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The articulation and re-articulation of space in the photographic paradigm
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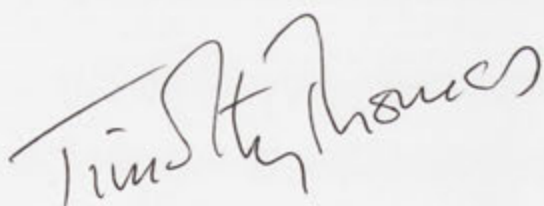
Study to test the proposition that a temporally discrete object such as a work
of art may contain a story

An exegesis and dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of The Australian National University

July 2014

Declaration of Originality

I, Timothy H. Thomas hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Timothy Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'T'.

Tim Thomas 15 May 2014

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Abstract: Studio Practice.

The articulation and re-articulation of space in the photographic paradigm

Definitions of photography whilst they include ideas of light, optics and chemistry or digital sensors also emphasise a link to real objects in real spaces. Henry Fox Talbot published the results of his successful experiment in fixing images from a camera obscura as *The Pencil of Nature* (1844 –1846), suggesting that nature was drawing itself without human intervention. It is this physical link with the real that is the basis of photographic truth claims. The photograph is used as evidence that *these* things were in *that* space. More recently Patrick Maynard leverages this link with real things and describes photography as an *Engine of Visualisation*, adding how we use photographs to a definition of photography

However computer 3D modeling software makes virtual spaces available and allows us to place virtual objects in those spaces. Virtual light can illuminate and a virtual camera can frame the object in the virtual space. Calculating the interaction of light, object and camera allows for a picture derived from the virtual space. It is hard not to think of these pictures as photographs yet doing so has implications for our understanding of photography.

This studio-based study investigates the photographic paradigm by making photographs of virtual objects in a virtual environment and adds to a broader understanding of photography as practice independent of actual subjects and actual light.

Abstract: Dissertation Component.

Study to test the proposition that a temporally discrete object such as a work of art may contain a story.

When we look at a pictorial work of art we are presented with a composition that contains a number of spatial relationships. There is the space bounded by the edges of the work that include the distribution of the art's compositional elements. This framed space is nested within the viewing space that is the space of the viewer as they look at the work of art. There is also picture space that is created in the picture that we use to organise the compositional elements on a depth axis. It is the created picture space that is made in response to our need to make sense of the picture that this dissertation uses to test the proposition that a temporally discrete object such as a work of art may contain a story.

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Thesis Introduction

Thinking about photography there have been two recent and significant changes to the world that impact on our understanding of what photography is and what we can expect to use it for. The first of these changes is a new photographic access to virtual space, that is the space created and accessed via a computer program. The second significant change is a new use for photography based on new technology's ability to put a camera and publication tools in every pocket in the form of a camera attached to a phone with access to the World Wide Web.

This thesis considers the first of these changes in the studio practice section where I explore the articulation of space within the expanded photographic paradigm, and make photographic statements concerning space. The idea of a photographic statement provides a link to both the second recent and significant change in photography and, in a round about way, the dissertation part of this thesis.

The notion that a photograph is a statement is not new. Roland Barthes comes close to this position in his description of a photograph as an index, and a message without a code that says, 'That has been'.¹ However, is it unclear who is speaking or what the photograph is an index to. For Barthes, the photograph is indexically linked to its content. Barthes chooses to not consider the act of making a photograph. Nor does he consider the events leading up to the shutter release or the subsequent time line of events that lead from the shutter release to his viewing the photograph many years later. Barthes' justification for concentrating on the 'looking at' aspect of photography comes from his unwillingness to take photographs himself because he is too impatient to wait for a photograph to be processed and

¹ Roland Barthes, *Reflections on Photography Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Flamingo ed, Fontana Paperbacks, 1984).

Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image Music Text* (Fontana, 1977).

Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image Music Text* (Fontana, 1977).

² Barthes, *Reflections on Photography Camera Lucida*: p9.

³ Christopher Frayling, "Research in Art and Design," *Royal College of Art Research Papers* Vol.1, no. No.1 (1993).

printed.² The recent technological changes in photography remove the opportunity for that impatience. Eight megapixel telephones, connected to the World Wide Web mean that the act of photography has become immediately available as a chatter statement. That is a phatic statement that says, “here I am / here we are together”.

Both Barthes’ photographic statement (“That has been”) and the chatter statements are about a particular understanding of photography and the photograph. They rest on an understanding of the photographic process that forms a link between the photograph, its content and how the photograph was made. Is it possible that a photograph can make statements independent of this understanding? The dissertation part of this thesis extends this question to all works of art. The dissertation is looking at a picture without reference to how it was made, and without reference to technical or cultural understanding of the picture’s subject. The dissertation examines works of art through the lens of spatial understanding and finds that a work of art can contain a story independent of any technical or cultural knowledge of the content.

Space is the link between the dissertation and the studio practice. The dissertation uses space as a tool to find statements. The studio practice uses space to make statements. The dissertation is looking for story type statements. The studio practice is making photographic statements.

The original contribution to knowledge

The studio practice and the dissertation understand space as a construct by which we organize perceptual events that happen at the same time.

The studio practice expands the photographic paradigm to include photographs made in virtual space of virtual objects. To do this I am testing

² Barthes, *Reflections on Photography Camera Lucida*: p9.

whether a photograph made of a virtual object in a virtual space is in fact a photograph.

The dissertation tests the proposition that a temporally discrete object such as a work of art can contain a story, and using space as an analytical tool, finds that the proposition holds true. Both “temporally discrete” and story are defined in the introduction to the studio practice exegesis.

Links between the Exhibition and the Dissertation

This candidature was started under an old program which asked that the candidate complete two independent studies. To emphasise the independent nature of these two studies the candidate was asked to provide two separate documents as part of the application process and, during the candidature, to have two separate supervisors. After the first year of study the Thesis Proposal Review also required two independent research plans.

The application documents are included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Studio Practice Exegesis

The articulation and re-articulation of space in the photographic paradigm

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Chapter 1.

Introduction to the Exegesis

The exegesis describes the studio practice in terms of “one thing follows another”. The first section covers the background to the study and describes a starting point for the studio practice and how this starting point was developed into a practice led research topic.

The section, **Defining the Terms** describes two activities. The first was curating an exhibition that asked questions about what is and what is not a photograph. The second activity was making objects in a 3D modeling program and rendering images from a virtual camera in that program. The rendering process forces a work rhythm very similar to a darkroom rhythm and it was in the rhythm of work that I find the closest analog to photographic practice.

The topic development provides examples of Christopher Frayling’s second research category, ‘research through art’ and the difficult third category, ‘research for art’ that Michael Biggs renames ‘work of art’.^{3 4} The research through art is in the form of curating an exhibition and experimenting with a 3D modeling program. The overarching project and the resulting exhibition is an example of researching for art.

In the section, **The Photographic Paradigm**, I cover the theoretical underpinning of my claim that a photograph of virtual space is a photograph. The section draws from Geoffrey Batchen, Roland Barthes, Patrick Maynard, Martin Heidegger and Jonathan Cohen and Aaron Meskin.

³ Christopher Frayling, "Research in Art and Design," *Royal College of Art Research Papers* Vol.1, no. No 1 (1993.).

⁴ Micheal Biggs, "The Rhetoric of Research" (paper presented at the Common Ground Design Research Society International Conference Brunel University, 2002), pp111 - 18.

The section **Models of rooms, light and crockery** describes the studio practice as I made models and photographs using the 3D modeling application Blender. Blender is an open source 3D modeling application. It is usually used for modeling, texturing, rigging and lighting virtual scenes for animation and computer generated imagery. The section presents ideas of stillness that come from observations about time in a virtual environment, the contribution of real world photographs, developing a visual vocabulary, the implications of post processing and compositing and how Blender has developed over time and how those developments impact on the studio practice.

In terms of this project the most significant change in Blender has been the render engine's 'understanding' of light as it interacts with objects in the scene. This is most easily seen in Blender's ability to describe attached shadows and shadows from incoherent sources. The other major development comes from the inclusion of non-universal focus, which allows for a limited depth of field as defined by settings in the virtual camera that control the point of focus, lens aperture, circle of confusion, focal length and sensor size. These ideas are covered in the section, **The Photographic Idiom**. The section draws on Rosemary Hawker's *The Idiom in Photography As The Truth in Painting* for insight into the implications of the conscious and unconscious use of idiom.⁵

The **Context** section looks at the work of Jan Dibbets experiments with perspective, Giorgio Morandi and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott as examples of still life and pottery, Jacky Redgate, and Geof Kleem for photographs that question the photographic surface and at Thomas Demand photographs of paper models and Thomas Ruffs photograms made in a virtual dark room.

The final section is a reflection on the work leading to a Conclusion. The study finds that the process and the finished works are photographic and

⁵ Rosemary Hawker, "The Idiom in Photography As The Truth in Painting," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. Number 3 (2002).

suggests that photography should be considered a thing that we do as opposed to a description of a technology, whether the outcome is a haptic statement or a still life picture.

Practice as a Rhetorical Position

Practice underpins rhetorical decisions in both the Studio Practice and the dissertation. Later in *Task Two , Making a Three D model*, the argument that a rendered image of a 3D model is a photograph of that 3D model starts with the observation that that the process of one is similar to the process of the other. The observation comes from not just the list of activities that make up the process but the work rhythm of that process. This rhythm is only available through practice.

The photographic aspect of this research project starts from the point of view of someone who makes pictures. Therefor the concept of photography starts from the position that it is something that people do. Whilst recent theoretical understandings of photography emphasise the impact that a photograph has on a person, this project is interested on the practice of photography and what that says about a photograph and what a photograph can say about that which is photographed.⁶

This practice based approach is also evident in the dissertation where after establishing the appropriateness of this methodology and the test subjects I look at two paintings by El Lissitzky. In looking I choose to consider the work of art in the moment of viewing, separate from its history and cultural significance. Beyond acknowledging that the work of art unlike a work of nature is a statement made by a person, I approach the work as marks on a surface. In so doing I am recognising that the picture itself does not contain theoretical tools. The picture may have been made in response to theoretical concerns and viewing the picture through the lens of those concerns may well

⁶ For an overview of photographic theory post *The Engine of Visualization*, (Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization, Thinking Through Photography* (Cornell University Press, 1997). see James Elkins, ed. *Photography Theory* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007).

result in an understating that more closely matches the artist intention, however, since I am looking at the picture as a self contained temporally discrete object, the artists intentions are beyond the scope of this study.

Chapter 2.

One thing leads to another; an account of a practice led research project.

This section is an account of the studio practice, starting from an initial observation that led to questions about photography and the photographic paradigm. The section begins with a description of my starting point.

Background

My starting point for the project was an interest in photographic flatness that I had developed whilst working in as part of the camera department in film and television. Using the visual vocabulary of motion pictures, it was very easy to fall into visual platitudes such as shooting through foreground objects or composing in depth with strong receding parallel lines (the movie equivalent of beachside postcards that have a palm frond in the top right hand corner as the curve of the beach stretches into the background). Using flat space, as opposed to deep space, provided me with an alternative narrative voice to a picture. Flat space meant that the viewer was not seduced by the easy option of vanishing points and depth provided by optical perspective. For me, the language of optical perspective, leading a viewer into the picture, too easily swamped ideas of light and shade, contrast, texture and volume. I had adopted a visual language that emphasized flatness, composing pictures so as to minimize depth in the hope that I could capture a viewer in compositional opportunities presented by the frame and the picture plane. This is not to say that I was only interested in the surface of the photograph. I still wanted depth but I wanted that depth to be uniform across the frame hence the idea of flat space.

As part of a project looking at choices that people make as indicators of their perfect world, I had been photographing houses as seen from the street (Figure 1). The houses represented the sum of the choices that people make about how they want to live, hence the idea of a perfect world. My interest in flatness led me to frame the house so as to only present the façade. In the foreground the curb presented a horizontal reference, parallel to the bottom edge of the frame and where possible the roof was also horizontal. There was depth in the picture but it did not come from optics. Instead depth was revealed through over lapping objects, height in the frame and aerial, or atmospheric, perspective. The pictures were interesting because of their subject matter, which was the way people choose to live, whilst the visual rules that I set myself provided a coherent visual style.



Figure 1. Tim Thomas. big hedge from *A Perfect World*. 2006 digital file

Whilst making the house pictures I had been working in and against the visual language of landscape. In contrast to landscape, I had also been interested in photographing personal objects as part of a cataloging process. Whereas the houses were square pictures, the objects were all in portrait format (collectively they added up to a self portrait), however I used the same ideas of flatness in my treatment of these objects so as to create a unified visual style for the pictures. As well as showing only one side, the pictures were composed so that the object filled the frame on at least one axis and rested at the bottom of the frame. This compositional rule led to ambiguities of scale. For example, a bicycle, being wider than it is tall only occupied the bottom half of the picture and so was smaller than a tea cup, which, being as wide as it is tall, filled the frame. This uncertainty of scale raised questions around the relative sizes of objects, questioning the link between the subject in the photograph and subject in actuality, suggesting that the frame was acting as a photographic constant, or benchmark against which other compositional elements were measured.

In contrast to the normal practice of using a key light to one side of the subject which has the benefit of forcing a sense of three dimensionality through cast shadows, my objects were lit with one light along the optical access. The single light along the optical axis did not cast shadows across the picture, instead volume was expressed as a function of the object through attached shadows caused by the object as it presented surfaces at varying tangents to the light source.

In choosing to photograph objects in this way, I was deliberately avoiding describing the objects in any way external to the object itself. I did not want to editorialize or romanticize the objects. The objects were acting as a list of personal objects, things that were mine and no one else's. For me, the objects were only interesting in that, as a collection, they represented a self-portrait, just as a collection of Thomas Ruff portraits tell us little about the individual sitter but a great deal about people. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Thomas Ruff i) Portrait R. Hubert (ii) Portrait A. Kachold (iii) Portrait P. Lappat (iv) Portrait Stoya, c-print 24. 13 X 18.08 cm, 1988. Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich. Christian Larsen Gallery, Stockholm. Private Collection, Stockholm.



Figure 3 Tea Cup from tim's world 2005. Silver gelatin print. 50x 60 cm.

In thinking about the photograph as a sign pointing to a sign, I can say that in both the house pictures and the catalogue of personal objects, I was exploring photography. For me the ultimate subject of a photograph and the only thing that a photograph could describe directly was photography itself.

Placing photography as the subject of the photograph led to two conflicting responses. The first response was that it made taking photographs unnecessary. This response used photography to capture moments, and recognized that in pointing the camera and releasing the shutter I was making just another photograph that would, if I paid attention to some basic composition rules, look like a *photograph*, and, if I released the shutter at a significant moment, create a sense of “fancy that”. My feeling about this option could be characterized by the question “So what?” In hindsight, as an artist I was avoiding using photography as what Susan Sontag described as “a principle device for experiencing something”.⁷ I did not want to be just an observer recording moments. I wanted to consider photography as the subject not an object.

However, if the subject of photography was photography itself, then that was an invitation to use the camera as a tool for making pictures rather than capturing moments. This second response put the emphasis on the picture as a thing in itself. To put it another way, I was interested in the picture as opposed to what the picture was of. The picture as a thing in itself allowed for collage both as compositing, in which one picture is placed seamlessly into another, paying attention to spatial and optical coherence, thereby creating an illusion of photographic reality, and as juxtaposition, in which two pictures are placed in a composition thereby creating an imaginary picture space with the opportunity of dialectic montage.

I explored the second option in a series of pictures that used fragments of other pictures. As a viewer looking at these pictures, I can make connections

⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979). p10.

between the fragments that go into the collage. I can also look at them as constructions that invoke a picture space without reference to a real space.



Figure 4 Tim Thomas fragment_tea cup sock 2008. Inkjet print 30 x 30 cm

So far I have described my interest and concerns as they were before I started this study, and in particular how an interest in flatness had made me aware of the contrast between the representation of space and the representation of picture space. In the next section I describe observations that led to the notion of articulating and re-articulating space.

Developing the topic

As a way of illustrating what led to my topic I will go to my original PhD application that contains the observation that provided a starting point for the PhD study program, which, given that it was made before I started the study, is still surprisingly appropriate for the exegesis.

While hanging out on a number of online forums that discuss three-dimensional modeling and the creation of virtual environments and characters, I noticed that the indicator of success for this activity is a replication of reality and realism within the virtual domain. Modelers seek ever more accurate renders of, for example, hair and the subsurface light scattering that gives skin its luminescence. They are looking to create worlds that have the visual characteristics of a photograph, that is, single point perspective, rendering fine detail and texture, while articulating three dimensional space on the two dimensional surface of a screen, in a virtual three dimensions.

Given that many of the models in question were fiction, in that they did not have a real world analogue, and drew heavily on fantasy for inspiration (think Lara Croft with pointed ears) it seemed incongruous that they were searching for something that looked “real” and that “real” equaled “like a photograph”. I also noted that contributors to the forums expressed great disappointment when a model used a photograph to provide texture, such as a photograph of a face mapped as a texture onto the surface of a model’s face. It seemed to me as if in rendering the model as a picture the modelers were looking for a photographic truth which suggested the same truth that they associated with a photograph. For them using a photographic texture from an actual person on a 3D model of a person was a cheat or photographic lie. In doing so they were not considering that the picture was a composite of two images, one from the model and one from a photograph, instead it was a model, contaminated with a photograph.

While I was not interested in the online arguments either for or against photographic as opposed to generated textures, the 3D modelers had, through their quest for photographic representation of virtual objects in virtual space, alerted me to the existence of space as a topic of photographic investigation. It raised a number of questions, in particular what is space, what is virtual space, and what is a photograph of virtual space?

It is in the question “what is a photograph of virtual space?” that I found my topic. It also goes to the question “what is a photograph?” The, “what is a photograph?” question is important. I was planning to present pictures made in a 3D modeling environment as photographs of that environment. However I was not sure that they were photographs. What was to say that they were not drawings? If they were drawings then they were not an index to the virtual referent, if they were photographs they were. Confirming them as photographs would indicate that an understanding of photography would have to include a new idea about virtual space. The next section is a description of how I came to an understanding of the photographic paradigm in relation to virtual space.

Chapter 3.

Defining the terms through practice

To answer the “what is a photograph?” question I set myself two tasks. Task one was to take advantage of VIVID, a national photographic festival in Canberra, and curate an exhibition that explored the littoral space between that which was, and that which was not, a photograph.⁸ The International Center of Photography asks the same question in the recent exhibition *What is a Photograph?*⁹

Task two was to do the process, to make a model using 3D modeling software and then make that into a haptic picture, that is a picture that I could hold in my hand.

Task one, curating an exhibition.

For the photographic exhibition I sent a call for submissions. The call for contributions drew heavily on a theoretical, as opposed to technical, description of photography...

The Exhibition asks what other practice fits the theoretical characteristics of a photograph and suggests that there may be more to photography than cameras and lenses.¹⁰

The reference to trans-medium photography in the call for papers was to allow for the introduction of non-optical photographic practices. I was hoping that the call for contributions would elicit a drawn photograph, and the exhibition did in fact end up including a set of drawings that were made of

⁸ Linda Groom, “Gateways,” National Library of Australia, <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/11779/20100707-0013/www.nla.gov.au/pub/gateways/issues/93/story14.html>.

⁹ icp.org, International Center of Photography, <http://www.icp.org/museum/exhibitions/what-is-a-photograph>.

¹⁰ Tim Thomas, “photo /not-photo,” Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/23725910@N03/sets/72157606306866757/#>.

light and shadow as it fell on the support placed on the ground under a tree. At that time, in thinking about a trans medium photograph I was reaching for an understanding of ideas suggested by Rosalind Krauss in her essay *Notes on the Index Part 1*.¹¹ (Later, I established a more concrete understanding of these concepts via Rosemary Hawker's discussion of Gerhard Richter's photo painting, and Krauss', *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post Medium Condition*.^{12 13})

The exhibition contained work from thirteen artists and ranged from "traditional" black and white pinhole photography to prints made from vinyl records and patterns produced by processing significant texts to create word lists. There were photograms and two sorts of scanner art, one a variation on a photogram process and the other a Frankenstein camera contraption made from an overhead projector lens used to project onto a flat bed scanner. There were also pictures that sought to spatialise time through processing either video image stream picture sets or still image intervalometer sets to reorder pixels such that time was represented on the x axis of a video image or as pixel strips in a circular image.

Responses to the exhibition included comments that knowing the process, that is, how the pictures were made, gave the pictures an aura of the real. In other words, while the images may be indecipherable, knowing the process that made them links them with their referent. Silver/digital photography also gives this sense of authenticity. This emphasis on process meant that if I were to make a photograph of a virtual space then I would have to be certain that I was following a process that maintained an indexical link to the virtual space and the objects in it. For example, any post processing, such as manipulating the pictures in Photoshop, would have to be carefully considered in terms of,

¹¹ Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1985).

¹² Hawker, "The Idiom in Photography As The Truth in Painting," pp. 541-54.

¹³ Rosalind E. Krauss, *"A Voyage on the North Sea" Art in the Age of the Post Medium Condition* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

“Am I making this up or is it in the virtual space?” The exhibition also indicated that wall art, as opposed to projections or screen based work, could, by virtue of its fixed point of reference in time and space, act as a control format in this study. A motion picture would on the other hand introduce variables around time and space through the montage and editing and the linear experience of the work.

Task two, making a 3D model.

I chose the open source software Blender to make my model.¹⁴ My choice was based on two principles, first, that Blender, being open source, was free and second, that also being open source meant it had a large, generous user community to help me learn how to use it.

The task was in two parts, making a model and then a picture. The model making was straightforward; I like teacups so I made one, thereby stepping into an experimental still-life tradition. There are a number of steps to making the model. The first step is to make the model shape.

I chose to start the model as a cube and build it up from there. Eight vectors define the basic cube, one at each corner of the cube. Joining the vectors produces the edges of the cube and filling the planes bounded by the edges gives the faces. The original vectors define the edges and the faces. In the case of the cube, the edges have sharp creases and that make faces flat and perpendicular to each other. Re-defining the edges as curved allows the same eight vector points to describe a sphere. This re-defining is applied as a modifier to the vectors as a “subdivision surface” or *sub surf* modifier. The sub surf modifier allows for smooth curves without extra samples similar to vector drawing. Extending a cube and applying the sub surf modifier to the sides, which makes the cube a cylinder, can make the shape or silhouette of the

¹⁴ Blender Foundation, “www.blender.org,” Blender Foundation, <http://www.blender.org/>.

teacup. Scaling the top of the teacup produces a truncated cone. Deleting the top face makes the teacup into a vessel. So far I have described making the outside of the teacup. If it is left like that the walls of the cup will be infinitely thin. One way to give the walls thickness is to extrude all the surfaces and scale them up just enough to give the teacup material thickness. The teacup handle is made separately to the teacup, and then attached, just as if it were made from clay.

The vectors give the object shape. The second step describes the object material. If we are only going to access the model via a screen or rendered image, as opposed to via a haptic workbench tool that gives touch feed back information, then we are in effect defining how the material looks. That is, its colour, its brightness, a transmission factor and a reflectance factor. See through material has a high transmission factor, while shiny objects have a high reflectance factor. How light scatters under the surface of the material is controlled by a sub surface light scattering factor. All these factors have implications for colour and brightness.

The third step to making a model is to define how it interacts with its environment. For example, will the object react to gravity or will it be like a floor against which other gravity affected objects break or bounce. It is also possible for an object to not cast shadows or not have caustic effects applied to specular highlights. Translucent objects may or may not transmit colour. Objects may be set to emit light and it is also possible to set limits to the effect that neighboring objects have on each other. Since complex interactions involving bounced light and reflections require extra calculations, choices about interactions have implications on render times.

Rendering is the process by which the vectors and materials are turned into a picture. But before a model or scene can be rendered that are some other choices that have to be made:

- Choose a camera position

- Choose a lens size
- Choose a sensor or film size
- Choose a light source
- Choose the spectral energy distribution or correlated colour temperature of the light
- Choose the coherence of the light
- Position the light
- Set the intensity of the light
- Depending on your choice of lighting ratio set a fill light and a backlight.
- When you have made those decisions
 - Render the image.
 - Assess the finished render and make alterations and then render again

The paradigm for making a picture in Blender is photographic. The point of view and the field of view are controlled by a set of controls that are grouped under the title 'camera', while setting the light is about using algorithms that mimic real world light. So it is not surprising that the list of choices sound like the choices that need to be made when taking a photograph in a studio. This is not so much about the skeuomorphic design choices in the user interface, though they are there; rather it is the process and the choices that have to be made. What did surprise me was the rhythm of work. A rhythm that I had become familiar with from printing in a photographic darkroom.

When I make prints in a darkroom I am forced to work at the speed of the processor. I make tests and wait for the processor. The processor (it might be a colour machine or a black and white tray process) takes time and I have to wait to see the result of my test and then make changes to exposure or framing and test again. Every time I make a test I have to wait for the processor. There are ways to speed it up such as working on two negatives and two enlargers at

once, alternating between them in the wait time, but I tended not to do that because I would get confused or forget what I was supposed to be doing. A digital workflow removed that waiting. I made my print in the computer, soft proofed on a screen and that was it.

Waiting for Blender to render the image of the 3D model felt the same as waiting for the processor, especially since until there was a rendered image I could only see an approximation of the light as it illuminated and interacted with the surface of the model. In 2008 Blender was unable to render on the fly. To see a test involved a conscious decision to render and a test render could take ten minutes just like a dark room test print. A final full resolution render would take overnight. Just like drying a fiber print. Before rendering, Blender could only show an approximation of the model and the lighting.

It was in the rhythm of work that I found the most convincing similarity with the photographic process and, once I was more adept at manipulating objects in the 3D work environment, setting up a scene also became more like working in a studio in the sense that, to create a 2D picture, I was moving objects in a 3D space.

For fun I made more teacups and copied Olive Cotton's photograph *Tea Cup Ballet*.¹⁵

¹⁵ Olive Cotton, *Tea Cup Ballet*, 1935. gelatin silver photograph 37.3 x 29.6 cm image; 38.0 x 30.2 cm sheet.



Figure 5 Tim Thomas *t cup disco* 2009 Digital file

In the first task I had surveyed the photographic environment and found that not only could we divide the world into two categories, on one hand what was a photograph and on the other hand, everything else, but that there was also a third category of object that I chose to call a *not-photo*. I considered a *not-photo* to be a photograph made through non-photographic means.

In the second task I had practiced making 3D models and in the rendering process found an analogue of the photographic process. Not only did the pictures of 3D models fit into the new not-photo category but by extending the definition of a camera to include a virtual camera I was confident that not only was the rendered image a not-photo but it was also, given the process, a photograph.

Thinking about the theoretical context of my studio practice I can say that making pictures and curating an exhibition had led to the conclusion that a virtual space and virtual objects are available to photographic exploration. The next section looks at theoretical underpinnings of that conclusion.

Chapter 4.

The photographic paradigm

In this section I consider the theoretical “what” of photography. As a starting point Geoffrey Batchen provides a narrative of photographic creation. I also acknowledge Roland Barthes' description of the medium and Patrick Maynard's concept of a photographic engine or tool, while Martin Heidegger provides insights into the nature of tools. More recently Jonathan Cohen and Aaron Meskin differentiate between photographs and other optical images through the images' epistemic value.¹⁶

In *Burning With Desire* Batchen outlines the birthing pains of the photographic process¹⁷. We can look to this creation story to provide a definition for photography. The early experiments in photography were searches for a process that would fix the image created in a *camera obscura*. As such this was a problem of chemistry not optics. The researchers could see that nature was, according to William Fox Talbot, able to draw itself, and so they were looking for a means to facilitate a permanent record of that drawing or trace¹⁸. They were not at that stage looking to record anything more than the act of drawing. They wanted permanence and accuracy. We can follow the developments in the photographic process with improvements in optics and chemistry, and we can make the step from chemical fixing to the electronic, digital process. In which case we can define a photograph as the result of a process that developed out of this series of experiments.

Looking at the photographic process to define a photograph is not without its problems. To say that a photograph is the product of a process whereby the image formed by a camera, a photographic apparatus, is fixed, tends towards a circular definition; a photograph is that which is produced by a camera, a

¹⁶ Jonathan Cohen and Aaron Meskin, "On the Epistemic Value of Photographs," *The Journal Of Aesthetics And Art Criticism* 62, no. 2 (2004): pp197-210.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire the Conception of Photography* (MIT, 1999). pp22-50.

¹⁸ William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844 and 1846).

camera produces photographs. Heidegger comes across a similar problem in his introduction to *The Origin of the Work of Art*, when he starts from the proposition that an artist is a person who makes works of art, and a work of art is made by an artist.¹⁹ Heidegger resolves this circularity by differentiating between *artwork* and *a work of art* and thereby recognising that *artwork* is a thing independent from and outside of the artist and independent from and outside a *work of art*. He calls this a *thing unto itself*.²⁰ Can we consider photography as being a thing independent of the photographic process and the photograph?

The Twentieth Century produced two broad approaches to understanding photography as a theoretical object. The first of these sees photography as an institutional instrument and so describes photography through institutions that use that instrument. In which case any discussion of photography becomes a discussion of the circumstance in which photographs are made and used, and of the reasons for making and using them. In this structural approach a photograph has no identity in itself, rather it takes its identity from the institutions that use it. Batchen charts this territory drawing attention to essays by John Tagg, Victor Burgin and Allan Sekula, as examples of theorists and practitioners who developed ideas of the photograph as a text that propagates meaning according to context.²¹ Barthes considers this text, because it comes as a whole, not broken down into parts that can be construed as a language, as a 'message without a code'.²²

In contrast, a formalist understanding of photography credits the photograph with having aesthetic attributes independent of the content of the image, that is, what the image is of, and without regard to the circumstances of the image's creation, or dissemination, that is, the use to which it is put, and that

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Martin Heidegger Basic Writings: From Being and time (1927) to the task of thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), p143.

²⁰ Ibid., pp146-65.

²¹ Batchen, *Burning with Desire the Conception of Photography*: pp187-200.

²² Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" in *Image-Music-Text* (Glasgow: Fontana 1997), p17.

these attributes give photography its identity. This approach does have the advantage of addressing the photographic object rather than its uses, and draws our attention to the photograph as an image to be viewed rather than a text to transmit meaning. Batchen covers this ground drawing on Clement Greenberg, Andre Bazin and John Szarkowsky.²³

Whilst the structuralist and formalist approaches seem to be incompatible, they do share a common ground in that they base their claims on the photograph's attachment to the real world. For example, while Tagg can point to the state's use of photography²⁴, that use is dependent on the idea of photographic truth and a link between the subject and the photograph, as is Bazin's assertion that;

*The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and in the purpose he has in mind.*²⁵

In both these descriptions of photography it is photography's special relationship with the real world that distinguishes it from other picture making activities. Barthes is describing this special relationship when he claims that a photograph says, 'that has been'.²⁶ The existence of the photograph in the world points to existence of other things that existed at a place and a time. Earlier I referred to Heidegger and his introduction to the *Origin of the Work of Art* and we can turn to Heidegger for reconciliation between the thing-ness of a photograph and the thing-ness that is photography.

In the dissertation section of this thesis I discuss Heidegger's concept of a tool as being ready at hand or present at hand. Here I want to consider photography in those terms. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that *Dasein's*

²³ Batchen, *Burning with Desire the Conception of Photography*: pp12-16.

²⁴ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation, Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillon Education, 1998).

²⁵ André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): pp4-9.

²⁶ Barthes, *Reflections on Photography Camera Lucida*.

interest and care for things revolves around his use as tools²⁷ When we consider a thing we should consider how we use it. This is analogous to explaining the concept hammer through a description of the act of hammering. In which case, so closely are the two aligned that the noun and the verb are the same. The action of hammering is more useful in the sense that it covers more instances of the idea hammer than a list of the attributes of any particular hammer could. A steam hammer and the malleus, a bone in our middle ear, have little physical similarity yet are both instances of the concept hammer. What makes them a hammer is not their form but the use to which that form is put. Heidegger would have the concept hammer as a thing and the instance of a hammer as a thing at hand. Barthes', 'that has been' is a product of a photograph's relationship to the real world and it is that relationship that underpins our understanding of the overarching concept – photography – and how people use it as a tool at hand. Considering photography in terms of how we use it defines photography not just as a thing but as an activity. Photography appears to be something that we do and a photograph is part of photography.

Patrick Maynard provides a further description of how we use photographs. For Maynard photographs act as a lever that extends our powers of visualisation.²⁸ We use a photograph to prompt an act of imagination, to imagine our connection with the things in the photograph. It may be that the picture of a family member reminds us of the last time we were in their company. A picture of a tourist destination allows us to travel vicariously. An advertising picture of a four-burner stainless steel gas barbecue catches our attention when we remember that we do not have one, and helps us to visualise the space in our lives that a four-burner stainless steel gas barbecue (with a side wok burner?) would fill.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [Sein und Zeit], trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, 1st English ed. (London: SCM Press, 1927; repr., 1st English Edition).

²⁸ Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization, Thinking Through Photography*.

Maynard's understanding of photography as engine of visualization, that is a tool wielded by the viewer, suggests that we can define photography through the impact that it has on a viewer. This is in contrast to the structuralist understanding that defines photography through the uses to which it is put, and the formalist understanding that recognises photography as having defining aesthetic attributes. In *What is a Photograph* Margaret Iversen further explores the psychological impact of a photograph as she reads Barthes' *Camera Lucida* through the lens of Jacques Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychology*.^{29 30} It is interesting note that Barthes' understanding of photography provides links with psychoanalysis, however this project is interested not so much in the psychological effect that a photograph or a photographic process may have on a viewer but in its relationship to space and, through that relationship, the possibility that a photograph may confirm virtual space as space.

Iversen's use of psychoanalysis is an example of what Jan Baetens identifies as a cross disciplinary approach to photographic theory. In *Conceptual Limitations of Our Reflection on Photography. The Question of "Interdisciplinarity"*, Baetens notes that photographic theory appears to be dominated by literary theorists as opposed to photographers.³¹ In asking the question, "What are the advantages of this (supposedly) literary approach of Photography?" Baetens recognises that the idea of photography appears to be more important than the process since moving away from a technical discussion of how a photograph is made allows for a discussion of the "cultural history and social critique".³² Or, in other words, allows for the structuralist understanding of photography that I described earlier. In this study I am approaching an understanding photography as a practitioner.

²⁹ Margaret Iversen, "What is a photograph?," *Art History* 17, no. 3 (1994): pp.450-64.

³⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts Of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar Of Jacques Lacan. Book 11*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973).

³¹ Jan Baetens, "Conceptual Limitations of Our Reflection on Photography: The Question of of "Interdisciplinarity"," in *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007), p.58.

³² *Ibid.*, p.59.

Earlier I described the process of making a photograph in virtual space and noted that the practice felt photographic. So I cannot ignore the photographic process. However I can also consider the position of the photographic statement, that is the picture thus produced and what it might say about its method of production, both in terms of its relationship to the viewer and in terms of the object that is photographed. In a later section I am going to consider the photograph in terms of a photographic idiom. So I can say that in this project I am approaching an understanding of photography, which includes virtual space, through the act of making photographs, hence the formalism of the pictures, which are not content driven. My interest in jugs vessel teacups and red lines extends only to their role as compositional elements in a virtual 3D space as it is recorded in a 2D photographic picture.

As well as being an aid to visualisation, I should also note that a photograph is a viewing aid. Photography can help us see that which we cannot normally see. Fast moving objects, the very small or very distant, worms' eye and birds' eye views. The framing of a view also reveals textures and patterns that whilst available to view are not normally apparent. These concepts appear in the work of modernist photographers such as Moholy-Nagy.



Figure 6. László Moholy-Nagy, Marseille, 1929 Photography, Moholy-Nagy Foundation, <http://moholy-nagy.org/art/photography/>

We can also include Muybridge's experiments in animal and human movement in this category.

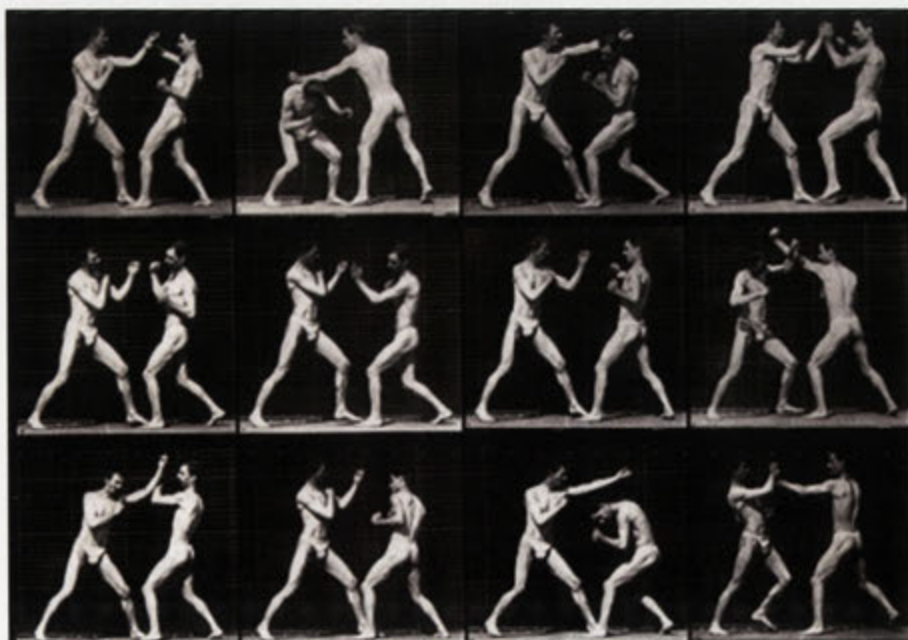


Figure 7 Eadweard Muybridge Animal Locomotion, Plate 336 (Boxing open hand.) 1887. Collotype prints approximately 20 x 24"

Other optical devices act as viewing aids. Jonathan Cohen and Aaron Meskin point to an attribute of photography that enables us to tell the difference between a photograph and other sorts of images such as reflections or images in telescopes.³³ A photograph does not change when we change our position, and a photograph, unlike a mirror does not provide information about the spatial relationship of the viewer and the *depictum*.

So it appears that the markers of a photograph and their 3D render equivalents are

Photograph

3D Render

A trace of more than itself,

The render is a trace of the 3D model and the virtual light

An index to the
photographed object

An Index to the model

Something that says, "that
has been "

The render more accurately
says "this is" (I will discuss this
in more detail later),

A sign without a code

... a teacup by any other name

An "Engine of
Visualization".

we can visualize all the other
tea cups and when we last
drank tea.

A picture in which the
subject has a part in the
picture's facture.

The model is required for the
picture.

³³ Cohen and Meskin, "On the Epistemic Value of Photographs." *The Journal Of Aesthetics And Art Criticism* 62, no. 2 (2004): 197-210.

A machine for seeing.

We see the computer code of
the model as a picture.

Does not provide egocentric
spatial information.

The render does not say where
the virtual space is in relation
to the viewer.

And that Photography is ...

A thing in itself,

A tool and,

A product of human desire,

A thing that people do.

But listing the attributes of a photograph does not, on its own, define the 3D renders as photographs. My experience in studio and dark room photography enabled me to recognize the process of lighting and rendering a 3D model as a photographic process. Theory underlined that recognition. In the next section I look at what I did next and consider space as a photographic subject.

Chapter 5.

Models of rooms, light and crockery

Having experimented with Blender to the extent of making and photographing teacups and a vase on a shelf I noticed a fundamental difference between working in a virtual environment and the world. In the world there are things. We see them and we organize them into separate perceptual events that go together to make a larger perceptual event. When two or more perceptual events happen at once we separate them using space. Phenomenologically we define space as being bounded by things. We say the space between or outside, under or over. To consider space in depth we imagine looking at the space from a position at right angles, either above or to the side, of our actual view and treat the depth as bounded in the same way as height or width.³⁴

I hold that two perceptual events cannot occupy the same space at the same time. If two perceptual events do occupy the same space then we separate them by using time, that is, the perceptual events are experienced sequentially.

In the world I open my eyes and I see things. When I open my eyes in Blender, that is when I open a new project, I see a cube, a camera and a light. If I delete those three default objects I see just the space with nothing in it. In the world this does not happen since in the world we cannot conceive of space without defining it by the objects in it. Empty blender space is undefined by objects.

To explore space in Blender I made a number of rooms, with doorways and windows that let in the light. I experimented with putting objects in the rooms and manipulating ideas of scale.

³⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenologie de La Perception*, trans. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2002 ed., Routledge Classics (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 1945). p 297.

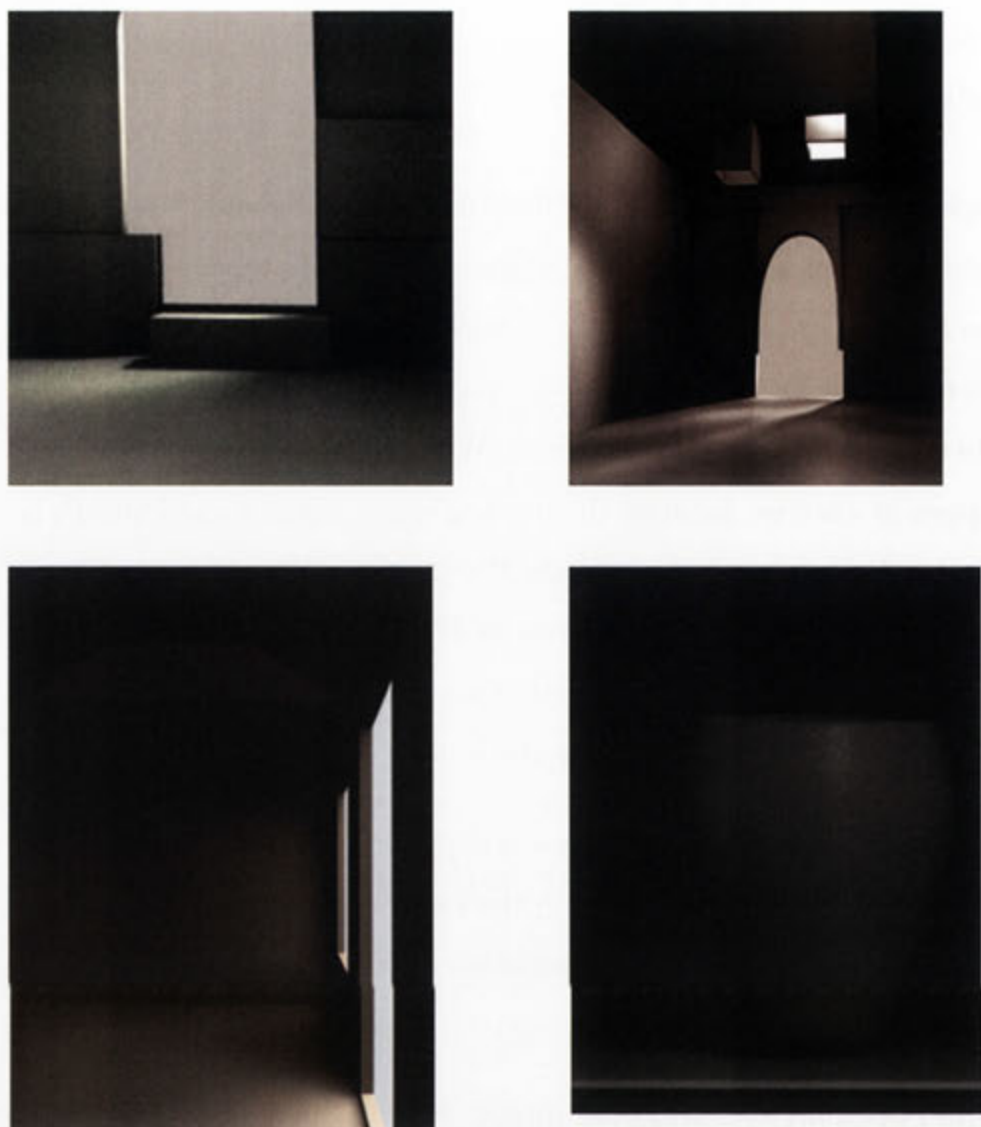


Figure 8 . Tim Thomas *Experiments with rooms and lighting* 2010. Digital files

A fun thing about virtual space is that gravity is optional. If you define some physical parameters you can have gravity so that objects fall until they hit something that stops them. You have to apply gravity to some objects, for example, a vase, but not to others, such as the floor. To see the effect of gravity on the vase you also need to add time to your scenario so that the vase has time to fall and hit the floor where, depending on your choice of impact attributes, it will either shatter, bounce or possibly fold like cloth. Without time objects do not move so I was able to float objects in space. Because I was

interested in making pictures to put on a wall as opposed to animations that run on a screen, I did not include time in my model scenes.



Figure 9. Tim Thomas. *Still vase in a blender room*. Digital file

For me the unsupported objects floating in space draw attention to that space. The objects are still as opposed to at rest, which is what they would be if they were supported. This idea of stillness is important to my studio practice. I am never looking for what has just been or what is about to happen. The event as part of a stream of events is not important.

Stillness

The notion of time has been important to photography both as a time that is past, as in Barthes', "that has been" and as a moment extracted from a timeline as in Henri Cartier-Bresson's "Decisive moment".³⁵ Earlier, in comparing the theoretical markers of a photograph with a 3D render, I said that whilst a photograph says "that has been" a 3D render says, "this is". To

³⁵ Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment : Texts and photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson*, French edition ed. (New York : Simon & Schuster, , 1952).

understand this better I devised a thought experiment based on Barthes' response to seeing a photograph of his mother in a winter garden.³⁶

Suppose that we were to make a 3D model of Barthes' Mother's imaginary childhood friend, Steve. We could render Steve using the same lighting arrangement as that which illuminates Barthes' Mother. We can model a garden and put Steve in it. We could show the print of that render to Barthes. In one hand he has a picture of his mother as child in a winter garden, in the other a picture of Steve, also in a winter garden. There is no question of authenticity since we know that Steve is imaginary, and Barthes will authenticate the photograph of his mother, based on resemblance and provenance. We know what Barthes makes of his mother's picture; it is a sign without a code that says "that has been" but what of Steve's picture?

The moment that is recorded in the Mother photograph can never be revisited except as an act of imagination prompted by that recording, the Mother gets older, she changes, hence the past tense. While it is conceivable to apply an ageing algorithm to the model Steve, unless we make a new model, the original Steve will be the original object to which the ageing algorithm has been applied. We cannot say that Steve "was". Instead we can say Steve "is". The render is an instance of the object, not the object. The render is a picture of Steve, not Steve just as the picture of Barthes' mother is not Barthes' Mother. We can use it in the same way we use a photograph, even though Barthes' Mother is real and Steve is not. It can, as Maynard suggests, remind us of the object or when we were last in the presence of the object.³⁷ It can be used as an illustration of the object or to illustrate another concept that is not about Steve but that Steve may represent. The picture of Steve could well provoke a sense of mortality. We will age and die but Steve will not. This might be the same for all fictional characters (Pooh does not age but

³⁶ Barthes, *Reflections on Photography Camera Lucida*.

³⁷ Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization, Thinking Through Photography*.

Christopher Robin does, he grows up and goes to school and stops visiting the Hundred Acre Wood. ³⁸⁾

Removing time from the photograph has the effect of creating stillness. In terms of my work, stillness is space with the element of time removed. In the 3D models there is no before and after the shutter release, hence no decisive moment and no timeline leading to a narrative. So the rendered images are not snapshots taken from a timeline of a before and after. The pictures do not represent moments that have gone, they just are.



Figure 10 Tim Thomas vase 2010 Digital file

³⁸ A.A. Miln, *The house at Pooh Corner* (London Methuen, 1928).

Real world photographs and marking space with a red line

As well as making photographs of virtual vases and teacups I also photographed real world vases and teacups (Figure 11)



Figure 11. Tim Thomas Vase 2010. Inkjet print. 21 x 29 cm

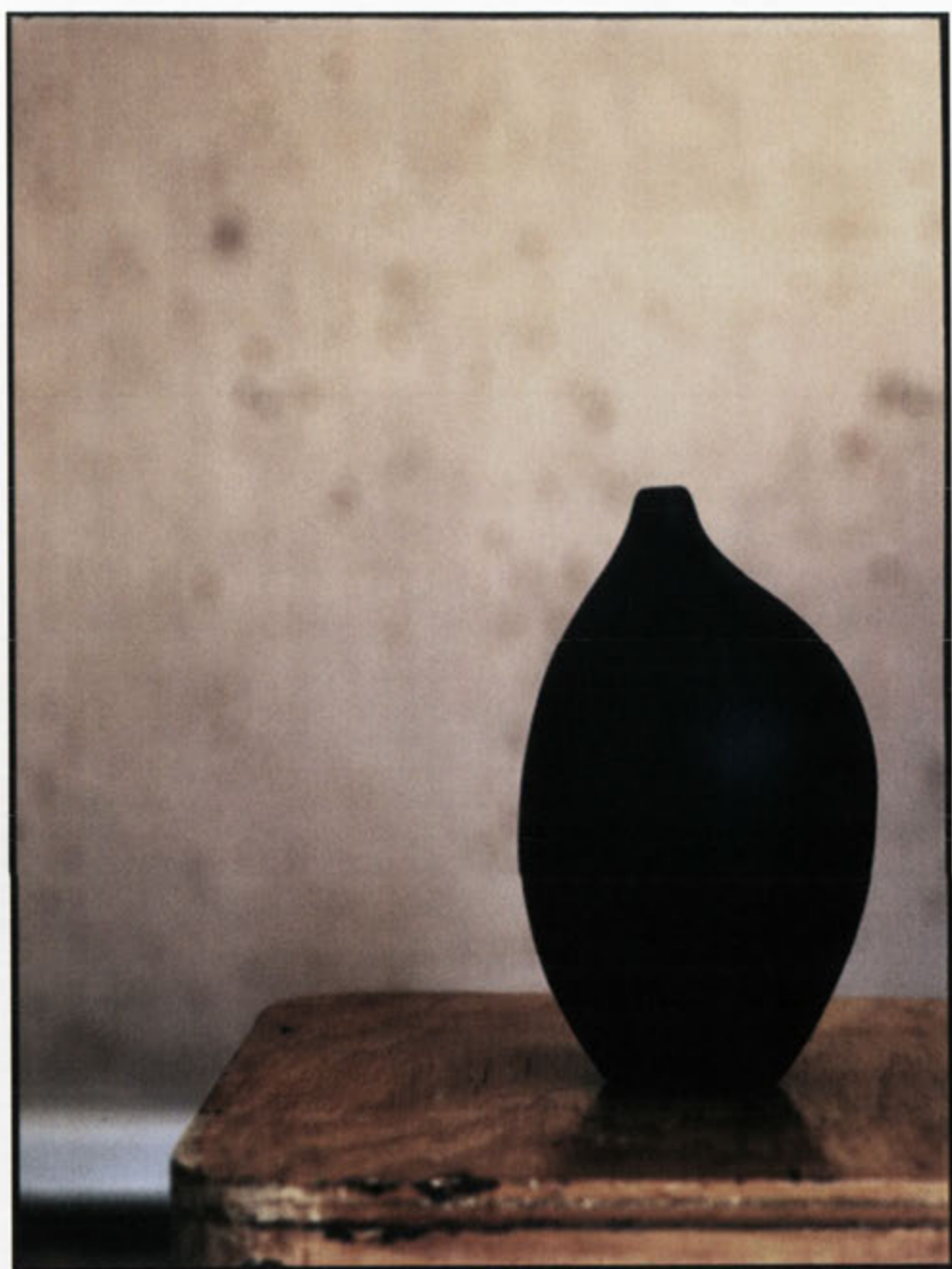


Figure 12 Tim Thomas *Vase* 2011. Inkjet print 21 x 29cm.

...And made model rooms out of cardboard and photographed their interior.

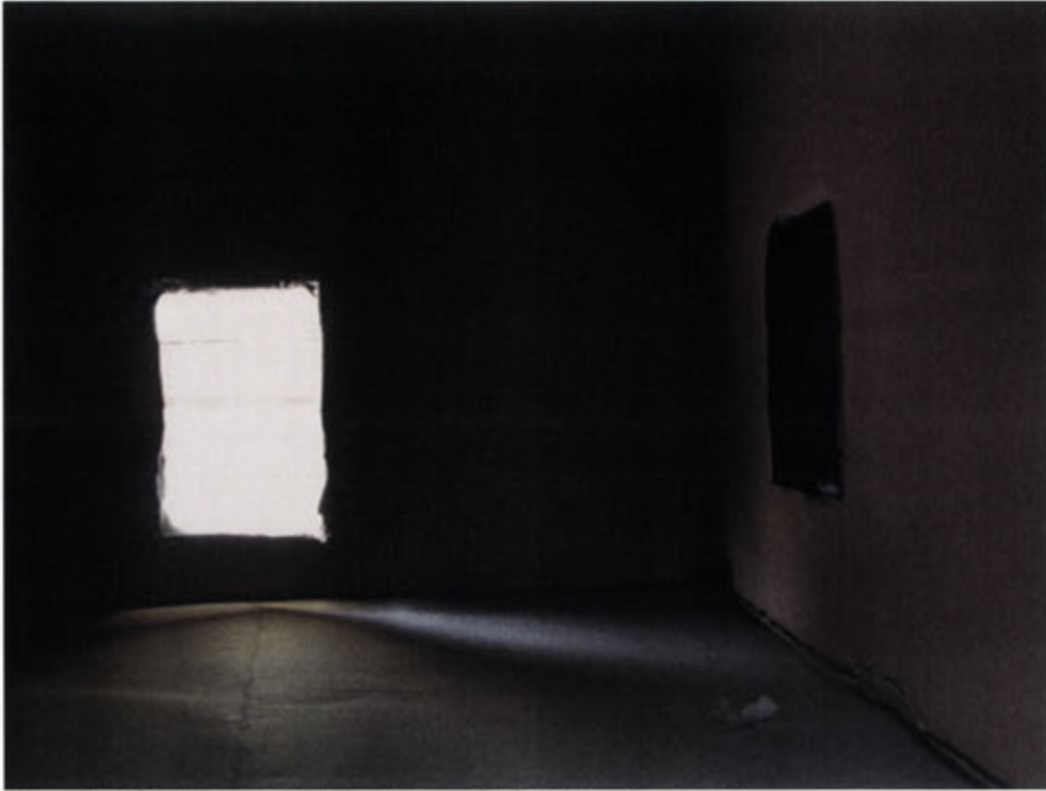


Figure 13. Tim Thomas *Cardboard room*. 2010 Inkjet print 29 x 21cm.

The real world photographs acted as a control. By continuing to stay in touch with the real world photographic process I was in a position to assess the process in Blender. Real world photographs also encouraged me to investigate the composition and map the compositional elements against the picture edge and each other. This was a practice that I had started doing at the beginning of this study when in my preliminary investigations I had considered the space of the picture, that is the flat space bounded by the picture's edge, as opposed to space in the picture or what the picture is of.

Lines in space

As a way of visualizing the composition as separate from the picture I would draw red lines on the image. I also used red lines to indicate composition in depth. In drawing the red lines I used perspectival conventions and indications of overlap to map depth from the picture space onto the picture surface.



Figure 14 defining space 1

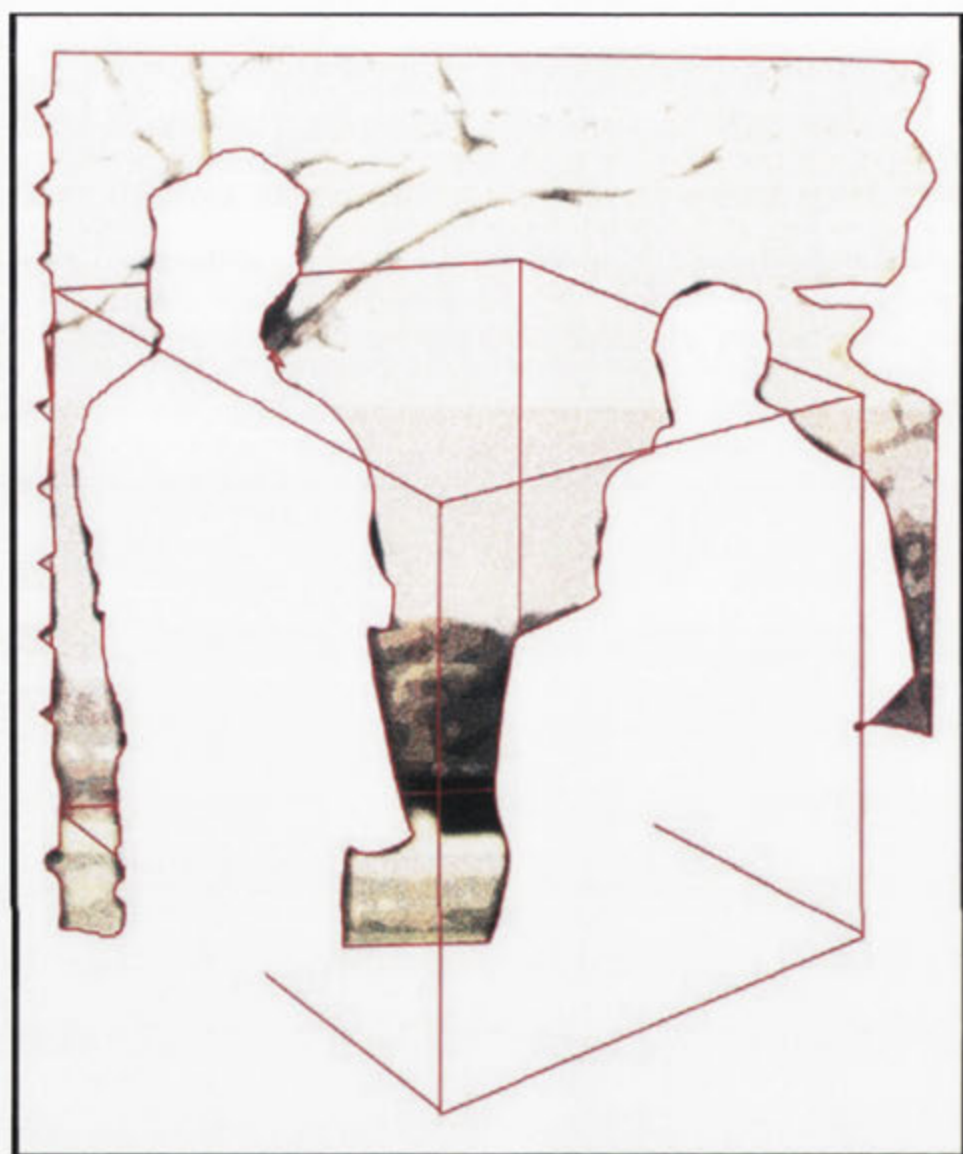


Figure 15 defining space 2

The red lines also acted as a compositional element in their own right, creating and defining spatial relationships.



Figure16. Tim Thomas. *Vase with red line*. 2011. Inkjet print. 21 x 29cm.

I took the red lines into Blender as red rods. The red rods in blender are space markers that flick between lines on a surface and lines in space.

Compositing, post processing...

It is possible to make a model in Blender, render that model as a photograph and then composite that photograph into another photograph. This sort of composite is normal and does not present any complications. Combining the two photographs is a fiction regardless of whether one of the photographs is from a virtual space or not. I experimented with compositing photographs from Blender into real world photographs as a way of reaching into the real world photograph's representation of space. In order to put the 3D object into the picture, as opposed to onto the picture, I had to identify a plane in the picture space in which to place the object and match the lighting and the plane of focus so as to make the object fit seamlessly into the real world scene.



Figure 17 Composite pictures using found negatives.

Much of the compositing was done in Photoshop as post processing. In particular, out of focus effects and overlap effects were added in Photoshop. Adding out of focus effects in Photoshop was part of a compositing process that helped to maintain the fiction that the model was part of the photographed scene. As such it was using the idiom of photography to make the composite look photographic. When I made the models for these composites it was possible to include a limited depth of field and the limited focus that lens-based photography includes. However, it was not a process built into the Blender paradigm, and involved exporting a grey scale map in which pixels are mapped between white and black as they recede on the depth axis, and then, using that map in a post processing application such as

Photoshop, control an out of focus effect. This process did not feel photographic since the photographic idiom was being applied as an effect to replicate lens based image making as opposed to being part of the process. For me the focus effect did not represent an indexical link to the virtual scene that included the virtual camera.

More recent versions of Blender include more lens controls and the ability to manipulate depth of field through f stop control, focal distance and the angle and number of iris blades. In real world studio photography the available equipment often guides these choices. Once Blender included these choices there was an almost infinite combination of focal length, sensor size and format to choose from. In the most recent version of Blender I have chosen my Blender equipment to limit these choices. From the second half of 2013 onwards I chose to make pictures on a 60 mm square sensor, with a 105mm lens, cropped to a 5 x 4 format. Fixing this combination of focal length, sensor and crop means that the field of view is controlled by camera placement as opposed to infinitely variable lens and camera specifications.

...And render engines.

Just as Blender's camera controls have developed over time so has its render engine. The render engine is the set of algorithms that build the picture from the combination of lighting, camera and object choices. When designing a render engine there are two possible approaches. We can either focus on the output or the process. If we focus on the output then we look at other picture making systems, note the way that the world is represented in those systems, and then develop algorithms to mimic that representation. The other option is to look at the process, or how the picture is made, and mimic that process. If the engine can duplicate the process then the output will look after itself. Different render engines will produce different interpretations of the same scene. This is comparable to different film and paper stocks, chemical

processors and, in a digital environment, colour profiles. Typically an output focused renderer will need less computing power than a process focused render, but will contain anomalies and artifacts that do not match real world effects. In contrast, a process focused renderer will take more computing power to measure the interactions of virtual light as it bounces off or is absorbed by the objects in the scene but the rendered scene will more closely match expectations based on an understanding of real world light and real world photographs.

When I started working with Blender the Blender render engine was output focused. Anomalies appeared in the shadows especially in the penumbra caused by incoherent light sources and reflected light. The renderer used dithering to replicate a penumbra and ambient occlusion as an alternative to bouncing light. My first blender scenes have an identifiable look to them especially in the shadow transition areas.

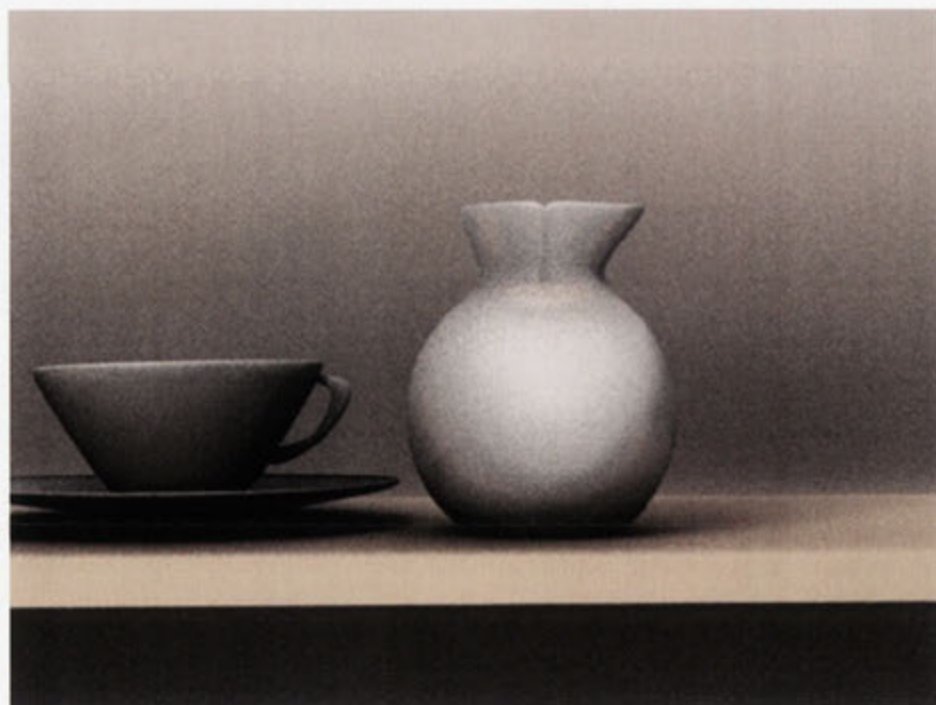


Figure 18. This image was rendered with the 2009 Blender Render. It uses dithering and ambient occlusion to approximate the effect of light on the scene.

The current version of blender gives access to *Cycles*, a process-based renderer in which the engine measures the interactions between light and objects as

light leaves the light source and bounces around the scene before reaching the camera.³⁹ Calculations have to be made for each pixel in the virtual sensor array.

The biggest difference between the earlier Blender render engine and the Cycles render engine is in the gamma and the Cycles' ability to handle the soft edges of cast and attached shadows associated with broad incoherent light sources. There is also significant difference caused by removing the ambient occlusion effect that the original render engine used to simulate the effect of shadows caused by proximity.



Figure 19. This picture was rendered with the Cycles renderer built into the 2013 version of Blender.

The photographic idiom.

Including depth of field in the render allows for out of focus effects. In earlier Blender versions I had added a blur to rendered objects as part of the compositing process as I placed that object into another picture space. Since

³⁹ Blender, "Dev:Ref/Release Notes/2.61/Cycles," Blender.org, http://wiki.blender.org/index.php/Dev:Ref/Release_Notes/2.61/Cycles.

the out of focus effect placed the rendered object onto a plane of focus in the host picture, applying the effect was part of the articulation of that picture space. Including focus effects at the render stage, as opposed to the compositing or post processing, made the out of focus blur part of the Blender vocabulary, there by adding another element to articulation of depth in virtual space that comes from the representation of that space photographically.

A photograph unlike our common experience does not have universal focus. Focus blur indicates depth before and after the point of focus. This depth of field effect is part of the photographic idiom. We do not normally see it in painting or drawing since the cognitive part of vision does not attend to out of focus effects. A camera records the optical part of vision that is the retinal image and so the focus effects are apparent. Rosemary Hawker writing about Gerhard Richter's claim that he is "making a photograph"⁴⁰ or "practicing photography by other means" labels these photographic artifacts as a "photographic idiom".⁴¹

Citing Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*, Hawker goes on to discuss the implications of the term "idiom".⁴² Using an idiom deliberately, or consciously, because it is idiomatic separates the idiom from its cloud of meaning and connections that make it idiomatic. In the composited pictures, in which a post processing out of focus effect was used to photographically refer to a plane of focus in the host picture space, the idiom was used consciously. Including the out of focus effect in the Blender rendering process allows for an unconscious use of the photographic idiom as part of the photographic visual vocabulary.

⁴⁰ Hawker, "The Idiom in Photography As The Truth in Painting." p. 543

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 541

⁴² Hawker, "The Idiom in Photography As The Truth in Painting." p. 544



Figure 20 Tim Thomas *wall_and_rod_1*, 2014. Inkjet print 72 x 58cm

Chapter 6.

Context

In the previous section I discussed my studio practice in the context of Gerhard Richter's photo paintings. In this section I will further contextualize my studio practice by looking at Jan Dibbets' photographs experimenting with forced perspective, Giorgio Morandi's still life paintings of vases, Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's arrangements of pottery, Jacky Redgate's series *Straightcut* (2002) and *Light Throw* (2010) and two pictures from Geoff Kleem's series *Lost and Found* (2009). I will also consider my practice in the context of Thomas Demand's photographs of full-scale models and Thomas Roof's virtual darkroom photograms.

Jan Dibbets (1941-); Experiments with optical perspective.



Figure 21 Jan Dibbets, *Perspective Correction - My Studio Li, 3: Square with Cross on Floor*, 1969. Black and white photograph on photographic canvass, 110 x 110 cm

Jan Dibbets has experimented with the optical perspective that makes receding parallel lines meet at a vanishing point. The photograph shows Dibbets' empty studio with six rods arranged on the floor. The rods appear to form the edges of a square with the two remaining rods making a cross in the middle. The plane of the square appears as perpendicular to the floor plane. That the rods appear as a square is an optical illusion. The rods are actually laid flat on the floor forming a trapezium. The top and bottom edges of the apparent square are the near and far edges parallel edges of the trapezium, the far edge being the longer. Since the longer side is further away it appears smaller. Dibbets has carefully arranged the parallel edges such that the longer edge appears to be the same size as the closer. Therefore the receding edges of the trapezium appear to be parallel when in fact they are not. This is in contrast to the studio walls that appear to converge in the usual way. The square appears to "stand up" because we understand squares and rectangles have parallel sides and that if those sides are receding then they should appear to converge, that they do not means that we read the square as standing up.

We commonly see this effect in on field advertising at sporting events.



Figure 22 On field advertising. 43

⁴³ bloggingfrombrissie, "rugby-surfers-climbing-0251.jpg," wordpress, <http://bloggingfrombrissie.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/rugby-surfers-climbing-0251.jpg>.

In making and recording the optical illusion Dibbets draws attention to the translation from a three dimensional space to a two dimensional representation. In particular it reminds me that we understand and organize objects using preconceived understandings of space. The optical illusion only works because of our expectation. So in making these photographs Dibbets appears to be exploring photographic conventions and the viewer's pre-learned understanding of optical perspective. The *Perspective Correction My Studio* (1969) is, like this study, a photograph about photography.

Giorgio Morandi and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott; objects that occupy and define space.

Giorgio Morandi (1890 – 1964)



Figure 23. Giorgio Morandi *Natura Morta*, 1956. Oil on canvas.



Figure 24 Giorgio Morandi. *Natura Morta* (Still Life), 1956. Oil on canvas.

There are formal similarities between Giorgio Morandi's still life paintings and the rendered photographs of cups and vases that I started making in Blender. Both use soft low contrast light and a limited pallet to show arrangements of everyday objects. Both place the objects within a flat space in which depth is marked by height in the frame and a horizontal horizon. There is a difference in the framing. The rendered photographs are composed so that the objects are in tension with the edge of the frame. In Giorgio Morandi's paintings the objects occupy the center of the frame. The objects rest on a surface that is part of a continuum that defines a ground plane, which is sectioned as it moves up the frame. The paintings are also different in that they have a universal focus.

The paintings present groupings of bottles and vases that have a formal stillness as if the objects are posed rather than arranged. In the early stages of the studio practice when I was first making Blender pictures, and before I noticed that I could remove time and hence the apparent effects of gravity, I was also grouping vases and cups on a surface that I defined as a shelf. As well as exploring Blender and how virtual light worked I was also exploring composition and playing with the visual weight of objects as they appear in the two dimensional space of the frame.



Figure 25. Tim GThomas *t_cup_2 with black glass* 2008. Digital File

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (1935 – 2013)

In an interview with Craft Australia, potter Gwyn Hanssen Pigott talked about Giorgio Morandi's influence on her use of space.

“My exploration of negative spaces grew from my love of the paintings of Italian Giorgio Morandi, a painter and print-maker who specialised in still life. Morandi's works have a great sensitivity of tone, colour and balance. In his paintings and drawings, space is important in a way that architecture relates to space. Space is always important.”⁴⁴

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott makes pots and, having made a collection of pots arranges them in a group. The pots occupy and define space. This is the space that Hanssen Pigott refers to when she says, “Space is always important”. I have only ever seen these arrangements photographed.

⁴⁴ Kathryn Wells, "Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Pottery and presence," Interview,(2011), <http://www.craftaustralia.org.au/library/interview.php?id=gwyn-hanssen-pigott-pottery-and-presence>.



Figure 26. http://www.sophiegannongallery.com.au/uploads//works/large/pigott-still_2010-xlg.jpg

Considering the photograph as an output of this practice it is easy to make comparisons between the photographs of Hanssen Pigott's pots and the early rendered pictures of teacups and jugs that I made in Blender. As well as similarity of content there are aesthetic similarities or similarity of visual style found in the photographs muted colours and soft light.(Fig. 27)



Figure 27 Gywn Hanssen Pigott. Quartet 2010, translucent porcelain 4 pieces Galerie Besson. Photo Brian Hand.

There are also similarities in the process. Hanssen Pigott makes the pots first. The forming, drying, firing, glazing, re-firing packing and delivering process is long enough and uncertain enough to mean that Hanssen Piggott does not start to consider the arrangement until after the pots are finished. It also means that when Hanssen Pigott is arranging the pots she is working with what she has at hand. If a pot is not right for the arrangement the only option that Hanssen Pigott has is to not use it, that is she cannot change the characteristics of a pot to suit an arrangement. This is similar to my working process in Blender. The glazing provides a further parallel to the modeling

stage in Blender in that, since it controls the pot's reflective characteristics, it spatially articulates the lighting. In Blender the same reflective characteristics are controlled by the material settings.

In Blender I try to use and reuse the same objects in pictures. In so doing I import an object that I made previously or re-use a previous project. Despite being able to revisit the modeling process so as to change a model to suit its current purpose I avoid manipulating objects to fit a scene. I do not allow myself to do this since my prejudices tell me that this stops being a photographic intention and starts to feel more like drawing. I say prejudice since there is nothing intrinsically wrong with being able to manipulate a model, and if I was using modeling clay I might not feel the same way. However I prefer to keep the photographic process that is the process of setting lights and camera and arranging objects separate from the modeling of the objects. The one exception is the background, which forms a photographic studio backdrop and so becomes part of the photography as opposed to modeling process.

While it is interesting that the earlier Blender images look similar to both the Morandi and Hanssen Pigott images, it should not be surprising. Both artists have an interest in represented space and the mapped space of the image surface. It is as if they occupy a similar *environmental niche* and so Hanssen Pigott has built on Morandi's visual vocabulary. The early Blender pictures are also occupying that *environmental niche* with the addition of an investigation into the application of virtual light. Arranging the objects and setting up the scene in blender has the same considerations in terms of the translation from three-dimensional to two-dimensional space. The photographic frame in the case of Hanssen Pigott, or the paintings frame in the case of Morandi, are compositional elements just as is the Blender frame made by the choice of virtual camera and virtual lens.

My reference to works from Hanssen Pigott and Morandi is driven by a common interest in space and in objects that define and occupy space. We also share an interest in process rather than function to reference the medium. In the next section I consider artists who are working with the photographic process, the photographic surface and light.

Jacky Redgate (1955-)

In terms of context, the previous two artists worked outside the photographic paradigm. Jacky Redgate works within photography with an interest in representations of space and light. In *Straightcut # 12*, this interest is apparent in the spatial ambiguity as a line of orange kitchen canisters is reflected in two mirrors, and in *Light Throw (Mirrors) #4* in which multi-coloured plastic plates define the surface of a wall whilst a system of light and shadow questions that surface causing the surface and the plates to advance and recede.^{45 46}

Redgate is photographing arrangements. These arrangements differ from Hanssen Pigott's arrangements in that the arrangement is made to be photographed, and so camera placement and lighting are part of the arrangement. The photograph is only incidentally capturing a moment in time. There is no sense of a before and after in the photograph. That these images question the photographic space and depth mean that, like El Lissitzky's PROUN's (discussed in the dissertation), the image never settles into a coherent picture plane, despite the camera's optical perspective.

⁴⁵ Jacky Redgate, *Straightcut #12*, 2002. C-type photograph 150 x 95cm.

⁴⁶ Jacky Redgate, *Light Throw (Mirrors) #4*, 2010-11. C-type photograph, 158 x 126 cm.

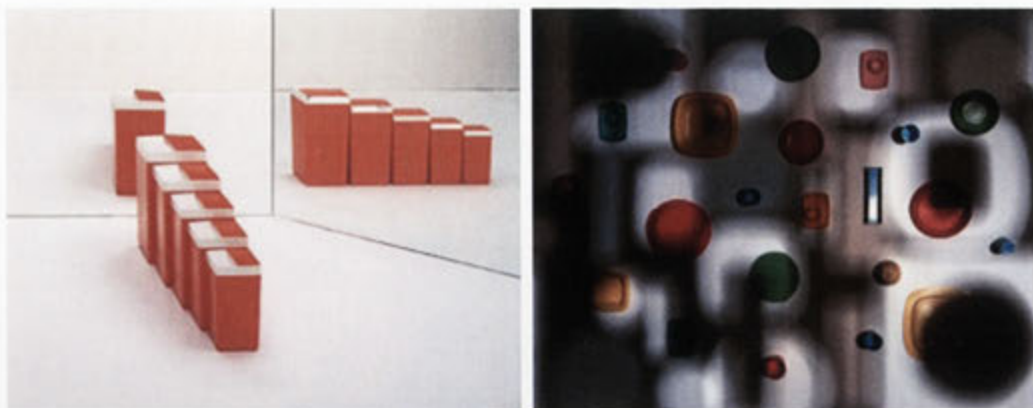


Figure 28. Jacky Redgate *Straightcut* #12, 2003

Figure 29 Jacky Redgate *Light Throw (Mirrors)* #4, 2010-11

I find that that the *Straightcut* and *Light Throw* series are particularly relevant to some of the Red Pole images from the studio practice, in which the poles question the representation of depth and the image.



Figure 30. Tim Thomas *rods_2_3*, 2013. Inkjet print. 72 x 59cm.

Geoff Kleem (1953 -)

In *Lost and Found #1* (Figure 31) Geoff Kleem has removed a rectangle from the image. The white space interrupts the photographic surface. I read it as an absence in which the white rectangle pierces the image surface and support revealing a void. It could just as easily be an addition, in which case the rectangle is overlaying the picture.

The interruption focuses attention on the picture's surface. We can see depth represented in the image but the rectangle reminds us that this is an image on a surface, and further, that just as the image is framed as part of the photographic construct, so is the surface bounded by a frame with physical dimensions and proportions. The rectangle is at once both an interruption to the photograph and a compositional element in the picture. In which case we can say that the rectangle occupies the space of the picture and space in the picture.

As well as an interruption on the surface of the picture the white rectangle can, depending on attention, be read as being in the picture space. In which case, it occupies a plane somewhere further into the image space than the right hand foreground tree. The distance into the picture is not fixed but adjusts as our attention moves over the picture. This differs from Dibbets' experiments with optical perspective in that the white rectangle is not photographed as part of the forest. In this sense it appears as a composite



Figure 31. Geoff Kleem, *Lost and Found #1*, 2005 Light jet print 90 x 240cm.
http://geoffkleem.com/02_photo_lost_and_found_01.html

Lost and Found #1 is the only picture in the *Lost and Found* series that uses the void as an interruption. The other pictures in the series are also forest scenes, however, rather than a white rectangle these scenes contain coloured smoke or twinkling lights that appear to have been added to the photograph.⁴⁷ If I use the first image to define an area of interest, that is the tension between picture space and framed space, the other additions, rather than creating a fictional space, as would be the case if I addressed these images as composites, articulate a space independent of the picture space. In which case, I find that there are two spatial codes at work in the *Lost and Found* series. On the one hand, there is a photographic picture space and on the other, there is a framed and constructed space.

⁴⁷ Geoff Kleem, "Geoff Kleem, Australian Artist, 1958, Official Site," <http://www.geoffkleem.com/>.



Figure 32. Geoff Kleem *Lost and Found #2*, 2005, Light jet print, 113.5 x 184cm, http://geoffkleem.com/02_photo_lost_and_found_02.html

Thomas Demand 1964-

Using photographs from newspapers as source material Thomas Demand makes life size models of out paper for the purpose of photographing those models. Conceptually this presents some similarities and some differences with the studio practice in this project.

The pictures play with the uncanny, in the sense of simultaneously familiar and strange, re-presentation of almost familiar places and in so doing invoke notions of hyper reality and a sense of “almost accurate” that I find similar to feelings I have when looking at model railways. Demand’s models are re enactments, accurate to the extent that there is a one to one mapping of the reference reality onto the model, but inaccurate in the sense that the details do not align. In other words, like a wax works figure, it looks OK from a distance.



Figure 33. Thomas DEMAND German 1964 Kontrollraum / Control Room. 2011 C-Print / Perspex 200.0 × 300.0 cm

The term model in this instance is different to the term as it is used to describe the 3 D models and virtual space created and photographed in Blender. Beyond sharing a spatial paradigm those 3 D models are not analogs of reality or representations of real world things or real world spaces. They are representations of themselves as opposed to models of other things.

Thomas Ruff 1958

In an earlier Section I referred to a series of portraits made by by Thomas Ruff in 1988 . Since then Ruff has explored other photographic process including a virtual dark room process by which his has made photograms. These photograms are recordings of virtual object casting shadows from virtual light sources.



Figure 34. THOMAS RUFF. *r.phg.06*, 2014. Chromogenic print. 240 x 185 cm

In the press release for the exhibition, THOMAS RUFF: Photograms and Negatives, Ruff states,

When you make photograms, without the use of a camera, you can indeed call that abstract photography, as the lens and the corresponding registration medium are lacking. No longer do you have pictures of reality or objects; you only have their shadows. It is a bit like Plato's cave, where one could only imagine reality; the objects themselves were not visible.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Gagosian Gallery, "PRESS RELEASE. THOMAS RUFF: Photograms and Negatives" (2014).

Ruff's claim that the pictures are photograms is relevant to this project. For in so doing Ruff, just like this project, is placing virtual light on the same photographic footing as real world light.

Ruff describes his process in an interview in an online publication and it is interesting to note that he is creating pictures by manipulating the virtual objects materiality, that is changing an object's attributes without changing the object, including assigning light emitting qualities to the object.⁴⁹ This suggests that Ruff is in fact making marks with the object as opposed to recording the object interactions with light, which seems more like drawing than photography.

In this section I have considered a context for the rendered photographs. Morandi and Hanssen Pigott provide examples of arrangements. Morandi provides examples of vernacular objects occupying and defining space, which Hanssen Pigott further develops by making the objects as subjects to be arranged. Both artists work with limited muted colours and for both artists the arrangement is an object of contemplation.

The examples from Redgate are also arrangements but being studio photographs the arrangement includes the camera and lighting. The examples from *Straightcut* address questions of photographic space and perception. Kleem uses recorded space and draws our attention to the space of the picture as opposed to in the picture.

Thomas Demands photographs of one to one scale models question the iconic reality of photograph whilst Thomas Ruff's photograms, whilst occupying and uncertain space between photograph and drawing support the notion that virtual light is photographically real.

⁴⁹ Ruth Reader, "Photographs Without Cameras: Going to Mars in Thomas Ruff's Bauhaus Spaceship," <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/thomas-ruff-digital-darkroom-mars-photograms>.

In the next section I will consider the thesis photographs in the context of the research topic.

Chapter 7.

Reflection and conclusion: the articulation and re-articulation of space within the photographic paradigm.

In this section I will consider the pictures in terms of the topic, which calls for the articulation and re-articulation of space within the photographic paradigm.

In earlier sections I have argued that a photographic paradigm includes photographs made in virtual space by a virtual camera using virtual light. I have discussed the experience of virtual space and how that experience is different to experiencing real space. In describing how the studio practice progressed, I pointed to the implications of compositing an object from virtual space into a real world photograph in which the virtual and real spaces are combined into a fictional relationship. I also described using red poles to map space.

In this section I will consider how the pictures present examples of nested space and how as we view the pictures we are asked to construct space as it moves from representation to articulation.



Figure 35. Tim Thomas. *gallerybeaker_1*, 2014. Inkjet Print. 72 x 59cm

gallerybeaker_1 (Figure 35) is a photograph of a virtual space. The photograph shows a wall with three block mounted landscape photographs. A large, red translucent vessel is on the floor in front of the three photographs. The floor, the wall, the vessel and the three block mounted photographs exist within a Blender space. The landscape photographs are pictures with their own picture space. When we look at this photograph we see a statement about objects, arranged in Blender and photographed. We understand that the landscape pictures are representations of other real world spaces. In *gallerybeaker_1* the landscapes are space, nested in the virtual space.

The photograph *rods_3_2* also shows objects arranged in virtual space. In this case there are four red rods in front of a large photographic panel, on which there is a landscape image of winter trees at sunset. The arrangement has been photographed so that the background, photographic panel is out of focus. The red rods and the panel are lit with a virtual studio light from the

right hand side focused on the top of the rods. The rods are unsupported. As in *gallerybeaker_1*, *rods_3_2* has real world space nested within the virtual space. However the virtual space is not defined by the continuum of the wall and the floor. The red rods articulate the space between the camera and the background photographic panel. The contradictory depth indicators presented by the arrangement of rods complicate understanding of the foreground space.



Figure 35. Tim Thomas.*rods_3_2*, 2013. Inkjet Print. 72 x 59cm.

The two middle rods appear to advance and recede. Swapping position, first one is closer, then the other. In looking at the picture I have to make and remake the space around the rods. The space is not fixed. I have to actively create the space for the rods to be in. I am using the space as an organizing tool.

Going back to *gallerybeaker_1*, I note that I described the red vessel as “large”. The sense of scale comes from the skirting board at the bottom of the wall. In

this picture, space is being articulated by the continuum of floor and wall. The large red vessel is understood in the context of that articulation.

jug and vessel_4 is an arrangement of objects photographed in Blender.(Figure 36) As such the arrangement includes the camera and lighting fixtures that we cannot see in the picture. Space is articulated photographically through cast and attached shadows on the foreground and objects, the infinity cyclorama panel in the background, and the depth of field characteristic of the lens, aperture and sensor size combination.

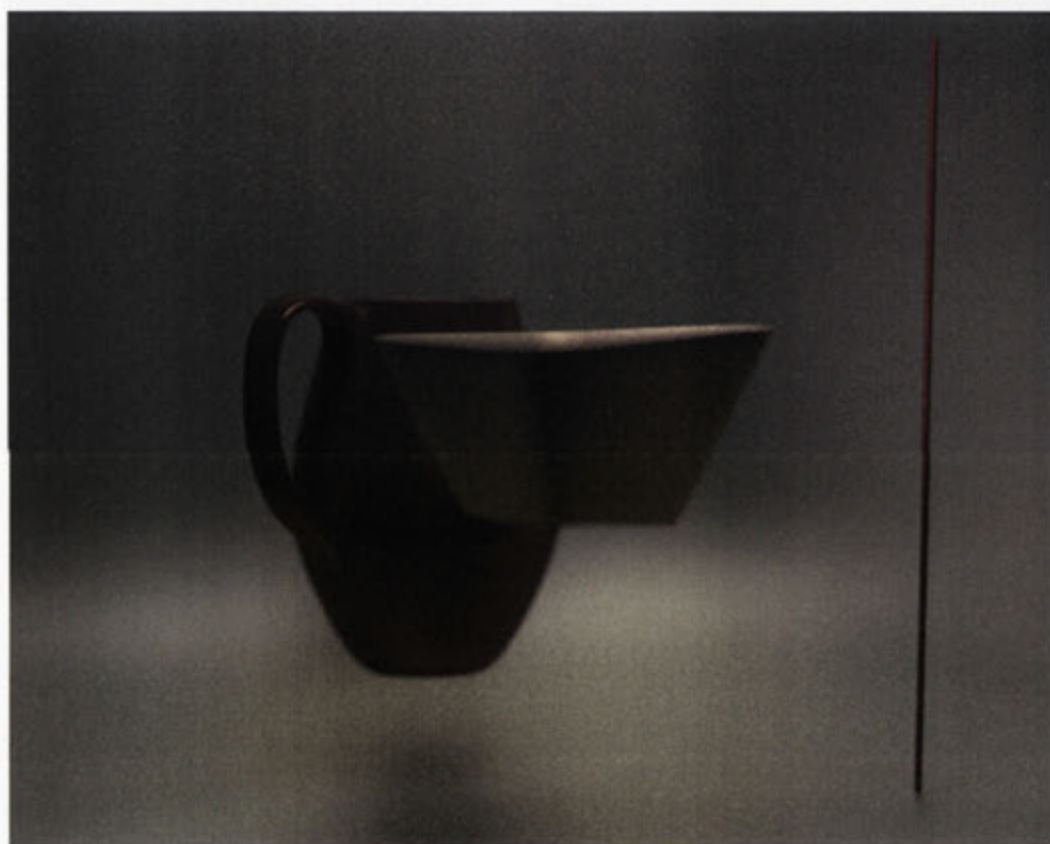


Figure 36 Tim Thomas. *jug and vessel_4*, 2013 Inkjet print 72 x 59cm

Conclusion

It is in *jug and vessel_4* that I find the clearest statement about the photographic paradigm and space. I also find it a satisfying image in terms of its composition. Thinking about the dissertation part of the thesis this image

also nudges the “need to make sense of story” that the dissertation found in the EL Lissitzky PROUNS.

In the Introduction to this exegesis I emphasised the separate and independent nature of the Dissertation and the Studio Practice. However this need to make sense of highlights further links between the Studio Practice and the El Lissitzky PROUNS in the Dissertation. Just as I found that the PROUNS invoke three-dimensional spaces via multiple perspectives using a variety of perspectival systems within the same picture field so do pictures in from the Studio Practice. In particular



rods_3_2, causes depth uncertainty in the relationship between the center vertical rods that can only be resolved by arbitrarily establishing either, a tilt on the depth axis to both rods, or, a difference in scale between the rods. The PROUNS demonstrated the same inability to settle within one stable spatial relationship.

The similarity between the PROUNS in the dissertation and some of the Pictures from the Studio Practice is not surprising since both project use spatial representation to and spatial understanding to gain insight into the separate research topics.

In addition to photography being part of the pictures I find that photography is embedded in the process. Making a photograph in Blender is a photographic process similar to making a photograph in a studio and a darkroom. So it is not a photograph by other means but a photograph photographically.

The study looks at the articulation and re articulation of space within the photographic paradigm and the pictures present virtual space as a photographic space. The pictures articulate that space using a photographic idiom and rearticulate other real world spaces using both compositing and nesting, and in so doing offer an expanded understanding of photography.

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Dissertation

Study to test the proposition that a temporally discrete object such as a work of art may contain a story

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Chapter 1. An introduction to the question, some definitions, a statement concerning the contribution to knowledge, and an outline of the chapters.

Introduction

This dissertation is part of a PhD study looking at space within the photographic paradigm. As such it is part of a larger study that revolves around a studio practice that seeks to make statements about the photographic implications of virtual space. The idea that a picture can be a statement is by no means clear-cut. That an art practice can lead to a new understanding or new knowledge is, to me, clear, as is the idea that a picture can be an illustration of knowledge. What is not clear is how the work of art itself can be a self-contained statement of that new understanding or new knowledge.

The idea that a work of art is a statement is not in itself problematic. At the very least an object is a statement of itself. To ask an object such as a work of art to be statement of knowledge is to ask it to be more than itself. As a result of this uncertainty this dissertation looks at the possibility that a work of art may contain a knowledge statement in the form of a story. If a work of art can contain a story-like statement then it clears the way for a work of art to contain a statement of new understanding or new knowledge.

There is a further complication in that a statement of knowledge presupposes that there is something to do the knowing. For a work of art to be a knowledge statement that thing would have to be something that could engage with a work of art. The options for that something are limited so anthropocentricity is inherent in the idea of a work art as a knowledge statement.

The proposition being tested requires some consideration. There is a reference to time in the term “temporally discrete object”, and an indication that an object may act as a container for a story, which suggests that a story is not a process but a thing. In this first section I will define the terms *story* and *temporally discrete*

object, and show what would need to be the case for one to be contained by the other.

To define *story* I must separate it from *plot* and *narrative*. When a storyteller is telling a story they relate a series of events over time. As I listen I am presented with two timelines. In one timeline there is an order to the events as they are told, and, in the other timeline, an order in which those events happen in the story. The two timelines often show the events in the same order but they do not have to. A storyteller may choose to change the order of events or they can leave something out altogether. Often they leave out events that are presupposed or do not progress the story. The storyteller also has to decide on the narrative order of story events that are concurrent. We can differentiate between the events that happen in the story time and the events that are told in the story telling. The series of events in the story, that is what happens, make up the *plot*. The events as the storyteller chooses to tell make up the *narrative*. Both the *plot* and the *narrative* involve events that happen in time and over time. From now on I will use the term *narrative* to describe two or more events related in sequence, and *plot* to mean the events that go to make up the narrative.

It is my contention that whilst the *narrative* and the *plot* involve time the *story* does not. The *story* is the overarching statement that is made *via* the *narrative*. It is easy to conflate *narrative* and *story*. In common usage the terms "narrator" and "storyteller" are interchangeable. In Chapter Three I will argue that the *story* exists out of time as an overarching statement of the way the world might be in response to an area of concern and that it is the narrative that brings the *story* into time.

That anything may exist outside time is awkward and contradictory. In this case being outside time suggests that the object is a potential. The *story*, (from now on I will omit the italics) exists as a possibility. The narrative reifies the story by bringing it into time.

This idea of story being separate to narrative is not new. Robert MacKee writing about story in Hollywood movies identifies story as overarching the narrative and

suggests that the story dictates the narrative.⁵⁰ Edward Schneider in a discussion of engagement and violence in game playing conflates story with narrative.⁵¹

However, he goes on to make a distinction between games that provide a justification for violence and games that are simply violent, for example a game in which the player has to kill people to save the world, and games in which the player just has to kill people. Both have the same plot, killing people, but in one the player is killing people, in the other the player is saving the world. So, whilst Schneider uses the terms story and narrative interchangeably, he inadvertently points out the difference between the plot, in this case killing people, and a story with an over arching area of concern, in this case saving the world. Not surprisingly Schneider notes an increase in player engagement with a game that has a story as opposed to just a plot.⁵²

Placing narrative within a single object is also not new. A photograph is a single object. In his book, *Stories of a War: Narrative and the Single Photograph* (2001), Greg Battye looks at the possibility of establishing a narrative with a single photograph.⁵³ To do so Battye places the photograph in the middle of a timeline that starts in the moment before the photograph was taken and finishes in the moment after. He finds that these moments, exterior to the moment in which the shutter was released, are both pre-supposed and defined by what Henri Cartier-Bresson described as "The Decisive Moment".⁵⁴ In Cartier-Bresson's 1932 photograph *Behind the Gare St. Lazare* that shows a man leaping over a puddle, Cartier-Bresson has released the shutter at the "decisive moment", just as the man's heel is about to break the surface of the puddle.⁵⁵ The photograph clearly refers to the wet sock moment just after the shutter release, as well the hopeful moment before the man starts his leap.

⁵⁰ Robert McKee, *Story. Substance, structure, style and the principles of screen writing* (London: Methuen, 1999).

⁵¹ Edward F. Schneider, "Death with a Story," *Human Communication Research* 30, no. 3 (2004): pp 361-75.

⁵² Ibid., p363.

⁵³ G. Battye, "Stories of a War: Narrative and the Single Photograph" (University of Wollongong, 2001).

⁵⁴ Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment : Texts and photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson*, French edition ed. (New York : Simon & Schuster, , 1952).

⁵⁵ Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Behind the Gare St Lazare*, 1932. Gelatin silver print. , 37.6 x 24 cm. . Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson.

Narratology and genre appear to be entangled with ideas of story. In the next section I will, after linking story to ideas of framing, distance this discussion from narrative and genre.

Despite having separated story from narrative, narratology, the theory and study of narrative structure and meaning, does provide insight into story through the notion of framing as described by Marvin Minsky.⁵⁶ Minsky argues that when faced with a new situation a person will draw on previous experiences to help understand the new situation. The previous experience acts as a framework adapted to fit the current new experience. Manfred Jahn applies Minsky's idea of a framework to third person (he said that she said...) narrative and suggests that, in understanding or constructing a narrative, the plot elements are organised and understood according to a frame. In Chapter Three I argue that a frame is separate from the narrative and since a frame presupposes a state of affairs that suggest how the world might be, pre-exists the narrative as a story waiting to be brought into time by the narrative.

In the *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* H.Porter Abbot divides narrative into two parts.⁵⁷ Abbot uses the term "narrative discourse" to describe how a narrative is presented and the order of events whilst for Abbot "story" is the events. Abbot also notes the difference between story and narrative and since story is, for Abbot, only ever experienced as a representation, raises the question of which comes first.⁵⁸ In this project I use the term "plot" to indicate the events and "narrative" or "narration" to indicate the choosing and ordering of those events. In Chapter Three I argue that story exists separately to both and plot and narrative, pre-existing, waiting, as it were, to be invoked, called into being, or, as I argue, brought into time, by the narrative. As such this project is not concerned with narrative but is concerned with story and so narrative theory and narratology is beyond the scope of this project.

⁵⁶ Marvin Minsky, "A Framework for Representing Knowledge," in *Frame Conceptions and Text Understanding*, ed. Dieter Metzger (New York: de Gruyter, 1979 [1975]). Quoted in Manfred Jahn, "Frames, Preferences, and the Reading of Third-Person Narratives: Towards a Cognitive Narratology," *Poetics Today* 18, no. 4 (1997).

⁵⁷ H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). p.19.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.20.

Just as “frame” “narrative discourse” and “plot” are linked to story so is “genre” “Genre” refers to a group of objects sharing common characteristics, or a class of things. In their introduction to *Genre. An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy* Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reif, before surveying the scholarly landscape surrounding genre and genre, note that genre acts not just a means of classifying a text but also as a model for how to approach a text and so a study of genre must include a notion of the body or society that identifies a genre and actions that are linked to that genre.⁵⁹ Discussing genre and literature Bawarshi and Reif note that theoretical approaches to genre demand an *apriori* list of categories.⁶⁰ This study is testing the proposition that a temporally discrete object may contain a story. In the next section I define the concept of temporally discrete as being available for a formalist understanding independent of pre-existing understandings or knowledge, and in Chapter Two argue that the proposition is looking for a story in the picture with out reference to codes or categories, so do not discuss genre in terms of the temporally discrete object. Further since I argue that, for this project, story exists separate to, and independent of, narrative, genre as it impacts on narrative is out side the scope of this project.

Temporally discrete objects

When we look at a work of art, for example a picture on a wall, we see the whole work and the parts of the work at the same time. We can take time to investigate the picture, examining the different compositional elements, but nevertheless the picture is available as a whole in an instant. It is experienced in the moment at which the viewer’s and the picture’s separate timelines intersect.

All objects have their own timeline external to themselves. Art objects, like all objects are made at a time and then exist over time. They can be made in response to events that happen before their existence and they can be made in a context that corresponds to the life and times of the artist. Yet as we look at the work of art

⁵⁹ Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reif, *Genre. An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition (Indiana: Parlor Press, 2010).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10.

this timeline is not within the work itself. If we do not already know the context then we cannot always see that context in the work. We do not see the context that corresponds to the life and times of the artist nor do we see the events that provoked the artist to make the work. Instead we see the work in the moment that we look at it, that is, we see the work now, separate from its past, and not yet in its future. As such, the work is temporally discrete.

There are advantages to seeing the work of art as being temporally discrete. As we do so we address the art as itself rather than as an illustration or representation of a cloud of meaning that, whilst it might be interesting from an art historical sense, in that it allows us to contextualize the work and interpret the intention of the artist, is very separate from the work itself. This formalist approach is important if we are to search for something contained within, as opposed to referenced, by the work of art.⁶¹

To contain a story, a temporally discrete object such as a work of art would have to contain the story in such away as to not rely on knowledge outside the object. It cannot rely on a narrative that describes the life and times of the artist nor can it require an understanding of the artist's intentions. Any encoding or sign that requires cultural knowledge would also be contraindicated, as would use of allegory and reference to other works. The story could not rely on technical or scientific knowledge.

To say that the story is contained within the object is to say that that story is available to a viewer through the object, without reference to ideas external to the object and the act of seeing it. The act of seeing the work of art as a work of art and an object separate from other objects presupposes that the viewer is able to identify the work of art as an object separate from her/himself and the environment. In the case of wall based art the viewer must be able to distinguish the art as separate from the wall and the space between the viewer and the art. In

⁶¹ Formalist in this instance refers to formalist theory as set out by Clive Bell in his 1914 work *Art*, Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914).

Chapter 5 I argue that this ability is what Michael Polanyi refers to as “tacit knowledge”.⁶²

This ability to recognize the space between the viewer and the art is an important distinction since there is an anthropocentric quality to the proposition that is centered around a human involvement both in the notion of a story that presupposes how things should be, and also in the idea of human activity that is embodied within a work of art. This study accepts that a work of art is a human-made object and further that a story requires a human, with areas of concern and the ability to conceive of a way the world might be, to experience the story as a story. The study is centered around human activity and experience that makes meaning from a subjective and constructed understanding of being.

Original Contribution to Knowledge

Defining the terms *story* and *temporally discrete object* brings me to the original contribution to knowledge as suggested by the proposition. It is clear that we can position narrative within a single picture. What is uncertain is how or if a single object can contain story. This study provides an original contribution to knowledge in a new understanding of the relationship between story and the temporally discrete object such as a work of art.

This new understanding is derived from bringing a phenomenological approach to describing an abstract construction. In trying to describe just what we see in say an El Lissitzky (1890-1941) *PROUN*, or Project for the Affirmation of the New, we find that language lets us down.⁶³ If however we perform an act of imagination and consider the *PROUN* as a three-dimensional space then we can organize objects on the Z or depth axis. It is in this act of organization that we find the story. That we need to organize the *PROUN* into three dimensions, and further that this, in the

⁶² Michael Polanyi, “Tacit Knowing: Its Bearing on Some Problems of Philosophy,” *Reviews of Modern Physics*, 34 no. 4 (1962).

⁶³ Peter Nisbet, “*PROUN* ca1923,” in *EL Lissitzky, 1890-1941. Catalogue for an exhibition of selected works from North American collections, The Spengal Museum Hanover, and the Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg Halle* ed. Harvard Universit Art Museum (1987).

case of the test image, is impossible, indicates that there is a way that the objects in the construction should be organized in order to fit in with a statement of how the world should be. The picture, by reaching towards a spatial resolution, is activating this statement of how the world should be in response to an area of concern that matches our need to organize the objects in a coherent three-dimensional space. It is here that we find a story contained within a temporally discrete object.

This dissertation starts with a discussion of the hermeneutic approach to the work of art that establishes the work of art as a stand-alone object, separate from the life and times of its creator. This is important so as to make sure that it is the work of art that contains a story as opposed to illustrating a narrative from history. I will argue, from example, that stories are a special type of statement that act as a function on a field of concern and that we use these stories as tools to make sense of events according to an understanding of how the world should be.

Having a hermeneutic model and definition of stories allows for testing. Before looking at the test pictures the dissertation looks at an example of story being attached to a picture in a debate from art history concerning the providence of a pair of shoes in a painting by Van Gogh (1853-1880).⁶⁴ Whilst at first glance it appears as if we have answered the question, further analysis reveals that understanding the stories requires a technical understanding of shoes and leather, the life and times of the artist and the nobility of toil.⁶⁵ Similarly we find that a cultural understanding is needed to parse an illustrated book by El Lissitzky.⁶⁶ We see from these examples that we are looking for a story that is neither technically nor culturally specific.

Choosing two of El Lissitzky's *PROUNs* as test pictures, we find that they do contain a story in that they activate a field of concern. The field of concern corresponds to our 'need to make sense of', or organize objects spatially, that is, organize discrete

⁶⁴ Vincent van Gogh, *A Pair of Shoes*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 37.5 x 45 cm.

⁶⁵ Meyer Schapiro, "The still life as a Personal Object – A note on Heidegger and van Gogh," in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society selected papers*, ed. Meyer Schapiro (New York: George Braziller, 1994).

Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Martin Heidegger Basic Writings: From Being and time (1927) to the task of thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992); *ibid.*

⁶⁶ El Lissitzky, *Khad Gadya The Only Kid. Facsimilie of El Lissitzky's Edition of 1919* (Santa Monica,: Getty Research Institute, 2004).

perceptual events that happen at the same time using three, x, y and z, dimensions and in response to depth cues. This 'need to make sense of' defines the story, even though the test case ends up showing such organization to be impossible.

The Argument

In Chapter Two I present an anecdote as an introduction to an hermeneutical approach to a work of art that positions the work as being separate from its maker and the circumstances in which it was made. I argue that, whilst an understanding of an art historical context is interesting, the art's relevance comes from its existence in the present, and so should be considered in relation to the *now* in which the viewer finds themselves.⁶⁷ I contend that this separation from the work of art's historical time is important if we are to consider the work of art as being self-contained and as containing, rather than referencing, a story.

I go on to explore the relevance of the study to now. I ask why this study is appropriate at this time? In doing so I introduce the work of El Lissitzky as being a suitable subject. I argue that though it is necessary to separate the work of art from its historical context the same does not hold for the question and the choice of test material. To demonstrate the relevance of the test material I draw parallels between the changing world as experienced by El Lissitzky and the world now. I point to the idea of space as having undergone significant changes. Firstly, space changed for El Lissitzky through the multiplication of space offered by developments in mathematics that suggested the possibility of multi-dimensional geometry. Secondly, space has changed for me via a collapse in spatial boundaries brought about by high speed travel, the internet and global communication, and by the fracturing, folding and creation of multi dimensional space within the virtual environment presented by the Internet, computer operating spaces and computer created, three dimensional space and objects.

⁶⁷ This *now* is not defined as the not *then*, which would be another art historical approach, but as the interaction between the viewer and the art.

Where Chapter Two concentrates on the *sine qua non* of the question and the hermeneutic approach to the work of art, Chapter Three concentrates on developing an understanding of stories as a special type of statement. I investigate a number of different story environments, and note that the stories all serve as tools for making sense of the world. Drawing on Michel Foucault's discussion of statements and John Berger's observations around field, I argue that a story activates a field of concern, and that, following Foucault, it is, therefore, a function.⁶⁸ It is as a function that the story exists waiting to be used or invoked by the action of the narrative.

Also in Chapter Three I define story as being separate from plot and narrative, and further, that story presupposes a concept of world as an area of attention that presupposes a preferred outcome. An example of story failure serves as a platform for dissecting the concept of story supporting an idea of world. That is, a world in which things should happen in a certain way. The chapter also looks at the use of figurative language and metaphor in describing and understanding real world events.

Having established how I will address the temporally discrete object, and how I come to my understanding of story, in Chapter Four I examine other potential examples of story within a work of art in the form of a debate between Heidegger and Meyer Schapiro over the providence and meaning of Vincent Van Gogh's *A Pair Of Shoes* (1886). My examination of the two different shoe narratives reveals that there is a story; however, that story is not contained within the painting. The narratives, as told by Schapiro and Heidegger, evoke the stories. The picture is used as an illustration to accompany the narratives, and illustrate an idea.

Chapter Four also looks at two works by El Lissitzky. The first is an illustrated children's book of a Yiddish song and the other is a book of typography and constructions from his *PROUN* series. Looking at the illustrated children's book reveals a cultural encoding in the use of language and text and contrasting scripts.

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York London: Routledge, 1972). pp89-98.
John Berger, "Field," in *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers Cooperative, Ltd., 1980), pp192-98.

On the other hand the *PROUN* storybook allows itself to be separated from a linguistic encoding, and from an understanding of early twentieth-century Soviet history. The contrast between the two books is reassuring since it confirms that the El Lissitzky's *PROUN*s are suitable test subjects for this study.

In Chapter Five, having reassured myself that *PROUN*s are a suitable test subject, I examine two *PROUN*s to test the proposition that a temporally discrete object such as a work art may contain a story.

Initially describing a *PROUN* proves difficult. If I describe just what I see, that is the marks and colours that make two-dimensional shapes on the surface of the two-dimensional support, I find that language becomes awkward. I need to use lots of words, wrapped into conditional sub-clauses that suggest objects that we cannot see, as a way of describing what we can see. This is due to two-dimensionality not allowing for the possibility of one thing overlapping another. In many ways it is a problem of object recognition. In two dimensions there can be no separation between the figure and the field. In two dimensions we cannot say that an object is distinct from its background indeed the notion of background becomes difficult.

This difficulty disappears if we allow the possibility of three dimensions. Since the *PROUN*s are two-dimensional the third dimension is formed by an act of imagination on the part of the viewer. In three-dimensions we can organize objects that overlap along an imaginary depth axis. It is in this act of imagination that I find the story.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of space as an imagining that we are viewing the depth relationship from a position at right angles to our actual position such that depth is then understood as either height or width, in which case, in using imagination to organize the spatial relationships I am using a tool that I use everyday.⁶⁹ This is important and I will come back to it in response to an objection that arises from my use of space to organize or make sense of the pictures.

⁶⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenologie de La Perception*, trans. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2002 ed., Routledge Classics (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 1945). p279

That I use space, as both an organizing tool and defining need, to recognize the story contained within both the Vincent Van Gogh and El Lissitzky pictures, suggests that I am using specialist knowledge from outside the picture, and that therefore the story is not in the pictures. Possibly it is in me, the viewer. This is the objection that I referred to in the previous paragraph when I noted that there is an objection to using space as an organizational tool.

In interrogating this objection I consider the anthropocentric nature of a work of art and the presumed knowledge embodied in the concept of being a human who looks at a picture as a picture. I argue that in order to look at a picture as a picture the viewer must have an understanding of space. Further, using Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge, we can categorize spatial understanding as subsidiary knowing, that is the sort of knowledge that we rely on, but do not attend to when dealing with a greater whole.⁷⁰ In the *PROUN* examples, our spatial understanding is tested, thereby drawing attention to that understanding.

Thinking in terms of tools, and using Heidegger's concept of a tool ready to hand or a tool present at hand, for a human who can look at art, space is a tool ready to hand.⁷¹ It comes with the ability to see the art as art. Again, using the *PROUN* examples, we see space change, from a tool ready at hand to a tool present at hand. Thus, space changes from something that we use but do not consider, to a concept that we may theorize about. In this way I argue that the spatial understanding, and the ability to use space as an organizing tool are subsidiary to both the ability to look at a picture and the ability to know that one is looking at a picture. We can extend this beyond looking at pictures to looking at things, indicating that spatial understanding is not specialist knowledge that we bring to understanding the story but knowledge that we use to understand everything. Therefore this knowledge is a very different kind to the culturally encoded knowledge as represented by language in El Lissitzky's illustrated song book, or the technical knowledge that is required to read *The Pair Of Shoes* as being well-worn.

⁷⁰ Polanyi, "Tacit Knowing: Its Bearing on Some Problems of Philosophy," p601.

⁷¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [Sein und Zeit], trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, 1st English ed. (London: SCM Press, 1927; repr., 1st English Edition).

The concluding chapter revisits the arguments presented in the early chapters with the intention of underlining the original contribution to knowledge. I note that the study uses a special understanding of the term story and on reflection I can see similarities between the understanding of story and Barthes' notion of *punctum*, that is the unexpected, personal experience of a photograph as reaching out, all at once, that we find in some pictures.⁷² I also find similarities between the notion of story as a statement and the positioning of a photograph as a statement of knowledge as demonstrated in the Studio Exegesis, concerning the articulation of and re articulation of space within the photographic paradigm

Finding that a temporally discrete object can contain a story suggests why it is that a work of art may extend beyond the circumstance surrounding its creation, and be a object that is a statement of itself first, and an illustration of ideas second. Further it is also possible that the representation of story as a function that activates a field of concern, poised outside time, waiting to be brought into time by the narrative, explains why it is that we find stories continually engaging, whether or not the narrative is familiar. These are areas for further study. More immediately, and more importantly for this thesis, finding a story statement in a work of art allows for the possibility that a work of art can be a statement of new knowledge or understanding.

⁷² Roland Barthes, *Reflections on Photography Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Flamingo ed, Fontana Paperbacks, 1984).

Chapter 2. An Anecdote that suggests a hermeneutic approach, some ideas for a tool to organize perceptual events and the answer to a question, “Why these pictures?”

This chapter starts with an anecdote. The anecdote serves to draw attention to the hermeneutic difficulty faced by this study. If a work of art is to contain a story, as opposed to referencing or illustrating a story, that story must be in the work itself, not in the history of the work. In developing an understanding of a work of art it is tempting to start by reconstructing the context in which the work was made. However this study is asking for the work to stand alone with out reference to its history or the circumstances surrounding its creation.

The second part of this chapter asks why this question is appropriate and why I have chosen El Lissitzky's *PROUNs* as a test material? Whilst the first part of the chapter argues that I must separate the work of art from its context, it is context that makes the subject a suitable test. Recognising this contradiction I argue that the choice of test subject is different to the actual test, and that since I am looking at the test objects my context and the context of the object make the *PROUNs* a suitable place to look for a story and further that now is a suitable time.

An Anecdote

Whilst visiting relatives in Italy we decided to spend some time in Florence. We were not going on an art historical pilgrimage nor to visit a must-see tourist destination; our plan was to see the sights but more importantly to be in Florence. As an indication of our attitude to the visit our light-hearted preparation for the expedition was watching the Merchant Ivory Production of the EH Forster novel, *Room with a View*, and so we were in the frame of mind where we too were ready for ‘Santé Croce with no Baedeker’ and a true ‘Florentine Smell’.

Santé Croce was full of art and tour groups being talked to about art and we did not stay long in the main Basilica, we did however spend quite a lot of time in the

adjacent Pazzi Chapel that was empty of both furniture and wall art. The room was rectangular; about eleven meters by eighteen meters with nine-meter high walls giving way to an interior dome about eighteen meters high. It wasn't huge, but spacious. Light entered the space through four tall windows and the open door.

I found this space very satisfying to be in. Tradition has it that the Chapel was designed and the construction supervised by Brunelleschi.⁷³ What I was experiencing was a space created by Brunelleschi's design choices. That the room was empty made this more apparent. We must have spent half an hour in this chapel talking whilst sitting on a concrete bench that ran around, and came out of, the wall. My sister taught my daughter to waltz and I took a photograph.

The next afternoon we found ourselves divided, along gender lines, as to what to do. Some of us wanted to shop and some wanted to do anything else. I fell into the latter group and remembering the satisfying time I had had in the Pazzi Chapel suggested that we visit the Basilica of San Lorenzo, in particular the Tombs of the Medici in the New Sacristy. The time spent the previous day had raised my curiosity about Renaissance interior design and the New Sacristy was another example of a designer space. That is a space that was nominally the work of one identifiable design act.

I had seen pictures of the statues on the tombs themselves but had never seen or thought about the space they were in. The word tomb made me think of underground, like a crypt, so I was surprised by the high ceiling and lantern tower. The statues were as I had expected, gestural, expressionistic and loaded with allegory. They were also very dramatic. The light was full of contrast, dark hard shadows, and bright highlights. As I looked up the room disappeared into the gloom, with a weight of shadow pressing down, the windows in the lantern tower just managing to create a spot of contrast in the distance. The statues were warm yet the shadows above were cold.

⁷³ I say tradition because of doubts cast on the chapel's authorship in Trachtenberg M., *Brunelleschi, Michelozzo, and the Problem of the Pazzi Chapel*. Place: Yale University Press, 2008.

This drama was created by the additional lighting, which was incandescent, spot lighting, focused on to the statues. It picked out the statues from their background and made them very special. It also made me want to turn it off. I wanted to see the room with the statues in it, not just the statues. I could see the windows above me and through them the sky. Luckily I couldn't see the light switch but my brother in law could speak enough Italian, so I sat down as he asked if we could have the electric lights turned off.

It turned out that we could. There was an announcement warning visitors that the lights would be turned off for seven minutes and asking that nobody fall over during that time, and then the lights were turned off, at which point a couple of things happened.

Firstly the statues stopped having hard, cast shadows and changed colour to match the rest of the room. Secondly the space in the room turned upside down. Whereas before, the darkness pressed down from above now there was light, drawing us up into the dome. This inversion made the Chapel a space with some statues in it rather than a display case for the statues. Just as I had experienced the space in the Pazzi Chapel so now I found myself experiencing space in the Basilica of San Lorenzo.

What is this an example of, and what does it mean?

Reflecting on this experience I find myself asking questions. On the one hand I could look at the lighting and say these are dramatic sculptures and the shadows and highlights really bring out their form. If I was to make a drawing of the statues I would also increase the contrast to create the impression of volume in the two dimensional translation. The lighting provides an added level of interest to the sculpture, which is not a bad thing: after all people go to see the 'Tombs of the Medici' and the lighting adds to their sculptural form. Since the statues and the room are an arrangement of signs that can be read or understood as a text, the lighting also raises a question concerning authorship of that text.

Michelangelo designed and produced the statues and the space but someone else has, as it were, expurgated this work with lighting, and in so doing offered a preferred engagement with the work. Is the lighting designer then a co-author or editor? I don't hold that seeing the work in its original state is by definition preferable to a modern viewing. What it does do is pre-define our area of concern. I was interested in the space, the volume of the room the sense of being in something. The sculpture is important for that but not at the expense of everything else. In which case perhaps I can expand my question to, 'Who is the author of the text and what is the text he/she is the author of?'

A second question arises in my engagement with the space. The statues are allegorical storytelling machines. The representations of night and day, dawn and dusk, owls and poppies all have connotational meanings and intertextual references such that searching for and understanding these references provides a narrativisation of the experience. We can break the experience into chunks of meaning and, once we have accounted for all the elements, produce a reading of the work. Like trainspotting or stamp collecting we hope that, by understanding the parts we can see the whole. But I can't experience the space as a series of parts. It is all or nothing, all at once, an indivisible gestalt. In later chapters I will argue that that story is not made up of narrative elements but exists as a function calling into action fields of concern. Is my response to the lighting and the subsequent turning off of the lights an example of a response to a story?

A hermeneutic response to an amusing anecdote.

Given that my questions seem to revolve around text, authorship and understanding perhaps it is a good idea to look at my experience in the New Sacristy through a discussion of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is the study of the interpretation of texts or how we understand a text. Hermeneutics doesn't tell us what a text says but it does provide a methodology for understanding a text. For an understanding of hermeneutics we

can turn to Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*(1994).⁷⁴ Gadamer starts from a Kantian position and builds on the work of Martin Heidegger and Georg Hegel as he develops an accessible understanding of a hermeneutic method.⁷⁵

The problem presented by texts, whether written or works of art, from the past is that we experience them in a time other than their own. The work is made at a time with an understanding of the world, whilst we are experiencing the work at a different time with a different understanding of the world. A question for hermeneutics is, do we have to understand the world of the text, or the context, in which it was created to understand that text? In *Truth and Method* Gadamer gives two possible approaches to reading a text, which he describes as Reconstruction and Integration.⁷⁶

Gadamer addresses this problem by looking at the example of a work of art. He starts by reminding us that a work of art is not only of its world but, due to its 'meaningful presence', by which he means its identity as a work of art as opposed to a non-work such as a rock, it is part of our world as well. So, when we approach a work of art, do we relate to it solely as an object from the past and so try and establish the historical context of its production, that is, do we attempt to reconstruct that context? Or do we consider the work as an object that we are confronted with in our world, at our time in our context, that is, do we look at the work as being integrated into our world? Gadamer looks to Frederick Schleiermacher, whose work on integrating Christian theology with perceived problems with the Enlightenment became a foundational work for modern hermeneutics, for insight into a reconstruction, and to Hegel for integration.

We find examples of the reconstruction approach in music that is played on period instruments, or painting that is taken from a gallery and placed in a period environment e.g., a church. These reconstructions are interesting commentaries on the text but do they help us in our analysis of the text. Suppose we were able to construct a perfect model of the original circumstance of a particular work of art

⁷⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall., 2nd rev. ed ed. (New York: Continuum, 1994).

⁷⁵ Jeff Malpas, "Hans-Georg Gadamer "
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/gadamer/>.

⁷⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and method*: p157.

and the historical stream of events that brought it into the present. Is it possible to insert ourselves into such a model without the model losing its claim to authenticity, and if it is not then, as Gadamer puts it,

‘... understanding based on reconstructing the original would be no more than handing on a dead meaning’⁷⁷.

Reconstructing the world of the work of art suggests that the work of art is not a complete statement, that it must be considered in relation to objects and practices external to itself and in particular in its past. There are areas of human concern such as law, that by definition require a strong attachment to tradition and custom. For a work of art to be a work of art it must be different to non-works of art. In an earlier section of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that a work of art is complete in itself and independent of its presentation. In the case of a performed work, such as a play or music, he argues that the performance is part of the work and not a presentation of the work outside the work.⁷⁸ This idea that a work of art is self-contained means that the circumstance of its display, amongst other things, is irrelevant to the understanding of the work of art.

Gadamer turns to Hegel as an alternative to a reconstruction approach to hermeneutics. Hegel like Schleiermacher recognises that works of art from the past are removed from their original context. For Hegel, establishing what that context is or was, is an activity external to the content of the work of art, and whilst worthy in and of itself, does not shed light on the meaning of a work of art today. For Hegel, and Gadamer, understanding the work of art or any relationship to the past comes, ‘not in the restoration of the past but in *thoughtful mediation with contemporary life*.’⁷⁹

With that mind we come to questions involving my adventure in the New Sacristy of the Basilica of San Lorenzo. Was I dissatisfied with the electrically illuminated sculptures in the tomb because I wanted a closer approximation to the original context of the statues, and was I, in fact, by requesting that the lighting be turned

⁷⁷ Ibid p167

⁷⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and method*: p67, p74.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.168/9 Gadamer’s emphasis

off, attempting to reconstruct a viewing from an earlier, pre-electric period? This appears to be the straightforward explanation. The statues did look more as Michelangelo saw them, not that he ever saw them installed, for he left Florence before their installation. If I had wanted to see them really as Michelangelo last saw them I would have had to take them down and scatter them across the floor and on trestles. So if not exactly as he saw them, more as he could have seen or imagined them. If I was reconstructing the context of the art was I, in terms of Hegel's analysis, guilty of a hermeneutical error, of forgetting that the sculptures were self-contained and independent of their display environment?

In terms of the sculptures the lighting shows them to great advantage. The strong contrasts draw out the tension in the representations of Night and Day, Dawn and Dusk adding to the excitement. The representations of the Medici above the sarcophagi are picked out and the lighting emphasises the three dimensionality revealing form and volume. The lighting appears to be designed to show the sculptures as exciting and dynamic objects, which it does at the expense of the room.

Without the artificial light the light levels in the room are low. Low enough for the management to be concerned that visitors might stumble in the dark. As a consequence of highlighting the statues the floor becomes brighter than the ceiling. This inversion combined with the increased contrast from the extra lumens means that the dome and lantern become secondary to the ground level and the sculpture. This would be fine if I was interested in the sculpture and nothing else, but I wasn't.

While the sculpture is exciting and the design elements of the sarcophagi are inspiring, my interest was in the enclosed space. My experience the previous day in the Pazzi Chapel had alerted me to the possibility of these carefully designed proportions. The lighting on the sculpture was hiding rather than displaying the space. Once the lights were turned off I was able to contemplate the room rather than the sculpture. In hermeneutic terms the text was the space and I was experiencing the space un-mediated by additional, artificial lighting. So rather than turning the lights off as an attempt to reconstruct the original context I was turning

the lights off to (strangely) be able to see. My concerns with space were prompted not by a desire to reconstruct the original viewing environment but as an interest in space itself. My field of concern led me to see the room as the text or object of study, to be read or understood rather than the sculpture.

The relevance of “an amusing anecdote” to this study

I started this chapter with an anecdote as a way to introduce some boundaries to this study. The anecdote and the discussion about hermeneutics demonstrate the importance of concern when looking at a text, whilst drawing attention to the idea that understanding the text comes from a careful contemplation of that text. In looking at pictures this study is using the pictures as tools for exploring a concept. Keeping in mind the special definition of story, a statement of knowledge of how the world should be that activates an area of concern, the concept we are exploring is that the pictures will, contain a story.

It is in the idea that the picture is a research tool that we come across the boundary of concern. Our area of concern will define how we use the pictures as tools. It will also limit the area of interest to the pictures themselves. Before I go further I must make clear what I mean by tool and concern.

In *Being and Time* Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) describes our relationship to tools and equipment.⁸⁰ He does this through investigating the idea of a conscious Being, who he calls *Dasein*, actively engaged with and in the world via equipment, that is, the things that *Dasein* encounters. These things come in two classes, those that are ready to hand, and those that are merely present at hand. Tools generally fall into the category of ready to hand, that is they have a function, to which their form fits them, and through their function are part of a web of interconnectedness that makes them part of a system. In using the tool *Dasein* interacts with and becomes part of that system.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time* [Sein und Zeit], 1927. Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. 1st English ed. London: SCM Press, 1962.

Heidegger makes use of a hammer as an example (a tool as a tool). When we reach for a hammer we are entering or are already engaged in a system of connectedness that includes the idea of what a hammer is, how it is used, where it came from what it is (not) good for and its relationship to nails and other hammer-able items. The hammer is a hammer because that is what *Dasein* uses it as, and it is the form and materiality of the hammer that make it useable as such. The tool is ready to hand because all the things that make it a hammer, all those connections, are already in place and working. *Dasein* does not have to consider them. However should the hammer break then the failure will cause all those connections to become apparent and important. When *Dasein* considers why the tool is broken s/he notices the system of connections that make a hammer a hammer. The object, previously known as a hammer, shifts from being ready to hand, to present at hand. What was once a useful tool is an object that just happens to be there, perhaps an object of study but not a hammer.

This study tests the proposition that a single picture can contain a story. The pictures in this case are tools that we will use in the course of the investigation. As a tool the picture will naturally enough be part of a network of connections and relationships that lie across the fields of art theory, art history, picture theory, geometry and space, narratology, history, design and colour and many more. But our area of concern, as defined by our reason for looking, provides a limit to our interest and acknowledgement of these fields.

For example, imagine that instead of stories this study had the Soviet Avant-Garde as its area of concern. That concern would define how we used the pictures. We would look at the pictures as the expression of a social experiment and as evidence that El Lissitzky was part of a project to build a new world. The pictures would act as illustrations of a series of events. The contexts in which the pictures were made and the artist's intentions in making them would be very important. Just as there is circularity in the form of the tool and its use, a hammer is well formed for hammering which is why it is a hammer, so the pictures are well formed as tools to explore the Soviet Avant-Garde, which is why they are used in discussions of the Soviet Avant-Garde. In which case, it is not so much the pictures themselves that

are being discussed but their relationship to the Soviet Avant-Garde, that is, the pictures are illustrative tools.

However, in our study we are using the pictures as tools to test a proposition. Our proposition is that a picture can contain a story. It is not illustrating a story nor referencing a narrative external to the picture. It is not through an art historical approach that we will test the proposition. In fact, arguing backwards, should the art historical context become apparent this might mean that our tools are broken, no longer ready to hand, but present at hand, and unable to help us. This means that we will be looking at the pictures as being complete and self contained, that is, that our area of concern is within the picture not the context.

And yet...

There must be a reason for choosing to look at one set of pictures rather than another and a reason for choosing works of art rather than other non-art works, or for that matter other objects. We are deliberately choosing a particular set of objects from within a particular class of things. Given our discussion of tools in the previous section we could rephrase this question as, what makes our choice of pictures suitable tools? A hammer is suitable for hammering because of its attributes. Hammers come in all shapes and sizes and for many applications. What makes them hammers is the act of hammering. We can hammer with a stone or a ball pin hammer. We cannot hammer successfully with marshmallows or jelly. A hammer despite being a tool defined by its function rather than its shape must have attributes that suit it to the function of hammering. These attributes must include relative hardness and the ability to be wielded.

What then are the attributes that make our tools suitable? To answer this I forced, despite misgivings that I am about to commit a hermeneutic error, to consider my choice of pictures in the context of their production and in relation to ourselves.

El Lissitzky.

*Perspective bounded and enclosed space, but science has since brought about a fundamental revision. The Rigidity of Euclidian space has been annihilated by Lobachevski, Gauss, and Riemann. (El Lissitzky 1925)*⁸¹

There are parallels between El Lissitzky's world and my world. The quotation draws attention to one of them. For El Lissitzky the world appears to have changed. In the middle of the nineteenth century, mathematics became able to describe geometric objects without reference to their being embedded in a three dimensional space, familiar through optical perspective which had proved particularly useful in transforming the three dimensional world into two dimensional picture space. Further, Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, that made use of these developments in multi dimensional geometry, suggested that contrary to common observations, space is warped.

To these developments in mathematics and geometry we can add new ideas in physics. Quantum Mechanics presented an understanding of matter at the sub-atomic level that in terms of Newtonian Physics made no sense, but was very successful at predicting sub-atomic events. The Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, developed during the 1920s put into non-mathematical terms the implications of seemingly nonsensical sub-atomic events.

That El Lissitzky is able to rejoice at the idea that "... Euclidian space has been annihilated..." can be accounted for by his professional training as an architectural engineer and his time and place in history. El Lissitzky was living through the birth of the Soviet Union. In 1925 the wars against the counter revolutionaries had been won and the country was undergoing a period of radical modernization as part of Lenin's plan for national development and recovery through, as he put it, "electrification".⁸² El Lissitzky was part of a movement to rebuild the world through socialism, and to make it a better place. Part of rebuilding does involve

⁸¹ Quoted in Victor Burgin, "Geometry and Abjection," in *The End of Art and Beyond Essays after Danto*, ed. A. Haapala, J. Levinson, and V. Rantala (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc, 1997), p43.

⁸² V I Lenin, "Notes on Electrification," Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/feb/x02.htm>.

demolishing. El Lissitzky was not alone in acknowledging a new concept of space, Bernhard Riemann also felt that getting rid of the old to make way for the new was useful. James Pierpont writing a summary of non Euclidean geometry for the *American Bulletin of Mathematics* six years after El Lissitzky's statement quotes Riemann,

*Abstract studies such as these allow one to observe relationships without being limited by narrow terms, and prevent traditional prejudices from inhibiting one's progress.*⁸³

It is not then surprising that Lissitzky feels able or even obliged to experiment with ideas of space, form balance and colour within the *PROUN* series.

So El Lissitzky could say that space in his world had undergone change and that he was, through his place in history, enabled to explore the implications of that change through pictures and designs. I too can say that space has changed.

Space

I have already made reference to non-Euclidean geometry describing higher dimensional objects without reference to three-dimensional space. Without mathematics these spaces are closed to us. We can make representations of more than three dimensions but these are illustrations only. Just as a picture of a cube is two-dimensional so is a picture of a hyper-cube, that is, a cube with more than three dimensions. The difference between the two is that we have direct experience of the three-dimensional cube, we have seen them, picked them up, rotated them. We cannot say the same about a hyper-cube. A hyper-cube building block is not available to us through an act of perception, and as an act of imagination it is, slippery at best.

83. James Pierpont, "Non-Euclidean Geometry, A Retrospect," *Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society* 36, no. 2 (1930): p70.

We should also note that as temporal beings, that is, beings who exist and perceive over time, all dimensional objects take on the characteristics of 3+1 dimensions, the +1 being time. We experience space in time. It is important to recognize not only that space has a time component but also that we experience it. Looking at space as something that we experience allows us to treat it phenomenologically rather than mathematically. Merleau-Ponty presents a phenomenological description of space.⁸⁴ For Merleau-Ponty space acts on us such that we perceive height and width as bounded by objects. So for example we experience height as the vertical axis of a two-dimensional system bounded by the floor and the ceiling or the ground and the sky. We can also experience height and width as beyond boundaries, that as being outside two objects, for example the space outside the goal.

Merleau-Ponty is describing the space as a two dimensional projection onto our retina. The mechanics and optics provide a causal link between the perception of height and width and its action on us. Depth perception is different since it requires the viewer to be integrated into the space.

Depth perception requires an act of imagination. We experience the visual perception of depth as if looking from a position perpendicular to that from which we experience width or height. So we can say of depth that the space is beyond or closer than a bounding object, in the same way that we say the space is between, or left and right of a bounding object for width or height. This act of imagination in which we visualise from a position outside ourselves whilst integrating ourselves into the space requires understanding of experience that is not directly associated with the perceptual event as we find it at any given moment. To identify depth we need to be able to identify objects as objects separate from their background, and draw on previous examples of those objects to accommodate optical distortions that turn spheres into ovals and a square into a trapezium. We then use the space to organise these objects on a depth axis with ourselves as the origin.

That we use experience and imagination to perceive depth allows me to argue, from Merleau-Ponty's description of space perception, that space is a tool, ready to

⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenemenologie de La Perception*: pp297-99.

hand, that we use to separate perceptual events that happen at the same time, and its corollary, that time is how we separate perceptual events that happen in the same space. This is not the same as claiming that we create our own reality, but it does put forward the possibility that we use reality for our own purposes. Optical illusions test our use of space as a tool.

In an optical illusion we are presented with information that can be organised in more than one way. Typically an illusion such as experimental psychologist Edwin Boring's (1886 –1968) Boring Figure presents two possibilities that we can flick between but not maintain simultaneously.⁸⁵ How we understand the image relies to a certain extent on a familiarity with women's fashions, but more importantly, in terms of the illusion, it hinges on how we perceive the rotation of a person's head, and hence their orientation in depth. Either the person is looking forward right to left, in which case we see an old woman or they are looking away from us right to left in which case we see a young woman.



Fig.1 E.G. Boring Figure 1930

Once we are aware of the different possible head orientations we become aware of depth perception as a tool, and how in the case of optical illusions involving depth the tool is broken and becomes an object of study, as a tool present at hand.

Michael Benedikt provides a further phenomenological approach to space when he observes that space is something that we and other objects can move in and

⁸⁵ E. G. Boring, "A New Ambiguous Figure," *American Journal of Psychology* 42 no. 444 (1930).

through over time. This has the advantage that it is describing space from a non-fixed point such as that occupied by a human.⁸⁶

So, I too can say that space has changed.

Or perhaps, since the new ideas in physics and geometry whilst not being new, are still relevant, not changed but multiplied and at the same time paradoxically collapsed. To say that space has multiplied is not to say that space has become larger, though it may have, but to suggest that there are more spaces available now than there were when El Lissitzky heralded the annihilation of Euclidian space. The development of virtual computer spaces, both local and networked, gives us practical access to spaces that earlier could only be articulated mathematically.

The multiple windows that we open and close on the computer desktop, in the course of accessing documents and using programs, are the two dimensional representations of multi dimensional (metaphorical) structures that we can move through. Our mental map of the file structures is aided by such ideas as *paths*, *locations*, *directories*, *sites* and *home*, and we navigate through *portals* and *links*. Distances are measured in clicks of the mouse button in a space that, in terms of 'real' space (from now on I will omit the apostrophes) has no dimensions. The computer space, as expressed in networks, in relation to the geographic locations of the servers and infrastructure over which they run, make little impact on the user. Questioning the actual location of a search engine makes no sense to a user.

In addition to, and partly as a consequence of, nesting computer spaces within real space, real space itself has collapsed. The dimensions are still there but the impact of those dimensions has been reduced. I live in a world in which the other side of the world is not that far away. Images and ideas cross the globe instantaneously. The differences between local and global economies are shrinking. What happens far away happens to me at the same time.

⁸⁶ Michael Benedikt, "Cyberspace: Some Proposals," in *Cyberspace First Steps*, ed. Michael Benedikt (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991).

Two motion pictures serve to demonstrate this collapse and folding of space. One is *Star Wars*⁸⁷ the other is *Transformers*.⁸⁸ Thirty years separate these two productions. Both are linear narratives in which good triumphs over evil, and both are directed by relatively young directors using leading edge film production technologies. Yet they differ significantly in their treatment of time and space.

The building block of a film is the shot. A number of shots can be joined together to make a scene. A scene covers the action in a narrative that takes place in one location at one time. If the action moves from out of one room to another then that is a new scene. If there is a break in the time within the same location then that is a new scene. A series of scenes are put together to make a sequence. In shooting a scene the director chooses a variety of camera angles to cover the action. The choices will be governed by how the director would like to unfold the narrative. The camera is put in position to record the action from each angle, and the actors repeat their actions for each angle. The different shots are then assembled during the editing process so as to give the impression of one continuous image stream. To ensure that this image stream appears seamless despite having been created from fragmented and discontinuous shots, great importance is placed on maintaining spatial and temporal continuity.

Spatial continuity controls the geography and the relative positions of actors and objects on the screen. When cutting between shots of people facing each other, attention to screen direction, that is the direction that a character is looking or moving, and matching eye lines ensure that there is a logical, coherent sense of the space as being continuous. Temporal continuity is achieved during editing by ensuring that actions are neither repeated, such that the film appears to jump back in time, nor omitted such that actions seem to jump forward in the image stream without appearing to travel through space. This style of editing, maintains the continuity of time and space. The fundamentals of the style were developed by early narrative filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith, and it is Continuity Editing that Lucas uses in *Star Wars*.

⁸⁷ George Lucas, "Star Wars," in *Star Wars trilogy* (US: Twentieth Century Fox, 1977).

⁸⁸ Micheal Bay, "Transformers," (US: Paramount Pictures, 2007).

The Bonus Material in the 2003 DVD release of the Star Wars Trilogy provides some insight into a difficulty presented by the Continuity Style of editing.⁸⁹ In an interview in *Star Wars: Empire of Dreams*, actors describe George Lucas's directing style. No matter what they did in a performance his comment was always, '.... faster and more intense.'

This indicates that Lucas was trying to create a fast paced narrative by manipulating the performance as opposed to the edit. The emphasis on the continuity style of editing limits the shots available. Other directors, for example, Stephen Spielberg in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* solved this problem by using multiple cutting to close-ups of objects from within the circle of action to the same effect, Lucas however chose not to.⁹⁰ The result is a film that is a good example of the continuity style of filmmaking and the Hollywood establishing shot, then shot/reverse shot, screen language.

Thirty years later *Transformers* exhibits the same basic screen language but with a much less structured approach to spatial and temporal continuity. Action sequences contain multiple angles that show variety and movement and allow modulation of editing pace at the expense of screen direction. Not only action sequences are treated this way, for, in a sequence in which the young hero is preparing to take his new car out for the first time, ("I've got the car. Now to get the girl...") he is shown in his room getting dressed. This sequence contains a number of moments that are cut together without regards for continuity in any form. The sequence of shots contains jumps in time and space with changes in screen direction and jump cuts used to move the story forward at the expense of continuity.

The result is a montage of moments. The effect on the viewer is not one of confusion. I suggest that a modern audience has become used to this narration. A modern audience's screen viewing includes exposure to music video in which the edit is a rhythmic compote of images held together by the sound track, news programs that contain multiple streams of information in different parts of the

⁸⁹ E. Becker, "Empire of Dreams: The Story of the Star Wars Trilogy," in *Star Wars Trilogy DVD Bonus Material* (Twentieth Century Fox, 2003).

⁹⁰ Steven Spielberg, "Raiders of the Lost Ark," (Paramount, 1981).

screen at the same time, and interactive screen activity such as web browsing, social networking and word processing at the same time.

Both *Star Wars* and *Transformers* are successful narrative films. Neither film was a paradigm shift in terms of storytelling technique, but they demonstrate different attitudes to space. For *Star Wars* space is fixed and continuous, whilst for *Transformers* space is fractured and folded.

So just as El Lissitzky could point to developments in mathematics that allowed him to announce that, 'The Rigidity of Euclidian space has been annihilated...' I too find that space has changed, not just theoretically but also phenomenologically.

It may be part of the human condition, but just as El Lissitzky was living through an historical moment of social change I too can point to a changing world. I can point to the further development of a global economy and the emergence of a knowledge economy. In a paper by John Houghton and Peter Sheehan from the Centre of Strategic Economic Studies at the University of Victoria for the National Innovation Summit the authors list the characteristics of a global economy. Ten of the twelve characteristics in the list contain signifiers of change, – *becoming, shifting, now and bringing* – and seven indicate a change in the rate of change – *increasingly*. They go on to identify the characteristics of a knowledge economy that is similarly described as *emerging* and undergoing increasing rates of change.⁹¹

In a slightly racier journalistic style Webber, writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, produces anecdotes from the business world to support his thesis that the *new economy* is not so much emerging as, in 1993, already evident and that the major work activity of the future will be conversations. Webber is writing to give a sense that this is a paradigm shift in the way that business does business.⁹²

⁹¹ John Houghton and Peter Sheehan, "A Primer on the Knowledge Economy," in *National Innovation Summit, organised by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, Canberra* (Melbourne, : Victoria University of Technology, Melbourne, 2000).

⁹² Alan M. Webber, "What's So New About the New Economy?," *Harvard Business Review* 71, no. 1 (1993).

El Lissitzky –Project for the Affirmation of the New.

El Lissitzky's work included typography, graphic design, architecture, photographic montage and construction. The pictures that I will be using come from his *PROUN*, or Project for the Affirmation of the New, series.

I will leave a description of the work for a later chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to list the characteristics of the work that make them suitable.

They are:

- Explorative,
- Non figurative,
- Deliberately testing,
- Produced as a conscious statement of *The New*, and,
- Overall indicative of research as process and out put.

This Chapter has been about tools. I have looked at a hermeneutic methodology and chosen an integration approach. This serves to define the boundaries of this study, which is looking for a story within the temporally discrete object. I have described the rationale for choosing El Lissitzky's *PROUNs* as tools to test our proposition. In the next chapter I will look more closely at the concept of story, identify how a story is different to a narrative and identify the attributes that I will look for looking for a story within a temporally discrete object.

Chapter 3. Stories: a long chapter that looks for the “what” of story.

‘For sale, baby shoes, never used’⁹³

I started the last chapter with an anecdote. I was careful not to call it a story or a narrative. Both those terms would have been appropriate for everyday usage. I chose not to use either because in this Chapter I am looking more carefully at the difference between story and narrative.

In the last chapter I established a method that looked at the object as self-contained and identified works of art as being such objects. I also presented a rationale for choosing particular works of art and made a case as to why they were suitable tools for me to use. In this chapter I consider the taxonomy of a story, since if I am to look for a story then I should make sure that I know what one looks like.

Story

We have an everyday common sense understanding of what is a story. We find the term used in various situations and used to indicate a variety of things. We can identify commonalities between the usages.

News

A news story is the subject of a news report which itself is prompted by a news event. It is also the report itself, so we find a T.V. newsreader saying, when they are referring to a report of an event that forms a section of the news program, “That story from our reporter in...” or “that story coming up...” We can track a

⁹³ This very short story is attributed to Ernest Hemingway who supposedly wrote it on a napkin to win a bet.

news story over a number of days as the news media reveal new ideas or information and reframe the event, that is re-tell the event in different ways to keep the story fresh. Robert Entman, writing on communication theory, defines framing:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.⁹⁴

This idea, that the same news events can be told in different ways raises a question. Given that the same event can be told in different ways what is the story? Is it the events or the framing? Later in this chapter I will make a distinction between story and narrative, at which point we should come back to this idea and these questions.

Fashion

The fashion industry has its own version of story. For fashion the story is the concept guiding the choice of garments and accessories, hairstyle and makeup that go together to make an outfit. Within the fashion publishing industry this is expanded in a fashion editorial to include photographs with locations, models, poses and photographic style, and text that form the layout of a series of pages on the same fashion theme. Patrick Demarchelier is a photographer working within the fashion industry, and his web site provides examples of these fashion story layouts.⁹⁵

Two in particular, *The Sheltering Sky* for British *Vogue* 05/08 and *Waterbaby* for American *Vogue* 06/06, are interesting because of their contrasting photographic styles and their different approaches to story.

⁹⁴Robert Entman, "Framing toward clarification of a fractured paradigm.," *Journal of Communication* 43(4), no. 4 (1993).

⁹⁵ Patrick Demarchelier, "Fashion Story Layout," Patrick Demarchelier <http://www.demarchelier.net/fashion.html>, <http://www.demarchelier.net/fashion.html>

The Sheltering Sky opening page shows a model, surrounded by seabirds that are landing and taking flight. The model is standing on a sea wall, with a North African walled town in the background. The point of view is low, looking up at the model, with an expanse of saturated blue sky in the background.



Fig.2 Patrick Demarchelier *The Sheltering Sky* Spread #1 2008 Fashion Story layout

The big text reads,

The Sheltering Sky. Fifties bohemia and modern artistry meet in summer's wildest, prettiest, fashion.

It is unclear whether the fashion in this instance refers to the model's clothes and accessories or to the style in which fifties bohemia and modern artistry meet. What is clear in the following pages and from the title is that the layout is using the Bertolucci film of the same title as inspiration for the choice of locations and costume.⁹⁶ The film follows the adventures and journey into death and despair of two American tourists in late 1940s Tunisia. The layout does not follow or represent the same series of events or characters as the film. Rather it uses a North African town and its citizens as a backdrop and location for photographs of the model as she wears outfits that mark her as out of place, and alien. The photographs as recordings of events do not show causality between one event and another. The story is not what is happening or the recorded events, e.g. *The Sheltering Sky Spread # 7*, model stands, holding fifties style shopping bags, in town

⁹⁶ Bernardo Bertolucci, *"The Sheltering Sky,"* (United States: Warner Bros, 1990).

square with an Arab woman in the background, or, Spread #2, model leans against a waist high wall wearing a cardigan, large bow in her hair, bangles and underwear.⁹⁷



Fig 3. Patrick Demarchelier The Sheltering Sky Spread #7 Fashion Story Layout.



Fig 4. Patrick Demarchelier The Sheltering Sky Spread #2 Fashion Story layout

The story is not what is happening in the photograph in the sense that the photograph is a moment with a before and after that combine into a narrative sequence, but a feeling of being. The text is encouraging the reader to do the same;

⁹⁷ Demarchelier, "Fashion Story Layout".

Find delight in ice cream pastels and sun-soft prints: tea rose chintz and deck chair stripes

We can look at the fashion in terms of different garments and accessories. These items could be used in different combinations as part of different stories. The photographs and layout present the fashion in an order and with an over arching style. Whilst the page turning controls the viewing order, each page stands alone and complete; each page evokes the whole story without reference to the previous or preceding page.

We can also look at the fashion layouts in terms of their being pictures. Since they are not in the nature of snapshots, but carefully crafted images consciously staged for a camera to capture, we should recognise that they use a visual vocabulary with compositional motifs and content that work in company with, and in contrast to, other pictures. The *Sheltering sky spread #7* serves as an example. We can look at this picture as a formal, structured image that divides the picture plane into horizontal and vertical thirds. The dissecting lines are activated by the compositional element formed by the model, the horizontal band of the sky as it meets the building, and as an intersection between the horizontal and vertical, in the covered woman in the mid ground. This figure is in a powerful compositional point, so that, despite the inequality in size, she adds compositional weight, balancing the model.

The picture provides a view out of the piazza towards a building with a tower that is close to the perspectival vanishing point, in contrast to the converging parallel lines offered by the paving stones that meet towards the right hand side of the image. The optical perspective is confusing. The paving stones point to an optical centre that is running away from the point of view close to the right hand side of the image. This is contradicted by the perspective of the distant tower, which is rendered perpendicular to a supposed horizontal, indicating that the tower is close to the optical centre of the wide-angle lens that distorts the verticals at the edge of the field of view. This can be explained by assuming that we are looking diagonally across the tessellation of the pavers, which are not laid evenly. The point of view is

low enabling the model to cross the three horizontal bands and project into the blue of the sky.

The sky acts as a contrasting colour gradient to the ochre and earth tones of the paving on the piazza and the model's clothes, which are in stark contrast to the covered woman.

The picture's semantic values extend beyond references to 1940s fashion and the Bertolucci film. There are two directions that we can take. We can consider the image as a study in contrast between the model and the covered woman. This path could take us to discussions of cultural imperialism, fashion as ideology, women's rights in a non-secular society, the modern hunter-gatherer as consumer, and so on.

We can also consider the picture with reference to depictions of the piazza in European art. Defining piazza as an open civic space would allow us to add L.S. Lowry's painting of a Lancastrian mill town as an intermediate step between Canaletto's views of the *Piazza San Marco Venice*, and Giacometti's bronze *Piazza of walking figures*.



Fig. 5 Canaletto *Piazza San Marco*, late 1720s. Oil on canvas 68.6 x 112.4cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York



Fig.6 L.S. Lowry *Coming From the Mill* 1930 Oil on panel, 43 x 53.3 cm. Manchester City Galleries

This option gives us access to, for example, discussions around trade and wealth creation, industrialisation and the costs of wealth creation, or the public face of leisure and work. We could also address the impact of purpose and intention on the consumption and appreciation of these images, with reference to images of lifestyle and architecture.

Including Giacometti's sculpture in the list gives added scope to the discussion, highlighting as it does the importance of point of view and position of the observer as active participant, (though this might be more about photography than anything else) and the depiction of figure and movement.

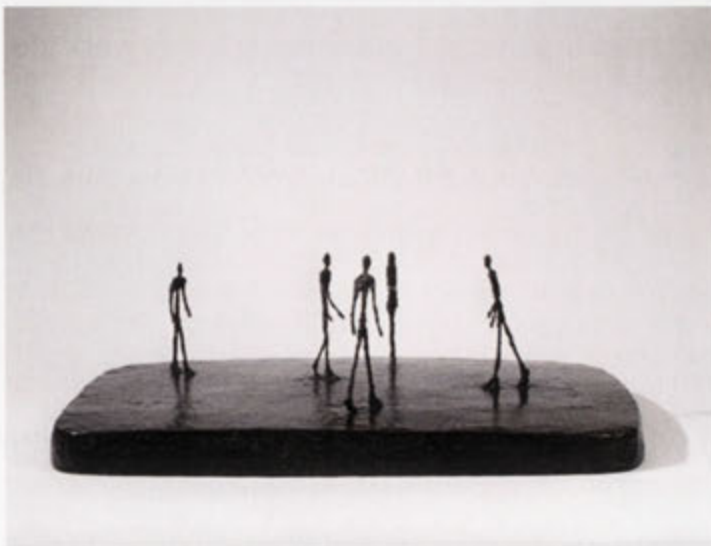


Fig.7 Alberto Giacometti *Piazza*, 1947–48. Bronze, 21 x 62.5 x 42.8cm The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

All these ideas, and more are available through the *The Sheltering Sky Spread #7*. They are grist to the mill that is art theory and art history, and a formal analysis of the composition and a semantic analysis of the contents of the image are the tools for defining and analysing pictures. But they don't give us access to the story as used in the fashion lay out spread.

The Sheltering Sky Layout uses references to a film adaption of a book as a starting point. My other fashion example, *Waterbaby*, takes for its starting point the blank slate of the photographic studio infinity cyclorama.⁹⁸



Fig.8 Patrick Demarchelier Waterbaby Spread #2 Fashion Story Layout

The big print is a way into the layout;

"In the evening I hang out, watch the moon, watch the stars...My work life isn't mellow, so my vacation has to be really mellow" ... *Giselle*

If there is a story in these images it is not revolving around a place and a time. Nor does it reference a series of events or characters from a novel or film; instead the layout uses the model herself as the character.

In "Rhetoric of the Image",⁹⁹ Barthes demonstrates the semiotic tools for understanding an image so we can, using those same tools, look at the pictures and notice that the model's hair is loosely tied back, with the freedom to move in response to her movement in turning, in the left hand image, and jumping, in the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana, 1977).

right, as well as the choice of clothes that are associated with resort wear in the right hand image and the sundress with the wrap in the left hand image that alludes to warm evenings out that might get cooler later. Add to that the emphasis, in both images, on orange as opposed to business grey, and we can make a confident statement that these images point towards vacations and relaxation, in an out of doors resort environment. What then is the story? Deconstructing the visual codes is not what these images are about. To find the story we have to ask why do we care? What is it about, "warm evenings out that might get cooler later," that makes us go "Ah ha"? Presumably Brazilian supermodel Gisele Bundchen has something to do with it but that is not all, since she appears in many pictures that don't have this story.

Where then are we to find the story? There are no events in the sense that nothing happens. We could assign the value <event> to the fashion and photographic choices, (in which case the plot would be, 'this goes with that...'), but in terms of a familiar plot/narrative, there is a character, in a non-space, who promises possibilities, in an imagined world that we understand. In talking about news stories and framing I asked if the news event was the story or if the story was in the framing. The fashion layout story provides a possible way into a definition of story that might be useful in more than the fashion context. The story is an overarching mood or feeling or situation that the layout, with its fashion and photographic choices, seeks to invoke. This suggests that the story might already exist before the events which show or tell it. We must come back to this idea just as we must come back to the question around framing. However, in the meantime we can say that the fashion layout stories, *The Sheltering Sky* and *Waterbaby*, present stories without a series of events. They present their stories all at once as a gestalt. We can also say that these stories exist, as it were waiting to be, before the fashion layout presents them.

Street

A TV detective arrives at a crime scene and, approaching her colleague says,

“What’s da story?”

Her colleague flips open his note book and begins to read what he has learnt so far about the characters and events leading up to the discovery of the body. These events, depending on the sort of TV detective in question, either explain the crime, for example a robbery gone wrong or a gangland slaying, or they don’t, that is they leave something waiting to be discovered. A third option is that they appear to explain the crime, only that explanation turns out to be wrong.

In the first example the series of events that explain the crime fit a pre-made understanding of the world, a world in which robberies go wrong, or there are gangland slayings. The investigators already have a number of scenarios that they can try and make the events fit. Just like the news reporter, they are framing the events to make sense of them. The third option in which the first explanation turns out to be wrong is an example of the same events being framed differently to accommodate a different interpretation.

So when the detective, standing over the body, asks, “What’s da story?” is she really asking for an account of the series of events or is she asking which of the ready-made scenarios account for this body? She is hoping that the world will continue to proceed normally and that there will be a scenario with a built in happily ever after outcome. Unfortunately for the TV detective, Joseph Campbell tells us that the outcome is not going to be straightforward since the demands of fiction are that the world falls into chaos and our hero has to embark on a journey to put the world right again.¹⁰⁰

When Campbell suggests that stories follow an archetypal pattern does he mean the stories follow a pattern or that the events in the narrative follow a pattern? Or to put it another way, the plot is arranged in an archetypal pattern or narrative, and it is that pattern that evokes the story.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Campbell, *The hero with a thousand faces*, Bollingen Series of XVII (Pantheon Books, 1949).

A Lie

We use story to mean something made up, or not true. It is a non-confrontational way of describing a lie. If I tell you a lie it is a bad thing, I am being dishonest. If I tell you a story in order to deceive then I am also being dishonest, yet a story may be permissible whereas a lie is not. Why is it that we will forgive a story but not a lie?

~

In describing different versions of story each description has led to a question. These questions point towards a definition of story. In the discussion of a news story I ask, given the practice of framing and re-framing, does the story lie in the events or the frame? In the fashion layout story I show a story without any events, and suggest that the story is in place waiting for the fashion layout to reveal it. The TV detective wants to know how the known events fit into a known scenario. She wants a story that makes sense of the world. The final question is about the semantic differences between a story and a lie.

Plot – Narrative – Story

These questions are all around the idea that a story is not a series of events. I am going to argue that events, or plot, are the building blocks of narrative, and that narrative is how we tell stories. This won't answer all our questions about story. We may know how to reveal or tell a story, and we may know the relationship between plot, narrative and story, but that is not the same as knowing the "what" of story.

In talking about stories I have used the term events. Events are things that happen. Generally when we describe what happens in a film or novel we are describing the plot. This happens and then another thing happens. Plot and character are the building blocks. As we saw in the description of a news story the events or plot can be arranged in a variety of ways for different effects. This arranging of events into a

sequence in which one thing follows another forms a narrative. A narrative is the plot plus structure.

In his discussion of narrative as it relates to photography Battye provides a general definition,

*Narrative, however defined, requires the depiction of time in some way, if not an actual unfolding of itself over time.*¹⁰¹

He is saying that narrative is not only the telling of events as they appear in narrative time, that is the time in which the events take place, but that narrative also takes time to tell. There is the time spent telling on the part of the narrator and the time spent listening, watching or reading on the part of the audience. So, not only does a narrative require time it must also must have a narrator, someone to arrange the plot events so as to form the narrative. Battye draws attention to the role of the narrator and the time spent story telling when he argues that '... narrative is as much a process as a thing.'¹⁰² In so saying Battye is using definitions of narrative that emphasise the difference between a random stream of events and the events chosen and ordered by the narrator and then narrated in the form of a narrative.

Cinderella is a fairy tale that provides an example of plot and narrative.

There are many events in the Cinderella life that do not make it into the narrative but the list of events that do is quite short:

- The first event is existential. Cinderella in narrative time is, or in narrator time was, a nice person.
- Then her father remarries and,
- Cinderella becomes a servant to her stepmother and her stepsisters.
- Sometime later the Handsome Prince is compelled to find a wife and so invites all the young women in the kingdom to a party.
- Cinderella expresses a desire to go to the party.

¹⁰¹ Battye, "Stories of a War: Narrative and the Single Photograph," p7.

¹⁰² Ibid., p9.

- And, with the help of her Fairy God Mother, who provides suitable transport and wardrobe is enabled.
- But there is a catch. The Fairy God Mother tells Cinderella that, since the magic that is making the transport and costume has a use-by time, she must be home before Midnight. Cinderella attends the party.
- The Handsome Prince falls in love with her.
- But loses her when she runs away at midnight.
- So he searches the kingdom.
- Eventually, despite the stepsisters' machinations, Cinderella is found thanks to the, 'if the shoe fits' technique.
- Happy ending.

The events that don't make it into the narrative are many. They are all the incidental events that happen as part of Cinderella's, and every other character's, finding their way into the narrative. Whilst these events may be implied, they are not chosen as part of the narrative. I should be careful at this point since much that is not included in the narrative is presumed. The narrative does not overtly include Cinderella breathing in and out regularly. This is implied. Gerald Prince, the author of *Narratology: the form and functioning of narrative* alludes to these implied events when he provides a modified definition of narrative:

...narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other.¹⁰³

So the events that are not included are those that bring characters and objects into the narrative; those that lead up to the Prince deciding to have a party or that make him decide to not settle for a convenient bride in favour of searching for his true love, but which don't impact on the Cinderella story. The narrative serves the story, which in this case is Cinderella's story, which put simple is, One Day My Prince Will Come, or Goodness Is Its Own Reward.

¹⁰³ Gerald Prince, *Narratology: the form and functioning of narrative* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co, 1982). p4.

In saying that the narrative serves the story I'm making a distinction between the plot, that is the events, the narrative that is the process, and the story. Whilst the narrative may be short or long, the story is a single statement that describes an over arching idea. Cinderella's story, *One Day My Prince Will Come*, is apt when we consider that Cinderella's only role is to be loveable in the face of adversity. She doesn't do anything to make her dream come true; that is left to everybody else. It is cognizable in terms of the hope that Goodness Is Its Own Reward.

We can look at the events and other characters in the Cinderella narrative and find other stories.

The Prince's story might be 'One man's struggle to overcome parental disapproval and marry HIS ONE TRUE LOVE.'

Or the Fairy Godmother, 'One last job before She *Goes*'.

The Stepsisters provide a story as, 'From darkness into light, a triumph of inner beauty.'

That these descriptions of stories sound like tag-lines from Hollywood movies is not accidental. The feature film industry is, over and above everything else, interested in stories and the tag-line identifies the story. The premise for the feature film industry is that if you can't define the story in one sentence then there probably isn't one. Robert McKee, writing in a tone calculated to energise prospective screen writers, is confident when he makes the claim, 'Story is about archetypes not stereotypes', and that, 'The archetypal story unearths a universally human experience.'¹⁰⁴

These story tag-lines identify a universal experience or desire. The Prince needs to become his own person, the fairy godmother can't let go, the stepsisters are good deep down. These stories are drawn out of the raw plot material by the narrative process.

~

¹⁰⁴ McKee, *Story. Substance, structure, style and the principles of screen writing*: p4.

Earlier in this chapter I asked whether the story in a news story was to be found in the news events or in the framing of those events. Now I think that we have an answer. That news events may be framed and then reframed suggests that framing is a process not dissimilar to the organising of plot events into a narrative. News stories are framed so as to be understandable in relation to a broad context. I suggest that this context is the story. Hsiang and McCombs identify context shift in a study of news coverage of the 1999 Columbine School Shootings in the United States. The methodology of the study was to use content analysis of news paper articles about the shootings against five spatial – individual, community, regional, societal and international – and three temporal –past, present and future – frames. Iris Hsiang and Maxwell McCombs describe the event in twenty-two words;

*On 20 April 1999, two gunmen in Littleton, Colorado, killed twelve fellow students and a teacher before turning their guns on themselves.*¹⁰⁵

Yet in *The New York Times* over a period of one month, they were able to find 170 news stories . As the news events were reframed from the personal, that is descriptions of the victims, gunman and eye witness accounts which Hsiang and McCombs's study noted made up 22% of the coverage, to the level of community and society, the authors observed that those events were used to evoke larger more general concerns around themes of the evils of popular culture, youth not being what it used to be, the failure of the education system, law and order issues, the rights of citizens to bare arms and associated gun control, and the decline of family values. These are ideas that are already in the public eye. The shooting does not create any of these concerns, yet the framing is able to attach these events to elements of the public consciousness that not only define that community but are archetypal. For example, that the young at any given moment are inferior to the young of an earlier age is an idea that comes under the title of, '...a truth universally acknowledged.' The point that I am approaching is that there are stories that define us and that framing fits events to these pre-existing stories

¹⁰⁵ Iris Hsiang and Maxwell McCombs, "MEDIA SALIENCE AND THE PROCESS OF FRAMING: COVERAGE OF THE COLUMBINE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2004): p26.

The “what” of story

In the previous sections I have established that story is different to narrative but as yet story itself remains elusive. In this section I am going to consider the “what” of story. I am going to argue that story is a statement of knowledge about how we live and be and the experience of living and being, further that these statements are of a kind that are outside time but have an inner logic that gives them world. An example of story failure serves as a way into this topic.

Story Failure

In 1996 a colleague asked me what I thought of the outcome of the European Cup Football semi-final that had played out the night before. Not only had I not seen the game but I had not even known that it was happening or which national teams were involved. My colleague took some pleasure in telling me that England had lost to Germany, after extra time, in a sudden death penalty shootout. I immediately felt viscerally upset, a sense of dismay accompanied a nervous, vertiginous, butterflies-in-the-stomach feeling. The butterflies passed but the dismay lasted for the rest of the day and when I think of it now I can still feel its trace. I didn't pay much attention to football so I was surprised that in this case I felt that the result was wrong. Not wrong in the sense that it didn't happen but wrong in that it shouldn't have happened. It was as if my world had suddenly shifted.

In trying to make sense of this feeling, which even then I recognised as being out of all proportion to the importance both of the event and my interest in it, I was led to consider two things. First is a sour grapes knee jerk redaction that sudden death penalty shoot-outs have no place in football.

The other consideration is more about me than football. The result of this game went against a national creation story. As a six-year-old starting school, I and all my new six-year-old friends, knew as a fundamental truth and article of faith that

the outcome of the Second World War was not because England was better at war than Germany, but because England was the best at everything. Evidence for this came from the against all odds description of the Battle of Britain and most importantly from the 1966 World Cup Final in which England beat Germany....again. For a six-year-old this was proof enough.

The importance that this game has to my sense of identity should not be underestimated. I was three in 1966, I don't remember watching the game, my first World Cup memory is from the 1970 tournament, but I did know that Bobby Charlton, the English captain, was a national hero who was still being idolised some years later in popular media. This sense of self and my identity as an Englishman was bound up in this creation type story from my childhood. It was this story that failed in the moment I learnt of the 1996 England defeat.

English television news and current affairs programmes from the day after the match led with descriptions of the aftermath of the game which included a riot in which rioters fought with police and destroyed vehicles, a great deal of game analysis, which emphasised how close England came to winning and that this was an heroic loss, and accounts of individual's disappointment. Heroic loss is a recurrent theme in English creation narratives, from the Battle of Hastings to Dunkirk and from Nelson's Death at Trafalgar to Scott's death in the Antarctic. So we can speculate on what was happening to the national Identity as it shifted from 'England wins because we should' and reformed around 'England loses heroically because that is how we do it.'

To say that the story failed is to say that the story had a function. In this case the story acted as a defining agent. Obviously as I had grown up other things, supposedly more important than football, had happened and been incorporated into my sense of self, and yet it would appear from my reaction to the events in 1996, that did not play out as my story suggested they should, that I felt unsupported in my identity, hence the butterflies and overwhelming disappointment. The story was supposed to provide me with an understanding of what it meant to be me in the last part of the twentieth century. Instead it showed me that none of that mattered any more.

Story predicts possible futures.

Professor of Storytelling at New Mexico State University, David Boje, uses the term antenarrative when talking about story, and provides a number of possible definitions of story as he separates it from the narrative process.¹⁰⁶ He uses the term 'living story' to indicate that the story exists outside the narrative. For Boje the term antenarrative itself contains two meanings. The first meaning is of a before narrative, that is the story before it is revealed by narrative or before it has condensed onto a beginning middle end structure. The Second meaning is ante as in a bet that is a prediction about the future. From these two meanings we can see that story has no time line structure but is a field of understanding, activated by the narrative process. The understanding reaches forward into the future. Each of the tag lines that I associated with the Cinderella narrative, pointed to one of these fields of understanding, independent of the beginning middle and end of the narrative structure. The field can be comprehended or felt all at once as a gestalt, available through a universal experience or desire stemming from a collective identity of shared experiences. Examples of these fields stemming from collective identity can be found in Australian's attachment to and use of the ANZAC narrative. Australians use the ANZAC narrative as a birth of nation story and as an indicator of national characteristics, e.g. mateship.

In my example of story failure there was a world, albeit a childish one, that the story supported, it just didn't happen to be the world I lived in. The story had suggested ideas about the future that were unsupported when the future arrived.

¹⁰⁶ David Boje, "What is Antenarrative?," New Mexico State University, http://business.nmsu.edu/~dboje/papers/what_is_antennarrative.htm.

Using Words

The way we use words provides insight into how we are organising our experience of the world so as to make sense of the present and anticipate the future. There is a temptation when describing factual events to insist on the facts and nothing but the facts and to avoid metaphor as being subjective and open to misinterpretation. We expect poetry to use figurative language since poetry is creative rather than factual writing. This section looks at the way we use language to describe real world events and how metaphor is used to establish new insights about the real world. To that end I would like to consider Haiku as a statement.

The appreciation of haiku stems from the production of a new relationship between two ideas that provokes an insight into the everyday that, when measured against a sense of the way things are in, for example, nature reveals a sense of rightness. This rightness is predicated not so much on our understanding of metaphors as on our understanding of the way things are in the world, or are as an expression of expectation. The emphasis on the everyday and nature in Haiku means that all readers have access to this sense of rightness.

In a discussion of haiku and metaphor, Blasko and Merski address the convention that haiku should not use metaphor since metaphor

*...would dull the imagery, obscure the deeper meaning, and destroy the total objective nature of haiku*¹⁰⁷

Blasko and Merski go on to argue that this is only the case if we apply a narrow definition of metaphor and that the haiku structure does in fact join two ideas but without joining words such as "is" or "as". They argue that it is by using metaphor, that is joining ideas together to provoke an insight, that the haiku achieves its 'total objective nature'¹⁰⁸. The process whereby insight into that objective nature could be created through metaphor is similar in principle to stories being evoked through the narrative. In both cases there is an existing thing, the insight or the

¹⁰⁷ Dawn G. Blasko and Dennis W. Merski, "Haiku Poetry and Metaphorical Thought: An Invitation to Interdisciplinary Study," *Creativity Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (1998): p40.

¹⁰⁸ That a poem, a piece of creative writing, can have a "total objective nature" is intriguing especially if we consider this idea in opposition to Plato's critique of poetry.

story that is activated by a series of events, and in both cases there is a reference to a shared understanding of the world as it is.

We can take this idea one step further. Poetry and creative writing in general can be expected to use figurative language as a literary device. We can argue that this is a reasonable way to interact with imaginary worlds and situations. Yet we find that metaphor and figurative language is also used to explain and organise real world experiences. In his book *The Poetics of the Mind. Figurative thought, language and understanding* (1994) Raymond Gibbs writes about figurative language as an indicator of thought. He argues that language use indicates that metaphor is a cognitive tool and process for organising abstract concepts such as time.¹⁰⁹ Citing a study by Whorf of the linguistic structures found in Hopi that describe time, Gibbs describes the use of plurals to indicate an amount of time in English, that suggest that hours may be understood as objects that can be considered all at once, when in fact hours may only be experienced sequentially.¹¹⁰ Gibbs gives the example of a period of ten hours that we talk of in the same way as ten apples, despite the impossibility of encountering ten hours all at once where as we can encounter ten apples all at once. If we consider ten hours to be a long time, to say sit in front of a computer, we are not suggesting that hour number eight, for instance, is worse than hour number seven, but that the total group of hours is too long. In comparison a Hopi speaker talks of ten hours as being a multiple manifestation of an hour. In Hopi it makes no sense to talk of a group of hours in the same way that it make no sense to consider that "...two visits by the same person constitutes a group of two people". Where as in English we might say "in ten hours", Hopi speakers will talk of the eleventh manifestation of an hour.

Gibbs cites Malotki when he goes on to disagree with Whorf's conclusion that Hopi speakers do not have a metaphorical understanding of time.¹¹¹ Whilst Hopi speakers do not talk of time passing or having direction of forward and back they

¹⁰⁹ R. W. Gibbs, *The poetics of the mind. Figurative thought, language and understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹¹⁰ B. Whorf, *Language thought and reality: The selected writings of Benjamin Lee Wharf* (New York: Wiley, 1956).

¹¹¹ E. Malotki, *Hopi Time* (Berlin: Mouton, 1983). Cited in Gibbs, *The poetics of the mind. Figurative thought, language and understanding*.

do use spatial metaphors to indicate areas of time, in the same way that English speakers might talk of having space in their calendar.

What Stories are...

So it appears that we use metaphor and figurative language as tools to organise and understand real world events. I suggest that stories are a variant or extension of these tools that are especially suited to understanding what it means to be human. Psychoanalysis already provides an understanding of what it is to be human through analysis of the meanings stories, but doesn't describe what stories are. For the purposes of this study we should consider that stories exist as social constructs that provide reassurance and guidance about the future. That they are directly related to cognitive processes that help us organise our understanding of the world, both in terms of where we have come from and where we are going to. For a story to be useful in this way it needs to have world. To say that a story has world is to say that it has relevance to a world. Story failure is an example of the story world collapsing in response to real world events. The bet form of ante is lost in this case.

To go back to my original questions about different sorts of stories: the framing of events in a news story is the narrative that attaches the events to a story. That story helps us organise and understand the events according to the world as we know it. The fashion layout story presenting possible futures and states of being and the detective stories are other versions of framing. Most interestingly we may forgive a story as opposed to a lie since a story, whilst misrepresenting events, does not challenge our understanding of the way the world is. To live a lie means that nothing is certain, but to maintain a story that has world, is to support what we already know.

When we look at a single, temporally discrete object, with a view to finding a story, we should be looking for indications of world, that is, reflections of the way things are, that help us organise our understanding. We should expect this world to be

available all at once rather than over time, and it should not be attached to any one narrative but be available for use by a number of narratives.

Fields, statements and world

The quote at the beginning of this chapter is a story without intrinsic narrative time. We can put time into it by creating a narrative structure that leads up to the quote and what might happen next. But what happens if we don't? What happens if we leave the story timeless and outside of time? Is it slippery and hard to grasp? Can we talk about the story without bringing it into time?

I have made a distinction between plot, narrative and story. I have argued that story is invoked by the narrative process and that the story exists separate to the narrative as a field of concern. I have also approached the idea of world as a defining characteristic of story and that stories unlike narrative are outside time. I would like to consider these ideas further. I will look at examples of a field of concern, and argue that stories are functions that are related to statements. To begin this I would like to look at an example of story from art history that demonstrates the separation of story and narrative and the hermeneutic process that I pointed to in Chapter Two.

As well as a quote about shoes we can look at a picture of shoes. Shoes provide another example because when we think about shoes we can't help but think about Van Gogh, Heidegger, Schapiro, Gauguin, and Derrida.



Fig.9 Vincent Van Gogh, *Shoes*, 1886, oil on canvas, 15 x 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches Vincent Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Vincent Van Gogh painted a picture of shoes. Heidegger used that painting as an example of the equipmental being of equipment,¹¹² but Schapiro tells us that Heidegger is wrong.¹¹³ Wrong to think that the shoes are serviceable but unthought-of peasant equipment. Wrong to think that Van Gogh was telling a story about the earth. And, I suspect, wrong to even consider writing about art historical objects such as a painting of some shoes. Schapiro knows this because Paul Gauguin tells him in his reminiscences that the shoes in the painting belonged to the artist and that it was the artist who wore them.

Rather than weigh into an argument about whose shoes they are I would like to look at the narratives involved in this debate and the relation that they have to stories.

¹¹² Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art."

¹¹³ Schapiro, "The still life as a Personal Object – A note on Heidegger and van Gogh."

Shapiro is very sure of his source. However, Gauguin's narrative is full of ornamentation and elaboration, which suggest an unusual desire to be believed. The witness creates a mist of causality where none is needed, "I don't know why I sensed that there was a story behind this old relic..."¹¹⁴ The addition of how Van Gogh ministered to coal miners in Belgium, and in particular how he nursed a burns victim that medical practitioners had declared beyond hope, make me pause. Even before I get to Derrida's questioning the paired-ness of these shoes, I am asking myself, what is it about Gauguin's narrative that Schapiro prefers to Heidegger's? Most of Gauguin's account deals with events incidental to anyone wearing the shoes. Gauguin quotes Van Gogh who does not say that he wore them merely that they "endured the fatigue of the trip". Schapiro ends his essay with the claim that the shoes were a memento of Van Gogh's own life.¹¹⁵

Yet, what is a memento if not a symbol. In this case an indexical symbol, that these shoes were worn on such and such an adventure. Van Gogh, who painted shoes, and Gauguin, who remembered shoes, are doing no more nor less than Heidegger. Heidegger uses the painting of shoes as a symbol, (they aren't really shoes), Gauguin uses his memory of, "a pair of big hob-nailed shoes..."¹¹⁶ (and memory isn't really shoes either) as a symbol. In both cases they are looking at examples of honest toil, and struggle against that which we cannot control. For the peasant it is the elements and for Van Gogh it is (a Tolstoyan struggle for social justice) the dangers of working underground that other people endure, whilst for Gauguin it is the artist as Christ figure.

The provenance of the shoes that acted as a model for the painting is neither here nor there. I'm not interested in whose account most accurately reflects the ownership of the shoes. Derrida suggests this by questioning the paired-ness of the shoes.¹¹⁷ I can go further and question whether, indeed, there are two shoes rather than one shoe painted twice. But what for? Derrida also reminds us of the context from which Schapiro takes Heidegger's descriptive passage. For Heidegger the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p140.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p141.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p140.

¹¹⁷ Jaques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Ian McCloud Geof Bennington (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

shoes are an illustration representing the peasant woman and her toils. Schapiro, in a case of not reading to the end of the page, or seizing upon a straight-forward, easy to parse, descriptive passage and being somewhat shy of the rest, takes this representation as a presentation, and so, citing Gauguin, finds it erroneous.

Schapiro recognises that Gauguin might be elaborating. What Schapiro calls literary affectation, I call Gauguin creating a narrative. Heidegger is also creating a narrative. Gauguin's narrative takes his understanding of events as they happened as a starting point. Heidegger uses the shoes to illustrate an archetypal character, the peasant woman, and an archetypal activity, toiling in a field. For Heidegger the picture of the shoes sparks the idea of the peasant woman and the toil without recourse to events real or imagined. The idea of honest and noble toil that the peasant woman represents is separate to Heidegger and Van Gogh. It is this idea that is outside of time waiting to be put into a narrative.

This timelessness, that is the idea of being outside time, is not available to us through empirical observation, nor is it available to language except through the description of events that invoke or illustrate the idea. This description of events brings the idea into time. I am using the word "idea" when perhaps I should be using "story". Story is outside of time. Narrative brings story into time.

Gauguin's narrative brings the artist's struggle as a story into time through the narrative. But the artist's struggle is as a Christ/prophet unrecognised in his own country story. Schapiro ignores the story in favour of the stream of events.

To restate: there are two narratives both of which activate a story around an idea that is independent to the painting, and neither narrative is directly depicted in the painting. The idea of toil can be constructed from the painting as the process by which shoes are worn out. Heidegger and Gauguin use their narratives to connect toil to nobility and so activate the story bringing it into time.

I have previously argued that the work of art must be considered as a self-contained object, independent of the historical context of its making. Heidegger does just that. For certain, just as Derrida is not sure about the pair and I am doubtful about there even being two, there is nothing in the picture to suggest who

owned the shoes or the circumstance in which they were worn. None of that however gets in the way of the picture being an illustration of toil. Heidegger is using the picture as a tool to illustrate the nature of equipment and things. Much of what Heidegger discusses is in the nature of being close to or beyond the boundaries of language. Objects that are outside time, being unavailable to direct experience or thought are also slippery and difficult grasp with language.

~

At the end of *About Looking* (1980) John Berger includes an essay, "Field", in which he looks for a description of what it means to notice something in the world around you and accept that to observe the everyday is to observe your own life.¹¹⁸ The essay also deals with the difficulty of talking or writing about things that are outside time.

The essay starts with three disconnected paragraphs. The first is a descriptive list of attributes that make little sense. The opening sentence starts:

Shelf of a field, green within easy reach, the grass on it not yet high, papered with blue sky through which yellow has grown to make pure green, the surface colour of what the world contains, attendant field.....

And continues in this vein until...

....., field I have always known, I am lying on one elbow wondering whether in any direction I can see beyond where you stop. The wire around you is the horizon.

The second paragraph doesn't explain the first. Instead, Berger starts again, approaching an idea from a different angle. On first reading I am bewildered and losing patience. This paragraph makes an analogy between repeated words and the melody of a lullaby and circular, inter-locking paths that form a chain. He claims that,

"The field upon which you walk and upon which the chain is laid is the song".

¹¹⁸ John Berger, "Field.", *In About Looking*. London: Writers and Readers Cooperative, Ltd., 1980. p.192

So it appears that there may be two sorts of field. The first has fences and grass and sky, the second is a metaphysical support for a song.

The third paragraph doesn't contribute to an understanding of the first two, but it does take ideas from them and introduces a new concept of a field which,

"... had been awaiting a first event in order to become realisable."

It is at this point in my reading that I, as it were, lean forward in my chair. It is also at this point that the writing switches style, choosing clarity over allusion. So much so that Berger is able to explain his opening statements as coming from an experience that whilst "precise and immediately recognisable", is outside the verbal, ... "hence the difficulty of writing about it."

The essay uses observations of a real field as an analogy for a conceptual field that is made apparent by events, whilst at the same time being itself an event.

The events that make it apparent are those things in the world that happen. Berger uses the examples of a chicken cackling or two horses grazing. These events draw our attention to the real field, that is the field in which the event takes place, and to the conceptual field as an event of connections that we make between our cares and concerns as observers and that which we observe. The suggestion is that our lives act as a field of interest in which things happen that we may or may not notice, but that it is only by reflecting on these things that we see the field. We frame the events of our lives according to this field of concern: a conceptual field that must exist before the event by which it is made apparent, but which is defined by that, and any subsequently related, event.

In talking about story I am talking about a theoretical object that exists outside time, but is brought into time by, for example, narrative, yet exists independent to that narrative as a potential. Narrative is one process for revealing story. When Schapiro dismisses Heidegger's peasant woman narrative in favour of Gauguin's life of the artist, he is favouring one conceptual field over another. Heidegger is concerned about the nature of being and the position of equipment as a determinant of the being of beings, where as Schapiro is interested in the Art Historical certainties of who painted what and the history of an object that acted as

a model for a painting. Heidegger goes to the painting to illustrate a concept, Schapiro looks to the painting as evidence incidental to Gauguin's narrative. What we can say is that Gauguin looks at the picture and presents a narrative from the life of Van Gogh, Heidegger looks at the picture and presents a narrative about an imaginary woman. Both narratives hinge on the nobility of toil, Gauguin in terms of both the artist's good works and the hardships endured by miners, Heidegger in terms of the peasant's honest labour in the fields. The two narratives invoke areas of concern, which overlap in their treatment of the idea of toil as being noble.

So far I have been describing story as a statement and as a conceptual field of concern, story appears to share some of the attributes of a statement. It will be useful to spend some time looking at the nature of statements so as to be able to place stories within the statement spectrum.

In the next section I will, using Michael Foucault's description of statements, compare stories to statements with the intention of positioning stories as an attribute of a particular sort of statement. To do that I must make a connection between the story and the interconnected associated field, as identified by Foucault that is activated by a statement, and further link the associated field with a concept of world.

~

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Michael Foucault devotes three chapters to defining and describing statements.¹¹⁹ Without going into all Foucault's arguments we can look at the conclusions. He notes that a statement is not a sentence nor is it a proposition though it may take either or neither form, instead it is a function that, 'cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space'.¹²⁰ To describe a statement as a function is to suggest that it is firstly defined by its purpose and secondly that it acts on something in the form of an associated field. This associated field contains all the elements that might be associated with the statement. These elements

¹¹⁹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p87.

include other formulations that include the statement, or to which the statement might refer, or might follow as a consequence, and form a web of interconnections.

I have already suggested that stories are tools for making sense of events in terms of the world as we know it and as we would like it to be. In which case we can already say that stories have a function. However what I am reaching for here is that not only do they have a function in that we use them as a tool, but that they are a function in that they act on our understanding by shaping that understanding. The story does not act on the events rather it acts via the field of concern, providing a background to understanding so as to push the world into meaningfulness.

Statements are made by people, and have a subject that has a defined position with regard to the statement. Foucault explains this point further in terms of how we might analyse a formulation as a statement by “..determining what position can and must be occupied by any individual if he is to be the subject of it.”¹²¹ In terms of story the subject should be seen as the individual that is in the position of making meaning.

So a story is a statement of how the world could be and by extension how the subject of that statement might behave in the context of such a world.

I must admit that world is a very woolly term. Erving Goffman in his introduction to *Frame Analysis*, writing about the idea of multiple worlds expressed by William James, observes that as a door it is likely to let in “wind as well as understanding”.¹²² I could use the terms domain or discourse, but I am worried that these terms are already taken. In his discussion of reality and its perception James’ use of ‘world’ rests on the notion of attention. Our attention falls on one area of concern to the momentary exclusion of others. Individual’s concerns vary, and so an event will differ between individuals, and be different for an individual as that individual moves from one area of concern to another. It is not just the spatial metaphor that lends itself to the notion of world. The area of concern

¹²¹Ibid., p96.

¹²² Erving Goffman, *Frame analysis : an essay on the organization of experience* . (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974). p3.

encloses and moulds our understanding of events, whilst at the same excluding other understandings. The area of concern is bounded and complete, with internal logic, hence world. The difficulty with the idea of many worlds, is that it tends to be taken up by mystics who use it to imply that reality is optional, and that the only reason that I can't perform magic and have a talking cat is that I don't really want to.

In the Cinderella narrative we have already seen multiple stories competing for narrative space. The story changes according to our attention. Each story has its own internal logic, which can be summed up by the associated tag line.

In this chapter I have shown that stories are used as tools to make sense of events, and that events may be organised through different stories. This process of organising events is narrative. The stories themselves pre exist the events and pre exist the narrative as a field of concern that acts as a statement function with ideas of prediction, a bet or wish, on future outcomes, and as a mould that shapes our understanding of events.

The idea of a field of concern can be expressed in terms of world with internal logic that, whilst it overlaps other worlds, is bounded and contained. World is outside time and it is the narrative process that brings world or story into time.

So when I look at El Lissitzky's *PROUNs* with the intention of finding or not finding story, I am looking for evidence of world that is an area of concern with internal logic. Since stories are outside time they are not directly accessible to language. Expressions of story might appear through narrative process or as metaphor.

In the last chapter I discussed why this study should use El Lissitzky's work as a test. In the next chapter I will revisit that idea and ask why, given that El Lissitzky also worked in advertising and propaganda, fields that at first glance appear more likely to contain story than the abstract *PROUNs*, we should look to the *PROUNs* to test our proposition concerning a temporally discrete object's ability to contain story?

Chapter 4. The image speaks: a possible solution, but not quite.

So far in preparation for looking at pictures I have described some possible pitfalls in the form of a hermeneutic error. I have identified some commonalities between El Lissitzky's world and mine that provide a background to this study. I have also presented a description of story that separates story from narrative. My purpose so far has been to circle around my proposition that a single picture can contain a story, presenting the proposition as a suitable question and defining my terms.

In the previous chapter, I spent some time discussing responses to Van Gogh's painting of old shoes. I looked at two examples. In one, Heidegger used the painting as an illustration of an idea around the concept of equipment. To re-enforce that idea he created a narrative that would account for the appearance of the old shoes that were the subject of the painting. The other response was in the form of a retelling of a remembered conversation that is offered as evidence as to why Heidegger is wrong. Previously I spent time looking at these two narratives as an example of narrative process being used to bring a story into time. The suggestion was that the story exists, waiting to be called into presence.

In both examples we can point to a narrator. Heidegger looks at the picture and is prompted to describe a series of imagined events. Shapiro asks us to consider a remembered conversation. The picture of old shoes prompts both these activities.

In this chapter we will further consider the position of narrator in terms of story. Heidegger's narrative calls a story into time. Is the story in Heidegger? Is it in Van Gogh's picture, *A Pair of Shoes*, or in Van Gogh? Is the picture a story type statement or is it an illustration? Or both? If it is a statement, who is making the statement, is it Van Gogh or Heidegger? If it is an illustration is there something besides old shoes that it is an illustration of and importantly what is an illustration?

This seems to be a lot of questions. The reason for asking them is to focus attention on the difference between my understanding of the art object as a receptacle that holds a story as opposed to the art object as a mirror that reflects the story. If the object is acting as a mirror then we should seek the source of the story elsewhere,

whilst as a receptacle we can say that the art object contains the story. There is a third option that places the story in the relationship between the art object and the viewer.

In exploring the relationship between narrator, story and art object, we are preparing the approach to El Lissitzky's *PROUNs*. In particular we need to ask why, given that El Lissitzky's work covers both propaganda and advertising, both of which would, on the face of it, present an opportunity to find story, would we choose to look at the *PROUNs*? This provides an opportunity to place the *PROUNs* in the context of El Lissitzky and the environment that shaped his work.

Who is talking

Starting from the proposition that since a narrative is the telling of two or more events over time and further, that narrative is a process by which we tell stories, that is we bring stories into time, we soon come to the question of who is performing this narrative process. Or, to put it another way, given that we are looking for a story in a temporally discrete object such as a work of art, we should consider who is the storyteller.

The term storyteller is confusing. I am using the term to indicate the person who is invoking the story either via a narrative or some other means. I am not using narrator since that might lead us to conflate the story and the narrative. In terms of this study I am hoping that, "other means" include making a temporally discrete object.

Looking for this storyteller presents two candidates. The first is the viewer. A viewer can look at a picture and experience the story. We can argue that the picture is triggering a story. The viewer looks at the picture and forms associations from what they see in the picture and constructs a narrative. The narrative activates the story. In which case on the face of it the viewer is telling himself or herself a story. The second option is the painter who makes the choices about what

to paint and how to paint it, thereby creating a narrative. We have an example of both in Heidegger's narrative that makes use of Van Gogh's painting as an example.

The viewer as storyteller

Earlier I used the example of Heidegger as he produces a narrative that accounts for what he finds in the picture *A Pair of Shoes*. Heidegger looks at the picture and performs a narrative that explains the condition of the shoes. His narrative uses scenes drawn from his understanding of a day in the life of a peasant. What isn't clear is whether Heidegger is reading the narrative from the painting or creating the narrative in response to the painting.

Examining the context it is safe to assume that Heidegger is using the painting as an illustration. His area of concern is equipment and our relationship to things. The picture acts as an example, as does the narrative. That the narrative evokes a story is an indication of truth. Not truth in terms of what has actually happened but in terms of the apparent rightness of the story world that Heidegger invokes. The painting doesn't show the scenes that Heidegger uses in his narrative but it does show some old shoes that Heidegger can point to as examples of the sort of equipment he is discussing.

If Heidegger is creating the narrative and using the picture as an illustration where is the story? We can see that the narrative comes from or at least through Heidegger, but does the story come from the same place? Given our understanding of story as a tool outside of time, that is brought into time as a means of making sense of the world, or as a form of statement about how the world might be, can we say that all the elements for that story are in the narrative? Would Heidegger's narrative work as a vehicle for invoking the story if the story did not already exist outside of Heidegger and as such was available to his audience as a possible area of concern? Using an archetypal peasant suggests not. But even so it is not yet clear whether Heidegger is responding to the painting or reading from the painting. Perhaps this will become clear if we ask what part does the painting play or what

makes the painting suitable as an illustration for this narrative? We can ask this question in another way, why does Heidegger choose to use peasant shoes as an example of equipment. Why not a potato basket, a coat or a hoe?

Why this painting?



Fig 9

Heidegger chooses shoes as an example of equipment, he chooses a Van Gogh painting that he saw in Amsterdam in 1930 to act as a 'pictorial representation' of the shoes.¹²³ We know which particular painting of shoes by Van Gogh because Schapiro has done the detective work for us.¹²⁴ Heidegger is looking for evidence of equipmentality and so he makes the point that it is only in its use that a thing becomes equipment, thus he introduces the character of the peasant woman who wears shoes in the field.

¹²³ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p158.

¹²⁴ Schapiro, "The still life as a Personal Object – A note on Heidegger and van Gogh," p136.

Heidegger also acknowledges there is nothing in the painting that attaches these shoes to the imagined peasant. He identifies them, wrongly or rightly, by their type. And then he adds an, 'And yet'.¹²⁵ This 'And yet' indicates that there is more to the painting than shoes. Heidegger points to the worn insides and the evidence of use over time. He associates the scenes from peasant life with particular parts of the shoe, which he describes in the context of his narrative. It would appear that Heidegger chooses shoes rather than other equipment because he can see the shoes', 'equipmental quality' in their material, in the 'worn insides' and the 'stiffly rugged heaviness'.¹²⁶ That he can do this is due to the choices made by the artist and his own understanding of shoes.

The artist as storyteller

The idea that Heidegger is using choices made by Van Gogh as a foundation on which to build his narrative brings us to the second possible storyteller. That is Van Gogh via Schapiro. Schapiro's criticism of Heidegger's narrative is based on two perceived errors. The first, covered in the previous chapter, is that Heidegger wrongly identifies the shoes as peasant shoes where as Schapiro is certain that they belong to the artist. The second is that Heidegger neglects the role of the artist or as Schapiro puts it, 'the artist's presence in the work'.¹²⁷

As a storyteller Van Gogh presents the same questions surrounding the location of story as does Heidegger. If we say that the painterly and compositional choices that he makes represent the narrative then where is the story? Our access to Van Gogh is via Schapiro.

Schapiro's interpretation of the painting, presumably takes into account the 'artist's presence in the work'. In so doing he creates another narrative. This one uses Schapiro's understanding of Van Gogh's life and interests to evoke a story that is not dissimilar to Heidegger's. Where Heidegger has a peasant toiling in the fields

¹²⁵ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art."

¹²⁶ Ibid., p159.

¹²⁷ Schapiro, "The still life as a Personal Object – A note on Heidegger and van Gogh," p139.

Schapiro has the artist toiling with his vocation. Interestingly Schapiro's position as an art theorist allows him to claim that his narrative is in fact Van Gogh's intention, and so is Van Gogh's narrative. In so doing he is committing one of the hermeneutic errors that I am keen to avoid. The painting as a work of art should be self-contained and therefore not rely on an understanding of the life and concerns of the artist. However we can for the moment look at the painting and, just like Schapiro and Heidegger, consider it as a narrative that presents a story of toil. Just as Heidegger and Schapiro see the evidence of hard use so do we. We can consider the choices that Van Gogh makes without resorting to symbolism or allegory. The shoes are presented on a surface in such a way that we see them as being well used. They are lit and revealed as the subject, isolated from their owner. They represent a series of choices made by the artist. The choices form the narrative that activates the story. The framing of that narrative is dependent on our areas of concern. For Heidegger that concern is peasant equipment as opposed to for Van Gogh via Schapiro who is concerned with the life and struggle of an artist.

Illustration or statement

Earlier I raised the question of whether Heidegger is using the painting as an illustration of an idea or a statement of that idea. As an illustration the painting works as an example from the narrative. It is easy to see that Heidegger is using the painting as an example of peasant shoes, he almost says as much, and that the painting therefore is an illustration accompanying his narrative. For Van Gogh it is not so straightforward, since whilst Van Gogh is using the painting to deliver the narrative, the painting is also acting as an illustration of the narrative, it is a painting produced through hard work.

The painting works as an illustration in both narratives because it provokes, via the representation of wear and tear, ideas of toil. In which case is it not possible that the painting is the statement as opposed to an illustration of the statement? This question is worth asking since if the painting can stand alone as a story type

statement then we may have a solution to the over-arching problem that we have set out to test.

A possible solution?

To be clear I will restate what I have just said.

- In our search for location of the “toil” story, Heidegger’s use of an archetypal character suggests that the story is not in Heidegger the narrator.
- We have also noted that for Heidegger the painting is an illustration whilst for Van Gogh/Schapiro the painting is both a narrative and the illustration of that narrative.
- Both Heidegger and Van Gogh/Schapiro are invoking the toil story
- The painting is an appropriate illustration since it provokes, via the representation of wear and tear, ideas of toil.

Does the story “toil” come from the painting? Is the painting the “toil” story?

In asking if the “toil” story is in the painting I am asking whether or not the painting is invoking that story independent of any other narrative. Or, to put it another way, whether the painting can, on its own, bring that story into time such that a viewer will experience the painting as a statement, activating an area of concern about how we might live.

Having talked about the painting, the different narratives surrounding it and the story that they invoke, it is hard to look at the painting without seeing it as a story. Just as, if I ask you not to think of blue elephants, we can be pretty sure that you are not going to be able to stop yourself thinking of blue elephants. So I can’t just look at the picture and say, “Yep, there’s your story, right there, embedded in the sweaty leather of those boots”. I can however ask what is the process by which the painting of those shoes produces that response? This is similar to the task Roland Barthes sets himself in his essay *Rhetoric of the Image*.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” pp.32-51.

How the image speaks

In *Rhetoric of the Image*, Barthes uses a photograph, advertising pasta and tomato products, to examine the different channels of information available to the viewer. He identifies three channels of information. The text is code in the form of language. The picture is of something and so denotes that thing, for example, the picture of the tomato denotes tomatoes in general and that tomato in particular, which is Barthes' message without a code. The final channel is at the level of connotation, that is, what we make of the picture as whole and as an assemblage of its elements within a context. He makes the observation that much of the information is culturally coded. For example, for the colour scheme and the name of the advertised product to produce understandings of 'Italianicity' requires a non-Italian's concept of Italy, and for the fresh produce, spilling from the string bag to be understood as an indicator of the recent return from a daily shopping trip, which in turn is about freshness, requires that the viewer has not only an understanding of the possibility of daily shopping, but an understanding of the alternative to which the message is not referring. It appears that the connoted message is a collaboration between the image and the viewer.

Given that each viewer brings an individual experience to the collaboration it is possible for meaning to be personal, that is different for every viewer. That it isn't Barthes attributes to the text that performs a framing action, presenting one possible meaning among the many as the preferred meaning.

Looking in this way at Van Gogh's painting presents a problem. Barthes chooses an advertisement for his exercise because he feels that in an advertising image the message is deliberate and intentional on the part of the producers. We don't have this level of certainty in Van Gogh's picture. Schapiro is able to say what the artist intended but I don't feel so confident. Beyond Van Gogh's signature we don't have

any text to frame the pictorial events. The title is descriptive to the extent that the painting contains two shoes and suggests that we consider them as a pair. Beyond that we can roam widely and, forgetting Schapiro for the moment, can assign a variety of messages to the painting whilst never being sure of the artists intention.

What we do know is that the artist chose these shoes to paint and that he painted them in such a way as to show certain of the shoes' attributes. Principle among those attributes is that the shoes have been worn, a lot. In saying this I am using my understanding of the effect of repeated and sustained use on leather footwear. Not only must I understand the wear patterns in leather but I must also have a mental comparison of new shoes available. I must understand what new shoes look like so as to be able to appreciate old shoes. Without this mental image of new shoes and an understanding of how old shoes get to look like that, the indexicality of those creases is unavailable to me.

As well as choosing the shoes the artist also chose how to present them. He could have chosen to present the shoes as hidden amongst shadows with cold blue green tones, or as discarded rubbish. But he didn't. Instead he shows us the shoes bathed in a yellow gold light. It is hard to see these shoes as an enemy or a burden. They appear as old friends or colleagues. The artist's choice of presentation is guiding in what regard we hold the shoes. We are encouraged to value something that is almost or entirely worn out. In this respect Van Gogh is framing his old shoe narrative. Asking as it were that we consider these shoes as something other than worn out rubbish ready for the bin. These are valued objects being shown respect in the sunset of their life. Framing the narrative this way is relying on our attachment to things, which is in contrast to Heidegger's view of the shoes in terms of their equipmentality. As equipment they are valued for their potential use. In Van Gogh's narrative the shoes' value has transcended their usefulness, moving from an economy of use to an economy of sentiment.

Considering the choices that Van Gogh has made in terms of communication we note that for the message to be decoded requires substantial cultural understanding from the viewer. Understanding beyond that required to parse the picture. To parse the content of the picture we have to be able to recognize shoes.

It is possible that we could be using the picture and the image together to learn about shoes, in the same way that pictures of food sometimes accompany menus, but beyond that all the ideas surrounding old shoes and how we might feel about old shoes or old things in general, is external to the picture yet has to be available in the viewer. Just as the stories about toil invoked by the Heidegger and Schapiro narratives required that an audience have the story available to be called upon, so the picture requires its audience to bring understanding. The picture has the advantage that it doesn't require coded language but it still requires cultural codes and technical understandings.

Looking at the picture for the location of the toil stories, does reveal why the picture works as a suitable illustration to accompany these narratives, but unfortunately it does not present us with the story on its own, self contained within the temporally discrete work of art. It does illustrate that in this case the picture can work as a narrative bringing story into time but that to do so requires more than the contents of the picture.

The Shoes

Before leaving Van Gogh's painting I should note the shoes themselves are candidates for the location of the story. They do after all serve as a model for Van Gogh's painting. In assuming that there was a model for the painting and that Van Gogh did not paint from his imagination, I am assuming that Van Gogh saw the shoes and experienced the story and then re-presented it in the painting. This is entirely possible. Van Gogh sees the shoes, experiences, and is moved by, the story and passes it on. This situation is similar to Roger Scruton's discussion around the impossibility of photography as a representational art.¹²⁹

Scruton presents an argument that photography should not be considered a representational art since the mechanics of making the photograph and the causal

¹²⁹ Roger Scruton, "Photography and Representation," *Critical Enquiry* Vol.7, no. No.3 (1981).

relationship between the object photographed and the picture thus produced suggest that it is not the photograph that is doing the representation but the object that was photographed. Scruton's example is of a photograph of a tramp that purports to represent *Silenus*.¹³⁰ Scruton's point is that the photograph, with its special relationship to real objects acts in the manner of a pointing finger. The finger is not doing the representation nor the person pointing the finger. It is the thing at which the finger is pointed that is the representation. It could be that the tramp is not a real tramp but an actor being paid by the photographer to pretend that he is a tramp, then the representation is on the part of the actor. Scruton does not apply this line of thought to paintings since painting does not have photography's special relationship to real things, in that a painting has been mediated by the artist here as a photograph has as mechanical or causal relationship to the objects in the photograph.

Since my question about the possibility of the story being somehow in the shoes suggests that there was a causal relationship between the shoes and the painting, that is, that the story in the shoes caused Van Gogh to make the painting in such a way as to act as a narrative to invoke the story, it is appropriate to apply Scruton's reasoning to the shoes, and ask if the painting is pointing at the shoes as if to say, 'look at that story?', do the shoes themselves contain the story or are they yet another version of the narrative?

Schapiro suggests that the shoes are a memento of Van Gogh's life.¹³¹ As a memento they function to provoke an act of memory, which is important since it reminds us that the memento is not the memory. Further a memory is uniquely personal. Van Gogh's memories are not accessible except via a narrative, provided in this case either by Gauguin, via Schapiro, or Van Gogh in the form of his painting. Presumably any object could remind Van Gogh of his journey, as long as Van Gogh can perform the necessary act of association. The shoes, with their signs of wear, are a particularly appropriate memento, for all the same reasons that make them a suitable illustration for any of the narratives that we have mentioned.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p589.

¹³¹ Schapiro, "The still life as a Personal Object – A note on Heidegger and van Gogh," p141.

I have described a number of narratives with common themes that have been attached to Van Gogh's painting, including the painting and the subject of the painting. Each time we find that we approach the place of story only to find that there is something that we need to bring in order for the story to happen and as such we can say that the painting is working as an illustration of the story, but that the story is somewhere else. Another way of putting this is that a message has been delivered via the painting and that that message requires that a receiver act on, that is apply a cultural or coded understanding to, that message so as to invoke the story. In which case each of these narratives require the audience to bring equipment in the form of cultural and technical knowledge or, as is the case with Heidegger, a complete story in need of illustration.

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At the beginning of this chapter I asked a series of questions, culminating in a question about the painting as an illustration as opposed to a statement. The question suggested that the painting could be reflecting knowledge back at the viewer, in other words an illustration of something that the viewer already knows. In this case the picture *A Pair of Shoes* reflects our understanding of the value of toil by leveraging our cultural and technical knowledge about shoes. Without these understandings and further without an understanding of the cultural codes and conventions surrounding used up and worn out things, the toil story will not be activated. This is not to say that the painting does not contain story. It might, but the toil story is not it. In some ways this is disappointing. The painting *A Pair of Shoes* is very evocative. As an illustration of the toil story it is readily available for a variety of scenarios. By choosing the abstracted no space of the background as opposed to a defined context Van Gogh has allowed the shoes to stand for every shoe and in turn every memento of a journey, real or metaphorical. Looking for story in *A Pair of Shoes* has been useful. The painting seemed to be a promising place to find story, but what we found instead was an illustration that reflected a story that was part of the viewer's world. It seems that it is not enough for there to be a narrative in the painting. The painting must also contain its own context or "world". This is world that I referred to in the last chapter. With out world the

picture or other temporally discrete object cannot be said to be self-contained. We should return to this painting later and examine it for world and hence a story.

In the next section I will look more carefully at El Lissitzky with a view towards identifying just why I should be looking at the *PROUN* series of pictures.

El Lissitzky in three stages.

In an earlier chapter I asked why El Lissitzky? Why choose to look for story within his work and why choose *PROUN*s rather than his other work? My answers were based on some similarities between El Lissitzky and myself and in particular ideas around space. This section looks at the *PROUN*s in the context of El Lissitzky's other work, and will serve to underscore why I have selected *PROUN*s.

In the previous section I looked at a work of art that provided a stimulus to a number of narratives that evoked stories around toil. In terms of those stories I argued that the painting acted as a narrative and an illustration, and that the toil narrative was not in the painting since it required that the viewer arrive at the painting with prior understanding of and access to the story. The purpose of contextualizing the *PROUN*s is to separate them from the narrative surrounding their provenance, and El Lissitzky himself.

In looking at El Lissitzky's work I will be drawing on ideas that were presented by Peter Nisbet in the 1987 exhibition and catalogue *El Lissitzky (1890 – 1941)*¹³² and on a review of the same exhibition by Yve-Alain Bois.¹³³

Bois divides El Lissitzky's work into three parts. The first part covers the work before early 1919, when he started working on the *PROUN*s. The early El Lissitzky

¹³² Peter Nisbet, *El Lissitzky, 1890-1941 : catalogue for an exhibition of selected works from North American collections, the Sprengel Museum Hanover, and the Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg Halle* (Harvard University Art Museums : Busch-Reisinger Museum, 1987).

¹³³ Yve-Alain Bois, "El Lissitzky: radical reversibility. (Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University)," *Art in America* 76, no. 4 (1988).

work is represented in the exhibition by pages from *Khad Gadya* a children's book based on a Passover song.¹³⁴ Bois describes these illustrations as Chagallian in that they appear to be heavily influenced by the work of Marc Chagall, who as director of the Vitebsk Art School invited El Lissitzky to direct the school's printing, architecture and graphic art studios. Bois underlines Nisbet's assertion that, despite surface similarities between the geometricized figures in the children's book and the *PROUNs*, 'abstract volumes' there is a no connection, beyond the biographical, between the drawings in the *Khad Gadya* and the *PROUNs*¹³⁵.

The *PROUNs* form the second part of El Lissitzky's work that begins in 1919 and then, after his return from Germany in 1925, becomes the third section, in which El Lissitzky concentrates on advertising and propaganda, eventually producing a, 'kind of conventional "monumental" neo-classicism'.¹³⁶ The *PROUNs* occupy a period of experimentation with art, form and materials that came to an end with the Stalinist preference for realism. It is possible to view these different bodies of work as responses to environmental influences. The figurative illustrations are in response to Marc Chagall and a Jewish renaissance, whilst the experiments with form and space were provoked by the arrival of Malevich at the Vitebsk Art School and excitement surrounding the events of 1919 to 1921.

Whilst the break between the early El Lissitzky and the El Lissitzky under the influence of Malevich's Suprematist ideas can be seen in terms of a revolution in art, the relationship between that revolutionary El Lissitzky and the later state propagandist is not so clear, and neither is it, in terms of this study, very important. Suffice to say that, since we are looking at the work as a stand-alone self-contained object, whether the propaganda is an example of El Lissitzky sacrificing his art for survival or evidence of his political commitment is neither here nor there. What is relevant is why we would choose the middle El Lissitzky's work over the early or later?

¹³⁴ Lissitzky, *Khad Gadya The Only Kid. Facsimilie of El Lissitzky's Edition of 1919*.

¹³⁵ Bois, "El Lissitzky: radical reversibility. (Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University)," pp164-5.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

an Affirmation

For our purposes I am going to let the PROUNs stand for the middle El Lissitzky. This is to ignore the exhibition and architectural designs made in the years immediately following El Lissitzky's return to Russia in 1925. It is the *PROUN*'s that seem most promising in terms of the search for story within a single object. Part of this promise comes from intention, in that, unlike a poster or illustration, the PROUNs are not presented for consideration in conjunction with matters beyond themselves. Ben Vedder writing on metaphor in Gadamer's hermeneutics expresses this by quoting Heidegger,

*In discourse so far as it is genuine, what is said is drawn from what the talk is about*¹³⁷

As abstracts the PROUNs do not draw on experience outside themselves as a group, except in their group identity, but even in that statement of difference they turn inward. The term *PROUN*, an acronym for Project for the Affirmation of the New, does two things. Firstly it groups the work into a class of work. That class is made up of pictures produced by El Lissitzky as statements within a developing art practice. Secondly it labels that group as an affirmation, a particular sort of statement that is positive. The affirmation says what is as opposed to what is not. In this case it labels the pictures as both being new and being affirmations of newness. In doing so it does not articulate what old might be, and neither does it require a viewer to consider the picture in terms of an old/new dichotomy. A negative statement such as "this is not old" would be drawing on cultural knowledge of old and placing that in opposition to the painting. By grouping the pictures under the umbrella affirmations of the new we are grouping with reference to what they are as opposed to what they are not. If we recognize a picture as a *PROUN* we are recognizing that the picture is itself and not an extension to or restating of something else. A comparison with other non *PROUN* work from EL Lissitzky will make this clearer.

¹³⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*. in Ben Vedder, "On The Meaning of Metaphor in Gadamer's Hermeneutics," *Research in Phenomenology*, no. 32 (2002): p196.

Below on the Left is a page from a children's book of a Jewish folk song *Khad Gadya* illustrated by El Lissitzky in 1919 and on the right is a page from El Lissitzky's *Of 2 Squares*, written in 1920 and printed in 1922.



Fig. 10 Title page *Of 2 Squares* marked up to show compositional relationships as squares.

A Picture Book

The *Khad Gadya* is a children's song that lists a series of violent acts that grow in size. It starts with a goat that is eaten by a cat. A dog bites the cat and is then beaten with a stick, which in turn is consumed by fire. Every agent of destruction is itself destroyed. This page shows fire in the form of a chicken burning the stick, whilst the dog looks on, a road leads into the picture providing a ground plane that locates a house in the background. There is a blanket of text over the image, a symbol in the top left and more text in the bottom right. The top text is the words of the song. The page is viewed in the context of the book, which contains the whole song. If we give powers of agency to the stick, accept that a cat can eat a goat, or more specifically a kid, and further that there is an angel of death that can itself be killed, the song can be understood literally. More usually, and with less of a stretch, the song is treated as a metaphor for the history of the Jewish people, or the history of Israel, ancient and modern.

Metaphor on its own does not suggest a reaching outside the topic or area of concern. In this case the area of concern is an entire cultural identity that includes a language that like all language makes use of metaphor. In which case the metaphor of the kid and the cat and dog etc. are the areas of concern. Insomuch as the page is telling part of the song in a book of the song, we can see that the dog, the stick, the fire and the text are taken from the area of concern. Not so much the chicken.

Chickens do not feature in the song, neither is there a clear metaphorical relationship between a chicken and fire. Perhaps a cockerel's comb and plumage suggest fire, but to understand that one has to draw on other knowledge outside the cultural object that is the song. In this sense the book is not a self-contained statement. It is an illustration and decoration that can accompany the song.

Without reference to the song as a cultural object, that is, if we consider the book without reference to the broader themes of Jewish identity and history, we are faced with text that frames, both in a compositional and story sense, the imagery. The text tells us what is in the picture, "Then Came a Fire and Burnt the Stick". In which case the page contains a language statement and an illustration of that statement. In finding a translation for the text we also find that there are three language systems represented on the page.¹³⁸ At the top left there is a Hebrew letter acting as a numeral, the framing script is Yiddish and the text at the bottom right is Aramaic. Using a variety of languages is a narrative device that forces us back to ideas of Jewish identity and history. It is not possible to look at the page without reference to allegory symbolism and representation. Just as the Van Gogh picture was an illustration of a narrative invoking a story external to the picture so is the page from the *Khad Gadya* picture book.

After the *Khad Gadya* was produced El Lissitzky was invited to teach at Vitebsk where he met Malevich whose influence replaced Chagall's, prompting El Lissitzky to abandon whimsical images of little people flying over rooftops.¹³⁹ El Lissitzky

¹³⁸ Seth L Wolitz, "Lissitzky, El," http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lissitzky_El. (accessed June 22 2012).

¹³⁹ Yve-Alain Bois and Christian Hubert, "El Lissitzky: Reading Lessons," *October* Vol. 11, no. Essays in Honor of Jay Leyda (1979): p115.

made the children's book *of 2 Squares* whilst he was in Germany. The book is part of the *PROUN* series and represents an experiment in the active application of typography as a compositional element within a construction.

From an art historical point of view it is hard not to see this small book, there are eleven pages, six of them form the narrative section, in the context of El Lissitzky, his career and the political and social excitements that form a backdrop to the book as an object from history. It is hard to ignore the artist in the work, just as Schapiro was unable to disassociate the *A pair of Shoes* from Van Gogh. To overcome this difficulty we can look at the book in terms of what we can see in the book. If that forces us to consider concepts outside the book, as did the text in the *Khad Gadya*, then we can say that the book is not self-contained.

A translation

The page that I have chosen is the title page of the book. Like the *Khad Gadya* there is text. Reading right to left top to bottom there is Cyrillic script (Russian for 'Of'), the numeral 2 and a red square. At the bottom of the page is the author's name in the form of a tick, the arms of the tick forming a right angle rotated so that the arms are 45 degrees to the vertical. The main elements form a rebus that gives the title of the book. These elements are arranged, bounded by a square marked out in a thin line. The elements appear scattered on the page and yet they serve to both energise and map the page. There is a modulation of contrast and affinity with contrasting elements. The angle of the "Of" text with the angle of the tick is an example of contrast whilst the angle of the tick is in affinity with the diagonals of the squares and the "2".

The relationship of the tick and the rebus elements to the boundary square suggests that the boundary acts as anchor point for all the other elements. The vertical center axis of the boundary passes through the bottom point of the tick, whilst the center of a square formed by the intersection of the vertical lines raised from the end vertical of the 2, the right hand side of the red square, and horizontals

In *Khad Gadya* it was the text that forced a viewer to consider the image within a social and cultural context as opposed to just the compositional context. The three different language systems, Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish, identify the book and the song as an illustration of a cultural object. In *Of 2 Squares* there is also text. It just so happens that I don't read Russian or the Cyrillic alphabet. I can find a translation so it isn't ineffable. Russian uses the Indo-Arabic numeral common to English and other European languages so whilst the "2" is also Russian, I find it familiar. I could conclude that the picture, by using Russian text wanted me to consider the image in the context of Russia and the Soviet Union. In which case the image is asking me to bring an understanding of Russia and the Soviet Union to the picture and therefor we could say that *Of 2 Squares* is similar to *Khad Gadya* in that it is referencing and illustrating a concept external to the picture. Why, however, would I consider Russian text, as the only text, to be about Russia?

Supposing the text was in English. I find English familiar to the point that when it isn't broken it is transparent. It is a tool ready to hand. When presented with English text I do not conclude that the topic or area of concern is English or a country in which English is spoken. Likewise when I see Japanese or German text I do not feel obliged to consider the nature of Japanese or German culture. I merely accept that I am seeing a language that I don't read. I can assume that, whilst on some level a language references a culture, not all utterances are about that culture. I am not, on seeing Russian, compelled to ask why has the artist used Russian, which would, in this study, be a hermeneutic error. I can accept that it just is Russian, and can appreciate the letters as compositional elements and as signs of another language. If there were a mix of languages that had a common cultural history, such as Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish then that would not be the case.

Comparing the *PROUN* picture book with the *Khad Gadya* picture book demonstrates that the PROUNs are self-contained statements. They appear to be the idea rather than a statement about the idea or an illustration of the idea. What that idea might be is as yet uncertain. The preferred reading of *Of 2 Squares* makes it a metaphor for the inevitable rise and success of socialism. This reading is imposed on the book based on an understanding of the artist's intention and as such is a reconstruction. Socialism is not mentioned in the text, though the subtitle

does refer to a Suprematist story, which through art historical links, suggest the Soviet *avant-garde*. For this reason I am shy of using the book to test the proposition though it does serve to indicate that the PROUNs provide examples that can be investigated as self-contained statements and therefor, potential examples of story within a temporally discrete object.

In this chapter we have come close to finding stories but each time we have found that the work of art was bringing a story from outside itself into time as opposed to being the locus of that story. In the *Of 2 Squares* example we can see that the *PROUN* is not bringing a story from outside itself, but we have not yet established that there is a story. The *PROUN* does appear to be self-contained with the possibility of having world. Having established that a *PROUN* is a suitable subject, the next chapter is concerned with finding story in *PROUNs*.

Chapter 5. Making sense of a *PROUN* in three dimensions.

In the previous chapter I looked at a Van Gogh painting that has been the subject of some discussion between Schapiro and Heidegger, both of whom used the painting as an illustration to accompany a story. I also looked at two of El Lissitzky's designs. This allowed me to test what it was I was looking for within a work of art, that would allow the work of art to contain a story. Each time I thought that I was getting close to finding a story I found instead that the works of art were directing me to look outside themselves for the story or for the technical understanding that the work was illustrating. I found that the work of art, instead of containing a story, had a narrative attached to it or was a signpost directing me away from the work of art. This underlines the requirement that, for a work of art to contain a story as opposed to referencing a story, that work should be self-contained. The story should be available without reference to anything else.

The concept of a self-contained work is reassuring when put in context of the idea of world presented in Chapter 3. The world should not only be self-contained in terms of our reading and area of concern but it should also contain the seeds of its own story as expressed in ideas of 'ante' as a before and as a bet, that I talked about in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 also raised the possibility that the story might occupy the boundaries of language and so be difficult to grasp with language.

In this chapter we will look at our test case examples of works of art. We have already identified El Lissitzky's PROUNs as being appropriate subjects. In describing the work I suspect that we will have to turn to geometry and drafting, to provide a vocabulary. In so doing I am not suggesting that we need to have an understanding of geometry or drafting to understand the picture. We can experience the sort of spatial relationships we will find in a *PROUN* without reference to their geometric structures, just as we can experience picture space without understanding different types of projection, however geometry and drafting do provide a vocabulary with which to talk about spatial relationships. If we find that the geometric structures deliver semantic information encoded in their being geometric structures, for example pyramids connote Egypt, or diamonds are a girl's best friend, then, unless the picture is defining its own

geometry in terms of such cultural constructs, we will be faced with a non self-contained work.

The PROUNs.

Two PROUNs will serve as examples.

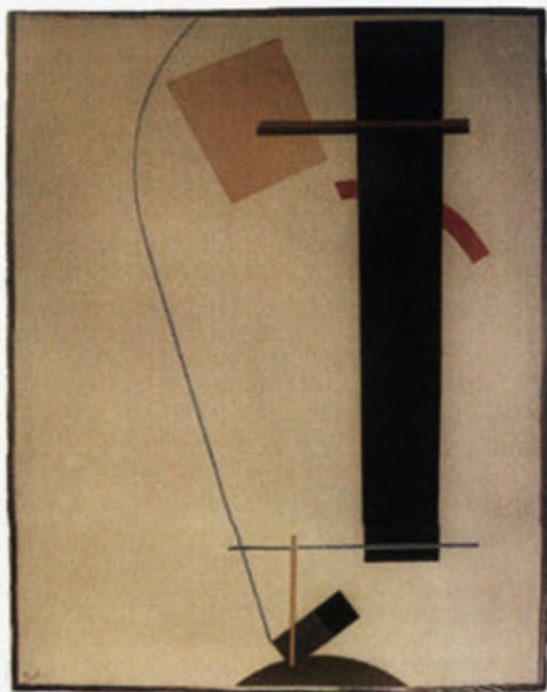


Fig 12 El Lissitzky PROUN ca1923

and

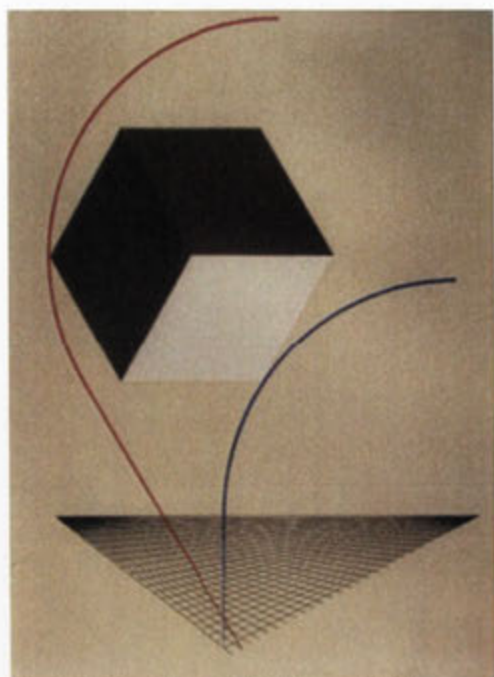


Fig. 12 El Lissitzky PROUN 1924-25 ¹⁴⁰

***PROUN* ca 1923.**

There is a signature in the bottom left providing an up reference that orientates the viewer. In the first instance I am going to make the assumption that the signature is not integral to the picture. I am choosing to have the signature orientate the viewer rather than the picture, thereby allowing for the picture to be rotated. If it later turns out to have an impact on this analysis I will return to it. The picture contains a number of shapes and lines on a buff, rectangular field. There are two ways to approach the picture as a spatial object, as flat space and as three-dimensional space.

¹⁴⁰Peter Nisbet, "PROUN 1924-25," in *EL Lissitzky, 1890-1941. Catalogue for an exhibition of selected works from North American collections, The Spengal Museum Hanover, and the Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg Halle* ed. Harvard University Art Museum (1987).

As Flat Space

If we consider the image to be a flat space without volume or depth then the shapes lie adjacent to one another. At the bottom of the picture is a solid green bow shape. The straight edge of the bow sits close, and parallel to the edge of the image. The bow straddles the image's vertical centre axis, the axis dividing the bow approximately in the ratio of one to two with the greater part to the right of the image axis.

Immediately above the bow is a yellow rod. The rod starts from a point on the picture axis just inside the area described by the bow and rises to one fifth of the picture height. At the base of the rod there are two grey shapes. On the left is a small right angle equilateral triangle. The hypotenuse of this triangle runs vertically and rests on the rod, thereby placing the lowermost angle immediately next to the base of the rod. The triangle's equal sides fit into the length of the rod four and a half times. The hypotenuse fits into the rod three and one third times. To the right of the rod is an irregular quadrilateral arranged so that, were the rod not to be there, the irregular quadrilateral could join with the triangle to form a grey rectangle. The right hand end of the rectangle subtends a darker grey square that extends the length of the rectangle. Two blue lines complete the picture's lower structure and provide a joining mechanism with the rest of the objects in the picture.

The longest of the blue lines starts on the apex of the small equilateral triangle and rises at an angle of sixty degrees until it reaches the top third of the picture at which point it describes a gentle arc through 30 degrees, before straightening and crossing the picture's edge just past the left hand vertical third. The second, shorter blue line is horizontal, lying between one quarter and one fifth of the way up the picture and is almost half as long as the picture is wide. The line is divided into two, unequal parts by the yellow rod which intersects the shorter blue line, as it does the light grey rectangle, dividing the line in a proportion approaching one to four. The shorter part projects left of the yellow rod, reaching and just crossing the longer blue line. The distance between the yellow rod and the longest blue line at

this point is the same as the length of the light grey rectangle, the left most corner of which is twice that distance from the point at which the blue lines intersect.

The yellow rod projects above the division in the short blue line a distance that that is equal to the short blue lines extension to the left beyond the long blue line. To the right of the yellow rod the short blue line extends, meeting the tapering black column and the small black rectangle.

The tapering black column rises from the small blue line stopping just before the top of the picture. The column is one sixth wider at the top than the bottom. The small black rectangle is below the short blue line and appears as an extension to the tapering black column. The height of the small black rectangle is equal to the height of the yellow rod above the short blue line.

The tapering black column's left hand, vertical edge lies on the right hand vertical third line. The column is made of two parts separated by a brown structure composed of a dark brown rectangle beneath a light brown irregular quadrilateral. The light brown rectangle and the dark brown irregular quadrilateral are of similar height and width. They extend either side of the tapering back column. The brown structure is shorter than the short blue line. A vertical line dropped from the end of the brown structure would bisect the left hand portion of the short blue line. The brown structure is similar in height to the length of the yellow rod extending above the short blue line.

Two other shapes interact directly with the tapering black column. They are a short and a long red arc. The short red arc is to the left and the long red arc is to the right of the tapering black column. Whilst the tapering black column interrupts each arc, extending the arcs across the column does not make them meet. The short red arc has a larger diameter than the long red arc.

The left hand end of the brown structure is embedded in an irregular yellow octagon, so arranged that if the brown structure was removed and the space thus left in the yellow octagon filled with yellow, the irregular yellow octagon would become an irregular yellow rectangle. Put another way, the brown structure pierces the upper right hand edge of the yellow shape so as to section its edge and

create three new edges where the brown meets the yellow. The upper edge of the brown structure divides the yellow edge in a ratio of two to one, with the shorter piece below the brown structure. The bottom right hand edge of the irregular yellow shape that extends diagonally down from left to right is the same length as a side of the dark grey square.

The composition of shapes and lines is against a buff background within a dark brown frame.

As Thee Dimensional Space.

The preceding paragraphs describe the picture using flat or two-dimensional space. The picture is indeed flat, it lies on the surface of its support, however I don't experience it that way. The circumlocutions that I am forced into to maintain the pretence that I am experiencing a flat space are bordering on painful. Consider the statement from an earlier paragraph;

The left hand end of the brown structure is embedded in an irregular yellow octagon, so arranged that if the brown structure was removed and the space thus left in the yellow octagon filled with yellow, the irregular *yellow octagon would become an irregular yellow rectangle*.

I don't experience the yellow octagon as an octagon. It is only an octagon if I force myself to read the construction as flat, without the possibility that one object can be in front of another. I live in a three dimensional world and find it much easier to consider the yellow octagon as a rectangle with a brown object in front of it, than as anything else. Not only does my experience of a three dimensional world and the attendant object recognition skills prime me to interpret this picture as being a series of overlapping objects my language is better suited to describing it as three dimensional. So forty-six words become eleven;

The brown structure ends in front of an irregular yellow rectangle.

Adopting three dimensions allows for more than a layering of objects along a z-axis. The objects themselves become three-dimensional. So the green bow is read as a green dome, the dark and light grey shapes form a rectangular solid, whilst the brown structure is not made up of a dark brown rectangle and a light brown irregular quadrilateral, rather, it is two faces of a single solid with the top, light brown face being drawn in perspective, showing the face receding from the viewer.

Experiencing the picture as three-dimensional is not without complications. The structure is not coherently within the same optical space. Nor is space rendered using one projection or convention. The brown structure uses a single vanishing point whereas the small grey solid uses an orthogonal projection without a vanishing point.

The space does not resolve into one coherent whole. Instead space is constantly being made and unmade as we move over the picture, negotiating the boundaries of the two-dimensional surface in conflict with the created space that fails to neatly organise the objects.

As well as space we can use balance as an organisational mechanism within the picture. Just as two dimensional space relates one object to another, and three dimensional space allows us to include elements of the objects that we can't see but that are suggested through optical and aerial perspective and overlap, so ideas of balance as suggested by size, colour and verticality help us parse the picture.

In terms of balance the tapering black column rests on a cantilever held in tension by the long blue line. The long blue line itself is in a counterpoise relationship with the small grey rectangular solid. There is a teleological relationship between the observed balance and the objects' assumed mass. We can see that there is balance so the objects must have different mass, and we assume mass because there is balance. This circular argument needs constant reinforcement as we speculate about the balance points around the picture.

It seems that we have come to an important moment in our search for a story within a temporally discrete object such as a work of art. I have described a picture without reference to any events outside the picture. Language has been difficult

but I have borrowed from geometry and, to a much lesser extent engineering. I have described the picture first by describing objects within the picture. That description includes the spatial relationship between the objects. Introducing a three-dimensional approach gives a more accurate and briefer description of the picture since it aligns more closely with how we experience it. As we experience the shapes as three-dimensional solids we are using our imagination within the picture. Applying ideas of balance adds another layer of imagination. The objects are not representations of objects outside the picture. They are only within the picture and we are imagining within the picture world. In the imagining we are guided by our need to, not so much understand as make sense of the picture and the relationships within it. This need to “make sense of” is an area of concern that is activated by the picture. The picture acts as narrative process presenting the objects that act as plot. It does not present a solution to the ‘makes sense of’ problem but keeps re engaging the area of concern. We want there to be balance and we want the object to be three dimensional but these ways of making sense are only suggested not resolved.

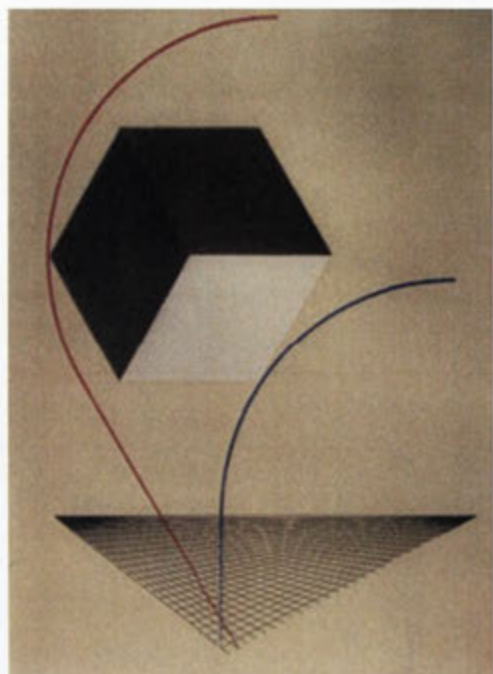
In the earlier chapter on stories I developed a checklist for a story. A story was a type of statement that comes from an area of concern. The statement is an expression of rightness or the way things should be. As a statement of the way things should be it should have world, that is world in which the area of concern is relevant and the expression of the way things should be, is. The statement exists out of time and is brought into time by a narrative that activates the field of concern.

In Chapter two I made an argument for treating the work of art as a discrete object separate from the conditions under which it was created. So far in this chapter I have looked at *PROUN* ca 1923, and found a narrative, an area of concern, and a world, that do not reference objects or ideas beyond the *PROUN*.

In looking at this *PROUN* we can say that the objects in the *PROUN* act as the narrative and that this narrative brings all the elements from our definition of story into time. Our area of concern is the need to “make sense of”. The picture invokes that area of concern by presenting the composition as a statement. The

statement suggests that the image should make sense within the context of the picture and it is the context of the picture that acts as world. Furthermore we have considered the object as an object defined by itself as opposed to an object defined through the circumstance of its making, the intentions of the maker or the qualities of objects outside the painting to which the painting alludes.

It would appear that this particular PROUN does contain a story and further it is a self-contained temporally discrete object. Which in terms of this study is very good news. It suggests that in terms of testing the proposition we have found at least one example that supports the proposition. In the next section I will look at PROUN 1924-25 so that I can be sure that it is not a one off example and then revisit Van Gogh's picture of shoes as a way of asking, does this only work with *PROUNs*?



PROUN 1924-25 compared to *PROUN* ca 1923 contains fewer objects. The compositional elements consist of the rectangular buff field that defines the picture's boundary, a triangle produced through a grid laid at a forty-five degrees to the edges of the picture. The straight lines that form the grid become ever closer to each other as they approach the longest edge of the triangle, which lies parallel to the shorter edge of the buff rectangle, dividing the long edge in the ratio three to four. The triangle occupies one quarter of the image, however no corner is in contact with the image edge. The triangle is an irregular triangle. The long central axis of the picture bisects the triangle's longest edge.

Two lines start near the angle opposite the triangle's longest edge. The shorter of these lines is blue. It starts parallel to the picture edge before curving

....So far I have been avoiding the terms left and right, up and down, top and bottom. The picture has no orientation marks. I can address it in any orientation. Defining the orientation would make describing what I see easier. For example I could say that the blue line curves right. If easy is what we want then I could stop

trying to explain the picture as a two dimensional object and go straight to how I experience the picture as opposed to what I see. ...

...In Three dimensions the grid defines a receding plane. At the near corner of the grid there are two lines. In the given orientation the shorter, blue line rises vertically before starting to curve right after one quarter of it's length. The curve describes a quarter circle with its radius close to the furthest right corner of the receding plane. The other red line starts one grid space to the right of the blue line and rises, leaning left, at a sixty-degree incline. It soon crosses the blue line continuing until starts to curve, mirroring the curve of the blue line partly encircling an ambiguous cube.

In this vertical orientation the ambiguous cube floats above the receding plane wedged between the curves of the red and blue lines. The cube is ambiguous since it is either an open cube in which case we see the interior, or it is closed, presenting three exterior faces. It flicks between the two options. This ambiguity stops the eye from resting. The picture is in constant tension as the cube alternately recedes and advances shifting its relationship to the red and blue lines, and by extension to the receding plane. There is further tension between the lines which suggest the outline of an orthogonally receding curved plane that hovers as a potential, brought in and out of being by eye track. The picture never settles.

Just as *PROUN* Ca 1923 brought the need to "make sense of" into time so does *PROUN* 1924-25. It differs in that it is not so complicated in terms of the number of elements or the variety of spaces, never the less in the, "searching for" process, there is the same need to, "make sense of". Both pictures address the same area of concern, bringing the same story into time, despite their very different narratives. So I can say that both *PROUN*s, as temporally discrete objects, contain story.

Returning to Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes*, I can see past the narratives that have been attached to the picture and address the picture itself.



The picture presents a series of pictorial statements. Where the *PROUNs* use geometric shapes, colour, composition, in the form of balance and tension, Van Gogh's picture uses objects, colour tone and texture, and composition within a single spatial construct. The created space is defined by a receding plane articulated by a modulation of tone and texture with out use of line. The far edge of the plane is delineated by a contrast between the light toned horizontal texture of the plane and the darker vertical texture of a more distant background. The near edge of the plane drops away at the bottom of the picture.

The shoes project upward from the receding plane balanced on an area of changing contrast that runs from half way up the left hand edge to the shoelace at the lower right hand corner, separating the bottom left quadrant from the rest of the picture. The shoelace's terminating curve sits outside the overall spatial construct in a state of tension with the edge of the picture. The cumulative effect of the changing contrast, the balancing shoes and the tense shoelace is, despite the overall balance within the composition, a picture that approaches and at the same time backs away from a paradox in the articulation of space. The space is presented as both real and fantastic, it activates a sense of compositional order even as it points towards alternatives.

It is in this tension that we can find an area of concern, in the form of a need for order in the face of chaos. The story is a variant on the "need to make sense of", that we found in the *PROUNs*. The narrative structure is a point of difference.

Instead of providing a complex set of compositional elements that fail to settle into one unifying space, *A Pair of Shoes* presents an ordered space underscored with the prospect of coherence failure. It does this with out reference to archetypal peasants, shoes, the life of the artist or culturally coded knowledge systems. In this sense the picture is self-contained, and contains a story. Again we can say that a temporally discrete object such as a work of art can contain a story.

From looking at the three examples, two *PROUNs* and Van Gogh's picture, there are two immediate observations. The first is a question and the second an objection. The question asks why it is that we find the same story in every example? The objection questions the pictures, their analysis as spatial constructions, and as self-contained objects. Considering the objection will provide an answer to the question.

The pictures are all two-dimensional in that they are marked planes. The support has a third, depth dimension and if we look at the surface of the plane through a microscope it is also three-dimensional. However seen from an appropriate viewing distance the material support for the picture is not significant in the picture's structure. When I consider the pictures as three dimensional, which is the activity that goes with the "making sense of" story, I am making things up based on a prior understanding of space and how space is usually arranged. In which case the objection must be that, if I require prior understanding to acknowledge the picture as containing a story does the story exist in my understanding of the prior knowledge and therefore outside the picture. Schapiro and Heidegger leveraged knowledge from outside the picture, whether it was the life and times of Van Gogh or the effect of age and repeated use on leather shoes, to identify their stories. In what way is my understanding of three-dimensionality different to their understanding of Van Gogh and leather shoes? If the story lies in my understanding of three-dimensionality how is that then in the picture? Might it not be more accurate to say that the *PROUN* is an illustration of the complexities surrounding our understanding of space?

There are two not unrelated ways to address this objection. We can consider the type of knowledge that we are using and see if it is in some way different to the

type of knowledge that Schapiro and Heidegger are using. We can also look at our understanding of space as a tool.

Tacit Knowledge

Michael Polanyi, (1891-1976), in *The Tacit Dimension*, identifies a type of knowledge that we can not say.¹⁴² That is, there are things that we know but we cannot say what they are, and we cannot transmit them. Polanyi chooses teaching a physical skill such as riding a bicycle as an example. Presumably if a skill can be taught then that act of transmission would indicate that the teacher can “tell” the knowledge. However Polanyi notes that no amount of telling will enable a student to ride a bicycle. The student has to actually ride the bicycle to get knowledge of the gestalt process. Whilst the teacher may be able to put the student in a position where they can learn all the different elements that go towards the whole activity that is riding a bicycle, the student has to coordinate the elements for themselves. And further once the student has learnt to ride a bicycle they too are unable to say exactly what it is that they do.

The bicycle example also demonstrates two sorts of knowledge that Polanyi describes as focal knowing and subsidiary knowing. Focal knowing is “knowing by attending too “ that is attending to the whole of something, whilst subsidiary knowing is the knowledge that we are relying on but not attending to as we attend to a greater whole.¹⁴³ In the bicycle example there is a whole that we call riding a bicycle that we can attend to, we can even focus our attention on different elements of the whole such as peddling. As we ride the bicycle we may be attending to coordinating our body balance with the pedalling, or with the steering but we are not concentrating on our depth perception knowledge as we apply the brakes in time to stop at a stop sign. Depth perception and how we integrate that into bicycle riding is subsidiary knowledge that we call on as part of the, ‘how to ride a bicycle’ knowledge that we are attending to. As we approach the stop sign

¹⁴² Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Double Day, 1983).

¹⁴³ Polanyi, “Tacit Knowing: Its Bearing on Some Problems of Philosophy,” p601.

we are attending to the act of riding a bicycle and applying the breaks at an appropriate time with appropriate force and to do that we are using our knowledge of space and depth without necessarily considering how we can describe that knowledge.

Spatial awareness is also a subsidiary knowledge when we attend to a picture. Indeed looking a picture pre supposes an understanding of space. Understanding two-dimensional space allows us to recognise that the picture is within its boundaries. Outside those boundaries is not the picture. Our understanding of three-dimensional space builds on the two-dimensional object recognition by allowing us to see a picture as being, in the case of wall art for example, on the wall rather than as the wall. Without this knowledge we cannot attend to the picture as a picture.

Once we have identified the picture as a picture we can use spatial knowledge to organise the picture itself both in terms of the two dimensional juxtaposition of compositional elements, and the three dimensional understanding that accompanies depth perception which gives rise to representation and creation of space within the picture plane. Knowledge of space precedes any knowledge of the content of the picture whether the picture is a construction of geometric forms or a representation of objects from life. As such it is a different order of knowledge to the knowledge about the artist or shoes that Schapiro and Heidegger are using in their understanding of Van Gogh's painting. The technical, historical and cultural knowledge that they bring to the picture is inline with Polanyi's, "focal knowing" or, "Knowing by attending to". It is not tacit knowledge, where as in their discussion around the purpose and origin of the shoes, for Schapiro and Heidegger the spatial knowledge is the tacit knowledge that allows them to recognise the picture as a picture. In that sense they are using spatial knowledge as a tool.

Knowing As A Tool Ready To Hand.

Thinking, or possibly not thinking, of tools reminds us that just as Polanyi divides knowing into 'focal knowing' and 'subsidiary knowing', so Heidegger divides tools into two classes, that is tools 'ready to hand' or tools 'present at hand'.¹⁴⁴ A tool ready to hand is a tool that we use to achieve a goal without considering or attending to the tool. A tool 'present at hand' is one that engages our attention as a theoretical object. Most tools do not do this unless we are either learning to use them or they are broken. If a tool is broken or not operating as expected then we are forced to consider the attributes of the tool rather than the outcomes of using that tool. Using a hammer as an example, we can happily drive nails with a hammer with out considering what it is about the hammer that makes this possible. Should the hammer be made out of marshmallow then we would be unable to drive nails with it. In which case we would be forced to consider what attributes the hammer would have to have for it to be able to hammer. In the case of the marshmallow hammer we would be led to the conclusion that a hammer should be harder than the thing being hammered. Polanyi's 'subsidiary knowing' is a tool ready to hand.

It is the knowing that we use to achieve a goal with out considering what it is we know or how we know it.

In the *PROUNs*' two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional space our subsidiary knowledge about space is cast into the spot light as being for all intents and purposes broken. The *PROUNs* do not settle into a coherent space. Instead there are multiple spaces that compete. The tool ready to hand becomes a tool present at hand. In the case of the two *PROUNs* space is destabilised through contradictory statements regarding the two-dimensional presentation of depth. In the Van Gogh picture we see space represented through tone and volume but questioned by the shoelace and the shoes' relationship to a defined ground plane. We see the pictures as two-dimensional objects that activate a three-dimensional understanding only to find that understanding questioned through the competing space and spatial inconsistency.

¹⁴⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

This discussion of types of knowledge and tools was prompted by a question and an objection. The question was, why is it that all three examples deliver a similar story? We can see that the narratives are different but the area of concern is the same. The objection was that the story requires knowledge of three-dimensional space, which would on the face of it suggest that the story is not contained within the picture, but requires knowledge external to the picture. In response to the objection I have argued that a general understanding of three dimensional space is firstly, foundational to understanding that a picture is a picture and secondly a subsidiary type of knowledge, that is knowledge that we use in the manner of a tool to achieve an out come. In our examples the tool is, to some extent, broken, and so the tool is brought to our attention hence each picture, despite the different narratives, activates the common area of concern thereby calling the same story, the need to make sense, of into time. This also explains why the *PROUNs* serve as example since they are overtly playing with space as opposed to the Van Gough that uses space as a tool rather than a subject.

In this chapter we have tested the proposition that a temporally discrete object can contain story. In earlier chapters we have defined story, as opposed to narrative, as a statement that activates an area of concern. We also illustrated the difference between looking at the picture as a self-contained thing and as an illustration of an idea outside itself. As part of this understanding we separated the picture from its author and the history or narrative surrounding its manufacture and subsequent timeline. In the last chapter, after considering Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes*, which was brought to our attention by a debate between Heidegger and Schapiro over the correct narrative to associate with the picture, we settled on two of El Lissitzky's *PROUNs* as test subjects. The initial description of the *PROUNs* as two-dimensional objects resulted in an almost unreadable circumlocution. Switching to a three dimensional description revealed that the *PROUNs* where indeed a statement that activated a field of concern with out demanding knowledge beyond the spatial knowledge required to see them as pictures. In this way we can say that it is possible for temporally discrete object such as a work art to contain a story.

The next concluding chapter will provide an opportunity to look back at where I been, as I have moved from positioning the question as a proposition and defining terms, to testing that proposition.

Reviewing the journey will naturally lead to speculation about the implications for further study in particular within the articulation and rearticulation of space within the photographic paradigm.

Chapter 6. Conclusion.

In this concluding chapter I bring together the elements of the preceding chapters, and underscore the study's original contribution to knowledge. The chapter is in short sections. The first section states the purpose and field of study. Section two covers the hermeneutic method and how the study arrived at a definition of story.

The third section describes testing and confirming the proposition through close analysis of El Lissitzky's *PROUNs*, whilst section four suggests implications of and areas of further enquiry coming from this study. The final section draws the elements together as it restates the study's question and findings.

1

We are used to pictures being used as *illustrations* of knowledge. What is uncertain is the possibility that a picture on its own could be a *statement* of knowledge.

Positioning stories as a special form of knowledge statement this study set out to explore the relationship of works of art to knowledge statements by testing the proposition that a temporally discrete object such as a work of art can contain a story.

The study tests the proposition through a close analysis of two of El Lissitzky's *PROUNs*.

2

Before looking closely at the *PROUNs* the study had to firstly define a hermeneutic approach, secondly define story, and thirdly demonstrate why the *PROUNs* are a suitable test subject.

Defining a hermeneutic approach allowed for the subjects to be considered as being independent from the circumstance surrounding their creation and the intentions of the artist. This was important if the *PROUNs* were to contain, rather than reference, a story.

Since the study is in response to considerations around the ability of a work of art to contain a knowledge statement, and the study proposed using stories as an example of a special form of knowledge statement, it was necessary to spend time demonstrating how the study came to understand stories to be statement. It does this:

- Firstly by identifying examples of the term 'story' in common use. 'Story' is used to describe news reports, fairy tales, the fashion industry, the quick analysis of a crime scene, the overarching, single sentence description of a movie, and a form of lying. In each case the story is independent of the events that are being described. The events are the plot. The story is found in the framing that forms the narrative, which is the telling of the events, and it is the narrative that invokes the story, which suggests that story exists independently of the narrative.
- Secondly 'story' is characterized as a statement that suggests how the world should be in response to an area of concern. In so doing we are drawing on Foucault's idea of a statement as a function that invokes a field of relationships. In terms of the story the area of concern is the field of relations. The narrative organizes the events, or plot, so as to activate a pre-existing area of concern. The story is a statement we can make in response to that area of concern that pre-exists the narrative.
- Thirdly, building on the idea of story as a statement, I argue that story exists outside time and that narrative is the way we bring the story into time. Further that we experience story as a gestalt.

As preparation for engaging with the *PROUNs* as test subjects I looked at Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes*. Heidegger had used the painting of shoes to illustrate the nature of equipment. In doing so he suggested that the shoes belong to an archetypal peasant. Taking Heidegger literally Schapiro offered another story to explain the shoes and why Van Gogh painted them. This exchange provides the opportunity to examine a picture that has narratives attached. Whilst it is interesting that the narratives both invoke the same nobility of toil story, neither version is in the picture. In both cases the picture is an illustration, pointing to

knowledge of either the effect of time and wear on leather, the life and times of the artist or both.

Taking time to look at the Van Gogh picture is important since it clearly demonstrates a work of art as an illustration. We know what we are not looking for in a *PROUN*. The same can be said of *Khad Gadya*, El Lissitzky's illustrated children's book, which required specialized, culturally encoded knowledge to understand. What we find in these examples is a work of art acting as a mirror reflecting knowledge as opposed to a vessel containing knowledge.

As a final preparation for looking at the test *PROUNs*, the study considered *Of 2 Squares*. In this, El Lissitzky's short picture book made up of *PROUNs*, we confirmed the *PROUNs'* potential as a test subject.

3

Testing the proposition required a close inspection and description of a *PROUN*. This study chose two *PROUNs*. The first, *PROUN* ca. 1923 revealed that whilst it was possible to describe the picture as two-dimensional, using three dimensions was easier, and more accurate. It was in this discovery that the study found a story contained within a temporally discrete object.

Remembering the definition of story as defined in Chapter Three, this study argues that the test *PROUNs*, *PROUN* ca. 1928 and *PROUN* 1924-5, are statements that activate an area of concern that corresponds to a "need to make sense of" story. Further, following the arguments outlined in chapters Two and Four, the *PROUNs* are considered as self contained and temporally discrete objects, that is, the analysis is of the picture in the moment of viewing and in relation to neither the life and times of its creator, nor any intention that its creator may have had. As such the study confirms the proposition that a temporally discrete object such as a work of art may contain a story.

That the study found the same need to make sense of story, in both *PROUNs* and in the Van Gogh painting raised a concern that the story relied on spatial knowing external to the pictures. The study argues that spatial knowledge is firstly a prerequisite for seeing the pictures as pictures and secondly, drawing on and making links between Michael Polanyi and Martin Heidegger, a subsidiary knowledge that we use as a tool.

4

Testing the proposition has implications beyond the quest to find a story in a temporally discrete work of art. The study uses space as a tool for identifying and organizing the objects in the test pictures. The *PROUNs* ask a viewer to use imagination to organize two-dimensional objects in terms of three-dimensional space. Considering virtual space as imagined space reified, what are the implications of picture making in virtual space and what is virtual space's relation to real space in terms of photographic indexicality? The studio practice part of this thesis takes this question as its subject.

Extrapolating from the *PROUNs*, with their abstract constructions, to figurative art it is possible that we can find universal knowledge statements that extend beyond human interactions with space to social relationships, and experience of what it means to navigate an emotional landscape.

What is not clear from this dissertation study is whether it is possible to make a new statement. Since story statements are pre-existing, all be it outside time, the story statements cannot be considered new knowledge. They may provide new understandings. This in turn provokes an awkward existential or metaphysical question along the lines of, is it possible that all knowledge is pre existing outside time and do new knowledge statements act to bring that knowledge into time?

This dissertation makes an original contribution to knowledge by firstly drawing together ideas around stories, statements, hermeneutics, tacit knowledge and ontology to define stories as specialised knowledge statements. Secondly, it identifies spatial knowledge as a tool for organising perceptual events that happen at the same time, and uses that tool to test a proposition. And thirdly this study finds that a temporally discrete object, such as a work of art, may contain a story.

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Appendix 1

Application by Tim Thomas to Visual Arts Post Graduate Study.

Studio Practice Component.

Aims of the Proposal.

General aims of the Studio Practice.

The studio practice will produce work in response to a perceived inability of photographic practice to represent the world as it is rather than as it appears to be through a single point, single moment, optical system. This will involve experimentation in the manipulation of picture space through photo-montage and collage with a view to creating wall art.

The experiments will seek to provide data and test ideas around the depiction and perception of space with in a photographic construct that includes perceptual events occupying the same space and different times, the same time but different spaces and different spaces and times.

The subjects of the photographs will be drawn from the mundane and vernacular of material culture.

Prior Practice and Experience

This work will build on previous work that relates to photographs as a non descriptive referent, and photographs that act as signs that point to themselves. This stems from an interest in the photograph as an object separate from the subject or content of the image.

In my Honor's thesis I made pictures that question the ability of a picture to adequately inform a viewer of any thing beyond the marked surface of the picture. To do this I photographed houses as manifestations of a perfect world. The pictures invited the viewer to speculate about the people in side the houses, whilst at the same time deliberately only providing a façade or masque on which to base these speculations. This work followed on from an earlier experiment in which, using a microscope, I photographed letters from the pages of a variety of books and displayed them as specimens. The letters were greatly enlarged so as to further remove them from their context and arranged so that they could be read as a word, in this case "egg" which was then contradicted by a photographic picture of a pear, also displayed as a specimen. The effect was to make pictures which whilst having an indexical link to the real world had no meaning beyond themselves.

My approach to the topic and the relevance of the Sub-Thesis to the Studio Practice...

Where the Studio practice is a practical exploration of the nature of photographic space the Dissertation Component will be a theoretical investigation into the

nature of that exploration. Over the six years of the research project it is expected that the scope of the project will change both as a result of the Dissertation and Studio Components of the study, when ideas articulated under the Dissertation Component are tested in the

Methods, Processes and Materials.

I will be working on photographs. This may involve a darkroom practice and will involve a digital practice.

I will be investigating the production of a physical negative from a digital file as an output option.

I will also investigate forming a relationship with the Photomedia Workshops Inkjet Research Facility, depending on where my investigations lead.

Context

This study comes about against a background of increasing visual realism with 3D digital modelling. In the on-line fora that deal with 3D digital modelling the indicators of success revolve around representations of a photographic reality of form, space texture and light. These attributes are what makes photography the bench mark of realism.

With in fine art photography Bill Henson and David Hockney have produced work that tests the ideas of space beyond that contained with in an optical single point convention.

Bill Henson, *Untitled 2000 to 2003*

In *Untitled 2000 to 2003* Henson has explored an extended space.

There is the space occupied by the figures and the no mans land edge of town space of the twilight industrial structures. This space conforms to photographic notions of perspective and of a fixed point single moment view. There is also allusion to another space in the form of projections onto the figures' bodies. These projections whilst being indecipherable contain their own optical perspective which becomes warped when it is mapped over the un-flat people. The projection space is used in part to define the three dimensionality of the figures. Space from one space intersects with space from another.

Despite the multi-space components these pictures are representations of the space with in the fields of view covered by the camera at the moment that the shutter was released. There is still the indexical link between that moment and the photograph.

There is more than physical space with in these pictures. Henson has used locations that are nowhere. They are not defined or mapped. They are edge places, the edge of town, a cross roads, the place where one thing becomes another. Like wise the models are no longer children but not yet adults. They are in a between stage. In using these interstitial elements Henson is invoking an inner, psychological space, and in so doing breaking down the space between the viewer and the picture.

David Hockney, *Joiners 1982 to 1987*

Hockney experiments with photography and multipoint perspective, work as a critique of the unnatural/unhuman photographic presentation of the world. People don't see from a fixed point with one eye closed neither do they see for only an instant. (Hockney 1984)

The joiners are made as a collage of many photographs, taken over a period of time from multiple viewpoints that together make a representation of space and objects. These collages acknowledge the process of seeing in a way that the photograph does not. They define space as something that we experience rather than as something that is.

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The first of these is the fact that the...
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Appendix 2

Application by Tim Thomas to Visual Arts Post Graduate Study.

Dissertation component

Aims of the Proposal

What are the general aims of the research program proposed? Please outline the topic of your proposed study, the nature of your project and its anticipated outcomes .

General Aims of this study

A photograph has embedded within it a blue print of an optical system that is very similar to our own eyes. This means that a photograph renders reality in a way that is very familiar to us. Objects in a photograph have the appearance of being true to life in respect of optical perspective and the rendition of tone and colour. The general aim of this study is to question the necessity of this state with reference to optical perspective.

This is not a new idea in that, with the advent of photography, painting appears to have dispensed with optical perspectival conventions, and in the early C20th there were photographic practitioners, (Moholy_Nagy, El Lissitzky, Edmund Teske and Man Ray, among others) who sought to demonstrate new ways of seeing through photographic experiments that more closely reflected the cognitive side of visual perception . More recently there have been re-articulations of this desire to photograph outside the boundaries imposed by single view point optics. David Hockney's "Joiners" are an example of this.

It is the aim of this study to contextualise this practice against a background of new digital technologies, and to research, questions relating to the depiction of space as represented by photographic imaging, and to further formulate a framework within which photography can produce images of things, firstly as they are, rather than as they are projected on to our retinas, and secondly that includes the cognitive side of the visual process.

In *The Optical Unconscious* Krause describes developments in the visual arts surrounding the DaDaist and Surrealist movements. The work she describes tracks the movement of visual art away from an optical representation towards a conceptual representation as the image becomes less an illustration of the world and more a collection of signs, the objects within the image being arranged to suit an iconic rather than indexical meaning.

Since optical perspective is used to create an image of the relationship between objects and between the spaces, or space, they occupy, is it possible to create photographic images that describe space without reference to optical perspective?

To understand space as a thing, rather than a convenient construct to put things in, requires an understanding of space beyond the experience of seeing space. We experience space quite differently as we move through it, to how we see it. In any picture there are a number of spaces that are referenced. These lie in the picture as picture space, with in the boundaries of the picture as the framed space, of the picture as in the space that the picture occupies, the viewers space, and story or psychological space which might include the metaphorical space between the picture and the viewer. Would removing the reliance on an optical perspective allow a more accurate articulation of any or all of these spaces?

One way to talk about space is to talk about perceptual events that occur simultaneously. For two things to exist at the same time with out being separated in space is for the things to be one thing. We use space to separate perceptual events that occupy the same moment in time. Photography has generally been concerned with capturing a moment in time. This study will seek to develop and extend the understanding of the photograph as a continuum of time. Can a photograph be made such that it describes an experience over time?

How does the proposal relate to your prior practice and experience?

My previous work has used the photograph image as a sign, and as such I have been interested in the iconic link between the image and the perceptual experience of the subject in the real world. This has led to an interest in representing the real world as flat, that is, not engaging in photographic practices that that portray three dimensionality of an object, whilst retaining texture and detail.

I have pursued this idea due to an observed inadequacy of the photographic image to either describe the world as it is with out reference to signs encoded with in the optical system, or provide an accurate description for the way we see. This is analogous to comparing a Fred Williams landscape with an Ansell Adams landscape.

In my Honours thesis I made pictures that question the ability of a picture to adequately inform a viewer of any thing beyond the marked surface of the picture. To do this I photographed houses as manifestations of a perfect world. The pictures invited the viewer to speculate about the people in side the houses, whilst at the same time deliberately only providing a façade or masque on which to base these speculations. This work followed on from an earlier experiment in which, using a microscope, I photographed letters from the pages of a variety of books and displayed them as specimens. The letters were greatly enlarged so as to further remove them from their context and arranged so that they could be read as a word, in this case "egg" which was then contradicted by a photographic picture of a pear, also displayed as a specimen. The effect was to make pictures which whilst having an indexical link to the real world had no meaning beyond themselves.

What is the relevance of the Sub-thesis or Dissertation to the Studio Practice component?

If the Dissertation is to question the articulation of space with in photography, then the studio practice will seek to make work in response to those questions,

with a view to testing ideas generated in the Dissertation. It is hoped that the Studio Practice will generate data, which will add to the dissertation.

The sort of questions that the Studio Practice will set out to answer are along the lines of, 'Is it possible to include in a photographic picture's field of view perceptual events that occupy different spaces and times, whilst maintaining a continuum?' Photomontage and photo collage may be useful starting points, in which case the Dissertation will aim to contextualise photomontage and collage within a digital workflow in which an image is a data set that can be reused and reinterpreted without destroying its indexical nature, thereby maintaining the relationship between the referent and its sign.

In this way the Dissertation and the Studio Practice can be seen to be working one from the other.

Methods and resources

What is distinctive about your approach to your topic?

As a way of approaching this topic I will be considering what the world looks like with my eyes shut and how can I make a photograph that shows the world in that way. By questioning the photographic representation of space I will be looking for a mode of photographic representation makes sense of the world on more than the optical level.

What methods and/or processes and materials do you intend to use?

The argument will be made based on the theoretical developments of Maynard in *The Engine of Visualization* [Maynard, P. 1977] who foregrounds technologies of visualization in his account of twentieth century art.

Maynard treats the photograph as an aid to visualisation or remembering. (Maynard 1977). He does not look at the photograph as containing semantic units that need decoding. As a way around the post-modern search for endless levels of meaning he looks at the use of photography as a means of increasing the viewers powers of visualisation not only of the subject content of the image but also of the situation in which it was taken. This challenges the understanding of photography as being about photographs which in turn are about their subject. Treating the photograph as a mechanical process or tool allows Maynard to formulate an understanding of the photographic image that includes the "thingness" of the photograph.

I wish to apply this idea to the photographic experiments of early C20th artists such as El Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy, who saw in photography a way of exploring the process of seeing and, in a Soviet Marxist context, an example of dialectic arising out of collaged elements on a picture plane.

To consider this idea of a picture plane and the collaged elements I will make use of the dualism of figure/field and not-field/not-figure as presented by Krauss (Krauss 1993). Krauss uses this distinction to describe the leaning towards abstraction in painting. I hope to develop this idea with a view to developing a description of dimensionality with regard to the work produced within the studio part of my research.

Context

The study will look at pre-digital experiments in photomontage and collage and using the ideas formulated in Maynard (1977) to see how these experiments fit into the Maynard model of photography as an aid to imagination.

It will look at contemporary practitioners, such as Bill Henson whose work includes montage and photographed projections, and Ang Lee whose use of multi frame collage in *The Hulk* articulated a comic book representation of space with a view to defining the use of space in photography.

The study will look at the relevance of photography against a background of 3D modeling. It will raise questions about the need for continued photographic representation of visual reality.

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