modification of that knowledge'.[645] In this way, it seeks to critique forms of established meaning, particularly that of science. Constructed

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[644] S. Jackman in K. Wasserman (ed.) 2007, *The Book as Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts,* Princeton Architectural Press, New York, pg. 110.

[645] M. L. Van Nice in K. Wasserman (ed.) 2007, *The Book as Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts,* Princeton Architectural Press, New York, pg. 181.

meaning may lack finality if it can be improved, added to or even contested by new discovery. The physical components of the work itself include loose pages containing textual information, fragments of pages that have been burned, a pen nib, a shelf of smaller texts and drawers constructed within the original object that reveal matches and a place to store partially incinerated material. The artist discusses the work saying: 'here is the written word; burn the written word; rewrite the written word; leave matches for the next guy'.[646] This implies an approach that is centered on sustained questioning. Such an approach is not supported by the constraints of narrative order and a progression towards a conclusion, as these focus on answering potential queries and providing a summary. A rejection of narrative conventions is further made evident when considering the material potentialities of the object. The interaction with the work as an object other than a book, and the implied destruction and revision of the content, does not support the more traditional act of reading because it activates the book in a different way.

7.7.11 Book installations

Forms of book installations that depart from the conventional construction and movement of the codex book entirely can also be referred to in a discussion of non-narrative artists' books because they also utilise or reference aspects of the book as a key component of the artwork. An example of this form of practice is American artist Lisa Kokin's installation *Room For Improvement*, 2008 (fig. 83).

Fig. 83

This work involves the transformation of selected self-help books from organised formal constructions to organic shapes. This can be considered as some form of return to the original condition of the books, to the organic tree matter used in the composition of the pages themselves. The original books are dismantled and pulped page by page, then sculpted into rock-like forms. These

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[646] Van Nice, pg. 181.

forms vary in colour due to the original colour of the pages, some of which has been intentionally left in tact. Due to this, areas of the original text can still be read and interpreted, which gives suggestion to the overall content that was previously contained in these now disintegrated pages.

Through her works, Kokin seeks to approach and represent aspects of 'the human condition by using the objects we leave behind'.[647] With this in mind, the original books contained within this work could be regarded as used and forgotten, and the transformation involved in this work acts as the final concealment of this disregarded information. It has undergone processes of disintegration, and no longer resembles any form of defined, clearly discernable literature. The objects can no longer be handled or read in any conventional manner relating to the notion of the book. The masses of content implied can only exist as suggestions put forward by the viewer, based on the fragments of information present and the viewer's recollection of the original form.

Fig. 84   Fig. 85

In addition to the book's potential to facilitate singular sculptural objects, it can also be utilised as a smaller unit in larger sculptures or installation-based works. This is demonstrated throughout Spanish artist Alicia Martin's practice, in works such as *Biografias III,* 2009 (fig. 84) and *Contemporáneos,* 2000 (fig. 85). These works question the function and potential of the book object from various perspectives, such as that of handling, placement, access and preservation. *Biografias III* is a large sculptural work where masses of individual book objects can be seen emerging from the window and then spilling out onto the ground in a stream-like manner. This composition alludes to a fast, forceful movement, but as the individual components are fixed within a seemingly suspended motion, the only movement occurring within the sculpture is subtle, such as the rustling of wind in the pages. *Contemporáneos* presents similar masses of book objects, but in this case, the objects emerge from a wall in a gallery space that is lifting away from its base. This partially lifted wall is a false one, installed into the gallery in order to create an illusion of the books breaking out of their container – the constructed room next to the one they now begin to occupy.

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[647] L. Kokin in in P. Sloman (ed) 2011, *Book Art: Iconic Sculptures and Installations Made from Books,* Gestalten, Berlin, pg. 126.

In both of these examples, the book assumes a different role than that of communicating narrative content through a single object. The abundance of books shown in these works, and their arrangement, which ensures that only limited content from many sources remains accessible, indicates that the subjects that occupy these sites and broader culture is saturated with information. From the perspective of the artist, she intends that her work 'be suggestive of all the memories contained in the thousands of books she uses, but also that it can serve as a reference to the over-abundance of information dispelled in society today'.[648] This abundance can be viewed as a form of narrative disruption. When the reader or viewer is presented with an excess of visual and textual information in such volumes, they are also confronted with the impossibility of knowing the objects in their entirety. While observing any area of information that remains visible, the viewing subject is simultaneously aware of the masses of information that remains concealed.

7.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed disrupted, non-narrative or seemingly incomplete book works[649] that rely on methods of departure from traditional book and narrative conventions, and therefore, also departing from the accepted or expected logic attached to such objects. Various works that serve this discussion from either a conceptual or material basis, or some combination of the two have been considered. Conceptual disruptions may not necessarily be exclusive to the book form, but can be extensively developed by this medium due to the narrative expectations the viewer carries towards the format of the book. The disruptions may be in the form of illogical or mismatched prose non-linear or fractured sequence or the presence of multiple or intersecting storylines. As the physical interruptions discussed refer to the form and movement of the book object itself, they also necessarily involve a conceptual component that designates how these should conventionally occur.

Alternatives to material traditions related to the book form that have been observed in this chapter include alternative or sculptural methods of binding, multilayered elements, partial or hidden information, loose or interchangeable pages and interactive aspects. Both conceptual and material disruptions have been shown to interrupt and prolong conventional narrative reading or viewing processes with this departure from book conventions, these non-narrative artists' book often seek to serve alternate sequence. For example, Cooke Brown's *Teatimes* present fragments of personal musings that cannot be pieced together in a wholly coherent, linear order. This may be seen to reflect the very

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[648] A. Martin in P. Sloman (ed.) 2011, *Book Art: Iconic Sculptures and Installations Made from Books,* Gestalten, Berlin, pg. 140.

[649] Zines can also be considered in a discussion about alternate methods of production and reading as they are generally derived from a conventional book form, however this is outside the scope of this dissertation. Anna Poletti states that a common function of the Zine is to provide 'the reader with a unique experience of the ephemeral, the personal and the handmade, and its audience must know where to look to encounter it'. It is perhaps these sometimes vague and unexpected factors that allow zines to lend themselves quite readily to non-narrative structures, yet they do not do so in the same capacity as the artists' books engaged in this dissertation. This is because the abovementioned lack of rules pertaining to the production of zines can be seen as synonymous with a lack of expectations. If the viewer does not have some clear conception of what they should expect from an object, they are more likely to accept the object as it appears. A. Poletti ed. S. Forster 2011, 'Staying Sticky', *Imprint,* Vol. 46, No. 2, pg. 7.

nature of human memory; it becomes increasingly partial, and often commands the role of imagination to forge intelligible links between remembered events and thoughts.

Laxon's *[Ho+Go] = It* uses the disruption and absence of visual linearity to refer to scientific conditions. In this work, a visual indeterminacy reflects a similar state of reality described by Quantum Theory. This is a state of partial knowledge and constant flux. Departing from conventional book structure, Kelm's *The Philosopher's Stone* illustrates the object of its concept while engaging the reader in explorative acts. In examples such as these, the objects intends to replicate its intended feeling or effect in the viewer, rather than describe it directly with language or image. This refers to experience rather than information. Due to their sometimes indirect and ambiguous qualities however, individual viewing experiences can be highly varied. Here, the non-narrative artists' book object calls for an increased role from the viewer. They may not merely assume the role of observer, but active participant in forming links between the presented stimuli.

The examples of alternate, non-narrative or disrupted book works discussed throughout this chapter all involve the negation of conventional reading processes, and some measure of the understanding of the object in general. When viewing such non-narrative objects, including the abovementioned works, that deal with some conceptual or physical alteration to the book and narrative conventions, the viewing subject must revise their understanding of the book object and its content. This process is necessary in order for the viewer to engage with the unconventional book object at hand.

The works discussed throughout this chapter do not follow the linear narrative conventions associated with the traditional book object. Instead, the viewer may experience sensations or implications that may be more readily associated with the traditional book object. A prolonged engagement with the object is brought about as long as some level of understanding is withheld, which can bring about a free play of imagination and understanding as outlined in Kant's aesthetics. In response to the changed function of the books, the viewer can no longer 'read' the object in a conventional sense. They can, however, seek to derive alternate forms of experience outside that of linear narrative or meaning from such works by means of physical and sensory engagement, contributing to conceptual content and observing the implications of fragmented concepts, objects and environments. In doing so, the experience of the work is extended beyond that which occurs within the constraints of the conventional book and narrative sequence.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the production and role of artists' books that engage in disrupted sequence or logic, or non-narrative ordering, to provide a historical and theoretical context for the reception of non-narrative artists' books. It investigated illogical or disruptive spaces that can arise within a work, rather than focusing on what is external to the work, such as cultural theory and the politics of aesthetics. In doing so, a gap in existing literature was addressed. The dissertation identified specific examples of book works that put forward a disruptive gap and found that they facilitate methods of prolonged engagement between the object and viewer based on the withdrawal of convention or expectation.

This form of engagement may involve physical contact where the viewer must handle the work in an unexpected way; the need to comprehend excess or unexpected information, or the presence of the desire to obtain information that is seemingly concealed or missing. In all of these instances, the viewer's expectation of the object is, to some degree, withheld. As such, these works can be discussed in terms of a Kantian aesthetic, where the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding are set into a state of free play with one another, and neither is subsumed by the other. This extension of a historical debate was necessary to facilitate the inclusion of non-narrative artists' books into a wider theoretical context.

In the dissertation, non-narrative artists' books have been shown to refer to some aspect or convention associated with the traditional book, yet ultimately depart from such conventions. As such, they require alternate modes of engagement and interpretation, not common to traditional understandings of the book. By investigating such methods, the viewer can seek a meaningful or engaging experience of the work outside conventional understanding. In order to address non-narrative book practices, this dissertation has identified five key subjects of interest that have been discussed throughout the preceding chapters.

Chapter Three *A Brief Historical Survey of Artists' Books* has provided a means for identifying artists' books in general, including a brief discussion of their historical development. Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology* determined the value and function of the narrative in society. Here, the potential for the formation of visual narratives was considered a key focus, as this is the primary mode of practice that has been departed from. With this in mind, Chapter Five *Aesthetics and Art History* investigated the fragmented or non-narrative visual work in terms of aesthetic theory. Further to this, Chapter Six *Art and Language* identified other theoretical approaches to, and interpretations of, non-narrative works, both linguistic and visual. Based on the discussions of these related subjects, Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books* then engaged with specific examples of both narrative and non-narrative artists' books. Throughout this chapter, different forms of disruption and the various ways in which the subsequent works may be engaged with were identified. From this, it was established that non-narrative artists' books may carry out many functions,

such as engaging and suspending the viewer's senses, sustaining the faculty of desire, providing a basis for a multifaceted engagement with and contribution to the work and assimilating other aspects of general experience. The following will provide a summary of the key discussions presented in the chapters, as well as an account of the conclusions drawn from this study that collectively form a theoretical account of non-narrative or disrupted narratives in artists' books and the ways in which a viewer may interpret or engage with them as a response to this disruption.

The overall difficulty in providing a conclusive definition for the term 'artists' books' was established in Chapter Three *A Brief Historical Survey of Artists' Books*. Here, instead of attempting to impose a rigid definition on a form of practice that is highly flexible and still under development, we sought to identify a general set of characteristics that apply to artists' books. It was shown that the key qualification in determining this form of practice was that the book object must serve as a work of art in and of itself. It is not a catalogue, a container for the presentation of artworks that exist externally to the object or a book that incorporates art in order to illustrate existing literature, but another medium by which artists facilitate their individual interests as practitioners. This is how the artist's book can be distinguished from a book in general.

The traditional book object can be regarded as one that is comprised wholly or predominately of written text; is bound in the codex format and presents its information in a linear, logically progressive structure. Although the increased incorporation of imagery into the book, experimental typography and changes in conceptual content can be located in books produced for centuries, such objects cannot truly be termed artists' books, but can be regarded as precursors to the form. This is because they only bring some artistic or experimental tendencies to the book, but they are not artworks in their entirety, or created and exhibited self-consciously as works of art. The practice of producing artists' books can be primarily viewed as a twentieth century development, particularly located, as they are understood today, during and since the 1960s when the widespread practice of producing a book as an artwork in and of itself can be observed.

As identified in Chapter Three, traditional conceptions of the book object often involve the presentation of a narrative or sequential and largely coherent content. Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology* then sought to investigate the value and function of narratives that operate throughout human culture in general. Here, the book is regarded as just one means by which information can be recorded, stored and received by multiple subjects. Narrative ordering is a common cultural practice, one that is carried out automatically for the purpose of rendering phenonmena, experiences and thoughts meaningful. This order organises information into a logical or linear sequence, and can be most readily associated with the structures and conventions found in spoken and written languages. In addition to these more traditional applications of the term 'narrative', Chapter Four focused on investigating the possibility of complete visual narratives. This possibility has been examined in theoretical approaches such as those of H. Porter Abbott, W. J. T. Mitchell and Julia Kristeva. Other accounts of narrative theory exclude this approach in response to a perceived

ambiguity in visual language, or to a lack of a clearly defined or constant set of conventions for viewing or reading an image. The individual viewing subject, to some degree, controls the order and extent of the viewing experience. Despite the limitations or inconsistences this may cause, a visual image or set of images can be discussed in terms of their meaning-making potential; of the narratives they present if they are read as such.

This dissertation has demonstrated an account of narratives present in works of visual art in relation to two key categories. The first refers to works of art that directly or partially illustrate an existing story, text, event or cultural practice. This approach can primarily be located in historical art movements such as Medieval art, History Painting in general and Realism. As shown in Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology*, Medieval works such as *The Adoration of the Magi,* 1507 by the Circle of the Strassburger Werkstattgemeinschaft illustrate existing works of literature. In this example, the image reflects the biblical story where Mary and baby Jesus are presented with gifts from the three wisemen. As this scene can be located in well-known religious literature, it acts as one moment within a narrative account of known events.

History Painting follows a similar approach, where a singular historical moment within an existing narrative is depicted. This can refer to a work of literature or to a known historical event. Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights,* c. 1504 extends the depiction of a visual narrative by illustrating three stages in a story in the form of a triptych. The three panels in this work show the progression of sin through the depiction of a stylistic yet narrative account of events. Realist works can also reveal a singular moment within an overall narrative, commonly one of everyday or common experience. *Le Repas des Pauvres,* 1877 by Alphonse Legros shows this approach through the depiction of three diners and a waiter at an everyday meal. This can be considered a narrative work because the event is easily recognised by the viewing subject, and is reflected in their own experiences. Common themes illustrated under the abovementioned practices include religious doctrine, political or bourgeois agenda or the depiction of common, everyday scenes and events. In these cases, the content or stories located in the works of art are not exclusive to the form they are presented in. These stories exist separately from the visual work, either as literature, as cultural belief or practice or as part of everyday life.

The second type of visual narrative discussed in Chapter Four facilitates the construction of new stories, either within the image or between the image and the viewer. These stories may be entirely specific to the artwork, or they may still refer to some aspects of other media. If the latter occurs, the other media becomes a smaller component of the story, rather than an entire duplication. Examples of this can be seen in movements and categories such as Cubism, Postmodernism, social commentary art, Identity art, conceptual art, community art and participatory practice. In Chapter Four, the following works were discussed as key narrative examples of each of the abovementioned categories. Roger de La Fresnaye's *Artillery,* 1911 is a Cubist work that depicts a progression of soldiers and horses past a band of musicians. Although the visual elements within the work have been reduced to basic configurations of lines, shapes and colours, the subject of the scene remains discernible. The

series of lines that map the direction of the carriage further suggest movement, which implies not just a narrative moment, but also a narrative sequence. Similar to works of Realism, the narratives that can be found in Postmodern works of art often relate to its references to everyday life rather than constructed stories. This is shown in the work *Retroactive 1,* 1964 by Robert Rauschenberg, which incorporates common images from visual media outlets at the time. In this way it refers to culturally known events or narratives; to stories from everyday life.

A similar approach can be seen in works of social commentary art, which seek to critique some cultural or social issue. This is demonstrated in *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?,* 1989 by the Guerilla Girls. This work compares statistics of the number of female artists shown in the Modern art sections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York compared to the amount of female nudes depicted in the works. The work gives additional information to a known culture, furthering narrative understanding. Works that refer to a collective identity such as gender, race or sexuality can function towards a similar end. Kara Walker's *Slavery! Slavery! Presenting a GRAND and LIFELIKE panoramic Journey into Picturesque Slavery or Life at 'Ol' Virginny's Hole' (Sketches from Plantation Life) See the Peculiar Institution as never before! All cut from black paper by the able hand of Kara Elizabeth Walker an Emancipated Negress and leader of her cause,* 1997 addresses both individual and collective racial concerns. This panorama implies sequence and movement, as well as a collection of stories belonging to different characters from a chosen location during the Civil War. The sense of a collective, culturally significant narrative can be adapted to the everyday experience of some individuals, and to known stories of others.

Works of conceptual art that draw on the notion of art as idea were also discussed in terms of their narrative or meaning-making potential. Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs,* 1965 demonstrates this notion by presenting three potential existences or representations of the understanding of a chair: a photograph of a chair, a chair object and a section of printed text that defines the term 'chair'. The description and presentation of this idea in multiple forms relates to conscious acts of developing understanding and narrating experience. The communicability of experience is also a key component of the narratives that can be observed in community based and participatory works.

An example of this discussed in Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology* is Gordon Matta-Clark's *Food*, 1971-73. The work involved the running of a restaurant space, where artists and other participants cooked and consumed food together. Participants were required to contribute something to discussions that took place in this space by leading them, responding to them or assuming the role of listener. In this way, conventional divisions evident in such spaces were done away with in favour of facilitating conversation and storytelling. This work shows an instance of imposed narrative, which is borrowed from avant-garde practices of the early and later 20th century. In this kind of narrative, the viewer is passive, and the participant in life is active. The narrative deployed in this work provides the distinction between the consumption of food in everyday life, and the consumption of food as art. Two

common tendencies that can be observed in such practices are the shift away from figurative and realistic pictorial representation and the related need for the increased role of the viewer in determining the narrative or narratives.

When discussing an image or set of images in terms of narrative theory, such as the artworks referred to in Chapter Four, the visual components are broken down and 'read' as in any other text. Where the meanings of linguistic units and the larger structures they form in written and spoken language are largely consistent, although misunderstandings can occur, the implications of visual units can be considered more flexible. Their meaning differs from viewer to viewer, based on memory, prior understanding, interpretive ability and any other cultural or individual qualities that may affect acts of reception. It is not only smaller images within an overall composition that have the potential to form a narrative, but the smaller units that comprise these images as well. For example, formations of colours, ambiguous marks or spontaneous lines could be reminiscent of an individual's environment, and therefore hold some form of meaning for them. As such, the reading of a visual work can be subject to flexible interpretation, more so than written and spoken communication. In such cases, the work puts forward an amount of cues that are then worked into a narrative structure, and thus logically completed, by the viewer. If there are not enough related or logical cues supplied by the work, or the cues presently are largely contradictory, however, the work may be regarded as resisting, disrupting or negating narrative order altogether. Just as spoken and written texts can resist narrative order, so too can visual texts, in the context of this dissertation, the artist's book.

This possibility was further discussed in Chapter Five *Aesthetics and Art History*. Here, a non-narrative visual work or element in a work was considered as a potential aesthetic element. In order to form this consideration, the theories of two major contributors to the field, G. W. F. Hegel and Immanuel Kant, were discussed. Although against chronology, these theorists were investigated in the abovementioned order so as to form a logical progression of ideas through the chapter. The key aspect of Hegel's theory outlined in this chapter is his account of the progressive narrative of human thought. In this system, beauty is derived from access to the Divine which is first achieved through nature, then, at a higher level, through art, then religion and, ultimately, philosophy. When art gives up its highest function at the point of Romanticism, visual works are still produced and can serve the function of self-reflection according to Hegel. It is this point that allows Hegel's narrative to be extended to include forms of modern and contemporary art. The theory itself is based on inclusion, and the submission of individual practices to an overall logic as was shown by Robert Pippin's extension of Hegel's theory to refer to the self-reflective practices of modern Abstract art. Due to its focus on some overarching narrative or sense of harmony, Hegel's position is not regarded as the most relevant theory for the discussion of the disruption or negation of visual narratives except as a counterpoint to the more fruitful Kantian approach ultimately deployed in the dissertation. Such works require the constant presence of a kind of difficulty or unknown element that disrupts such narrative ordering, whereas Hegel's

system imposes a logical function on all forms of work and all particulars contained within it.[650]

Contrary to Hegel's absolutism, Kant's aesthetic theory was discussed in order to describe the potential inclusion of an illogical or unidentifiable aspect in a visual work. A partial or disrupted narrative within a visual work can be referred to in terms of Kant's account of judgements of beauty, particularly in regards to his concept of the 'free play' of cognitive faculties. In this system, a visual work can be discussed in terms of displaying dependent beauty if they bring about a sustained, harmonious play between the viewing subject's imagination and understanding. For this to be sustained indefinitely, neither faculty must subsume the other. Therefore, a totality of understanding is not a necessary condition of a judgement of beauty under Kant's theory. With this in mind, works containing some absence or contradiction can be included as they can bring about a free play between imagination and understanding. There can be some indiscernible or disrupted presence inside of the central narrative that is never resolved, that never fully becomes known.

In addition to its potential as an aesthetic element, a non-narrative or disruptive inclusion or exclusion in a visual work can further be discussed in terms of narrative, communication and semiotic theories as well as specific non-narrative works. These were the key topics raised in Chapter Six *Art and Language*. Although Chapter Four *Semiotics and Narratology* approached similar ideas, Chapter Six focused on the other side of the debate over the potential for narrative meaning versus the potential for disrupted logic. Chapter Six determined that in order for effective communication to occur, by any means, the sender and receiver of information must have a mutual understanding of the spoken, written or visual language they are engaged in. In response to potential inconsistencies in the formation and dispersion of narratives, this chapter investigated the three key circumstances, outlined by Warren Weaver, by which problems are likely to occur during acts of communication. The first relates to the technical aspects of such processes, which can involve problems with the transference of symbols from sender to receiver. The second involves issues of semantics, where complications may occur if the sender's intended meaning does not satisfactorily compare with the receiver's interpreted meaning. The third concerns the effectiveness of the information communicated, and involves the validation of the sender's desired outcome or response. While such an account of communication reveals the areas that must be fulfilled in order for these processes to be effective, as in a narrative structure, it also points to areas of and stages within communicative acts where problems may occur.

Such problems are more prevalent in the context of reading a work of visual art, when an increased contribution and interpretive role is required from the viewer. Although this was viewed as an invitation for the active formation of meaning in Chapter Four, Chapter Six recognised the possibility of this process being ultimately unsuccessful. In order to demonstrate this, Mieke Bal's semiotic account of Louise Bourgeois' *Spider,* 1997 which sought a coherent

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[650] It could be argued, as Slavoj Žižek has, that contradiction drives Hegel's dialectic, but this form of disruption to totality only leads to further examples of the system.

narrative reading was discussed in order to refer to a context for the alternative. In contrary systems, such as the response provided by James Elkins, the practice of forcefully assigning meaning to every purposeful and incidental mark or image alike is done away with. For Elkins, the possibility of an ever-present and even essential difficulty can be examined. Such an element may act as a means for the viewer to come to further know the image as it is, and themselves through an ongoing search for meaning. Here, it is acknowledged that a sense of lack, implied missing contents, illogical information or contradictory stimuli could result in a kind of trauma or at least frustration, but it is further suggested that such elements may drive a sense of desire in the viewing subject. Eliminating a sense of lack through the fulfillment of narrative order consequently eliminates the sense of desire. This is a desire for knowing, or to discover the object in its entirety and obtain a complete sense of understanding towards it. If this state is reached, the object can no longer act as a source of active contemplation towards a present experience.

Some works of art and literature, such as those of Surrealism, Dadaism, Postmodernism and contemporary practice discussed in Chapter Six *Art and Language*, were shown to investigate this alternative approach. Surrealist work *The Satin Tuning Fork*, 1940 by Yves Tanguy comprises a landscape of dreamlike imagery that is reminiscent of everyday figures and objects, yet is ultimately indiscernible on closer inspection. As such, there is some sense of narrative stated but, due to foreign or unexpected elements, not ultimately fulfilled. While Surrealism referred to the unusual, partial and disruptive workings of the unconscious, Dadaism sought to critique the supposed logic of external experience. One example that was discussed is Hannah Hoch's *Weltrevolution,* 1920 which utilises and collages together found texts and images of the time in a manner that departs from traditional modes of presentation and expression in the arts, as well as the layout of everyday media. In this work, political, social and cultural narratives and practices are disrupted or critiqued through the use of everyday sources in an unconventional and nonsensical way. It refers to existing sources of narrative or logic, but undermines their validity.

Some works of Postmodernism suggest forms of meaning, but through fragmentation and temporality, only achieve partial coherence or understanding. As an example of implied but partial visual narrative, Chapter Six discusses Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #21,* 1978 in terms of Douglas Crimp's essay *Pictures,* 1979. For Crimp, the isolated image of a female character shown in Sherman's photograph is a singular fragment or moment in an implied but unfulfilled narrative. Further than this, it is a fragment that lacks an overall context. The work is termed a 'film still', yet it is not from a film, but is a singular, staged photograph. Therefore, this work is disruptive to the formation of an overall narrative because it is incomplete, and can only be resolved to varying degrees by the imaginative potential of each individual viewer.

After demonstrating potential ways in which visual works can disrupt or negate the formation of coherent narratives, Chapter Six discussed specific works that, like artists' books, have inherent ties to sequence and temporality. The works

discussed were film and literature based, where both mediums carry expectations of narrative sequence and logical resolution. The examples discussed in this chapter, however, disrupt such conventions through illogical information or sequence, disruptions to logical conditions and the implication of concealed or missing information. Four commercial films were discussed in terms of their resistance to conventional narrative sequence and meaning: *The Truman Show, Dark City, Stranger Than Fiction* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. The Truman Show,* 1998 gives an account of a constructed and unstable reality. In this film, the protagonist lives in a world that has been built and is controlled by the other characters in the film: actors and crewmembers of a reality television show. This show is about, yet occurs unbeknownst to, the central character. This is disruptive to conventional narrative structure in that it offers an additional layer to implied reality. Similarly, the film *Dark City,* 1998 also presents an account of multiple realities: one that is acknowledged by the central characters and one where a select few characters manipulate this first reality. In order to do so, they alter memories and circumstances in order to observe whether this level of manipulation is able to create a predictable future. This outcome is not consistently observed, which points to the inexplicability of the human condition. Furthermore, the film suggests instabilities of the mind, knowledge, purpose and meaning. These are aspects that are synonymous with the formation and reception of narratives, yet throughout the film they are questioned as, ultimately, stability and resolution are not attained.

The depiction of instabilities within the characters and culture in general is not the only method of disrupting a narrative sequence. The film *Stranger Than Fiction,* 2006 was examined in Chapter Six in terms of the way it disrupts the structural conventions of a narrative. In this story, the narrator does not assume the traditional position as an unseen, unheard and unacknowledged presence. The film is based on the actions the protagonist takes while being aware of the narrator's intentions and as he attempts to prevent them. This questions both the structure and fixed quality of the narrative, and implies that it is subject to manipulation. The final film that was discussed, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* 2004 combines both of the abovementioned modes of disruption. It questions the stability of implied reality, while also manipulating traditional, sequential structures. In this film, areas of different characters' memories are erased in order to have them forget a person of their choosing. While this points to the instability of experience and related narratives of memory, this film further uses disruptive techniques in its own sequence. The viewer witnesses scenes and events out of chronological order, which resists the conventional narrative structure and the attainment of understanding.

Also related to the moving image, the video clip for English band Radiohead's song *Just,* 1995 alludes to the formation of a wholly coherent narrative. In this clip, a man is walking down a street when he stops and lies in the middle of the pavement. Throughout the sequence he refuses to move and, by the use of subtitles, the viewer can witness him avoiding any acknowledgement of why he is there or what he is doing. After a large group of people has gathered in front of him demanding to know the reason for his behaviour, the man begins to explain. At this point, the subtitles disappear while the man's lips keep moving. Following this, all of the characters are shown lying on the pavement in a

similar manner. This story is not lacking a conclusion, but is disruptive in that it lacks a logical link between preceding events and the conclusion.

Chapter Six *Art and Language* did not refer to disruptions within inherently sequential works solely in terms of moving images, but also discussed examples of literature. Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman,* 1759-66 was shown to disrupt conventional reading processes and the expected content and progression of the book object in general. In this work, the events and accounts do not occur in a chronological order, and they are rarely played out without digression. Many characters are introduced, some of which are incidental, making it difficult to obtain a coherent totality. Moreover, there are unusual visual elements that further disrupt the flow of the text, including pages that are completely blacked out and those that are left blank and encourage the reader's contribution. The short story *Bartleby, the Scrivener,* 1853 by Herman Melville was also discussed in terms of its resistance to conventional narrative structure. Throughout the story, the protagonist becomes increasingly dismissive of the tasks required by his job and everyday life, repeatedly stating that he's 'prefer not to' complete them. This behaviour escalates until Bartleby refuses to do anything, even move from the building where he had worked after it had been sold to new owners. Following this, the new owners have Bartleby taken to prison where he refuses to even eat and eventually wastes away. Like the video clip for Radiohead's *Just,* this story contains an irresolvable frustration. While it has a conclusion, it lacks explanation towards this end.

The final work discussed in Chapter Six was Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,* 2005. This story follows a young boy's attempt to locate a presumed message or object previously belonging to his father who died in New York during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The boy is shown to be particularly neurotic and easily sidetracked, which is reflected in both the textual content and physical layout of the book. The work includes aspects of disrupted chronological order, unusual text placement, areas of unreadable content and abstract visual insertions. These aspects deter conventional reading processes, and can be more closely likened to unorganised thought patterns and accounts of memories than a logical, sequential narrative.

Non-narrative visual works, especially those involving the implication of some form of story or progression, are particularly relevant in relation to the subsequent discussions of artists' books conducted in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*. Each form of disruption identified in this chapter can be considered both in terms of the ways in which book works can forge departures from narrative conventions, and in relation to the value, role, intentions and effects of such works. The following will provide a summary of some of the key disruptive techniques discussed in Chapter Seven and, in the context of the information presented in the preceding chapters, consider the abovementioned concerns. The disruptions to the concept of narrative and the form and idea of the book referred to deal with both conceptual and material factors, thereby dealing with the work on its various levels of engagement with the reader or viewer.

One method of narrative disruption that can occur in artists' books identified in Chapter Seven is the insertion of illogical text. This can refer to instances whereby a story is implied but some aspects of the written content don't appear to serve this purpose, or where separate fragments of the work show some progressive coherence but this is not ultimately sustained in the work as a whole. One example discussed in Chapter Seven is *Variations of a Fall,* 2002 by David Schulz. This work provides an account of recurring dream experience in different variations. Like dreams themselves, this book presents a number of different, recognisable elements that are nonetheless rendered illogical in their given sequence. An illogical sequence or configuration of stimuli can be seen as a form of interruption to the conceptual content or flow of the work. The presence of *some* narrative text encourages the reader to assume the processes of logical ordering that can be regarded as synonymous with human consciousness itself and related acts of communication and meaning-making in general. As such, any failure to sustain a logical, direct narrative through writing can present as an unexpected, disruptive and potentially frustrating development.

Related to this is the practice of creating nonlinear sequence, either within the constraints of a fixed binding, or as a result of interchangeable fragments. When contained in a more traditionally bound book object, the occurrence of a nonlinear sequence can be considered especially jarring. The reader's prior understanding of the book as a narrative object is no longer met, and in response to this, they must experience it in a new and unconventional manner. This was seen in Ruth Laxson's book *[Ho + Go] = It,* 1986, which reveals a kind of visual and textual collage of information throughout its pages. The work makes reference to both everyday life and theories of Quantum physics, alluding to the indeterminacy of lived experience. It draws on a sense of immediacy, rather than a conventional, sequential book experience. Here, the experience of the work may be likened to other sensory occurrences such as dreams or incidental activities and stimuli presented by any means. In such cases, the product of the experience may not be the attainment of a wholly coherent account of events, but rather a feeling, or a basis for self-reflection or external contemplation. These instances focus the reader's attention on something external to the work itself, to the active pursuit of meaningful resolutions to the seemingly unrelated material at hand.

Similar experiences can be brought about by the presence of interchangeable fragments, either within the pages of the book or as the pages themselves through a lack of fixed binding. Such works involve slightly different interpretive processes that require physical methods of rearranging and attempting to obtain meaning. Allison Cooke Brown's *Teatimes,* 2005 is an artist's book that uses loose, dismantled teabags as pages. Although the text appears to proceed logically on each loose page, they are fragments of an unobtainable whole. The sections of the text are excerpts from the artist's daily journal. They provide isolated cues towards a narrative that cannot ultimately be reconciled into a singular, coherent story. Before seeking meaning external to the work, the reader or viewer can attempt to render the information present logical by altering its position and, consequently, the entire sequence of the object. Loose fragments of information also imply the possibility of missing

contents, and therefore open up an additional role for the viewer in bridging such gaps by imagining further content. Conceptual disruptions in artists' books that are brought about through illogical text, nonlinear sequence or interchangeable elements need not necessarily be resolved or overcome. They can, instead, engage the viewer in ongoing thought processes as forms of alternate and extended content is examined and reexamined. This becomes a conversational experience, rather than a situation whereby information is simply received and retained by the reader, as in the case of a traditional book object.

Another form of conceptual disruption that can occur in an artist's book is that caused by multiple and intersecting storylines. In Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-narrative Artists' Books*, Tate Shaw's *String Lessons,* 2002 was discussed in relation to this form of practice. This work contains written and visual information from four musicians in a quartet, collectively alluding to their instructor. The work contains a collage of dialogue, musical notation and imagery, which reflect a series of interwoven experiences and stories. The artist intends for the reader or viewer to take on a performance based role, where the narrative needs to be put together from disparate cues. This is a practice that lies outside conventional reading processes, where the level of coherence that can be obtained from the work relies on the extent of the viewer's investigative, interpretive and imaginative ability. While traditional texts, especially novels or other, longer narratives, often refer to multiple characters, events and even perspectives; they do so in a manner that is ultimately, if not intermittently, coherent and informative. Multiplicity within the form of the book must serve the formation of a larger understanding in some way in order to be considered harmonious rather than disruptive. Here, Edelman and Tononi's account of the inability of consciousness to integrate two or more incoherent ideas or occurrences at any one time can be recalled. While the viewing or experiencing subject can come to know two mutually incoherent states or outcomes in quick succession, they cannot do so simultaneously or as a singular, integrated experience. As previously discussed, this is also reminiscent of gestalt theory. When a viewer is presented with an image, for example, that from one angle depicts a duck, but from another shows a rabbit, they can only picture one or the other. Once aware that both exist, a viewer can switch between both, but as the two images are mutually incoherent, they can never be realised simultaneously. Such theories suggest that a viewer cannot process forms of multiplicity within an object or work if the information given is contradictory.

Furthermore, multiple and intersecting storylines can pose difficulties towards reading processes and the attainment of coherence if there are too many accounts or if they do not adequately serve some common thread. Even if the storylines present are derived from some loosely related experience, their individual directions may not sit comfortably with one another as a resolved narrative account. Susan Goethel Campbell's *After the Deluge,* 2002 was discussed in terms of this approach. The work investigates the perspective of sixteen different animal species at a common stage in history: the early twenty-first century. Each page spread reveals a different position, and comprises both images and fragmented text. The partiality of the work brought about by the

use of the fragment as well as the multiplicity of perspectives disrupts the formation and observation of a traditional, linear narrative.

In such instances, the viewing subject may liken the experience of the disrupted object at hand to something outside the processes generally associated with reading a book. The experience of multiple and potentially contradicting narratives that occur simultaneously in a common space can be likened to that of everyday life in general. The lack of harmony that can be observed in the presence of a surplus of separate accounts that overlap and intersect is reminiscent of any gathering of a number of individuals. The larger this number, the more difficult it can be to observe a linear, unified narrative in relation to accounts of ideas, events or experiences. In such situations, the viewing or experiencing subject can come to acknowledge opposing perspectives, alternate endings and various potential outcomes of common events. This points to a lack of fixedness in language, communication and everyday life in general that can, in some cases, be recreated in the form of the artist's book.

In the abovementioned example, the viewer may come to approach the conceptual content of the work in a manner that is unconventional to the general reading processes associated with the book. Other artists' books may require an unconventional physical engagement from the viewer or participant. This need may present itself through the incorporation of multilayered compositions, the potential for the book object to exist in various forms or arrangements and the creation of hybrid objects. Sarah Bryant's *The Index,* 2006 disrupts the physical conventions of the book object. Its implied cover must be separated from the work in order to view its entire contents, it has no spine and it requires unfolding rather than page turning. The coherent content of the work can only be received when the pages have been fully unfolded, at which point the viewer can see a print of a human skeleton. If the pages are turned without unfolding them, this information appears only partial. Anything that physically interrupts the linear motion of following straightforward content and turning pages disrupts the narrative of reception towards the book. When multilayered or moveable materials are included in a page or page spread, they are able to distract the viewer from the conventional progression through the content of the page. In Western society, convention dictates that pages are read from left to right, top to bottom. The inclusion of images introduces the need for some pause in the flow of reading, while the viewer engages in methods of visual interpretation. This, however, is an inclusion in the book that the viewing audience is largely used to. As long as the image reinforces or elaborates on the textual content, and poses no significant contradiction, the viewer is able to process the visual information and resume reading the text.

If, however, there is some opportunity for the viewer to have a further physical input into the work, this may bring about a sustained distraction from the forward progression of the pages. This may involve acts of unfolding, rotating, rearranging, moving or even pausing to recognise different textures. These acts involve a physical engagement outside of that required by the traditional book object. Therefore, once the viewer enters into such processes, they begin carrying out actions that do not conventionally belong to the act of reading a book. Despite these elements being disruptive in this sense, they also have the

capacity to facilitate a multifaceted experience within the constraints of the book object. Here, the viewer may begin to process additional sensory information while, if elements can be somehow rearranged, having some control over the composition of the work.

Also involved with the notion of an unconventional physical engagement with the book object is the handling of works that can be considered hybrid objects, or somehow reminiscent of another purpose or function. Examples of this may be seen in works such as those that create pages out of any existing material (such as the teabags used in Allison Cooke Brown's *Teatimes*), books that are carved or sculptured to represent other three-dimensional objects or landscapes and sculptural book works where the pages fold out at odd angles. In such instances, the viewer must integrate their understanding of the book object with that of another object or existence entirely. Daniel Kelm's *The Philosopher's Stone,* 1993 is a sculptural bookwork where the 'pages' fold together to form an object that is reminiscent of a precious stone. The pages contain fragments of handwritten text, rough sketches and detailed diagrams. As such, it can be likened to a set of research notes or progressive stages of discovery. This is furthered by the physical engagement required by the work, which is outside of that required by a conventional book object. Once again, conventional reading processes are disrupted by the potential for an alternate physical engagement with the work.

The recognition of something other than the implied pages of a book further suggests a multiplicity of function, but possible confusion over how the object should be approached and handled. Once recognised, the presence of another object or function becomes inseparable form the implications of the book. While attempts to conceptually integrate two or more physical possibilities may prove jarring, such works may, like those that reveal a multiplicity of written or visual conceptual content, begin to approach aspects of everyday life. The viewer recognises the representation of other objects that are encountered regularly, in addition to the book, which now exists in a changed form. Here, it may begin to be handled as a participatory object, rather than a traditional book. Any physical process of turning, unfolding or rearranging becomes a means for discovery and coming to know the object.

A further form of narrative disruption that can be brought about through artists' books discussed in Chapter Seven *Narrative and Non-Narrative Artists' Books* is one of lack or concealment. This can be introduced by works that incorporate the implication of missing contents, hidden information or altered material from an existing source. Generally, these can be located in altered books, as well as sculptural or installation-based practices. Works that utilise an existing text or book object as a basis for a new artwork can be described as altered books. The transition between existing object and artist's book is brought about by methods of removing areas of the pages, fixing other areas together, layering, collage and adding other artistic content. When an area of the object is removed, concealed or altered in any way, it simultaneously comes to represent a new work in addition to the irretrievable information from the former work. In Chapter Seven, Brian Dettmer's *Double Day,* 2009 was discussed in terms of the concealment and omission of information as a narrative disruption within the

form of the book. This work is comprised of multiple existing book objects that have been carved into and fixed together in a sculptural configuration. While the selected content that remains, and forms a new visual composition, acts as a source for new narratives, the viewer simultaneously becomes aware of the information that has been removed or is no longer accessible. Despite the new links and sequences that may be formed, the viewer is always in the presence of another narrative that is only partial due to the removal or concealment of previously coherent content. In such instances, the information put forward may be received as only so many cues for the reader, where the totality of implied meaning now only exists as an activity initiated by the book and completed by the recipient. That is, the viewer may extend the activity that has been undertaken by the artist: the recognition and use of selected existing cues for the purpose of creating new links, stories and spaces of meaning.

As mentioned above, narrative disruptions brought about through concealment or lack can also be seen in works that utilise existing book objects as smaller units of sculptures or installations. Book objects may be carved into or fixed together in a larger configuration in order to form a new work or environment. In the case of larger scale book installations, some of the books used are only partially visible, some are entirely concealed and act only as structural support, and many pages within the individual books themselves are inaccessible or only reveal a limited amount of their original content. *Biografías III,* 2009 by Alicia Martin is a work that uses a large quantity of existing book objects to form a sculptural installation. The books appear to be cascading from the second storey window of a building, frozen mid-motion. This is the implied movement of the work, but the actual movement is only a slight rustle in the exposed pages caused by the wind. In addition to the implication of hidden or missing contents, works made up of multiple existing book objects further introduce a disruption brought about by the recognition of a surplus of information.

Even if the texts used in Martin's works appear outdated and therefore potentially irrelevant and needing to be discarded, the viewer can recognise an excess. This refers to the implied information held in each individual book object, which the viewing subject would not likely have the ability to fully comprehend and obtain, even if it was entirely physically accessible. Upon the recognition of this limitation, the viewer can identify with the notion that there are always further, possibly contradicting, narrative accounts in existence and that the totality of these is beyond recognition. Instead of handling the books within larger sculptural or installation works in a traditional sense, the viewer may come to identify new physical configurations that emerge from such objects. Further than this, the recognition of excess can be likened to processes of understanding and knowing in general. These are always partial, or there would be no need for further discovery and no potential for further creation. The experience of such works can mirror an everyday condition, which redirects the viewer's focus from the potential attainment of singular, fulfilled narratives.

Through the discussions of historical accounts, theories and art practices carried out in this dissertation, it can be suggested that while non-narrative or disrupted works of visual art, particularly artists' books, do not conform to

traditional modes of reception as art or as books, they can function outside clearly defined structures of meaning. In regards to the book object, there are some qualities and experiences that can occur in such spaces that are outside the possibilities of wholly coherent, narrative works. That is, while books that follow narrative conventions are readily interpretable to the reader or viewer, they can only provide the straightforward experience of the presentation and reception of information. This can be viewed as a specific activity: written and visual information is recorded throughout the pages of a book and is then read and understood by a recipient without further interactions or alterations. When the conventions associated with the book object and narrative sequence in general are challenged, disrupted or departed from in any significant way, the reader or viewer can investigate alternate methods of interpreting and experiencing the work.

In some instances, it was shown that by considering and undertaking alternate ways of making physical contact with and drawing conceptual connections between the stimuli presented in the book object, the viewer could gain some meaning or function from the non-narrative work. This may mean distancing oneself from preconceived expectations of the book object, or integrating these with other potential, though possibly unconventional, experiences. For example, if an artist's book contains sculptural or moveable elements, the viewer may interrupt the automatic flow of straightforward reading in order to pause and carry out additional physical interactions. Such occurrences may deter conventional reading processes, but can simultaneously provide the viewer with a sense of input into or control over the outcome of the work. These processes can become conversational, where the viewer engages in the exchange and manipulation of information, rather than simply receiving it. Although this may call into question the fixedness and finality of the book as narrative, it also draws on aspects of everyday experience and integrates them into the interaction between the viewer and such objects.

This does not imply that books aren't already common, highly recognisable objects. It does, however, suggest that our interactions with such objects are often specific, limited and are not continuous from other modes of communicative activity. For example, the traditional book is handled in a specific way. In Western society, each page is read from left to right and they proceed in a logical order from beginning to end, the reader's physical contact with the book is limited to the need to turn the pages sequentially to uncover more information. Artists' books that require methods such as unfolding, rearranging or the handling of a different three-dimensional object no longer solely refer to the conventional handling of a book. Further than the potential for non-narrative artists' books to facilitate an increased physical engagement with the viewer, they can also bring about a kind of cognitive play through conceptual disruptions. The forward progression of narrative discovery related to the reception of books or other forms of logical information in general is driven by desire: the desire to gain understanding through the fulfillment of a coherent account of events or information. As identified in this dissertation, the completion or fulfillment of an implied narrative eliminates desire. Upon this completion, however, the reader or viewer simultaneously abandons the need or desire for further conceptual engagements with the work. The insertion of a

non-narrative space or illogical element, or the implied concealment or omission of material does not only engage the viewer in processes of discovering the object at hand, but can also bring about self-reflective activity. In these circumstances, the book object puts forward a limited amount of cues for the interpretation and further elaboration of the viewer. Here, the viewer may integrate present stimuli with past memories, personal persuasions and forms of imagination. In doing so, some degree of narrative continues to unfold, as an extension of the incomplete object.

In all of the examples of non-narrative, disruptive of unconventional book works discussed throughout this dissertation, the reader or viewer must adjust or even abandon their preconceived expectations of the book object, how it should be handled, and what kind of experience one should anticipate gaining from the work. In doing so, the viewer can extend general communicative practices to the reception of the artist's book. Such experiences do not necessarily require the disrupted or subverted narrative to be overcome, thus attaining coherence within the object itself. Instead, they may draw on the potential for varied methods of physical engagement and subsequent outcomes of the object, or the ongoing play of thought processes brought about by limited cues. By departing from the indefinitely ordered, specific reading processes of the traditional narrative book object, nonlinear or disrupted artists' books are able to lead the viewer to draw on other areas of communicative experience, and use them to interact with the physical and conceptual ideas put forward by the work. Such works are left open for contribution, revision and elaboration. The non-narrative artist's book does not provide an idea or set of ideas that are wholly and singularly coherent within the object itself, but it does provide the basis for an increased and ongoing engagement with and development of the work. This ongoing engagement is one that addresses a disruptive or illogical gap that occurs as the subject's response to the work.

The dissertation has discussed artworks that reveal different ways in which a prolonged engagement with a work, that results from the withdrawal of expectation, can occur. It was shown that this kind of engagement can be brought about through the following: the need to carry out unconventional forms of physical engagement with the work, attempts to comprehend or integrate unrelated or excess information into a coherent whole and the facilitation of desire to come to know something that is seemingly concealed or missing; something that is regarded as inaccessible. In each of these cases, the viewer's understanding of the object is incomplete. In terms of aesthetic debates, such works can be spoken of in terms of Kant's free play of imagination and understanding – neither cognitive faculty subsumes the other. Upon drawing on theories of narratives and their disruption in general, and engaging with historical debates about visual works, this dissertation has extended theoretical discussions for the inclusion of non-narrative artists' books. It has thus provided a platform for the ongoing investigation of a mode of visual practice that is undertaken in contemporary art.

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