

**ON THE SERIOUS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF HUMOROUS ART**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

**MASTER IN VISUAL ARTS**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**JANUARY 2007**

**DECLARATION**

**Student number 0628-473-6**

**I declare that ON THE SERIOUS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF HUMOROUS ART is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.**

.....  
**SIGNATURE**  
**(MRS AM VAN TONDER)**

.....  
**DATE**

## SUMMARY

Title:

On the serious social implications of humorous art

Summary:

Modern humour appears to initiate the deconstruction of modern correspondence thinking. A close examination shows the opposite, namely that modern humour forms part of correspondence thought in a complicated reciprocal relationship of disruption and support. Ironically, humour is particularly suited to explicating the deconstruction of correspondence thinking in poststructuralist language theories by being prone to refute cornerstone principles of modernism such as truth, rationality, reliability and permanence. This dissertation focuses on the exceptional suitability of humour to adapt to the loss of the centre and to demonstrate the shift from the modernist ontological approach to the postmodernist creative metaphorical approach to art. Humour, like metaphor, reinvents meaning rather than discovers it; it remains open-ended instead of offering closure. It becomes a valid creative option and enters a new dynamic into a postmodern culture of play where truth and meaning remain infinitely suspended in an ungrounded state of possibility.

List of key terms:

Artistic ontology, artistic teleology, becoming, correspondence thinking, humour, logocentrism, loss of centre, metonymy, non-logical, open-ended, play, possibility, wandering

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- (2) Catalogue for an exhibition entitled *Bennie's Games* held at the Bell Roberts Art Gallery, Cape Town, 19 July to 12 August 2006.

## PREFACE

As a woman sculptor who creates huge environmental pieces, I have always found humour an exceptional device to deal with the tribulations and consequences of my tendency to undertake the impossible. I am, in other words, constantly chasing windmills or trying to empty the ocean with a spoon. I have always felt that art can take itself too seriously. This does not mean that I am not serious about my art; only that art should not remain remote and aloof in an elevated sphere which ordinary mortals, uninitiated into the complexities of aesthetics, cannot enter. My own humorous art is thus an extension of this viewpoint.

This dissertation examines postmodern humorous art. This area of study is undertaken, firstly, because certain critical assumptions concerning the artistic value of humorous art have even today not been fully resolved. Secondly, it is an invaluable discipline in contextualising my art within the broader scope of a postmodern artistic milieu where many boundaries have been shifted in a playful attitude of irony that is encapsulated by the following Zen saying: "Eat a love toad every morning and nothing worse will happen to you for the rest of the day."

I wish to thank my supervisors, Mr JP van der Watt and Dr FJ Potgieter, for their faith in me and for their support. I am deeply indebted to my models and many individuals who played a part in the making of my work, most of all to Alan Parker for his constant support and Reginald Lewies (my assistant of the past 17 years). I wish to thank my friends for their unfailing patience with me and my studies. I especially want to thank my life-partner Gerome for his enthusiasm, patience and financial support; and my three children Yancke, Romy and Kristian for loving a mother who makes art. Lastly, I wish to thank my Heavenly Father.

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Fig 90: Anita van Tonder. *Bennie's Games* (2003/6). Close-up of the dog in *Tiny Dorfling*. Plaster, Acrylic resin, wire mesh and porcupine quill: 80 x 30 x 32 cm. Artist's collection (photograph taken by Jonty Handsworth; reproduced by kind permission of Jonty Handsworth).

Figs 91 (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e): Viewers participate by playing the games at the Oudtshoorn KKNK 2006 exhibition of *Bennie's Games* (Photograph [a] taken by Alet Pretorius; reproduced by kind permission of Alet Pretorius. Photographs [b], [c] and [d] taken by Franci Cronje; reproduced by kind permission of Franci Cronje. Photograph [e] taken by Kristel Loots; reproduced by kind permission of Kristel Loots).

Fig 92: Anita van Tonder. *Bennie's Games*, as exhibited at the Bell Roberts Galley in Cape Town from 19 July to 12 August 2006 (photograph taken by Gerhard Hanekom; reproduced by kind permission of Gerhard Hanekom).

Figs 93 and 94: *Miss Pucman* and *Bennie* on opening night, 19 July 2006, at the Bell Roberts Gallery in Cape Town (photographs taken by Kristel Loots; reproduced by kind permission of Kristel Loots).

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COD: Concise Oxford Dictionary

KKNK: Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees

MED: Microsoft Encarta Dictionary

MEE: Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia

NMMU: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

OCA: Oxford Companion to Art

OCP: Oxford Companion to Philosophy

## INTRODUCTION

In 1841 the poet Robert Browning (1812-1889) (Fowler 1987:262) wrote the following: "God's in his heaven, All's right with the world" (Pegrum 2000:5). Less than a century after him, the poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) (Fowler 1987:343) wrote: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" (Harvey 1996:11). A mere fifty years later, the novelist William Gass wrote: "It's as though you had discovered that your wife were made of rubber: the bliss of all those years, the fears...from sponge" (Ryan 1985:50).

The words of these three writers contain the parameters of this dissertation. They collectively express the major shift from the early modern perception of the world as being logically ordered and supported by ontological structures of truth to the postmodernist loss of faith in truth and reason and the deconstruction of these structures.

The central argument of this dissertation is that humorous art has the exceptional potential to demonstrate this deconstruction. Humour is most suited to illustrate the artistic shift from the ontological to the metaphorical which resulted from the postmodern loss of belief in truth, logic, stability and permanence of structure because humour has no need of them in the first place. The final conclusion is that it is indeed the loss of modern centring principles that allowed a new freedom of ironic play and gaming in postmodern cultural products. This loss can thus be seen, from a positive viewpoint, as making way for a new and dynamic inventiveness in postmodern art.

In order to illustrate this argument, the humorous works of the eighteenth century English artist William Hogarth (1697-1764) will serve as typical examples of the modern ontological view of art as a means to find closure of truth (Uglow 1997: xi). The author's own works and those of the contemporary American humorous artist Cindy Sherman (1954- ) who is considered, says Harvey (1996:7), "a major figure in the postmodern movement" will serve as examples of the postmodern metaphorical approach where art no longer provides truth or closure but becomes playful, inventive and open-ended.

For the sake of clarity, this dissertation consists of two parts. The first two chapters focus upon modern humour and the ontological approach to art. It is argued that modern humour formed part of modern correspondence thinking and its ontological approach to

art despite the initial impression that it seems to be the first instance of its deconstruction. The remaining three chapters, which focus on postmodern humour, argue that (a) humour is exceptional in demonstrating the postmodern deconstruction of the modern correspondence paradigm, and (b) humorous art has tremendous potential to give visual expression to the postmodern creative metaphorical approach to art.

The method can be seen as historic and hermeneutic. Chapter one provides a historical overview of the modernist search for universal principles and the correspondence mode of thinking. According to correspondence thinking, the application of human logic and rationality to surface patterns which were made available to man would reveal deeper immutable ontological truth principles about being and meaning that were already in existence somewhere. The modernist ontological and teleological approach to art is then viewed as part of this modernist correspondence thinking. The purpose of these discussions is to prepare the stage for an analysis of modern theories of humour. This analysis involves a close reading of five types of modern theories of humour in order to uncover what Nietzsche (quoted by Degenaar 1986:25) identified as hidden traces of a "philosophical mythology" that already reflects a certain "understanding of the world" in these theories. A careful study of these theories of humour reveals concealed evidence that modern humour was involved in a complicated reciprocal relationship with correspondence thinking and modern principles and was not, as it at first seems, the first signs of its deconstruction.

An analysis of the humorous works of William Hogarth, as being typical of modern humorous art which encountered the world in a correspondence manner, is undertaken in chapter two. Hogarth allows the characters *in* his works to engage in illogical behaviour in order to provoke laughter, but the logical formal structure of the works *themselves* remains within and pays homage to the prevailing modern artistic ontology. His works also clearly propagate a typically modernist teleological movement towards a pre-formulated ideal, moral and ethical standard by suggesting the possibility of human reform or progress. Paulsen (1992:207-14) relates many instances where Hogarth frequently voiced his opinions about how art could be improved in the direction of what he believed good art should be. He also expressed this in some of his satirical works, such as *Time Smoking a Picture* (1761) (see Fig 26) and *The Battle of the Pictures* (1744-1745) (see Fig 27). This suggests that he believed in the linear teleological development of all art towards one pre-established ideal goal. This places Hogarth's art within the

modern correspondence paradigm, even though his humour seems to be an early instance of its deconstruction.

This analysis establishes modern humour and humorous art as part of the modern correspondence world view to prepare a platform for the central argument by enabling a comparison between the modern ontological approach and the postmodern metaphorical approach to art in general and humour in particular.

The third chapter starts with a detailed explanation of metaphor. The purpose of this is to clarify the difference between *literal meaning* (which functions in a correspondence manner by providing closure) and *metaphoric meaning* (which is open-ended and therefore also more inventive and more disruptive of correspondence). This clarification is essential to an understanding of the postmodern creative metaphorical approach to art as opposed to the modernist ontological approach. The difference between traditional metaphor and metonymy is also pointed out. Metaphor retains traces of correspondence thinking by relying upon the similarities between two things in a literal comparative way in order to make a point without permanently disrupting the existing perception of them. Metonymy, on the other hand, drags meaning from one thing to another – which then becomes something entirely different – so that it is more disruptive of correspondence than the traditional metaphor. This differentiation is relevant because postmodern creative metaphor is more often of the metonymic kind. Metonymy, humour and postmodern play also share certain characteristics, such as a disregard for pre-existing truth structures.

This is followed by a synoptic historical overview of the general decline of belief in modernist centring principles of truth. Evidence of an ever-increasing philosophical questioning of the modern notion that the world is perfectly and logically ordered by permanent structures of unquestionable truth, as it gained prominence from the mid- to late nineteenth hundreds to the present, will be illustrated by respectively addressing the theories of the following three thinkers namely; Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) (Cahoone 2004:109), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) (Cahoone 2004:174) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) (Cahoone 2004:225). The controversies, discrepancies and finer nuances or shifts in the theories of these thinkers are not taken into consideration because they are not relevant to this dissertation. Their theories serve merely to illustrate the general shift in thinking *from* the modern belief in the singular supremacy of logic and rationality as a means to discover permanent truth about what it is to be fully human *to* a

postmodern attitude of ironic doubt that such truth can be discovered in this way. For example, Heidegger is quoted by Kuchler (1994:241) as arguing in favour of a "non-metaphysical" and "non-logical" way of encountering the world, since the prevailing "logico-metaphysical" way of inquiring into being has not produced any real understanding of it.

Despite their differences in opinion and historical position towards this tendency to subject all theories to philosophical interrogation, both Heidegger and Derrida argue respectively that the modern centre of being and meaning is neither stable nor permanent; it is infinitely replaceable and therefore not reliable or even logically predictable. Derrida's theories thus show evidence of the influence of his predecessor. Heidegger questions the modernist belief in the stability and permanence of the centre of being by arguing in his *Letter on Humanism* (2004:178) that all philosophical theories that are based upon metaphysics thus far only attempted to find the truth about beings but never went beyond this thinking to ask what being itself is. He is quoted by Caputo (1970:30) (as explaining in *Der Satz vom Grund*) that because being cannot be an ordering principle for itself, there must be a more original structure beyond being. Derrida (1972:247-249) also argues that structuring is the function of a structure or what makes it a structure; therefore, in order for it *to be* a structure, it must itself be structured by something else. This means that closure is impossible. In *Being and Time* (1996:313-334) Heidegger says that to think into this abyssal nature of being is beyond human rationality. Being, says Heidegger (quoted by Caputo 1970:37) randomly reveals and conceals itself to man as it plays in a way that is not rationally explainable, stable or predictable. Both their theories thus suggest that what the modernist sees as a permanent structure is not stable or predictable but constantly changes as one centre replaces another.

In a cultural and discursive climate where thinkers like Heidegger and Derrida express doubt about the validity of existing metaphysical thinking, distrust logic and question the stability of the centre of truth by identifying the infinite changeability of its play, humour becomes a suitable vehicle of expression and metaphor a viable creative option since neither of them need logic, truth or stability to function successfully in the first place.

Poststructuralist language theory and Derrida's theories in particular deconstruct language as a stable source of truth. Both Heidegger (1971:58) and Derrida (1976:11) see language as a major universally unifying and centring structure in modernist correspondence reasoning. Nietzsche (quoted by Degenaar 1986:81) also argued that the

most significant remaining evidence for the modern belief in fixed external ordering principles can be found in its view of language. Derrida (1976:10) clarifies the prominence of language in correspondence thinking as follows in his *Of Grammatology*:

All the metaphysical determinations of truth, and even one beyond metaphysical ontotheology that Heidegger reminds us of, are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the logos, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the logos, in whatever sense understood: in pre-Socratic or the philosophical sense, in the sense of God's infinite understanding or in the anthropological sense, in the Hegelian or the post-Hegelian sense. Within this logos, the original and essential link to the *phone* has never been broken.

Derrida (2004:225-240) deconstructs this link to the *phone* (the spoken word) as being representative of the *logos* (the spoken word of God which is truth, MEE sv "Logos") by arguing for the recognition of what he calls *différance*, because words are spelt and pronounced differently and can thus have more than one meaning and refer to more than one "truth". He (1976:144) argues that a "violence" of hierarchy is at work in language, whereby certain concepts are given preference over their opposites exactly because they are seen as superior concepts on account of their correspondence to the logos. He shows how these hierarchies can be reversed, infinitely replaced and thus deconstructed. Nietzsche (quoted by Degenaar 1986:15) says that language should never have stood as a guarantee for truth in the first place because it is not truth but metaphor. Degenaar (1986:16) further quotes Nietzsche who saw concepts as "negotiable and not as meanings with a fixed foundation in reality"; therefore "language loses its assumed role of being a vehicle for truth about reality". Stern explains (quoted by Degenaar 1986:16) that language is now "taken to be metaphorical, and therefore [an] inexact, approximate intimation of our being in the world"; it becomes "an aesthetic phenomenon" rather than a keeper of truth.

Whereas modernism saw language as the most important cultural product of man, the bearer of the perfect logic and truth of a higher Being; instability and illogic within language itself are identified and recognised in the postmodern and humour becomes more central to its cultural products. Because humour was already identified, amongst other things, as a "violation" of *logic* (Mendel & Grotjahn 1970:40) and the "absence" of rationality (Kant 1972:176) since Plato (Morreall 1989:249), it can be seen as being exceptionally suited to illustrate the deconstruction of modernist theories and principles that are based on logic and truth. Humorous art has enormous potential to be an

exceptionally appropriate visual illustration of postmodern metaphoric creation; because humour is, in the first place, unpredictable and unstable since it continually recreates itself, never provides closure of truth, and remains open-ended and inventive.

Chapter four reflects on the application and consolidation of this argument with regard to the humorous works of the American postmodern artist Cindy Sherman whose works that will be discussed were created roughly two-and-a-half centuries after Hogarth's. Hogarth's works continue to serve as a means to make a comparative analysis. Heidegger's differentiation between a "non-metaphysical" and "non-logical" way of encountering the world – as opposed to a "logico-metaphysical" encounter (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24) – is used to structure a comparison of the humorous works of these two artists. This comparison illustrates how postmodern metaphorical art like Sherman's does not rely on a correspondence with truth, but remains open-ended and inventive. This makes it deconstructive of the modern ontological approach to art that is found in Hogarth's work, which claims to provide closure of truth by relying on a logical correspondence. Hogarth's humour questioningly ridicules certain aspects of the world he lives in, but Sherman's brings the world we live in into question. Hogarth's humour sustains and propagates correspondence thinking; whereas Sherman uses humour to subvert the icons and ideologies that are representative of this kind of thinking and radically reinvents them.

The final chapter is an analysis of the author's own art which shows how and why it is an example of postmodern humorous play and gaming as a creative option. The purpose of this chapter is to use this art to demonstrate the final argument that it is *because of*, and not *despite*, the loss of all modern centring principles that a new freedom of inventive play is manifested in postmodern art. Richard Rorty's article *From Logic to Language to Play* (1986) is referred to in order to recap and summarise the general shift in creative thought from modern logic to postmodern playful thinking from a historical perspective. Derrida and Heidegger's theories are again engaged in order to explain the intricacies of postmodern play. Despite their differences, both Heidegger and Derrida's theories argue in their respective ways that the modern centre is not stable but subjected to the random movement of its unending ability to be replaced. This movement is identified by Heidegger (2004:180) as the non-teleological or non-logical "play" of being which is unpredictable and not fully comprehensible by the human mind. Therefore, being can never be rationally explained or understood because it is in a constant state of play as it toys with man by alternatively revealing and concealing itself randomly without reason.

The author's work uses humour to demonstrate and visually illustrate this aspect of postmodern play and gaming. Like postmodern play, these works intermittently familiarise and defamiliarise themselves to the viewer in random play but never offer closure of truth. Like Sherman's works, they not only confuse, tantalise and play with the viewer; but also allow him/her to invent his/her own play – thus visually demonstrating the tremendous creative power of open-ended free play. These works are a demonstration of the inventive potential of the postmodern playful metaphorical approach to art, which encourages the formation of different perceptions of what was previously accepted as ontologically fixed and unquestionable. This supports the conclusion that the loss of the modern centre and the loss of faith in logic can be seen as creatively positive.

Postmodern play, like the play of being, should however not be seen as being devoid of all seriousness or as pure frivolity; but rather as a game with serious consequences. As the title of this dissertation suggests, humorous art is involved in social implications that are serious. What follows is an overview of how these implications are addressed. The best place to start is at the beginning, which in this instance is the modernist period.

Modernism simultaneously bore witness to fast changes and technological and scientific advances (or "progress"), and displayed a tireless quest for new knowledge and improvement that resisted change by seeking the stability and certainty of pre-existing centring principles. Spivak (quoted by Derrida 1976:xi) writes that "[h]umankind's common desire is for a stable centre, and for the assurance of mastery – through knowing or possessing." In modernism it can be said that this desire took the form of a search for truth and meaning in pre-existing theories with the aid of human reason, new scientific knowledge and the fixed certainty of some kind of immutable divine ordering presence. Charles Baudelaire (quoted by Harvey 1996:10) wrote in 1863 that modernity is "the fleeting, the contingent" on the one hand and "the eternal and the immutable" on the other hand. This paradoxical modern zeitgeist which embraced change and yet searched for permanence and stability also manifested its contradictory presence in the modern view of humour.

Humour in the form of satire, parody, sarcasm and irony was not balanced and orderly like the classical model, which was the aesthetic norm during the early modern period. It did not display the attributes and principles of Christianity, which was the ethical norm of this time, nor the logic and rationality of the scientific norm of early modernism. Humour

was seen as un-ideal, imperfect, illogical, irresponsible, untruthful, and even cruel and rude. It is described in so many words in modern theories of humour *and* those from antiquity. Yet, although it is seen in modern theories as being disruptive to these norms, it is paradoxically also seen as being supportive of (and even propaganda for) them. Secondly, although humour was illogical, imperfect, etc, modern theories of humour implied the existence of external norms of logic and perfection. Paradoxically, humour did not display a stable teleological movement of conformance to such a norm; but was instead ephemeral, impermanent and prone to change. This suggests that modern humour should be seen as a first sign of the deconstruction of modernist correspondence and idealistic Universalist thinking.

A close examination of modern theories of humour shows that this is merely a superficial assumption. Although modernists viewed humour as harmful, it was *also* seen as being harmless and innocuous. This accorded humour a kind of amnesty which allowed the humorist a larger degree of freedom than the non-humorist. However, this freedom also neutralised any effect which humour could have had on the status quo. Humour was only allowed to function in this separate realm of pardon, set aside for jokes and the like, which do not involve truth and consequently do not have to be taken seriously. Ultimately, this means that modern humour is not as it seems the deconstruction of modernist principles, but part of and conducive to what Kuchler (1994:1) describes as "the metaphysical desire to ground things in principles; to stabilize movement on the basis of laws; to neutralize ambiguity in the hermeneutic move toward the constitution of meaning; and, finally to reduce the multiplicity of phenomena to the one instance that is common to them".

This is why Hogarth was chosen as an example. His humour functions in typical modernist fashion *within* this complicated reciprocal relationship with the different modernist norms. He employs technically advanced methods and techniques of reproduction. His style borrows from the classical and his content from the Christian Bible. To crown it all, his presentation is humorous and his motive is to sell to the very same patrons (with their classical tastes) and to make a name in the very same high art circles that he ridicules in his works. At first glance, his humour seems to disrupt modern correspondence thinking. Yet a closer analysis of his work reveals that in a strange and ironic twist his humour, (in typical modernist fashion) actually relies on, supports and propagates all the external principles that are seen in modern thought as models of what it is to be truly human. His humour can be seen as part of modern correspondence because

it sustains the modern belief that closure of truth can be discovered in pre-existing permanent principles.

The serious social implications of humour in the modern can be summed up as follows: in an ironic twist, rather than being a means of change, modern humour not only accentuated the modernist perception of truth and normality; but also kept things the same as they "had always been". Modern humour supported the norm rather than encouraged difference by accentuating the notion of "otherness" as the imperfection or incongruity within the ideal. It can thus be seen as a tool that was used to shape a modern social consciousness. It encouraged progress towards pre-ordained metaphysical ideals in the utopian hope of improvement. This applied to the modern perception of morality, ethics or religion. It also shaped the perception of the individual self by prescribing fixed models for beauty and perfection or general behaviour which was considered "proper". Modern humorous art largely conformed to a pre-established artistic ontology and teleology, and thus propagated them. Humorous art therefore assisted in shaping and maintaining the modern understanding of meaning and truth.

However, by the time that William Gass wrote the passage that is quoted in the introductory paragraph above, the world had changed drastically and so too had the world view. Humour thus found itself in a completely different relationship with truth. In Gass's postmodern world, truth had become relative, if not non-existent. Poststructuralist language theories proved that meaning was no longer situated in one fixed locus outside of things, where it lay waiting to be discovered as the modernist believed; but was multiplied by infinite possibilities of interpretation and endlessly deferred in a random repetitious motion of play. The release of language from its truth function by poststructuralist language theory which legitimised the free play between word (sign) and meaning opened up a proverbial Pandora's Box which manifested its presence in all the creative disciplines in the postmodern. This opening up can be seen as allowing for the escape of unspeakable artistic mutations which heralded the end of artistry as it was known. It can also be seen as allowing for the invention of new artistic configurations, hitherto prevented by the confinement of creativity within a fixed external truth structure. The positive viewpoint is that the *loss* of the postmodern centre and the notion that only order, balance, stability and rationality can create an aesthetic that is worthy of man's superiority in fact opened up infinite inventive possibilities. The very notion of possibility itself is cancelled out by closure. *Without* the modernist view that art is a

means to gain access to existing truth and meaning, art becomes a metaphor – a continual playful process of renewal and invention of meaning.

Humour functions in the first place outside logic, truth and reason and is therefore inventive in the following ways: It twists words and relies upon misunderstanding. It deliberately creates confusion between a word (image or object) and its traditional meaning. Thus it has great potential to disrupt modernist logocentric thought. Words do not remain pure in their correspondence to one specific literal meaning; but mix, combine and create new hybrids in new metaphorical and humorous configurations. Humour is fleeting and expendable, and makes no claim to provide truth or closure. It is equally at home on toilet walls and on gallery walls. It is neither discreet nor polite. It poses questions but expects no answers. Humour and metaphor are also susceptible to context and do not care for permanence; but thrive instead on change, disruption and their own re-invention when they become part of convention. Humour, like metaphor, is totally unperturbed by any replacement of a centring principle, reversal of rule or amendment to the status quo. It is infinitely adaptable and immediately able to launch itself successfully from the basis of any issue or principle which it chooses to make the target of its ridicule. Because humour shows no respect and immediately destroys any pretence at being representative of the final word or truth about anything, it continually creates the possibility of new viewpoints.

Humorous art like Sherman's have the potential to become a powerful weapon of deconstruction that is perfectly suited to the postmodern Heideggerian view of being which never allows itself to be fully comprehended. Their images are in a perpetual ungrounded movement of play by alternatively concealing and revealing their origins without ever providing closure. Kuchler (1994:6) says that play heralds a postmodern mode of thinking which fundamentally displaces the metaphysical determinations of truth and their underlying interpretations of being which announce a new sense of truth. He writes that this truth "liberates itself from the metaphysical notion of correspondence and adequation in order to turn into something dynamic that is the performative movement of self-production and self-manifestation in a 'manifold praxis' where truth no longer derives from some universal standard or norm." The very loss of or slackness within the centre which was identified by poststructuralist language theories is responsible for this freedom. It creates an artistic culture which invents ironic games with the remnants of modernism that never provide closure but remain open-ended in a state of infinite possibility.

Finally, with regard to the serious implications of postmodern humour stated in the title, the following: this liberation from closure, like the freedom that is accorded to humour on the grounds of triviality, does not come without a price. It is not freedom as it is conventionally known, but the freedom of play. Here nothing is finally grounded and freedom means to perpetually remain within the possibility of becoming, but can never be the realisation of this becoming since that would put an end to the notion of possibility. Postmodern play should not to be viewed as a total loss of seriousness as is often suggested in critical discourse, but as a serious game that is presented in an ironic humorous manner. Postmodern play is not a frivolous attitude that is devoid of all gravity, but an ironic acceptance that closure of truth can never be reached – which has significant social consequences. The author's own humorous work engages in both the penalties and the gains of humorous play in an ironic questioning of what it is "to be" and "to be in" a postmodern world.

Humorous art like Sherman's and the author's do have serious social implications. Humour poses questions which raise a social awareness of the existence of others and viewpoints of groups which were previously marginalised on the grounds of their "otherness" (as compared to the norm). It generates new perceptions of the self. It exposes the constructedness of the existing and provides the opportunity for a change of mind. It unlocks the notion of one truth and creates the possibility of difference, renewal and invention. In fact, the very loss of the centre brought into art what Derrida (quoted by Kuchler 1994:4) calls a "certain laughter and a certain step of dance" and produced as Selden (1989:73) says "a great deal of self-reflexive and self-parodying fiction". This playfulness creates a determination to continue to invent even after the postmodernist William Gass discovered that books do not tell the truth but merely consist of words (Ryan 1985:50). It now becomes an option to recycle the rubber and the sponge which he found his metaphorical wife to be made of and to use it like Sherman and the author: to invent something new that has nothing to do with truth because in the joke, the metaphor, the game and the terrible freedom of the Heideggerian abyss of play "where any kind of ultimate totality becomes unavailable", there is no truth or becoming – only the ironic certainty of possibility (Kuchler 1994:3).

## CHAPTER 1: MODERN THEORIES OF HUMOUR

The focus of this chapter is on an analysis of the modernist endeavour to define humour. The historical period that is relevant to this discussion is the early modernist period which is generally known as *The Age of Reason*, commencing from the early/mid-eighteenth centuries when the English artist William Hogarth (1697-1764) created his humorous works to the present. This endeavour can be understood as being part of the general modernist desire to discover existing ontological principles of "normal" human behaviour. Although this statement is true as far as broad objectives go, a problem arises when one analyses specific modern definitions of humour because these definitions most often define humour as acts that disrupt the expectations of what a "normal" person is. Seen from this perspective, one can argue that modern definitions of humour should *not* be considered along with the modernist endeavour to establish ontological categories and related universal norms, but rather as early attempts of deconstructing the very notion of normativity.

In this chapter the opposite will be argued, namely that early modern theories of humour can be seen as part of modernist *correspondence thinking*. This is so because, on close analysis, it becomes clear that modern humour has not only depended on a reciprocal relationship with normativity to be humorous in the first place; but often acted as a didactic tool for propagating normativity.

Modern theories of humour reveal humour's complex relationship with the modern correspondence paradigm. The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the modernist effort to describe human knowledge and understanding in a particular way. The aim of this investigation is to establish modern theories as instances of correspondence thinking. When one thinks in this way, one believes that truth and meaning have always been in existence somewhere. Man can discover hidden permanent and unquestionable ontological truth by correctly deciphering and understanding its universal surface codes or patterns. This truth can be seen as a perfect design for what it means to be truly human. The hope of those who believe that normality can be described is optimistic. The feeling that such a teleological movement towards a utopian ideal will inevitably result in progress is not what happens in reality. This applies to modern artistic ontology which encourages artists and critics to pronounce that the aim of important art is

to discover its correspondence to such a pre-existing, external, ontological, timeless and transcendental aesthetic essence.

Utopian thinking is also evident in modern artistic teleology in the form of the optimistic belief in a continual logical, linear artistic progression towards the ideal. It forms part of what the modernist saw as the natural correspondence trajectory of reform and progress in which mankind moves to overcome chaos and entropy. This discussion informs the second part of this chapter, namely how the modern correspondence paradigm applies to the modern view of humour.

An analysis of five modern definitions of humour, emphasising the dual understanding of humour, then follows. In these definitions humour is supposed to be an act that disrupts norms while simultaneously supporting the idea of normativity which is defined according to modern correspondence thinking. The conclusion that can be drawn from these definitions is that although modern humour seems to disrupt the norms in modernist correspondence thought, it actually supports its idealising principles. Modern humour belongs to the modernist belief that truth exists in correspondence with fixed principles which are already there. From this thinking, humour has even been credited with the potential to reform. Theories of modern humour are based on the idea that it is possible to give a definition of what it is to be truly human. An example of this mode of thinking is found in the views of Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), the major eighteenth century English literary satirist, who believed it is possible to discover an irreducible universal essence of humour (Runes 1964:626). His view shows that modern theories of humour form part of the modernist correspondence mode of thinking (Halliwell 1991:271).

## **1 MODERN CORRESPONDENCE THEORIES**

It can be said that the modernist correspondence view of the world was essentially a search for certainty. By re-examining what already existed rather than searching for the new, intellectuals were able to show that truth is judged according to facts that are external to it. This kind of thinking seems to be similar to what modernists believed. Truth and knowledge are available to man in some correspondence manner in this kind of world view. Things which are true are simply waiting to be discovered. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century springs to mind. A brief review of what fed modernist thinking can be described as the belief that principles already exist in humans.

In this mode of thought it was believed that the application of a unique godly ability to think logically and rationally which human beings possess would result in the discovery of truth and inevitable progress.

The seventeenth century French philosopher Rene Descartes (1595-1650) believed that truth could be found by applying human reason to every existing principle (Tsanoff 1953:277).<sup>1</sup> The influential eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), (Cahoone 2004:52) later shows a similar humanist slant in his argument in the preface to his *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781 that we already have principles within ourselves according to which "it should be possible to have knowledge of objects *a priori*, determining something in regard to them prior to their being given". Scruton (1981:166) states that another German philosopher Georg Hegel (1770-1831), based his search for truth on the idealistic concept of a universal mind, which he referred to as "The Absolute".<sup>2</sup> Similar views were developed during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the Dutch rationalist and philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and the German philosopher Gottfried Leibnitz (1646-1716) respectively. Leibnitz, in his *Monadology* of 1714 (Scruton 1981:68), wrote that the world is constructed from what he called "Monads" to form a harmonious whole as part of God's plan.<sup>3</sup> The eighteenth century rationalists (Scruton 1981:71) spoke of the *principle of sufficient reason*, whereby they meant that everything is rationally explainable. John Morreall (1989:251), professor of philosophy at the Rochester Institute of Technology, explains in his article *The Rejection of Humour in Western Thought* that the *a priori* knowledge principle can be summed up as follow: "...for the existence of any being or truth of any positive statement, there is something, known or unknown, which makes that thing exist or that statement true". It is believed, says Morreall (1989:251), that this pre-existing truth will be revealed "to an all-knowing mind" which has an understanding of the "rational patterns" that everything should/must correspond to.<sup>4</sup>

Harvey (1996:27) cites the following diverse list of eighteenth and early nineteenth century writers and thinkers who share this mode of thinking: Voltaire, d'Ambert, Diderot, Condorcet, Hume, Adam Smith, Saint Simon, August Comte, Matthew Arnold, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. He then provides the following summary of a complex history which he considers useful for understanding this kind of modernism:

The Enlightenment project...took it as axiomatic that there was only one answer to any question. From this it followed that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if

only we could picture and represent it rightly. But this presumed that there *existed* a single *correct* mode of representation which, if we could uncover it (and this was what scientific and mathematical endeavours were all about) would provide the means to Enlightenment ends.  
(my italics)

What is of importance here is that the modernist correspondence view of the world was essentially a search for certainty which would provide answers to questions concerning truth and meaning.<sup>5</sup> To search in the hope of discovering answers implies that it is believed that truth already exists somewhere. These principles of truth were then seen as universal laws. The eighteenth century French Enlightenment philosopher Condorcet (1743-1884) is quoted by Harvey (1996:13) saying that: "A good law must be a law for everyone in exactly the same way that a true proposition is true for all." Although modernists believed in progress that is generated by scientific and other developments and man's rational abilities<sup>6</sup>, they were backward looking in their search for truth in pre-existing principles such as those of Christianity<sup>7</sup> and antiquity<sup>8</sup>. The ontological strain of modern metaphysics asks "What are we and where do we come from?" while the teleological strain searches by asking "Where are we heading?" Both are motivated by the belief that the truth about our destiny and origin corresponds to pre-ordained principles. Both these types of correspondence thinking manifest their presence in modern theories of art and, consequently, in its theories of humour.

### **1.1 Modern theories of art as instances of correspondence thinking**

In order to be certain of what art is or should be, modern intellectuals had to establish a universal model which encapsulated the essence of art. This meant that a fixed principle already had to be in existence so that it could serve as a measure for a standard of perfection for all art. For modernists, "good" art was art which did justice to man's ontological position as the being with a superior ability to reason. In order to satisfy this requirement for the pre-existing model of art, it had to reflect perfect rationality, balance and order. To find such a model for art, modern intellectuals had to look backwards in history to find a period of aesthetic excellence to which this art could correspond. The model which best suited such a requirement for modern art was found in antiquity. Jenny Uglow (1997:74) writes in *Hogarth, a Life and a World* that the subjects of paintings which ranked the highest in this view were "[c]lassical subjects, stirring moments in history and elevated allegories of personal or civic virtue". Gardner (1980:70) quotes Sir Joshua Reynolds (1732-1792), one of the foremost English painters in Hogarth's time, as saying in his *The Discourses* that it is the "...general opinion of the enlightened part of

mankind" such as "...the poets, orators and rhetoricians of antiquity" that artists should "...receive their perfection from an ideal beauty". Reynolds further suggested that what makes art "great" is something that lies "beyond" art as a copy of nature. He also said that the principle which was laid down for "the excellencies" of what he called "this art" was "far from being new or singular" (MEE sv "Excerpt from the discourses"). Reynolds thus confirmed both the modern belief in the existence of an ideal aesthetic standard that was already in existence somewhere outside art and even nature itself *and* the possible historical prototype which could assist in formulating this standard.

Art was also expected to be worthy of godly perfection. In order to satisfy such a requirement for its perfect pre-existing model, the modernist had to look towards theological principles of goodness and morality that were worthy of the ideal perfection of a Higher Being. Uglow (1997:74) writes that the view held by the eighteenth century elitist patrons and so-called connoisseurs was that the appreciation of "great" art could lead to an understanding of beauty, of nature and hence of the Deity. In this view, says Uglow (1997:74-75), the function of art is "...to improve on nature in order to reach a certain standard of perfection worthy of the Deity" if nature did not provide this in the first place. Morreall (1989:75) writes that in order for art to reflect such a standard of godly perfection, the artist was expected to present an "elevated" universal quality of art and not a replica of the natural. Because man reaches a state of perfection in imitation of God's perfection, he would not merely copy nature and its imperfections. From this perspective, an aesthetic standard that was already in existence is confirmed.

The ontological essence of what good art had "to be" in the modern era consisted of a mix of solemnity, rationality, balance and order according to the existing classical model and the ideal unquestionable logic and ethics of the Higher Mind. Any modern intellectuals who subscribed to this ontological/teleological approach to art directed their aesthetic theories from within the parameters of a fixed *pre-existing* aesthetic standard and identified certain ideal elements as universally representative of the basic "being" (*esse*) of art. This is exactly what modern theorists such as the eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant and the twentieth century critic Clement Greenberg imply in their theories of art. Theories like those of Kant and Greenberg (the latter cites the former as "the first real modernist" [1973:67]) are based on a universal pre-existing artistic ontology.

## 1.2 A modern artistic ontology

In *The Critique of Judgement* Kant (1952:51) wrote: "...the judgment of taste...must involve a claim to validity for all men, and must do so apart from universality attached to Objects, i.e. there must be coupled with it a claim to subjective universality." He suggests that it is possible to establish an artistic ontology or metaphysical "being" of art to determine what art has "to be". He applies correspondence reasoning by suggesting the existence of a universal sphere for the assessment and appreciation of art which is situated beyond art itself and transcends individual preference. Kant had been schooled in the Classics and his aesthetic viewpoint reveals this.

The Greek philosopher Plato (428-347 BC) (Collinson 1987:20) taught that there was an ideal transcendental "realm of perfect forms, non-corporeal and eternal and wholly real of which the world of material objects appraised by the senses was an imitation". Aristotle (1969a:38) wrote: "In general, in some cases art completes what nature cannot carry to an end." He wrote elsewhere (1969b:51) that "...in general human skill either completes what nature is incapable of completing or imitates nature" and "[s]ince the poet is an imitator no less than the painter or other maker of likenesses, he must necessarily in every case represent things in one or other of three aspects, either (a) as they were or are, or (b) as they are said or thought to be or to have been, or (c) as they ought to be" (1963:48).

Greenberg (in his article *Modernist Painting* which was first published in 1965 by *Voice of America* [Battcock 1973:67-77]) endorses the idea that in order to judge what "good" art should be those classical elements should serve as an aesthetic model that pre-exists outside art itself. Greenberg (1973:67-77) writes about "the essence of modernism". He claims that modernists have continued to honour "the cardinal norms" of painting and to maintain "past standards of excellence" and standards of quality in order to "provide the experience of art in all its essentials". What Kant and Greenberg have in common is the existence of a hidden predetermined aesthetic ontological model to which all (good) art should *correspond*. It is to this ontological model that modern theorists like Feibleman (1970:178) refer when stating that humour is the absence of perfection. Sully (1902:99) suggests that imperfection makes us laugh. What is implied is that humour is funny because it does not *correspond* to a permanent aesthetic or, for that matter, any modernist principle which modernist theorists believe already exists.

Greenberg and Kant aver that important art should be or *is* above, untouched and unchanged by power relations and propaganda (religious, political or other). Greenberg (1973:68) writes: "The arts could save themselves from this kind of levelling down [by becoming involved in religion or entertainment] only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity. "Similarly, Kant (1952:60) held the transcendental idealistic view that art should be "disinterested" in all concerns but the aesthetic when he maintained that it should please universally "apart from a concept". Scruton (1981:159) says that art should be "outside the demands of practical reason".

Since humour forms part of the cultural products of an era, modernist theories of humour can be expected to be imbued with the same ideas as modernist theories of art.

### **1.3 A modern artistic teleology**

The sixteenth century writer Vasari (1987:85) writes, from a teleological view of art, in his *Lives of the Artists*, that "...it is inherent in the very nature of the arts to progress step by step, from modest beginnings, and finally to reach the summit of perfection". This type of theory displays a *fervent* belief in a historical development of artistic quality and inevitable artistic progress towards a goal in a linear way. Four centuries later Clement Greenberg echoes this theory by outlining the "progress" of modernist painting as being determined by a purposeful horizontal historical development towards a proposed aesthetic goal of "flatness" to which modern art "orientated itself". He describes its course from Manet, or even further back from David and Ingres, to High Modernism which is the final culmination and essence of this artistic quality of flatness (1973:69-72). According to him, the aesthetic quality of all art prior to modernism is "determined" by its degree of "correspondence" to the proposed ideal state of flatness.

Amongst later twentieth century modern critics whose theories imply the pre-existence of an artistic teleology is the German sociologist/philosopher Jurgen Habermas<sup>9</sup> (1929- ) who argues for modernity as a process of "continuation" of a specific "new aesthetic consciousness". He outlines this in his article *Modernity – An Incomplete Project* where he (1983:5) formulates his theories according to the idea of a progression within aesthetic modernity as proposed in the work of Baudelaire which "unfolded in various avant-garde movements and finally reached its climax in the Café Voltaire of the Dadaists and in

surrealism" and suggests that this process is still ongoing. Habermas's aesthetic theory proposes a simultaneous forward progression and a revival of a past stability. He (1981:5) writes about "these forward gropings, this anticipation of an undefined future and the cult of the new mean in fact the exultation of the present" and asserts that "[t]he new value placed on the transitory, the elusive and the ephemeral, the very celebration of dynamism, discloses a longing for an undefiled, immaculate and stable present." He is thus lobbying for both the existence of an artistic teleology in avant-garde progress and the stability of an artistic ontology which is still *continuing*. Habermas (1983:8), despite his rejection of certain premises of the Enlightenment, maintains that "reason and knowledge could still work towards the practical improvement of society". He (1983:12) recognises that modernity is in trouble, but prefers to believe that it can be revived as a deterministic, horizontally developing aesthetic paradigm.

The German Marxist philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), in his *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit (Jargon of Authenticity)* of 1964, criticises his predecessor Heidegger and others who deny the possibility of objective truth (Cahoone 2004:159). Adorno (1975:12) expresses concern that the ideals of the Enlightenment have been corrupted. In his article *Culture Industry Reconsidered*, he (1975:12-13) blames what he calls "the culture industry" which turned art into a commodity. Thus Adorno places art in an ontological sphere separate from and above trade and commerce. Adorno (1975:12) writes: "The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above. To the detriment of both it forces together the spheres of high and low art, separated for thousands of years. The seriousness of high art is destroyed in speculation about its efficacy; the seriousness of the lower perishes with the civilizational constraints imposed on the rebellious resistance inherent within it..."

Briefly, the critics cited above believe (one way or another) in an autonomous artistic ontological/teleological sphere to which all (good) art should, in their opinion, *correspond*. They also believe that this will ensure the salvation of true artistic value and continued progress. Hegel calls it the "Absolute" (Collinson 1987:96); Greenberg (1973:71-72) sees the redeeming factor as "flatness"; Habermas (1983:5) hopes for the continuation of an "aesthetic consciousness"; Adorno (1975:12-13) hopes to preserve the "autonomy of works of art" and the "seriousness of high art" by separating "high" and "low" art.

In humorous art, just as in artistic teleology, the teleological reveals itself when humour is described as "responsible" (Elkin 1974:3-4) for "the amendment of vices" (Pollard 1970:2) or the "criticism of society" (Worcester 1940:18). Put differently, the idea that humorous art can assist in improving or hastening the moral progress of humanity springs from the modernist teleological belief.

The theological/ethical connotation in the use of the word "fervent", previously used to describe the modernist belief in inevitable artistic progress, is therefore not accidental. According to Mendel and Grotjahn (1970:130), the nineteenth century Danish religious philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) even believed that art is at the heart of the religious experience. If the modernist theory that humorous art has a moral responsibility is considered, the art/aesthetics/ethics link now seems less incongruous. Wiener writes in his article *Sense of the Comic* which is included in his publication entitled *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas* (Wiener [et al] 1973:470) that in the modern view humour has a responsibility. According to Scruton (1981:166), Hegel believed that art, religion and philosophy are the bases of the highest spiritual development. Stace (1955:443) quotes Hegel who wrote: "Only when the mind perceives the Idea shining through it is it beautiful. Since the Idea is the absolute truth, it follows that truth and beauty are identical. For both are the idea." Hegel's theory implies that art is not only part of the higher spiritual conscience of man, but is also conducive to man's spiritual good. Hegel's theories of art, like Greenberg's and the modern moral purpose theories, are based on an artistic teleology which believes in goal-directed ethical/aesthetic progress that is determined by its gravitation towards or *correspondence* to a specific ideal.

## **2 WHY THEORIES OF HUMOUR CAN BE SEEN AS INSTANCES OF CORRESPONDENCE THINKING**

What follows is a closer analysis of modern theories of humour and their relationship to pre-existing standards. This analysis will confirm the presence of what is described by the American literary theorist Steven Weisenberger (1995:6-12) in his *Fables of Subversion: Satire and the American novel* as "identifiable universal codes" which are "held aloft as universals of conduct" in modern culture. In this section the discussion revolves around modern theories of humour which define humour ontologically and are understood as part of the modernist desire for discovering existing ontological categories of "normal" human

behaviour. A close analysis of these theories reveals that modern humour functions according to the same "universals of conduct" or "codes" upheld in modern correspondence thinking. They are that there is progress and the superiority of human reason enables it; pre-existing standards can be established as external principles; and the belief in the existence of an overarching divine ordering presence that is manifested in man in the form of a rationally structured language and other cultural products. The categorisation of humour that is used by both John Morreall in his article *The Rejection of Humour in Western Thought* (1989), and Arthur Berger in his book entitled *An Anatomy of Humour* (1993) serve as the structure for making distinctions among the different classes of humour.

## **2.1 The destruction of expectations theory**

In the words of Margaret Rose (1979:66) in *Parody/Meta-Fiction*, some see the essential universal component of humour as the "destruction of expectations". According to this theory, humour results from the incongruous. Berger (1993:3) and Morreall (1989:243) term this view of humour the "incongruity theory". Incongruous includes what is unexpected because it is out of place, odd, inappropriate, inconsistent or strange; something that is not in correspondence with the existing standard of "normality" and rationality. This suggests that a norm for what is considered appropriate or "not strange" is already in place.

Morreall (1989:243) writes that a connection between incongruity and humour was seen by philosophers since before the eighteenth century. Aristotle (384-322 BC) described, in his *Rhetoric III*, a technique for getting a laugh from an audience: set up a certain expectation in them and then "jolt them with the unexpected" (Morreall 1989:249). Later versions of this theory can be found in the work of the eighteenth century Scottish poet and philosopher James Beattie (1735-1803) and that of the nineteenth century philosopher Kierkegaard. Kant's (1972:177) suggestion is that "laughter is an affectation arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing". Rose (1979:23) translates Kant's theory as follows: "The essence of humour is raising the expectation for x and giving y." Kant (1972:178) provides the following examples:

An Indian at the table of an Englishman in Surat, when he saw a bottle of ale opened and all the beer turned to froth and overflowing, testified his great astonishment with many exclamations. When the Englishman asked him, "What is there in this to astonish you so much?" he answered "I am not at all astonished that it should flow out, but I do wonder how you got it all in".

and

The heir of a rich relative wished to arrange for an imposing funeral, but he lamented that he could not properly succeed, "for" (said he) "the more money I give my mourners, the more cheerful they look!"

The nineteenth century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) wrote in *The World as Will and Idea* that the phenomenon of laughter "...always signifies the sudden apprehension of an incongruity between...a conception and the real object thought under it" and also that laughter itself is an expression of this incongruity (Schopenhauer 1909:271). Morreall (1989:249) quotes a similar remark by Schopenhauer, namely that "amusement arises when we are struck by the mismatch between a concept and a perception of the same thing, and we enjoy that conceptual shock". Schopenhauer is implying that humour disrupts the "normal" rational and fixed word/thing/truth relationship of correspondence. He relates the following anecdotes as typical of this type of humour:

...the Gason at whom the King laughed when he saw him in light summer clothing in the depth of winter, and who thereupon said to the king: "If your Majesty had put on what I have, you would find it very warm"; and on being asked what he had put on, replied: "my whole wardrobe". (Schopenhauer 1909:272)

and

When someone declared that he was fond of walking alone, an Austrian said to him: "You like walking alone? So do I; therefore we can go together". (Schopenhauer 1909:277)

Others who express this view of humour are James Sully (1902:110), who speaks of the "logically incongruous or the *absurd*"; Neil Schaeffer, author of *The Art of Laughter* (1981:17), who says that humour is caused by "an incongruity presented in a ludicrous context"; James Feibleman (1970:180) who writes in his *In Praise of Comedy* that "[s]omething is expected and does not happen; the result – comedy"; and Peter Elkin (1974:4) who, in his inaugural lecture at the University of New England entitled *Satire*, agreed that satire is "...the perception of an incongruity". Elkin (1974:3) quotes the

following example of a joke which relies upon the Kantian "[s]trained expectation into nothing" or incongruity in order to be funny:

"I'd horsewhip you," says Groucho Marx in one Marx Brothers Film, "If I had a horse". (Elkin 1974:3)

To establish something as incongruous means that a rule for what is *not* incongruous should be in place. By saying that something is expected, the writer implies that there is an existing standard for how things are supposed to be. Something becomes humorous when it transgresses this rule. But there is more. The necessity of the *pre-presence* of the norm, which allows humour to be successful in the first place, is implied. According to this view, if there was no rule which sets up the expectation for "normality" which "does not happen", there would be no humour. Feibleman's theory is that the existence of what he calls an "ideal logical order" that is normally at work in humour takes the form of, first, an expectation which is not met and then the resultant "comedy" (Feibleman 1970:178). He reminds us that in order for humour to happen, a rule has to be broken but the rule itself is then emphasised. Humour paradoxically cements a fixed rule even further in the process of breaking it.

Another of Feibleman's observations is that humour relies on a lack of "logical order" to make the unexpected happen. The absence of logic in Groucho Marx's "I'd horsewhip you...if I had a horse" is a good example of this. Humour functions by setting up a "normal" rational expectation ("I'd horsewhip you") for a logical (true) conclusion (a horse, a whip or a pardon from a whipping), only to disrupt this expectation by presenting something that is seen as completely abnormal and irrational ("if I had a horse"). Laughter is generated not because of the absence of the horse but because of the absence of logic and the outrageous quality of the threat. One thing does not logically correspond to another as it is expected to do. It is, however, both because Groucho's words do not correspond to the thing and because they emphasise that they should have that this joke works. Such a joke is involved not only in a single but in a dual relationship with correspondence thinking. This type of humour which, according to the modern view is seen as being destructive of rationality, at the same time enforces and strengthens the modernist belief in reason – and does not, as it first seems, disrupt it.

## 2.2 The violation of logic theory

According to this type of theory, humour is not only seen as irrational by implication but is directly described as irrational. Mendel and Grotjahn (1970:40) write in their book *A Celebration of Laughter* that humour arises from a complete "violation of logic". In his *An Essay on Laughter: Its Forms, its Causes, its Development, its Value* Sully (1902:180) describes humour as "the mode of conceiving of the laughable which finds its essence in the annihilation of a rational attitude". Kant (1972:176) states in his *Critique of Judgement* that humour can be seen as the frustration of our "judgement of reason" and "an intellectual effort and its frustration". He (1972:177) felt that any disruption of reason cannot be pleasurable since it presents two mutually exclusive ideas. In his article *The Sense of Beauty* of 1955, George Santayana (1863-1952), the American professor of philosophy at Harvard, agrees with Kant when he writes that to enjoy any disruption of the human ability to reason is impossible since "...man, being a rational animal, can like absurdity no better than he can like hunger or cold" (Santayana 1955:152).

The difference between the destruction of the expectations theory and this theory is the more critical or derogatory viewpoint towards humour which emerges from the latter. In a culture such as that of the early modern, where reason and logic are highly valued, humour as being destructive of rationality emphasises the modernist ideal of what it is to be a perfectly rational human being. An absence of the thing that is most valued reveals its importance all the more. Tsanoff (1953:60–61) writes that, in Plato's view, one should always be guided by reason. Plato (quoted by Collinson 1987:16) said: "The perfect Forms of all things existed independently of their physical examples and could be known by the exercise of intellect and reason". Morreall (1989:249) agrees that this was Plato's objection towards art in the first place because he reasoned that "since art could appeal to irrational emotions...it could develop to subvert rather than support reason". Plato (quoted by McInerny 1963:150) says that "[t]he true object of knowledge cannot be conveyed by sensation." Morreall (1989:249) writes that Plato believed that all emotions are irrational and that anyone who is in the throes of emotion "is no longer guided by reason", which resulted in his ban on comedy of all kinds. Morreall (1989:249) believes Plato's theories could have been the origin of this modern viewpoint of humour as a violation or absence of logic.

. In the destruction of logic – "the only foundation for knowledge" (Scruton 1981:29) – there is an element of lying. Humour cannot guarantee a true conclusion and thus places

the given premises in doubt. In innumerable examples of humour, humour is provoked by creating a deliberate misunderstanding which relies to a large degree on using words outside of their "normal" position in the word/truth/logic correspondence relationship. Egon Larsen (1980:70), in *Wit as a Weapon: The Political Joke in History*, quotes an excellent example of humour that is based on a violation of logic:

The squire advertises for a tutor for his children, and a little old Jew turns up. "Well," says the squire, "I was actually thinking of someone a little younger than you. But I suppose you have the desired qualifications. Are you good at History?" "Not really sir". "What about geography?", asks the squire. "Well I must confess" says the man, "I don't know much about geography". "Calligraphy?" "Calli...What's that?" The squire gets rather annoyed with the man. "What the hell did you come here for?" The Jew explains, "Sir, I just wanted to tell you that you should not rely on me for the job".

This example, like the others cited above, illustrates that humour of this kind does disrupt all logic and can therefore be criticised for its complete lack of rationality. Yet, paradoxically, it evokes laughter exactly because of this. In fact, this story would not function as humour at all if it were not for the complete illogic of the "applicant" for the job as tutor. In other words, such jokes are simultaneously supported by and destructive of the norm of reason. These examples are also paradoxically recognised by those who, like Schopenhauer and Kant, cite humour as being devoid of logic and truth as examples of successful humour.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson's (1859-1941) way of overcoming this paradoxical relationship between humour and logic was to say that "the logic of the comic is the logic of dreams" (Bergson 1911:187). Even Kant (1972:177), despite having said that a disruption of rationality could never be enjoyable, later had to admit in his *Critique of Judgement* that humour is simultaneously enjoyable *and* a disruption of any understanding. Kant (1972:177) solved his problem by coming to the conclusion that although any disruption of reason "...in which the understanding...can find no satisfaction...is certainly not enjoyable to the understanding..." According to Kant (1972:177) humour is thus seemingly an exception since it makes it possible to experience a disruption of reason as a "very active enjoyment for a moment". However, despite this slight and typically paradoxical concession, Kant maintained the pre-existing conception of humour as being irrational. As Morreall (1989:257) puts it, Kant sees

humour as pleasurable "*despite* the frustration of our reason". One could say that humour functions *because* it frustrates our reason.

### 2.3 The absence of perfection theory

"The unexpected indication of the absence of perfection" (Feibleman 1970:178) can manufacture humour. This theory assumes that any thing which does not comply with a certain expected requirement for perfection is funny. Such an idea posits that perfection can be found elsewhere. As Feibleman (1970:180) puts it: "The situation must illustrate the absence of *what ought to be*, if it is to reveal comedy" (own italics). This means that comedy needs a pre-existing idea of perfection to be funny in the same way that the modern artist shows things as they *ought to be* (Aristotle 1963:48). The imperfection that is identified here by its very lack of correspondence with the ideal ontological aesthetic norm, serves the purpose of accentuating the ideal. Hegel exemplifies the link between logic, art, perfection and truth in modern thought (Stace 1955:443) when he says that "truth and beauty are identical". Although this seems to suggest that art should show truth, the apparent dichotomy is explained by Uglow (1997:76) when she says that the Renaissance dictum "truth in art is higher than truth in life" was the order of the day in the early modern. This aesthetic dictum was not seen as untruthfulness but rather as an expression of a higher universal level of truth, excellence and knowledge – which means that any art form which did not adhere to these norms was considered inferior (i.e. imperfect). This is why humour in the modern view was defined by its absence of logic in the first place and this was then seen as the absence of perfection.

Sully (1902:99) cites the imperfections which are liable to raise a laugh as "[n]ovelty, oddity, bodily deformities, moral deformities and vices, breaches of order and rule, small misfortunes, references to the indecent, pretences, want of knowledge and skill". Sully's list makes it plain that *anything* which does not meet the expected requirement or ideal norm on any level of human existence (such as the social, the moral, the ethical, the physical, the intellectual, the mental, the legal or the aesthetic) can evoke laughter.

Modernist theorists often have different imperfections in mind when formulating this type of theory of humour. Bergson (1911:37) wrote in his acclaimed publication on the mechanistic basis for comedy *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* that

amusement is evoked by "something mechanical encrusted on the living". The following contemporary examples of this kind of humour from *The World Joke Book* (Adams & Newell: 2004) illustrate the variety of imperfections that are found humorous:

*Intellectual imperfection (676): Stupidity*

A Blonde girl walks into a store that sells curtains. She tells the salesman, "I would like to buy pink curtains in the size of my computer screen." The surprised salesman replies, "But madam, computers do not have curtains!" And the blonde says, "Hello! I've got windows!"

*Physical imperfection (514): Ugliness*

A bloke goes into a chemist shop to buy cyanide. "I can't sell you cyanide," said the chemist. "Please, you must sell me some cyanide," pleads the man. "Sorry I can't. Why would you want it anyway?" "I want to kill my wife", says the man. "Well I definitely can't sell it to you." The man reaches into his pocket, slowly takes out his wallet and produces a picture of his wife and slides it across to the chemist. "Oh I didn't realise you had a prescription," says the chemist.

*Social imperfection (2): Drunkenness*

A drunken staggers into St Mary's, enters a confessional box and sits there grunting but saying nothing. After a few moments the priest coughs once, then twice, to get his attention. But the drunk just sits there grunting. Finally the priest pounds three times on the wall. The drunk mumbles, "Ain't no use knocking. There's no dunny paper on this side either."

*Mental imperfection (335): Insanity*

After hearing that one of the patients in a mental hospital had saved another from a suicide attempt by pulling him out of a bathtub, the director reviewed the rescuer's file and called him into his office. "Mr James your records and your heroic behaviour indicate that you are ready to go home. I'm only sorry that the man you saved later killed himself with a rope around his neck." "Oh he did not kill himself," Mr James replied, "I hung him up to dry."

Although the imperfections listed above mostly point to physical or mental imperfections, some can be interpreted to include all human imperfection.

## **2.4 The superiority theory**

The theory of superiority suggests that the absence of perfection evokes laughter because we laugh at the imperfections of others since it makes us feel that we are better than others by comparison (Morreall 1989:243). The proposed attitude of superiority towards the supposed imperfections of "the other" is nicely summed up by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) who writes in *The Elements of Law: Natural and Politic* that laughter is evoked in humans by "infirmities of others, by comparison wherewith their own abilities are set off" (Hobbes 1969:41). Morreall (1989:244) interprets Hobbes's statement as follows: "Laughter is caused either by some act of their

own (those laughing) that pleases them: or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves." In *The Essence of Laughter* Baudelaire (1956:117) goes so far as to say that laughter is satanic. According to Scruton (1982:17), Kant saw moral principles as "categorical imperatives" or "absolute commands of reason...to act only in a way which you would be prepared to see everyone act". These definitions carry the derogatory implication that humour is a primitive response which is at odds with the modernist conception of what it means to be a fully developed, civilised and rational human being.

A moral criticism is suggested in such a view of humour by recognising that humour can be cruel and unnecessarily demeaning to its victims. Therefore, a pre-existing cultural ethical code for proper conduct is implied. According to Morreall (1989:244), strains of this theory first featured in the ideas of Plato in his *Republic III*. Plato saw ridicule of others as the only kind of laughter and Aristotle, who felt that because we always laugh at someone, saw all laughter as containing an element of "derision". Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric III*, described humour and even wit as "base" and "crude", since wit was "educated insolence". Elkin (1974:4) sums up this type of theory by saying that humour, according to this view, is essentially an incongruous combination of two ludicrous things with a "...lowering effect on one of the two objects". Egon Larsen (1980:68) quotes an example of this type of humour in *Wit as a Weapon: The Political Joke in History*:

An old Jew lies on his deathbed. "Sarah my wife, are you here?" he asks. "Yes I am here." "Nathan my son, are you here?" "Yes father." "Esther, my daughter, is you here?" "Yes Father, I am here." "And who's minding the shop?"

The humour in this joke is structured, firstly, upon a derogatory racialist conception (the "cruel") that all Jews care only about money (the "imperfection") and, secondly, makes laughter possible because the recipient of the joke can view the reaction of the Jewish father as that of the "other". Those of us who laugh feel superior. The idea of superiority suggests a pre-existing norm of perfection which the superior person assumes his/her being or conduct is already in correspondence with. Racial jokes turn races into stereotypes. People are presented as "the other" (i.e. not part of the cultural norm of the listener or reader). The norm is undermined by the humour but is simultaneously supported as existing.

An important reason for this complicated and seemingly paradoxical view of humour being possible in modernist thinking is that humour was viewed as harmless and innocuous. It was labelled as irrational anyway. Because the irrational had no place in the modernist blueprint for what it was to be truly human, humour could be shrugged off as “only a joke” and was not to be taken seriously. Precedents of this view of humour can be found in the theories of Aristotle, who is quoted by Armstrong (1885: 232) as saying that humour functioned around the “[h]armless slip or blemish.”

Modern humorous art was traditionally seen as dealing mostly with the more menial human vices. Sully (1902:99) expressed a similar opinion in 1902 by saying that humour focused only on “[s]mall misfortunes...provided that it is small enough to be viewed as a harmless plaything”. This means that the norms themselves remained unchallenged, while the lesser imperfections or deviations from them (which are highlighted by most modern humour such as Hogarth’s) provide “only a kind of harmless shock to our firmly rooted apperceptive tendencies” (Sully 1902:110). As Armstrong (1985:237) puts it in his *The Idea of the Comic*: “...the satirist may poke fun at what is gravely amiss, with the serious aim of exposing and discrediting it, although he proceeds by handling it ostensibly as though it were something only slightly amiss; otherwise jesting passes over into invective.”

## **2.5 The moral purpose theory**

The moral purpose theory is closely related to the absence of perfection and the superiority theories. However, the modern theorists who propagate the moral purpose of humour go one step further by suggesting that modern humour has a moral, didactic and corrective purpose. The humorist does not or should not only record human deficiencies, abnormalities or imperfections but also critically point them out with the sole purpose of *correcting* them or as Arthur Pollard (1970:2) puts it in his book *Satire*: “...the amendment of vices”, which means that humour should encourage conformance to an implied ontologically fixed set of ethical codes. Elkin (1974:3-4) writes that satire is a twofold activity, namely (a) the perception of an incongruity, and (b) the expression of a criticism. He adds that “while at first the perception of an incongruity issues in laughter, the second, the expression of a criticism, makes the laughter responsible”. Elkin (1974:4) uses the following joke by Disraeli, who commented on the members of treasury in his parliament, as an example of this type of humour:

"As I sit opposite the Treasury Bench", he said, "The Ministers remind me of those marine landscapes not unusual on the coasts of South America. You behold a range of exhausted volcanoes."

This type of joke differs from the Groucho Marx "horsewhip" joke (on page twenty-four) as follows: Firstly, it not only poses the incongruity (by comparing the members of parliament to mountains) but also expresses a criticism (by calling them "exhausted volcanoes"). Secondly, however indirectly, it suggests a solution to the proposed "imperfection" (like replacing these ministers with younger, more active [i.e. not "exhausted"] members).

### **3 HUMOROUS ART**

The following modern theorists hold the view that the purpose of humorous art is the moral instruction of man. Pollard writes that the aim of humour is to "correct" or "amend" man's vices (1970:21). David Worcester (1940:18) writes in a similar teleological vein in his *The Art of Satire* that "the laughter of satire is directed towards an end". He continues that "the test for satire in its success is within its prescribed sphere", which is the "criticism of man and of society". Gilbert Highet (1962:20) writes in his *The Anatomy of Satire* that humorous art has a "constructive purpose to benefit society". Edward Ballard (1973:470) in *Sense of the comic* encapsulates the ontological/teleological humanist approach in his summary of the modern view of humour most succinctly by writing that humour was seen in modern times as "...the comic sense to bring the deviating individual into accord with social norms, or to bring the deviating society to awareness of the ideal, or, finally to reconcile the individual and his social milieu with the ideal by way of a productive and unifying insight into a more authentic vision of human possibilities". Modern humour as a product of the deep respect felt for the rational, and in the tradition of the classical thinkers and their successors among the humanists, supports a didactic purpose for man's desire to laugh.

According to neo-classical ethical and social standards of decorum, humour was often seen as being contrary to the general concept of what it meant to be a rational, ethical and even a moral human being. Yet modern humorous art was made responsible for the moral education of modern society. As we have seen, Plato banned laughter and mockery was forbidden by law during Aristotle's time on the basis that it was irrational and therefore not suitable behaviour for a rational human being. During the neo-classical period, many

of these ideas were rekindled by the eighteenth century elite and so-called experts on social behaviour and proper decorum who expressed derogatory opinions about the indiscriminate use of laughter. Strict rules for the social practice of humour can be found in early modern discourses on ethics. The paradox is that although humour was labelled as irrational and unethical, humorous art was seen as a suitable vehicle for propaganda for the ethical conduct of a rational human being – often by *one and the same* theorist. The final ironic twist is that the opposite is also true. This violator of logic and perfection and destroyer of expectations – or in short, humour – was also *supported by* the ideal pre-existing norms for logic, perfection and other modernist expectations which allowed it to *be* humorous.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

Modern humour can be understood to have existed in an ironical and paradoxical three-pronged interrelationship of dependency on, subversion of and propaganda for the accepted idea of normativity. In the first place, modern humour could only be seen as disruptive of or devoid of the modern standards of (for example) logic, perfection and morality if these ordering principles were already in place. The presence of such a standard in these theories is implied by the possibility of something which was expected to manifest under "normal" circumstances. This expectation could only be possible if a certain standard, law or convention for a logical progression of events already existed. Only then could the expectation for an accepted order of things be disrupted or "destroyed". Humour could not succeed without a reciprocal relationship with these pre-existing principles, since its disruptive force was kept in place and even sustained by the very norms and standards which it defied. Modern humour was therefore defined and functioned from within the parameters of modern ontological principles.

Secondly, these pre-existing immutable laws for human behaviour were so deeply ingrained in modernist thought that although humour is described in modernist definitions as exploiting what is not logical, not ethical and not perfect, these same supposedly errant/delinquent characteristics of humour were brought in line with the ideal norms of ethics, reason, perfection and stability by seeing humour as being responsible for upholding them. This was made possible by seeing the potentially disruptive mechanisms without which humour cannot function as advantageous to the idea of reforming human society and habits through various didactic ruses which exploited laughter as a kind of cure. Just as in antiquity, modern humorous art was (more

than non-humorous art) seen as exceptionally suited to a didactic and reforming role in society. Weisenberger (1995:1) uses the term "generative" to describe the purpose or focus of modern humorous art. Because the modernist idea of continuous progress applied to all aspects of modern culture, modern humour was also defined by its teleological position in pursuit of this ideal.

Consequently, the expectation of a potentially ideal state of affairs that existed somewhere where reasoning could discover it was both ontologically and teleologically built into modernist theories of humour. Modern humour therefore played an active role in the formation of human consciousness in the modern. It provided the modern individual with preconceived principles which shaped his/her perception of the self and his/her ontological position in the world, it assisted in shaping and propagating a specific understanding of modern culture and society. It promoted the modernist hope for a teleological movement towards the ideal. This means that humorous art in the modern can be seen not only as *part of* the modernist correspondence paradigm and its search for permanent ontological principles of truth, but also as playing an active role in *assisting* in upholding it and *not*, as it first seems, in destroying it.

Baudelaire's "eternal and immutable" universal standards for the ideal essence of all things that are based on the reasonable and according to which all men are expected to live provide the individual with stability (Harvey 1996:10). Therefore, the belief that something as essential to man as humour remains in essence the same for all human beings was in modern times a comforting element in a changing world. Marcel Gutwirth in *Laughing Matter – An Essay on the Comic* (1993:5) explains: "As the disposition to be amused, humour thus binds all humankind into one by way of an Aristotelian universal." It is the same desire to know that everything is in its rightful place where it has always been (and in correspondence with an ontologically stable principle of how it is supposed to be, which Aristotle saw as a guarantee for the unity and purposefulness of nature) that was expressed in 1841 by Browning (1971:32) when he wrote "God's in his heaven, All's right with the world".

According to Morreall (1989:252), even Existentialists who hold that "the world is absurd and without epistemological, metaphysical or ethical foundations, are still rationalist enough to wish it did have these universal foundations" because we "...are all...at least closet rationalists". Morreall (1989:252) says that even Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), the

twentieth century intellectual and leading exponent of existentialism whose theories are mainly based on a critique of dialectical reasoning, is an example of this. According to Sartre, it is part of the human condition "to want foundations, to want a determinate nature which makes us understandable and provides a guide for our actions". Morreall (1989:252), quotes Sartre as saying that even though our existence is absurd, we have an inherent desire for it is not to be so because we are "being *pour soi*" craving "being *en soi*".

The desire to view all human phenomena as corresponding to a permanent ontological pattern which has always existed – irrespective of whether this pattern is representative of the Absolute, the Divine or any other pre-centring principle – underlies the modern desire to define humour ontologically. This is clearly expressed in the words of the well-known modernist Samuel Johnson who believed that "[m]en have been wise in many different modes, but they have always laughed in the same way" (Halliwell 1991:271).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Roger Scruton (1981:31) states in *From Descartes to Wittgenstein: A short History of Modern Philosophy* that Descartes reverted to a system of *doubting* everything that he believed to be true until he could be absolutely certain of its value as an *a priori* principle.

<sup>2</sup> Collinson (1987:98) writes that "Hegel maintained that philosophy, religion and art are ways of comprehending the Absolute".

<sup>3</sup> The MEE states that "[t]here is no way in which it could make sense for a Monad to be altered or changed internally by any other created thing" which is testimony to the desire to find the immutable and eternal (MEE sv "Monadology").

<sup>4</sup> All the examples mentioned, in typical modernist humanist mode, emphasise human rationality. However, most modern philosophical theories also identify patterns which provide the codes to a final pre-existing universal principle of truth believed to pre-exist in the perfect reason of some Ultimate Being. Even Descartes, despite his well-known principle of doubt, reassessed the interpretation of God as Divine Reason and presented proof of God's existence on the basis of reason (Tsanoff 1953:282). Scruton (1981:34) writes: "Descartes, for all his radical departures from scholastic tradition, remained true to the medieval conceptions which his philosophical education had bequeathed him." In his *Meditation on the First Philosophy* Descartes first rejected as false all beliefs on the grounds that what he experienced as reality could be the work of what he called "[s]ome deceiver, supremely powerful, supremely intelligent who purposely always deceives me" (Collinson 1987:58). He came to the conclusion, however, that in order to experience deception, he had to think and therefore he existed (Descartes 1967:157). From this consciousness of his own thinking, he

argued the existence of a "perfect being – God himself" (Scruton 1981:30). What this means is that Descartes established the supremacy of human rationality by determining the existence of God from the premise of first determining his own existence and not the other way around as in pre-Enlightenment mode. Although the Cartesian view is a typically modernist humanist view because the proof of God's existence is first subjected to man's reason, it nevertheless reasserts the existence of a divinity as a reality when he writes in his *Meditations III* that "the proof of God's existence is grounded in the highest evidence" (Descartes 1976:170).

<sup>5</sup> Robin Middleton describes the zeitgeist of this period in *Art of the Western World*: "It seemed for a short time that the universe might be fully understood by man, that all phenomena might be explained. Human activity could be precisely calculated and pursued to clearly defined ends, and eventually pure order and certainty would prevail. The whole cosmos could be explained in rational terms." (Hooker 1991:270).

<sup>6</sup> The ground-breaking scientific and other advances of the early modern period such as those by the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) (Kenny 1998:184) and the discovery of universal gravitation by the English physicist and mathematician Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) (Hooker 1991:270) in 1684 especially also had a major effect on the humanist rationalist emphasis in modernist reasoning, namely a re-examination of that which was already in place and the elimination of any theory that could not hold water if its certainty could not be proven and verified by external facts.

<sup>7</sup> John Randall (1977:9) writes in his *Philosophy after Darwin* that even after the evolution theories of Charles Darwin (1809-1882), men so much wanted to believe in God that they grasped at any straw: "God was the 'Unknowable', God was Evolution, God was Energy, God was the 'Principle of Concretion' – somewhere, in some scientific or pseudo-scientific concept, lurked the Father of mankind, exercising his Divine Providence. Men wanted to believe in God because they simply could not order their lives if they did not."

<sup>8</sup> The early modern neo-classical revival (1750-1810) was also a reinstatement of pre-existing theories to find universal timeless values (Hooker 1991:270). The historical parallel between the early imperialism of Rome and the restored English Monarchy, both of which had replaced republican institutions, was not lost on the ruling and learning classes. Their appreciation of the literature of the time of the Roman emperor Augustus led to a widespread acceptance of the new English literature and encouraged grandeur of tone in the poetry of the period – a literature characterised by reason, moderation, good taste, deft management and simplicity. The successive stages of literary taste during the period of the Restoration and the eighteenth century are conveniently referred to as the ages of Dryden, Pope and Johnson, after the three great literary figures who, one after another, carried on the so-called classical tradition in literature (MEE sv "English Literature").

<sup>9</sup> Habermas's theories belong in the ranks of those who subscribe to the existence of an artistic teleology such as the Frankfurt School of thought; and the German writer, Marxist theorist and highly influential aesthetician Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) who collaborated with the institution; and the German Marxist philosopher Theodor Adorno

(1903-1969) who became an associate in 1930 and taught in the institution until 1957 (whom Habermas [1983:15] incidentally sees as "the very image of emulation" for any intellectual worth his salt) (Kohl 1992:216).

## **CHAPTER 2: HOW HOGARTH TYPIFIES MODERN THEORIES OF HUMOUR**

This chapter is an analysis of the humorous art of William Hogarth who, it is generally considered, was a prominent artistic personality in England during the first half of the eighteenth century. Seen from the perspective of modern definitions of humour according to which humour is a disruption of what is believed to be principles of normality, it can be argued that Hogarth's work should be viewed as an early example of the deconstruction of modernist principles. In this chapter Hogarth's work is viewed from the opposite perspective. It is argued that his work can be seen as part of the typical modernist correspondence mode of thinking because (like most modern humorous art and modern theories of humour) it is based on an intricate, ironic and paradoxical relationship with the modern view of normativity. His humour seems to disrupt the norm and yet paradoxically also relies on the norm to function successfully. It is thus a didactic tool to propagate the ideal of the norm while seeming to destroy it. The typical modernist correspondence view that universal laws for normality and ontological categories for humanity are already in existence somewhere is implied in his works.

Hogarth's works are established as belonging to a general modernist mode of thinking in which humanity is divided into general stereotypes according to fixed universal categories or models to the extent that even human abnormalities are shown as typical. Human phenomena such as humour are presented in his works as if they can be universally understood. This becomes evident upon a closer inspection of his narratives, wording and choice of titles. He sees himself as the typical modernist author who can take it for granted that his works can communicate his meaning and intentions universally. In his work is manifested a modernist artistic ontology and teleology. His works paradoxically display an orderly, rational and serious formal compositional arrangement in deference to the pre-established aesthetic ontology rather than the modernist understanding of humour as disorderly, irrational and unserious. He also propagates the modernist notion of horizontal progression towards a pre-existing artistic ideal in his works.

On the basis of this discussion, it is shown that Hogarth's humour functions according to the five modernist theories of humour that were discussed in chapter one. His art functions in support of modern correspondence thinking rather than as its deconstruction.

Specific works of art that will be discussed are the following humorous graphic works created by Hogarth between 1732 and 1751: *A Harlot's Progress* (1732, Figs 1-6), *A Rake's Progress* (1735, Figs 7-15), *Marriage à la Mode* (1743, Figs 17-18), *The Painter and his Pug* (1745, Fig 16), *Industry and Idleness* (1747, Figs 19-21) and *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1751, Figs 22-25).

## **1 HOGARTH: MODERNIST ONTOLOGICAL ESSENCE AND CATEGORIES**

Hogarth's works such as *A Harlot's Progress* (Figs 1-6), *A Rake's Progress* (Figs 7-15), *Industry and Idleness* (Figs 19-21) and *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (Figs 22-25) might represent particular persons or specific incidents in a highly individualistic manner. Yet his pictures, though historically inspired by specific personalities, depict humanity as if it consists of general human categories or types. Firstly, specific human traits are shown as if they can be understood as being universally inherent in all humanity in accordance with some pre-existing transcendental pattern. Secondly, in a typical modernist manner Hogarth, as the author of these works, seems to be supremely confident that they will universally communicate his meaning and intentions to his viewers. Thirdly, Hogarth's work seems to rest on the modernist understanding that the essence of humour can be ontologically defined and can thus be universally understood. Finally, if Hogarth's works are closely analysed, it becomes clear that the requirements for his humour to be successful were secondary to the formal requirements of the reigning pre-established modernist artistic ontology and teleology.

### **1.1 Hogarth's titles and categories of humanity**

In an advertisement of 2 April 1743 in the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* for the sale of engravings of one of his paintings, Hogarth promises that "none of the Characters represented shall be personal" (Paulsen 1992:208). By the author's own admission, he is not presenting individuals but recognisable types. If his titles are studied carefully, it is indeed so that Hogarth represents people and their qualities as if they form part of an essential generalised pattern of what it is "to be" human –which is already in existence somewhere. Fowler (1987:70) reminds us that the characters are similar to those of the plots of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, in which the characters are subordinated to the plot in the intrigues shown on stage. They go back even further than the medieval and

Renaissance characters to stereotypes of antiquity among famous satirists such as Juvenal, Terence and Aristophanes.

The stereotype is emphasised by the article "a" in Hogarth titles: *A Harlot's Progress*, *A Rake's Progress*, etc. The harlot is an example of the archetypal good-hearted whore of popular picture stories of Hogarth's time which can still be found in today's films and literature. She is both the "charitable but promiscuous chambermaid" in the eighteenth century English novelist Henry Fielding's (1707-1754) *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his Friend Mr Abraham Adams* of 1742 and Demi Moore as the struggling mother/stripper in Andrew Bergman's contemporary film of 1996 entitled *Striptease* (Paulsen 1992:199). Hogarth repeatedly uses this model in works such as the charitable Sarah Young in *Southwark Fare* (1733/4)<sup>1</sup> and *A Rake's Progress*. The oil overflowing from the lamplighter's can to the rake's head in Plate 4 (Fig 10) is, according to Paulsen (1992:25), a metaphor for her "angelic intercession" and she even joins Rakewell in prison and adopts the Pietà pose of Mary in the final scene (Figs 14 and 15).

Most probably, *A Harlot's Progress* and *A Rake's Progress* were indeed not even "...addressed to harlots and rakes, but to an audience that could meditate with detachment on such representative types" (Paulsen 1992:292). Hogarth confirms the fixed correspondence between the definitive essence of such a person and the word that is used to describe his/her person. In this mode of thought even the way that someone speaks becomes a pre-cast formula. In Fielding's description (Paulsen 1992:196) the way in which his character "Lady Booby" speaks is exactly "as a Lady does to her Sweetheart in a stage-Play". The same impulse as that of Hogarth's is at work. Universally, humanity shares similar traits. In order to be funny, Hogarth focuses mostly upon our abnormalities. Yet even these are shown as if they can be seen as typical of the human race in its entirety.

## **1.2 Hogarth and a universal category of abnormalities**

The irrationality, immorality and imperfection of Hogarth's characters are simultaneously presented as constituting conduct which should be avoided and depicted as common human vices. These vices are paradoxically presented in order to speak as the "normal" abnormalities of humanity. "Normal" because all of us, at some time or another, indulge in or fall victim to them; and "abnormal" because they should be seen as "wrong" within

the ideal pattern. Put plainly, Hogarth is like the modern theorist of humour who almost attempts to create a general universal category or essence of human abnormality. Ironically, Hogarth's work displays the typically modernist belief in a universal essence of humanity by establishing certain transcendental universal parallels – although a universal parallel of wrongdoing in this case. This tendency of his is in line with the general modernist approach to the comedy of the time. Someone like Fielding who was, according to Paulsen (1992:201), trained in the typical modern classical canon, discussed comedy by beginning with "its subject (as defined by Aristotle): the poor, ugly and deformed".

Ironically, "abnormalities" such as irrationality, immorality and other imperfections are presented as being universally present in the appearance and behaviour of mankind *and* should be laughed at as oddities within the rule. The subjects of the works rely for their humour on the viewer (who notes the disruption of the norm) by showing these traits as abnormal but, simultaneously, pointing out the ideal and therefore propagating conformity to it. The presentation of the individual differences of his subjects *as* imperfections already places Hogarth's work within the modern correspondence paradigm.

### **1.3 Hogarth and a universal category of ethics**

In the same advertisement cited above, Hogarth promises that "Particular care will be taken, that there may not be the least objection to the Decency or Elegancy of the whole Work" (Paulsen 1992:208). What is implied here is that Hogarth accepts the existence of a fixed universal ontological ethical standard of "decency" which is already in place. This moral standard is implied in practically all of Hogarth's works, for example in *A Harlot's Progress* (Figs 1-6) and *A Rake's Progress* (Figs 7-14) where both of the recreants who are represented come to a dismal, unfortunate end. What is relevant here is that this standard generalises morality into one fixed universal law of what is "usually" considered "normal" behaviour. Both works propagate the idea that *all* harlots and rakes *always* end up badly precisely because such types do not live according to this ideal model. Hogarth's take on ethics is therefore not individual or particular. As Laurence Gowing (1972:28) puts it in his 1972 review of an exhibition entitled *Hogarth*, "the morality that concerns him is social". Closure about "normality" is, in other words, provided by one all-encompassing model which excludes other viewpoints. In the early modern this model

is a general compilation of biblically and classically inspired ethical mores. The clear advocating of the Protestant work ethic which enjoyed popularity at the time as found in Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness* (Figs 19-21) and *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (Figs 22-25) is a case in point. According to Paulsen (1992:294), *Industry and Idleness* uses the parable of the talents of Matthew 25:14-30. David Bindman (1970:153) quotes Hogarth as saying that what he wanted to create was "[m]odern moral subjects".

Implied in many of Hogarth's works is the idea that there is something better to which to aspire than the fall into vice. The general sense that mankind can better itself by progressing towards a common ideal is evident from the satirical subjects.

#### **1.4 Hogarth and a universal category of narratives**

In Uglow's (1997:259) comprehensive volume on eighteenth century art entitled *Hogarth, a Life and a World* (1997), Jenny Auden explains that Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* "is the story [albeit a humorously presented story] of a man destroyed by the temptations offered by good fortune, is timeless...it is a myth; it represents, that is, a situation in which all men, at least potentially, find themselves, in so far as they are human beings" (my insertion). Put differently, each of the narrated situations in which Hogarth's characters find themselves, though historically contextualised in careful specific detail, can nevertheless also be seen as a "classic" example of what happens in a certain "type" of situation. This is very similar to the types of jokes which refer to (for example) blondes, blacks, Jews, Afrikaners, farmers, nagging wives, drunks or philandering husbands. Such stories function by relying upon the hearer's *pre-knowledge* and recognition of these "types" and the assumption that they transcend contextual differences. Hogarth's narratives are all what can be called "classic" tales that are based on some well-known story with a strong moral slant which is viewed as universal. His central themes are clearly based upon the typical early modern pattern that consists of pre-existing models from antiquity and Christianity. *A Harlot's Progress* (Figs 1-6) and *A Rake's Progress* (Figs 7-15) specifically find their prototypes in the story of the original fall of man through sin and vice. All of the narratives or ethical content of the abovementioned works are derived from what were seen as classic universal themes that were propagated in the popular literary themes of the time, which also contrived to create a combined classical/biblical ethical storyline. The work of the seventeenth century

English writer John Bunyan (1628-1688) and others exemplify the trend (Greensdale 1975:509-510).

## **2 HOGARTH: THE AUTHOR, CATEGORIES OF MEANING AND UNIVERSAL COMMUNICATION**

In the text of the advertisement quoted above Hogarth wrote: "...the Heads for the better preservation of the Characters and Expressions to be done by the Author" (Paulsen 1992:208). By referring to himself as "the author", Hogarth is not only accepting responsibility for these written words but also promises that the buyer can be assured of a high standard of work because it will be executed by the "author" himself and no one else. Hogarth is also implying, in modernist terms, his ontological position of genial mastery. One of Hogarth's compatriots, Vertue, described him as "a true English genius" in a review of his auction in March 1744 (Paulsen 1992:235).

According to Selden (1989:79), Hogarth as the author of his work thus enjoyed what poststructuralist theorists like Roland Barthes later identify as "metaphysical status". Hogarth worked within the modernist paradigm which held that an art work could fully communicate the meaning and intentions of its creator. He uses his images and metaphors in a modernist mode of unambiguous correspondence with a fixed locus of meaning which already exists somewhere outside of the work itself. His images and the idealised narratives in which they appear can be easily interpreted in literal fashion because they correspond to a fixed pre-decided meaning.

Hogarth supplies the viewer with information that reaches a specific conclusion and can only be interpreted (read) in one way from beginning to end. The viewer of these works becomes what Selden (1989:115) describes as "a passive recipient of an entirely formulated meaning...because the message is stated within a completely closed system". The works present a typically modernist classical "closed" or "readerly" text which he, the author and not the reader/viewer, creates and controls. Hogarth is, in typically modernist humanist fashion, both in control of what his work communicates and how it is received or interpreted. This is possible for Hogarth because the modernist was secure in the knowledge that a word or an image communicated his intentions about the world. This, in turn, was so because of the modernist belief in a fixed meaning of correspondence with a pre-existing permanent pattern or structure situated outside art or

language itself that constitutes truth and reality. Selden (1989:75) quotes Catherine Belsey who identifies this in her publication *Critical practice* of 1980 as being typical of a "classic realism" which "proposes a model in which author and reader are subjects who are the source of shared meanings, the origin of which is mysteriously extra-discursive".

Uglow (1997:xv) says that Hogarth himself believed that "a picture was worth many volumes of print" and "all his work moves back and forth between word and image; speech bubbles, captions, commentaries, written keys, mottoes and texts are a central part of his graphic art". Moreover, his titles literally correspond to the content of these works by giving a clear and unambiguous indication, even an almost literary or verbal explanation/illustration, of what these works are about. His narratives are almost stronger in their emphasis on the literary interpretation than the visual. His well-known self-portrait *The Painter and his Pug* (Figs 16) shows rows of books with the names of authors like Shakespeare and Swift clearly readable on their spines (Uglow 1997: xvi). Hogarth thus affirms his penchant for the novelistic and literary influences. These literary references also lend "truthfulness" to his works in a modernist cultural climate where it is believed that an author's words tell us the truth about the world. Uglow (1997: xi) points out that Hogarth makes use of many references and little situations inside the main plots of his works which can be experienced in literary fashion as jokes which should be "read" by his viewers. Despite his sarcasm or ironic subplots and the modern view that humour subverts truth and logic, the fact remains that the source of meaning which Hogarth draws from to convey his intention to ridicule is in typical modernist correspondence mode of thinking.

### **3 HOGARTH AND A UNIVERSAL REPERTOIRE OF MODERN HUMOUR**

Hogarth's humour was assumed by himself and his contemporaries to be universally understandable. There is a sense in which the certainty about the existence of a universal essence of humour becomes concrete in his works. The situations and characters are presented in Hogarth's works not only as examples of what is expected to be universally human, but also what is expected to be universal in its potential to evoke humour (namely a stupid whore, a fickle dandy and a fat rich man). They are what can be called classic examples. Each character, though individualised in great detail and possibly recognisable to an eighteenth century Londoner, can be seen as the ridicule of a universal *idea* of (for example) a fallen maiden or "harlot" in *A Harlot's Progress* (Figs 1-6); a spoilt,

philandering, young aristocrat or "rake" in *A Rake's Progress* (Figs 7-15); and a rich, overweight land baron in *Marriage à La Mode* (Fig 17) (Uglow 1997:375).

Moreover, their *vices* of (for example) greed, pretentiousness, overindulgence, stupidity, fickleness, obesity and especially hypocrisy are expressed as typical of what is assumed to be an eternal, universal comical repertoire of comedic wrongdoing. The vices, deformities and misfortunes in Hogarth's works are listed almost word for word in Sully's list of what the modernist theorist of humour sees as typical human traits that can be found humorous universally (see chapter one, page twenty-seven). This underlines and confirms that the modernist conception of the transcendental timelessness and universality of humour is upheld in Hogarth's humorous works despite the apparent individualisation and specific geographical correctness and historical detail. His simultaneous attempt at realism and elevated classical idealism is, in fact, one of the paradoxical formal elements in Hogarth's art.

#### **4 HOGARTH AND A UNIVERSAL ESSENCE OF ART**

Hogarth ran the advertisement for his engravings (which was mentioned previously) once more a few days after its first appearance, but adds the following telling bit of information after the words "Engrav'd by the best Masters in Paris": "*after his own paintings*" (my italics) (Paulsen 1992:209). He repeatedly emphasised in all his advertisements that he was using French Masters as engravers (Paulsen 1992:212). According to Paulsen (1992:208-209), Hogarth travelled to Paris in May 1743 and apologised profusely in more advertisements when the war prevented the work from being done in Paris by assuring his buyers that the employed French engravers would uphold the same high standard even though they would subsequently do the work in England. The high standard of work in art and engraving was fundamental for Hogarth and his buyers. What this makes clear is that Hogarth believed in a certain standard for good art which already existed somewhere, and it seems that he endorsed the general early modern opinion that it existed in the neo-classical style<sup>2</sup> of continental art and specifically in France.<sup>3</sup>

Paulsen (1992:214) writes that it seems that Hogarth desired an "elegance of style that was decidedly *un-English*", which is also why he gave his work *Marriage à la Mode* such a "frenchified title" (Paulsen 1992:210). Paulsen (1992:207) further writes that he

believes Hogarth created his *Characters and Caricatures* of 1743<sup>4</sup> purely to prove his ability to be a "comic history painter" and not a "mere" caricaturist. In this work he deliberately presents the head of a beggar in a style which could be seen by the connoisseurs of his time as caricature or grotesque in-between two idealised heads of Saints John and Paul. But, says Paulsen (1992:207), all three are "copied from the Raphael cartoons, the generally accepted example of great history painting". He demonstrated that his works "are not descendent from cartoons but are in fact part of the great genre of history painting". Hogarth, says Paulsen (1992:185), tried to raise "popular and ephemeral prints and novels" by connecting them with the highest ranking and most ancient of genres, history painting, in an effort to "elevate" a contemporary subject.

Therefore, as the following section will show, this modernist artistic ontology is at work in (amongst other things) the way Hogarth's compositions correspond to the current artistic neo-classical model. He was so eager to ensure that his own art reflected this standard that he placed its requirements ahead of the requirements of his humour.

## **5 A RATIONAL REPRESENTATION OF THE IRRATIONAL**

In many of Hogarth's works that are under discussion, the citizens of eighteenth century London are presented in realistic and often unflattering detail as they scurry about their daily business in rags, loll about loutishly or lord it over the less fortunate in palatial homes. They are portrayed as very ordinary ridiculous human beings, both imperfect and disorderly (or illogical) in their reasoning, actions and appearance. Hogarth clearly attempted to create humorous scenes by adopting the energetic dynamism and robustness of the figures of the popular eighteenth century Rococo, an aesthetic movement easily suited to the humorous and light-hearted (Gardner 1980:700). Yet he also, in deference to the current neo-classical taste, attempted to place the figures in smaller, more balanced, structured or logical groupings here and there on his canvasses. The robust and dynamic, and also the structural and logical, can therefore simultaneously be found in his works. Fowler (1987:123-146) writes that in Hogarth's time specifically, during the period from 1660 when Charles II was restored to the English throne until roughly 1789 (known as the Restoration Period), culture was characterised by an emphasis on the supremacy of reason and a penchant for reviving the classical in the fields of politics, theology, arts, ethics, social behaviour and aesthetics.

A specific example of this can be found in one of the scenes from *A Rake's Progress* entitled *Bedlam* (Figs 14 and 15), where Thomas Rakewell (the *rake* in question) is finally incarcerated in a mental asylum. Although this scene portrays what is considered the ultimate loss of reason (namely insanity), the disruption of rationality is only expressed through the body language and facial expressions of the inmates and not through the almost ornamental formal groupings of the figures. Although Hogarth is showing madness here, and thus complete loss of rationality or logic, he presents it in an ordered and logical style. His compositional arrangement of these groups can be seen as being based on the classical tradition or the "Old Master" paintings of the Renaissance rather than as being expressive of the irrationality of the insane or the proposed humorousness of this insanity. In other words, Hogarth used reason rather than emotion to restructure the natural in correspondence with the requirements of the current aesthetic model. Hogarth's humour was shaped by, dominated by and part of the artistic ontology of his time – and not, as it first seems, the other way round.

### **5.1 A serious representation of the un-serious**

Hogarth's narratives show further evidence of a current taste for a classical solemnity of order and logic. Kenny (1998:62), in his volume entitled *History of Western Philosophy*, writes that Aristotle emphasised that the unity of a plot has to rely on a "self-contained story" which follows a logical pattern. Hogarth's narratives display such "classical" structural order by developing in a logical pattern with "a clear beginning, middle and end" (Kenny 1998:62). The idea of logical sequential development is also suggested by the words "stages" or "progress" in the titles of all these series. The stages in each series follow logically upon each other like the scenes in a modernist play, the chapters of a modernist novel, or even the frames of a modern film or comic strip.

Each narrative builds (as Kenny explains) in traditional fashion up to a pinnacle and then gradually declines toward a conclusion. The narratives are, as Aristotle had prescribed, not disparate episodes connected only by the common hero/heroine; but rather a "single significant action" which holds the whole plot together (Kenny 1998:62). The relatively simple "plot" in Hogarth's works creates a closed-off unit or an Aristotelian "universal whole". The different elements of the plot are consistent or in accordance with the whole and express one intended meaning or truth clearly, rationally and unambiguously with

only one possible interpretation. This is directly opposed to the modern view that humour is not rational, logical or true – which means that the motivation behind Hogarth's formal decision to make these works in a sequential series of several (in the case of *A Rake's Progress*, eight) pictures was therefore not in the first place concordant with his intention to be humorous, but was rather based on the demands of a logical classic narrative.

Hogarth may have allowed his "characters" to display irrational behaviour, make illogical decisions, appear incongruous and seem ridiculous; but the formal aspects of his work remain within the modernist neo-classical tradition of a rationality that is characterised by balance, order, logic and unity. He was, throughout his life and career, exposed to the conventions of a neo-classical literary and theatrical tradition through continued contact and interaction with many of the literary and theatrical personalities of his time, some of whom were directly influenced by the theories of Aristotle. It is possible that he was indirectly influenced by the general neo-classical tendency toward an aesthetic of restraint, order and rationality in the seventeenth and eighteenth century literary and dramatic arts. The formal structure of these works is not funny, only the content is.

In the second part of this chapter Hogarth's humour is discussed through the lens of theories of humour that were proposed by modernists (and discussed in chapter one) as part of the modernist search for universal patterns of truth to establish normality.

## **6 HOW HOGARTH TYPIFIES MODERN THEORIES OF HUMOUR**

Hogarth's humour functions in the same complex, paradoxical way that typified the view of modern humour and modern correspondence thinking. His works create the initial impression that they are disruptive of the principles identified in modern theories of humour, but an analysis reveals that the relationship of his humour with the modern correspondence paradigm is more complex than this.

### **6.1 Hogarth and the destruction of expectations theory**

Hogarth's humour does function by first creating an expectation and then destroying it in order to evoke laughter. However, as closer scrutiny will show, although this has the potential to evoke laughter, the ethical and other modern norms which form the target of

Hogarth's humour are only superficially and temporarily disturbed and are in no way permanently deconstructed by this humorous device.

The titles of Hogarth's works (such as *A Rake's Progress*, *A Harlot's Progress*, *Industry and Idleness* and *The Four Stages of Cruelty*) create a typical expectation in the viewer of inevitable *progress* towards a fixed pre-established biblically and classically inspired ethical goal. This expectation is, however, only seemingly destroyed when it becomes clear in the successive engravings of each series like *A Rake's Progress* (Figs 7-15) and *A Harlot's Progress* (Figs 1-6) that Hogarth's use of the word "progress" is ironic because the move is not upwards or forwards, but a downward spiral into misery and ruin. His works also set up an expectation for unambiguous enjoyment of an art work in the conventional sense by appearing to be representative of the reigning artistic ontology whereby any early modern art work in the neo-classical tradition is valued as "normal" or "good". The viewer is seduced by the attractive compositional groupings, size and apparent solemn grandeur of the traditional "old master" work – only to discover that the content of the works is misery, squalor, vices and pretences which satirise the very elements that lured him/her to the work in the first place. The viewer therefore suddenly discovers that he/she is faced by a bouquet of horrors, so to speak, and not only with the beautiful or sublime subject matter which was the aesthetic preference of the time. As Aristotle suggested, all of this does indeed "jolt them with the unexpected" (Morreall 1989:249).

Hogarth's humour in these works does therefore follow the same Aristotelian pattern or recipe for successful humour as the ideas about humour that are suggested by Kant and Schopenhauer. The Groucho Marx joke served as an example of this in chapter one on page twenty-four. The expectation of something is contrived throughout, only to be destroyed by an incongruous and subversive element in the "punch line". Hogarth created an expectation for a conventional understanding of both *moral progress* and a typical *masterpiece*. This is why modern theorists see modern humour like Hogarth's as a destruction of an expectation and the humour as a species of lie. However, Hogarth's works (like these jokes) still function by relying on the implied norm to be funny and therefore still pay homage to the norm. Although these ambiguities create the impression that Hogarth's works are destructive to the modernist correspondence paradigm, this impression is only superficial and all the works can nevertheless still be seen as part of modern correspondence thinking. Hogarth's works do not disrupt the modernist trust in

man's godly perfection of goodness, reason, logic and truth. The apparent disruption to these cornerstone principles of modernism merely serves to draw attention to them and actually promotes them.

Moreover, because humour is seen as harmless ridicule which exists outside of truth, and it is commonly accepted that humour works this way, the effects of the Hogarthian destruction of an expectation are neutralised. The eighteenth century viewer could walk away from his works in the knowledge that "this is just Hogarth and his jokes" and know that his/her world and its principles remain untouched. In fact, the expectation (read "existing rule" or "principle") which Hogarth's humour is supposedly destroying not only remains intact, but is revitalised and reinstalled. It merely reminds the viewer of the rule itself which one should not overstep and is further cushioned by the fact that it is only a joke. Even Hogarth's almost blasphemous allusions and satirical presentations of God, Christ, or moral and theological cornerstone principles that are found scattered in some of the subplots of some of his works (such as *A Rake's Progress* [Figs 7-15]) were understood as the prerogative of the humorist which could not give offence. Therefore, in the early modern moral and aesthetic climate, humorous works like Hogarth's were viewed as reprimands which pointed out aberrations that had to be avoided rather than attempts to deconstruct the existing moral codes.

The relationship between Hogarth's work and modern correspondence thinking is therefore not as it at first seems the early manifestation of the deconstruction of this mode of reasoning. If the complexities of the relationship between his humour and correspondence thinking are further unravelled, it becomes clear that Hogarth's humorous art can be viewed as part of and even being supportive of this mode of thinking.

## **6.2 Hogarth and the violation of logic theory**

This modernist theory of humour not only *implies* that humour is not rational, but also states that humour violates logic. The term "incongruous", often used to define humour in these theories, is especially suitable to describe Hogarth's humour. "Incongruous" is a synonym for what is odd, strange and not congruent in any way with place, setting or context. What is illogical can be incongruous. The implication of the use of this term is

therefore that a normal, logical (not strange) context does exist. In fact, the idea of incongruity is only possible if a pre-existing standard is in place.

Hogarth's humour relies strongly upon this reciprocal relationship which is created when an incongruity (the odd, unsuitable, illogical or strange) is presented within what is considered a "normal" and logical context. A specific example of Hogarth's use of incongruity in this way can be found in his *Marriage à la Mode*. In this work (Figs 17-18) he presents the father of the prospective bride as a man from the upper class or aristocracy in palatial surroundings which would be logical for someone of his status (the expected). As the viewer studies the rest of the works in this series, it becomes clear that despite this impression of ideal normality, he is also ridiculously presented as pompous, pretentious, devoid of taste or morality, overweight, greedy and stupid (the unexpected). Hogarth presents us with both the incongruity (the strange) and the conventional and logical (not strange). The humour functions in a dual relationship with the idea of normality by first *subverting* it and, secondly, ironically also *depending* upon it in order to be funny. Thirdly, it places the validity of the values of modern self-made members of the English aristocracy in question. In this way it *propagates* what are considered as proper values for an honoured member of a society which bases its values on the norm of rational (i.e. "good") behaviour. For didactic purposes, the kind of progress that the harlot enjoys is not one that the artist would suggest anyone follow.

Hogarth creates a relationship of incongruity on the aesthetic level in two ways. First, the illogical and disorderly behaviour and robust appearances of his characters are placed in a logically structured formal (and strangely pleasing) composition. Secondly, the ordinary or low humorous (unserious) content is contrasted by the elevated (serious) presentation of the works. In both cases Hogarth is placing the incongruous within the expectation or the rule. He is presenting us with something which seems odd and out of place (not logical) in a specific context. Jenny Uglow (1997: xi) writes that "though they seem solid and real, Hogarth's prints are also distant and strange, and this too is part of their appeal." The pompous or uncouth characters in Hogarth's works seem at odds with their settings and this apparent dichotomy is one of the reasons why Hogarth's works are humorous. Without the norm, this would be impossible.

### 6.3 Hogarth and the absence of perfection theory

Hogarth's humour subscribes to the modern theory of absence of perfection because he depicted the unlovely, the imperfect, the "deformity" (Bergson 1911:23) or "the meanest subjects of the world" (Uglow 1997:74). The viewer is an exponent of the ideal standard for "decency or elegance", as Hogarth describes it, and the imperfections of the images belong to "the other" (Paulsen 1992:208). The contrast of beauty versus ugliness only highlighted the rule and the misfit served to accentuate the appropriateness of the conformist (Paulsen 1992:208-297). This functions, as Hobbes (1969:41) said, as the "infirmities of others, by comparison wherewith their own abilities are set off". The ideal remained the dominant toward which both the creator and the recipient of this art strove. The modernist idea of perfection was thus not disrupted but was sustained by the ridicule of imperfection in Hogarth's works.

Hogarth's subject matter was bodily and moral deformities, indecency, stupidity, greed, pretentiousness, general misfortunes and breaches of order. Hogarth, the satirist, was however still always "acutely conscious of the difference between what things are and what they are supposed to be", as Arthur Pollard (1970:2) writes in his book *Satire*. Hogarth's humour functions in the space between the way things are and the way they are expected to be. Put differently, Hogarth's humour was structured around and dependent upon the very difference between the ideal and the deviant, the norm and the recalcitrant element. Without the norm and the possibility of perfection, Hogarth's humour would not be funny.

Like his narratives, his sculptural poses and ordered compositions follow an orderly, universally fixed ideal design which may not necessarily be the disorderly pattern of real-life events but rather the "improved" pattern of what can ideally be expected. Kenny (1998:62) writes that Aristotle's answer to Plato's complaint that art was merely an imitation of everyday life was that real life happens as if by accident and it is only in fiction that we can see the proper working out of things to their "natural" consequences. In Hogarth's works, ordinary figures are placed in decorative, compositionally pleasing (ideal) groups. Even where the final stages of the main character's decline into absolute misery is depicted, the squalor and dejection is idealised by these graceful groupings. The same idealised, pleasant and appealing overall formal compositional arrangement is used in, for example, *A Rake's Progress* to depict scenes as different as the palatial interior of

the hero's home (Fig 8); the squalid interior of an eighteenth century jail or asylum (Fig 14); and emotions as different as absolute pleasure and light-hearted frivolity (Fig 9) or deep repentance, anger and insanity (Fig 14).

Hogarth repeatedly uses carefully arranged emblems to represent disorder, like an overturned piece of furniture or a dramatic gesture in *A Rake's Progress* (Fig 12) or *A Harlot's Progress* (Figs 2 and 5). These devices curiously seem to enhance the logically structured quality of his compositions by forming many smaller ornamental arrangements within the larger dimensions of the works. Each of these separate little decorative compositions is carefully integrated into the whole to form an overall impression of studied orderliness rather than disorder. His poses and compositional groupings are clearly "improving" on nature. He honours the ideal and the perfect rather than the odd, the ridiculous and the un-ideal despite his intention to be humorous. This is testimony to the dominance of a pre-existing norm of perfection that is based on the superiority of man's rationality over nature itself, even in modern theories of humour and humorous art.

Hogarth's humorous art therefore has an exceedingly complex relationship with this norm, which is why it is easy to overlook the fact that it does not disrupt modern correspondence thinking but sustains it. Hogarth depicts the defects of man (subverting the norm) in an idealised setting (accentuating the norm). He appears to disrupt the norm in order to be humorous (relying on the norm) but, in actual fact, advocates the ideal by its comparison with the un-ideal (propagating the norm).

#### **6.4 Hogarth and the superiority theory**

This type of theory claims that humans laugh at others because they feel superior. This means that although humour is defined by another theory as the absence of perfection and therefore has to show imperfections in order to be funny, this particular theory states that it is because of a realisation of one's own perfection that one laughs at the imperfections of others. Paulsen (1992:201) mentions an example in the work of the English writer Alexander Pope (1680-1744), which can be seen as typical of this paradoxical view of humour. One of Pope's characters, a common fishwife is humorously depicted as she tries to speak like Dido, a more educated, refined character in the same work. The contradiction between the two theories is that humour is seen as imperfect in the one and yet it is also seen as evoking laughter by making one feel superior about one's own

perfection in the other. If this is so, then humour is not disruptive of the modern model for perfection as the one theory states but is rather conducive to it.

Hogarth's works display such contradictions. The stupidity of the young aristocrat in *A Rake's Progress*, the gullibility of the young maiden in *A Harlot's Progress*, the cruelty of the characters in *The Four Stages of Cruelty* or the laziness in *Industry and Idleness* are all depicted as "vices" which lead to disaster through a transgression of the accepted norms. The early modern viewer of Hogarth's work could therefore, in the first place, feel superior towards the antics of his characters. At the same time, Hogarth depicts some of his characters (such as the bride's father in *Marriage à la Mode* [Fig 17]) as displaying a misplaced idea of their own superiority which again refutes any idea which the viewer might have that these works condone the idea of superiority over others. Paradoxically, the viewer sees the satire and grotesqueness of the images but is precluded from feeling as if he/she could be superior.

Another example of this is found in the scene from *The Rake's Progress* entitled *Bedlam* (Figs 14 and 15), which shows two genteel society ladies peeping through a door in the background at the insane inmates of an asylum. It was common practice at the time for upper class citizens to visit such places for their own amusement in order to laugh at the antics of the mad (read "loss of reason") (Uglow 1997:225). The viewer of this work can laugh along with the ladies at the madmen themselves *or* laugh at the strange practice of viewing madness for entertainment. Hogarth is here also presenting us with the double-edged "purpose" of his humour. The didactic purpose of the scene is clear – take a moral lesson from the horror of this practice and feel superior because we are morally above such an inhumanity. Alternatively, the viewer can feel superior on both counts by arguing that he/she is thankfully neither mad nor mean and cruel. However, in all of the above instances, it can be said that (a) Hogarth's humour needs the ideal rule for normality (i.e. total rationality and perfect ethics) in order to be humorous, and (b) regardless of which of the abovementioned triggers amusement in the viewer, the ideal rule is accentuated and propagated in each case. The mad prove the results of a loss of rationality; the laughing ladies bring the rule of proper decorum to the fore.

## **6.5 Hogarth and the moral purpose theory**

It is only when Hogarth's work is viewed from the perspective of *this* modern theory of humour that it becomes clear exactly how intricate his humour and its relationship with

modern correspondence thinking really was. Paulsen (1992:22) quotes Jonathan Richardson who, in *Science of a Connoisseur* of 1719, describes the modern view of art as didactic as follows: "...the function of art in a polite society is to be collected and hung on the wall and emulated, with the clear implication that such behaviour will raise the individual's status as well as his character." This modern understanding of art as responsible for the moral education of humanity is part of its complex relationship with modern correspondence thinking. Hogarth's works function through satire, irony and burlesque to teach a lesson in morality. Satire does not need to cause the viewer to laugh uproariously; it is all the better if the arrow flies home with its moral lesson by sobering the viewer up. But, as always, there has to be a standard of good behaviour whereby the degree of the fall of the vicious is measured in order for the virtuous to understand their danger.

Hogarth said that his prints of 1760 are specifically "calculated for the use and instruction of the youth wherein every thing necessary was made as intelligible as possible" and continued that the engraving makes this possible because "it provides that which is infinitely more material viz that characters and expressions were well preserved, the purchase of them within the reach of those for whom they [were] chiefly intended" (Paulsen 1992:290). The tales that are told in Hogarth's works suggest a definite distinction between right and wrong. It is easy to recognise and identify with the generalised characters, and the moral messages are often supplied in the form of mottos and banners bearing inscriptions from biblical proverbs. In other words, these works have been designed to be interpreted from the viewpoint of a shared morality. It is assumed that this viewpoint is universal and transcends all barriers of race, religion or moral creed.

This makes the artist's works exceptionally suited for use as modern moral propaganda or, put plainly, moral lectures. So successful are they, says Paulsen (1992:290), that sermons were preached on works like *Industry and Idleness* (Figs 19-21) and they were hung on classroom walls. Hogarth was also commissioned on November 1740 by a certain Aaron Hill "upon the pre-supposition that Mr Hogarth is able (and if anybody is, it is he) to teach pictures to speak and think" (Paulsen 1992:187). In June 1740 the English novelist, playwright and leading satirical dramatist Henry Fielding (1707-1754) wrote in an essay on satire published in the periodical *The Champion* that he saw Hogarth's works as examples of the most successful satire which any age had produced:

In his excellent works you see the delusive Scene exposed with all the force of Humour, and, on casting your Eyes on another Picture, you behold the dreadful and fatal consequence. I must dare affirm that those two Works of his, which he calls *Rake's* and *Harlot's Progress*, are calculated more to serve the Cause of Virtue, and for the Preservation of Mankind, than all the *Folios* of Morality which have been ever written; and a sober family should no more be without them, than without the *Whole Duty of Man* in their house. (Paulsen 1992:194)

## 7 THE LITERARY AND THEATRICAL INFLUENCE

The novel became popular during the eighteenth century. Satire was tremendously successful and Hogarth's familiarity with the English novelist and journalist Daniel Defoe (1666-1731) and Henry Fielding, who was "partly responsible for the establishment of the English novel", was important to the artist (MEE sv "Daniel Defoe", "Henry Fielding" and "British Art").<sup>5</sup> Hogarth himself also did book illustrations. His engravings were used to illustrate an edition of the satirical novel *Hudibras* by the English writer Samuel Butler (1612-1680) in 1726 (MEE sv "Samuel Butler" and "Illustration").

Hogarth's works strongly rely on a narrative or literary element to make the didactics easily understandable and clearly visible. This makes his work effective as moral propaganda. The descriptive titles of his works already prepare the viewer for the moral message. The strong moral storyline follows a definite logical sequence in the early modern neo-classical tradition. The clear beginning is continued in sequential "chapters" in series of six or even eight matching works. This carries the tale to a logical end in order to create the illusion of "truthfulness" for the viewer. As Uglow (1997:xi) notes: his works can even be "read" as one would normally read, namely from beginning to end and from left to right since they follow in logical chronological and temporally correct sequences. *Although A Rake's Progress* (Figs 7-15) ridicules and disrupts, it was created with a specific end-result or goal in mind, comes to a predestined conclusion and typically offers definite closure.

It is possible that Hogarth was familiar with and influenced by the many examples of literature, plays and operas that were available during his time. Molière, the luminary French satirist, was considered a "comic genius" because his work exposed the "vices and follies" of contemporary society (Uglow 1997:8). A famous example is *L'Avare* (The Miser) of 1669. There are resemblances between Molière's plots and Hogarth's *Marriage*

*à La Mode*, *A Harlot's Progress* and *A Rake's Progress*. His closest friend was David Garrick (1717-1779), a successful British Shakespearian and comedy actor, theatrical manager and playwright. Hogarth painted Garrick's portrait in 1745 and Garrick wrote Hogarth's epitaph when he died in 1764 (MEE sv "Garrick, David").

Hogarth's works also do not only read like modern novels, but provide drama and spectacle like the modern theatre. Paulsen (1992:18) explains that many dramatisations of *A Harlot's Progress* were created both before and after Hogarth's painting was made. Drama has long served as a teaching method even to the illiterate. Hogarth himself said in 1763 said: "My picture was my stage and men and women my actors" (Uglove 1997: ix). The spatial arrangement of the interior and exterior spaces where "little ballad operas", as Uglove (1997: x) calls them, unfold, resembles the stage by giving the impression of being closed off. This heightens the effect of the "closed-ness" of the interpretational possibilities of the work. Furthermore, the sequential scenes resemble the scenes of a play or opera. The figures are portrayed with stage-like, dramatically exaggerated postures, facial expressions and gestures which seem permanently frozen in attitudes of moral retribution. Their fingers point towards each other or to certain symbols which the artist wished to accentuate in order to ensure that the single moral message will be unambiguously received in one glance.

## **8 THE CHRISTIAN/CLASSICAL MORAL IDEAL**

Like the works of Bunyan and the English poet John Milton (1608-1674), the all-pervasive Christian ethics of the time also pervade Hogarth's work. He used the mythology of Christianity in *Satan, Sin and Death*<sup>6</sup> (after Milton's *Paradise Lost* in 1735-1740). The earlier *A Rake's Progress* and *A Harlot's Progress* show marked allusions to and dependence on the same themes as those of *Paradise Lost* in both narrative and moral message (Fowler 1987:130). Hanley (1989:36), in *Satan, Sin and Death; Sources for Milton's First Illustrator, and for Hogarth*, wrote that *Paradise Lost* could be "found in every literate household throughout the eighteenth century and beyond".

Milton's famous allegorical poem about the banishment of humanity from paradise because of sin was part of the prevailing culture. That the poet should treat the theme in the epic style and Hogarth through satire, and expect their audiences to understand and

share their viewpoints is not unusual for their time. Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* and *A Harlot's Progress* can in fact be seen as a modern-day version of Adam and Eve. Also, the full title of Bunyan's book is *Pilgrim's Progress: From this World to that which is to Come*. This is also part of the title and suggested theme of Hogarth's two works since both the main characters *progress* through human trial and sin to death or to *that which is to come*. Christ and the redemption also forms the narrative theme of Milton's second book that was entitled *Paradise Regained* (1671) which dramatises the triumph of Jesus over Satan to regain the paradise which Adam and Eve had lost (Fowler 1987:130-133). Themes of redemption and salvation inform *The Rake's Progress* (Figs 7-14). In *Bedlam* (Fig 15) the Pietà-like pose of Tom Rakewell on the lap of a female figure, both illuminated by a single shaft of light in an otherwise dark interior, is an example of this. Tom Rakewell therefore, like Jesus Christ who is the *Logos* (both word and reason incarnate), overcomes Satan's stronghold of sin and vice in his final moment and is redeemed.

Certain forms of Protestant Rationalism, such as Unitarianism which denied the Divinity of Jesus Christ, started to gain influence in England after 1689. Although a more humanistic approach (which would make Christ as human as Hogarth's *rake*) was propagated in this view, the emphasis on the ethical teachings and example of Jesus Christ was retained in the link between rationality and ethics. The influence of Descartes' earlier theories that reaffirmed God's existence by producing rationally deduced evidence of it could have influenced these theories. Wheat (1970:123-124) writes that the *Logos* was brought into the Christian religion via the gospel of John who treats the *Logos* as both God ("the *Logos* was God") and Jesus as "the *Logos* became flesh". *Logos* also forms a link between the classical (reason), the "word" (literature) and modern Protestant religion (morality) as found in the Gospel according to John. In view of the modern belief that man's ability to reason could result in continuous progress towards an ideal, the modern Protestant conception of morality and ethics can be seen as being reliant on the belief that Jesus is the Word, and the Word is reason. The *Progress* of both a rake and a harlot can thus be seen as upward progress towards the modern ideal of morality through the application of reason.

The redemption motif, as found in Hogarth's work, also illustrates that modern norms of ethics and morality were based on the conception that the logical reaction of *any* rational civilised society like that of ancient Greece for example (and not only a morality based

on Christian principles) to an observed vice or imperfection in someone would be to attempt to redeem the culprit in some way. This mode of thinking was propagated by many modern philosophers after the ethical models from antiquity such as Kant who, according to Scruton (1982:17), believed that one should "...act only in a way which you would be prepared to see everyone act". What is relevant here is that Hogarth's works, like the modern theory in question, support the idea that some fixed idealistic ethical model – whether derived from a classical or a Christian pre-existing principle for perfect ethics – exists outside of the work. Moreover, progress in the direction of this model is not only deemed universally possible but is seen as the universal responsibility of man. This places most of Hogarth's works within the tenets of modernist teleology and the modernist theory that art, especially humorous art, can and should serve as propaganda for the betterment of humanity.

The subversive element in Hogarth's work was paradoxically allowed in the first place and neutralised in the second place exactly because it was humorous. Hogarth expressed a blatant criticism of the lifestyle of the people who were responsible both for his economic survival and acceptance within the higher circles of art. Ironically, the fact that humour was seen as without truth value and humorous art as less important than "good" art, it was also responsible for allowing him the freedom to express these criticisms (Paulsen 1992:28). The privilege of amnesty which humour enjoyed is therefore double-edged. It gave Hogarth more iconographical leeway than the "serious" artist. The reprieve which protected his art from being viewed as entirely aesthetically offensive was however only seen as the realisation of an artistic ontological ideal on the grounds that it worked towards the moral progress of humanity (Worcester 1940:18). His *humour* thus paradoxically granted him a degree of entry into the category of "high" art, yet also prevented him from sharing the glory with the old masters in his time as a "comic history painter" (Gowing 1972:28).

## **9 CONCLUSION**

Hogarth presents humanity and its vices and traits as generalised into essential categories and not as it may seem in a specific manner. He creates parallels that are based not on difference, but on a common denominator of similarity which binds humanity together in correspondence with an essence or law that is already in existence. He is able to do this because he works within the modern paradigm where it is believed that correspondence

to these laws constitutes progress and truth. He is therefore confident in the knowledge that an artist's intention is unambiguously communicated by his work and is universally understood.

The early modern correspondence paradigm was so securely ingrained in early modern thought that it overshadowed the possibility that someone like Hogarth, or indeed any humorous art, could destabilise it. Instead, humorous art was made part of the modernist correspondence paradigm and its desire to categorise, define and place all human phenomena on indubitable grounds, albeit by creating a special category for it within the broader category of art. Hogarth himself continued to employ many of the same artistic methods and conventions of the type that he was attempting to subvert through ridicule. His insistence that modern art could be improved by the elimination of an institutionalised encouragement of the practice of copying old art points to a teleological mode of thinking. As a typical modernist, he thus believed in the idealistic notion of progress and improvement. Therefore, his work (and specifically his humour) should also be seen as part of modernist correspondence thinking and its utopian hope for progress – and not, as it initially seems, as the first instances of its deconstruction.

Hogarth did not want his humour to destroy modernism as it stood, or uproot the metaphysical structures which supported it, but only to make room for his art within it.

## ENDNOTES

William Hogarth, *Southwark Fair* (1733). Engraving. Dimensions unknown. British Museum: London (Illustration and data: Lindsay 1979:54).

<sup>2</sup> Uglow (1997:xiv) explains: "The influential writers and statesmen of early eighteenth century Britain aspired to the model of Augustan Rome. The civic dignity and 'virtue' that fostered Horace and Virgil, and Hogarth, like other artists, felt the power of this ideal." Although Hogarth himself vehemently refuted and denied the influence of the ancients, and much of his chagrin was openly directed at the practice of institutionalising the validity of imitating the old masters in his works, evidence of this influence can nevertheless be detected in his work.

<sup>3</sup> Uglow (1997:83) writes that Hogarth's "alleged disrespect is untrue" and "is shown by the many borrowings and allusions in his work which reveal him to be steeped in classical tradition – even the head of the little boy crying in *Noon* is taken from Poussin's *Rape of the Sabines*..." Hogarth was acutely aware of new movements as well as those of the past. Among the foreign artists in London in 1719-1720 were Watteau and Hogarth. "Hogarth responded swiftly to the new, flowing, delicate French styles. His astounding memory

retained images from all the paintings and prints he saw and he adapted them with flair. He acquired an avid – if largely second-hand knowledge of the great art of past and present, fusing his mental notion of daily with models from the long history of art."

<sup>4</sup> William Hogarth, *Characters and Caricatures* (1743). Engraving: 20.32 x 21.59 cm. Collection unknown. (Source: Uglow 1997:369; data: Uglow 1997:776).

<sup>5</sup> Uglow (1997:xiv) reminds us that both the writer Henry Fielding and the actor David Garrick who greatly admired the classical, were Hogarth's close friends.

<sup>6</sup> William Hogarth, *Satan, Sin and Death* (1735-1749). Oil on canvas, 62 x 74.5 cm. Tate Gallery, London (Source: Hanley 1998:35).

## ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTER TWO



Fig 1: William Hogarth. *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) Plate 1 (Title unknown).



Fig 2: William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) Plate 2 "The quarrel with her Jew Protector."



Fig 3: Hogarth. *A Harlot's Progress*. (1732) Plate 3 "Apprehended by a Magistrate."



Fig. 4: William Hogarth. *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) Plate 4 "Scene in Bridewell."



Fig. 5: William Hogarth. *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) Plate 5 "She expires, while the doctors are quarreling."



Fig 6: William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) Plate 6 "The Funeral."



Fig 7: William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress* (1735) plate 1 "The young heir takes possession."



Fig 8: William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress* (1735) Plate 2 "Surrounded by artists and Professors."



Fig 9: William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress* (1735) Plate 3 "The Tavern Scene."



Fig 10: William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress* (1735) Plate 4 "Arrested for Debt."



Fig 11: William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress* (1735) Plate 5 "Married to an Old Maid."



Fig 12: William Hogarth, *A Rakes Progress* (1735) Plate 6 "Scene in a Gambling House."



Fig 13: William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress* (1735) Plate 7 "The Prison Scene."



Fig 14: William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress* (1735) Plate 8 "Scene in a Madhouse."



Fig 15: William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress*. (1735) "Bedlam."



Fig 16: William Hogarth, *The Painter and his pug* (1745).



Photo © The National Gallery, London.

Fig 17: William Hogarth, *Marriage A la Mode* (1743) Plate 1 “The Marriage Settlement.”



Photo © The National Gallery, London.

Fig 18: William Hogarth, *Marriage a La mode* (1743) plate 6 “The Lady’s death.”

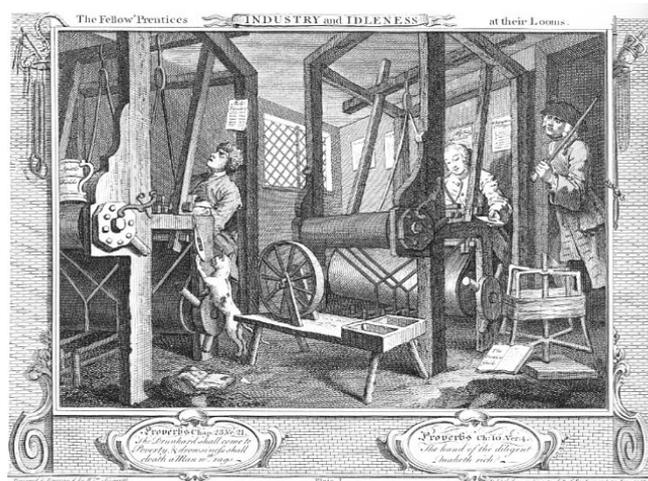


Fig 19: William Hogarth, *Industry and Idleness* (1747) plate1 “The fellow apprentices at their looms.”



Fig 20: William Hogarth, *Industry and Idleness* (1747) plate 11 “The Idle Prentice Executed at Tyburn.”



Fig 21: William Hogarth, *Industry and Idleness* Plate 12 “The Industrious Prentice.” Lord Mayor of London.



Fig 22: William Hogarth, *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1750-1751) Plate 1 “The first Stage of Cruelty.”



Fig 23: William Hogarth, *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1750-1751) Plate 2 “The second Stage of Cruelty.”

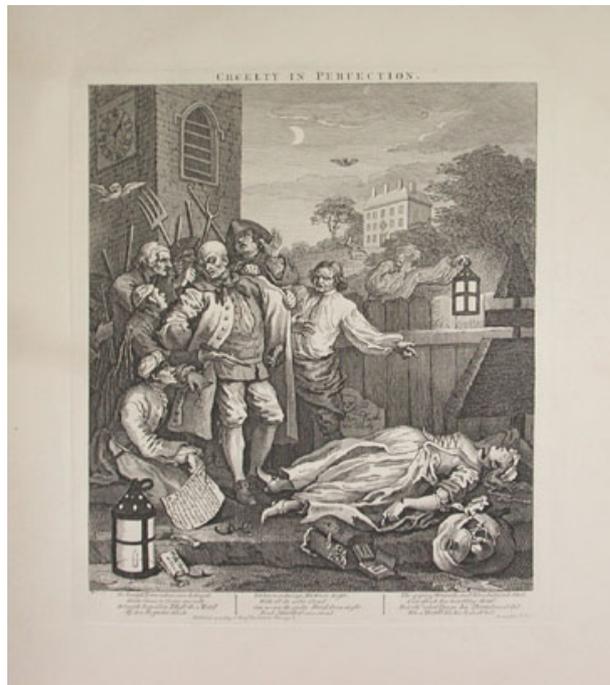


Fig 24: William Hogarth, *the Four Stages of Cruelty* (1750-1751) Plate 3 "Cruelty in Perfection."



Fig 25: William Hogarth, *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1750-1751) Plate 4 "The Reward of Cruelty."

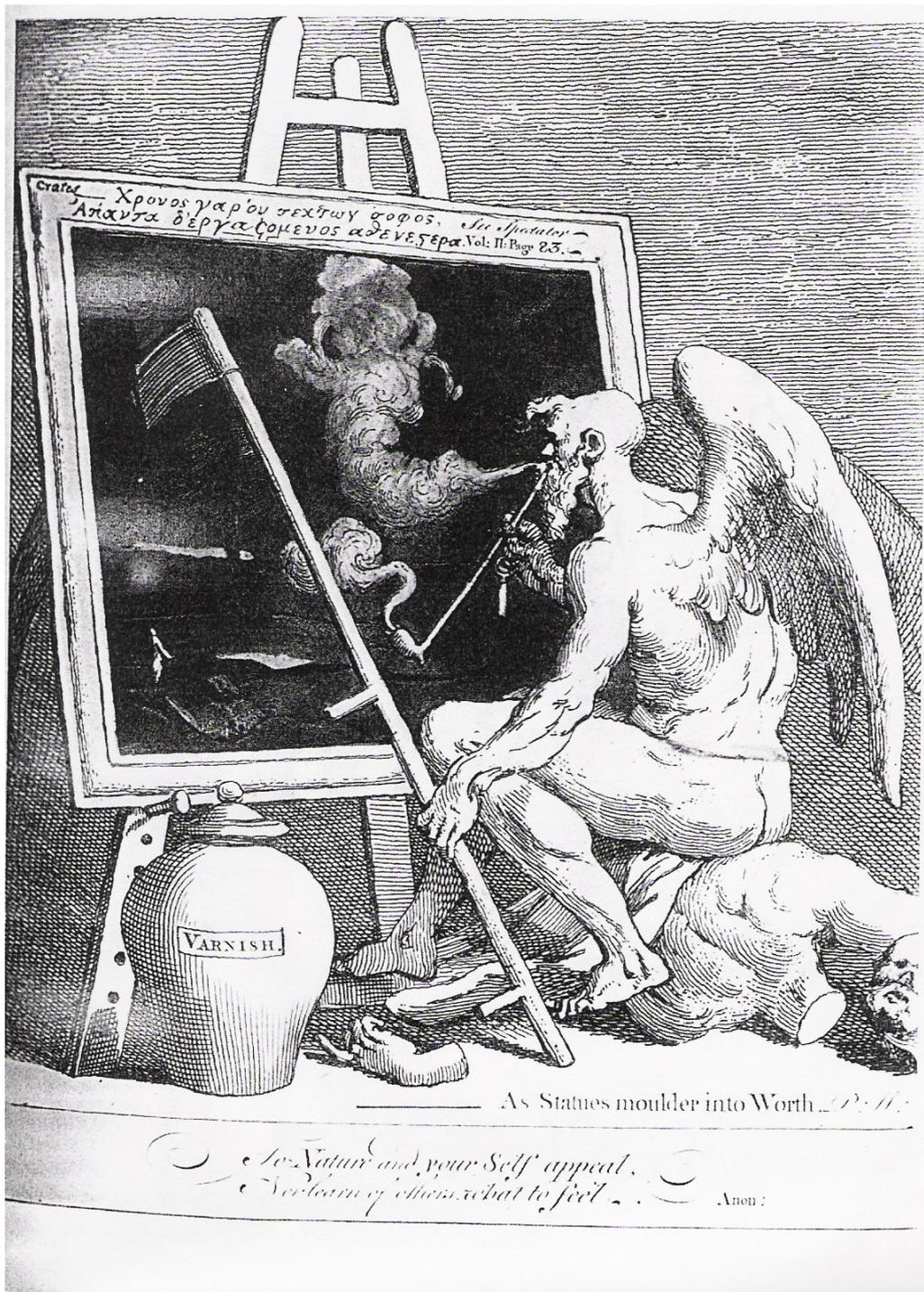


Figure 26: William Hogarth *Time Smoking a Picture* (1761).

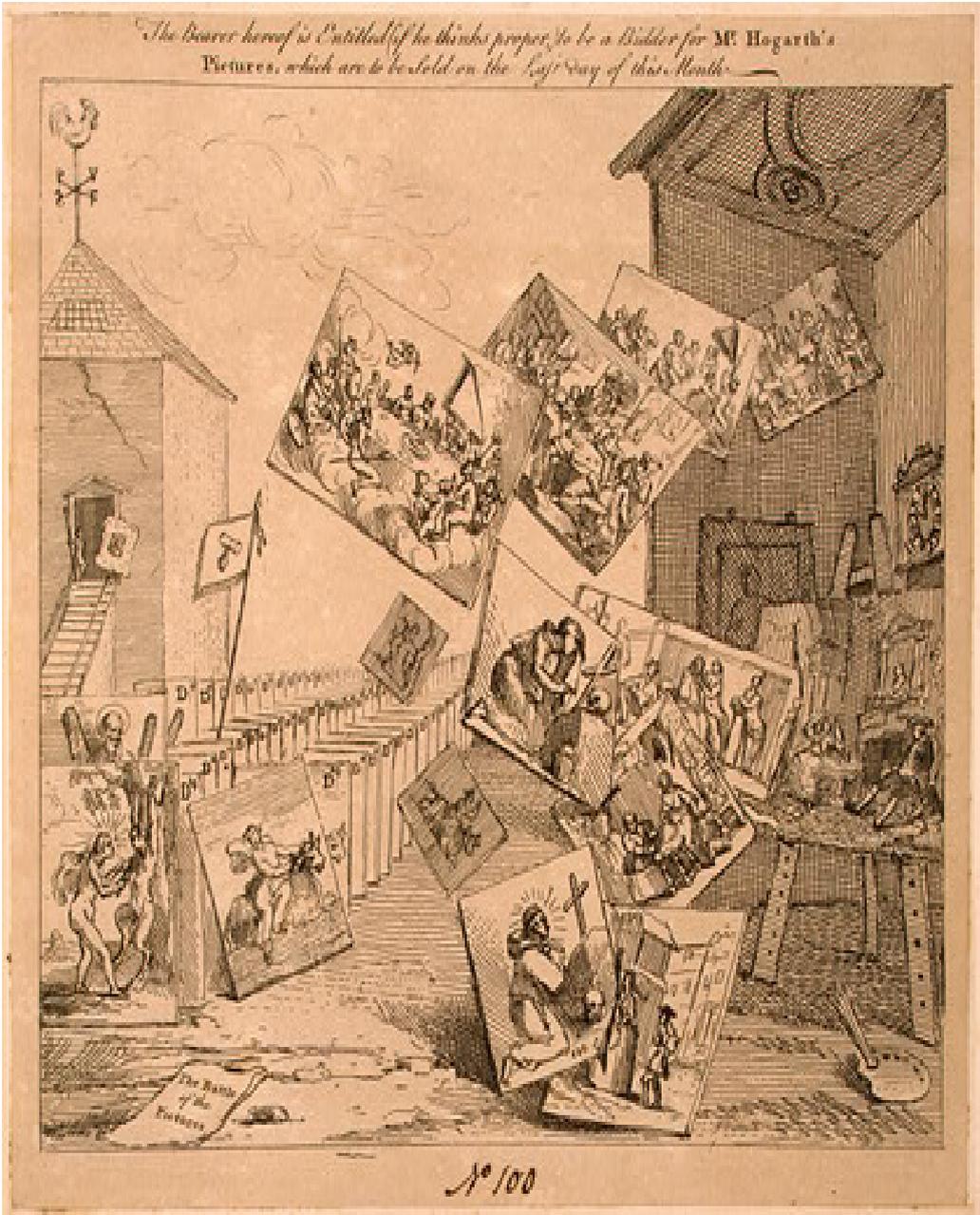


Fig 27: William Hogarth, *The Battle of The Pictures* (1744-1745).

### CHAPTER 3: DECONSTRUCTION, HUMOUR AND CREATIVE METAPHOR

In this chapter the role of humour in the shift from the modernist ontological to the postmodern metaphorical approach to art will be examined. The central argument is that humorous art is particularly suited to illustrate and demonstrate this shift. From an artistic viewpoint, the move from the ontological to the metaphorical need not, as it may at first seem, be regarded as negative. It can be argued that the deconstruction of the fixed ontological centring principles of modernist correspondence thinking led to a metaphorical approach to art which is characterised by change, renewal and invention. Humour has exceptional inventive potential because it is infinitely adaptable to change, which makes it a valuable means of expressing this approach.

Whereas the modernist believed in the discovery of unchanging pre-existing universal principles of truth that transcend all differences; the postmodernist recognises contextual instability and change (or *différance* as Derrida says in his 1978 publication). Kuchler (1994:23-4) describes this in *Postmodern Gaming: Heidegger, Duchamp, Derrida* as a move "from the structurality of metaphysical thinking with its desire to ground the world and to secure its meaning in a notion of Being as transcendental presence – to a post-metaphysical thinking where play functions as a moment of un-assimilable difference that precedes and thereby punctures the stability of metaphysical grounds". Art in the postmodern view is therefore no longer ontologically enclosed in a literal corresponding relationship with truth and meaning (like the modern); but is playful, open-ended and metaphorical.

The first part of this chapter serves as a platform for the central argument. First of all, an explanation is provided for what metaphor is, since an understanding of it is vital to the argument. The loss of modern faith in the closure of truth is then briefly viewed from a historical perspective. This is followed by a general discussion of how the stabilising centres of modern correspondence thinking were undermined by postmodernist deconstructionist theories. Though by no means the only possibilities, and therefore not reflecting any notion that their theories are the sole origins of deconstruction but because the nature of this text demands selectivity, the author engages with the theories of Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>, Heidegger<sup>2</sup> and Derrida<sup>3</sup>. Despite their numerous differences<sup>4</sup> that are not relevant to this dissertation, certain aspects of their theories are relevant to the argument

and to each other. Heidegger and Derrida's theories in particular posit what Heidegger (2004:180) sees as "post-metaphysical" thinking. This kind of thinking attests that the modern centre is not stable but is continually destabilised by an unintelligible non-rational, non-teleological movement of play which is caused by the infinite replacement of the centre itself. The creative potential in the similarities between this play and metaphor is then pointed out. This is followed by an investigation of how poststructuralism specifically deconstructs the modern view of language and the modern view of art and humour, which results in the move to a metaphorical approach. From this, the theory is developed that humorous art is particularly appropriate to articulate this creative metaphorical approach where art is no longer ontologically grounded in truth.

The second part of this chapter shows why humour is suited to demonstrate the deconstruction of modernist truth structures and why humorous art is an exceptionally appropriate illustration of the *inventive* nature of postmodern play and creative metaphor. Although humour depends on some kind of law, rule or convention to function successfully, it does not depend on the *permanence* of structure. It is indefinitely adaptable and able to launch itself from any new structure. It is not destroyed by change but is rather revitalised because of it. Humour does not function by corresponding to literal truth but by deliberately creating a certain play with meaning and reality. It is unpredictable because it has no fixed form or logic. It is also most susceptible to context and is thus not stable; but continually changes and is being *reinvented* to remain topical rather than to be *rediscovered* in what already exists. This can also be said of metaphor.

The following discussion of metaphor is valuable for an understanding of the difference between the modern ontological approach and the postmodern metaphorical approach.

## **1 METAPHOR**

Metaphor<sup>5</sup> is defined in the MED as figurative speech, ("not literal", "representational" and "allegorical or emblematic...to represent an abstract idea or quality"). It is also described as being continuously disruptive of conventional or "literal" meaning (MED sv "Figurative"). Meaning in metaphoric language is *vague* because of not "having a clear or perceptible form". It is not "transparent", "obvious" or "easy to recognise" (MED sv "Transparent"). In other words, metaphor does not *literally* represent real things. The word is derived via Old French from the Latin word *literals* (from *litera* which means

letter") and is the source of the English word "letter", which implies that the literal meaning of something adheres *to the letter* – "to the basic meaning of an original word or text without further elaboration or interpretation word for word: exactly following the order or meaning of an original word or text" – and is used "to emphasise [the] truth of something" (MED sv "Literal").

### **1.1 Formlessness and impurity**

Metaphor is said to be *not transparent*. The word "transparent" means that a thing is "clearly recognisable as what it is" (MED sv "Transparent"). Literal language is thus transparent in meaning. Transparency of meaning is typical of the modernist desire to define being. Transparent also means "clear as crystal". Crystal is defined as a "homogeneous [of the same kind] portion of matter that has a definite, orderly atomic structure, an outward form bound by smooth plane surfaces, symmetrically arranged. The angles between corresponding faces of any two crystals of the same substance regardless of size or superficial differences of form, are always identical" (own insertion) (MED sv "Crystal"). The similarities between modernist correspondence thinking and transparency of meaning that is as "clear as crystal" are multiple (such as the desire for similarity despite superficial differences; symmetry of form, logic and order). Pamela Ryan (1985:40-46) writes in her article *The Postmodern Text in Recent American Fiction* that a classical text "once created, [has] the stiffness – so to speak – of a crystal... a stable meaning and a single interpretation which decodes signs as if they were fixed denotations reflecting a known reality". Metaphor is by implication and because of its not-crystal-like nature, formless by correspondence standards. As Hawkes (1972:4-5) writes in *Metaphor: The Critical Idiom*: "Metaphor... has no pristine (pure) form". Traditional metaphor, because it is still somewhat literal or transparent, retains a degree of adherence to a pre-established form.

In order for something to be transparent (clearly recognisable for what it is), it has to consist of one substance only (as does a clear diamond or water). Something that is described as "opaque" is a mixture of two substances, the infiltration of one into another or an impurity like coal which is composed of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen (MEE sv "Coal"). When it is applied to metaphor, it is the improper (mixed) use of language which can have more than one meaning compared to the correspondence view which depends on the idea of *one* (or as Derrida [1976:271] put it "precise" and "univocal") meaning.

Metaphor functions by "reweaving", as Richard Rorty (1986:752) says in *From Logic to Language to Play*, new *impure* combinations between linguistic concepts. Moreover, if one looks at pure and transparent water, the bottom of whatever contains or supports it is visible; whereas if it is murky or impure ("opaque"), it seems as if it is without end and not supported by any structure. When applied to metaphor, opaqueness suggests that it is not grounded in any clear correspondence with a specific pre-existing meaning but is endless or open-ended in infinite possible interconnections with other words and concepts. When applied to art, it means that metaphoric and humorous art (like parody) is impure in its inter-textual referral to other art and invented mutations between concepts; it is not kept pure by its adherence to a specific pre-ontology for perfect (pure) art. A lack of transparency, which makes it impossible to see the end, means that if applied to metaphoric art, it is not teleologically focused towards a pre-established goal. Hawkes (1972:4-5) says that metaphor has no clear function; it only exists because metaphors do.

## **1.2 Vagueness and impermanence as inventive**

The Latin origin of the word "vague" that was used above to describe metaphoric meaning means "wandering and inconstant", which aptly describes metaphor's disobedience to the literal and its inventive potential (MED sv "Vague"). Metaphor is not stable or logically predictable like the literal. It does not correspond to literal meaning in a fixed pattern, but randomly plays and disrupts the fixed relationship between word and meaning. It invents by creating new couplings with new meaning in a way that is similar to humour. Metaphor couples the Kantian x with y or even z with g in endless new combinations (like man + pig or machine + mouse inside language itself in order to invent new hybrids) (Rose 1979:23). The phrase "he is a pig" or the contemporary referral to the small computer tool as a "mouse" are examples of the way in which metaphoric language ignores the "normal" corresponding relationship between an object or person and its linguistic term. This illustrates that metaphoric language is exceptionally susceptible to change and context. It is metaphor, and not literal language, which is responsible for the creation of new terms for new things like the computer "mouse". Such terms soon become an accepted part of language, are annotated in dictionaries as legitimate terms, and themselves become outdated when new terms replace them. Metaphor is not permanent; it has a shelf life. Its open-endedness and the

continual movement as it is infinitely replaced, create an ongoing dynamic rather than stable obedience to a fixed pattern that already exists.

It seems that if one wanted to emphasise truth, one would use literal rather than metaphorical language. It can thus be said that a modernist would be more inclined to use literal descriptions and a postmodernist would be more inclined to use metaphorical terms. However, nothing is that clear cut and modernism is rampant with examples of metaphorical speech and writing. This can partly be explained by considering the difference between metaphor and metonymy.

### 1.3 Metonymy

The distinction between the two types of metaphor becomes clear when viewed from a Lacanian<sup>6</sup> perspective on the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) theory of "displacement". Raman Selden (1989:86) explains the difference between metaphor and metonymy in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* by showing how the French poststructuralist psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) reinstates his predecessor Freud's theories of dreams as a textual theory. Freud saw dreams as the main channel for repressed desires. He believed that the unconscious stores meaning in symbolic images which have to be deciphered. These images undergo, says Freud, (a) "condensation" or the combination of several images, and (b) "displacement" where the meaning of one image is shifted to a next one. Lacan calls the first process "metaphor" and the second "metonymy" (Selden 1989:86).

Metaphor denotes one kind of idea in the place of another word/phrase "for the purpose of suggesting a likeness between the two" that is more comparable to the simile, which means that a certain *literal descriptive correspondence* is still at work. The difference is illustrated by the examples used above, namely when one says that someone "is a pig" and when a computer tool is called a "mouse". The latter is more metonymic than the former because it simply drags the attributes of a mouse over to something else. All such tools are from then on a "mouse"; whereas "pig" does not from then on indicate all men. Another example is found in the biblical book of Psalms which refers to God's law as being a "lamp" (like a lamp) to our path, which combines ("condenses") similar attributes (both make us see) of two images into one. Metonymy is more direct like the synecdoche which functions by "displacing" a word or phrase with another or by making a part stand for a whole or the abstract stand for the concrete. For example: "The best

brains of this country are represented here", where the word "brains" is used instead of the phrase "intellectually brilliant people" (MED sv "Figure of Speech").

Although both metaphor and metonymy function by playing upon a certain degree of similarity between words and concepts, metaphor relies more upon the reader making a relatively *literal* comparative connection (lamp is *like* God's word) than metonymy which uses part of a collective image more concisely to create a synoptic *abstraction* to function as a symbol or icon for a concept (brain *is* intellect). The word "abstract" is used here in its relationship to the Latin *abstractus* or *abstrahere*, which means *to drag away* or *remove* (MED sv "Abstract"). Metonymy "drags" the meaning of a word or phrase from it to another. In his book *Metaphor* Terence Hawkes (1972:1) agrees by writing in a similar vein, but uses the term "to carry" over meaning. Traditional metaphor thus still contains traces of correspondence between words/concepts and their fixed meaning; while metonymy is more disruptive of and disobedient to the fixed relationship between words, and its meaning is more open-ended. More importantly, traditional metaphor retains traces of correspondence by creating meaning inside the relationship between words and truth *which already exists*; whereas metonymy invents an entirely new relationship. It should thus be kept in mind throughout the rest of this chapter that the modern use of metaphor can rely upon an ontologically fixed word/image/meaning relationship, but that postmodern post-Saussurian<sup>7</sup> use of metaphor no longer has such a secure relationship and leans toward the metonymical. As the next section shows, this is so because truth in the postmodern becomes relative.

## **2 THE DECLINE OF MODERN CORRESPONDENCE THINKING: FROM TRUTH TO "TRUTH"**

As was established in the preceding chapters, modern thought was motivated by a search for the truth about what it is "to be" human. This was believed to be in immutable universal structural principles that could be discovered by correctly deciphering their surface patterns. It was optimistically believed that following these codes to their underlying structures of truth and adhering to them would inevitably lead to some kind of utopia. The postmodernist, however, became disillusioned with these promises and began to question the truth structures with an attitude of ironic suspicion. This postmodernist *weltanschauung* of doubt did not happen overnight and it is impossible to pinpoint its historical parameters. What can be said is that certain world events and philosophical,

psychological and techno-scientific developments accelerated its growth. After World War II, the Holocaust, Hiroshima, the splitting of the atom<sup>8</sup> and the split of the self<sup>9</sup>, the declaration of God's death<sup>10</sup>, and the confusion between reality and fiction created by the media and computer technology<sup>11</sup>, the notion of truth or reality<sup>12</sup> could no longer survive. Something like the World Trade Centre disaster now looks, says Bert Olivier (2002:206) – professor of philosophy at the NMMU<sup>13</sup>, "like a replay of Independence Day". Reality has, in other words, become relative. "Truth" can now only be referred to in parenthesis.

This means that nothing is certain. No universal ontological principle, text or rule of any kind can proclaim sole authority. The stability of closure of truth which was guaranteed by the modern ontological centring principle is brought into question. Difference, plurality and the endless unstable movement of the open-ended enter into all discourse and art becomes playful and metaphorical.

## **2.1 The deconstruction of the modernist centre: From stability to play**

Derrida (1972:247) writes in *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences* that "[t]he concept of structure...and even the word 'structure' itself are...as old as western science and western philosophy." What this means is that humans have always desired a transcendental ordering presence or structure of some sort which is already in existence and functions as a centre of meaning. Derrida (1972:247) lists the following names which have been given to such centres: "essence, existence, substance, subject...transcendentality, consciousness or conscience, God, man". However, no ontological centre that is representative of being as a transcendental presence can, as the poet Yeats had written in the early nineteenth century, hold in the face of the ironic question that is asked by postmodern and poststructuralist theories: If an unorganised centre is not conceivable, what stabilises and organises the centre itself? (Fowler 1987:343). Heidegger and Derrida both pose this question at different times. Although their answers take different turns, both are relevant in showing how postmodern theories approach the deconstruction of modern correspondence thinking by means of a different kind of thinking.

## 2.2 A new kind of thinking: Beyond metaphysics

Heidegger (1996:4-5) in *Being and Time* sought the answer to the question of being by returning to the original metaphysical concept of "there being", because he believed that the question of being had never been asked in the right way in Western metaphysical thinking. He (1996:4) writes: "As a seeking, questioning needs prior guidance from what it seeks. The meaning of being must therefore already be available to us in a certain way." However, the problem is that although we do not *know* what "being" means, we ask "What is being?" According to Heidegger (1996:6), it is true that being is presupposed in all previous ontology, but "not as an available *concept* – not as the sort of thing we are seeking". In his *Letter on Humanism* he (2004:178) suggests that "[t]he necessary and proper form of the question concerning the truth of being, forgotten in and through metaphysics, can come to light only if the question 'What is metaphysics?' is posed in the midst of metaphysics' domination". This can only be done, says Heidegger (1996:20), through "a loosening of the sclerotic tradition and a dissolving of the concealments produced by it" which is the task of "the destructuring of the traditional content of ancient ontology". He (2004:178-180) proposes that "a new kind of thinking" outside of the "language of metaphysics" is needed, since "[e]very determination of the essence of man that already presupposes an interpretation of being without asking about the truth of being, whether knowingly or not, is metaphysical".

What this means is that in Heidegger's view, philosophical questioning about the essence of man has so far been directed from a metaphysical perspective into the nature of beings and did not properly ask what being *is*. John Caputo (1970:34), in his article *Being, Ground and Play in Heidegger*, writes that Heidegger was inspired by Goethe to say that Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason is only true of beings and not of being. This kind of thinking, says Heidegger (2004:178), "does not think of the difference of both." He (2004:178) believes that beings and being (the being-ness of beings) are two different things and that "metaphysics does not ask about the truth of Being itself", only of beings. Searching for the essence of man, as metaphysical thinking does by arguing that man is unique on the assumption that he is the only rational *animal*, places man ("grounds" man) for example within the realm of the animal without asking if this is where man truly belongs. This, says Heidegger (2004:178), is a "metaphysical interpretation" of an original Greek concept. It is not false but remains, like most philosophical theories thus far, "conditioned by metaphysics". Therefore, Western metaphysics stopped short before

what Heidegger sees as the proper questions about Being itself have been addressed. Such questioning is therefore "grounded" in philosophical terms, in metaphysical thinking itself. This is why Heidegger (2004:180) suggests that the only way to the answer is to think "outside of metaphysics".

By positing the idea of thinking beyond metaphysics into a realm of thinking outside of it, Heidegger puts forward the possibility that the ontological centres that have been established by modern thinking are not the final word, the Hegelian "Absolute", or modern immutable ontological end-all and be-all concerning the question of being and existence. Metaphysics, according to Heidegger (2004:178), has not only failed up to now to ask about being but this question is "inaccessible to metaphysics as such". In Heidegger's thinking, the question of being is neither finalised nor permanently closed by the discovery of the modern centres of truth (as correspondence thinking believes), but remains open-ended while "Being is still waiting for the time when it will become thought provoking to man" (2004:178).

If it is possible in Heidegger's kind of thinking<sup>14</sup> to think beyond what is taken by modern metaphysics as immutable centres of truth about what it is "to be", then it becomes possible to understand the idea of being itself as reaching beyond concepts such as transcendence, essence, god, man, etc which Derrida (1972:247-9) later says were put in place in Western thought to designate "the constant of a presence". In other words, it is possible to question the unquestionable in a Heideggerian (2004:180) "new kind of thinking". In fact, poststructuralists like Derrida show evidence of this thinking<sup>15</sup> in their arguments.

### **2.3 The centre is not permanent**

Derrida (1972:247) shows similarity to the theories of Heidegger before him by arguing that any structure is inherently unstable because of the very nature of the "structurality of structure". He (1972:249) says that because structuring lends the centre its function (namely to "orient, balance and organise"), an unstructured and unorganised structure *cannot* be regarded as a structure. A centre, Derrida (1972:249) argues, cannot both govern and escape structuring itself (as it has always been believed) since by this definition, the centre is both "*within* the structure and *outside* it..." This serves as evidence of Heidegger's theories<sup>16</sup>. Caputo's (1970:38) explanation of Heidegger's view

of play is as follows: Because being is itself without ground, it can give no account for itself since being *is* in itself the final "account" for the "realm of beings". Caputo (1970:38) quotes from Heidegger's *Die Technik und die Kehre*<sup>17</sup> where he says that "[b]eing does not have anything like to itself alongside of it. It does not have an effect produced upon it by another, nor does it produce an effect itself. Being does not, indeed it never runs its course as a causal connection of events". Put simply, this means that (like Derrida) Heidegger argues that *to be* the centre of meaning of being *itself* means that being cannot govern or structure itself.

The translator of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976: xv), Gayatri Spivak, explains that since being is "always anterior to thinking", it can never be formulated as an answer to the question "What is...?" What is taken in Western metaphysical thinking as the final and permanent centre of truth and being is therefore neither final nor permanent. This means that what is seen as the centre is not permanent but is endlessly replaced by its own centring or ordering structure *ad infinitum*. Derrida (1972:248) also concludes that "the center is not the center" because "the center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality) the totality *has its center elsewhere*". Any existing understanding of a centre of being is therefore, in this new kind of thinking beyond metaphysics, not permanent and immutable as the modernist believed. Derrida (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24) says that meaning is therefore "endlessly deferred". This means that the centre is not stable as the modernist believed, because its infinite replacement by another causes movement and instability which is known in postmodern discourse as "play".

## 2.4 Postmodern play

In Heidegger's view "play" is the simultaneous concealment and un-concealment of being to man. Heidegger believes that metaphysics does not understand being. He is quoted and translated by Caputo (1970:37) as explaining in his German publication entitled *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung 3*<sup>18</sup> that being is never entirely intelligible to man – not because of any failure of the mind but because it is, in the first place, equiprimordially unintelligible since it retains an unintelligible core; therefore it *can* never be completely rationally understood. What metaphysical thinking misunderstands is that being holds *itself* back as it tantalisingly moves in a form of play as it conceals and unconceals itself to man. It is this movement of being within its state of groundlessness (also called the abyss of

nothingness) which Heidegger sees as its "play". Caputo (1970:29) further quotes Heidegger from *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)*<sup>19</sup> as saying that being is thus the nothingness which is beyond understanding; being at the same time conceals and unconceals itself to a certain extent in an unending fluctuating *play* between the two to "waver meaninglessly in nothingness". Kuchler (1994:5) says that play is "no longer the one or the other, presence or absence, but both at the same time oscillating between the two in a movement that never comes to rest".

What is relevant to this discussion is that play never comes to rest and never provides closure about what being is, but remains suspended only in what it could or could not become. What is important is that this play is in an unstable state of *possible* becoming which is different from the realisation of becoming that would rule out the inventive, creative potential of infinite possibility. Moreover, says Kuchler (1994:6), it is a non-teleological movement. Heidegger is quoted by Caputo (1970:38) as saying that it just plays "because it plays" because play is "without reason". What is meant by this is that it (a) is neither rational nor logical, and (b) has no end goal or purpose. According to Caputo (1970:42), Heidegger emphasises that "[t]he function of this question [about being] is precisely not to be "closed" [or "answered" like ontic questions] but always to stay open. For what it questions into is a groundless play, to which anything like a final explanation is simply inappropriate" (my insertion). This acceptance of a non-teleological open-endedness in thinking can be seen as the result of the deconstruction of the modernist centre. More importantly, because it is no longer possible in poststructuralist thinking to believe in the permanence of the centre but only in its infinite movement of endless play, no closure of truth can ever be attained. Modernist ontologically *enclosed* correspondence thinking is thus replaced by a playful *open-ended* metaphorical thinking. Without the stabilising presence of a centring structure of truth about being that already exists somewhere, invention becomes an option. Without the hegemony of logic and truth, the irrational, the illogical (the humorous and playful) and the non-literal (the metaphorical) attain a different status.

## **2.5 The inventive similarities between play and metaphor**

The similarities between the characteristics of postmodern play and metaphor can be summarised as follows: both have no definite teleological goal or purpose; both have no fixed form and are not dependent upon permanence of structure, but are rather stimulated

by impermanence; both are therefore characterised by instability; both are unpredictable and non-rational and can therefore not be logically explained or comprehended; both generate dynamic movement because of their endless replaceability and are therefore neither ever able to provide closure but can only remain open-ended. For these reasons, both are conducive to change and invention rather than correspondence to a rule that already exists.

The next section shows how poststructuralist language theory deconstructs the modern view of language by identifying the instability of play within language itself, thus showing that language can no longer be seen as a vehicle of literal or ontological "truth" (as it was in the modern) but as metaphorical.

## **2.6 Deconstruction and language: From truth to metaphor**

Nietzsche is quoted by Johan Degenaar in a series of lectures under the title *Art and the Meaning of Life* (1986:81) as writing in his *Twilight of the Idols, and: The Anti-Christ* that as long as we have grammar, we will never get rid of God. This underlines the importance of language in the deconstruction of modernist correspondence thinking. Like his predecessors Heidegger and Nietzsche, Derrida (1972:247) believes that Western metaphysical centring thinking had its "roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language..." as a permanent pre-existing source of truth. In his classic work *Of Grammatology* Derrida (1976:3) calls this thinking "logocentrism" because, as Selden (1989:88) explains, "Logos (Greek for word) is a term which in the New Testament carries the greatest possible concentration of presence". In the modern view language is accepted as the universal *human* manifestation of the perfect reason of such a divinely ordered universal mind.<sup>20</sup> Language therefore functions as a basic, fixed external ordering principle in modern correspondence thinking in order to establish a universal essence of humanity or a pattern for what it is "to be". This makes the written and spoken word and a theoretical linguistic definition of an essence of something synonymous with truth from a logocentric viewpoint.<sup>21</sup> As Heidegger (1971:151) puts it: "The word makes the thing into a thing."

This longstanding assumption that language is synonymous with truth was already contested in structuralist theories. The Swiss linguist de Saussure (1857-1913) investigated the distinction between *langue* (the pre-existing shared system underlying language) and *parole* (actual individual use of language) in his *Course in General*

*Linguistics Part I* which is reproduced in Cahoon (2004:122-126). He argued that words are not symbols that correspond to referents but "signs" that are made up of two parts: the signifier (a mark either written or spoken) and the signified (the concept which is what is thought of when the mark is made). De Saussure argued that the relationship between the two is arbitrary because meaning is not the result of a connection between words and things, but only parts of this system of relations.

What this means is that words only have meaning in relation to other words within a certain sign system. Words do not represent truth or reality. We merely think they do because some system which is situated outside of the practical use of language functions as its source of meaning. In reality, words only mean what they mean inside a language system. Language is, according to this view, not the reflection of any final reality or permanent truth as is assumed in modernist correspondence thinking; but is a reflection of "truth" only within the context of a current dominant system or ideology. There are many examples of postmodernists who question the belief that language equals truth. Degenaar (1986:15) refers to it in his *Art and the Meaning of Life* as "[t]he lie of language". This lie, he says, is the lie that pretends "that language represents reality". He (1986:15) quotes Stern who agrees by saying that this lie "consists in the vital pretence that language is able to relate the world of man to some wider, benevolent cosmic scheme by offering them reliable knowledge of that scheme". Nietzsche is also quoted by Degenaar (1986:15) as saying that "the assumption that reason can operate in a sovereign sphere which guarantees access to truth is an illusion since reason itself functions in terms of figurative language".

Although the relationship between structuralism and poststructuralism was neither as simple nor as fluid as the following statement may suggest, it is not necessary to discuss the differences<sup>22</sup> between them here since all that is relevant to this discussion is the following: The structuralist separation of the practical *use* of language and its structuring *system* is sustained by poststructuralist language studies.<sup>23</sup> It continues to argue that signs (language) do not *correspond* to an ontological, teleological or subjective pre-existing "truth" or reality; but only refer to other signs within the sign system itself. Nietzsche is quoted by Degenaar (1986:25) as saying that traces of pre-existing ideologies which are inevitably part of language can only be discovered by means of deconstruction. Only then can new images and a different view of the world be explored in order that, in the place of the "repressive ideology of reason", an "open plurality of discourse" can be made possible by the "free play of signs".

This is what Derrida aims to achieve in his theories. Derrida invented the term *différance*, a term which he explains in his *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (reproduced in Cahoon 2004:225-240) as follows (here very roughly and much simplified): It is not the same as difference and refers, amongst other things, to what he sees as the largely overlooked fact that although certain words are spelt differently, they are often pronounced the same. *Différance* and difference is an example of how important even the change of one letter in a word is, which means that the same word can be understood in different meanings.<sup>24</sup> Derrida (1972:260) thus identifies instability or play in language, which he argues leads to "scandalous signification" because certain words can signify more than one meaning.<sup>25</sup> He (1976:115) uses the term "supplement" to explain the unstable relationship between linguistic couplets such as "good" and its opposite "bad" by arguing, for example, that in French the word *suppléer* (supplement) also means "to substitute". He further argues (1976:144) that because of the possibility of difference of meaning in words themselves, preference is sometimes given to one part of such a traditionally fixed coupling between two binary concepts over another, which constitutes what he calls a "violence done to the natural destiny of language". Derrida is quoted by Selden (1989:89) as calling this a "violent hierarchy", which he goes on to prove, can be exposed and reversed by the deconstructive interrogation of any existing theory.

As a result of this instability in language, Derrida says (quoted by Kohl 1992:29) that "...all texts and works of art say something other than what they are appearing to say, regardless of the artist's intention. There is no single meaning to be extracted from a text. Every text, through interpretation, can be shown to contain a multiplicity of meanings". He thus also identifies *free play* in language on the basis of the argument that the meaning of any word can be substituted for another. Derrida (1972:260) says that "a finite language – excludes totalization" because it is a field "of freeplay, that is to say a field of infinite substitutions" since there is "something missing from it, a center which arrests and founds the freeplay of substitutions."

Language can now only be seen as Nietzsche (quoted by Degenaar 1986:15) sees it, namely as "radically metaphorical". Degenaar (1988:15) argues that because "language consists of arbitrary signs", we must not even expect it to give a "referentially true account of things as they are" since "words do not designate things but rather imitate

them. Words are metaphors for things". In other words, language should not be taken as literal truth as it has been in modern correspondence thinking because it is, in the first place, metaphorical. Nietzsche (quoted by Degenaar 1986:16) says that language as truth is not truth at all, but "illusions which one has forgotten are illusions" and merely "worn out metaphors which have become powerless".

The positive effects of this deconstruction of language that are relevant to my argument are as follows: It can be said that the very loss of centring in language is responsible for a new approach where language is seen as metaphorical and its release from truth generates a multiplicity of interpretative possibilities and invention. Nietzsche's "worn out metaphors" of the modern can, in other words, be given a new lease of life. However, the effects of the recognition of *différance* (as Derrida terms it) in the postmodern have far-reaching implications far beyond the more obvious fact that it means that language can no longer lay claim to the metaphysical status it enjoyed in the modern as being representative of ontological truth. As Nietzsche pointed out (quoted by Degenaar 1986:25), all language already reflects a certain "understanding of the world". Therefore, the deconstruction of language also heralds a *revision* of the validity of every single existing understanding of human existence. It makes its presence felt in the postmodern human consciousness by creating an awareness of moral, social, political, historical, theological, geographical, gender and cultural differences. This should, like Derrida's interpretation of the word, not be seen as difference in its conventional meaning. Instead, it is a critique of the intolerance of difference. It is not a celebration of difference itself, but of its erasure. It is characterised by a recognition and validation of the viewpoints of those who were previously categorised and marginalised as "the other", exactly on the grounds of difference. This is the direct result of the deconstruction of the modern centre which "opened up", as it were, the fixed modernist rule which served to measure difference. This "new kind of thinking", which reminds us of Heidegger, particularly manifests itself in contemporary cultural products in the form of a distinctly ironic questioning of the ridiculousness of the intolerance of difference.

## **2.7 Deconstruction, art and humour: From the ontological to the metaphorical**

Poststructuralism refutes the assumption that man's creative cultural products reflect truth by corresponding to some singular originating source of truth about art by disclosing the instability of any such source. This inevitably brings into question the modernist

assumption of a pre-existing artistic standard or essence (ontology), the notion that artistic progress is inevitable (teleology), and the notion of the immutability and universality of modern theories of humour. The universality and transcendentalism of any such ontology is deconstructed by the poststructuralist argument that no centring principle is stable and permanent but is, by definition, unable to govern itself. It is therefore infinitely replaceable and unstable because it is endlessly being replaced by another. Stability is thus not possible; only continual change. Art can thus no longer be seen as a vehicle to provide truth or permanent evidence of being. The notion that the modernist aesthetic realm is a permanent locus of perfection to which good art should correspond cannot, for example, survive deconstructionist interrogation such as the question; "Whose standards are used throughout history and across all differences to compile such an ontological model?" This deconstructs modernist theories like Kant's (1952:51) and Greenberg's (Battcock 1973:67-77) who respectively argue for a universal artistic realm or standard of excellence which transcends contextual barriers.

Poststructuralism also places most modern theories of humour and humorous art under interrogation by raising the question that one standard for humour cannot possibly function across all socio-cultural, geographical, historical and other borders. A joke about what is considered mental, physical or behavioural imperfection that raises a laugh in one part of the world or historical period will probably not even raise an eyebrow in another or simply be found disgusting. All of the modern theories of humour are seen as the opinion of a specific cultural/historical group that was produced in its ideological context only and can therefore have no absolute universal truth-value. From a poststructuralist viewpoint, it indeed becomes impossible even to believe that a final word on what humour is can or should be found, which explains why many modern theorists expressed great difficulty in doing so.<sup>26</sup>

The modernist absence of perfection theory, for example, is centred by the idea that a single universal median for perfection exists and thus excludes the possibility of *other* perceptions of perfection. A poststructuralist thinker like Foucault can raise the issue of context by asking the question; "Whose idea of or expectation for perfection is destroyed?" Human perfection, it can be argued, is not a stable concept; but differs according to the ideology of a specific culture, or changes constantly according to the ruling economics of a dominant group (such as the beauty, fashion, the film industry and the media).

The violation of logic theory infers that logic should be privileged over illogic and precedes illogic in the grand scheme of things. This is a typically logocentric viewpoint.

According to Derrida, this hierarchy can be reversed. In certain cultures illogic and chance are highly esteemed. The Zen tradition teaches that rational thinking, though part of our lives, has no absolute value because "...the Cartesian cogito produces the illusory idea of the individual substantial mind and an exaggerated trust in reason" (Morreall 1989:262). The Zen philosopher recognises the value of all kinds of incongruity, illogic and nonsense<sup>27</sup> which involve illogical changes of thought "to derail the mind" and generate fresh and imaginative views in order to create an awareness of the "illusion of the individual substantial self and the true nature of reality" (Morreall 1989:261). Incidentally, Heidegger had an interest in Zen philosophy.<sup>28</sup> From a poststructuralist perspective, the modernist theory that humour is a violation of logic and indeed all modern theories of humour can be refuted deconstructively on the grounds that no universal standard for logic (or for that matter of any kind) is permanent.

Moreover, the proposed irrationality, unpredictability and randomness of play that is exposed by poststructuralism refute both the idealistic modernist notions that humorous art is responsible for leading man towards an ethical ideal and the notion that art moves in a logical linear historical or teleological progression towards an ontologically fixed ideal. Derrida (1972:262) asserts the opposite<sup>29</sup> when he (1978:26) writes that "an organised totality", an endeavour which is purely determined by a specific cause or inevitable end result, is in fact running the risk of "stifling force under form". What this means is that Derrida believes that teleological thinking is not a creative progress, but is creatively futile. His theory therefore contests a viewpoint such as Greenberg's who literally saw the historical development of modern art as determined by a specific end result which he regarded as inevitable aesthetic *progress* which transcends context (i.e. *différance*) in a linear historical procession towards an aesthetic ideal. In Derrida's opinion such end-determined reasoning actually *stifles*, and do not promote, becoming and progress. Derrida's argument thus also implies (like the Zen) that non-teleological thinking encourages creativity and invention. He is by no means alone in this. One is again reminded of Heidegger's "new kind of thinking", which refers to thinking "outside of metaphysics" and in its recognition of difference the creative value of non-logical thinking or irrationality. Heidegger is in fact quoted (Kuchler 1994:24) as making a clear

differentiation between a "logico-metaphysical understanding of the world" and a "non-metaphysical and non-logical encounter with the world".

This non-logical kind of thinking, which results from the loss of the centre, finds humour an exceptional demonstration or even an ironic celebration of a world where illogic makes more sense than logic. Paul Lewis, in his article *Three Jews and a Blindfold: The Politics of Gallows Humour* in Avner and Zajdman's publication *Semites and Stereotypes: Characteristics of Jewish Humour* (1993:48), writes that in the face of atrocity humans frequently adopt a stance of detached irony in the humorous anecdotes which they invent in order to cope. The following joke quoted by Lewis speaks for itself:

Three Jews are about to be shot by a firing squad, and each is offered a blindfold by the captain of the squad. The first Jew takes the blindfold, and the second Jew takes the blindfold. When the third Jew says he would prefer not to wear a blindfold, the one next to him says, "Take a blindfold. Don't make trouble." (Avner & Zajdman 1993:47)

The loss of centre led to an awareness of different kinds of thinking other than those that were based upon reason and logic which the modernist saw as the only possibility to access truth. Humour, which was already labelled as irrational in the modern, then becomes an exceptionally apt mode of expression.

### **3 HUMOUR: ITS INVENTIVE POTENTIAL AND SUITABILITY FOR METAPHORICAL EXPRESSION**

Humour was essentially defined in modern theories by its "otherness". Not only its subject matter (the ugly and the deformed) or characteristics (irrationality, imperfection, illogic and incongruity) but also humour and humorous art were categorised and marginalised within the modern aesthetic paradigm as "the other" art. This positioning of humour was only possible as long as the ontologically fixed rule for, amongst other things art, was in place. The deconstruction of the fixed rule, however, brought with it this "other kind of thinking" whereby the notion of "otherness" became an outdated and obsolete concept – and with it the modern view of humour. Consequently, humour joined the main stream instead of remaining on the fringes. Irony, for that matter, came to be seen in postmodern discourse as typical of the entire postmodern mode of expression. The loss of the modern centre thus not only created a negative or nihilistic *zeitgeist* in the postmodern (as many believed), but it also "made more room" (so to speak) for humorous art within the broader cultural picture. It brought about a new playful inventiveness or what Derrida (quoted by Kuchler 1994:4) calls "a new step of dance" into postmodern

culture. Selden (1989:73) agrees and says that many theorists recognise that "the decentering of language itself has produced a great deal of playful, self-reflexive and self-parodying fiction".

### 3.1 Humour and "the other"

What took place was a shift in thought which can be simplified by saying that in the modern the dictum "one standard for all" (singularity) was replaced by a mode of thinking which recognised difference that is characterised by a "to each his own" mode of thinking (plurality). The latter is illustrated by a tolerance for or, in fact, a joyful celebration of what was previously considered "the other". Numerous examples in advertising, popular entertainment, television sitcoms, films and literature can be cited here, of which *Less than Perfect* (the misfit)<sup>30</sup>, *That Seventies Show* (the Latino)<sup>31</sup>, *George Lopez* (the Mexican)<sup>32</sup>, *Will and Grace* (the homosexual)<sup>33</sup>, *My Family* (the dysfunctional family)<sup>34</sup>, *Bart Simpson* (Homer, the anti-hero)<sup>35</sup>, *As Good as it Gets* (the psychologically dysfunctional)<sup>36</sup>, and even *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (the insane)<sup>37</sup> or *Pulp Fiction* (the psychotic)<sup>38</sup> are but a few examples.

What is different about this new type of humour is that we are no longer laughing at the otherness itself, but more often than not the humour is an ironic send-up of our own intolerance of what was previously seen as "otherness". The characters in *Will and Grace* often jokingly refer to the fixed, outdated and erroneous general perception that all gays, for example, listen to Barbara Streisand or still dress like the members of the pop group *The Village People*. The father character in *George Lopez* wryly concludes that a woman who claims to be his long-lost sister is indeed telling the truth because she admits to a particularly conniving action she performed against another family member who, ironically, confirms to him that she certainly "must be Mexican" just like him.<sup>39</sup> These examples of contemporary popular humorous entertainment therefore most successfully deconstruct the Derridean (1976:144) "violent hierarchies" of modern culture. They expose what Derrida (1976:13) sees as "hidden sediments that cling" not only to language but to all cultural products. Such products are, by definition, never innocent because they always (even the examples cited above) hide what Nietzsche (quoted by Degenaar 1986:25) identified as a hidden "philosophical mythology" which already reflects a certain "understanding of the world". However, the examples above nevertheless push the boundaries of the rule or the law for "normality" by exposing the cultural status quo as a

vehicle of a limited ideology, and not truth. They are a powerful tool to deconstruct the old and to generate a renewed perception of the existing.

### 3.2 Humour, reality and truth

Metaphors and jokes do rely upon the existence of an ontologically or teleologically supported view of reality and normality in order to be funny. However, it can be said that they themselves are not seen as real or "normal". In other words, although jokes and metaphors *play* upon our acceptance of certain things as truth, they are not expected to be true. Non-humorous art, on the other hand, is *expected to assist* in the search and discovery of ontological and teleological truth in the modern view.

In the first place, both the metaphor and the linguistic use of forms of humour such as sarcasm, irony and especially parody have somehow always openly declared their own fictionality. As shown, satire, sarcasm and irony are often subversive by undermining their own pretence at being "serious" or at presenting us with "reality" or truth in order to raise a laugh. Humour, like metaphor, possesses the potential to turn on itself and create "play" with "reality" or literal meaning. Humorous art (such as parody and satire) also often does not refer to a reality outside of art, but appropriates or refers to other existing art works and texts within the artistic discipline. Parody and mimicry openly *displays* their own fictionality and *rely* upon the receptor's recognition of their duplicity in order to function successfully. Both parody and satire are defined as "amusing imitation: a piece of writing or music that deliberately copies another work in a comic or satirical way; poor imitation: an attempt or imitation that is so poor that it seems ridiculous" (MED sv "Parody" and "Satire"). Parody can be exceptionally successful not only in deconstructing an existing concept such as modern correspondence but also in creating an awareness of different perceptions of any existing mode of thinking.

These types of humour therefore all function within the "impure" site that is created by their disruption of the traditional correspondence between language and truth (mentioned earlier with regard to metaphor) and enjoy a certain kind of freedom by playfully floating and wandering between ideas, words and concepts to make "new" connections and to create new hybrids. Caputo (1970:31) explains, however, that this freedom which Heidegger also recognises is (like the freedom of play) different from the conventional idea of freedom. The freedom of the joke and the metaphor is the freedom of non-closure,

of never finding final truth. It is, in Heidegger's view (quoted by Caputo 1970:31), the freedom of the *possibility* "to be"; of being which may also "not be" but can "collapse back into the abyss of nothingness". It remains forever an open-ended freedom of what it may become – and not the fixed idea of what it *is* or is supposed "to be". The metonymic metaphor and the joke use words and concepts with the possibility of their becoming something, but never provide closure as to what this becoming is. Words and concepts are set free in an ungrounded ontological position with regard to truth and can only have meaning(s) within multiple possibilities of context and reception, never in correspondence to one meaning or truth.

The American postmodern novelist Kurt Vonnegut quotes the following ironic joke which illustrates this in *Fates Worse than Death* (1991:183): "As the man said when they strapped him into the electric chair in Cook County Jail years ago: This will certainly teach me a lesson." This joke does not cast judgement, provide closure or expect to control the reception of the joke; but leaves the last statement "this will certainly teach me a lesson" to free-float and make any number of connections in the mind and experience of any number of receptors of the story. If language is seen by the poststructuralist as being unable to provide closure of truth, then such humour demonstrates and expresses this mode of thought.

Another factor in the humour/reality/truth relationship is that humorous and non-humorous art have a different relationship with reality. Although a metaphor, joke or a funny artwork is (according to the modern view) expected to honour a relationship to the truth, it is paradoxically also recognised as fiction and is therefore granted a kind of autonomy from truth on the grounds that it should not be taken seriously because it is "only a joke or a metaphor". Non-humorous art is expected to maintain an illusion of truth and reality. In other words, although the products of the artist/playwright/author are artifice, emulation and fiction, they are expected to satisfy the reader/viewer expectation for the truth by appearing to "tell us the truth about human life" (Selden 1989:51). On the other hand, humour is structured to create doubt by deliberately undermining its own pretence of truthfulness. This means that humorous metaphorical art is both free to disrupt and undermine existing art, concepts, standards, principles and ideologies and to invent and create new ones to a far larger degree than non-humorous art. Intertextual referral such as parodic and ironic humour therefore gives exceptionally apt expression of the doubt of a media-dominated postmodern world where, as the French philosopher Jean

Baudrillard (1929- ) (Cahoone 2004:420 ) says in *The Precession of Simulacra*, the "real" has the same truth-value as the copy or the "hyperreal" (Baudrillard 1984:254).

Humorous art is seen as being neither true nor serious. It enjoys a kind of amnesty from truth and recrimination, and creeps into reality unobtrusively under the camouflage of harmlessness in order to traverse the borders between real life and artifice more freely than "serious" art. This allows it to exercise its power to subvert the established on many levels – be it the aesthetic, political or socio-cultural. Its ephemeral structure infiltrates ordinary reality more easily and frequently than the non-humorous. Berger (1997:14) asserts: "The comic is ubiquitous in ordinary, everyday life". Humorous art, unlike non-humorous art, can contaminate reality from inside its own parameters and eat away at the seriousness and weightiness of truth and reality like a renegade virus with complete disrespect for traditional boundaries between reality and artifice. This, says Derrida (1976:24), is typical of deconstruction which "does not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting these structures...operating necessarily from inside".

### **3.3 Humour and language**

Heidegger (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24) says that the difference between his proposed "logico-metaphysical understanding of the world" and "non-metaphysical and non-logical encounter with the world" is most notable in the way that these two types of thinking see language. The former uses prepositions to "posit the world as an object, determine it through predication and thus makes it accessible to understanding", which means that the subject of these prepositions then "functions as a stable source of meaning". Language, in a "logico-metaphysical" mode of thinking can be seen as a tool to secure and communicate metaphysical truth in a correspondence manner. Humour, on the other hand, can be seen as engaging with language in a "non-metaphysical, non-logical" manner. Certain types of humour creep into the crevices within the correspondence between a word and its reception, or between a word and its meaning, and open them wider. Sarcasm and irony thrive upon "misinterpretation" and contextual play within language. This makes irony particularly suited to give expression to post-metaphysical thinking where language is no longer seen as being in correspondence with one meaning.

The dictionary definitions of different types and strategies of humour seem to identify them exactly by their refusal to be used as linguistic tools to convey ontological truth linguistically. Irony is described as a "dryly humorous or lightly sarcastic mode of speech, in which words are used to convey a meaning contrary to their literal sense" and "irony in drama and literature, a statement or action whose apparent meaning is underlain by a contrary meaning" (MED sv "Irony"). The absurd example that is quoted as such an instance of irony is "the suggestion, put forward with apparent seriousness by the English satirist Jonathan Swift in his 'A Modest Proposal', that the poor people of Ireland should rid themselves of poverty by selling their children to the rich to eat" (MED sv "Irony"). Sarcasm is described as "cutting language: remarks that mean the opposite of what they seem to say and are intended to mock or deride" (MED sv "Sarcasm"). Paradox is defined as a "statement or sentiment that appears contradictory to common sense yet is true in fact", such as "mobilisation for peace" and "a well-known secret agent" (MED sv "Paradox"). An anticlimax is a "sequence of ideas that abruptly diminish in dignity or importance at the end of a sentence or passage, generally for satirical effect", such as the following sentence: "Among the great achievements of Benito Mussolini's regime were the revival of a strong national consciousness, the expansion of the Italian Empire, and the running of the trains on time". These examples have in common that they are seen to function by deliberately creating confusion between words/phrases and truth/meaning and thrive upon ambiguity or the combination of disparate concepts and words and not in correspondence with any onto-*logic*-ally secured pattern.

Humour (like metaphor) works exactly because it muddles, mixes or interlinks the unmatched in an illogical, impure or non-metaphysical way. Humour plays upon the misunderstanding of the meaning of words and not their correspondence. The working of most kinds of humour is in the first place designed to create doubt. Truth and meaning are destabilised by irony or sarcasm which says one thing and means another. Satire tends to undermine the modernist faith that man is capable of upholding the laws of the ideal and parody functions by making intertextual referral rather than referring to reality. Humour is inclined to expose contradictions and juxtapose disparate elements, and this often results in a destabilisation of fixed patterns of thought by making more than one reading or meaning possible. Many jokes are deliberately obtuse and can either not be interpreted easily or depend upon a misreading of meaning. This is why we sometimes do not "catch" a joke. Humour therefore does not function by presenting the stable, but exploits instability. It deliberately uses the unexpected to destroy the expected and

questions the unquestionable; it thrives on the fragmentation of reality and plays with identity, all of which make exceptionally suitable devices of deconstruction.

Consider again Kurt Vonnegut's ironic joke about the electric chair quoted on page ninety-five. His joke brings the moral logic of such retribution into question and uses the disruption of the "natural" word/concept truth/logic correspondence to be funny. This kind of humour *is* destructive. It denies signs the privilege of a fixed corresponding relationship with others to guarantee their meaning. It is also inventive because a new relationship is created. It combines morality with illogic. This "impure" combination deconstructs the notion that all morality is logical and makes us reconsider our understanding of both logic and morality. Thus the "normal" relationship between language and a fixed principle outside of it is destroyed, but the possibility of endless unprecedented combinations of signs and concepts is opened up.

The Groucho Marx horsewhip joke (on page twenty-four of chapter one) also raises a logical expectation of something (the horsewhip or x) and then delivers the unexpected "If I had a horse". This not only destroys our expectation of the horsewhip, but also our "normal" assumption that someone who owns a horsewhip would have a horse to use it on. Since neither ever existed in the first place, Groucho's joke is not based on reality but "plays" on our assumption that things correspond to reality, as it is "supposed" to be. Groucho's joke is not as innocent as it seems. It unsettles the traditional metaphysical/ontological correspondence pattern according to which meaning is formed. This means that closure of truth is not provided. It also means that a new pattern is formulated. This humour is most suited to demonstrate the Heideggerian "non-metaphysical and non-logical" understanding of the world.

### **3.4 Humour and context**

Art in the modern view is seen as being above context and is expected to express a universal *unchanging* standard of artistry and beauty. Both metaphor and humour, however, develop from a specific socio-cultural, linguistic or political context and continually *change*. Outdated jokes and metaphors are always being replaced by new ones as and when the context changes. Language is often enriched by the invention of new words when the old become obsolete. This makes humour suited to the poststructuralist view of meaning as unstable and susceptible to context. Hawkes

(1972: 4-5) writes; "Metaphor only exists because metaphors do. And metaphors only exist when they actually occur in language in society and in time. None of these elements is a constant factor. In other words, the notion of metaphor itself is shaped at any given time by linguistic and social pressures, as well as by its own history." Metaphoric creation is a process whereby literal meaning is disrupted by new metaphoric configurations. Metaphors, like jokes, continually disrupt themselves by forming new metaphors when they turn into accepted terms and become literal meanings themselves. This is their creative power.

To understand the inventive power of the creative metaphoric approach to art is to understand the difference between the process of discovering pre-existing meaning and the invention of meaning. Both humour and metaphor encourage inventiveness by their impermanence, because they are continually being replaced or reinvented according to the fluctuations of context. Once you have become used to a joke or if the context has become alien to you, it will no longer evoke laughter. Jokes about public figures or statesmen (like the flood of jokes after the British Secretary of State's Profumo scandal which were in abundance in March 1963) are now seldom heard and are no longer funny because they are no longer topical (MEE sv "Profumo John"). We also no longer find it strange that a computer component is a mouse. It has *become* a legitimate meaning for the word "mouse". It is accepted by linguists and is listed in dictionaries (and is not even instantly recognised as metaphorical speech or writing by us any longer).

Like metaphor, humour has a shelf life. It enriches language and life itself in a continual dynamic process. Humour does need rules and principles to function, but it is infinitely adaptable and can immediately latch on to what it identifies as the new centring factor in any situation or ideology because it can direct itself equally successfully from there as from its predecessor. Humour is therefore exceptionally suited to demonstrate and exploit the Derridean endless deferral of meaning and infinite replacements of the centre, survive in the Heideggerian groundlessness and thrive in the unpredictable movements of play. This tendency to encourage change rather than stability makes it valuable for a postmodernist creative metaphorical approach to art.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

"Truth", says Degenaar (1986:16), is "a worn-out metaphor which has become powerless." His words imply the need for a new way of understanding the world; a new way of thinking that does not continue, as he puts it, to "hold onto truth as correspondence with reality". This suggests a way of thinking that is not based on the metaphysical assumption that some unquestionable and immutable truth about reality is already in existence somewhere and lies waiting to be discovered if only man can successfully decipher its surface codes. The need for a complete revision or deconstruction of the way whereby Western civilisation is defined by its correspondence to certain pre-existing principles or structuring centres of truth is indeed expressed in the theories of many thinkers, of which Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida are only a few.

The questioning of the hegemony of metaphysics resulted in the deconstruction of the modernist centre as an absolute and final structure of truth which ordered the world. Language especially was seen in postmodern and poststructuralist theories as being responsible for the hegemony of correspondence thinking. Derrida (1972:248) says that "the permutation or the transformation of elements...is forbidden" by the centre. He is quoted by Kuchler (1994:2) as saying that such transformation is possible "after the disappearance of any kind of underlying structural ground", which means that he recognises the inventive and creative possibility that results from the *loss* of the centre. Derrida (1972:248) thus agrees with the argument that this loss opened up the portals of truth, as it were, for a different kind of thinking which allows the metaphorical "permutation" and "transformation of elements" which were prohibited by the centre. The deconstruction of modernist truth principles makes it possible to become aware of the existence of "the other". Worn-out convention is recognised as outdated ideology and clichés are reinvented. The recognition of the value of the irrational, the illogical, the incongruous and the imperfect (i.e. the creative power of humour) becomes possible. In this mode of thinking language and art can no longer be seen as vehicles to discover reality or truth, but only as metaphorical. Without truth, life is described "in terms of becoming rather than being" (Degenaar 1986:24). Nothing can align itself towards a single defining principle that is based on a single understanding of truth. What something "is" becomes irrelevant. It is replaced by the open-endedness of the infinite creative possibilities of what it "can be".

This heralds the entry of what Derrida (quoted by Kuchler 1994:4) calls "a certain laughter and a certain step of dance" into postmodern culture. Humour is a form that is exceptionally suited to expressing truth-free thinking. It is always in an open-ended state of becoming. It does not particularly care for permanence of structure or for truth to function, but uses any so-called truth as a point of departure. Both humour and metaphor are extraordinarily capable of overcoming the conventional way of looking at things, because both continually reinvent themselves the moment they become part of convention. They are thus excellent devices for destroying and replacing "truths" which are illusions and "which one has forgotten are illusions, worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses, coins which have their obverse effaced and are now no longer of account as coins, but merely as metal" (Stern, as quoted by Degenaar 1986:16).

To conclude, the following: William, a character in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* says: "The anti-Christ can be born from...excessive love...of the truth...Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, to make truth laugh, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for truth" (1983:491).

## ENDNOTES

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) (Cahoone 2004:109).

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), the German phenomenologist existentialist philosopher (Cahoone 2004:174).

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida (1930- ), the Algerian French born philosopher (Cahoone 2004:225).

<sup>4</sup> Derrida, for example, criticises both Heidegger and Nietzsche, and outlines how and why he differs from them in *Of Grammatology* (1976), specifically in the chapter entitled *The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing*.

<sup>5</sup> If metaphor is analysed, this becomes clear: The MED's first example of what metaphor means states that it is an "implicit comparison" and continues that it comes from the "Greek *metaphora*, from *metapherein* 'to transfer', literally 'to carry between' from *pherein* 'to carry'" The Greek prefix "meta-" ultimately comes from the Indo-European "between" that is also the ancestor of the English "midwife" (MED sv "Metaphor" and "Meta"). Metaphor is further explained as "the use of a word or a phrase denoting one kind of idea or object in place of another word or phrase for the purpose of suggesting a likeness between the two", as is often found in biblical terms (MED sv "Figure of Speech"). Metaphor, in the traditional *metaphysical* sense, therefore relies upon a stable

relationship; a strong comparison "carried between" a thing and its meaning *as a whole*, to the point where it can literally "give birth" to it. Metonymy, on the other hand, "is a figure of speech in which an attribute of something is used to stand for the thing itself", from the Greek *metonnumia*, literally "change of name". Synecdoche is a "figurative locution whereby the part is made to stand for the whole" (MED sv "Metonym", "Synecdoche" and "Figure of Speech"). A metonym or synecdoche is thus more figurative than literal, represents the whole by a part of something and changes it.

<sup>6</sup> The French psychiatrist Jacques Lacan (1901-1980) applied structural linguistics to psychoanalytical theory (Cahoone 2004:195).

<sup>7</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) was a Swiss linguist who "presented a new approach to the study of language and hence implicitly to all cultural phenomena, which not only revolutionized linguistics but had great impact on structuralism and the poststructuralism that succeeded it. Of particular importance was his attempt to analyze language as a system in which each element is dependent on relations to other systems" (Cahoone 2004:122).

<sup>8</sup> Discovered by two Cambridge University physicists, John Cockroft and Ernest Walton, in 1932 (MEE sv "Atom is Split").

<sup>9</sup> The Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), introduced the split of the self (Cahoone 2004:144).

<sup>10</sup> The theories of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) also postulated the loss of God as the final point of reference (Cahoone 2004:109).

<sup>11</sup> Bert Olivier (2002:205), professor of philosophy at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, writes that the postmodernist can no longer clearly distinguish between the real and the artificial with the same certainty as the modernist because the media have become the "only available source of information concerning certain events" to the extent that it has become possible to "play the game of constructing reality via the media".

<sup>12</sup> Smith (Cruz, Smith and Jones 2000:29) quotes Avgikos, who writes: "We recognise ours as a time of such unparalleled transition and mayhem that science-fiction starts to look more and more like reality".

<sup>13</sup> NMMU stands for The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth.

<sup>14</sup> Kuchler (1994:24) says that Heidegger's thinking makes a distinction between the "logico-metaphysical understanding of meaning and truth on the one hand and the non-metaphysical and non-logical encounter with the world...on the other" by arguing that "whereas the former is intimately related to the structure of the metaphysical subject, the latter prepares a 'new', that is a non-metaphysical understanding of truth".

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger's influence upon other poststructuralist thinkers such as the German Marxist philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903-1970) and the French philosophers Michael Foucault (1926-1984) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) is widely recognised (Cahoone 2004:159; Cutrofello 2005:80-88).

<sup>16</sup> Kuchler (1994:140-156) gives a complex account of the ways in which Derrida's theories diverge from Heidegger's in certain aspects. Derrida is, however, by his own admission largely indebted to Heidegger.

<sup>17</sup> Caputo quotes from: Heidegger, M. (1962:19-24). *Die Technik und die Kehre*. Pfullingen: Verlag Gunther Neske.

<sup>18</sup> Caputo is quoting here from Heidegger, M. (1963: 88/126/138) *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 3.Auflage Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

<sup>19</sup> Caputo quotes from: Heidegger, M. (1963:152). *Sein und Zeit*. Auflage Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.

<sup>20</sup> According to Wheat (1970:118-124), the spoken word of God ("Logos") was in fact seen in Greek philosophy as a sort of rational natural law or "universal reason, in which the human *logos* – human reason – participated" while "[i]n biblical usage the Logos is the word of God". Ford (1989:320) in *The Modern Theologians* explains that Logos is "Greek for 'word'; more widely, the rational or ordering principle in something or in reality as a whole; in Christology, used to refer to Jesus Christ as the Word of God, God's self-disclosure". It can thus be said that in this view, human utterances (language) are seen as the tangible manifestation of a God-like logic and rationality in man.

<sup>21</sup> According to Runes (1971:183), "Logos" is "[a] term denoting reason...expressions of reason or order in words or things, such as word, discourse, definition, formula, principle, mathematical ratio" which affirms the link in correspondence thought between reason, truth and word. In philosophical terms the term "essence" means "the ideal nature of something, *independent of and prior* to its existence" which suggests a pre-existing perfect presence that is available to man in some ideal surface pattern that has to be discovered and used to determine and achieve universal perfection (MED sv "Essence"). Since language is the medium used to communicate such an essence, it can be said that, *as* the principal evidence of the materialisation of the perfect reasoning of the divine, the *literal* (true) interpretation and meaning of words/things form a key element in correspondence reasoning. The word as truth is therefore also an originary model in modernist cultural production.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida in his *Of Grammatology* (1976:12-18) explains how his theories differ from those of de Saussure.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Young (1981:1) explains the complex relationship between structuralism and poststructuralism as follows: "The name 'post-structuralism' is useful in so far as it is an umbrella word, significantly defining itself in terms of a temporal spatial relationship to structuralism. This need not imply the organicist fiction of a development, for it involves rather a displacement. It is more a question of interrogating structuralism's methods and assumptions, of transforming structuralist concepts by turning one against another...Structuralism as an origin never existed in a pre-lapsarian purity or ontological fullness; post-structuralism traces the trace of structuralism's difference from itself."

<sup>24</sup> Hogarth's use of the term "rake" is a case in point. He believed that the word "rake" would universally communicate one meaning of the word and all the connotations it implies. However, another version of the word, namely *rakel* (*hasty/rash*) has since become obsolete and a rake also means "slope" and "garden tool". This means that anyone who no longer understands the 18<sup>th</sup> century use of this word as denoting an "immoral pleasure seeker" would lose much of Hogarth's possible intentions or be confused by his choice of title for this work (MED sv "Rake"). Uglow (1997:xi) agrees that Hogarth's humour relied upon references and jokes that his viewers could "read" in a way that is lost to us today.

<sup>25</sup> What this means, as the title of the Francis Coppola film of 2004 states, is that the original meaning of any text can be *Lost in Translation*. Wheat (1970:123-124) even raises the point that the very idea that the logos is seen as "word" which became "word of God" in subsequent editions of the Bible is in fact due to mistranslation. If the word is not seen as the direct vehicle of an authors' meaning, the word of God, the Logos cannot be seen as the vehicle of the *original* spoken word of God. This kind of thinking is in direct opposition to what Derrida (1976:12) calls the "epoch of the logos".

<sup>26</sup> Many modernist theorists had great difficulty in finding the perfect definition of the universal essence of humour. The enigma of the humorous and the futility of attempting to define its essence has been compared to trying to study the colours of a rainbow (Koestler 1964:22) or the fragrance of a perfume (Kiken 1977:5); or explain an orgasm, soap bubbles or lightning (Freud in Sully 1902:3). W. R. Reaves (2001:2) writes in her article entitled *The Art in Humour, the Humour in Art* that "[h]umour is a slippery subject. Elemental, universal, and yet extraordinarily difficult to analyze, it is a topic that art historians tend to avoid". G. B. Milner (1972:1), in an article entitled *Homo Ridens, Towards a Semiotic Theory of Humour and Laughter*, writes that even though much thought and time have been spent on the topic of humour for the past two thousand years "...the riddle is still with us" and quotes Darwin who said more than a hundred years ago that "...the subject is extremely complex". The one thing which these critics seem to agree on is that it is not really possible to define the essence of humour. The Oxford Companion to Philosophy (OCP) states the following on the topic of humour: "Although laughter, like language, is often cited as one of the distinguishing features of human beings, philosophers have spent only a small proportion of their time and pages on it and on the allied topic of amusement when compared to the volumes devoted to the philosophy of language. Jokes and witticism have some features of the aesthetic in that economy is generally valued though humour 'dates' in a way that art tends not to" (OCP [1995] sv "Humour"). The inscription in this dictionary implies that humour does not, like art, have fixed or stable universally recognised qualities which would have qualified it as a subject worthy of more philosophical contemplation. It further suggests that only something which does not "date" is of real, lasting (aesthetic) value. This underlines the importance which has traditionally been placed on the necessity for something to possess certain stable universal qualities which can be formulated in one universal definition of its essence.

<sup>27</sup> According to Morreall (1989:261), Zen philosophy claims that fixed concepts distort reality because reality is not static but in constant flux. The rational mind "freezes" and divides up the world into distinctions and opposites like mind/matter, good/bad and subject/object; while reality is essentially a unity. "We are attached, according to Zen, when we treat rational thinking as a form of control and power over the world." Before we are liberated or "enlightened", we tend to "try to get control over things and people, but our attachment to them gives them power over us". Zen believes we have to free ourselves from this attachment and uses humour in its pursuit of this liberation (Morreall 1989:260) which, in the words of the fifteenth-century master Kukoku is a "grand overturning of the whole system of consciousness", a statement which clearly finds many parallels in the postmodern discursive climate of deconstruction (Suzuki in Morreall 1989:261).

Typical Zen-type illogical statements/jokes are:

"Even paranoids have enemies"

"Everything tastes more or less like chicken"

"Eat a live toad every morning and nothing worse will happen to you for the rest of the day" (Morreall 1998:257).

<sup>28</sup> The MEE (sv "History") states the following about the Western interest in Zen philosophy: "Western interest in Zen dates from the publication of the first authoritative account of the subject in English *Essays in Zen Buddhism* by the Japanese scholar Daisetz T. Suzuki. After World War II and the occupation of Japan, a great interest in Zen developed in Europe and the United States, notably among artists, philosophers, and psychologists. It had a special appeal for abstract and non-objective painters and sculptors. Philosophers have noted its affinities with the thought of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, with the theory of general semantics of the American scientist and writer Alfred Korzybsky, and to some extent, with the existentialism as propounded by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger."

<sup>29</sup> Derrida writes that what he calls "the thematic of historicity" has always "been required by the determination of being as presence". In other words, theorists who believe in historical determinism use historical progress as a guarantee of epistemological, ontological and teleological being or truth. As Derrida (1972:262) puts it: "...the concept of episteme has always called forth that of *historia*, as if history is always the unity of a becoming, as tradition of truth or development of science or knowledge orientated towards the appropriation of truth in presence and self-presence, toward knowledge in consciousness-of-self." In his *Writing and Difference*, Derrida (1978:26) says that such teleological thinking "[w]hether biology, linguistics or literature..." with a specific end in sight "risks enclosing progression toward the future – becoming – by giving it form".

<sup>30</sup> This programme is currently running on Mondays at 18:30 on MNet.

<sup>31</sup> This programme is currently running on Mondays at 18:80 on MNet.

<sup>32</sup> This programme is currently running on Wednesdays at 21:00 on SABC3.

<sup>33</sup> This programme is currently running on Wednesdays at 20:30 on SABC 3.

<sup>34</sup> This programme is currently running on SABC at 20:30 on Wednesdays.

<sup>35</sup> *Bart Simpson*, an animated series written and directed by the US cartoonist Matt Groenig (1954- ) in 1990. This programme is currently running on Wednesdays at 18:30 on MNet.

<sup>36</sup> *As Good as it Gets* is a 1977 film directed by James L Brooks about an obsessive compulsive Melvin Udall, played by Jack Nicholson.

<sup>37</sup> *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a Metro Goldwyn Mayer film of 1975, adapted from the novel by Ken Kesey (1962) and directed by Milos Forman. (Source: "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest". Microsoft Encarta 2006 [DVD]. Redmond, WA Microsoft Corporation, 2005 [accessed on 27 October 2006]).

<sup>38</sup> *Pulp Fiction* is a 1994 film directed by Quentin Tarrantino.

<sup>39</sup> Episode of *George Lopez* , broadcast at 21:00 on 25 October 2006 on SABC3.

## CHAPTER 4: HUMOUR AND CREATIVE METAPHOR IN POSTMODERN ART

This chapter consists of an application of the argument of the previous chapter, namely that the deconstruction of the postmodern centre is characterised by an artistic shift from the ontological to the postmodern metaphorical approach to art which humorous art is exceptionally suited to demonstrate and illustrate. Specific examples of humorous art from both the modern and the postmodern periods are used to illustrate and consolidate this argument by means of a comparative analysis. The humorous works of the American artist Cindy Sherman serve as examples that are typical of the creative metaphorical approach of postmodern art. The work of the English humorist William Hogarth continues to serve as an example of the ontological approach to art that is typical of modern correspondence thinking. Specific works that will be analysed are: Cindy Sherman's *History Portraits* (1989-1990) (Fig 28-35), *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980) (Fig 36-40), *Portraits of Society Women* (2000) (Fig 41-45) and *Sex Pictures* (1999) (Fig 46-48); and Hogarth's *Time Smoking a Picture* (1761) (Fig 26) and *The Battle of the Pictures* (1744-1745) (Fig 27). Other works will be referred to when necessary.

These two artists are specifically chosen for a practical demonstration of the difference between the modern ontological approach and the postmodern metaphorical approach to humorous art, for the following reasons: Firstly, both artists use humour. The way that Sherman uses it is representative of the postmodern view of humour, which is characterised by its radical deconstruction of modernist conventions and truth principles. Hogarth's humour, on the other hand, is to such an extent part and parcel of the modernist correspondence mode of thinking that (as shown in chapter two) it is even used as propaganda for its views in general. Secondly, both artists use metaphor. Sherman's use of metaphor should, however, rather be seen as metonymy which is most compatible with humour and more deconstructive of the fixed literal correspondence between words, images or concepts and truth or meaning. It is more inventive than the type of metaphor that Hogarth uses that is more literal, thus retaining traces of correspondence thinking.

This analytical comparison illustrates in practical terms the exceptional potential of humorous art in giving visual expression to the deconstruction of modern principles and the resulting creative metaphorical view of art. It shows how humorous art is particularly capable of invention rather than discovery, which is one of the hallmarks of the

postmodern creative metaphorical approach that sets it apart from the modernist ontological approach.

In order to create a clearer understanding of the difference between the ontological and metaphorical approaches, the deconstructive and inventive potential of the different types of metaphor and meaning is reviewed in the first part of this chapter. The difference between metaphor and metonymy, vague and transparent, and abstract and concrete meaning is investigated as illustrated in the humorous art of Hogarth and Sherman.

The next section is structured according to two different ways of experiencing the world which are found in the theories of Heidegger, namely (1) humorous art as a "non-metaphysical encounter with the world" and (2) humorous art as a "non-logical encounter with the world" (quoted by Kuchler 1994:241). This is followed by two more sections: (3) humorous art as deconstructive and (4) humorous art as inventive.

## **1 THE DECONSTRUCTIVE AND INVENTIVE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN METAPHOR AND METONYMY IN THE WORK OF SHERMAN AND HOGARTH**

As previously pointed out, metaphor and metonymy both function by joining the attributes of one thing with another in some way. However, traditional metaphor retains a larger degree of literalness when combining the two. It still relies upon a degree of descriptive comparison between two images, concepts or words. In other words, it retains the correspondence between them and an existing understanding of such a word, concept or image as being expressive of some kind of truth. Metonymy, on the other hand, reinvents a completely new term, image or concept from the existing. It "drags" the meaning of one thing away and deposits it onto another. The new thing it creates then not only resembles or seems "like" the other; but becomes it, only in a completely new form.

The example of the word "mouse" can once again be used to make the difference even clearer. If I say to someone "Do not be such a mouse", I am using metaphoric language. I am comparing a person to a mouse in a literal and descriptive (or "correspondence") manner. When the computer tool becomes *known* as the "mouse", it actually becomes a mouse (not as we know it but a new kind of mouse). This is metonymy. Certain attributes of the small grey animal such as its shape and speed are not only compared to it for a

while (as when someone acts "just like a mouse"); but it invents another, different meaning for the word "mouse". In other words, it widens our normal conventional understanding of the word and makes permanent room for the entry of another completely new understanding of it. Metonymy deconstructs not the existing term "mouse", but our perception that it can always only function in correspondence with one single fixed and permanent understanding of the meaning or truth of the word. It releases, as it were, the term from its correspondence to one fixed meaning and in so doing many meanings of it become possible. Metonymy is thus deconstructive of convention on a different level than metaphor and therefore has more inventive potential. This difference should be kept in mind from now on in references to the way that these two artists use metaphor.

Hogarth's use of metaphor is of the more literal and descriptive type (i.e. he shows in other words that one thing is "like" another in typically modernist correspondence manner in order to make a clearly understandable comparison to illustrate a certain point). His use of metaphorical images therefore relies to a large extent upon an easily recognisable correspondence with a fixed perception of something that already exists to make them seem "true". The title of his work *Time Smoking a Picture* (Fig 26) is an example of this. He uses the term "smoking" a picture instead of the conventional "painting" a picture. He is inferring that time gives an art work a certain patina of age which is "like" smoking it. He is using a literal, descriptive humorous metaphorical comparison between smoking and painting to make his point in a correspondence manner that can be easily and clearly understood and provides definite closure of truth.

Sherman's metaphors, on the other hand, are of the metonymic kind. Her metaphoric images permanently change the way that something is seen. They deconstruct the conventional perception of a certain thing by showing that there are many other possible ways of seeing it and many possible meanings and interpretations of it. This is done by taking a conventional image and changing it into something different which thereafter either replaces the existing image or permanently exists next to the old in a new form. She gives her rendition of the Old Masters the title *History Portraits* (1989-1990) (Figs 28-35). She uses a metaphorical comparison by saying in her title that her photographs of herself in disguise are portraits of history "like" the works of the Old Master, but in an open-ended, less descriptive and narrative manner than Hogarth's. She directly transfers the traditional concept of a history portrait onto her works by simply calling them *History*

*Portraits* (1989-1990) (Figs 28-35). By doing this, her works are identified as history portraits, albeit of a very different kind. They take their place next to them in a new, reinvented yet equally legitimate form. It can be said that they even replace the originals since the ridicule heaped upon these by Sherman's parody makes it impossible to ever see an Old Master Painting again without mentally visualising hers.

### **1.1 The inventive potential of transparent versus vague meaning in the work of Sherman and Hogarth**

Hogarth's humorous metaphors can be called "transparent". The conventional relationship of an ontological correspondence between his images and their meaning is clear, obvious and easy to recognise in his *Time Smoking a Picture* (Fig 26) and in most of his other works. His depiction of *Time* before an easel is easily understood as an unambiguous humorous metaphor for both the art world of his time and the historical progression of time itself. Hogarth the modernist is providing closure with no room for misinterpretation. His metaphors have "the stiffness...of a crystal" that Ryan (1985:40-46) speaks of in their permanent relationship of correspondence with a fixed frame of reality-reference outside the work and their single logical interpretation and stable meaning. Such transparent meaning provides closure of truth and does not invite other interpretations.

Sherman's use of metaphor is *vague* and not so easy to understand via a conventional ontological correspondence pattern. It has as Hawkes (1972:4-5) writes "no pristine (pure) form" (own insertion). In most of her early works such as her *History Portraits* (1989-1990) (Figs 28-35) and her *Portraits of Society Women* (2000) (Figs 41-45), Sherman uses *herself* as undefined material or (to put it simply) as without pure or definite form. She becomes a humorous metaphor for the way that we make ourselves and our thoughts available as formless material to be moulded into fixed patterns according to "truths" which exist only in media-induced perceptions and do not correspond to any existing "reality". Moreover, many viewers can endlessly concur by "wandering" through their memories of art history as they try to find out which model she is imitating in her range of *History Portraits* without ever reaching consensus of truth. Each viewer will thus "invent" a different opinion.<sup>1</sup> These parodies of Sherman's resemble their origins just enough to tantalise, tease and confuse (as opposed to Hogarth's which provides us with all the information and leaves less to the imagination).

Sherman's referral to Old Masters deliberately remains vague and never allows closure as to the truth about their origins. In this way, plurality of interpretation and even the invention of some origin are encouraged. The vagueness confuses and so subverts the singular power which each original is believed to possess.

## **1.2 The inventive potential of concrete versus abstract meaning in the work of Sherman and Hogarth**

Because Hogarth's metaphors are rather literal, descriptive and elaborately narrative of reality, and directly representative of the physical world wherein he exists, their meaning is inclined to be more concrete rather than abstract. Sherman, on the other hand, is more concise because she is less literal. She presents a summary as it were and does not directly refer to things that exist in the physical world, so that the meaning of her metaphors is more abstract. Fenner (2000:363-365) explains that in the postmodern and in Sherman's work "the centrality of the human figure as storyteller is being replaced by a more abstract, yet equally pointed metaphorical focus". As in the case of vagueness or transparency of meaning, concrete meaning is found in Hogarth's work because it is in correspondence with a fixed perception and physical presence of reality. This is not conducive to the invention of something different. Abstract meaning, as found in Sherman's work, is not to such an extent in correspondence with something that already exists and can thus be seen as the invention of something new.

With these differences clearly outlined, it can now be shown how Sherman's work is representative of the metaphorical approach to art and Hogarth's of the ontological. What is meant by this is that as a postmodernist, Sherman's humour and metaphor do not rely on a relationship of fixed correspondence with an ontological perception of reality or truth which already exists somewhere; however, the modernist Hogarth's humour does. Put differently, Sherman is not using her humour to discover the truth about reality in her work like Hogarth the modernist, because Sherman the postmodernist does not believe in a fixed perception of truth or reality in the first place.

Hogarth used words and images in the secure knowledge that they would literally communicate meaning to the viewer in direct correspondence with his intentions as the creator of the work. As previously shown, metaphor does not literally represent real things, does not adhere "to the letter" and is not used to emphasise the truth of something.

If this description of metaphor is applied first to Sherman's *History Portraits* and then to Hogarth's *Time Smoking a Picture*, the following becomes clear: Hogarth's use of humorous metaphor is dependent upon "real things" and can therefore be seen as an application of metaphor which is fixed within the correspondence paradigm and what Heidegger (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24) calls the "logico-metaphysical understanding of meaning and truth". Sherman's metaphors are what have been identified as metonymic and function in what Heidegger describes as (also quoted by Kuchler 1994:24) a "non-metaphysical...encounter with the world". In short, in Sherman's postmodern world art does not have to represent reality or truth; but in Hogarth's it does. Humour, as modern theorists have pointed out, is an exceptional way of expressing what is not true or real in the world.

## **2 DIFFERENT WAYS OF EXPERIENCING THE WORLD**

### **2.1 Postmodern humorous art as a non-metaphysical encounter with the world**

Hogarth the modernist still makes art supported by the belief that truth can be communicated in correspondence with fixed pre-existing truth patterns, but Sherman the postmodernist can only refer to images in the knowledge that they represent no fixed truth value in the first place. In short, Sherman does not refer to real things but Hogarth does. As Kuchler (1994:3) puts it: In Hogarth's early modern world "the unified notion of the human being as subject – a subject endowed with a stable essence and a certain set of inalienable values and rights" is available. In Sherman's "the identity of the human self is no longer defined in terms of a stable essence or, for that matter, with reference to the overall framework of humanistic ideals". Therefore, Sherman is no longer (like Hogarth) attempting to show in her art what it is to be an ideal human being or presenting her art as a visual representation of ontological truths that already exist somewhere. Instead, she works from within the tenets of what Amelia Jones (Cruz, Smith and Jones 2000:31) sees as a "culture of simulation". Sherman's world already consists mainly of simulacra and mediated images; whereas in Hogarth's world only the first signs of this are starting to appear.

A comparison between Sherman's *History Portraits* and Hogarth's *Time Smoking a Picture* again illustrates this. It can be said that both artists use humour to ridicule the idea that an art work's value lies in its originality which increases over time and

questions certain values which an Old Master painting represents. However, the difference in approach is vast. In Hogarth's *Time Smoking a Picture*, a figure which allegorically represents time sits before an easel and smokes (paints) a picture. In Sherman's *History Portraits* none of this is shown and nothing that *is* shown is real.

Hogarth's *Time Smoking a Picture* can be described as being representative of a metaphysical encounter with the world. In this work we see (a) a painter/artist "Time" who is (b) painting/smoking a picture. There is also (c) a model, albeit an allegorical one; (d) a "portrait" of what "Time" is imagined to look like; (e) the physical presence of the engraver/engraving itself which is evidence of its existence and can only be reproduced according to the number of times the engraving process allows and is therefore (f) an original master copy out of a limited number which actually make physical contact with this master copy and therefore retain a measure of "originality". As Walter Benjamin (1970:222) says: manual reproduction is still dependent upon the original.

Sherman's *History Portraits*, on the other hand, can be seen as a Heideggerian "non-metaphysical...encounter with the world" (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24). In this work there is (a) no painter and (b) no painting because they are photographs; (c) no model because they are all of Sherman herself; (d) no portrait because Sherman is unrecognisable, (e) no ontological reality since everything is fake and when disassembled by Sherman on completion of her exercise, there will be nothing left but a roll of film; and (f) no original, since they can be technologically reproduced virtually indefinitely.

Sherman's images and metaphors, in comparison with Hogarth's, do not in any way function in correspondence with an existing ontological truth. Because she realises the potential of humour to express this, she is thus relying upon humour for a powerful demonstration of the ironic fact that as a postmodernist she can no longer believe in the truths represented by an Old Master oil painting. Hogarth's work, on the other hand, shows clear evidence of a belief in ontological truth. His images belong within the tenets of metaphysical thinking. His metaphors largely function in literal correspondence with a fixed ontology of meaning. Hogarth's figuration of an easel with a painting on it literally represents the aesthetic world of his time. The well-known allegorical figure of "Time" is a relatively traditional and easily understood metaphor for the temporal. Although Hogarth's metaphorical representation of the idea that time gives a work more aesthetic value and meaning is not entirely literal, it is far more so than that of Sherman and thus

displays noticeable traces of correspondence thinking. The following statement by Heidegger (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24) can be applied to Hogarth's *Time Smoking a Picture*, namely that his metaphor and image "merely points" and "appropriates the world through the subject", which means that the subject "endows the world with meaning...as if meaning were a property *attached* to beings" (own cursive).

Sherman, on the other hand, never identifies her images as being representative of an existing ontological truth. On the contrary, she does the opposite. In her *History Portraits* she deliberately *detaches* the anonymous Old Master images from their stable mooring within a modernist notion of an existing truth and releases them into the Heideggerian groundless "abyss" of endless, random non-teleological movement or play where they no longer represent any metaphysical truth (Heidegger, as quoted by Caputo 1970:31). Nowhere in this work does Sherman refer to any "real things" or searches for any existing truth. In fact, the whole work becomes a humorous send-up of the modern belief in the existence of meaning and truth. According to Rice (1999:25-24), Sherman is

...uninterested in the messy disorder of places or people clamouring for attention in the physical world; her encounters take place within the realm of the virtual, where everything has already been frozen into images – fetish objects that are complete, self-contained, still as death...her inverted odyssey takes us on a trip through the morgues of history, where horror, violence, murder, and sexuality abound. Cindy Sherman rummages through our cultural image bank the way shoppers rummage through the racks in a flea market. This comparison is particularly apt, since her subjects are always "used", never invented...

Sherman always refers to products and images that are produced by convention; never like Hogarth to the occurrence itself. She is not even referring to real Old Masters in her *History Portraits*, but to copies of them in art history books and our fading memories of them (Danto 1991:10-11). She works with "iconic phantoms" or traces of things like unidentifiable recollections of a certain type of film in her *Film Stills*<sup>2</sup> (1977-1980) (Fig 36-40); clichés that are "normally" part of the sex industry in her *Sex Pictures*<sup>3</sup> (1999) (Fig 46-48); and her vague memories of art history in her *History Portraits* (1989-1990) (Fig 28-35) (Danto 1991:6). These are not, in the first place, replicas of things in the real world; but are metaphors for an already tampered with, mediated world. Her entire oeuvre is, in a sense, based on the principle of parodic metaphorical re-referral to images "...conveyed by the media, images which have long been part of reality without ever reflecting it" (Rice 1999:24). In a postmodern world where images like McDonalds provide the same familiar reassurance as any powerful religious image Sherman's

metaphors are not bound, closed or limited by correspondence to a deeper ontological meaning like Hogarth's; but are allowed the creative Derridean "free play" of open-endedness (Danto 1990:6).

Sherman's humour thus completely destabilises the singularity or hegemony of the status quo by introducing the possibility of alternative viewpoints or interpretations. Her images are not like Hogarth's representative of an unchanging pre-existing centre of meaning. They offer no closure of truth but remain open-ended and can generate infinite Derridean *différance* in meaning in their reception or invent an entirely new interpretation of meaning (Derrida 2004:225). They are not stable or predictable in any correspondence with one meaning because they have what Heidegger (2004:178) sees as the freedom of *possibility* of their becoming (or not becoming).

Sherman thus uses the exceptional potential of humour to demonstrate another way of encountering the world which lies outside of the metaphysical and of truth. Heidegger (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24) described this manner of thinking about the world as "circumspective interpretation" where "meaning and truth are neither the property of beings nor the content enclosed in propositions". This is the realm in which Sherman's images function. They are released from the notion of correspondence and are allowed to "float and wander" in what has previously been identified as the "improper" site in-between image and pre-fixed meaning. This is the realm of play. What Sherman clearly understands is that humour undoubtedly has enormous potential to give expression to Heidegger's different "non-logical encounter with the world" (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24).

## **2.2 Postmodern humorous art as a non-logical encounter with the world**

Poststructuralist theories showed that the modern centre is not predictable, logical or even fully comprehensible. The modernist centre, argues the poststructuralist, is also not stable but infinitely remains in an unending state of play as it is continually replaced by another. The similarities between these characteristics of the modern centring structure and humour are significant. Most modern theorists will agree that humour is not logical or predictable in the conventional way. It can also often not be rationalised according to "normal" standards. Moreover, humour is not predictable but is unstable as it continually replaces and renews itself to remain funny. This makes humour an exceptional mode of

expression for a world without a fixed centre of logic. The postmodern humorist, like Sherman, uses humorous metaphors and images in a way that cannot be described as logical; but rather as unpredictable, unstable or playful.

The modernist Hogarth's metaphor and humour are both logical and predictable, and therefore do not propagate or celebrate instability or illogic. Instead, it most specifically singles these attributes out as "abnormalities" to the rule, just as they are described in most modern theories of humour. Hogarth's works also form a metaphorical/allegorical whole in narrative which follows a logical pattern from beginning to a predetermined end in almost all his works (as discussed in chapter two).

Sherman's work, on the other hand, often consists of disparate fragments or (in the words of Hassan, as quoted by Harvey 1996:43) the typical postmodernist anti-narrative or *petite histoire* "borrowed" from films, well-known art works and media-images.<sup>4</sup> She presents these to the viewer, knowing that the apparent unity of the picture is contradicted by the fragments of memories evoked in the viewer's mind. Like the mind, the computer<sup>5</sup>, the fantasy or the joke (all of which can easily "overcome" geographical and historical distance and time and "occupy" more than one location or idea simultaneously as it floats or "wanders" from one to the other) Sherman's art defies normal logic and unity. Arthur Danto (1991:10), writer of *Cindy Sherman: History Portraits*, recalls that Sherman's *History Portraits* literally had historians and the like falling over themselves to find any logical correspondence between the photographs and their "originals" (which these complete fakes ironically refused to disclose). The closest a group of learned theorists came to identifying her sources was to scribble underneath one of them "Boucher/Nattier/Fragonard/Watteau" (Danto 1991:10). Danto (1991:6) writes that the unifying factor or logic in Sherman's works, in typical postmodern fashion, hinges solely upon "...the presence of some single *auteur*" and nothing else. Her *Film Stills* (1977-1980) (Fig 36-40) especially function in this way. These works, like the *History Portraits*, deliberately play with the viewer's desire to make logical sense out of them as they play upon the processes of our memory.<sup>6</sup> They consist of photographs which almost, but not quite, resemble well-known Hollywood B-grade films. Amanda Cruz, (Cruz, Smith and Jones 2000:4) say that these works "tease with the promise of a story the viewer itches to be told". A story (says Van Garrel, Lueken, Foster, Brehm & Scheldal [1996:10]) that you imagine as "a complete film" while knowing full well that no such film exists. You cannot help, says Danto (1991:10), but "seek the underlying narrative

which ties moments together in the life of the same single heroine". Danto (1991:6) concludes that Sherman's stills are *defined* by the tension that is created between the fact that they have the air of artistic wholes and yet one knows that "no single model was drawn upon". On the one hand, Sherman purposely relies upon our desire to "make sense of" her works by finding a logical unity between her images and their origins or a logical link to reality. On the other hand, she relies on the frustration of this desire to bring home the irony when we realise that our habitual dependency upon logical unity as representative of truth is not honoured in any of them but is completely destroyed. Sherman is therefore not like Hogarth propagating logic, but is playfully ridiculing the very desire for logic which is so imbedded in our minds.

In her *Sex Pictures* (1999) (Figs 46-48), Sherman combines and mutates male and female limbs and genitalia by using the parts of dolls in grotesquely humorous playful combinations with a total disregard of logic, gender or other boundaries in order to mock the stock poses and clichés of the porn industry. Here Sherman even disregards the logic of the human body and the human self. They are not even a metaphor for sexuality per se but rather a delight in a satisfactory desensualising, anti-climactic ridicule and consequent deconstruction of the typical media constructed sexual image. The *Sex Pictures* are also not clear or logical in their metaphorical or narrative configuration, because they do not correspond to an ontologically fixed moral stance towards sexual promiscuity. If these works are compared with the sexual innuendos in for example *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) (Fig 1-6), the difference becomes clear. Hogarth uses rational, clear and unambiguous humorous metaphors to "voice" a moral stance of virtue in correspondence with a pre-existing ontologically fixed moral pattern, which is propagated as the proper moral behaviour of a person of "normal" reason. His viewers can, with great transparency of metaphor and allegory, reach a logical moral conclusion about this. His images and his narrative, which illustrate his viewpoint, thus follow a clear logical pattern.

Hogarth's ridiculing criticism of the immorality of the situation is however not present<sup>7</sup> in Sherman's *Sex Pictures*.<sup>8</sup> They offer no logical closure, even though they seem blatantly and grotesquely sexual.<sup>9</sup> Brehm (Van Garrel, Lueken, Foster, Brehm & Scheldal 1996:120) explains that "[t]he criticism levelled at role-related clichés in general and the image of women in the media in particular is not designed to polarize society into 'the guilty parties' and their 'victims', the prosecutors and their prosecuted: instead, the focus is on how these clichés are internalized and how they help shape our thinking".<sup>10</sup> Hogarth

provides closure; Sherman does (can) not. Because Sherman's metaphor is open-ended, its inventive potential is multiplied. Her metaphor is vague and wandering like the parts of the dolls in her *Sex Pictures* which are "impossible to categorise" according to any logic in their "potential for both unlimited reproduction and manipulation, writes Brehm (Van Garrel, Lueken, Foster, Brehm & Scheldal 1996:110).

Hogarth propagates the importance of logic both in the form and content of this work. Put plainly, the figures *in* his work may indulge in illogical random behavioural play, but the works *themselves* do not. Sherman's works (like her *Sex Pictures* [1999] [Fig 46-48], *Film Stills* [1977-1980] [Fig 36-40] and *History Portraits* [1989-1990] [Fig 28-35]) all clearly show the unpredictability, the illogic, the instability and even the incomprehensibility of the deconstructed centre. She uses humour to express this as she realises that these same attributes are also the attributes of humour. Sherman does not, like Hogarth, merely describe or metaphorically narrate the instability of humour or its illogic. Illogic and instability become part of the formal structure of her works themselves which, in turn, become ironic metaphors for the so-called logic of a postmodern world, its ideologies and its conventions.

Sherman's images (whether they are her *History Portraits*, her *Film Stills* or her *Sex Pictures*) are dislodged from their conventional logical linear position in history, physical reality, psychological significance or any position they might have occupied in our minds or memories. They thus function as dislocated fragments which are released in an illogical, unpredictable, unstable and deliberately (almost incomprehensible) infinite state of play as our minds infinitely replace each possible interpretation with another as we strain to make sense of them. Sherman therefore succeeds in using humour to give visual expression to the condition of a postmodern world and a postmodern mind which no longer believes in the logic and stability of a modern world, only in ironic play with its remnants.

### **2.3 Postmodern humorous art as deconstructive**

What Sherman and Hogarth have in common in their *History Portraits* and *Time Smoking a Picture* is that they are both attempting to question modernist conventions and principles, although to a different degree. Both are using the Old Master Painting as an

example of this and both are using their own humorous metaphorical configuration of images to do this. However, whereas Sherman's work displays a complete negation of the modernist belief in the existence of an artistic teleology and ontology, Hogarth's work remains enmeshed in the very ideologies that he attempts to dislodge.

In Hogarth's works the viewer is, throughout the experience, aware of an underpinning reality/truth/meaning that the work refers to. Hogarth the modernist is using humour in an attempt to destroy the aura of truth conventionally believed to be represented by old art, but his own work is rooted in the convention that art allows us to reach closure of truth. Sherman the postmodernist's humorous metaphoric configuration is, on the contrary, not in any way supported by or supportive of such ontological truth. Put simply, Hogarth is convincing us that some things *in* our world are not what they seem but Sherman is convincing us that our world *itself* is not what it seems. Her humour is therefore deconstructive on a far deeper level and more radically subversive of modernist principles than Hogarth's.

Evidence that Hogarth believes in a modernist notion of an existing ontology of art can be found in his own works (as shown in chapter two). It is therefore sufficient to mention here that the narrative content of his *Time Smoking a Picture* (1761) (Fig 26) and his *The Battle of the Pictures* (1744-1745) (Fig 27) implies that art can be improved by taking a certain direction toward what *he* believes will bring about artistic progress. Sherman, on the other hand, neither identifies these images as being representative of an existing ontological principle for art nor suggests progress. On the contrary, she deliberately wrenches these anonymous Old Master images from *their* privileged position within a modern ontology of art and their logical position within the horizontal linear progression of history. She ridicules them, robs them of their metaphysical status by creating fakes that look just like them but are actually herself posing as them, which shows that the originals have no real power in a world of technological reproduction. She thus releases the Old Masters into an endless random repetitious non-logical non-teleological movement of play where they no longer represent any metaphysical truth. Sherman employs the exceptionally powerful deconstructive potential of humour to create what is virtually a visual demonstration of the poststructuralist theory which argues that anything (like these paintings or theory such as ontology of art) which poses as an unquestionable, immutable centre of truth can indeed be infinitely *replaced*.

In her *History Portraits* (1989-1990) (Figs 28-35) Sherman destroys the belief that these works and models are an eternal and immutable representation of the values of "mankind". She subverts their position as vehicles of the original meaning of their creators by showing us that they cannot possibly have the same meaning which they had when they were created. They no longer represent the hegemonic power of a single artistic ontology, but merely Sherman herself transformed over and over in costumes obviously gleaned from second-hand stalls and blatantly fake prostheses to "play" the roles which the people that are depicted in the originals had taken seriously as unquestionable truth. Forgacs (1998:45) writes: "When Sherman replaces or covers her flesh-and-blood self with mannequins, masques, plastic body parts, dolls and props, she shifts from an external description of a fictitious person to the monstrous landscape of a very real, late twentieth-century mind." She is showing that they are mere images without permanent value, products of a specific ideology and its conventions, generated in a specific context that is no longer valid and as devoid of immortality, of meaning, and vulnerable to change as any other image, text, knowledge or belief.

Sherman is virtually applying the meaning of the word "deconstruction" to what we see as the truth and meaning that are carried by images by "undoing, piece by piece a building or other construction such as a bridge or a monument until there is nothing left" (Kohl 1992:29). The word "monument" that is used above is specifically apt in the way in which the aesthetic/ideological hegemony of the so-called Old Master works and what they represent are humorously "de-monumentalised" by Sherman in her *History Portraits* (Radhikrishnan 1983:41). In these works, Sherman exposes the Old Masters as redundant *monuments* of values, conventions and metaphysics of a past that is no longer believed in. Whereas Hogarth attempts to change an institutionalised modernist creative practice, Sherman undertakes a systematic deconstruction of the underlying ontological principles *of modernism in its entirety* which hailed these works as eternal and ideal bastions of unchanging truth and stability. "The sheer ridiculousness of these works suggests that Sherman is mocking the Western canon and its seemingly endless depictions of extravagantly dressed royalty, clergy, mistresses, and religious figures" writes Cruz (Cruz, Smith & Jones 2000:12). Sherman thus exposes the fakery of convention by employing the power of humour to deconstruct by ridicule and to rob convention and ideology of any power they might have held.

Hogarth's humorous metaphors make us look critically at certain conventions in our world while (as have been shown in chapter two) he employs these conventions himself. Sherman, on the other hand, metonymically deconstructs convention from the ground up and reinvents the way that we look at the world. She ridicules not only the conventional understanding of "normality" but also the tactics or methods used to ideologically convince us of a particular view of such normality. She does not, as Hogarth does in most of his works, point out convention and its tactics as if standing outside of the situation as it were. She internalises it by both metaphorically and physically "becoming" the victim of convention herself. Sherman disguises herself, thus changing her own appearance in accordance with the very convention which she is ridiculing. She employs the very rhetoric by which a convention was created in the first place in order to mock and expose its fakery through its own tactics.

Her *History Portraits* are, for example, presented in the stereotypical perception we have of "high art" format, gold frames and pose of genuine Old Master oil paintings hung in prestigious galleries. In her *Portraits of Society Women* (2000) (Figs 41-45) she uses the cosmetics, wigs and other fakery propagated by the fashion and cosmetic industry as the means to transform ourselves into the image of perfection that is projected daily to us in the media. The results of Sherman's transformations of herself are however neither glamorous in her *Portraits of Society Women* nor dignified in her *History Portraits*. They are, instead, simultaneously tragically moving yet highly comical. What Sherman achieves by means of humour is to *abstrahere* (drag away) the meaning of an image only to reassemble it in a different configuration with a totally different meaning. The *Portraits of Society Women* remove the myth of glamour that is conventionally promised by such images and deposits it onto an image which is the antithesis of glamour. Her *History Portraits* remove the myth that surrounds the Old Master works and superimposes it onto her ridiculous fakes. Sherman's images thus become a powerful humorous metaphorical deconstruction of these myths.

Sherman deliberately lets us see the fakery of her own staged scenes. Her works visually illustrate the fact that any parody relies upon the recognition of its fakery and knowledge of the original it mocks. In many of her *History Portraits* the fake prostheses are purposely badly attached to the figures and clearly visible to the viewer. The breasts of the female figure in her *History Portrait (Untitled # 216)* (Fig 29) which vaguely resembles *La Fornarina* by Raphael (1518)<sup>11</sup> are very obviously completely fake and in

another *History Portrait (Untitled 205)* (Fig 28) the breast of the "Madonna" figure is clearly not attached to her body. This becomes a humorous metaphor for the fact that these breasts are as easily detachable from Sherman's Madonna's and Mistresses as their reputations as archetypal mother or female seductress are. The cloths which Sherman used for the headscarf and shawl (Fig 29) and the curtain (Fig 28) are clearly cheap and nasty finds from second-hand stores that are vastly different from those which a genuine Old Master model would have used and become a subversive bit of humorous metaphor for the fact that nothing in this work or its "original" can be taken at face value. Hogarth, in *Characters and Caricatures* (1743), used the inferred similarity between Raphael's work and his own in a parodic attempt to show that his (Hogarth's) was as "good" as the other, thereby implying his admiration of Raphael's artistic status or the unspoken desire to have his work "elevated" to a similar status. Sherman's (possible) referral to Raphael suggests nothing of the kind. On the contrary, its mockery rather robs the Old Master of its status.

Sherman often uses the very medium of convention to subvert its constructed reality. As a photographer, she knows that in a culture that was raised on the mediated image, a photographic image carries a reputation for being a direct representation of reality. Abigail Solomon-Godeau (in Rice 1999: ix) writes that "...photography has come to mediate, if not wholly represent, the empirical world for most of the inhabitants of industrialised societies..." The contemporary individual unquestionably accepts photographs as "truth" in much the same way which the modern individual believed that words expressed truth. Sherman is also aware of the adaptability of humour to deconstruct any centring structure which poses as an origin of truth in order to expose its fakery. In her more mature work she employs both this ability of humour and the devices of photography to parody and subvert the perception that all that we see in a photograph is necessarily real or true. Her *History Portraits* are prime examples of "trick photography" since one is not immediately aware of the fact that these "old masters" are not even paintings, but photographs. In her later works, such as her *Film Stills*, she also deliberately uses commercial composition and lighting.<sup>12</sup> Sherman also uses real elements in these images, like the clearly visible tripwire in her *Bus Riders* (2000) (Figs 49-50). However, unlike Hogarth's use of real things, this piece of cable ironically becomes a humorous metaphor for what is not real. It becomes a tongue in cheek critical metaphor for the fake and the lie.<sup>13</sup>

Sherman thus literally removes meaning from any image, deconstructs it by means of its own rhetoric and relocates it at the site of its origin. Her works become commanding humorous metaphors to convey that what we accept and use to model our bodies, our perception of self, our beliefs and convictions are not in any way, as the modernist believed, in correspondence with a pre-existing ontological model for truth but are fallacies that are perpetuated by tradition. By wrenching the original meaning of an image from its hallowed position in a specific tradition and “relocating it at the site of its origins” Sherman succeeds in exposing its meaninglessness in a new humorous metaphorical configuration (Brehm in Van Garrel, Lueken, Foster, Brehm and Scheldal 1996:112).

The deconstructive potential of humour is also demonstrated by the different ways in which Sherman and Hogarth address the modernist notion of physical perfection. Hogarth’s *A Harlot’s Progress* displays evidence of a belief in an ideal modernist norm of perfection that is based on a fixed *ontological* principle which is already in existence and corresponds with the ideal concept of man made in God’s image. Hogarth humorously depicts imperfection in all its forms. However, as previously shown, his imperfections are measured in correspondence with this norm of perfection. This implies that the physical ideal to strive for is this ontological rule of perfection. Sherman, in turn, in her *Portraits of Society Women* suggests that any such norm is never based upon any metaphysical truth but is always based on a *fictional* idea. What this work exposes is not only man or woman’s inability to comply with such an ideal, but the realisation that it is not created after a godly ideal and is rather a "construct of the mass media" which, like a mirage, can never be reached because it technically never existed in the first place (Pollack 1999:146).

The question that Sherman illustrates by ridiculing the idea of physical perfection as a godly instituted ideal is the poststructuralist question, namely: Exactly whose idea of an ideal is this? She is showing the impossibility of suggesting that one physical ideal can exist in a universal manner and transcend cultural, racial and historical barriers. Sherman’s *Film Stills* and *Portraits of Society Women* function in the gap between a media-created stereotypical *image* of perfection and our impotent efforts to satisfy it. She uses the *Portraits of Society Women* as a metaphor for the convention and ideology behind it, and not as an idea of ideal physical perfection itself. Hogarth implies that he condones this notion. He makes us laugh at the imperfection itself. Sherman, on the other

hand, uses the deconstructive force of ridicule to subvert the ideology which presents itself as the final truth about human perfection. In this work Sherman is taking on the role of the victim herself. She becomes the metaphor and the ridiculous; whereas Hogarth remains apart and his metaphor points out the imperfection in a literal manner.

Sherman ridicules and exposes this convention but does not give closure by providing any clues as to what the ideal is. Rather, because it is Sherman herself who is transformed over and over again, she leaves this questionable question open. By using her own face and body as raw material, Sherman shows that there can never be an answer to that question. Therefore her metaphor in this work also becomes humorous demonstration to show that any rule which considers itself the final unquestionable truth about anything (including human perfection) can be deconstructed and endlessly replaced by another just as she is recreating or replacing her own self with wigs, prostheses and make-up over and over again. Hogarth, on the other hand, is implying that we should even "improve" on nature itself if it does not present us with perfection in the direction of a single fixed modernist ontological ideal which, as believed by the modernist, is already in existence somewhere (i.e. a typically modernist rule that provides closure of truth about perfection). For Sherman the postmodernist, no such ideal exists.

Sherman's works leave the viewer with the open-ended realisation that neither an ontological model nor the media-induced model for perfection ever existed anywhere but in our minds, which in turn creates an opportunity for the reinvention of this convention and exposes the fact that many other perceptions of physical beauty are possible. She taps into and engages the exceptional ability of humour to adapt and reinvent itself indefinitely. In short, her works become a visible humorous illustration of the postmodern deconstruction of modernist correspondence thinking and its belief in a pre-existing and immutable centre of truth.

#### **2.4 Postmodern humorous art as inventive**

Hogarth, the modernist, makes art supported by the belief that meaning can be *discovered* and communicated in correspondence with fixed pre-existing truth patterns that exist outside of art. Sherman, the postmodernist, can only refer to an image that contains no fixed truth value in the first place and so *invents* meaning without ontological support. Humour, like metaphor, does not need the permanence of ontological truth. It can

immediately operate from any new centring principle and is in fact invigorated by change. The mere fact that both Hogarth and Sherman, who work in such different cultural and historical circumstances, both still succeed in being funny is evidence of the ability of humour to endlessly reinvent itself. This ability of humour is most valuable in a postmodern discursive milieu which argues that any centre is endlessly replaceable and which adopts an artistic approach that is characterised by metaphorical invention rather than a modernist artistic approach that is based on ontological discovery of the existing fixed principle.

What Sherman does in her *History Portraits* is to remove the connection that is traditionally formed in the mind between the word "art" and the iconic image of a Raphael or Rembrandt in oil in a gold frame, only to deposit it onto a completely new site where its meaning is entirely reinvented, because this is the site of humour. In her *Sex Pictures* the clichéd image of the idea of sexuality is similarly dragged away from its traditional site and virtually dumped, so to speak, in a decidedly un-sexual site of black or macabre humour. Neither the clichéd Old Master nor the clichéd sexual image can survive unchanged outside of its "normal" cultural site. Sherman therefore *reinvents* these images. She uses humour so successfully to reinvent them exactly because humour can so successfully adapt to any context and reinvent itself continually.

Sherman operates in the insecure space which poststructuralist theory has created between the image and its meaning. In this space images are no longer in an ontologically stable relationship with what they signify, which specifically lends itself to the creation of a humorous situation. (1999:24) writes that Sherman's work can be compared to that of the American artist Claude Cahun whose work was designed to subvert such "Idées fixes" in order to "destroy those mental images that force the living into a kind of experiential death". Rice (1999:24) says that Sherman playfully releases a dead image from its stagnated meaning within the confines of its connectedness to a fixed meaning constructed by its ideological origin by presenting it to us in a humorous context. She robs the iconic image of its credibility by removing the concrete meaning of the image from the image itself to relocate it as metaphor of an entirely different or *reinvented* meaning only to be understood within the context of her work. Humour is a most successful way of reviving such a dead clichéd image or concept. Humour and metaphor thrive on renewal because both are constantly threatened by the possibility of becoming clichés themselves, since specifically humour would then merely cease to be humorous.

Humour and metaphor are thus particularly suited to an inventive approach to art in many ways which are exploited by the postmodernists like Sherman to a far more extensive degree than the modernists like Hogarth.

Hogarth, by providing closure, prohibits different interpretations of his metaphoric humour. Sherman multiplies the inventive possibilities because individual experience can never universally represent exactly the same thing for all human beings.

### **3 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion it can be said that modern humour like Hogarth's is expressed in a form of metaphor that retains traces of correspondence thinking because it is literally or transparently and logically descriptive of the concrete. In other words, it encounters the world in an *ontological* corresponding manner because the modernist has the security of the belief in the pre-existence of ontological principles of truth and in the supremacy of human rationality. Modernist humorous metaphor thus clearly provides closure of this "truth". The postmodernist, on the other hand, no longer experiences the world as logical and no longer believes in any kind of metaphysical truth. Postmodern humour like Sherman's is therefore expressed in a different kind of metaphor or metonymy which is less literal; more dense, abstract and vague in meaning; and therefore not so easily understood. Therefore, postmodern metaphor remains open-ended and never provides closure of truth. As a result, this kind of metaphor does not stifle the imagination nor prohibit the invention of new perceptions of truth and differences of meaning like the modernist kind but, in Richard Rorty's (1986:752) words, succeeds in "reweaving our beliefs and desires rather than trying to bring these into conformity with something else".

In other words, the modern humorous artist used humour to show a logical "true" picture of the world in conformance to a pre-existing ontological pattern for truth and logic despite the fact that humour is seen as irrational and untruthful. The postmodern humorous artist no longer has such a pattern and his/her humour does not conform to any pre-existing design or reflect a "logico-metaphysical" encounter with the world, but is free to perceive the world in the "non-logical" and "non-metaphysical" way that Heidegger (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24I) speaks of. The postmodernist thus uses humour to create *new* metaphorical configurations and different insights of the ideologies and conventions of the modern correspondence mode of thinking; whereas the modernist

continues to use humour as a means to access the pre-existing patterns and principles of truth which support this kind of thinking.

The postmodernist no longer relies, like the modernist, on an ontologically stable point of truth reference which exists somewhere outside of the work in order to make a humorous critical comparison between the norm and our shortcomings. Modern humour like Hogarth's remains enmeshed in the very ideologies it ridicules, but postmodern humour displays a complete negation of the modernist belief in the pre-existing. Radhikrishnan (1983:47) writes: "...the objective here is to orient the present in such a way that the past is made to collapse through atrophy or hypertrophy. In either case, the past is touched, manipulated and dislocated." The postmodern humorist understands the dynamic deconstructive power of humour (such as parody, mimicry and irony) in playfully but brutally exposing the constructedness of existing norms which we habitually accept as truth and opens up this site for reinvention. Postmodern humour, says Radhikrishnan (1983:50, 53-54), unlike the modern variant which functions within the stable structures of the correspondence paradigm, operates "as a force that enables endless change" by locating "that hole within dominant structures" and participating in "the blowing open of a new discursive space".

The postmodern humorous artwork is, in the strictest modernist sense, no longer even an artwork but a cultural site or meeting place of endless intertextual metaphorical parodic/ironic referral which never reaches closure of truth. Sherman's images, for example, go beyond the proverbial thousand words that a picture (like Hogarth's) is believed to tell and speaks through a dense metaphorical configuration with many layers placed over one another like a palimpsest and not through a single meaning which is logically in correspondence with one "truth", ideology or convention. The interpretational possibilities are multiplied in its reception. Sherman demonstrates this by ridiculing and seemingly infinitely replacing her own self. This becomes an illustration of Derrida's view that meaning is endlessly deferred. The postmodern perception of the self is thus infinitely multiplied and an unending reinvention of the self is suggested as an open-ended ungrounded and uninterrupted state of possibility. Sherman's humour thus visually demonstrates the Heideggerian notion of ungrounded, non-logical, unpredictable and incomprehensible unending play. Sherman realises that old jokes have to be reinvented in an endless Derridean process of continual change and difference in order to prevent the sedimentation of that which already exists, so she takes up the challenge herself. She

declares that she has grown weary of using her own body and renews her own methods by using parts of dolls instead of her own body to revive what she realised had become a worn-out metaphor (Langford 1999:67).

Ironically, Hogarth's work has also been reinvented and entered into the ranks of the postmodern parodied rather than the modern "parodier". The British artist David Hockney used Hogarth's works as the originals for a pop-comic-style series of parodies (1961-1963) (MEE sv "Hockney, David"), so his work would (in the postmodern aesthetic) finally have been what he wanted it to be, namely "Comic History Painting" (Paulsen 1971:28). By having *her* comic fakes pose as "high art" in prestigious galleries much like those that Hogarth wanted to be in and reap the acclaim that Hogarth wanted, Sherman the postmodern humorist finally and literally managed to allow humorous art "the last laugh".

The humorous fakes of Sherman bring the meaning of art in its totality and the validity of its entire history as we know it into question. Hogarth's works do not convince its viewers to permanently doubt the reality or existence of any known thing in their world, but Sherman's entire oeuvre does exactly that – to the extent that the viewer, after seeing her works, is chillingly aware of the constructedness of a postmodern world. She creates, in the words of Jan Avgikos as quoted by Smith (Cruz, Smith and Jones 2000:29), "a post-apocalyptic ontology" in which nothing is what it seems and it becomes impossible to discern between the fake and the real. Arasse (1999:26) writes that Sherman's "...photographic itinerary constitutes an almost clinical analysis of the collapse of classical humanist beliefs". Put simply, Hogarth the modern humorist is convincing us that some things *in* our world are not what they seem but Sherman the postmodern humorist is convincing us that our world *itself* is not what it seems.

Hogarth presents his works in the modernist mode of thought that his art is telling us the truth about the world. Sherman is telling us that like most things in our world, all her photographs are lying. Like the main character in Dostoevsky's *Bobok* (1873), Baron Klinevich, the postmodernist realises that "[o]n earth it is impossible to live without lying, because life and lie are synonymous..." (Selden 1989:19).<sup>14</sup>

## ENDNOTES

Danto (1991:9) writes that "[t]he implied audience for the stills is ...the lower middle-class America, whose form of entertainment was the movie...By contrast, the implied audience for the old master portrait has gone to college, studied art, travelled to Paris and Rome, has eaten sushi, can buy fresh pasta at the supermarket...In truth the historical portraits do refer to paintings such an audience might well have seen, or at least seen a slide of".

<sup>2</sup> Lueken (1996:21) explains: "...in it dwells the latent horror of many Hitchcock films displaying their maker's sadistic predilection for young platinum blondes in hazardous situations."

<sup>3</sup> "Among Sherman's models...is pornography, surely the genre that inspired the pose of the silicone-breasted doll who lies on her back, smiling benignly while spreading her thighs with her hands" (Frankel 1999:126).

<sup>4</sup> In a Quentin Tarrantino film the scenes frequently do not follow in logical order. Rap music consists of fragments of other music and many contemporary novels employ similar non-logical devices to express this postmodern experience of space and time which borders on the illogical. Often they are "...made completely out of fragments of well-known works which the assembler makes his own and counts on his audience's ability to see what he has done with what others have done" (Danto 1990:5). Cindy Sherman's works are, in similar fashion, often made up of fragmented and appropriated disparate parts to form a "whole". If most postmodern art such as the abovementioned types are viewed from a modernist perspective, it could be said that they lack logical perfection.

<sup>5</sup> Turkle (1996:12) writes about several players (of a computer game called "muds" where one simulates an identity) who joke that they are like "the electrodes in the computer", trying to express the degree to which they feel part of its space.

<sup>6</sup> About the historical portraits, Danto (1991:7, 8) writes that "...again these would be the narratives everyone carries in his or her head because they define the culture; the story of Madonna and Child is as widely known as the tales of love and suspense which composed the standard scenario-with-variations of the B-movie repertoire".

<sup>7</sup> As we have seen, postmodern reality itself has come to resemble a state of amorality which is similar to that of the autonomous world of humour. Postmodern humour is therefore different from modern humour because of the removal of boundaries and lack of faith in fixed norms. It can be said that postmodern humour resembles the moral stance of Mennippean satire and the works of Aristophanes rather than the later New Comedy of Menander (342-291BC) (MEE sv "Aristophanes").

<sup>8</sup> To illustrate the postmodern stance towards morality, the following: Black humour and the humour of the grotesque find fertile ground and flourish in the postmodern aesthetic. Films like *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill 1* and *2* are prime examples of postmodern works which so combine graphically realistic scenes of gruesome killings, music and colour that death becomes a spectacularly executed decorative emblem that is so casually introduced into the rest of the plot that it evokes no sympathy or moral indignation, only a removed amusement.

<sup>9</sup> To further illustrate the difference in approach towards sexual morality in the postmodern (as opposed to the modern) as influenced by television and the Internet, Turkle quotes the example of a sixteen year old boy who reported: "Before I was on the net, I used to masturbate with Playboy; now I do netsex on DinoMUD with a woman in another state." He continued: "With netsex it is fantasies. My MUD lover does not want to meet me in RL" (Cyberspeak for real life). The boy explained that despite the fact that he was still only touching himself, he saw the "fantasies as something that's part of sex with two people, not just me in my room". In the same way infidelity, lies, murder, rape and theft by one of one's cyber-characters is both more real than reality itself to some of these players, yet remains as unpunishable as one's mere fantasies are in "RL" (Turkle 1996:20-21). Cyber-fantasies therefore provide the player with the same kind of retribution-free immunity as that which is often given to the presenter of a scandalous or immoral joke, a stand-up comedy routine, a creator of a shocking example of humorous art which finds its first prototypes in the world of Aristophanean comedy and Mennipean satire.

<sup>10</sup> Smith explains the difference between the modern and postmodern approach by using Goya as an example as follow: "Many of Goya's renditions of young women carry similar attributes. In contrast, however, he endows the phantasms, desires, temptations, foibles, vanities, malignancies (and a host of other real or imagined terrors that surround them) with physical form as grotesque personifications. However, both Sherman and Goya allude to and critique a social nexus of conventions and behaviour codes surrounding women in the artists' respective cultures. Sherman accomplishes this not only by insidiously inverting the types of voluptuous, seductive female figures that consistently populate the magazine centrefold format but also by parodying a stock range of emotions embodied in a series of ordinary, seemingly empty-headed young women characters drawn from the conventions of media and popular culture" (Smith in Cruz, Smith and Jones 2000:21).

<sup>11</sup> Raphael. *La Fornarina* (1518). Oil on panel: 85 x 60 cm. National Gallery: Rome. Available at: [www.archives.com/archives/R/raphael/raphael\\_fornarina.jpg.html](http://www.archives.com/archives/R/raphael/raphael_fornarina.jpg.html)

<sup>12</sup> "... Sherman employs harsh backlighting and is fearful of ambiguously melancholic expressions, and she poses to convey a sense of terror, as in the melodrama of a horror film, or a vague, sullen sense of longing and frustration that could equally indicate mindless boredom or romantic reverie" (Smith in Cruz, Smith and Jones 2000:21).

<sup>13</sup> Wilson (2000:34) explains that "[t]he staging for each photograph is bare, with little or no set dressing. The same electric sockets appear in each photograph, points are marked on the floor by scraps of masking tape and snaking across the floor with no attempt being made to hide it, is the shutter release cable of her camera...This artifice allows the photographs to be seen clearly as critical documents" (Wilson 2000:34).

<sup>14</sup> Selden (1989:19) explains the following about a scene in Dostoevsky's *Bobok* (1873): "A scene in a cemetery culminates in a weird account of the brief 'life outside life' of the dead in the grave. Before losing their earthly consciousness completely, the dead enjoy a period of a few months when they are released from all the obligations and laws of normal existence and are able to reveal themselves with a stark and unlimited freedom. Baron Klinevich, 'king' of the corpses, declares 'I just want to live without lying, because life and lies are synonyms; but here we will tell the truth just for fun.'"

**ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTER FOUR**



Fig 28: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 216* (1989).



Fig 29: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 205* (1989)



Fig 30: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 209* (1989).



Fig 31: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 210* (1989)

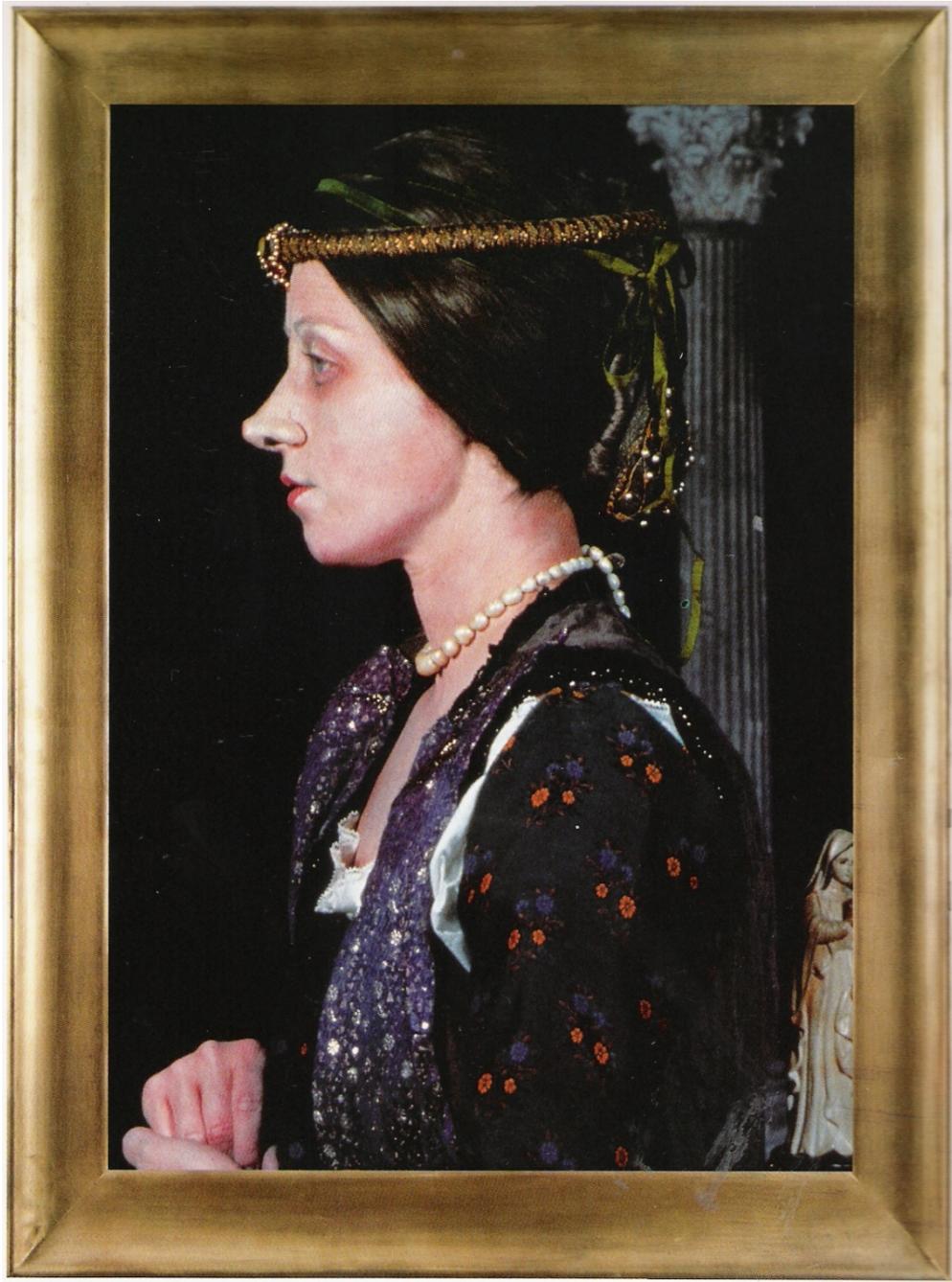


Fig 32: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 212* (1989)



Fig 33 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 225* (1990)



Fig 34: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 183* (1988)



Fig 35: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 215* (1989)



Fig 36: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still # 21* (1978)



Fig 37: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still # 3* (1977).



Fig 38: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still # 54* (1980)



Fig 39: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still # 35* (1979)



Fig 40: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still # 6* (1977).



Fig 41: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 351* (2000)



Fig 42: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled 353* (2000)

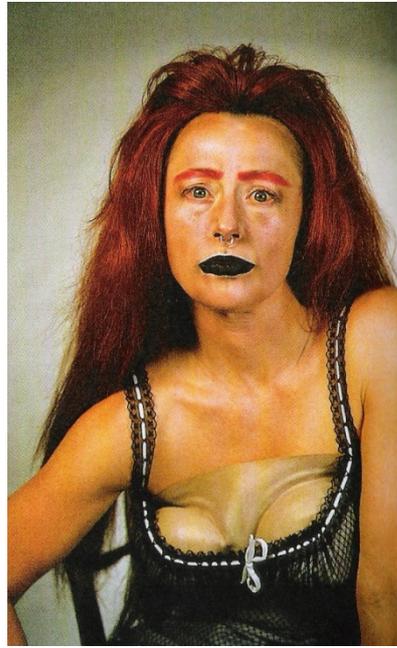


Fig 43: Cindy Sherman *Untitled 2000*



Fig 44: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled 2000*



Fig 45: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled 33* (2000)



Fig 46: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 263* (1992).



Fig 47: Cindy Sherman *Untitled # 253* (1992)

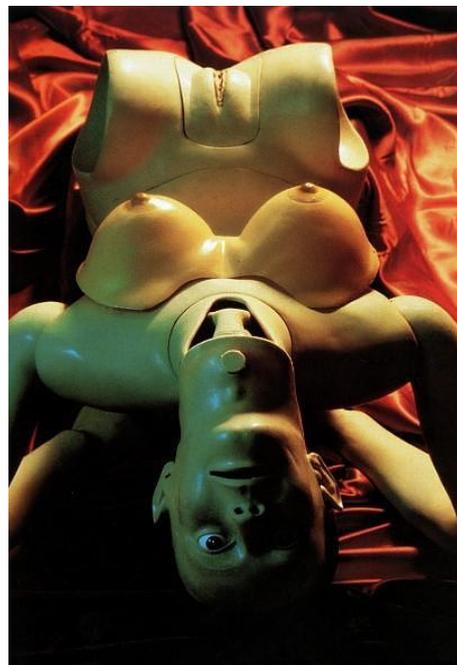


Fig 48: Cindy Sherman *Untitled # 261* (1992)



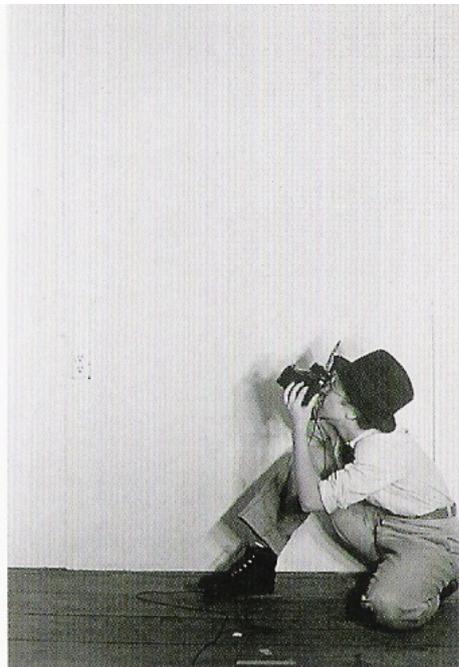
Fig 49: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled*#1976-2000.



Fig 50: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled* #1976- 2000.



Fig 51: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled* # 1976-2000. ('The Press')



## CHAPTER 5: A POSTMODERN CREATIVE OPTION: ART AS PLAY

In this chapter the author's own work is viewed within the parameters of postmodern play and gaming as a creative process of invention. It contains a strong element of humorous play and a rather "dark" ironic side which casts, in the words of fellow of artist Andre Naude, "an acid green spotlight on various morality plays" (Van der Watt, Le Grange, Froud & Van Tonder 2006:23). Examples of the author's work will be critically examined in order to determine the extent to which it forms part of the postmodern stance of ironic playfulness which has developed into a very specific genre and popular cultural phenomenon. It will be contextualised within the dimension of a critical postmodern society in which cultural practices, conventions, habits, taboos and histories are continually reassessed from a typical postmodern ironic vantage point of playful mockery and consequently reinvented and replaced.

In the first section *From modern logic to postmodern play*, the general development of postmodern play in Western philosophical thought is briefly viewed as outlined by Richard Rorty in his article of 1986 entitled *From Logic to Language to Play*. This is followed by *What is postmodern play*, a slightly more specific investigation of the theory of play as found in John Caputo's interpretation of the philosophical theories of Martin Heidegger in *Being Ground and Play in Heidegger* of 1970 and in poststructuralist theories such as those of Jacques Derrida. In *The (loss of) seriousness of play* these two discussions are used to formulate the following theory: Although the postmodern tendency to adopt a playful humorous stance towards issues in general seems to herald a dizzy frivolousness that is devoid of all seriousness, on closer inspection it becomes clear that postmodern play and gaming is something entirely different from the traditional idea of play. Although it takes the form of a playful ironic stance of un-involvement, it can be seen as the manifestation of a deep ontological loss of security that has serious consequences.

This does not have to be viewed as negative because the very *loss* of modernist trust in the immutability of fixed ontological principles and the supremacy of logic opens up infinite new possibilities. Heidegger's attempt to "reinvent" metaphysical theories is a case in point. (Heidegger's theory is presented in such an uncommonly poetic language

and almost mischievous tone that it causes Caputo [1970:44] to speculate whether the philosopher himself is perhaps engaging in some existentialist "play" of his own) The postmodern adoption of an attitude of humorous play and gaming can, on the one hand, be seen as a powerful subversive force of ironic doubt because it allows nothing to settle into a state of permanence; however, on the other hand, its playful refusal to provide answers and closure can be seen as responsible for a continual process of reinvention, with serious social implications on both counts.

Since the author's own work displays many of these characteristics, the following examples serve to illustrate a discussion under the heading *Play and gaming in the postmodern creative process: Bennie's Games* (2002-2006)<sup>1</sup> (Figs 70-71) which forms the practical component of this dissertation; and two older works *Die Vervelige Lewe van Hermanus Henning* (1994)<sup>2</sup> (Figs 52-56) (hereafter referred to as *Hermanus Henning*) and *Die Preek van Dominee Jacob Rudolph Jacobus Bosch* (1995)<sup>3</sup> (Figs 57-69) (hereafter referred to as *Die Preek*). Cindy Sherman's works that have already been discussed will be referred to from time to time. The different ways in which the author's humorous art typifies postmodern play as a continued process of reinvention and the replacement of existing conventions will be analysed. The first section is devoted to a discussion of how this renewed perception of existing is brought about by toying with the viewer through creating a "play" of familiarisation and also defamiliarisation. It is then shown how these works create such inventive "play" by fragmentation by playing with the past, technique and medium and by using the human body as its playing field. This is followed by a demonstration (under the heading *The viewer plays*) of how these works encourage viewer participation and invention. Finally, the consequences of play are surveyed.

## **1 FROM MODERN LOGIC TO POSTMODERN PLAY**

As shown previously, a major ontological shift took place from the modern to the postmodern viewpoint of art. This move was characterised by a decentralisation of man from his position of ontological supremacy due to his rationality which guaranteed that his cultural products were seen as a vehicle that he controls to communicate his individual genius, intent and meaning. In the postmodern history proved to humanity that the application of human reason to all human phenomena in the fields of language, philosophy, psychology, ethics, religion, aesthetics, technology and science does not necessarily result in progress. It can also result in unspeakable human atrocities, media

manipulation, separation from the self and the alienation of man from his world. Furthermore, poststructuralist theory proved the instability of language which showed that closure is no longer possible.

Applied to art, this means that art no longer represents any kind of truth, offers any kind of closure or promises any kind of progress. The artist is no longer in complete control of the way that meaning is communicated in his/her work and the artwork is therefore no longer seen as representative of a unique "truth" which is expressed by the geniality of the artist or iconic value based upon originality. One option that is left to artists who are in a position where truth and meaning have little or no value is to accept the freedom this grants them and to continue to make art *with* the very concept of non-closure. An exceptional way of demonstrating this postmodern doubt is found in humorous art that has already been labelled by modern theorists as disruptive of logic, perfection and truth. The work of Cindy Sherman and the author demonstrates that this lends a humorous playful or "gaming" quality to a great deal of postmodern art.

Richard Rorty provides, as the title of his text states, a useful overview of the shift in thinking from *Logic, to Language, to Play*. To put it in a nutshell: the time of "logic" that Rorty (1986:748) refers to began with an early nineteenth century reaction *against* the scientism of the Enlightenment but ended with "a willingness to see scientific progress and political progress...as parallel and inseparable aspects of the triumph of rationality over superstition and prejudice". He writes (1986:748) that this resulted in a clear-cut opposition between a literary culture (counter-Enlightenment tendencies such as the Romantic Movement and German Idealism) and a scientific culture to which philosophers like Husserl and Russell in particular and philosophy in general aligned themselves, because it would establish its scientific status and saw the literary culture as "privatised aestheticism containing disturbing strains of irrationality".

The time of "language" Rorty (1986:749) speaks of is identified by him as a later "anti-Aristotelian, anti-substantialist, anti-essentialist move away from scientism and positivism" that was marked by a change in attitude towards logic by a number of philosophers who saw the return to Enlightenment ways of thinking as "naively realistic". Rorty (1986: 249) writes that Kant's suggestion that we "create a phenomenal world to suit our faculties" was later reinforced by thinkers such as Cassirer and C. I. Lewis who suggest that "the categories, the ground plans for constructing such worlds were not fixed

by the nature of our faculties but susceptible of historical and cultural change". Rorty (1986:249) identifies a similar attack on analytical truth by philosophers such as Quine as well as Wittgenstein who raised the question "Why did we think that logic was something sublime?" Rorty (1986:750) says that this resulted in the liberation of philosophy from language. He writes (1986:750) that this "de-logisizing and naturalisation of language" and the new theory of meaning give us a sense of "language as a variety of human behaviour...attempts to cope with the world" rather than as a "structure or a body of rules" and a realisation that

...there is no way to underwrite or criticize the ongoing, self-modifying know-how of the user of language by philosophical account of the nature of the relation of his mind or his language to the object. There is no way to reach outside our language-game to an account of the relation between that language-game as scheme to "the world" as "content" (Rorty 1986:751).

Rorty (1986:750) says that "human inquiry – in all areas, literature as well as science, politics as much as in physics – is a matter of reweaving our fabric of belief and desire, our attitudes towards various sentences of our language". He continues that the role of Heidegger and his break with the Cartesian subject-object model of knowledge can later be seen in Gadamer's rightwing efforts to overcome Kant's notion of "the aesthetic" and Derrida's leftwing attempts to see language as a "seamless intertextual web", both of which blur the distinction between philosophy and literature; the aesthetic and the moral; the cognitive and the non-cognitive; and, more important to this discussion, the serious and the playful. This leads us to the time of "play" that Rorty refers to in his title.

### **1.1 What is postmodern play?**

Postmodern play or gaming is not conventional play. The literal meaning of play is defined as taking part in an "enjoyable activity...simply for the sake of amusement" (MED sv "Play"). This definition is not an altogether apt description of postmodern play. Play is however also defined as a "flickering" or "shimmering movement" (as of light on water); "the amount of looseness in something such as a rope"; or "room for free movement between parts", which is a closer description of the postmodern kind of play (MED sv "Play"). What is relevant to this argument that the loss of structure allows for the freedom of play in this definition is that both the "play" of a slack rope or light on

water is made possible by the absence of a fixed structure. Not the rope, the light or the water is attached to something stable which would prevent them from "playing". Structural rigidity prevents movement or "play" and, by its very nature, prohibits freedom and change. This underlines the fact that it is the loss of the modernist fixed, stable and immutable centre that also allows postmodern play. Derrida (1972:249) writes about the "free play" that is found within each centring principle which is caused by the fact that any centring structure is by its very nature situated outside itself. This means that any centre can therefore be replaced by another in an indefinite process. This can be interpreted as looseness, slackness or absence of stability within the stabilising centre which allows freedom of movement that is caused by the intermittent replacement of one centring principle by another and causes an indefinite process of reinvention of the centre. This free play is made possible by the fact that closure can never be reached because of the instability of the shimmering, flickering or moving play of the ever-changing centre.

Since the influence of Heidegger upon the theories of Derrida is widely recognised, the Heideggerian notion of play (as developed in his philosophical theories) is relevant to an understanding of postmodern play. John Caputo gives a useful translation and lucid explanation of Heidegger's theories in his article *Being, ground and play in Heidegger*. of 1970, which gives an account of Heidegger's theories of play as found in his various publications in German in a simplified and condensed form. Caputo (1970:31) writes that Heidegger identifies the intermittent movement or play as made possible by what he calls the "abyssal" character of being in his *Einführung in die Metaphysik*<sup>4</sup> Caputo (1970:26-33) further explains Heidegger's theories as outlined in his *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysic 3*<sup>5</sup> as follows: Heidegger aims to rebuild the structure of metaphysics by returning to its origin in order to restore the matter of Being to a state of untouched vigour. This is so, says Heidegger as quoted by Caputo (1970:33) from his *Identität und Differenz*<sup>6</sup>, because "the history of metaphysics, for which Being itself is responsible, is the history of a lost or forgotten ground".

Heidegger's argument in *Identität und Differenz* (quoted by Caputo 1970:32-33) is that most metaphysical theories are *rational* accounts of the idea of Being which fail "to transcend the realm of beings" by always taking a being (either the human subject or "the highest being" – God) for the ground; whereas he (Heidegger) sees ground as "before" rational metaphysics. Heidegger (quoted by Caputo 1970:37) argued that Kant, for

example, still operated within the Aristotelian tradition which saw God as the first uncaused cause or ultimate ground beyond which there was no further ground, where the mind ceased its inquiry and came to rest as if overwhelmed by the limits of its capacity to comprehend this "groundless ground". This is where Heidegger goes further, explains Caputo. Heidegger (quoted by Caputo 1970:28-38) writes in *Der Satz vom Grund*<sup>7</sup> that being is itself without ground and because being *is* in itself the final "account" for the "realm of beings", it can give no account for itself. Therefore, there must be a deeper, more "original" source or "a hard core of concealment, a reserve which has not yet stepped into manifestness" which Being refuses to reveal. According to Caputo (1970:29-37), Heidegger further argues in *Sein und Zeit*<sup>8</sup> that this concealment is due to Being itself because "while Being is intelligible (manifest) it is equiprimordially unintelligible". This is not to be put down to a failure of the mind to comprehend, but to the fact that Being "holds itself back" or tantalisingly engages in a simultaneous "concealment and unconcealment" of itself into its groundlessness or the abyss of "nothingness".

Heidegger, writes Caputo (1970:34), sees this "concealment and unconcealment", and the advancing and withdrawing of being, as the "historical movement of being". In fact, Caputo (1970:34) quotes Heidegger as saying in his *Sein und Zeit* that the mission and history of Being as "the perduring (*verweilen*) inexorable hand of time" ("das weil"). Heidegger (1996:306) writes in *Being and Time* that "[m]easurement of time is constitutive for being-in-the-world". In short, being is time itself and it is the historical movement of being that Heidegger sees as "play". Therefore, the Heideggerian abyssal nature of grounding (the advancing/withdrawing and concealment/unconcealment which the author compares to the slackness of rope or shimmering of light on water, Derrida to the free play of the centre and Rorty sees as a language game) points to an unstableness, a wavering or trembling movement *because* there is no fixed or stabilising or grounding factor to prevent it. The very *absence* of a stable ground in being *is* what is "letting it waver meaninglessly in nothingness", says Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* (quoted by Caputo 1970:29). In short, this random movement is what play is.

## **1.2 The (loss of) seriousness of play**

Let us return to the examples of the play of the rope and the light on water. Neither of these can be seen as useful or purposeful in a utility kind of way because the light is not a steady beacon and the rope is not a firm anchor. In fact, one cannot use them for much

more than enjoyment purposes. However, moving light allows the exploration of new territory over a wider area and slack rope can be woven to become something else – and both would be impossible without the freedom of their "play". In the same way, Heideggerian "play" would not be possible if it is seen as a game with rules and restrictions. It should rather be seen as a more childlike kind of play which is without purpose because, as Heidegger writes in *Holzwege*<sup>9</sup> and *Der Satz vom Grund* respectively (quoted by Caputo 1970:37, 38-40), "the very existence of rule, order or rigor would destroy the 'freeplay' of the playing". Being, in Heidegger's view, is without motive and capriciousness, and just "plays because it plays...The play is without 'why'. It plays while it plays". For Heidegger, says Caputo (1970:38), the play of being is not an orderly logical process at all. Rather, it is a "fluctuating (wandelend), wavering dance". As we have seen, Derrida (quoted by Kuchler 1994:4) also observes a playfulness which introduces "...a certain laughter, and a certain step of dance" into contemporary artmaking.

It is clear that both Heidegger and Derrida's views have serious consequences since their theories are in direct opposition to the high regard for truth, rationality, logic, stability and immutability in Western metaphysics. What Heidegger proposes in *Die Technik und die Kehre* (1962:42-3)<sup>10</sup> (quoted by Caputo 1970:38) is that it is neither "possible to explain the missionary movements of Being...according to any causal pattern" nor to reach closure of truth since "Being is neither truth nor untruth" but "Being as a groundless ground *is* its ingrained ineradicable obscurity". This means that man is no longer in control of his being, since it is being that is "toying" with man and conducting a "masquerade" with man by "concealing itself in its truth and hiding that very concealment". Therefore, even if postmodern play is more often than not humorous and is frequently labelled in postmodern discourse as a loss of seriousness, it is not entirely frivolous or inconsequential. Caputo (1970:40) makes it clear that in the Heideggerian view "it is a mistake of tough-minded rationality to underestimate the gravity of play" since it must also be seen as a "deadly game between man and Being". Huizinga, professor of history at the University of Leyden, in his book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture* (1949:89) recognises this lethal potential of human gaming in his chapter entitled *Play and War* when he concludes that when language refers to war as a game, it should be viewed literally and not metaphorically.

This underlines the fact that postmodern playfulness and ironic gaming is not entirely for amusement. Just as there are many types of laughter – and not all express joy – there are

many kinds of humour, some with a more seriously subversive underbelly than others. The postmodern humorous play in Sherman's work offers no retribution, solution or closure; whereas Hogarth's does. However, it is the very lack of the admonishing Hogarthian finger pointing in the proposed direction in Sherman's work that is far more devastatingly subversive than its stabilising and reassuring presence. When standing before a Hogarth, one would laugh at the human inability to live up to the truth; but when standing before a Sherman, one's laughter would be at the abyssal discovery that there is no truth (Heidegger's "groundlessness", Derrida's "absent centre" or Gass's "rubber" and "sponge"). This is something entirely different from mild amusement from within the safe confines of the knowledge that truth does exist. Armed with this knowledge, we are now ready to view the author's work within the context of the postmodern phenomenon of humorous play and gaming.

## **2 PLAY AND GAMING IN THE POSTMODERN CREATIVE PROCESS**

Postmodern humorous artistic play can present itself as total frivolity which conceals a serious undertone. It can also present itself as perfectly serious with a concealed ironic undertone or pose as truth, only to reveal that it is not. The "play" is the almost devious alternating oscillation between the concealment and unconcealment of the concepts that Heidegger speaks of. It is also something which, as we have seen in previous chapters, humour is particularly adept at and suited to, namely the playful presentation of itself as something other than what it is. Sarcasm, irony and parody are examples of this. Humour and play are both "toying" with the perception of reality, truth or seriousness; but are in themselves never fixed (grounded) in truth or untruth, seriousness or un-seriousness, reality or non-reality. They continually occupy the abyssal territory of no-man's land by wavering between the two. At the same time, they are also "toying" with the viewer. However, they are also capable of allowing the viewer to enter into this undiscovered virgin territory in order to *participate* in the invention of new perceptions of truth and reality. This is undoubtedly true of the work of Cindy Sherman. It is also true of the author's recent work *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-69) and her previous works *Die Preek* (1995) (Figs 57-69) and *Hermanus Henning* (1994) (Figs 52-56).

### **2.1 Toying with the viewer**

*Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-94) consists of several individual life-size "games" that are either accompanied by human figures or built into human figures which form part

of a larger environmental installation simulating a contemporary games arcade or casino. This work plays with the viewer on various levels.

Like a real casino or arcade, this piece at first seems to be a space that has been created purely for pleasure, laughter and enjoyment. The bright neon light and the plush red carpet invite the viewer; the figures are like huge funny toys; the games can be played; and the overall presentation is humorous, light-hearted with touches of frivolous, garish décor which are purposely used throughout to create playfulness and an awareness of the contemporary kitsch culture. Upon closer inspection, however, each sculptural group and game at some stage reveals the fact that it is addressing a serious social issue such as abuse of power and substance abuse; media-induced obsession with possessions, food, physical appearance and sex; and general corruption. This is presented in such a playful manner that it is intermittently revealed and concealed in typically Heideggerian play. Because no closure is reached and no moral direction is offered, this literally removes the stabilising "ground" of truth from under the viewer and leaves him/her in an unsettling position of "wavering" between certainty/uncertainty and laughter/seriousness.

This work uses humour to toy with the viewer by simultaneously playing between familiarising certain elements (which draw the viewer into the work) and then defamiliarising others (which force the viewer to review his/her perception of them by their sudden unexpected unfamiliarity). A sense of familiarity is achieved which turns the viewer into an "accomplice" and not a critical observer of the antics of "the other". The inner "self" of the viewer is allowed to identify with, to "recognise" and express the ironic laughter of self-criticism at "our" fallibilities. Like Sherman's *Society Women* or a contemporary sitcom like *Friends*, the "characters" in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-69), *Hermanus Henning* (1994) (Figs 52-56) and *Die Preek* (1995) (Figs 57-69) are "us" and not "the other". An awareness of and tolerance for difference is thus created which replaces the modernist tendency to marginalise certain groups and viewpoints on the grounds of their position outside of the norm.

## **2.2 The play of familiarisation**

The postmodern creator of humorous art or the director of a contemporary comedy/sitcom has to choose his/her characters or models carefully if he/she wants to engage in this "play" of familiarisation in order to bring about a tolerance for "otherness". The model for the *dominee*-figure in *Die Preek* (1995) (Figs 57 and 60) was, for example,

chosen specifically because his appearance and taped voice<sup>11</sup> (refer to the DVD) would be instantly recognisable as belonging to a specific type of theologian who is associated with a very specific ideological, historical and even geographical circumstance. The physical appearance of the model, outfit and other exterior adornments (such as the hairstyle, ostentatious jewellery and the cell phone that is attached to his belt along with a huge bunch of keys) of the *Bennie* character in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 73-75) were also carefully chosen. The model is constructed to represent and playfully ridicule what is generally perceived as typical of someone who frequents a casino or games arcade. The recognition of these figures by the viewer thus evokes an ironic humour that is tinged with recognition despite the obvious mockery. The careful attention to detail speaks of sharp critical observation that is tempered by an attitude of fond empathy, even tenderness and nostalgia. Whether it is the characters in most contemporary sitcoms, Sherman's women, the congregation members of *Die Preek* (Figs 61-68), the *Bennie* character (Figs 73-75), the escort agency type of figure (Figs 76-77), the pair of over-exercised figures in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 71-72) or *Hermanus Henning* (Figs 52-56), we all know "someone just like that". In most cases, that someone is us or close to us. Ruth Sack writes in a review in the *Mail and Guardian* of April 13-29 in 1995 (np) about *Hermanus Henning* (1994) as follow:

A smoker with "bad taste" (despite his headless state), he could be anybody's husband. And because the work projects a fond tolerance, an intimacy even, we feel not as voyeur or onlooker, but rather as participant, experiencing directly the combination of love and distaste that seems to speak of "family" for van Tonder. Momentarily, we live with these ornaments and this man.

The postmodern viewer therefore interacts differently with this type of postmodern artwork than the traditional viewer. These works (in content, characterisation and environment) rely on the storage bank of experiences and memories of the viewer to "complete" the narrative possibilities and draw the viewer into the work itself instead of experiencing, interpreting or judging it from a critical distance. In *Die Preek* (1995) the viewer can even seat himself/herself in the benches next to the sculpted figures and become part of the work while listening to the taped sermon (Fig 69) or play the games in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Fig 91). This means that the viewer actually *becomes* one of them. The standard reaction of viewers of *Die Preek* is to approach it rather apprehensively and suspiciously until they discover something familiar in the work which reminds them of something or someone they know, and then they start to identify with it and find it funny.

Furthermore, these works are placed or "played out" in specifically created environments that are similar to the staged production or sitcom. Each "prop" is carefully chosen to evoke reminders of a specific era or social structure, like the wall plaques which are used to display the text and hymns for the day in *Die Preek* (1995) that anyone who is familiar with this type of religious meeting will recognise. These objects further contribute to the metaphorical content because they draw upon the viewer's memories through association. They represent objects that are traditionally expected to be found in, for example, the typical middle-class home of the stereotypical overweight middle-aged rugby fan/couch potato in *Hermanus Henning* (1994) like his ashtray or his mementoes on the wall that is covered with wallpaper which is reminiscent of a décor style of a certain era (Figs 52, 54 and 56). The same can be said of the typical games arcade scenario in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-69) or the props that are used in the set to represent the typical lower middle-class apartment in the popular sitcom *Love and Marriage*. These environments are in a sense a condensed variation of a specifically recognisable milieu, and become an ironic parody of ourselves and our tendency to stereotype others. The viewer experiences himself/herself as *part of* the ridiculous impotent effort of contemporary existence. Irony in such a humorous work is no longer the irony of one who sees himself/herself as elevated above or separate from the ridicule expressed in the work, but is a typically postmodern ironic stance towards the self-in-the-world. As Martha Langford (1999:67) writes about the dolls in Sherman's *Sex Pictures* (1999) (Figs 46-48): "These toys aRe Us."

### **2.3 The play of defamiliarisation**

These works also play with the viewer by using a process of defamiliarisation. The humour in such works resembles the play of being described by Heidegger as it simultaneously and alternatively reveals and withdraws itself in a continual play between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Seducing the viewer into the work via the familiar is therefore merely one aspect of the mechanics of humorous play. It also functions on a more subversive level by displacing or "de-familiarising" the familiar, the conventional and the habitual to invent a new definition of "reality". Feinberg (1967:16-19) writes: "We are shown old things in a new way. Satire presents the familiar in a new form." By using the familiar, the postmodern artist allows humour to creep into our understanding of our "selves" under the guise of its harmlessness to question fundamental issues and

seriously alter our perception of "how things have always been" and to introduce the possibility of other viewpoints. Margaret Rose (1979:66) writes: "...we pass through stages of recognition which lead to laughter, to shock, to the destruction of expectations, and to a possible change in our knowledge of a thing perceived and our manner of observing it." One of the devices that are used in postmodern art such as the author's to subvert the habitual and conventional is context. Removing an image or object from its familiar context to an unfamiliar context is another way of defamiliarising it in order to see it anew.

A commercially and technologically orientated postmodern world is characterised by instant global communication and travel. Consequently, even the ordinary layman has become increasingly aware of the implications of context and the existence of others and their differences. This awareness of the significance of context is reflected in postmodern cultural products. Whereas modernist art works, and specifically the works categorised as "high modernist", are seen as elevated above context as "art for art's sake only"; postmodern art is not. Postmodern film, television, literature and visual art display a tendency to accept and exploit, rather than avoid, contemporary developments/phenomena; although with a typical attitude of ironic resignation. Jameson (quoted by Selden 1989:73), speaks of the postmodern "landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Readers' Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film". Selden (1989:71) notes that "[t]he commercial culture is no longer 'quoted' and parodied in Joycean fashion but incorporated directly into postmodern art". Harvey (1996:44) describes the postmodern acceptance of circumstances as a

... total acceptance of ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic...it does not try to transcend it, counteract it, or even to define the "eternal" or the "immutable" elements that might lie within it. Postmodernism swim, even wallows, in the fragmentary and chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is.

In other words, postmodern art refers to, capitalises on and even becomes part of the contemporary context. The contemporary context becomes art. Although the difference between the "real" and the "artefact" is blurred, it also means that the real *as* artefact becomes "strange" and unfamiliar by its very familiarity in an unfamiliar setting. Like Heidegger's being, the art work simultaneously allows interpretation by revealing the familiar and the "real"; yet this familiarity is paradoxically also refused, concealed or

cancelled out by the unfamiliar context, which forces the viewer into a "playfully critical distortion of the familiar" (Feinberg 1967:16-19).

Games arcades, casino games, and video and computer games have for example become both big business and an integral part of the ordinary postmodern context. Like *Hermanus Henning* (1994) (Figs 52-56) which seems to be at once a criticism and a celebration of life with television, the work *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-94) is an art work which ironically both *becomes* part of this contemporary context and *turns* the contemporary games-orientated culture *into* art which simultaneously familiarises and defamiliarises it. This is done in *Bennie's Games*, firstly, by the placement of a simulated artefact variation of a typical games centre in an exhibition space and by allowing the viewers to "play" the games. Because this type of game is designed to allow the player to enter a simulated reality in the first place, the experience of this work (which is in turn a simulation of such an arcade) becomes a complicated ironic/parodist "play" with reality on more than one level. The viewer not only enters the simulated world of the game, but experiences it in a simulated context. The viewer therefore "plays" inside a parody of an original gaming context and another dimension is thus added to the regular experience.

In *Die Preek* (1995) (Figs 57-69), a traditional religious scene is removed from its original sacred space and placed in a secular exhibition space. It is environmentally transplanted and defamiliarised and, as Radhikrishnan (1983:41) puts it, "demonumentalised". It now becomes an artificial representation or parody of the original. The viewer is forced to view it away from the emotionally laden significance of its usual architectural surroundings and can step "outside" his/her traditional experience of it to view it more objectively, much like the viewer of Sherman's *Sex Pictures* (1999) (Figs 46-48) is forced to view them in an art gallery, outside of the "normality" of a porn-site or magazine. The *dominee* in *Die Preek* (Figs 57 and 60), who is preaching his message to a congregation without heads in an exhibition space, is turned into an ironic/satirical metaphor which ridicules and undermines the reality of a specific ideology/convention by emphasising its reliance on a specific context. Similarly, Sherman's *Sex Pictures* (1999) (Figs 46-48) or the distorted pictures gleaned from porn-magazines in the *Miss Pucman* game (Fig 77c) in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) are robbed of any sexuality because they have become ironically un-sexual outside of the context in which they are habitually found. After becoming aware of their social and contextual constructedness because of viewing them *out* of their normal context, the

viewer can now only experience them as ridiculous. This "defamiliarisation" thus contrives a revision of the habitual perception of the over-familiar which has become so embedded in our minds that we perceive it as "normal" or "true". Here one is again reminded of Nietzsche who is quoted by Degenaar (1986:16) as comparing conventional truths to the "worn-out metaphors which have become powerless", like coins which are no longer recognisable as coins but merely as metal.

Also, as Rorty pointed out in his article *Logic, to Language, to Play* (1986), the postmodernist understands that the conventional perception of logic can no longer suffice in the postmodern. Postmodern humorous art therefore also defamiliarises by presenting us with the illogic of random play which Heidegger (quoted by Caputo 1970:38) argued is not a rational, orderly, logical or predictable process but "just plays because it plays". The games in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-79) resemble "real" games. However, on closer inspection, these games are found to be ironic parodies of their "real" counterparts. Like Sherman's works, the games in *Bennie's Games* do not reward effort. Instead, they are illogical and unpredictable "machines" which leave the viewer baffled, disappointed or even mildly irritated. It is almost as impossible to get the balls into the oscillating mouths of *The Pillars of Society* (Figs 83-84), hit the "jackpot" on the chest of *Tiny Dorfling* (Figs 87-89) or find any sexual gratification in the pictures shown in *Miss Pucman* (Figs 76 and 77a) as it is to locate the origins of Sherman's *Film Stills* (1977-1980) (Figs 36-40) or *History Portraits* (1989-1990) (Figs 28-35). In fact, these games are not games at all but ironic metaphors for the "games" of contemporary reality.

*Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-79) is therefore neither an art work in the strictest sense nor not a "real" game centre, but an ironical/metaphorical space that is used as a parodic referral to or commentary on contemporary reality. These games have deliberately been placed in this unfamiliar space to create a renewed awareness of a similarity of the randomness, unpredictability and illogic of the game called life. It is also, in the conventional sense, ultimately not a funny work at all but a serious ironic/dystopian criticism of contemporary life. Once the viewer has tired of the original playful seduction by the familiarity of the games and the figures in this work and pauses to observe more closely, the full impact of the work should become clear. As with Sherman's *History Portraits* (1989-1990) (Figs 28-35) and its viewers who will not be able to see an Old Master painting and the ideologies it represents, the viewer of this work may not experience the gaming culture or certain aspects of life itself in exactly the

same manner as before since after seeing a parodist version of it in a space that is alien to it, a new definition of the experience becomes possible. The games in *Bennie's Games* are not designed to provide entertainment but, ironically, to *be* entertained.

#### 2.4 Playing with fragments

The environmental displacement/defamiliarisation of *Die Preek* (1995) (Figs 57-69), *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-79) and even *Hermanus Henning* (1994) (Figs 52-56) functions by allowing the viewers to experience certain elements of a known reality as displaced fragments from another context in the immediate context of their viewing of the work. Not the whole, but *part of* a specific scenario which is normally experienced as a whole, is removed from its conventional physical, ideological and/or mental context and placed in another to become fragmented. This is not only to subvert the *convention* that it is associated with (as we have seen) but also in order to prise the *image itself* loose from its embedded position in solidified convention and habit, and to force us to see it anew. It is released from its fixed correspondence to a single meaning. This can be compared to the use of the technique of fragmentation or "collage" which, according to Ryan (1985:47), is employed by many postmodern novelists like Gass, Brautigan and in particular Barthelme in order to "revitalise" the word or engage in "mental spring cleaning". "Fragments are all I trust", says one of the characters in what is seen as a typical postmodern novel by the American Donald Barthelme (Ryan 1985:47). The novelist Kurt Vonnegut, for example, attempts to decontextualise over-recognised American signposts in his humorous novel *Breakfast of Champions* in order to "achieve a kind of liberation from their effects" by using them as interreferential traces that are randomly placed in the work (Ryan 1985:47).

These traces (like those found in the author's works and those of Sherman as mentioned above) often function as unifying metaphorical links in the postmodern humorous work, which has become a cultural site for fragmentary parodist referral rather than a unified artwork in the strictest traditional sense. These fragments of reference are the only unifying factor in what would otherwise be unrelated sculptural groupings. In *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-94) for example, certain materials (such as plastic, perspex, fake leopard print, fake roses, vinyl or gold paint, and garish carpeting) are purposely used repeatedly in order to evoke an association with the contemporary junk, kitsch or "bad taste" culture and superficiality of the popular contemporary gaming/casino

environment. These bits of junk have no meaning in themselves other than the new significance that is invented for them *within* the context of the work. *Hermanus Henning's* (1994) wallpaper (Figs 52, 54 and 56) – like the wall plaques, benches and baptismal font in *Die Preek* (1995) (Fig 66) – have become anachronisms in the contemporary milieu. The nostalgia that these items evoke is deliberately used by the artist to entice the viewer into the work, only to gradually bring home the fact that the ideologies and conventions which they represent have become (like them) obsolete. The viewer's association with these items as representative of a reality they have come to accept is thereby destabilised and brought into question. This underlines the powerful potential of humour to stealthily subvert, undermine and expose convention whenever it becomes an unquestionable part of our accepted thought patterns.

Bits of an old gaming machine or part of the typical casino adornment are placed inside or as part of the sculpted figures in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-69). These fragments are brought forward into a new frame of reference. Their meaning is reinvented. The "money slots" that are embedded just above the elastic of their briefs in the bodies of the two bodybuilders who are positioned at the entrance of *Bennie's Games* (Fig 72b) now have a sexual connotation. Considering the fact that the money falls into the clear perspex pedestals under the feet of these the figures (Fig 71), it can however also be seen as a general reference to the human greed for/power of money and the financial prostitution of art itself. *Tiny Dorfling* (Fig 89), on the other hand, has part of a slot machine built into his chest – which either turns him into a mechanised human or a humanised machine. The same can be said of the female *Miss Pucman* figure (Fig 77e) that has a bunch of artificial roses built into her head which plays the tune *Let me call you sweetheart* if a button in the centre of her forehead is pressed. She becomes an automated "love" toy/machine and a contemporary metaphor for the expectation of sexual gratification on demand. To engage in play with these "toys" is therefore not ordinary play, but an ironic Heideggerian kind of *playing with* both the serious consequences of *contemporary existence* and the fragmented remnants of a *past* which is no longer valid.

## **2.5 Playing with the past**

The anachronistic objects in *Die Preek* (1995) (Figs 57-69) and the junk and kitsch that are used in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-69) are playful emblematic references to certain cultural rules and conventions of a bygone era. They critically emphasise and

expose the outdatedness of the conventional and therefore encourage a reassessment and possible reinvention or replacement of worn-out rules. This can also be said of Sherman's bits and pieces which she found in second-hand markets and which function as metaphors that parody a more remote past in her *History Portraits* (1989-1990) (Figs 28-35). A parody can in fact only function by referring to or "playing" with the already existing. In order to be funny, most humour (as we have seen in chapter one) needs a pre-existing norm, convention or even language *to* subvert or "destabilise". It is also true that all parodies not only ridicule but also, to some extent, pay homage to and revive their original merely by making it part of a new creation. This also applies to postmodern humour. Although postmodern humour interacts differently with the past than modern humour, this does not mean that postmodern humour has no relationship with the past. Neither *Die Preek* and *Bennie's Games* nor Sherman's *History Portraits* or *Sex Pictures* could, for example, function as humorous if a reference to an existing cultural practice was not possible. In order to ensure its survival as being humorous, humorous play has a special reciprocal gaming relationship with the past and existing ideologies. Most postmodern humorous art paradoxically engages in what can be termed a relationship of parasitical fragmented renewal of the past, and not purely a complete obliteration of it. Put differently, parody often engages in a dual play of honour and dishonour with the past.

Radhikrishnan (1983:36) explains the postmodern interactive relationship between the old and the new with clarity and insight when he refers to the Nietzschean way to "...critically 'remember' the past" in order to achieve a creative "forgetting". What is important here is the fact that there *is* something to forget, and it is the forgetting of this *something* that makes the new creation possible. The postmodern humorous art work should thus not only be viewed as a force which is purely destructive of all that precedes it, but also as a many layered site of intertextual and inter-cultural/historical reference as the new is superimposed over the old like a palimpsest in order to invent a completely different experience of the "reality" of the present. The past is not entirely obliterated by these deconstructive tactics of humorous art, but is often still visible under the layers in order to function as a parodist reminder. Derrida (1976:10) explains that deconstruction is not the "demolition, but the desedimentation" of the past. This kind of humour can thus optimistically be seen as revitalisation and not total destruction.

This playful attitude of renewal of the rules of the past is found in both *Die Preek* (1995) (Figs 57-69) and *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-79), and also in Sherman's works. Sherman's *History Portraits* (1989-1990) (Figs 28-35) joyfully mock the seriousness of the Old Masters, *Die Preek* engages in an almost sacrilegious and irreverent playful look at what is conventionally seen as an extremely serious subject, and *Bennie's Games* turn something as serious as life into a game. All these works "de-monumentalise" not only what are considered grave issues, but also their accompanying rules and conventions. In many cases these rules and conventions are exposed and mocked by using them to undermine themselves. However, these rules are never entirely destroyed but can rather be seen as pawns, pieces or fragments inside the intertextual games of endless parodist referral without which postmodern humour could not exist. Without this play, reinvention would also not be possible. Put differently, the present becomes a lens through which we view the rules and conventions of the past. Radhikrishnan (1983:41) explains that "...rules make the past available to the present for purposes of scrutiny, evaluation, acceptance, or outright rejection" and what we get when we do this is "...not the knowledge whose representatives rules in general are, but subversive knowledge about the nature of the rules themselves". He continues: "The acknowledgement that rules are not the justification of the conditions of their production, but are the oblique comments on the limitations of those conditions, paves the way for the de-monumentalization of the past and an understanding that knowledge is disruptive and hence progressive." Radhikrishnan (1983:41) concludes: "Rules now become what the artist plays with and not what he/she reveres for the purpose of his/her own success and salvation. The insight that whatever has been constructed can be deconstructed leads to a serious but uninhibited attitude towards the past."

## **2.6 Playing games with technique and medium**

The employment of the technique of body-casting is neither accidental nor arbitrary in works such as *Hermanus Henning* (1994), *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) and *Die Preek* (1995). The casting process makes these figures seem deceptively real, which makes the second level of the subversive humour that is used in the work possible (namely the discovery that they are, like the ideology they represent, not a "true" reflection of any permanent reality). These figures, unlike the process that is used by the American sculptor George Segal (1924-2000), are the result of a second casting inside the mould which is chipped away to reveal an imprint of the model's body. This method records

every minute detail such as the nails, bodily hair, pores, fine grooves and wrinkles or folds in the flesh (Figs 62 and 67). These specifics form an integral part of the content of the work by making the characters both intensely recognisable and familiar in order to allow the viewer to identify with specific physical details as they stir up recollections of similar physical traits of characters in their memory. The casting process also records that the model was physically present when the cast was made. Like a photographic recording of an event, it lends factuality to the "having been there". It therefore verifies the physical existence of the person. The person is no longer there, yet the cast (like a photograph) is paradoxically at once a ghostly trace of him/her being there and not being there. This is an integral part of the content of *Die Preek* (Figs 57-69) in particular. The casting process and the absence of heads becomes a metaphor for the physically present yet absent state of the members of the congregation. They are literally portrayed as "wavering" between being there and being absent – "in body but not in spirit" – in order to satisfy a social convention and a religious ideological requirement.

The casting process is further an integral part of this work. The process plays between the fun aspect of having one's cast made and the extreme discomfort of the experience. The models are nervous when they pose in underwear. They feel stripped of all pretence, as their "originals" did, when sitting under the penetrating gaze of the *dominee* who represents the all-seeing eye of God. This is visible in the finished products that seem stiff and uncomfortable like people who have to sit on hard benches during a long church service. The casting process also accurately records and emphasises the way that tight clothes and shoes cut into flesh. This compounds the metaphorical representation of the discomfort of socially enforced laws (Fig 67). It becomes ironic when seen in the context of the supposed willingness with which attendance of a church service is normally associated.

The casting itself also represents the way in which identity is confined by dogma to the extent that the desire for acceptance encourages deceit or attempts to hide one's true identity. Ironically the ideology concerned is supposedly non-judgemental. The figure of the deacon (*Die Preek*) in his G-string (Fig 65) can be seen as a metaphorical representation of the urge to hide one's identity (in this case, what is perceived as "alternative" sexual preference). These figures are literally playing a game of hide and seek with God, which becomes humorous if one imagines the consternation of the authorities of such an institution upon discovering it. The casting process also records

every detail and texture of the clothing that was worn by the model (such as lace, elastic, the ribbed cloth of the socks and the exact structure, fasteners or decoration of their shoes) (Figs 64-68). In the case of *Die Preek* (1995), this is significant. They are in their underwear, which can be seen as a metaphor for the fact that they are spiritually disrobed before God and yet attempt to deceive Him by *their* play-acting at being present. They are wearing special shoes and jewellery as tokens to represent the garments that convention requires. This is the playful irony of the work because the shoes and jewels represent the futility of decorating the outside in order to hide the inside from an all-knowing God.

The casting process makes it possible to record a detailed imprint of the real shoes, pieces of jewellery and undergarments which were acquired with great care from various sources in order to represent a specific type of clothing that was likely worn by a specific type of person from a specific historical era. The items of clothing, which really did exist but are no longer there in the cast version, become an ironic referral to the outdated ideologies that are represented by the type of clothing. Like the old-fashioned y-front underpants and the Elmar vests worn by the elders and deacons, the ideologies and conventions that are represented by these garments become ridiculous anachronisms in the contemporary context. The *dominee's* garment (*Die Preek*) (Figs 57 and 58), designed according to specifications of particular denominations with the exact prescribed number of tassels, becomes rather preposterous in the cast version – exactly like the empty rituals of religious dogma. Moreover, the dignity that is normally associated with the leaders of patriarchal hierarchical social structures is derided and destabilised by, for example, the bow ties worn by the deacons and elders who are in their underwear. In the context of this work, a pair of y-front underpants becomes a subversive humorous metaphor for the outdatedness of patriarchal power. The statuesque monumental female figures, representative of a specific matriarchal culture, are undermined by the fact that they appear to be supported by complicated structurally engineered undergarments rather than their faith.

The traces of the physical presence of the garments that have been recorded by the casts furthermore become metaphors for the traces of ideologies which survive in contemporary thought like the traces of pre-existing ideologies which Nietzsche says (quoted by Degenaar 1986:25) are inevitably part of language and can only be exposed by means of deconstruction to allow the formation of new images and a different view of

the world. The message of "Geloof, Hoop, Liefde" (Faith, Hope, Love) (Fig 57) that is embroidered in braid on the velvet cloth and which is always displayed in front of the pulpit in this type of church becomes, in its contemporary context, a blaringly ironic criticism of the apartheid ideology of the historical context from which the original cloth comes. The cast version of it becomes evidence of the lingering presence of this ideology, a rigid obituary-like inscription to its demise that is made of plaster which is prone to disintegrate with time.

The whiteness of the plaster (which traditionally represents purity, honesty and piety) becomes an ironic statement in the fake environment of churchgoers in *Die Preek* (1995) (Figs 57-69) who are so obviously dishonest about their motives for being there in the first place and are unable to hear the taped sermon (refer to DVD) about the whitened sepulchres because they have no ears. The whiteness of the material in this work can be seen as Olivier (2002:216) sees it, namely "a cold, harsh, pitiless, inexorable (non) colour". The contrast that is achieved by placing these white figures on blackened wooden replicas of church benches becomes an ironic reminder of the fundamentalist dogma of good versus evil that is propagated by such religious institutions. The whiteness of the plaster ironically also covers up the fact that many of the models that were used for this work were not white and would traditionally not have been allowed into such a service. However, upon viewing these headless figures cast in white plaster, it becomes impossible to distinguish colour or race. The casting and the material therefore ironically become a levelling factor which undermines pre-existing socio-cultural and racial barriers. The colour white "equalises people the way the clinical white surroundings of a hospital reduce all those who lie in white beds to the same status" (Olivier 2002:217). It emphasises the ideological constructedness, hidden prejudice and fakeness of a dogma that supposedly propagates a Christ-like love of one's neighbour. As Olivier (2002:217) concludes: "...white stands for the equalising power of money". The monumental figures that represent what was believed to be an ideologically solid society become an ironic ghostly presence of fakes cloned in plaster. The temporary nature of the material undermines the permanence that is represented by these figures and the promise of eternal life upon which their faith is based. The viewer discovers that what they believed to be eternally and immutably true is not. Their perception of reality is shifted, redefined and reinvented.

This kind of discovery is also applicable to the heraldic type of designs which decorate the pedestals upon which the three *Pillars of Society* (Fig 83) in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) rest. They seem decorative but, on closer inspection, turn out to be like the casino promise of wealth and happiness – a deception – since they are made of plastic toy bugs, snakes and spiders (Fig 86a). Although the figures in *Bennie's Games* (Figs 70-79) are not entirely cast or made in plaster but in the much harder and more durable medium of acrylic resin, technique and medium play a similar role in this work. The white casts form what can be seen as "blank" or negative spaces when they are seen against the backdrop of colour in the created environment. They function like the well-known cut-on-the-dotted-line children's pictures. The blankness gives the viewers the opportunity to superimpose their memories of others or themselves on these spaces, and makes it easier for them to imagine themselves as part of the work. Despite their highly individualised appearance, *Bennie* (Figs 73-75) and the two bodybuilders also become "everyman". *Miss Pucman* (Fig 76) consists of the body parts of more than one woman. Her hands are casts of the author's own (rather battered and ageing) hands, her toes are casts of the author's daughter's toes, her body is a figment of imagination and her face belongs to a friend named Brenda. She therefore quite literally represents *every woman*.

The idea that someone is "cast in a mould" further contributes to the ironic send-up of the stereotypical here. The stiff unresponsive mould and hard durable material become a metaphor for our tendency to stereotype. The clothing and paraphernalia carried by *Bennie* (figs 73-75) as a typical gambler therefore become, in the cast version, an ironic look at our tendency to judge by appearance and *cast* our opinions that are based on appearance (metaphorically speaking) "in stone". The model who posed for this piece was, like most of the others, cast while wearing these items of clothing. The casting process permanently fuses the garments onto the body of the model. The specific outfit therefore literally becomes *part of* the person and metaphorically defines his/her identity. The female figure which accompanies the *Miss Pucman* game (Figs 76 and 77) is partly cast and free sculpted. She clearly illustrates the relationship between appearance, the medium used and the stereotype. She consists largely of papier mâché that was made from newspaper advertisements for escorts and prostitutes. She *is* therefore her trade, created out of the very source that is responsible for her reputation and stereotype. She is a paper Barbie doll that wears the stock trade uniform of the sex worker (player?) portrayed by the media and sex industry. What she is wearing is therefore not based on any truth but on the traditional *idea* promoted to us of what a sex symbol should/would

wear. Her fishnet stockings and G-string are embedded and fused into her flesh with layers of papier mâché and it is easy to imagine that she was born wearing it. Her (the author's) hands were cast wearing long false nails, her lips are permanently glossed with resin and her coiffed hair is permanently styled.

*Miss Pucman* (Figs 76-77) is thus a humorous metaphor for the media-invented stereotypical female sexual image that is "...based on the pictorial conventions of hard-core porn magazines" (Fenner 2000:364). This image is however rather ironically undermined by the fact that, due to the dimpled effect of the papier maché modelling, she is obviously no longer as young, firm cellulite-free and perfect as convention wants her to be. The "reward" offered upon mastering her game is designed to undermine the conventional expectation when the player is allowed to touch the realistic looking "breast" only to discover that it is made of cold brittle plastic. *Miss Pucman* is therefore expertly playing her own age-old game with her "customers" by leaving them to hover somewhere in-between desire and disgust.

In Sherman's work (such as her *Sex Pictures* [1999] [Figs 46-48] and *Film Stills* [1977-1980] [Figs 36-40]) and the games in the author's *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-93) and *Die Preek* (1995) (Figs 57-69), convention is undermined by its own ploys, trimmings and devices. It can therefore be said that the medium and techniques of the author's work become, like Sherman's, part of the "games" that are being played and the human body becomes the playing field.

## **2.7 The human body as the playing field**

The casting process (particularly with reference to the two figures of bodybuilders) ironically refers to the way in which the media prescribes what we see as our identities, both physically and mentally. Films, television and advertising literally mould how we see ourselves *and* how we think we should be. Like the casting process, this ideal mirage towards which an increasing number of contemporary exercise addicts strive is as cruel and painful as the casting process. The relentless media prescriptions and conventions are as stiff and unbending as the material that was used to cast these figures. The two *bodybuilders* (Fig 71) in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) have literally moulded themselves into the cast prescribed by the media of how a human being should look – much like Sherman's *Society Women* (2000) (Figs 41-45) tried to do. Out of context, as they are in

this work, the ridiculousness of this contemporary tendency is emphasised and the convention is exposed/undermined as being media and socially constructed. They are simultaneously presented in great detail as highly individual characterised (real) human beings and as completely vacuous human "fields" whose identities have been cancelled out and replaced with identities formed by social and media pressure.

A character in William Gass's novel *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife*, called Babs, who is herself a metaphor for language, makes the following statement about the difference between the modern and postmodern in terms of the use of metaphor which seems most applicable here, especially when viewing the Apollo-type figure of the male bodybuilder in *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Fig 71). Babs (quoted by Ryan 1985:50) says: "...it will give new glasses to our own eyes, and put those plots and patterns down we find our modern lot in. Metaphor must be its god now gods are metaphors." The bodies of these two figures have indeed (like the rules and conventions of past ideologies, or the characters in a contemporary sitcom) become pawns in the postmodern game of ironic metaphorical referral or fields used for critical references to various issues. Despite individualisation, they are no longer human in the strictest sense but are displaced into another frame of metaphorical reference to become "...the only mode in which man is available today...as signifier among other signifiers" (Radhikrishnan 1983:39).

In *The Pillars of Society* (Figs 83-86) a similar process is at work, but here the metaphor is reversed. These figures are metaphors for ideology *itself* rather than the influence of ideology on us. The models were dressed in clothing that was especially made, found or chosen for their representation of the rigidity of ideological power before they were cast. They respectively represent a pope-like figure (religion) (Fig 84b), a pimp (sex) (Fig 84a) and a soldier (war) (Fig 84c). Their clothing, badges and jewellery metaphorically become images that are associated with specific economic, sexual, political and religious hierarchical power structures. They become meaningless as expressions of the "self", but function as signs or pawns which have no meaning outside the context of the work. This loss of self is paradigmatic of the loss of self in postmodern existence. However, this need not be negative because the reinvention of the self is made possible by its very loss.

### 3 THE VIEWER PLAYS AND INVENTS

According to Radhikrishnan (1983:39), the postmodern loss of identity is the result of the emergence of the study of man by man himself or "man as a creature of discourse". Postmodern humorous works (like Sherman's *Sex Pictures* or *Portraits of Society Women*; and the author's *Die Preek*, *Bennie's Games* and *Hermanus Henning*) all enter this arena where the game called "man as creature of discourse" is played out. They all expose the manner in which the self is *created* within the cultural discursive space by themselves becoming an open site that is available for reinvention by both artist and viewer. By exposing the contextual interchangeability of identity through societal ideological and media manipulation, the self is set free from the solidified picture it has formed and is allowed to participate in a process of reinvention exactly *because* of the loss of the original. In *The Bodybuilders* (Figs 71-72) the social prescriptions according to which we form our bodies and identities become a humorous game. The self is set free from the media mould to reinvent its perception of itself.

*The Three Pillars* (Fig 83) are supported by a Lotto-type game that is built into their pedestals in order to signify the fiscally-driven motivation of three areas of contemporary life namely, religion, sex and war. Here the reality and seriousness of dogma are undermined and ridiculed by the fact that the figures are ironically supported by/part of a game of chance. Ironically the outcome of these games is not as certain as proposed by the ideologies which they represent, but uncertain and unpredictable. As the viewer participates in the game, it is brought home that the truths that are propagated about these three issues are socio-politically and economically based. This allows the viewers to redefine and reinvent their perception of their own particular "reality". The open-endedness of the games and the participating role of the viewer increase the inventive possibilities that are offered to the viewer.

*Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) capitalise upon the fact that the postmodern viewer who has been raised in a culture of technological spectacle and virtual reality can no longer be expected to be satisfied by passively consuming an art work. The postmodern artist can no longer ignore technology; the postmodern work provides the viewer with more. The typical postmodern creative reaction is to accept the presence of contemporary phenomena with ironic resignation and to continue making art by incorporating, even

exploiting, them as part of the content instead of creating art that transcends them. In *Bennie's Games* the noise, lighting, kitsch décor, technology and excitement of a game centre become the *medium* that is used by the artist.

The contemporary viewer is called upon to play an active and creative role rather than the passive consuming role of a conventional viewer. Heidegger (quoted by Caputo 1970:40) argues that the play of Being is not one-sided and that "Being needs man's attentive cooperation although it retains the upper hand". Therefore, says Heidegger as quoted by Caputo (1970:40) it is necessary for man "to play along with... (mitspielen) play" because "[m]an is not so much a being as a relationship of openness towards Being" and that "Being and man 'cor-respond'; they are a dialogue, an interchange. Their play is interplay". The author's games have also been designed from the outset to involve the viewer. The viewer is invited, even seduced, to participate. *Bennie's Games* (2002-2006) (Figs 70-79) cannot properly function in a non-participating viewer relationship but needs, what Heidegger calls, "interplay". As Heidegger says, these games "need man's attentive cooperation" and frequently retain "the upper hand". The very *absence* of stability, closure and direction allows and *invites* the viewer to invent his/her own interpretation and to formulate a different understanding of its meaning. This non-closure functions like the Derridean ever-changing centre. The work is reinvented each time that it is viewed. This would not have been possible if the work was presented in a strictly serious manner or offered the stability of clear answers to the issues which it addresses.

None of the works mentioned above presents a fixed or unified narrative with a predetermined ending. All viewers are allowed to create their own narrative and form their own conclusions by "matching" the enticingly familiar aspects that have been deliberately interwoven into the meshed layers of old and new to their own highly individual experiences and memories. Like any parody, these works (by layering the new over the old) can be looked at as "a fabric or tissue" which can be unravelled and not an object "with boundaries or an edge" which remains fixedly intact after its creation (Ryan 1985:41). Ryan says that in the latter situation, the viewer becomes an uninvolved "consumer" of the work, as opposed to being actively involved in its production in the former way. According to Ryan (1985:40), who quotes Eco, works with such an open and more "flexible system of signification" can be seen as being "...capable of generating meaning which can not only be freely interpreted but also cooperatively generated by the

addressee..." The varied reactions of viewers to *Die Preek*, for example, include the following: Some saw it as an exultation of Christianity; others were motivated to engage in introspective self-investigation while still others angrily declared it as hideously blasphemous or merely ridiculous. These reactions are testimony to its generative potential for plurality.

These works are open-ended and do not offer any predetermined suggestions for reform. Both *Bennie's Games* and *Die Preek* present the viewer with a certain amount of information that some can see as a moral reproach. However, they offer no real fixed alternative or solution. The artist's obvious delight in creating the figures in *Die Preek*, and the obvious enjoyment and element of fun experienced in the search and discovery of suitable objects and items of clothing, belies the possibility of a purely serious or moralising intent. Furthermore, in all the games in *Bennie's Games* the outcome is left both to chance and to the dexterity of the viewer, and is not controlled by the artist or any pre-fixed or predictable structure. *Mr Fortuin* (Fig 78) stands mute, while the viewer activates the apparatus in his open mouth (Fig 79c) to reveal one of twelve empty clichéd promises that "predicts" his/her future. *Tiny Dorfling* (Fig 87) sits passively as the viewer spins the wheels in his chest which may fall into any sequence of three images out of an infinite number of possibilities. The pinball game in *Bennie's Games* (Figs 80-83) allows the viewer to *play* his/her own way into either heaven or hell. It offers no fixed moral conclusion because the final destination is created by the viewer and determined by chance. There is no privileging of good over evil; only ironic play with both. The work provides no closure or reproach, but encourages the viewer to invent his/her own "destiny". All these works have money slots for the viewer to insert a coin, which adds to the perception that they are willingly committing *themselves* to the game and its unpredictable outcome.

These works do not, in Radhikrishnan's (1983:40) words, "...have for their objective any kind of absolute corrective or rectification. For such a disciplinary move would only serve to reinstitute the notion of knowledge as ratio and rectitude" – a notion which each of the works emphatically rejects. In fact, the very content of these works is a refutation of this notion in their exposure of the fact that rules and constraints are "...themselves externals and are therefore eminently displaceable, replaceable, and even dispensable" (Radhikrishnan 1983:40). The postmodern artist uses rules and constraints as his/her material *to play with* in an attitude of ironic gaming. What sets the postmodern attitude

towards rules, conventions and issues apart from its modernist predecessor's is the fact that it presents no closure and invites reinvention. Instead, these works display the typical postmodern ironic acceptance of and playful revelling *in* our "condition", as opposed to the unrelenting modernist hope of progress.

This places the author's work within the contemporary creative milieu where the validity of existing social, political, religious, racial, economic and other topical cultural questions, rules and conventions are ironically questioned. Contemporary popular sitcoms such as *Friends*, *Sex in the City*, and *Love and Marriage* (and also the work of visual artists like Cindy Sherman) adopt an open, questioning stance that is heavily laden with irony towards topical matters (such as cultural positioning or "othering", socio-economic and/or sexual and religious conventions) rather than the traditional habitual perpetuation of fixed accepted views. These works ironically celebrate the anti-hero, the non-hero and the dystopian instead of searching for utopia. The postmodern "non-hero" (like Homer Simpson or the father figure in *Love and Marriage*), as opposed to the modern superhero, is a case in point. Like Sherman's *Society Women* or the father figure in *Love and Marriage*, figures such as *Bennie* (Figs 73-5) in *Bennie's Games* or *Hermanus Henning* (Figs 52-56) are depictions of those who have failed to live up to their dreams and expectations. They are ironic in their Quixotic and Homer Simpson-like acceptance of their impotence against nature and society, as opposed to the typical modernist potent heroic figure who masters nature. They are locked into what Heidegger and Huizinga (quoted by Caputo 1970:40) see as a deadly contest with being, and the viewer becomes an accomplice. Contemporary South African curator Gordon Froud (Van der Watt et al 2006:6) writes about *Bennie*:

Like the fake gold watch and oversized gold ring on his hand, I realize with a tremor that he is just as sad and unfulfilled as the rest of us. He sets up this parlor to entice us to find our fulfilment but is in fact an inmate of his own prison. I recall the words of a Rodriguez song where "the turnkey comes and locks himself on in again".

Concepts such as success, honesty, sex and sexual preferences, marriage, religion, racial and other human traits, and socio-cultural concerns are ridiculed and viewed with ironic scepticism. They are not held up as existing ideals which some of us have perfected and therefore do not propagate the idea that humanity can or should constantly attempt to live up to these ideals. On the contrary, our attempts and failure to do so are presented with the typical postmodern attitude of ironic acceptance of their futility. These works

establish a culture of irony that can paradoxically be described as a celebration of dystopia. This also has serious consequences.

#### **4 THE CONSEQUENCES OF PLAY**

Postmodern art in general questions by placing every existing socio/historical/cultural practice and product in a contemporary context, often from a dystopian viewpoint of irony and mockery. However, by taking cultural phenomena which have become associated with a specific fixed and established understanding of reality and meaning out of their original context and placing them in a contemporary context, the ironic/parodist and often fragmentary juxtapositioning can be seen as the continual invention or creation of a different reality and not a search for an existing reality. Postmodern humorous art should therefore be considered as a cultural phenomenon with serious social implications, since it not only subverts and undermines existing socio-cultural conventions and solidified perceptions of reality but continually provokes new perceptions of these on a global scale through the ironic (often dystopian) stance taken in film, television, literature, music and visual art such as the author's. The reaction evoked by *Die Preek* in 1996 in the media, from religious leaders<sup>12</sup> and the general public<sup>13</sup>, is testimony of the implications of this power – which is expressed by the eighteenth century satirist Alexander Pope as follows:

Yes, I am proud, I must be proud to see to see,  
Men not afraid of God afraid of me:  
Safe from the Bar, the Pulpit, and the Throne,  
Yet touch'd and sham'd by ridicule alone...  
(Pollard 1970:2, from Dialogue II of Pope's *Epilogue to the Satires*, 1738:208-16)

#### **5 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it can be said that the author's work forms part of what Richard Rorty identifies as the time of play. It forms part of a postmodern culture of gaming and play which has replaced the modernist singular trust in the stable, the permanent, the predictable and the logical. It forms part of postmodern humorous art which generates exceptional inventive potential exactly because, instead of believing that reality, meaning and identity can be *discovered* in existing principles, it engages in a powerful ironic game of doubt with the rules, restrictions and conventions of an era that placed its trust in

reason and logic; and *creates* an altered perception and *invents* a new definition of these conventions.

This art plays. It plays with its viewers by familiarising them with the work so that it can playfully find its way into their perception of reality, only to undermine it by the tactic of defamiliarisation. It appropriates elements from the past and plays with the remnants that are no longer seen as the only reality but as the multiple existing context-related/ideologically constructed "realities" that are available to us as fragments from the past which can be woven and layered into a reinvented configuration of the present. It uses as its medium our bodies, our everyday events, and the games and conventions of ordinary contemporary life; turns them into art by removing them from their familiar context and playfully placing them in a different context to make us recognise them for what they are; and then invites us to play along and reinvent them.

This play, like the play of being, is however not devoid of all seriousness as is often believed. Heidegger (quoted by Caputo 1970:40) says that the power of play between man and being should not be undervalued by rationalist reasoning which underestimates the deadly serious implications of the game. However, the risky nature of the game need not be seen as negative. The subversive potential of postmodern humorous play also has serious inventive and progressive possibilities. By creating an awareness of the contextual relativity of "truth", postmodern humorous art like the author's allows the viewer to participate in the formation of a new, revised perception of it in what the British philosopher of science Mary Hesse (quoted by Rorty 1986:752) calls "metaphorical redescriptions of the explicandum".

Radhikrishnan points out that Foucault does not view the postmodern ironic stance of doubt and the resulting "loss" of reality and the self as a tragedy: "This loss of self is in fact liberation, a projective and futural move that is creative to the extent to which it is risky and precarious" (Radhikrishnan 1983:39). In this context the risky and the precarious can be interpreted as the typical uncertainty and instability of the postmodern as opposed to the fixed and the stable of the modern. However, invention always involves risk and uncertainty; whereas convention provides not only certainty and stability, but also sedimentation and stagnation. Any kind of play or gaming involves risk and uncertainty, and specifically the possibility of loss or losing. However, in the postmodern gaming ethos, the loss of certainty can also be seen as gain. The creation of a new

perception of one's self and reality is only possible after losing or forgetting the old and the conventional. Radhikrishnan (1983:47) writes that this is "[a] hard-earned forgetting that has been through the travail of remembering". The subversion and destabilisation of existing covert norms, ideologies and conventions by humorous art can be seen as an opening up to reveal an "outside that operates as a force that enables change" (Radhikrishnan 1983:50-52).

Contemporary existence is the gaming board and we are the pawns in this ironic game were the rules are continually re-invented as we play, or perhaps they are playing a game of their own by constantly shifting the goalposts.

## ENDNOTES

*Bennie's Games* consists of seven different games that are individually referred to in this text, namely: *Bennie*, *Miss Pucman*, *The Three Pillars of Society*, *Tiny Dorfling*, *Mr Fortuin*, *De Breede en de Smalle Weg* and *The Bodybuilders*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Boring Life of Hermanus Henning*

<sup>3</sup> *The Sermon of Minister Jacob Rudolph Jacobus Bosch*

<sup>4</sup> Caputo quotes from: Heidegger, M. (1958:124). *Einführung in die Metaphysik* 2. Auflage. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.

<sup>5</sup> Caputo quotes from: Heidegger, M. (1965:13-15, 19). *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* 3 Auflage. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

<sup>6</sup> Caputo quotes from: Heidegger, M. (1957:37) *Identität und Differenz*. Pfullingen: Verlag Gunther Neske.

<sup>7</sup> Caputo quotes from: Heidegger, M. (1957:178-183,207). *Der Satz vom Grund*. Pfullingen: Verlag Gunther Neske.

<sup>8</sup> Caputo quotes from: Heidegger, M. (1963:152). *Sein und Zeit*. Auflage. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.

<sup>9</sup> Caputo quotes from: Heidegger, M. (1963:55). *Holzwege* 4 Auflage. Frankfurt am Main Vittorio Klostermann.

<sup>10</sup> Caputo quotes from: Heidegger, M. (1962:42-43). *Die Technik und die Kehre*. Pfullingen: Verlag Gunther Neske.

<sup>11</sup> Reading Matthew 23:25-28

<sup>12</sup> A Dutch Reformed minister by the name of Henry Williams who saw *Die Preek* used it for a sermon in his church in Petrusville on 14 April 1996. Included on page 3 of his newsletter which was handed out at this sermon is a photograph and description of the work. He wrote:

Wanneer 'n mens 'n yskas skoonmaak, neem jy alles wat daar binne is en besluit wat moet bly en wat weggegooi moet word. Daar is soms ou kos wat al muf gekry het, wat eens op 'n tyd lekker was en 'n goeie doel gedien het, maar nou onsmaklik geword het en boonop gevaarlik daarby, omdat dit 'n mens kan vergiftig. So is dit ook met al die gebruike in ons kerk. Sommige daarvan was goeie en doeltreffende dinge wat op hul tyd 'n goeie doel gedien het, maar word oud en raak struikelblokke vir ons in ons kerkwees. Dit kan ons selfs vergiftig en ons geestelike dood beteken.

<sup>13</sup> Amongst the hundreds of bits of commentary in the visitors book at various venues where the work was exhibited, are the following:

"Praise the Lord Sister" (K. Everett: 15:05:95)

"Mind-blowing cool" (L. Greyling: 22:05:95)

"Never seen anything quite like it" (K. Duffel-Canham: 26:05:95)

"Makes one think deeply" (Vuru Dupe: 06:06:95)

"I turned white too!" (I. Cazes: 08:07:95)

"Not rude enough, but quite beautiful" (P. Ryan: 08:07:95)

"The truth" (C. Gendall: 08:07:95)

"Ek sien myself hier" (F. Ferreira: 09:07:95)

"Dit is lasterlik. Ek is diep seergemaak. Mens spot nie met die volk en sy kerk nie." (L. Botes: 09:07:95)

"Walks a sharp light in the shadows of the mind" (Mina: 09:07:95)

"Very Familiar" (J. Bucholz: 10:07:95)

"Your subject matter is very close to home. My dad is a priest." (J. Commin: 12:07:95)

"Angswekkend" (M. Richter: 13:07:95)

"I was moved" (Moses Hertzog: 15:07:95)

"I hate it" (C. Blomerus: 01:06:95)

The author was also angrily confronted by a minister who invited her to speak on Radio Pulpit to, as he saw it, explain herself. She received both letters of encouragement and what can be seen as hate mail. A couple of attempts were made to save her soul.

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTER FIVE



Fig 52: Anita van Tonder, *Hermanus Henning* (1994) Life-size Installation, Mixed Media.



Fig 53: Anita van Tonder, *Hermanus Henning* (1994) (daytime view of figure)



Fig 54: Anita van Tonder, *Hermanus Henning* (1994) (night time view of figure).



Fig 55: Anita van Tonder, *Hermanus Henning* (1994) Back of figure.



Fig 56: Anita van Tonder, *Hermanus Henning* (1994) overview.



Fig 57: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek van Dominee Jacob Rudolph Jacobus Bosch* (1995) Life – size installation, Mixed Media. Pictured here: Dominee and pulpit



Fig 58: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek* (1995) overview of installation.

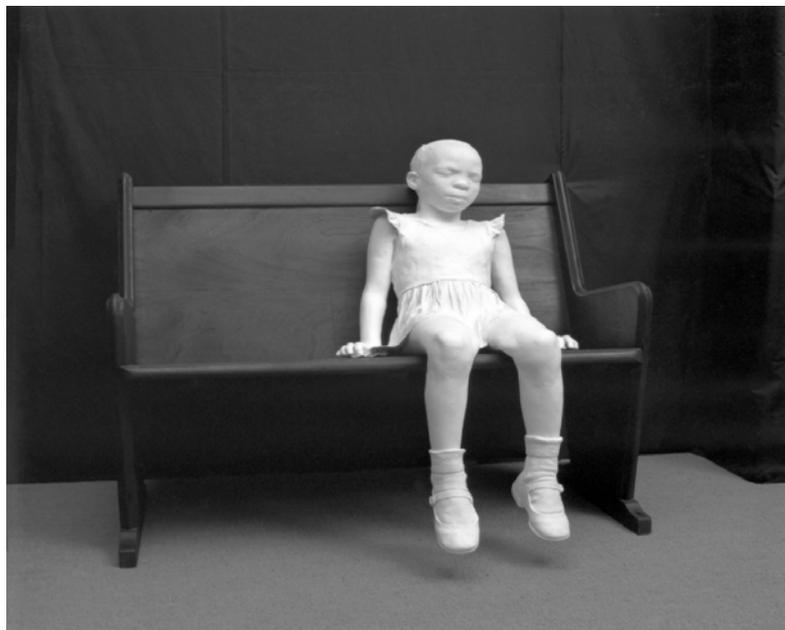


Fig 59: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek* (1995) Detail of child figure.



Fig 60: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek* (1995) View of Minister and organist.



Fig 61 and 62: detail of the organist.

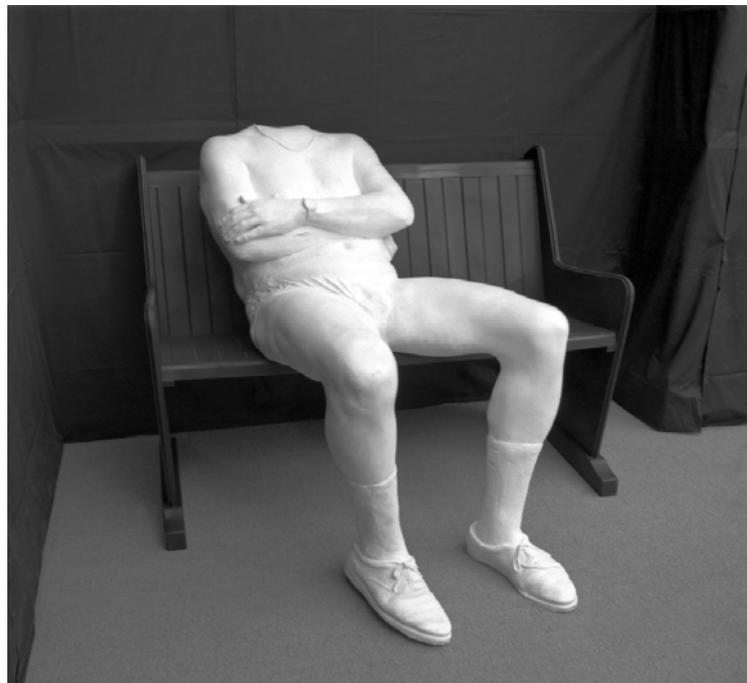
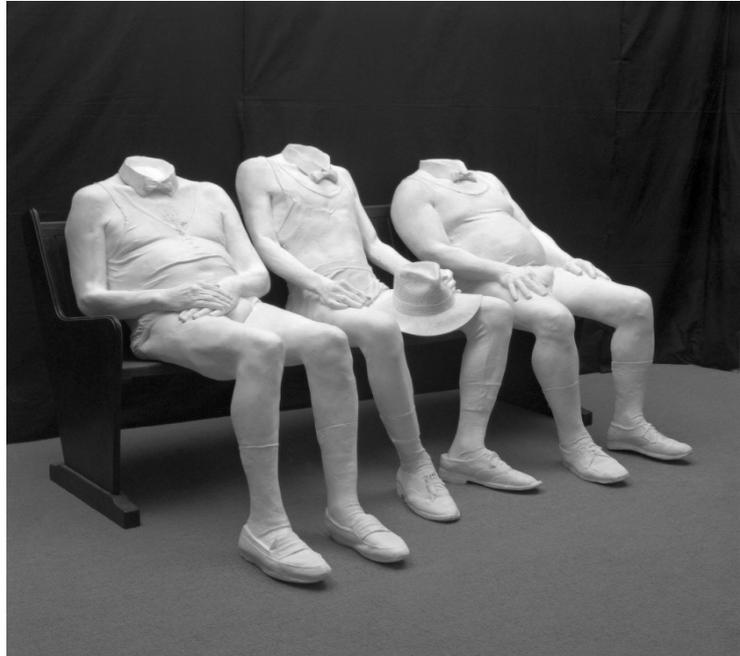


Fig 63 a and b: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek* (1995) Two views of the Elders.

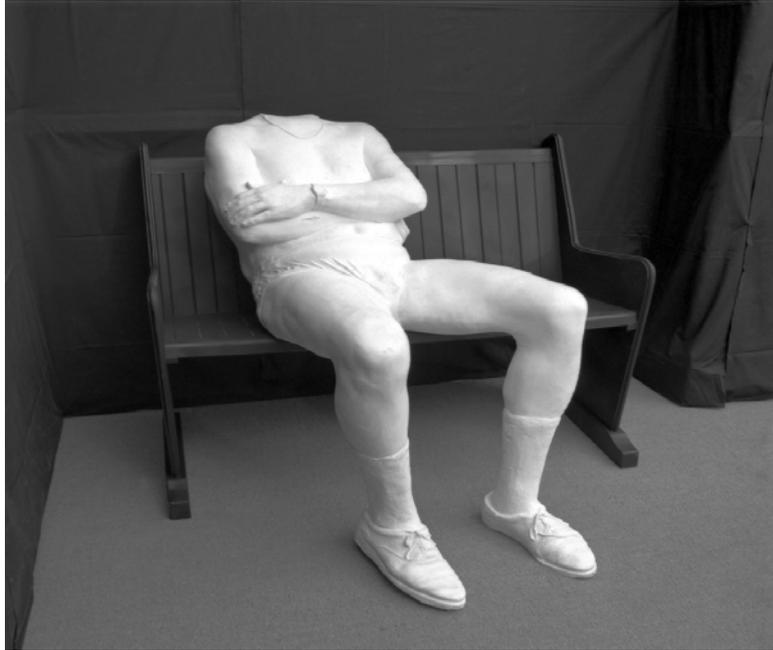


Fig 64: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek* (1995) Seated Deacon.

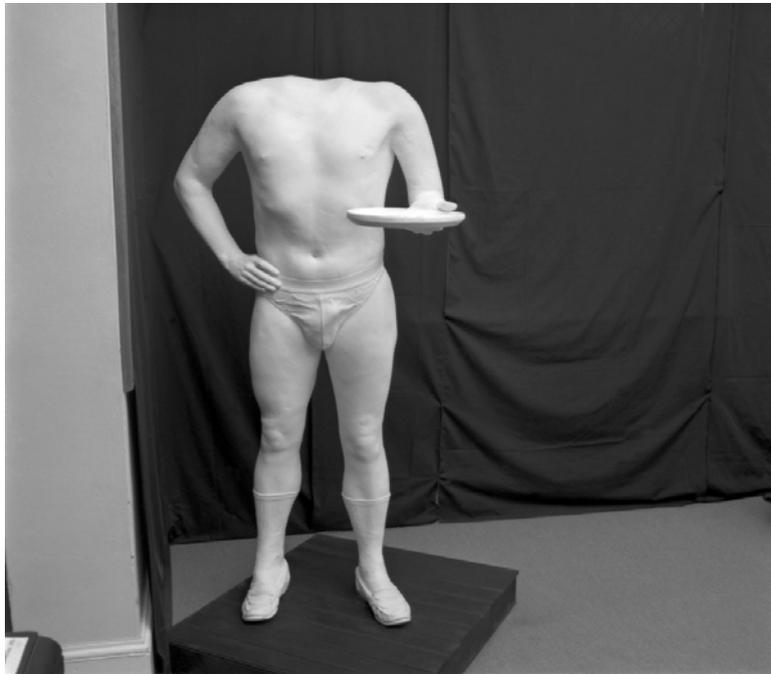


Fig 65: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek* (1995) Deacon with collection plate



Fig 66: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek* (1995) Overview of congregation and baptismal font.



Fig 67a and b: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek* (1995) Detail of two of the female figures.



Fig 68: Anita van Tonder, *Die Preek* (1995) Close-up of figures in front pew.



Fig 69: An overview of viewers participating in *Die Preek* when exhibited at Oudtshoorn KKNK in 1996.



Fig 70: Anita Van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) Life-size Installation, Mixed media. Overview of the exhibition at Oudtshoorn KKNK 2006.

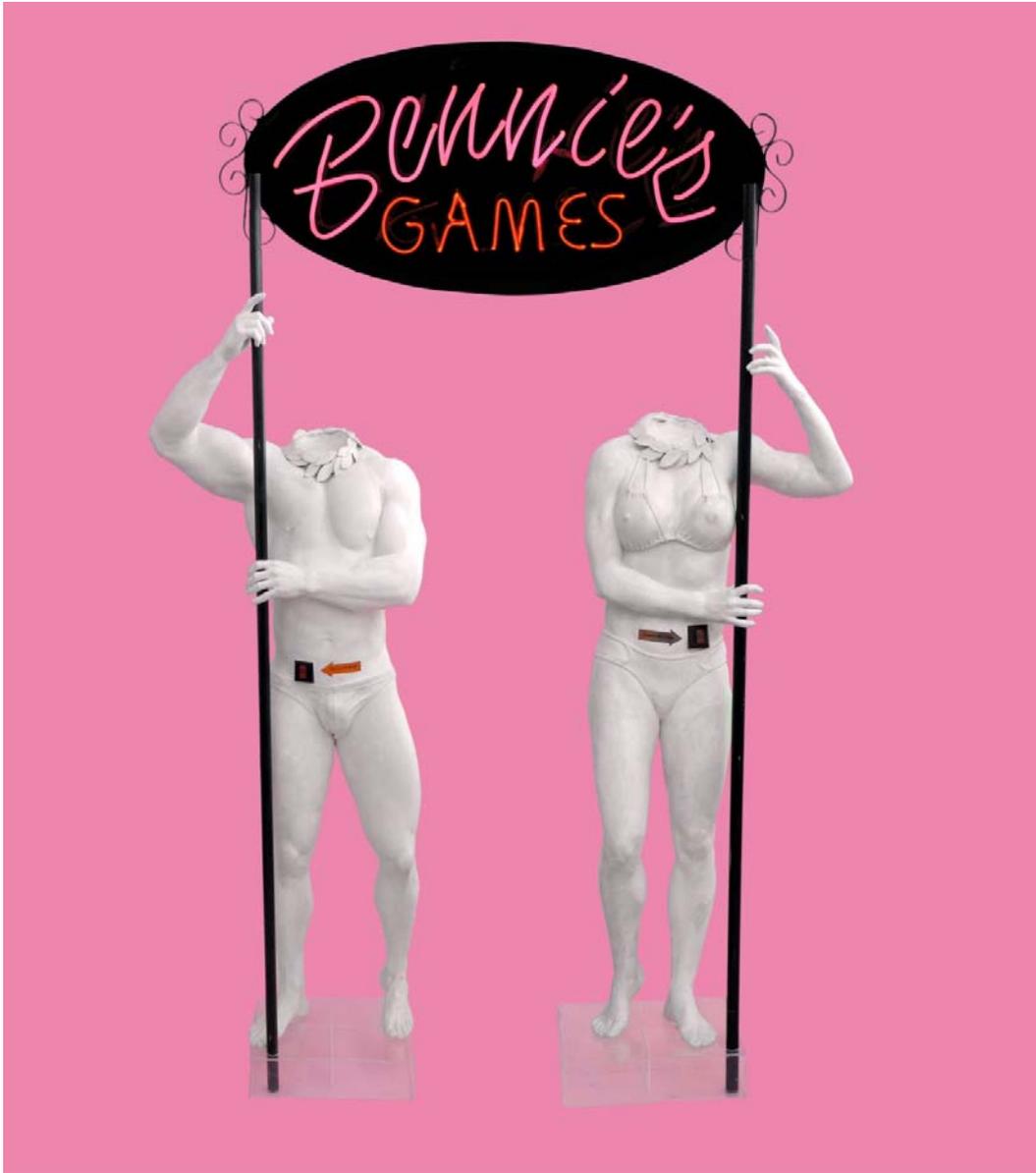


Fig 71: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) Entrance with *The Bodybuilders*.



Fig 72a,b and c: Detail of *The Bodybuilders*



Fig 73: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) *Bennie*.



Fig 74: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) Back view of Bennie.



Fig 75 a,b and c: Detail of *Bennie*.





Fig 76: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) *Miss Pucman*.



Fig 77 a,b,c d and e: Detail of *Miss Pucman*.



Fig 78: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/4) *Mr. Fortuin*.



Fig 79 a, b and c: Detail of *Mr. Fortuin*



Fig 80: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) *De Breede en de Smalle weg*.



Fig 81: Detail of *De Breede en de Smalle Weg*.



Fig 82: Close up of *De Breede en de Smalle Weg*.



Fig 83: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) *The three pillars of Society*.



Fig 84 a,b and c: Detail of *The three Pillars of Society*.



Fig 85: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) Detail : *The Three pillars of Society* centre figure.



Fig 86 a, b c and d: Detail of *The Three pillars of Society*.



Fig 87: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) *Tiny Dorfling*.



Fig 88 a, b, c and d. Detail of *Tiny Dorfling*.



Fig 89: Anita Van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) Close-up of *Tiny Dorfling*.



Fig 90: Anita van Tonder, *Bennie's Games* (2003/6) Close-up of dog with *Tiny Dorfling*.



Fig 91a,b,c,d, e: Viewers participating in *Bennie's Games* at Oudtshoorn KKNK 2006.



Fig 92: An overview of *Bennie's Games* as exhibited at the Bell Roberts Gallery, Cape Town (2006).



Fig 93 and 94 *Bennie* and *Miss Pucman* on opening night at the Bell Roberts Gallery: CapeTown (2006)

## CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this dissertation quotations were used to convey the different perceptions of the world that were expressed by three authors to illustrate the major shift from a modern-centred world to a postmodern world where the centre had been deconstructed. Robert Browning (Fowler 1887:262) optimistically saw the world as a place where everything was in place as it was supposed to be because God was at its centre; William Butler Yeats (Fowler 1987:343) saw this centre as crumbling because it could no longer hold; and, finally, William Gass (Ryan 1985:50) voiced the shocking discovery that nothing was what it seemed. The five chapters between the introduction and this conclusion attempted to show the role of humour in the transition from the modern ontological to the postmodern metaphorical view of the world and its art.

The first chapter uncovered hidden evidence of correspondence thinking in modern thought, including modern theories of art and humour (i.e. a kind of thinking that holds that every human phenomenon should correspond to deep structures of truth which can be discovered and deciphered from surface codes and can be applied to put together a pattern for what being is or should be). The modern theories which propagate an artistic ontology and an artistic teleology were shown to be based, like general modernist correspondence thinking, on the notion of a standard that already exists. This artistic realm was seen as being transcendent of context and was thus believed to be universal and permanent. The analysis of modern theories of humour also revealed a complicated strange and ironic reciprocal relationship between humour and modern norms with many ramifications and indications of correspondence thinking. In these theories modern humour seems to be seen as being subversive to all modern principles such as logic, truth and perfection. Yet, ironically, it also seems to need the ethical, aesthetic and other norms in order to function properly *and* it is expected to propagate these norms despite being labelled as being disruptive of them.

The subsequent analysis of the humorous works of William Hogarth showed that, like most modern humour, his works not only appear to deconstruct modern correspondence

thinking but are, in fact, involved in a complex and often ironically inconsistent relationship with the modern view of normativity. His humour appears to disrupt the norm and yet, oddly enough, also relies on the norm to function successfully and is seen as an educational tool to propagate it. Therefore, the typical modernist correspondence view that universal laws and ontological categories for normality are already in existence somewhere is implied in his works. This analysis also showed that the hegemony of the early modern correspondence paradigm could not be destabilised by “mere” humorous art. It was instead engulfed by the modernist penchant for categorisation and definition, and was thus marginalised as the "other" kind of art in a special category within the broader modern aesthetic realm. Ironically, Hogarth himself succumbed to the pressures of this aesthetic norm and used many of the same artistic methods and conventions that he was ridiculing. Instead of being subversive to it, his work and humour are thus in many ways supportive of and supported by the modernist correspondence paradigm. The conclusion was drawn that modern humour and humorous art are firmly rooted in a logical kind of thinking which experiences the world in a correspondence manner. Art, according to this view, is seen as a tool to discover a deeper ontological artistic principle of universal truth which is already in position somewhere. Art is further expected to maintain and propagate this truth as part of the modern optimistic hope that continual progress is inevitable if art strives in a horizontal manner toward this immutable and unquestionably perfect aesthetic model.

Chapter three showed how this modernist belief in the permanence of the ontological structuring centre is deconstructed. The longstanding authority of metaphysical reasoning undergoes a philosophical questioning by poststructuralism. Heidegger and Derrida respectively argue that the centre is not stable but in continual motion as it is replaced by another. Thus it is not reliable because this movement is neither logical nor rationally comprehensible but is randomly and unpredictably at play. This kind of reasoning deconstructs the modernist belief that the universe is logically ordered and centred by permanent structures of truth.

Language especially is seen as being responsible for the hegemony of correspondence thinking. Poststructuralist language theories questioned this hegemony. They

deconstructed language and created a metaphorical approach to art by releasing language from the modernist notion of a deeper centring structure by arguing that it is unstable and impermanent because it only refers to other signs within language itself and not to any fixed truth outside of it. Radhikrishnan (1983:38) refers to this deconstruction as the realisation that "language is a vehicle and not a vehicle of" which resulted in the "liberation of language". What this means is that language is no longer seen as the bearer or signifier of *truth of* but merely as a signifier that refers to other signifiers. Derrida invented the concept of *différance* and it is outlined in his publications *Of Grammatology* (1976) and *Writing and Difference* (1978). He based his argument upon the fact that words are pronounced differently and thus have different meanings, so that meaning is not fixed in truth or stable but is endlessly deferred. This deconstructs the very core of correspondence which is the fixed relationship between a word and the single ontological truth that is seen as being permanently attached to (signified by) that word. Language which is no longer the bearer of pre-existing truth can only be metaphorical. In this kind of thinking outside of the hegemony of truth an ontological approach to man's cultural products is also no longer valid and a metaphoric approach becomes a suitable way of seeing art.

This deconstruction of language has far-reaching implications which also, ultimately, change the way that humour is seen in the postmodern. The wider implications of the deconstruction of the relationship between language and truth, as based on the singularity of meaning, is that it opens up the possibility of many or plural meanings. This broadens the entire world view and not only the view of language. It becomes possible for previously marginalised groups to be recognised and incorporated within the mainstream. Recognition of difference means that the notion of "the other" is reconsidered, found obsolete and invalidated. This also means that rationality and logic no longer have dominance over "other" ways of seeing the world, and the non-logical and non-serious become valid ways of encountering the world. According to Heidegger, this kind of thinking recognises the value of the non-metaphysical and the non-logical. Degenaar (1986:23) writes that Nietzsche, for example, also proposed "a new way of thinking that goes against the search for a unitary vision usually associated with metaphysics".

Humorous art is therefore an excellent illustration of this new kind of thinking which manifests itself in a postmodern metaphorical approach to art. Metaphoric meaning is open-ended and therefore more disruptive of correspondence. Consequently, it is also more inventive than literal meaning which functions in a correspondence manner and provides closure. This is why Hogarth's metaphors retain traces of correspondence because they are still rather literal. Humour is similarly disruptive of correspondence and is not concerned with providing closure, which is another reason why it is suited to the metaphorical approach. However, because the traditional use of metaphor still harbours traces of literal comparison, it can be said that the postmodern use of metaphor is rather metonymic – which is more disruptive of correspondence and subsequently more playfully inventive because it removes meaning from something and deposits it onto another thing which then turns it into something new. This is also what humour does.

This is the type of postmodern humorous metaphoric creation that can be found in the work of Cindy Sherman. She creates and invents by using metaphor and humour to deconstruct modern correspondence theories and conventions; whereas the modernist Hogarth's humorous work supports and forms part of it. Sherman's images, for example, go beyond the literal into a densely layered metaphorical configuration which is not easy to interpret or transparent like Hogarth's. It is not singular in meaning or in correspondence with one truth but open to multiple interpretations. Sherman is virtually creating a humorous illustration of Derrida's poststructuralist argument that meaning is not stable but endlessly deferred when she reinvents herself over and over in her works. This is practically a visual illustration of the way that humour and metaphor perpetually recreate and replace themselves when they become worn out, much like the modernist centre.

Sherman's seemingly endless humorous recreation of herself into someone different deconstructs the modern notion of singularity on yet another level by positing the recognition of plurality or Derridean *différance*. What is meant by this is that she manages to metaphorically contrive an awareness of and consequently the deconstruction of modernist marginalisation on the grounds of "otherness" by demonstrating that she herself can take on the role of other selves by merely using make-up and prostheses. In Sherman's work the self is infinitely multiplied in an unending process of reinvention which never reaches closure but remains suspended in an open-ended ungrounded and uninterrupted state of possibility (much

like a humorous demonstration of postmodern play). Sherman uses these humorous "demonstrations" as metaphor for the fact that conventional truths are merely as deep as the surface of the skin and only as permanent or "true" as the ideology which creates them. Sherman's work is therefore an exceptional example of the compatibility between postmodern play, humour and metaphor. This leads one to conclude that her work illustrates the exceptional ability and potential of postmodern humour to deconstruct modernist principles by exposing and undermining convention. It encourages the reassessment of the truth value of these conventions and the invention of different perceptions, new ways of thinking and an entirely new encounter with the world as opposed to Hogarth's humour which merely questions the validity of certain things in the world.

This postmodern ironic stance towards all structures of truth and the inventive power of humour and play which has developed into a very specific genre and popular cultural phenomenon is also central to the author's own work. Like Sherman's work, it forms part of a general postmodern ironic questioning of cultural practices, conventions, habits, taboos and histories which has led to the reassessment and reinvention or replacement of outdated viewpoints. These works expose, as Foucault puts it, "...what passes for truth is in fact ideology" and "reweaves" these truths into something new and different by implementing the inventive potential of humorous play and games in typical postmodern fashion (Rorty 1986:752). They play with the viewer by familiarising them with the work in order to playfully find their way into the viewer's perception of reality, only to undermine it by the tactic of defamiliarisation. The works yield fragments from a single layered past and places them in a different context and configuration where they are only visible as one of the layers of the many layered present (i.e. part of what Derrida [quoted by Degenaar 1986:96] calls "the fabric of differences"). Its real medium is not the materials which the works are made of, but the imprints of our bodies in the moulds as metaphor for the way that convention moulds us. These bodies and conventions are turned into art by removing them from their familiar context and recreating them as games that invite us to play along and reinvent our perception of ourselves and the conventions that are addressed in the games. This reinvention is made possible by the open-endedness of the games: they cast no judgement and provide no closure. They remain unpredictable and beyond logical comprehension. Ironically, they just seem to watch us play them over and over, each time with a different and inconclusive result while they remain irritatingly impassive in their continual demand for coins. These games become a

visual illustration of the potential of humour to demonstrate the postmodern acceptance of the unending random play of being. They are an ironic metaphor for the abyssal play of being because "[i]f we gaze into [their] abyss, the abyss gazes back at us" (Nietzsche as quoted by Degenaar 1986:31) (my insertion).

This play, like the play of being, is however not devoid of all seriousness as is often believed. Heidegger says (quoted by Caputo 1970:40) that the serious nature of play between man and being, which has never been taken seriously in logical thinking, must not be undervalued. In the freedom of play and the game nothing is finally grounded. Although this freedom means to perpetually remain within the possibility of becoming, it can never be the realisation or closure of this becoming since that would put an end to the notion of possibility. Postmodern play should therefore not be viewed as a total loss of seriousness as is often suggested in critical discourse, but as a serious game that is presented in an ironic humorous manner. Postmodern play is not mere frivolity or entertainment, but is an ironic acceptance that the modern dream of utopia which was built on the strength of the belief in human rationality and logic is never going to materialise. In order to continue to create metaphor, humour and play became one of the only remaining options that can give artistic expression to the postmodern post-ontological condition.

In conclusion it can be said that this need not be viewed as negative. On the contrary, it should rather be argued that creative power is stifled by the modern desire to keep its cultural products (like language) grounded in correspondence to a single truth structure. It can be said that this restricts modern products by their confinement to one particular perception. By cutting language loose from God (by "getting rid of God" in language in Nietzschean terms, so to speak [quoted by Degenaar 1986:81]) or by separating language from the Logos, language can be seen as a creative aesthetic metaphoric experience in the postmodern. This not only applies to language but to all cultural products (including humorous art) which were expected to conform to and even propagate modern principles. Therefore, the loss of the centre should not be viewed as being negative in the conventional sense, but as having the potential to unleash the possibility of becoming. Even though closure of truth can never be reached because this state of possibility and never becoming is all that is left after the denigration of the centre by poststructuralism, this open-endedness is exactly the inventive power of the metaphorical approach. Becoming transfixes stabilises and permanently

grounds, and puts an end to possibility. Becoming undermines invention. Possibility is however the first step towards an infinite process of reinvention.

Postmodern humorous art like Sherman's and the author's own work, unlike typical modern humorous art like Hogarth's, provides no answers and offers no closure. The postmodern artist understands the importance of context and the multiplicity of interpretational possibilities of the reception of an art work. Each receiver experiences the work differently in his/her context and in terms of his/her understanding. The interpretational possibilities and meaning of the work are no longer fixed and grounded in the creator's perception of truth but are infinitely multiplied and suspended in an open-ended state of possibility. Therefore, the postmodern art work takes this into consideration from the outset by allowing the work to play with the viewer and the viewer to play with the work. The postmodern artist sets the work free more often than not with his/her tongue firmly in his/her cheek into this state of open-endedness of play. He/she knows that the matter concerning the reception of the work is not closed but indefinitely remains open-ended. It thus remains vulnerable to the Derridean *différance* of meaning in its interpretation; vulnerable even to be deconstructed. Yet this is the only option for the postmodern artist who also knows that closure means exactly what it says (namely to close, to make permanent and to pose as final truth) and no longer believes in such finality of truth. The postmodern artist realises that closure would be to enter into the ranks of the ideological and the conventional. Closure would put an end to all further discourse and thus also all potential for difference and invention.

This is why the loss of closure and the loss of the modernist permanent principles of truth can be seen not only as positive but also as the annihilation of all standards of excellence. What this loss opened up is both the inventive power of possibility itself and the deconstructive power of the kind of thinking which it made possible. This loss made it possible to invent and to ask the following question: Whose standards were used to set these standards? Or: Whose idea of truth is this? This kind of thinking is not permanently lodged in and directed by a fixed centre of truth which excludes all that falls outside of it. This kind of thinking broadens out towards a consideration and validation of the culture and viewpoints of groups that were marginalised and excluded by their "otherness" when judged by the single standard of the modernist. Radhikrishnan (1983:34) calls it "the legitimization or valorization of difference".

The loss of the modernist single standard and the single truth thus resulted in the enrichment of a postmodern culture and not in its impoverishment.

This is also what humour and metaphor do. They invent and enrich. Humour and metaphor hover and waver in an endlessly perpetuated state of becoming, but never settle in any grounded form of truth. Humour, like metaphor, has no fixed *single* purpose; it just *is*. Humour and metaphor are infinitely adaptable and able to launch themselves from any historically, ideologically or socially constructed centring principle which poses as truth. Humour functions by subverting truth and therefore needs some kind of fixed truth to be in existence in the first place. What it does not need is permanence or immutability, since it can and does continually renew itself by finding and using whatever is accepted as truth within any specific time, place or culture to function. This is exactly the creative power of renewal that is found in humour and in metaphor. They continually reinvent themselves as the context within which they find themselves changes. New jokes and metaphors are continually being created as they become outdated. The stability or permanence of truth is neither important nor necessary for humour to function, since it only refers and responds to it in a fleeting transient and ephemeral relationship. In fact, both humour and metaphor flourish and multiply in a world of impermanence. They question and subvert truths as truths are formulated; therefore, they are also a constant cultural site of renewal. Put plainly: as things change, the humorous metaphor (whether ironic, parodic or satirical) both "plays" with the original meaning that is represented by a specific image/idea and continually invents/changes its meaning. Humour is therefore exceptionally suited to give expression to the postmodern world where nothing is what it seems.

The postmodernist, like Gass, when discovering that what he saw as truth was just "rubber" and "sponge", may thus well ask like Nietzsche before him: "What then is truth?" Degenaar (1986:16) most eloquently answers this by saying that language, like truth, is not truth at all but "illusions which one has forgotten are illusions, worn out metaphors which have become powerless". However, this need not be seen as the end of creativity. It can be seen as a new beginning in the postmodern game of art. Many theorists speak of a joyful laughter and dancing which are introduced into postmodern art and release it from stagnation or "sedimentation" (as Radkrishnan [1983:55] calls it). Like Derrida (quoted by Kuchler

1994:4), Nietzsche is quoted by Degenaar (1986:6) as suggesting that "dancing of the mind" invites "playful interpretations" such as a 'dancing of the pen' or even a "dancing God".

What this means is that after it had become clear to the postmodernist that human rationality, truth and logic were never going to deliver their promises, the value of things irrational, things illogical or random things without purpose or direction (like laughter and dancing) is recognised, legitimised and enhanced in the postmodern creative milieu. The stability of the centre which is disproved by deconstructionist theories through showing that the centre is being endlessly replaced by another heralds the entry of humour and metaphor as the replacement of seriousness and permanence exactly because humour and metaphor are already in an unending state of continual replacement themselves. The crumbling of the centre which William Butler Yeats wrote about (quoted by Fowler 1987: 343) should therefore not be seen as posing a threat to postmodern art, but rather as being generative of a different kind of thinking beyond the confines of metaphysics into the realm of play.

This makes one wonder whether, in a world where the virtues of rationality have neither warranted nor justified its results, the so-called irrationality or illogic of the child or the mentally disturbed is not perhaps a field of research that is worth pursuing. Nietzsche, says Degenaar (1986:18-22) preferred Heraclitus's God who "builds sand hills only to overthrow them again" like a child who delights in "creating and destroying in order to create anew". Perhaps what is needed even today is never to stagnate into the misplaced confidence of those who believe that they have arrived at some kind of conclusion, but to playfully continue to write and rewrite "truth" each time in a "a sort of halting, stammering translation into an entirely foreign language" (Nietzsche as quoted by Degenaar 1986:15).

## Glossary of terms

**Abstract:** Not concrete. Used in this text to indicate the way that metonymy removes (abstracts) meaning from one word or concept and deposits it onto another to form new meaning. Kohl (1992:3) writes that the word originates from the Latin *Abstractus* which means "drawn off, from, ab, away trahere, to draw".

**Abstrahere:** As used in this text means "to draw or drag away". It is closely related to the term "abstract" from the Latin *abstractus* (from *ab* which means away and *trahere* which means to draw) (Kohl 1992:3).

**Abyss:** The literal meaning of the word is a chasm or void. In philosophical terms, as used by Heidegger (quoted in Caputo 1970:26-33), it indicates what can be seen as the abyssal nature of being since being cannot be a stabilising centre for itself; therefore it is infinitely replaceable and it cannot ever be fully comprehended.

**Anti-essentialist:** An anti-essentialist viewpoint is held by someone who refutes the idea that it is possible to define the essence of anything by its universal characteristics. It further indicates a rejection of the belief in the pre-existence of indispensable fundamental principles.

**Anti-narrative:** A narrative is essentially a story that is traditionally believed to consist of a beginning, middle and an end which follow logically upon one another and make reasonable sense as a whole when heard or read. It is also traditionally believed that novels tell us the truth about the world. An anti-narrative or the inclination to use anti-narrative results from the postmodern tendency to question this belief and to create works which deliberately muddle the traditional format, revert to fragmentation or refuse to tell a story in a logical manner.

**Anti-substantialist:** An anti-substantialist rejects the doctrine that "behind phenomena there are substantial realities" (COD sv "Substantialism").

**Avant-garde:** Refers to those who are considered as forming the vanguard in art of a particular period because their work is seen as pioneering and innovative.

**Cartesian:** Refers to the theories of "René Descartes (1596-1650), French philosopher, scientist, and mathematician, sometimes called the father of modern philosophy" (MEE sv "Descartes"); or the theories of other philosophers whose work shows evidence of the influence of the theories of Descartes.

**Classical:** Used in this text to indicate styles or theories from antiquity.

**Commedia Dell'Arte:** The MEE (sv "Commedia Dell'Arte") explains this as a "form of professional theater, one of the earliest and most influential in Europe, originating in northern Italy in the 1550s and flourishing for 200 years. Without traditional dramatic texts, Commedia troupes of 6 to 12 actors improvised comedies on outdoor, informal stages or in conventional staging areas. They relied on stereotypical characters, masks, broad physical

gestures, seemingly unrehearsed dialogue, musical interludes, and clowning to develop large audiences composed of all social classes and cultures".

**Concrete:** Used in this text as the opposite of abstract. Concrete meaning in an art work or in language is based upon the assumption that what it refers to is real, true or tangible and is usually something that is already in existence.

**Correspondence thinking:** Someone who thinks in this way believes that truth and meaning have always been in existence somewhere and that hidden permanent and unquestionable ontological truth can be discovered by correctly deciphering and understanding its universal surface codes or patterns. One can consider oneself as truly human if all one's actions and mental patterns correspond with this perfect design.

**Deconstruction:** Deconstruction literally means to break down or remove bit by bit until there is nothing left. As used in this text, it refers to a theory in the field of criticism which exercises the practice of a deconstructive "reading" of any text (and in this mode of thought everything is text) by interrogating it from a critical perspective in order to expose what is seen as ungrounded truth-assumptions or hidden meanings (Derrida 1976:13). The deconstructionist further believes that no text can ever claim to fully communicate its author's intentions because language is (in the first place) not a bearer of truth and (in the second place) open to plurality of interpretation. Selden (1989:90) writes that "[d]econstruction can begin when we locate the moment when a text *transgresses the laws it appears to set up for itself*. At this point texts go to pieces, so to speak".

**Decontextualise:** To remove something like an art work, literary or any other text, ideology or historical event from a specific context; or to view/read or assess/criticise it without taking the context wherein it was created into consideration.

**Defamiliarisation:** Used in this text to indicate a device used by the author in her works, namely to remove things from the context that is "normally" associated with such an object/practice/historical moment or ideology in order to make the viewer more intensely aware of the transient nature of context. This is not the same as decontextualisation since the device is not used to disregard context or to place things in an elevated sphere above context. It is used to place things in an unfamiliar context in order to make them seem strange, thus creating a heightened awareness of the importance of recognising the influence of context. This forces the viewer to reconsider what has become habitual and to re-assess and subsequently reinvent things after viewing them from a new perspective.

**De-logising:** Logic is an instrument of reason. To de-logise is thus to reject the supremacy of reason in favour of non-reason or to deliberately argue or work in a non-logical manner.

**Deterministic:** Someone with a deterministic viewpoint believes that everything, including all human behavior, is predetermined or gravitates towards a predetermined goal and rejects the concept of free choice.

**Difference:** Literally refers to the degree to which one thing is not the same as another. In this text a term coined by Derrida, namely *différance*, has another meaning. It refers to the fact that words that are spelt the same (or practically the same) can often have different meanings which leads to many interpretations of the same word. According to Derrida

(quoted by Selden 1989:89) this can result in preference being given to one meaning over another and create what he terms a "violent hierarchy" within language itself.

**Dystopia:** The opposite of a utopian outlook on life (see utopia).

**Ephemeral:** Something that is ephemeral is short-lived or temporary and has only a momentary existence.

**Explicandum:** This term refers to the belief in the existence of the possibility to explain, clarify or develop meaning or the implication of meaning in its entirety.

**Generative:** Used in this text to refer to the generative nature of humour in terms of its ability to invent, create or generate new meaning.

**Hermeneutic:** "The art and craft of interpretation" which "concerns itself with hidden meanings in texts, music, works of art and even speech and gesture" (Kohl 1992:32).

**Hyper-real:** Used in this text to refer to the excessively realistic media, television and film images which are digitally generated or electronically produced to seem more real than reality and can lead to confusion between the real and the fake.

**Idées fixes:** Fixed ideas.

**Immutable:** An immutable law or governing principle is believed to be permanent, absolute and indisputable.

**Interreferential:** Refers to a referral made inside (and not outside) a body of text or between closely related branches of any aesthetic discipline, corporation or group which shares a similar nature or goal.

**Intertextual:** Used in this text to refer to a specific device where a text refers to itself or another text often found in, but not exclusively used in, parody.

**Logocentrism:** A term devised by Derrida (1972:3) to refer to the tendency to believe that words tell the truth about the world, derived from the idea that the word of God (logos) forms the ultimate unquestionable centre of truth and meaning and the origin of all things (Selden 1989:88).

**Logico-metaphysical:** A term devised by Heidegger (quoted by Kuchler 1994:24) to indicate what he sees as all previous attempts to understand being by the application of reason and logic. He believes that this is not possible since the human mind can never fully comprehend being and states that all such previous attempts to rationally understand being are lodged in the metaphysical (ie "logico-metaphysical"). He therefore proposes a new kind of "non-logical" and "non-metaphysical" philosophical way of thinking.

**Manifold praxis:** Multiplicity or diversity of practice/custom or art form.

**Metaphorical:** In language metaphor is the non-literal use of words. In visual art metaphor is also used to create a non-literal interpretation or representation of something. The term is

used in this text to differentiate between the modern and the postmodern approach to art. It is argued that the prior approach to art is ontological and the latter metaphorical because the postmodern artist has become disillusioned with the modern belief in ontological certainty and truth. Metaphor is not reliant upon existing ontological truth to create meaning. It does not need to refer to real things in a literal fashion. It is therefore more inclined towards the invention of new meaning rather than to search for it in the already existing, which makes it a creative device most suited to the postmodern tendency to doubt and question the existing.

**Metonymic:** Metonymy is a figure of speech whereby a thing, concept, person or group is represented by something closely associated to it. Metonymy is closely related to metaphor. In this text the difference between metonymy and metaphor becomes important because metonymy is less literal than metaphor since it is less reliant upon a comparison between two existing things and is more inclined to take the characteristics of one thing and to deposit it onto another, which then becomes an entirely new thing.

**Non-corporeal:** The word "corporeal" indicates that something has a material body or consists of material objects. Non-corporeal refers to something that does not consist of a material body or object. The MED (sv "Corporeal") gives as its antonym "mental".

**Normativity:** Is the tendency to establish a fixed norm.

**Ontological:** Ontology is a branch of metaphysics. It is a study of existence and "deals with the nature of being, and the different ways of being in the world" (Kohl 1992:75).

**Open-ended:** Literally means a statement, theory, literary text or other art work which does not provide closure but remains open-ended. In this text it is argued that a closed text, for example, prohibits invention by its reader since it already pre-supposes a specific outcome or conclusion or provides an answer which is believed to be final and beyond questioning.

**Otherness:** In this text the term "otherness" refers to the assumption that fixed universal norms of what it is to be truly human are already in existence and anyone who does not physically, mentally (or in any other way) conform to this norm is seen as "the other". This kind of thinking excludes any physical or mental difference to this norm or proposed ideal pattern for humanity, with the result that those who are earmarked as the "other" are marginalised on all levels of existence.

**Palimpsest:** This term refers to the ancient practice of removing the original writing on a manuscript in order to allow the writer to write on it again or to superimpose a new text on top of the old. In this text it is used to refer to the recognition by postmodern artists that history consists of many layers in terms of different interpretations of its "truths". Each new interpretation/theory/text must therefore take cognition of the ineradicable visibility of the many layers of its predecessors as it "weaves" itself upon it like a palimpsest.

**Parameters:** Used in this text to indicate the historical, socio-political, aesthetic or other limits which form the theoretical boundaries or restrictions that have to be considered in a critical assessment or approach towards any existing event, practice, theory or text.

**Petite histoire:** Means a short, little or small history.

**Play:** Used in this text to refer to postmodern "play which is not the conventional interpretation of the word, namely to engage in recreation in order to amuse oneself. Postmodern "play" is a term which applies to the play between man and being as found in the theories of Heidegger (quoted by Caputo 1970:29) or the play of the centre of being/meaning which is seen in deconstructive theories such as Derrida's (1972:260) as impermanent and endlessly replaceable as it is substituted by another. This loss of the permanent centre brought a playfulness into postmodern cultural products.

**Positivism:** The COD (sv "Positivism") explains this as "a philosophical system of August Comte, recognizing only positive facts and observable phenomena and rejecting metaphysics and theism".

**Post-metaphysical:** Metaphysics literally means "the investigation of the ultimate nature of reality, such as matter and mind, the origins of the universe, proofs of the existence of God, and the nature of time and space" (Kohl 1992:74). In short, it is "the study of the ultimate grounds of reality, of the first principles of the world" (Kohl 1992:123). Heidegger (2004:178) proposes that all Western metaphysical philosophical questioning that are directed at finding the truth about being has so far omitted to ask the right questions about being exactly because such questioning was directed from a metaphysical position. He therefore proposes what he terms a "[p]ost-metaphysical" and "non-logical" (2004:180) line of questioning which starts by asking what being is *before* attempting to establish it as an a priori certainty.

**Protestant Rationalism:** This is a branch of Protestant theology which appeared in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, resulting from the influence of increased scientific thought and the Enlightenment (MEE sv "Protestant Rationalism").

**Rake:** This is a term that was derived from the word "rakehell" (hasty) during the 17<sup>th</sup> century to indicate an "immoral pleasure seeker: an unrestrained indulger in pleasures and vices eg drinking and gambling" (MEE sv "Rake").

**Readerly text:** This refers to a text that only allows passive reading of a text as opposed to a writerly text that invites the reader to participate in its creation by perhaps not providing closure in the way that a writerly text does but by remaining open-ended or by allowing the reader to access it from any point and not only as is traditionally practiced, from its beginning. Selden (1989:80) explains that the poststructuralist Roland Barthes coined the terms "readerly" (lisible) text and "writerly" (scriptible) text, and that "[t]he first is made to be read (consumed), the second to be written (produced)".

**Scientism:** A way of reasoning or doctrine that is deemed to be typical of a scientist (COD sv "Scientism").

**Sclerotic:** Literally refers to someone who is a sufferer of sclerosis, which is a disease that hardens membranes (specifically the brain and spine is subject to chronic deterioration of this nature). As used in this text, it refers to a hardening of reasoning or stiffness – so to speak – as in a refusal of flexibility in an argument or a gradual deterioration which results from this inability to move or adapt.

**Teleological:** A teleological viewpoint results from the belief that any event can be explained by its purpose or end-goal. The example that Kohl (1992:85) uses is that in this mode of thought the telic cause of an infant's growth is the adult model which it strives to become. A teleological approach to art would thus be to believe that art or artists strive towards a specific pre-existing aesthetic model in the hope of reaching perfection or excellence.

**Transcendental:** The COD (sv "Transcendental") describes this word as signifying something which is "of a priori character, pre-supposed in and necessary to experience". In this text it is used to indicate certain aesthetic theories that subscribe to an artistic ontology and propagates the existence of a separate elevated sphere for all "good" art which is believed to exist apart from and surpass (transcend) the limitations of the material world.

**Transient:** Something that is not permanent but fleeting, passing and temporary. It is a synonym of the ephemeral that is used in this text to explain the adaptability of humour to change when it becomes outdated.

**Unitarianism:** Unitarianism advocates unity and believes in the centralisation of power. A Unitarian rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and believes that God is one person. Unitarianism also denied the divinity of Jesus and promoted his example and his teachings instead. It propagates freedom of belief in general (COD sv "Unitarian").

**Utopian:** Kohl (1992:88) explains that the word "utopia" was created by Thomas Moore (1478-1535). It does not indicate a real place, but a perfect imaginary society. Utopian thinking is thus based upon the idea that a perfect society can be created.

**Weltanschauung:** The way one perceives the world or one's philosophy of life.

**Zeitgeist:** Spirit of the times (COD sv "Zeitgeist").

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