

**A SEMIOTIC CONTEXTUALISATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN POSTAGE STAMPS
AND LETTERS RECEIVED BETWEEN 1996 AND 1999.**

by

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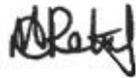
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DECLARATION

I, Mari Retief, declare that *A semiotic contextualisation of South African postage stamps and letters received between 1996 and 1999* 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Retief', is centered on the page.

SUMMARY

Title:

A semiotic contextualisation of South African postage stamps and letters received between 1996 and 1999.

Summary:

The purpose of this research is to use semiotic and narrative theory to unpack the layered meanings related to postage stamps and handwritten letters and explore their similarities. The theories of Peirce on icon, index and symbol, provide a systematic framework from which to explore the parallel narratives in a personal collection of postage stamps and letters received between 1996 and 1999.

Postage stamps and letters are sent as a unit, allowing their public and private narratives to arrive in parallel. Both the practical and theoretical components of this research explore these narratives, treating letters and postage stamps as both personal and impersonal objects of communication. They are archival objects of national and personal history and of an era that is slowly fading. This research does not reinforce the different modes of communication offered by postage stamps and letters, but rather unpacks and compares, from a personal perspective, their many layers of meaning.

List of key terms:

Semiotics; Narrative; Postage Stamps (South Africa); Handwritten Letters; Peirce (Charles Sanders); Correspondence, Visual Arts.

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PREFACE

This research uses semiotic and narrative theory to unpack the layered meanings related to postage stamps and letters, focusing on Charles Sanders Peirce's theories on icon, index and symbol. The purpose of this investigation has not been simply to reinforce the multimodality of postage stamps and letters, but rather, through a personal perspective, to explore their semiotic landscape and unpack their many layers of meanings.

A personal collection of postage stamps and letters I received while living in England between 1996 and 1999 forms the base of this investigation. They were a form of reconnection and reminders of home: friends, family and South Africa. Both the hand-written letters and postage stamps are significant to me because they are archival objects from my history and an era that is slowly fading. This research hopes to capture aspects of the relationship between postage stamps and letters before they disappear. This relationship is one of co-dependence: a letter needs some form of affixed proof of payment and a postage stamp needs something to send. Usually arriving together, one could argue that parallel narratives exist between the two: the public narratives of postage stamps and the private narratives of letters sealed inside an envelope.

I explore these narratives in both a personal and impersonal manner. Electronically re-typing the letters I received, allowed me to gather data such as word frequency and word choices, and analyse their content more objectively. The data gathered can be found in the Appendix. Studying their narratives as well as the data collected, allowed the theoretical and practical components to compliment and support one another.

This paper begins by discussing semiotic theory, focusing on Peirce, thereby creating a framework for the rest of this research which is unpacking the narratives of postage stamps and letters: in general and from a personal perspective. Consulting other theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen, John Deely and Marcel Danesi, has allowed insight into past and contemporary views on semiotics. Writers such as Jack Child, David Scott and Donald Reid provided a starting point for the application of semiotic theory to postage stamps and letters. Artists such as Camille Utterback, Nicholas Felton and Siemon Allen were studied to explore possible visual applications of personal narratives and subtexts in identity. I also consulted Jacques Bertin, who investigated drawing techniques of diagrams, networks and maps.

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Emma Willemse, who has supported and guided me through this journey. Her unwavering belief in me and the importance of this investigation has made all the difference.

I would also like to thank Talita Fourie, curator of the South African Post Office Museum and Archive; Connie Liebenberg, Research Officer of the RSA Stamp Study Group; as well as the design team at the Post Office head office in Pretoria; who took the time to answer many questions. Although this meeting does not form part of my references, our long conversations have given me clarity and provided an overview to the research I conducted.

Further, I would like to thank the UNISA Student Funding Department for awarding me a bursary; I am grateful for their financial support.

A special thank you to my sister, Tania Gill, who took the time to read this document and offer a fresh, unbiased view. Your insight has been valuable.

Finally I would like to thank Dr Celine Hunter, who took the time to edit this document. Thank you for your patience and suggestions.

This research has been both a personal and academic journey, having grown as both an artist and researcher. It has been rewarding to re-read the letters I received as a teenager, re-live the memories and attempt to find the writers I do not have contact with anymore. For me this journey has been both nostalgic and enlightening by revisiting my past as well as South African history and being able to see how both have been represented from personal and public perspectives. The process of exploring this topic has also been a reminder of the material tangibility of postage stamps and letters: something which is lost with electronic forms of communication. This investigation has tried to capture this materiality and the many layers of meaning found in the unique relationship between postage stamps and letters.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SAPO	South African Post Office
UPU	Universal Postal Union

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This research uses semiotic and narrative theory to unpack the layered meanings related to postage stamps and handwritten letters. A letter cannot be posted without some affixed proof of postage paid, thus co-dependent, parallel narratives exist: I will explore the similarities and differences between them.

A personal collection of letters, which I received while I was living in England between 1996 and 1999, allows the application of semiotic and narrative theory to investigate why and how their parallel narratives are created. The pictorial images of the postage stamps on the envelopes, together with the content of the handwritten letters, reminded me of home: friends, family and South Africa. Their multimodal texts created both personal and socio-political narratives.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

I have found no academic research which applies semiotic theories to South African postage stamps nor any type/image comparisons which uses both postage stamps and letters as a tool. I hope to capture - before communication through letter writing possibly disappears - the unique relationship between postage stamps and letters. Electronic mail (email), instant text-messages and social media, for example, are eliminating the need for slow, postal communication:

Something that has been crucial to our economic and emotional well-being since ancient Greece has been slowly evaporating for

two decades, and in two more the licking of a stamp will seem as antiquated to future generations as the paddle steamer (Garfield 2013: [sp])¹.

1.3. METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The research methodology follows Charles Sanders Peirce's (1839-1914) theories on semiotics, particularly his three-class typology: icon, index and symbol. These theories create a platform from which to unpack the layers of meaning in both postage stamps and letters and to explore what they have in common. According to Gianfranco Marrone (1971-), the Italian semiotician, semiotics moves from one specific field to another, and indicates each time what different texts may have in common regarding their functioning (Kull 2014:538).

I have selected postage stamps and letters as specific fields. This research moves between these two fields, to explore their parallel narratives; to search for similarities in their different *texts*² and to find links between them. To better understand the narratives embedded in postage stamps and letters, I investigate *which* types of narratives they employ as well as *how* and *why* these narratives are created. I have also consulted and applied semiotic and narrative theories of other semioticians to shed light on the formation of these narratives and their significance. These include: Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), Roland Barthes (1915-1980), Thomas Sebeok (1920-2001), Gunther Kress (1940-), Theo van Leeuwen (1947-), John Deely (1942-) and Marcel Danesi (1946-).

¹ Simon Frank Garfield is a British journalist and non-fiction author.

² By *text* I mean any entity/object - such as postage stamps, illustrations or letters - that can be *read* (observed and interpreted). Throughout this research paper I will be using the word *text* when I refer to objects that are *read* and I will be using the word *type* when I refer to physical words and their appearance.

Other works consulted include: Jack Child (1938-2011), *The Politics and Semiotics of the Smallest Icons of Popular Culture: Latin American Postage Stamps*, 2008; David Scott, *European Stamp Design - A Semiotic Process*, 1995; and Donald Reid, *The Symbolism of Postage Stamps: A Source for the Historian*, 1984.

My primary source for this research is a personal collection of letters I received while living in London between 1996 and 1999. The UNISA Ethics Committee granted permission³ to use the data in these 54 letters, on condition I keep the authors' identities and do not quote directly. Four letter writers gave permission to use and quote from their letters anonymously. I developed a coding system to refer to these 54 letters.

I re-typed the 54 letters electronically to analyse their content more objectively. I have used this data in the practical and theoretical components to explore elements such as word frequency, choice of words and topics of discussion. I have also analysed the frequency of postage stamps, the type of postage stamps and choice of pictorial imagery. In those areas where my personal collection of letters and postage stamps are limited, I have applied the theory to South African and International postage stamps and letters in general. The theoretical and practical components examine letters and postage stamps as both personal and impersonal objects of communication. The practical work also explores my personal collection of letters and postage stamps as archival objects from my past and a postal era that is fading.

This personal collection of letters gave me a sense of reconnection with my roots. While the handwritten letters tell a personal narrative, the government issued postage stamps tell a more public one. I examine these different narratives and their significance.

³ Ethical clearance project identification number: 2016_AVME_STUDENT_002.

I have consulted the artworks produced by various artists to examine possible visual applications of personal narratives and asked questions such as: Which personal *texts* exist in the postage stamps and letters and how do they relate to one another? How can this data be visually (re)presented? The following artists and their work are unpacked in relevant sections to help me explore these questions further: Nicholas Felton, an American artist and the author of several Personal Annual Reports,⁴ who uses mundane, every-day personal data to create information graphics; Jacques Bertin, a French cartographer and theorist, who investigates drawing techniques of diagrams, networks and maps in his book *Semiology of Graphics* (1983); Kim Lieberman, a South African artist, who explores the interconnectedness of messages given and received through the mail; Camille Utterback, an American artist, who explores interactive installations with text; and finally, Siemon Allen, a South African artist living in the United States, who creates artwork from collections of historical artifacts, including postage stamps, to explore the subtexts that are generated and how these reflect both South Africa's political history and its shifting identity.

1.4. THEORY

Scott, Child and Reid both apply semiotic theories to postage stamps. They use Peirce's three-class typology - sign, object, and interpretant – to divide them into three layers of meaning:

Peirce's distinction between iconic, indexical and symbolic signs provides a set of criteria against which both the authenticity and the functional efficiency of stamps as signs can be judged (Scott 1995:14).

⁴ Personal annual reports represent day-to-day, sometimes mundane, facts of one's life that have been gathered, statistically analysed and presented in the form of a report.

Following Scott, Child and Reid, I have applied the same methodology to letters and will compare the ways in which meanings are generated in these two inseparably linked forms of communication.

I motivate this approach with the following reasons:

Since semiotics analyses both verbal and nonverbal texts, it can be used to analyse the narratives produced by both type-based letters and image-based stamps.

Postage stamps and letters are multimodal: an image is never 'just an image' and text is never 'just text'. It is difficult to keep discourse out of an artwork; it is equally difficult to keep visuality out of a piece of writing (Mitchell 1994:99). Postage stamps are more than *just proof of payment* and letters are more than *just written language*: they are both verbal and non-verbal – multimodal - bearers of signs. The information received is thus the sum of many levels of meaning.

Other factors to consider when studying the semiotic properties of written text include: the material on which it is written; writing instruments; letterforms; aesthetics; and the psychological disposition of the writer. Visual designs also involve more than pictorial images: as with written text, similar factors must be considered when studying the semiotic properties of postage stamps.

Lastly, my theory and practical work explore an interdisciplinary, text/image relationship: the layers of meaning produced by the parallel narratives of postage stamps and their enclosed letters. This is also integral to the semiotics approach. John Deely, an American semiotician, comments on "how semiotics is the only inherently interdisciplinary perspective there is" (Kull 2014:533). Peirce (1933:4.448) suggests that "the most perfect of signs are those in which the iconic, indicative and

symbolic characters are blended as equally as possible”. For Saussure (1983:118), no sign makes sense on its own but only in relation to its structural relationship with other signs.

Narrative theory is also concerned with the relationship of signs with one another. Exploring shared and changing stories, narrative is concerned with the semiotic reading of *texts* and how meaning is created. Postage stamps and letters are story tellers. This research uses semiotic theory to unpack these stories, but is guided throughout by Gunther Kress’ challenge: namely, to compare and contrast existing theories because these “... theories that [have] come to us, shaped in a different, another ‘social’. That might entail asking: what remains, shared and common, what changes, and why?” (Kress quoted in Kull 2014:544). In the light of this challenge, I have explored questions such as: What are the narratives, why are they chosen/discarded, what is shared and why do they change?

In conclusion, by applying Semiotic and Narrative theories in this study, I am mindful of the context of meaning making. Contemporary semioticians do not study signs in isolation, but as part of semiotic *sign-systems*. They study how *meaning* is made and how *reality* is represented (Chandler 2007:2). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:35) further argue that, even though meaning is not inherent in forms, forms are unavoidably involved in meaning making:

[V]isual communication [and linguistic communication] in a given society can only be understood in the context of, on the one hand, the range of forms or modes of public communication available in that society and, on the other hand, their uses and valuations (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006:35).

Kress and van Leeuwen call this the ‘semiotic landscape’ (2006:35). Exploration of the parallel narratives of postage stamps and letters as part of a semiotic landscape will reveal how postage stamps and letters create meaning and (re)present reality.

1.5. CHAPTER REVIEW

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Frameworks of meaning for letters and postage stamps

This chapter explores the general definition of semiotics, with focus on Peirce's theories on iconicity, indexicality and symbolism. It argues that *meaning* in postage stamps and letters can be studied through semiotics and uses Peirce's theories as an effective platform from which to unpack their layers of meaning. It also looks briefly at postal history to show how the role of postage stamps and letters have changed since the invention of the postage stamp.

Chapter 3: Narrative and its significance in postage stamps and letters

This chapter discusses narrative theory in general. Since narrative theory is concerned with the semiotic reading of texts, this chapter focuses on the reading and telling of stories on postage stamps and letters. It applies the semiotic theory discussed in Chapter 2 to explore how meaning is created in postage stamps and letters and how our reading of signs affect our interpretations of these narratives.

Chapter 4: Type/image relationship of postage stamps and letters

Chapter 4 explores the layers of meaning in the images and type on postage stamps and letters and how the artist/writer's conscious and unconscious decisions influence these narratives. It investigates the concept of cancellation marks and handwriting as unique markers and pointers to their source, and how the use of tropes creates meaning. It argues that this semiotic landscape can be understood only within a learnt *context*. A sign cannot denote anything "unless the interpreting mind is already acquainted with the thing it denotes" (Peirce 1932:8.368).

Chapter 5: Practical work

My practical work further explores Peirce's theories on icon, index and symbol. Peirce's architectonic approach to semiotics has influenced the way I approached the practical component of my research in a systematic way. I re-typed the letters I received and analysed the data of both the letters and postage stamps, thereby treating them as both personal and impersonal objects of communication. This allowed insights that would not have been possible otherwise. I have displayed my visual process and research in an archival manner (a form of inventory). This has allowed me to communicate and process the information, and to comment on the historical importance placed on them.

Fragmented narrative is a digital video exploring the fragmented, and sometimes random, nature of narrative. This project investigates the idea that our actions cause a myriad of possibilities. My use of a digital and impersonal format for this project provides a contrast with the materiality of postage stamps and letters. It also comments on how this very personal method of communication is fading as email and social media are chosen in preference to hand-written letters.

Portals explores, through 22 artist books, how letters and postage stamps are windows into an interconnected network of narratives and how these connections fade as distance increases. It also explores the similarities in themes that are illustrated and written about in postage stamps and letters.

Words matter explores the visual effect of the large number of unique words (1,892) received in the 54 letters. These words are categorised and graphically illustrated through a density map: they are hand stamped - from most frequent to least - as many times as they occur.

(Re)print is in the form of a triptych, created from lino prints and embossing. It explores the unique mark-making nature of cancellation marks and how personal connections, unique and impossible to reproduce, lessen and fade over time.

S96D99 is an infographic book, visually representing the data collected from my collection of postage stamps and letters.

Chapter 6: Conclusion.

1.6. CONCLUSION

Postage stamps and letters are multimodal forms of representation and communication. Applying semiotics and narrative theory thus allows for a deeper understanding of their layers of meaning. Many factors influence meaning. Signs should not be studied in isolation, but rather as part of a semiotic sign system, within a semiotic landscape. The multimodality of postage stamps and letters create a platform from which to study this semiotic landscape. Their mixed mediums and different communicative purposes create private and public parallel narratives.

The purpose of this image/text research is not simply to reinforce the idea that stamps and letters are different modes of communication using mixed mediums. Through exploring a personal collection of postage stamps and letters I also aim to unpack their layers of meaning and the parallel narratives that they create. I am guided here by Kress who, when questioned about the *application* or *relevance* of semiotics, replied: “I would wish to be able to make that theory ‘count’, ‘be telling’, be useable and useful in my world, able to use it to engage with issues and problems in my world” (Gunther Kress quoted in Kull 2014:544).

CHAPTER 2

Frameworks of meaning for letters and postage stamps

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves to provide the theoretical framework for the rest of the research. It includes a brief overview of the history of postage stamps and letters; provides background to the case study used in this research; and offers an overview of semiotic theory, with a focus on Peirce's theories. My aim is to contextualise semiotic theory and thereby to create a platform from which to unpack, in the following chapters, the layers of meaning contained in postage stamps and letters.

Broadly defined, semiotic theory¹ is concerned with studying signs and their interpretations. But this chapter defines semiotics more narrowly by using Peirce's theories on iconicity, indexicality and symbolism to unpack the layers of meaning found in postage stamps and letters. Peirce argued that since "the entire universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs" (1934:5.448), any field of study could be approached through semiotics, the "formal doctrine of signs" (Peirce 1932:2.227). This research argues that *meaning* in postage stamps and letters can also be studied through semiotics.

¹ There are two branches of traditional semiotic theory: the theories of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and those of American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). Although, the term *semiology* is sometimes used to describe the Saussurian school of thought, and *semiotics* to describe the Peircean school of thought, nowadays the term *semiotics* is widely used as an umbrella term to embrace the whole field (Nöth 1990:14). Both Saussure and Peirce were concerned with the definition of *the sign*.

Semiotics has been successfully applied to postage stamps by writers such as Scott, Reid and Child.² I would like to argue, however, that their approach can be applied to letters as well. I will therefore briefly apply Peirce's three semiotic categories as a systematic approach to unpacking meaning in both postage stamps and letters in general. I will then briefly apply Peirce's three categories – icon, index and symbol – as a systematic approach to unpacking *meaning* in postage stamps and letters in general.

Although the theoretical focus is primarily on Peirce's theories, other theories are also discussed in relation to Peirce and their significance for the creation of meaning through the manipulation of signs. Saussure's theories on signifier and signified lay the foundation for Barthes' theories on myth and it is argued that these are similar to Peirce's theories on the infinite sign. The theories discussed in this chapter are significant since they provide the tools which I use to unpack meaning in the narratives of postage stamps and letters in the following chapter.

This chapter will also touch briefly on the history of postage stamps to illustrate how the modern postal system has been influenced by historical practices. It will also show how postage stamps have evolved from their primary function - as proof of postage paid - to collectors' items and national symbols.

² Jack Child (1938-2011), *The Politics and Semiotics of the Smallest Icons of Popular Culture: Latin American Postage Stamps*, 2008; David Scott, *European Stamp Design - A Semiotic Process*, 1995; and Donald Reid, *The Symbolism of Postage Stamps: A Source for the Historian*, 1984.

2.2 NATURE OF LETTERS AND POSTAGE STAMPS

2.2.1 Brief history of the modern postal service

A brief history of the modern postal service is significant to this research because it contextualises the roles played by postage stamps and letters today. Although these roles have changed significantly over time, their main purposes remain the same: letters communicate information and postage stamps are proof of payment for postage. According to S.P. Chatterjea,³ before adhesive postage stamps and enveloped letters were used:

[P]ostage on letters was either pre-paid in cash by the sender or collected from the person to whom the letter was delivered. The cost was calculated according to the distance the letter had travelled... As envelopes had not then been invented, a letter sent by post was just folded, sealed and addressed on the back... However ... the system failed to meet the demand of the public for an efficient and cheap service (1999:14).

In 1839 the British Treasury implemented a plan for an affordable postal service to meet this demand. This plan was proposed by Sir Rowland Hill, a British school master. Seeking inspiration, the Treasury announced a competition for designs⁴ and suggestions of how the penny postage may look. Although none of the entries were selected, the first postage stamp - the Penny Black - came into use on 6 May 1840 (Mackay 2011:11).

³ Former Secretary General of the Philatelic Congress of India.

⁴ A competition was organised to suggest "the manner in which the stamp may best be brought into use". When making suggestions the following considerations had to be kept in mind:

1. The stamp should be convenient to handle.
2. It should be safe against forgery.
3. It should be easy to examine and check at the post office.
4. The expense of production and circulation of stamps should be given.

More than 2,600 entries or 'essays' as they are called were submitted and four prizes of £100 each were awarded but none of them was used for the stamp (Chatterjea 1999:16).

South Africa followed other countries⁵ and introduced postage stamps in 1853 – the Cape Triangular stamp:

The stimulus of foreign competition and the long campaign of imperial enthusiasts finally made this penny rate empire-wide (with a few exceptions) in 1898. However one views modern history, the connection between the spread of the 'postage stamp revolution' and English imperialism is clear (Reid 1984:227).

English overseas mail routes were extensive and postage stamps linked its empire together: “[d]irectly or indirectly, the rest of the world borrowed the postage stamp and the reforms that went with it from England” (Reid 1984:228).

The fact that between 1996-1999 I was living in London, the birthplace of postage stamps, is significant to me: I could write and receive letters as a result of the innovation of postage stamps. Although postal systems have been modernised and postage stamp illustrations have become more expressive, the basic process of writing a letter and putting it in an envelope with a postage stamp has not changed much since 1840. But the growing preference of electronic communication and courier services over postal communication in the last decade is changing the need for, and the roles of, postage stamps and letters.⁶

⁵ Other countries also issued postage stamps following the success of the Penny Black. Although Brazil is generally credited as the second country to issue postage stamps in 1843, the New York City Dispatch was using adhesive postage stamps a year earlier (Mackay 2011:12).

⁶ The lessening use of postage stamps in South Africa is clearly noticeable when Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) announced it made changes to their Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket early this year (2017). CPI measures price level changes of goods bought by households. The CPI basket contains goods that are frequently bought by households and inflation is calculated from this basket. It is updated every four years and items are added or removed that may or may not affect inflation. This year postage stamps were removed. Stats SA writes: “[a]nother victim of technological change is the removal of postage stamps from the basket” (www.statssa.gov.za).

2.2.2 The parallel links between postage stamps and letters

This research discusses the public and private parallel narratives of postage stamps and letters. Postage stamps and letters are sent and received as a unit; their stories always arrive together – in parallel. To send a letter, one needs to add some form of proof of postage paid.⁷ Conversely, if one wants to use a postage stamp, one needs something to post. Studying the similarities in their meaning making potentials, such as typography and illustrations, can highlight the parallel nature of their narratives.

Artworks on postage stamps are not randomly designed. They are commissioned by government and postal officials and need to follow specific criteria.⁸ Letters are planned less carefully. Although they need to follow certain grammatical rules (which may be broken), they are created rather than designed. A hand-written letter evolves during the process of writing: words are crossed out; side notes are added: sketches embellish the corners and frequently a post-script (P.S.) added. There is no legally required information on a personal letter, unlike a postage stamp: any type and size of paper can be used, provided it can fit inside an envelope.

Letters and stamps combine skill, spontaneity, planning and emotion. Whether planned or random, the content, paper, writing utensils, printing technique, letter form/typography, colour and imagery all affect - consciously and subconsciously - how postage stamps and letters are *read*. These elements also affect the narratives produced.

I investigate this conscious and subconscious reading of the parallel narratives of postage stamps and letters in the following chapters.

⁷ Although other forms of franking will be discussed briefly in the following chapters, they are not the focus of this research.

⁸ These elements are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

2.2.3 A case study: letters and postage stamps received between 1996 and 1999

This research uses as its case study a collection of letters and postage stamps which I received between the years 1996 and 1999. During this time my family and I lived in London, England.⁹ I was a high school teenager and, knowing I would return to South Africa to study, tried to keep in contact with my friends using the only means available to me at the time: letter-writing.¹⁰

It takes effort and commitment to maintain contact through letter-writing. There is no guarantee of an answer and absence does not necessarily make the heart grow fonder. I received more than half the total letters between September 1996 and December 1997. Thereafter, only a handful of friends still wrote (fig 1). This total dropped to four writers in the last year (1999). I am still in contact with these four writers and it is their letters I have permission to use in this research.

Total letters received	54
Total letter writers	13
Male	1
Female	12

Total word count	14,208
Unique words	1892

Letters received in 1996	9
Letters received in 1997	24
Letters received in 1998	9
Letters received in 1999	12

Total stamps received	75
Total commemorative	10
Total definitive	65
Unique commemorative	4
Unique definitive	19

1. Data gathered from personal collection of postage stamps and letters (1996-1999).

⁹ My father was a diplomat and every few years we moved between South Africa and abroad.

¹⁰ International phone calls were expensive and a rare luxury. I could not email nor fax because we had neither internet nor a fax machine. Letter writing remained the only means I had to connect with friends and family.

A more detailed unpacking of the data can be found in the Appendix. Even a brief look at the data above reveals that although I received a large number of letters and postage stamps, the variety of postage stamps was small. There are significant reasons for this which will be discussed later in this chapter. It suffices here to acknowledge that, although their primary role of providing proof of postage paid was fulfilled, their secondary role - as 'ambassadors' - was limited by this lack of variety.

Postage stamps and letters allow exchange of information. But there is more to letter-writing than merely information exchange. This research argues that hand written letters and postage stamps are both expressive forms of communication: an expressiveness that is lost with electronic communication methods. Vivian Gornick, American critic, journalist, essayist and memoirist, writes in her book *Approaching Eye Level*, "[t]he expressiveness lies in the writing and that, after all, is the task of the letter: to communicate expressively" (1996:141).

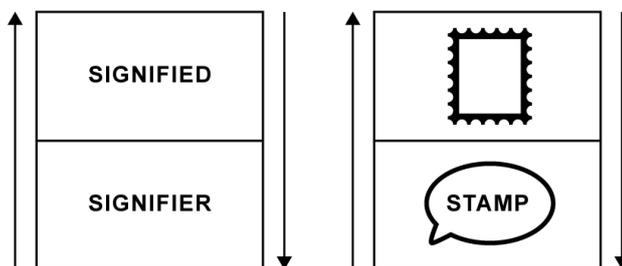
This research uses semiotic theory to study the elements (or signs) that create this expressive communication to better understand how *meaning* is created in postage stamps and letters.

2.3 SEMIOTIC THEORY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN POSTAGE STAMPS AND LETTERS

Peirce and Saussure formulated their sign models at similar times and are generally agreed to be the co-founders of semiotic theory; their models of what constitutes a sign are the two dominant contemporary models (Chandler 2007:14). Although this research focuses on Peirce, it is important to discuss Saussure's theories briefly, especially with regards to his influence on Barthes' theories on myth.

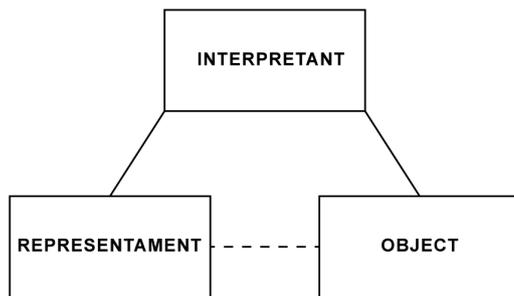
Saussure argued that language is made up of signs and can be split into two parts: a sound pattern and a concept. He called these parts the *signifier* and the *signified*, respectively (fig 2). The signifier is the phonetic word constructed from written or spoken graphemes. The word *stamp*, for example, is constructed from the letters (graphemes) *s-t-a-m-p*. Neither the graphemes, nor the word *stamp*, resemble an actual stamp. The words and letters only *represent* a stamp. Saussure uses the term *signified* for the mental image of a stamp that is formed when the word *stamp* is spoken or read. The *signified* is the concept formed of a word. It is our perception - or interpretation - of these mental images, combined with linguistic sounds, that create a two-part mental-linguistic unit which Saussure called *the sign*:

A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept (signified) and a sound pattern (signifier). The sound pattern is not actually a sound; for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions. The sound pattern may thus be distinguished from the other element associated with it in a linguistic sign. This other element is generally of a more abstract kind: the concept (Saussure 1983:66).



2. Signifier, signified and the concept of the sound pattern¹¹.

¹¹ Based on a drawing by Charles Ogden and Ivor Richards, who used the terms: 'symbol', 'thought or reference' and 'referent' (Ogden & Richards 1946:11)



3. Peirce's semiotic triangle¹².

Peirce believed that a third element is needed for semiosis: an *interpretant*. The interpretant allows the process of semiosis to occur. He argues¹³ that the process of semiosis may be explained by a triadic (three-part) relationship (structure) between a sign/representamen (firstness), an object (secondness) and an interpretant (thirdness) (fig 3). Peirce (1958:8.343) defines a sign (or representamen) as “anything which is so determined by something else, called its object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the latter is thereby immediately determined by the former”. A sign is therefore

¹² Based on Saussure's drawing of “the linguistic sign ... [as] a two-sided psychological entity” (Saussure 1959:66).

¹³ According to Peirce, these three categories are “necessary and sufficient to account for all of human experience” (Hébert 2011:192). They “represent collectively Peirce's way of indexing ‘what appears in the world’, [and are] his way of bringing order to the immeasurable variety of the thinkable. [...] Since by definition knowledge can only be acquired by semiosis, it follows that the categories represent the three types of elements that can be present to the mind” (Jappy 2013:66). Firstness is whole and complete, “with no boundaries or parts, and no cause or effect [...] that is independent of anything else. [It] belongs to the realm of possibility [and] emotional experience” (Hébert 2011:192). Firstness “comprises the qualities of phenomena, such as red, bitter, tedious, hard, heartrending, noble” (Peirce 1931:1.418). Secondness is “the mode of being that is in relation to something else” (Hébert 2011:193). For example, it has to do with qualities such as facts, experience and existence. Postage stamps have a quality of secondness because they can be found on envelopes to prove postage has been paid. Thirdness is a “category of elements of phenomena [that] consists of what we call laws when we contemplate them from the outside only, but which when we see both sides of the shield we call thoughts” (Hébert 2011:193). Peirce argues that thoughts are neither qualities nor facts. A “quality is eternal, independent of time and of any realization” (Peirce 1931:1.419), while thoughts can be created and can grow. Facts are specific, while thoughts are usually more general. Thirdness allows the process of semiosis to occur, relying on the relationship between Firstness and Secondness.

anything that *stands for*, or *refers to* something else. For example, smoke may signal a fire (Peirce 1932:2.371). The sign/representamen – and not necessarily a material form - is like Saussure’s definition of the sign in the sense that it stands in for, and makes present, a prior meaning (Bradley 2008:71). The object - also not necessarily a material form - is that to which the representamen refers. The interpretant is the meaning, or understanding, created, from the representamen/object relationship (Hébert 2011:1993). It is the relationship between a *sign* and its *object* that allows meaning to occur. Peirce split this relationship into three categories: icon, index and symbol.

Peirce’s triadic (three-part) sign differs from Saussure’s dyadic (two-part) sign. Peirce’s model suggests a sign is not the smallest unit of signification; rather, any *thing* or *phenomenon* may be defined as a sign (Hébert 2011:193): “A sign is either an icon, an index or a symbol” (Peirce 1932:2.304). Thus, a sign must always belong to one of these three subclasses, defined according to their specific modes of representation – for example, verbal or visual modes (Jappy 2013:79). Following Scott (1995), Reid (1984) and Child (2008) – who applied Peirce’s object trichotomy – the following three sections will briefly explore some of the similar applications of Peirce’s semiotic theory to postage stamps and letters.

2.3.1 Icon

The icon is the first of Peirce’s sign/representamen subclasses or categories. The reference between a sign and its object is iconic if the sign represents the object: the semiotic message is representational and “afford[s] information concerning its Object” in recognisable terms (Peirce 1932:2.147). According to Scott, postage stamps represent aspects of their country of origin (1995:8) and similarly letters represent aspects of

their writer. Icons closely resemble the objects they represent. An icon may look-, sound-, feel- or taste- *like* the thing to which it is referring. The relationship between the sign and the object is thus conceptual and, in a sense, metaphorical.

Pictorial images of postage stamps with cancellation marks over them have become postal system icons: postal metaphors. Postage stamps have iconic, rectangular shapes with perforations around the edges that are instantly recognisable in cultures that use postal systems (Child 2008:19). Although other shapes - such as triangles and circles - have been issued, the familiar, rectangular shape has become the metaphor for sending and receiving written communication. Our experience of metaphors may “lie in our physical interaction with our environment – moving, manipulating objects, and so on” (van Leeuwen 2005:33). Our past experiences with sending and receiving letters through the postal system have resulted in images of postage stamps, cancellation marks, letters and envelopes becoming iconic objects for communicating with written words:

Iconicity plays a decisive role in shaping everyday life in all cultures. Iconic signs suffuse humanity’s communication codes, verbal no less than non-verbal (Sebeok 2001:110).

Interestingly, although no postage stamp is required to send an email, the pictorial representation is also recognised as an icon for electronic communication. For example, Apple’s email icon (fig 4) is an image of a postage stamp with a cancellation mark over it (fig 5). Similarly, the envelope - with its iconic rectangular shape and triangular flap - has also become a metaphor for sending and receiving communication. Microsoft Outlook (fig 6) and Google email (Gmail) (fig 7) both use envelopes in their logos.



4. Apple email icon.



5. BL99071, cancellation mark over stamp (1999).

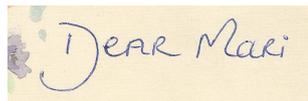
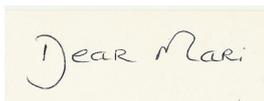


6. Microsoft Office email icon.



7. Google email icon.

Handwriting - a unique marker like a fingerprint - can also be an iconic object. As will be explained in Chapter 4, handwriting can act as an index to its owner. If handwriting acts indexically by referring to the person who made the signature, then handwriting may also act iconically by representing *aspects* of its owner. Fig 8 and fig 9 show two examples of 'Dear Mari' written by the same person – the large 'D' and mixture of large and small letters is characteristic of this writer's handwriting. Another example is Walt Disney's signature, which is used as a basis for the Walt Disney logo and is an icon recognisable worldwide (fig 10).



8. JN9903, "Dear Mari" (1999). 9. JN9912, "Dear Mari" (1999). 10. Walt Disney logo (Animation Studios).

2.3.2 Index

The index is the second of Peirce's sign/representamen subclasses, or categories. The reference between a sign and its object is indexical if the sign is "really affected by that Object" (Peirce 1932:2.247-248). Like Saussure's signifier and signified, the sign object relationship is directly connected:

An index is essentially an affair of here and now, its office being to bring the thought to a particular experience, or series of experiences connected by dynamical relations (Peirce 1933:4.58).

Both the postage stamp and letter play an indexical role, almost to the extent that they are really affected by it. Scott writes the stamp functions primarily as an indexical sign (pointing to the country of origin)" (1995:7). Child argues the semiotic message delivered is indexical and self-referential - a postage stamp must identify itself as a postage stamp (2008:14). and a letter must identify itself as a letter. Postage stamps have an iconic shape: they are usually small and rectangular with perforations. When an envelope arrives in the post with this object affixed in the top right-hand corner (its usual place), cancelled with a date/city mark, we can deduce we have received a postage stamp (Child 2008:14). Similarly, if an envelope arrives with a postage stamp, we can deduce we have received a letter. Envelopes that do not have postage stamps on them are franked by other methods, such as franking machines or postage meters. The mark left on an envelope by these methods are simultaneously proof of postage paid and evidence of (index to) the time and place a letter has been sent.

Sebeok notes that indexical elements are “sometimes also called expressive features” (Sebeok 2001:98). Amongst other interpretations, these may:

...broadly [refer] to membership-identifying characteristics of a group, such as regional, social, or occupational markers, [or] more narrowly, to such physiological, psychological, or social features of speech or writing that reveal personal characteristics as the voice quality or handwriting in a producing source (Sebeok 2001:98).

These expressive features, either broadly and narrowly defined, are found in postage stamps and letters. Hand-written letters carry information that verifies the writer’s existence. They are a glimpse into the writer’s life and, because they are hand-written, may also reveal something about the writer’s character.¹⁴ Postage stamps verify a country’s existence and allow the letter to be sent. They also “[function] as an index of the cost of postage ... and the fact that the price of postage has indeed been paid” (Scott 1995:8). Cancellation marks verify the legitimacy of a postage stamp as well as the letter’s place and date of origin. It is illegal to re-use a postage stamp: once it has served its purpose it must be cancelled, or defaced, to prevent a postage stamp’s re-use. When sending a new letter, postage must be paid again by buying a new postage stamp. Receiving mail is also an index of the existence of a postal system. According to Reid (1984:225), postage stamps: “almost supplement written records by providing evidence of postal service in issuing countries”.

Peirce argues that there is no such thing as a pure icon or pure index: by themselves “icons and indices assert nothing” (Peirce 1932:2.291). Since an icon can only be a fragment of a sign (Peirce 1932:2.230) and an index “must form a part of every assertion” (Peirce 1932:2.337), both icon and index are needed to convey information about the object: both are needed to make an assertion, or to form a proposition. Peirce uses the example of

¹⁴ Graphology - character analysis through handwriting - although not a focus of this research, is discussed briefly in Chapter 4.

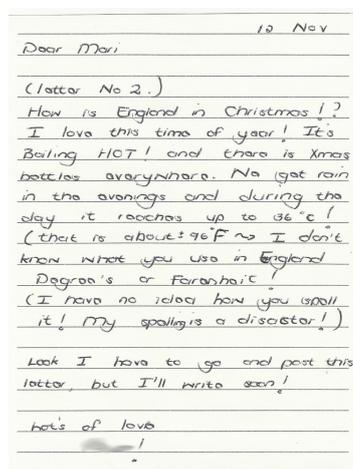
where a legend (index) under a portrait forces us to regard the portrait as an icon. One could argue that the indexical properties of a postage stamp - such as the currency, country name, cancellation mark and its position on an envelope - force us to regard the adhesive piece of paper on an envelope as an icon.



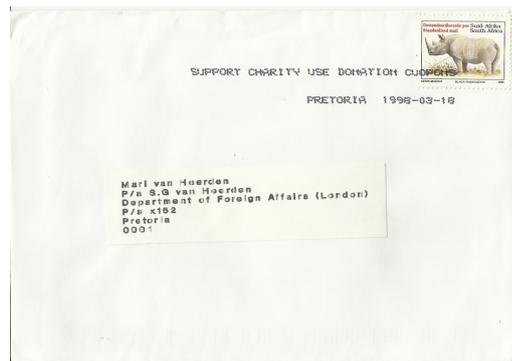
11. BL99071, cancellation mark (1999).



12. BL99071, cancellation mark (1999).



13. KC9711, letter no.2 (1997).



14. KC9803, envelope (1998).

Marcel Danesi (2004:30) further categorises Peirce's indices into three basic types: spatial indices; temporal indices; and person indices. Spatial indices: "refer to the spatial locations of objects, beings, and events in relation to the sign-user" (Danesi 2004:30). These include manual signs (pointing finger); demonstrative words (this/that); adverbs (here/there); and figures (arrows). Temporal Indices: "relate things to each other in terms of time" (Danesi 2004:30). These may be adverbs (before, after, now, or then); timeline graphs; and dates on calendars. Person Indices: "relate the participants taking part in a situation to each other" (Danesi 2004:30). These are personal pronouns (I, you, he or she); and indefinite pronouns (the one, the other).

Postage stamps and letters simultaneously incorporate all three of Danesi's indices. A postage stamp (material object) can be classified as a spatial index because it is *pointing* to its country of origin. At the same time, a postage stamp identifies its monetary value and, since it is a form of franking, it is also an index (proof) to postage paid. Similarly, a letter - as a material object - identifies its sender and is an index to (proof) of the sender's existence. As a temporal index postage stamps refer to a specific time and place of issue and, when postage stamps are placed in chronological order according to their date of issue, they may act as a timeline of cultural history. Letters also refer to a date and place, as does the cancellation mark over the postage stamp. This cancellation mark acts simultaneously as a spatial and temporal index: it is evidence (points to) that a postage stamp has been legally used and evidence of when and where a letter was sent. Postage stamps are not person indices: they are objects. Although letters are also objects, the handwritten content may be interpreted as a person index: it uniquely identifies the writer and is usually written from a first-person perspective (I, me, my, mine).

2.3.3 Symbol

The symbol is the third of Peirce's sign/representamen subclasses or categories. A sign is a symbol when it refers to its object "by virtue of a law" (Peirce 1932:2.249). For example, passwords, tickets, banknotes, coins, postage stamps and words are all symbols.

A symbolic mode is where there is no direct link between the sign and the object. Their relationship is arbitrary, conventional and must be learnt:

A Symbol incorporates a habit, and is indispensable to the application of any intellectual habit, at least. Moreover, Symbols afford the means of thinking about thoughts in ways in which we could not otherwise think of them (Peirce 1933:4.531).

Postage stamps are bearers of symbols. Scott writes as part of a system of communication, they represent their country of origin and "offer a symbolic representation of the country in traditionally recognisable terms" (1995:8). They incorporate symbolic features, such as linguistic or numerical elements, paper, colour, typography, layout and any representational illustrations or graphics. Letters represent their writers. Their messages are carried by similar graphical features of design, such as paper, colour, layout and especially typography and handwriting. Chapter 4 explores these features in greater detail.

A symbol is constructed from the interpretation of the relationship between the iconic and indexical modes of an object. Since indexical and iconic signs need to be learnt, we may say that symbols are constructed from socially and culturally learnt codes or conventions. For example, because we have learnt that a postage stamp is an object for proof of postage paid and points to its country of origin, we interpret the postage stamp as an index to its country of origin and an index to a legal pre-payment document. Moreover, because the shape of a postage stamp is well recognised, we have learnt to interpret it as an iconic object. The pictorial

elements on a postage stamp may also be well-known - such portraits of former presidents or famous landmarks - because we have learnt about them. The pictorial elements may thus also be iconic. The symbolic interpretation of the postage stamp object could be that this legal document, with its iconic shape and pictorial imagery, is like an official document with officially approved imagery and official ideals.

2.3.4 The unlimited process of semiosis and Barthes' theory on Myth

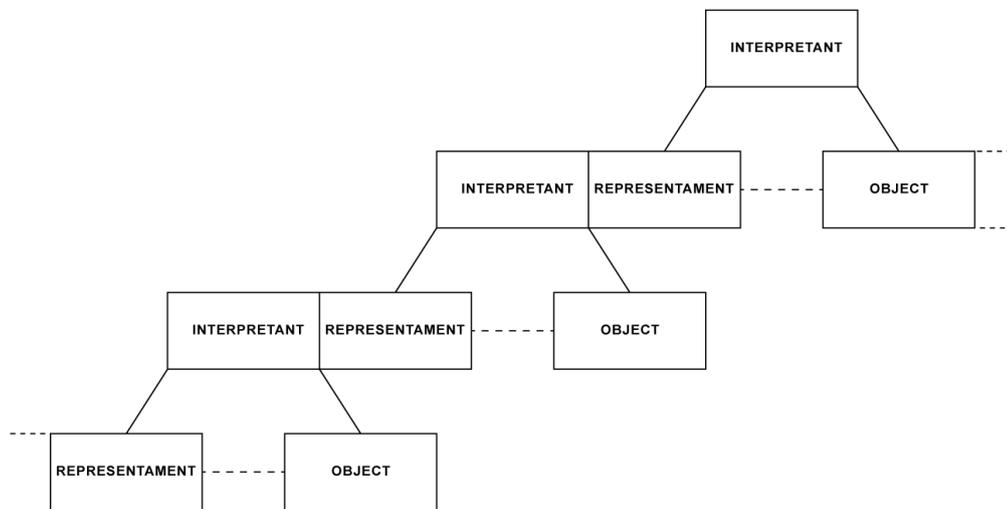
Since the interpretations of *meaning* in postage stamps and letters are a result of many inter-related parts, Peirce's architectonic approach is useful to explore each part. Tony Jappy,¹⁵ in *Introduction to Peircean Visual Semiotics* (2013), suggests that Peirce's approach to semiotics is influenced by the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant's "'architectonic' theory of the sciences: the idea that the various branches of philosophy had to be organized and interrelated in a rational manner" (Jappy 2013:64). In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines 'architectonic' as:

the art of constructing a system. Without systematic unity, our knowledge cannot become a science; it will be an aggregate, not a system ... Reason cannot permit our knowledge to remain in an unconnected and rhapsodistic state, but requires that the sum of our cognitions should constitute a system" (Kant 2007:[sp]).

Kant (2007:[sp]) defines a 'system' as "the unity of various cognitions under one idea." It is the result of various interdependent or related parts. Saussure also believed that *meaning* is made by finding the structural connections between semiotic units as part of a semiotic sign-system (Chandler 2007:2) rather than by studying these units in isolation.

¹⁵ Tony Jappy is an English language and linguistics Professor at the University of Perpignan, France.

Peirce argues that these structural connections can carry on infinitely. When a process of semiosis occurs and a sign is created from this process, this sign is “the interpretant of the first sign” (Peirce 1932:2.228). When interpreted, the representamen can trigger an interpretant, which then becomes a representamen by triggering another interpretant which refers to the same object as the first representamen - thereby allowing the first one to refer to the object - and so on (fig 15). Like a chain of thought, interpretations of signs can lead to new interpretations, which in turn can lead to even newer interpretations.

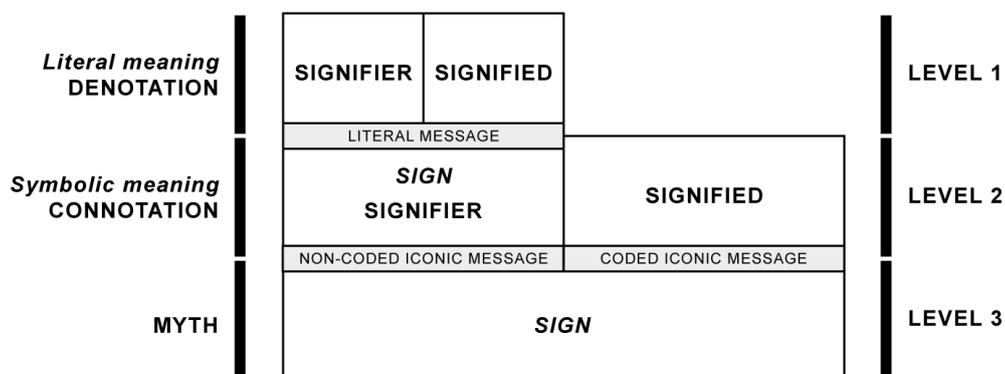


15. Peirce's infinite semiotic triangle

Roland Barthes' theory on *myth* followed a similar structure to Peirce's infinite sign, where interpretations can lead to newer interpretations. He criticised Saussure's model of the sign because it focused on denotation at the expense of connotation. Barthes and other theorists thus developed Saussure's model to include the concept of connotation when exploring meaning (Chandler 2007:138). Unlike Saussure, who only focused on linguistics, Barthes believed the concept of the signifier and signified could also be used in deconstructing meaning in images, especially advertising images.

According to Barthes, advertising messages rely on the creation of myth: they manipulate signs to create many layers of meaning and interpretations. Since postage stamps are a form of advertising, Barthes' theories on deconstructing images are useful to explore meaning. Letters can also be viewed as personal advertising.

Barthes extended Saussure's theories on denotation and connotation to explain how signs are manipulated and myth is created. The first level of meaning - or signification - is denotation; it comprises a signifier and a signified (fig 16). This is the linguistic, or literal, reading of an object. For example, the word *stamp* (signifier) signifies a mental picture of a stamp (signified). This is the literal reading of the word *stamp*. The second level of meaning is connotation: this is the iconic reading of an object. The iconic message can be coded or non-coded. Barthes (1977:36) categorised images into three messages: "a linguistic message, a coded iconic message, and a non-coded iconic message". On this second level, the non-coded message acts as a signifier and the coded iconic message acts as a signified. The sign of the first level has now become the signifier on the second level. The signification of the first level (the literal/denoted meaning) signifies a new symbolic/connotated meaning - a new sign. This process can create a chain of significations, like Peirce's unlimited process of semiosis in which the interpretant of a previous sign becomes the representamen of the next sign.



16. Barthes' model of the sign.

When this process of semiosis happens for a third time, Barthes calls the resulting sign a *myth*. Myth: “shares with other narratives a common structure which is open to analysis ... and it is impossible to combine (to produce) a narrative without reference to an implicit system of units and rules” (Barthes 1977:80-81). The creation of myth in narratives is explored in more detail in the following chapter.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a brief historical contextualisation of postage stamps and letters; a personal contextualisation substantiating why I have chosen these postage stamps and letters as a case study; and a discussion of semiotic theory in general, with a focus on Peirce’s object trichotomy. Semiotic theory thus provides a systematic approach by which to unpack the layers of meaning embedded in postage stamps and letters and personal contextualisation provides a framework.

Scott, Child and Reid have provided a starting point to apply semiotic theory to the numerous semiotic messages embedded in postage stamps. This chapter has extended their theories to include letters, thereby opening an avenue to explore further the similarities in their layers of meaning.

These similarities were briefly discussed and applied in this chapter. When objects act conceptually - or metaphorically - and become a reference for something, they act iconically: postage stamps thus represent *aspects* of their country of origin and a letter represents *aspects* of its writer. But when objects act as *pointers* to something, their relationship is directly connected and they act indexically. For example, when a postage stamp points to its country of origin or a letter’s handwriting points to its writer. When objects *represent* something, they act symbolically. For example,

postage stamps represent their country of origin through the pictorial images on them, or the words in a letter represent its writer.

Finally, the similarities between Peirce's theory of the infinite sign and Barthes' theory on myth in the creation of meaning in narrative were discussed. Chapter 3 uses semiotics as an effective method to unpack the parallel narratives in postage stamps and letters and the impact which these narratives have.

CHAPTER 3

Narrative and its significance in postage stamps and letters

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Narrative theory¹ is concerned with the semiotic reading of *texts: stories* and how the *telling* of stories affect our perception. While narratology focuses on stories and their meanings, semiotics attempts to make sense of texts and how meaning is created. Chapter 2 discussed semiotic theory; this chapter applies it by exploring how meaning is created in postage stamps and letters and how our reading of signs affect our interpretations of the narratives created in postage stamps and letters.

Narrative is always created within a context and can only be understood if that context is known. According to Culler (2002:15-16), narrative:

[I]nvolves identifying the constituent units in a semiotic system, the structural connections between them and the relation of the parts to the whole. This is not an empty exercise since relations are important for what they can explain: meaningful contrasts and permitted or forbidden combinations.

This chapter investigates these contrasts and combinations to understand their context and relation to the whole: their grand narratives. It explores how postage stamps and letters can reflect different narrative modes - public and private - and how they are both single and collective narratives. Personal letters are confidential. They are usually written by an individual to an individual, classified as single narrative and studied individually. But when letters from a group of individuals - received over a time-period - are

¹ Algirdas J. Greimas (1917-1992) is generally credited with developing the field of narratology which is a branch of semiotics. Greimas defined narratology as “the study of how human beings in different cultures invent similar kinds of narratives (myths, tales, etc.) with virtually the same stock of characters, motifs, themes, and plots” (Danesi 2004:10).

studied collectively, they may reveal a broader narrative. Similarly, postage stamps also reveal a broader, meta narrative when studied as a collective group, rather than as individual editions.

Narratives are limited by the words on paper and the images on postage stamps. We can only interpret what the narrator allows us to see. Similarly, we are only able to interpret the narratives on the postage stamps and letters that we receive. We cannot read what we do not have. Thus all narratives – grand or individual - are fragmented.

3.2 DIFFERENT NARRATIVES IN POSTAGE STAMPS AND LETTERS

An obvious difference between the narratives of postage stamps and letters is that the narratives of postage stamps are not as spontaneous as those of letters. Each postage stamp edition is meticulously planned and researched to promote its country of origin. In *Rhetoric of the Image*, Barthes (1977:33) writes about the significance of the image in advertising:

In advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed *a priori* by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible. If the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are full, formed with a view to the optimum reading.

It seems that Barthes' ideas could be applied to postage stamps since postage stamps are miniature, national, advertisements. The postage stamp's image is 'undoubtedly intentional' since the image is carefully planned by government and postal committees and officials as a means of propaganda. Moreover, the image:

[M]ust be susceptible to massive use and extensive exposure, the elaboration of a symbolic form that is official, immediately recognisable and also attractive and responsive to various modifications and permutations ... [it must] express both the longevity and legitimacy of a particular culture or tradition and, at the same time, assert its inherent flexibility and modernity in relation to a changing world (Scott 1995: 9).

The primary function of a letter – unlike postage stamps - is to tell a story. The letters I sent and received were personal narratives, filled with daily titbits, sketches and original typography. Each letter was an extension of me as the writer. Vivian Gornick, American critic, journalist, essayist, and memoirist, writes in *Approaching Eye Level*, that one writer's letter was:

[D]iscursive, and narrative in nature. He had a subject (that is, a reason for writing) but he didn't hesitate to ramble, digress, describe everything in sight, give in restlessly to the easy pull of mood change (in the letters he sighs, he yearns, he accuses). As he writes he is placing himself in the world, alone and with the rapture of the poet ... [his] letter resembles the social novel of a hundred years ago (Gornick 1996:138).

Henkin writes:

[t]he popular mid-century novel *Reveries of a Bachelor*² dubbed letters as 'the only true heart-talkers ... a true soul-print,' unsullied by the distortions of other forms of social interaction. As in a mirror one shows his face to himself, so in a letter one shows his heart to his friend (Henkin 2006:99-100).

The letters between Ingrid Jonker and AP Brink, published together in *Vlam in die sneeu, die liefdesbriewe van André P Brink en Ingrid Jonker*,³ are an example of how letters are 'true heart-talkers ... a true soul-print'

² *Reveries of a Bachelor*, published 1850, is a novel by Donald Grant Mitchell theorizing about life, memory and dreaming.

³ André P Brink and Ingrid Jonker, two renowned South African writers, had a tragic love affair in the 1960s that lasted almost two years. *Vlam in die sneeu, die liefdesbriewe van André P Brink en Ingrid Jonker*, published posthumously by Penguin Random House in 2016 and edited by Francis Galloway, is a compilation of their love letters.

(Henkin 2006:99-100). Their letters were not written for publication, but frank outpourings of the heart and distinctly private.

The privacy which a sealed envelope offers enables private letters to be confidential disclosures, unguarded and intimate:

Letters of friendship, love, and affection are sacred things, and should be so imbued with the spirit of the writer as to render them worthy of the devoted attention they call for (Henkin 2006:100).

In contrast with letters, the public nature of postage stamps ensure that it is a form of art that is seen on a frequent basis: they are visible to everyone who sees or handles a letter. Few art objects are more accessible (Frank 1997:182). Like letters, postage stamps provide portals into their narratives: doorways allowing the onlooker to step through and gain access to information:

Sets of stamps offer the opportunity of creating a musée imaginaire of pictures, an anthology of poetic images. [...] it is knowledge encapsulated in an idealised, almost imaginary form (Scott 1995:13-14).

Even the format of postage stamps and letters is similar to a window or door (fig 17). They are usually rectangular, and display pictures and type within a frame revealing to viewers a scene from their own cultural background and values.



17. Comparative example of a postage stamp, letter and picture frame.

3.2.1 Types of postage stamps and letters and their narratives

There are two main types of postage stamps - definitive and commemorative ⁴ and each has a different narrative.

Definitive postage stamps – also called everyday postage - are a series of generic postage stamps that only change every seven years. Their designs are symbolically significant but their narratives tend to be ‘safe’: usually flora, or fauna or architecture. Child writes their iconic messages are general and not time-sensitive (2008:16). The South African definitive postage stamp series I received while in England were from the endangered, South African animal series (fig 18).



18. SAPO, *Sixth Definitive Edition* (1993).

The pictorial images do not represent a specific moment in the country’s history nor do they challenge the viewer by making bold cultural or political statements.

⁴ Definitive postage stamps are usually slightly smaller and are used over several years before the design is changed. These stamps are also called ‘everyday postage stamps’ because their primary function is to indicate their country of issue and the postage paid (Scott 1995:6). They are usually issued at the post office counter or are available in postage stamp booklets.

In contrast, commemorative postage stamps are a representation of current events or culture. Their narratives may be less 'safe' and tend to be:

[An] extension of the [definitives] in that they [propose] a representative image of the country of issue in a way that is more visible and evocative than mere provision of the country's name (Scott 1995:6).

The *Freedom Day* example (fig 19) shows the contrast between definitive narratives and commemorative narratives.



19. SAPO, *Freedom Day* (1997).

Commemorative stamps have become icons that reflect and promote national identity and “express both the longevity and legitimacy of a particular culture or tradition” (Scott 1995:9).

Broadly speaking, there are two types of letters: open letters and private letters. The contents of private letters are confidential; the contents of open letters are public. An open letter can take many forms. It could be a letter written in a newspaper or online column, or one written to an organization. Or it could be a letter that was originally intended for private correspondence, but subsequently shared with the public in a newspaper, online or in a book.

3.2.2 Private and public narratives

Letters are “confidential disclosures made in [an] insulated context” (Henkin 2006:101). The private letter:

... written in absorbed solitude, is an act of faith; it assumes the presence of humanity; world and self are generated from within; loneliness is courted not feared. To write a letter is to be alone with my thoughts in the conjured presence of another person. I keep myself imaginative company. I occupy the empty room. I alone infuse the silence (Gornick 1994).

Legal permission is needed from the writer or, if deceased, from the writer’s family to publicly publish the contents of a private letter. I needed to receive permission from the letter writers in order to use my collection of letters for this research.

While living in London I also wrote a type of open letter. Since I did not always have enough time to write a personal letter to every friend I had in South Africa, I wrote a group letter, which I called “London Newsletter”.⁵

Garfield argues that letters “ironically [found their] greatest ally in moveable type” (2013: [sp]). Letters could now be collected, printed, bound and archived, thereby ensuring a greater chance of survival. Garfield writes that when the letters of Desiderius Erasmus, a Dutch humanist, were printed, Erasmus claimed “that his letters were not history but literature and now both arts would have their day, and it would be a lasting one” (2013: [sp]).

⁵ An online blog is also an example of an open, published, letter. If I were living in London now, I would perhaps have created a blog or sent a group email to a ‘friends’ mailing list. Interestingly, the terms used to make content available on the internet is ‘publish’ or ‘post’. In today’s electronic world, if I had posted or published my correspondence online, I would have lost the *silence* that comes with the writing and reading letters.

Similarly, “the desperate story of Abelard and Heloise⁶ still smoulders more than 800 years after its enactment is due entirely to the existence of letters and the interpretation one places upon them” (Garfield 2013: [sp]).

A more recent example South African example of private correspondence being made public is the book *Vlam in die sneeu* which contains the private correspondences between Ingrid Jonker and Andre P Brink. These letters have become a combination of history and literature: their private words archived in public libraries.

Postage stamps are perhaps also a form of open letters. Although the word *letter* is used to describe a written document, a postage stamp is also a document, just a pictorial one. Their narratives are deliberately public and open. Postage stamps are “... one form of art that is seen on a frequent basis because they are visible to anyone who sees or handles a posted envelope” (Frank 1997:182). Although the pictorial images and what they represent are a secondary function of postage stamps, this function has become an increasingly important consideration in stamp design. A single-edition commemorative postage stamp tells the story of an important event, place or person, for example, in its country’s history:

[S]tamps are an acknowledged medium for the national propaganda of any country and should, wherever possible, present its broad spectrum of cultures, concerns and achievements in a positive light (Setempe Nov/Dec 1996:9).

Stamps thus represent the country itself. They: “resemble government buildings, monuments, coins, paper money, flags, national anthems, nationalised newspapers, [or] ambassadors as conveyors of official viewpoints” (Reid 1984:224).

⁶ A true love story from the 12th century between the philosopher Abelard and his student Heloise. For many years, their only connection was through letters.

3.2.3 Context: Singular and collective narrative

Postage stamps and letters do not only function alone as a single narrative; they can also function as a sequence of pictorial images. While individual stamps may allow us insight into a particular historical event, when taken together, stamps can form a linear timeline, revealing gradual changes in a country's history. For example, if one was to take all the postage stamps ever issued in South Africa and display them together, one would get an interesting overview of the significant milestones, events and people in South African history. Thus, the single narratives, when viewed together, may form a grand (or meta) narrative.

The scenes depicted in postal stamps are symbols related to a country. Because symbols are interpreted within a cultural context, different cultures may attach different meanings to an object:

...when we speak of meaning, we speak of 'seeing' within the world of human symbols. It is not a free floating intangible, but a phenomenon that stands in relation to the conventions of culture (Wagner 1986:13).



20. Mexican Postal Service, *Memín Pinguín*, (1995).

This relationship between context and culture can have unintended consequences. For example, in 2005 the Mexican Postal Service (SEPOMEX) released a set of five postage stamps depicting Memín Pinguín (fig 20), a comic book character, who is “a small and mischievous

black boy with pronounced Sambo-like features” (Child 2008:1). Although these postage stamps were issued as part of a series depicting the History of Mexican Comics, in the United States they were viewed as offensive and a case of racial stereotyping.⁷

This stamp series can be read as a single narrative. The symbolism of Memín Pinguín is not contextualised within the greater context of Mexican culture. This is a risk with postage stamp designs since postal items sent internationally will always be judged from a different cultural perspective and thus subject to criticism.

Countries generally issue definitive postage stamps because the meanings of signs and significance of themes can change over time⁸ and in different contexts. There are many South African postage stamps that, if issued today, would elicit the same response as the Memín Pinguín set. These postage stamps were issued at a different time in history when pictorial images, considered controversial today, were acceptable. For example, the layers of meaning associated with the postage stamps in

⁷ Scott McClellan, the White House press secretary, commented:

[R]acial stereotypes are offensive no matter what their origin. The Mexican government needs to take this into account. Images like these have no place in today’s world. (www.nbcnews.com)

Carlos Caballero, assistant marketing director for the Mexican Postal Service, responded: “This is a traditional character that reflects part of Mexico’s culture ... His mischievous nature is part of that character” (www.nbcnews.com). The Mexican president, Vicente Fox, was also baffled that the Americans would find this beloved Mexican childhood character offensive (Child 2008:1). Elisa Velazquez, an anthropologist studying Mexican black communities, seems to agree with McClellan:

[Issuing the stamps] at this point in time [was] probably pretty insensitive ... This character is a classic, but it’s from another era ... It’s a stereotype, and you don’t want to encourage ignorance or prejudices (www.nbcnews.com).

⁸ My argument about signs and symbols in their time context refers to Saussure’s use of the words *synchronic* and *diachronic* to interpret signs. *Synchronic* refers to the study of signs at a specific point in time. *Diachronic* refers to how signs and meaning change over time.

fig 21 are very different today compared to when the postage stamps were issued in 1960 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Union of South Africa. The old South African flag and national anthem, combined with images of wagon wheels and the emblems of the old South African provinces are images of 1960 propaganda. They were created to instil pride, but they did not reflect the values of all South Africans. In post-apartheid South Africa, these images would provoke criticism as reminders of an unjust regime.



21. SAPO, 50th anniversary of the founding of the Union Campaign⁹ (1960).

Sometimes meanings do not change much over time. In my opinion, the significance of the life-saving heart transplant procedure, performed by Dr Christian Barnard (fig 22), will always be an awe-inspiring and world-changing event.



22. SAPO, 1st heart transplant operation (by Dr Christiaan Barnard) and opening of the 47th South African Medical Congress, Pretoria Campaign¹⁰ (1969).

⁹ Part of the series: *Flag and Notes from National Anthem, Arms of the Union and of four provinces (not shown), Pushing wheel uphill, Official Union festival emblem (not shown).*

¹⁰ Part of the series: *Hands Holding Heart, Groote Schuur Hospital and Dr Barnard.*

A collective narrative is when a story is told from various viewpoints. In novels, different characters tell their own story, each story intertwining and influencing one another. The personal letters I received in London between 1996 and 1999 are like a novel of collected stories in which each writer is a character. Although each letter is written by a single person, the combination of all the letters can be seen as a collective narrative. The letters were from many friends and I received multiple versions of the same event or activity from different writers. This gave me a more global perspective on life back 'home'. Placing all the letters in chronological order by date sent allows a small window into how life back home in South Africa changed while I was in London.¹¹



23. Siemon Allen, *Stamp Collection* (2001). 24. Siemon Allen, *Stamp Collection* (2001).

Similarly, multiple postage stamps viewed together can form a collective narrative. For example, if one were to place all the postage stamps ever issued by a country in chronological order, one could observe a timeline of the issuing country's history. Siemon Allen, a South African artist who creates artwork from collections of historical artefacts - including postage stamps (fig 23 and fig 24) - describes this timeline as: "a history told in a succession of scenes, in a voice that is constantly relocating with subtle and dramatic shifts in political power" (www.siemonallen.org). Allen's

¹¹ For example, a great topic of interest was how the South African schools changed their year divisions from "Standards" to "Grades". While remembering to say "Grade 11" instead of "Standard 9" was a small irritation for some of the letter writers, the new division system alludes to many changes to the South African Educational system that was brought into effect after the demise of the apartheid regime in the democratic election of 1994. These changes can be viewed in the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996.

exhibition entitled *Stamp Collection - Imaging South Africa, 2011*¹² uses over 50,000 postage stamps:

[The exhibition] explores the political history and shifting identity of South Africa through the collection, cataloguing, research and display of postal stamps released in the country from the formation of the Union in 1910 to the present ... [telling] the story of the changing face of South Africa, revealing how the country, over time, has chosen to represent itself both within its borders and internationally (www.siemonallen.org).

3.2.4 Fragmentation of narratives in letters and postage stamps

The postage stamp is:

[A] highly mobile record of visual propaganda, reflecting how a country at a given period sees itself and seeks to present itself. It disseminates a narrative, on both local and global levels, that speaks as much about what is shown as what is not (Allen quoted in www.artthrob.co.za).

Allen alludes to the fact that postage stamps are a fragmented narrative. In *The Frightened Land* Jennifer Benningfield, a South African architect living in London, suggests that a nation's history is built on remembered as well as erased memories and that this remembering and forgetting is a crucial factor in the creation of a national identity (Benningfield 2016:17). For Allen, the official message of each stamp carries a sub-text. A critical look at the collection thus reveals the persistent contradictions that exist between the images presented on the stamps and the social realities of the period in which they were released (www.siemonallen.org).

The fragmented and sometimes contradictory nature of postage stamp images are a result of the selection process of their pictorial images. Child

¹² Siemon Allen presents his work in an archival manner. In 2011, he held an exhibition in Washington DC at the Corcoran Museum of Art entitled *Stamp Collection - Imaging South Africa, 2011*. He currently lives in the United States.

emphasises the “[t]he iconographic semiotic message is the one that is more subtle and complex ... It is in the selection of the icon that a government frequently makes a conscious choice of what message is to be delivered, and how” (2008:16). Postage stamp edition suggestions are made by a collective group consisting of government officials, post office officials and the general public.¹³ The approval of these suggestions lies with the board of directors of the South African Post Office and government officials, depending on which postage stamps represent their country of issue in the best possible manner at that given moment in time and “[relate] directly to South Africa - [such as] events or achievements of outstanding national and international interest or significance” (‘How are South Africa’s commemorative stamps distributed’ 2014:10).¹⁴ These contributors, as well as social opinions, change over time and therefore so do the narratives of stamp editions. For Allen, “it is a kind of public

¹³ South African postage stamp editions are managed by the Stamp Advisory Committee, made up of specialists in philately and representatives from Department of Communications and a representative from the Post Office Board. The Committee meets twice a year and reports to the Post Office Board of Directors and the Minister of Telecommunications & Postal Services on the annual South African postage stamp issuing program and related issues (SA Post Office Annual Report 2015:30). The Chairman of the committee is on the board of directors of the South African Post Office (SA Post Office Annual Report 2014:30).

¹⁴ Proposals from various sources, including the public, are considered and submitted, two years in advance, for approval to the Product Development section of the SAPO. “The Board considers submissions and recommendations [...] and makes independent decisions based on its fiduciary responsibilities and the strategic direction of the company” (SA Post Office Annual Report 2015:23). Proposals should meet the following criteria:

- Topics must be related directly to South Africa
- Events or achievements of outstanding national and international interest or significance, such as:
 - culture and achievements of the South African people
 - contribution to international affairs
 - contribution of South Africans to the scientific, cultural and economic development of a broader world society
 - varied aspects of local life and values
 - flora and fauna of the country
 - economic activities of its people, and
 - any other topic which reflects positively upon our values, culture, aspirations and accomplishments.

The above list is published in the January/April 2016 Setempe edition (2016:10)

relations gesture - a highly self-conscious attempt to express through a single image some aspect of national identity" (www.simonallen.org).

One could argue that postage stamps are thus "a valuable instrument of discreet national publicity" (Comfort & Buchanan 1947:24) and can be viewed as official documents with messages conveying values deliberately produced by the government. Reid (1984:224) likens stamps to "government buildings, monuments, coins, paper money, flags, national anthems, nationalized newspapers, and ambassadors" and suggests that these are all conveyors of official attitudes. The social significance of the postage stamp is that it is an emblem of propaganda with which everybody comes into contact.

Like postage stamps, the interpretation of letters can change over time as well, or meaning can be lost. For example, in the correspondence between Jonker and Brink, much of what they write is left open to interpretation since we, the readers, were not present when they wrote the letters. We may miss, or misinterpret, subtle nuances, inside-jokes or era-specific comments. We interpret the letters with our modern ideas and knowledge of history. Similarly, the letters that I wrote and received between 1996 and 1999 refer to certain era. They were communication between high-school children, written and interpreted from the viewpoint of teenagers. Reading them today, twenty years later, many of the letters seem silly or superficial. I cannot read the letters now in the same way I did when I was a teenager; I cannot erase the knowledge I have gained since then. The interpretation of signs and their meaning cannot help but change over time since people and society are constantly evolving.

Barthes viewed these changing interpretations - the "dominant ideologies of our time" (Chandler 2007:144) - as *myth*. As discussed in Chapter 2, myth is a result of interpretations (connotations) that have led to newer

interpretations (myth). Barthes, however, “did not see the myths of contemporary culture as simply a patterned agglomeration of connotations but as ideological narratives [and] saw mythical form as a metalanguage”¹⁵ (Chandler 2007:144).



25. SAPO, *Masakhane Campaign*, (1995). Offset lithography on perforated postage stamp paper, 14.25 x 14in.

Myth as ideological narrative is visible in many postage stamp editions. For example, the *Masakhane Campaign* (fig 25), depicts, on a denotative level, a group of people building a wall. On a connotative level, the group of people are multi-racial and are building a wall that looks like the South African flag in the shape of South Africa. And, on closer inspection, we see that the word ‘Masakhane’ means ‘building together’ and that the date on the postage stamp is 1995. The ideological message (cultural myth) of the postage stamp thus seems to portray a multi-cultural, post-apartheid South Africa working together to build a unified people and country.

Myths need not only be created socially; they can also be personal. Each myth is a repository of many stories, past and present. Sometimes we create our own versions of events, our own myths, and re-tell these stories in our letters. Myths may become constricting and boring unless they are examined and revised from time to time:

¹⁵ *Metalanguage* is the term used for language that describes language. For example, the word *metaphor* is a form of metalanguage.

We need to reinvent ourselves continually, weaving new themes into our life narratives, remembering our past, revising our future, reauthorizing the myth by which we live (Keen 1988:45).

3.2.5 Fragmentation in the narrative of postage stamps on letters received between 1996 and 1999.

During the years 1996-1999 I received 75 postage stamps on 54 letters from South Africa. Of the 22 different designs, only four were from a commemorative series. As can be seen from fig 26, the total amount of commemorative postage stamps received was small in comparison to the definitive series.¹⁶ Initially I was disappointed when I realised that I had only received a small variety of postage stamps. According to the Universal Postal Union (UPU), postage stamps should “serve as ambassadors for countries and their postage stamp issuing authorities, both nationally and internationally” (UPU 2013:21). The small sample I received did not reflect the grand narratives of South Africa at all. Where were all those wonderful postage stamps I had seen in catalogues? Who sees those postage stamps if they are not posted?

There are various reasons for this small selection. First, most commemorative postage stamps are issued mainly for philately:

[I]t is probably true to state that the commemorative stamp programme of previous years was run almost entirely for the benefit of philately. Regrettably, this is no longer considered to be sound business practice (Setempe Nov/Dec 1996:6).

Second, even though all Post Offices receive the definitive series, not all receive every commemorative issue nor in equal amounts (Olmesdahl 1997:10). Third, unless a specific postage stamp is requested at the post office, one from the definitive series is usually given. Finally, in 1996 the

¹⁶ A more detailed table can be found in the Appendix.

SAPO introduced postage stamp booklets with the definitive series. The public often bought these booklets, thereby eliminating the need for frequent trips to the Post Office. To encourage the public to use commemorative postage stamps for everyday use, the SAPO added standard postage rates to commemorative postage stamps in 1996. Previously, the standard postage rate was only available on definitive postage stamps. Even though other systems were also put in place in 1996 “after extensive consultation with specialist societies, dealers, members Federation and key Post Office officials” (‘Some trends in international philately’ 1996:6), the variety of stamps I received remained small (fig 26).

COMMEMORATIVE	
Christmas 1996	6
Masakhane	2
Merchant Marine	1
Creation of South African Post Office	1
Total commemorative	10
DEFINITIVE	
Sixth definitive series (1993)	53
Sixth definitive series redrawn (1998)	12
Total definitive	65
TOTAL POSTAGE STAMPS RECEIVED FROM SOUTH AFRICA	75

26. Data from my personal collection of postage stamps.

3.3 CONCLUSION

Narrative is concerned with the semiotic reading of texts. While Chapter 2 explored Peirce's theories directly, this chapter applied narrative theory to postage stamps and letters in general. Although this chapter did not discuss Peirce's theories directly, many of the theorists discussed developed their ideas from those of Peirce and Saussure. Signs are not studied in isolation: this chapter has thus studied the 'bigger picture', or meta narrative, created by the connections between semiotic units.

The meta narrative is not easily defined, however. This term can refer to the signs created by a single letter or postage stamp; a group of letters or postage stamps; or to the roles played by postage stamps and letters in a social, cultural and political context.

This chapter has shown that on different levels both the letter and the postage stamp reflect identity and a representation of the narrator:

[e]veryone writes a letter in the virtual image of their own soul. In every other form of speech, it is possible to see the writer's character, but none so clearly as in the letter (Garfield 2013: [sp]).

Similarly, postage stamps also reflect a nation's character by representing "an aspect of the reality of a country or a culture, [while at the same time representing a country] as a national unit" (Scott 1995:8). Moreover:

[l]etters have the power to grant us a larger life. They reveal motivation and deepen understanding. They are evidential. They change lives and they rewire history (Garfield 2013: [sp]).

Postage stamps also have the power to reveal motivation and deepen understanding. Even if they do not "rewire history" as Garfield suggests, I argue that they are evidential, reveal motivation and deepen understanding.

The primary purpose of postage stamps is to carry mail; their narratives are their secondary purpose. However, most postage stamps never travel further than the stamp collector's album. Many of these 'ambassadors' never reached my letter box during the time I lived in London (1996-1999). I received only a 'chapter' or 'fragment' of the greater narrative. Similarly, the letters I received reveal only a portion of the writer's life. Both windows reveal limited insight. They are windows we can merely look through, observe, and draw conclusions.

These windows, or fragmented narratives, are chosen in advance by the narrator:

The *text* directs the reader through the signifieds [of the postage stamp and letter], causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance (Barthes 1977:40).

The following chapter explores the methods employed by narrators in creating meaning. The different layers of meaning that create the narratives in postage stamps and letters are unpacked, with reference to Peirce's theories on iconicity, indexicality and symbolism. Whereas this chapter has explored the 'bigger picture', or grand narratives, the following chapter unpacks the different semiotic units that create these narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR

Type/image relationship of postage stamps and letters

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter unpacks the different layers of meaning in postage stamps and letters through the application of Peirce's theories on iconicity, indexicality and symbolism. It applies Peirce's theories to personal and general letters and to postage stamps to explore their semiotic landscape and reveals how these different modes employ similar semiotic means to create their messages.

There is a significant difference in the construction of meaning between linguistics and pictorial representations since their "resources ... for understanding and for meaning-making, differ from one another" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006:32). The primary goal of postage stamps and letters is to convey information as clearly and legibly as possible. Although the linguistics of letters rely primarily on grammar rules to convey their messages whereas postage stamps rely primarily on visual cues, this does not mean that: "the meaning of language is inherent in the forms and the meaning of images is derived from the context, or the meanings of language as 'conscious' and the meanings of images as 'unconscious'" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006:19).

Although meaning is not inherent in forms, this chapter will argue:

[t]hat rhetorical forms are deeply and unavoidably involved in the shaping of realities. Form and content are inseparable. Language is not a neutral medium and our choice of words matters (Chandler 2007:123).

Chapter 4 unpacks how language in letter writing is often a spontaneous exercise and meaning is created unconsciously. In contrast, postage stamps are carefully planned and meaning is thus a conscious construction. It also explores how various factors affect *reading* - consciously and subconsciously - of the narratives produced. These include - content (image and written type); writing utensils; printing technique; and letter form. As important for meaning making are visual type choices on postage stamps and letters - such as letterform, colour and size. The end result needs to convey the intended message visually and verbally.

This chapter suggests that handwriting can be studied as a form of typography - or at least a form of unique type - when deconstructing handwritten letters. Exploring unique handwriting characteristics, or traits, can demonstrate the many overlapping elements with typography.¹ The study of graphology,² the analysis of personality or personal characteristics through handwriting, is not part of this study, although it is mentioned briefly under the section on handwriting.

4.2 INDEXICAL NATURE OF TYPE AND IMAGES

Although images, words, alphabetical letters and numbers are generally categorised as icons and symbols, some theorists have identified certain instances where these elements can *act indexically*. For Peirce: “[a]n index has nothing to do with *meanings*; it has to bring the hearer to share the experience of the speaker by *showing* what he is talking about” (1933:4.58). Images and words both provide several ways in which they can show what someone is talking about, or what message they are trying

¹ Generally defined as the art of arranging and designing type.

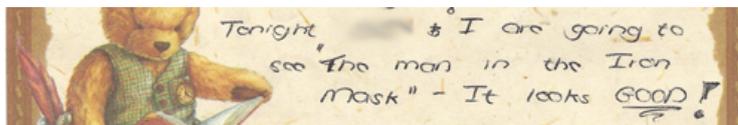
² Graphology, the study of the interpretation of handwriting, is too large a scope to discuss in detail here; neither is the aim of this research to substantiate graphology’s claims to be a science nor to attempt an analysis of handwriting and personality traits.

to convey. This section will discuss some of the different ways in which images and words on postage stamps and in letters can act indexically.

4.2.1 Indexical words

Words usually have the same connotative and denotative interpretations every time they are read. In contrast, indexical (deictic) words or expressions shift their designations thereby possibly changing the interpretation of a phrase. For example: “[t]he words *this* and *that* are indicative words. They apply to different things every time they [are used]” (Peirce 1933:4.58).

David Kaplan, an influential theorist on the indexical characteristics of words, created a standard list of indexicals (Perry 1997:1). Kaplan distinguished between two types of indexicals: *pure indexicals* and *true demonstratives*. The meanings of pure indexicals - I, you, today, yesterday, et cetera - are understood easily in the context of their use. But true demonstratives - here, there, this, that, et cetera - need additional information to interpret their meaning, such as a pointing finger, for example.



27. KC98071, "Tonight [anonymous] and I are going to see the 'The man in the Iron Mask' – it looks GOOD!" (1998).

The excerpt in fig 27 shows the writer making use of pure indexicals. We can assume that the person index,³ 'I', is the writer but, since the letter arrived a few weeks after it was written, we do not know for certain when

³ See Chapter 2 for a description of how Danesi categorises Peirce's concept indices further.

the spatial index ‘tonight’ was: it could have been any day of the week.⁴ The indexical word ‘tonight’ only makes sense when it is read on the day it was written. When read on any other day, the reader changes the word ‘tonight’ to another indexical word or phrase that makes sense, such as ‘last week’ or ‘yesterday’.

4.2.2 Indexical type

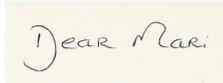
In her article, *The Semiotics of Typography in Literary Texts: A Multimodal Approach*, Nina Nørgaard⁵ divides written type into three indexical categories: the source of the type; the tool used to display the type; and the letterform of the type. Although her categories are based on written type, I suggest that they are applicable to all forms of typography, including the type found on letters, postage stamps and cancellation marks.

4.2.2.1 Source and unique markers

Written type is an index to the source of a piece of writing: the writer. Handwritten type functions differently from non-handwritten type because it is generally agreed that everybody writes in a unique style. Even though handwriting “has always been socially regulated, most recently through the ways it has been taught in the school system, ... everybody [still] has their own recognizable handwriting, their own individual style” (van Leeuwen 2005:140).

⁴ The letter is dated 19 July 1998. If the letter was started, completed, and dated on the same day, ‘tonight’ would 19 July. But the date on the cancellation mark is 21 July 1998: ‘tonight’ thus could be any day between 19 and 21 July.

⁵ Associate Professor, Department of Language and Communication, University of Southern Denmark.



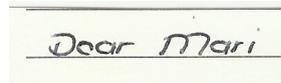
28. JN9903, "Dear Mari" (1999).



29. BL9908, "Dear Mari" (1999).



30. KC9903, "Dear Mari" (1999).



31. KC9711, "Dear Mari" (1997).

Handwriting - with its unique characteristics⁶ - is an authentic indexical marker of a person's existence and identity (fig 28-31). An identification mark - or unique marker - is any *thing* or sign that can be used to identify or prove the legitimacy of something or someone. The sociologist Erving Goffman calls these unique markers "*identity pegs*" (Sebeok 2001:60). Sebeok, who refers to them as *expressive features* (2001:98), argues that: "the notion of 'uniqueness' implies the manifestation of indicators" (2001:60). Unique identity markers rely on the existence and manipulation of indexical signs.

Nørgaard (2009:148) describes handwriting as the writer's "graphological⁷ trace" – it is like a fingerprint that leaves evidence of your presence. It is

⁶ In *Developments in Handwriting and Signature Identification in the Digital Age*, Harrelson and Miller (2012:5) note that:

Handwriting is not only unique but its various features are interrelated, creating a complex handwriting formula for each individual writer ... [it has an unimpeded flow of movement ... [and a] natural range of variation ... [that can change over time due to variable] ... factors such as health, external circumstances, medications, alcohol, and other conditions... (Harrelson & Miller 2012:5-6).

⁷ Graphology, the analysis of personality or personal characteristics through handwriting, relies on the manipulation of indexical signs to analyse handwriting. Although graphology is an intriguing study, it does not form part of this research. Ghullan-Whur (1998:259), in her article *The function of the semiotic principle in establishing the claims of a pseudo or protoscience (graphology) to the status of empirical science*, argues that although graphology has potential as a science reliant on indexical signs, it still has many variables and conflicting opinions about its validity and accuracy. For this reason, I will neither attempt to discuss graphology in-depth in this research nor will I presume to analyse the letters I received. My focus is on handwriting traits, or graphological markers, as a form of typography unique to individuals.

for this reason that handwriting and signatures are often used to identify a writer. Handwriting is pattern based and experts rely on examining patterns to verify the legitimacy of someone's handwriting or signature (Harrelson & Miller 2012:5). In criminal cases graphologists are often used to analyse these patterns and thereby verify the identity and, often, the personality of a writer.

Typography on postage stamps and cancellation marks can also be viewed as indexical markers to their source: postage stamps point to their country of origin and monetary value; cancellation marks point to the send date and post office. Scott (1995:8) notes that although words and numbers are generally classified as symbols, these typographic elements act indexically when used as pointers. The Universal Postal Union (UPU)⁸ lists denomination and country name - either written out in full or abbreviated - as the two most important typographic elements on a postage stamp.⁹

⁸ "Established in 1874, the Universal Postal Union (UPU), with its headquarters in the Swiss capital Berne, is the second oldest international organisation worldwide. With its 192 member countries, the UPU is the primary forum for cooperation between postal sector players. It helps to ensure a truly universal network of up-to-date products and services. In this way, the organisation fulfils an advisory, mediating and liaison role, and provides technical assistance where needed. It sets the rules for international mail exchanges and makes recommendations to stimulate growth in mail, parcel and financial services volumes and improve quality of service for customers" (<http://www.upu.int/en/the-upu/the-upu.html>).

⁹ The UPU requires that postage stamps used for international mail must display the issuing country's name. Some countries choose to write the name in English; some in their native language; and sometimes the name is written in both English and another official language. Great Britain is the only country that is exempted from this rule because the postage stamp originated there (UPU 2013:C.12).



32. SAPO, *Dicerus Bicornis*, 6th Definitive Edition (1993).
33. SAPO, *Black Rhinoceros*, 6th Definitive Edition (1993).
34. SAPO, *Kudu*, 6th Definitive Edition (redrawn) (1998).

Besides being indexical pointers, cancellation marks are also unique markers since no two postage stamps will be cancelled in the same manner (fig 32-34). Many variables influence the final *look* of a cancelled postage stamp. First, postage stamps are never stuck in exactly the same place on an envelope. Second, a hand-stamped cancellation mark is never stamped in exactly the same place on an envelope and over a postage stamp. Third, the ink on a cancellation stamp will never leave exactly the same mark every time since the detail on the stamped mark will depend on the quantity, type and age of the ink used, as well as on the force with which the mark is stamped. And finally, the envelopes are not always fed in the same way through the electronic cancellation machine. Since printed cancellation messages vary over time - as do the different shapes and information on hand stamps - the marks over a postage stamp will thus almost¹⁰ always be unique.

¹⁰ I use the term 'almost', because I cannot with utmost certainty say that there is not a method of placing a postage stamp and its cancellation mark in *the same place every single time* and using *the same level of ink and pressure*. Although achieving this level of accuracy would be extremely difficult and rare, I still argue that cancellation marks over postage stamps may generally be classified as unique markers.



35. SAPO, *CJ Langenhoven and Anthem Series* (1973).

The artist's name is another form of indexical typography that is sometimes found on postage stamps. In South Africa the artist's name also appeared on the postage stamp in small print underneath the artwork until October 1996. This can create confusion as to whether the artist or the person on the postage stamp was being commemorated, especially when the artwork is a portrait. Since a portrait may act indexically, the name - when added under the artwork - acts as an index to the person in portrait. The natural conclusion is that the name and the portrait are the same. Pierce calls this an "informational index" (1932:2.320). On the CJ Langenhoven stamp (1973) in fig 35, the artist's name - Jan Mostert - is printed the same size as Langenhoven's name thereby causing confusion as to who was being honoured. Shortly after the release of the postage stamp edition, *Linn's Stamp News*, an American magazine, erroneously published an article entitled *RSA honours Jan Mostert* (Olmesdahl 1996:24). The confusion surrounding the CJ Langenhoven stamp thus exemplifies the important role typography plays in communication. The correct type choices - such as form, size and positioning - are crucial for effective communication. Typography, like any artwork, needs to guide the viewer through the information being presented. Since October 1996, the names of the artists have thus been removed from South African postage stamps to avoid similar confusion (Olmesdahl 1996:24).

4.2.2.2 Tool

Written type is an index to the writing instrument used (Nørgaard 209:148). Letter writers must think about *how* a letter will be written. They must decide what tool to use – for example, a pen, a pencil, or a felt-tipped pen - and what colour to write in. The letter in fig 36 was written by two different writers; each made different tool choices: black pen, blue pen, pencil, and felt-tip pens.



Fig 36. KCJN9902, different letter writing tools (1999).

Although a postage stamp artist may choose the tool (any medium) with which to create the artwork on postage stamps, neither the artist nor the graphic designer may choose how the final postage stamp will be printed. Post Office officials decide on the printer and method of printing: usually offset lithography or digital depending on the quantity printed.

The cancellation mark - or date-stamp - over a postage stamp is an index to the cancellation method. The UPU states that “all postages stamp valid for prepayment shall be cancelled” (UPU 2013:C.18). But when another means of franking, such as a franking machine, is used, “the name of the place of origin and the date of posting appear on these impressions” (UPU

2013:C.18). This impression acts simultaneously as proof of payment and cancellation. In the past, if there was no cancelling tool available, then the postmaster's signature cancelled postage stamps (fig 39). The letters I received were cancelled with a variety of methods: hand ink cancellation marks (fig 38); electronic cancellation messages (fig 37); and franking machine stamps (fig 40).



37. BL9908, electronic cancellation mark (1999).
 38. BL99071, hand inked cancellation mark (1999).



39. Cape of Good Hope, 1p Rose. Cancelled by initials instead of date slug (1893-1902).
 40. RM9910, franking machine cancellation marks (1999).

4.2.2.3 Letterform

Written type is an indexical marker to letterforms: it “invokes material origin of its existence” (Nørgaard 2009:148). This letterform could be a font style or handwriting style. On an indexical level, designers and letter writers must make typographic decisions concerning character modes or letterforms. According to van Leeuwen (2006:150), there are a few distinctive features to consider when analysing letterforms:

- Weight: bold/regular/light
- Expansion: condensed/narrow
- Slope: sloping/upright (italic or not)
- Curvature: angular/rounded
- Connectivity: connected/disconnected
- Orientation: horizontal orientation/vertical orientation
- Regularity: regular/irregular

When these character modes are used on their own, they are merely letterforms and operate indexically. But when these character modes are used metaphorically, the characters and words begin to operate iconically and symbolically. Thus designers and letter writers must consider features such as word/font size; for example, whether to use capital or sentence case and whether emphasis or decorations should be placed on certain words. The choice between a serif font over a non-serif font can also alter the mood of a piece of type. Serif fonts are regarded as being more serious than non-serif fonts and more legible for large pieces of type, such as documents.

Post offices must also consider letterforms. The UPU requires that postage stamps used for international mail must display the country name and monetary value in Roman letters for the information to be easily identifiable (UPU 2013:C.12). It also requires that the date-stamp (cancellation mark) be displayed in Arabic numerals (UPU 2013:C.19). Another consideration is Optical Character Recognition (OCR) fonts. OCR fonts are usually used on envelopes or parcels to record automated tasks such as postal tracking. The advantage of OCR over bar codes is that OCR fonts are simultaneously machine-readable and human-readable text whereas bar codes are only machine-readable.¹¹

¹¹ Machine-readable text has its origin in 1958, when a new typeface - E13B - was introduced (Nørgaard 2009:154).

4.2.3 Imitation and onomatopoeia

When an artist endeavours to create a realistic portrait, the artist imitates the features of a person since portraits *reflect* the features of the people being sketched or painted. The resemblance is not by accident. Peirce classified a portrait of a person as both iconic and indexical. Portraits have an iconic character because the portrait resembles (or refers) to the person posing for the portrait thereby enabling the indices of the portrait to convey information. Portraits also have an indexical character: “because [the view is] greatly influenced by knowing that it is an *effect*, through the artist, caused by the original's appearance, and is thus in a genuine Obsistent¹² relation to that original” (Peirce 1933:2.92). Because a person's combination of features is unique, portraits are generally recognisable and therefore an index to them.

Peirce seems to suggest that it is only because we can conclude - using deductive reasoning - that a portrait refers to a person and is in fact a genuine likeness (imitation), that we know a portrait refers to an actual person, whether we know/recognise that person or not. For example, the postage stamp edition in fig 41 is a series of portraits of South African Nobel Laureates. If we apply Peirce's theories (above) we can deduce these portraits are exact likenesses of the Nobel Laureates primarily because the other signs - such as the legends under the portraits - conclude that these portraits refer to the Nobel Laureates. They are thus imitations and indexical signs to the Nobel Laureates.

¹² Peirce defines Obsistent (1932:2.96) as an argument or deduction which represents facts in such a way that we are compelled to represent the facts in the conclusion because the facts in the premise could not be true if the facts in the conclusion were not there. “[T]hat is to say, the Conclusion is drawn in acknowledgment that the facts stated in the Premiss constitute an Index of the fact which it is thus compelled to acknowledge” (1932:2.96). For example, the oil painting, *The treachery of Images*, created in 1928-1929 by Belgian surrealist artist, René Magritte (1898-1967) is read in a specific way because Magritte has added the sentence: ‘Ceci n'est pas une pipe’ [this is not a pipe]. This conclusion alters our interpretation of the image: the reading of the stated facts is determined by the conclusion.



41. SAPO, *South African Nobel Laureates, death centenary of Alfred Nobel* (1996).¹³

Linguistic imitations are referred to as onomatopoeias since onomatopoeic words “sound-like” the thing to which they are referring. For example, the word ‘buzz’ imitates the sound insects make when flying and is an index to the sound; or ‘pooped’¹⁴ (KC96112 1996) sounds like something deflating to indicate loss of energy. For Pharies, there is a parallel relationship between portraits and onomatopoeias.¹⁵ Imitation - “the intentional creation of icons through indices” (Pharies 1985:70) - is the key element for both forms of expression. Pharies further suggests that:

[I]t is because of this indexical character that we can say that both [portraits and onomatopoeias] are MOTIVATED, since this term refers expressly to the intention of the creator...both [portraits and

¹³ Top left to bottom right: Max Theiler, medicine, 1951; Albert Luthuli, peace, 1960; Alfred Nobel (1833-96); Allan Cormack, medicine, 1979; Aaron Klug, chemistry, 1982; Desmond Tutu, peace, 1984; Nadine Gordimer, literature, 1991; Symbol for Nobel Prizes 1901- 96; Nelson R. Mandela, peace, 1993; j, F.W. de Klerk, peace, 1993.

¹⁴ “So I am really pooped and busy” (KC96121 1996)

¹⁵ Pharies (1985:74) is concerned that: “the failure to understand the dynamics of the relatedness between these two grounds has had disastrous effects in much of the scholarship on the subject. The source of difficulty is the fact that, whereas iconicity is by definition a purely synchronic phenomenon, indexicality has a definite diachronic interpretation” (Pharies 1985:74).

onomatopoeias] involve observance of conventions, the sound imitator being bound by his phonological system, the painter by the limitations imposed on him by his medium (Pharies 1985:70).

For example, in the Nobel Laureates stamp series the portraits were commissioned by the SAPO with the intention of being created as references to the Nobel Laureates. The small scale of the postage stamp, the printing medium and the budget allocated for design, development and printing physically limit the Nobel Laureate portraits. A small budget may reduce the time an artist can spend on the design and may also reduce the printing technique (offset lithography or digital) and colour use since more colours are more expensive to print. The project's brief limits the artist conceptually.

Pharies (1985:74) thus concludes that:

The conception of onomatopoeias as lexical indices is every bit as valid as the iconic interpretation [because] the iconic properties were intentionally incorporated into the icons at the moment of their creation (Pharies 1985:74).

4.3 ICONIC NATURE OF TYPE AND IMAGES

The email icon examples in Chapter 2 show how a simple envelope, with its own iconic properties, has become an *iconic sign* for email communication. Peirce termed this iconic sign a *hypoicon* and introduced it to differentiate between a *pure icon* and an *iconic sign*. This new sign has its own indexical, iconic, and symbolic properties. A pure icon can only be a *possibility* (Peirce 1932:2.275); its *mode of being* is possibility. But “a sign may [also] be *iconic*... [It] may represent its object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being” (Peirce 1932:2.275). A physical object, with iconic properties, may become a *hypoicon*. Peirce divided the hypoicon into three categories: image, diagram and metaphor.

Their classification is based on the relationship between an iconic sign and its dynamic object.

4.3.1 Image

When an image acts as a sign it can be classified a hypoicon because an image is *of something* and not the thing itself. An image acting as a hypoicon can be both a physical picture and/or a mental picture in the mind (imagination) (Peirce 1932:2.276). When we read a story, for example, our mind creates images (hypoicons). Thus stories “[they] excite an idea by a reaction upon the brain” (Peirce 1932:2.276). These images frequently draw us into their world: “The qualitative features inhering in the images ... tend to absorb our attention, rendering us oblivious of all else” (Michelucci & Fischer 2011:162). Letters also conjure up images in our minds. In one letter a friend describes her cousin’s wedding:

My cousin got married on 9th of May, it was a fairy-tale wedding! The church looked like a tiny cottage, there was just enough space for the bride and groom and the parents. The garden (outside the church) was filled with little pottery decorations (birds - doves, olives, pools ... et cetera). And around the church there were towering pine trees. It looked like forest! (KC9808 1998)

Images are known through recognition or association with the content or created through expressive, explanatory writing. When either reading or writing letters: “I alone keep myself imaginative company” (Gornick 1994).



42. SAPO, *Dicerus Bicornis*, 6th Definitive Edition (1993).

In contrast, a picture does not generally conjure up imaginative images because the physical image is already in front of the viewer. Peirce nevertheless argues that, without a legend, any image is only a *representation of something* and may thus be classed as a hypoicon. Its meaning is open to interpretation (Peirce 1932:2.277). For example, if the rhinoceros postage stamp in fig 42 had no legend, the image of the rhinoceros would be a hypoicon since it could be a picture of anything. We can interpret the image only because we know what a rhinoceros looks like. The information will only make sense if we are already acquainted with the *thing* being described:

[N]o sign can be understood -- or at least that no proposition can be understood -- unless the interpreter has 'collateral acquaintance' with every Object of it (Peirce 1958:8.183).

The rhinoceros postage stamp has a legend with three entries underneath the image: "Denis Murphy" (artist's name); "Dicerus Bicornis" (the Latin name for black rhinoceros); and "1993" (the issue date). If we follow Peirce's argument: only if the viewer has seen a black rhinoceros and also knows the Latin language, can the viewer say: 'This is a picture of something that looks like the word under the picture.' But suppose the viewer has never seen either a real rhinoceros or any picture/photo of a black rhinoceros, or the viewer does not know that Denis Murphy is an artist, then the viewer might think that this is a picture of Denis Murphy. Unless the viewer has some acquaintance with what is being portrayed,

he/she cannot with certainty say: 'this is a black rhinoceros'. It is because multiple information in the legend can cause confusion about *what/who* is being portrayed by *whom*, that artist names no longer appear on postage stamps. Thus the name of the artist(s) no longer appears on postage stamps largely for this reason: multiple information in the legend can cause confusion about *what/who* is being portrayed by *whom*.

4.3.2 Diagrams, networks, and maps

The term *diagram* is often used to describe any type of simplified, informational drawing (representational graphic) that shows relationships between things. For instance, lines on a diagram that act as signs to direct our attention to something other than themselves. Peirce (1933:4.531) describes a diagram as:

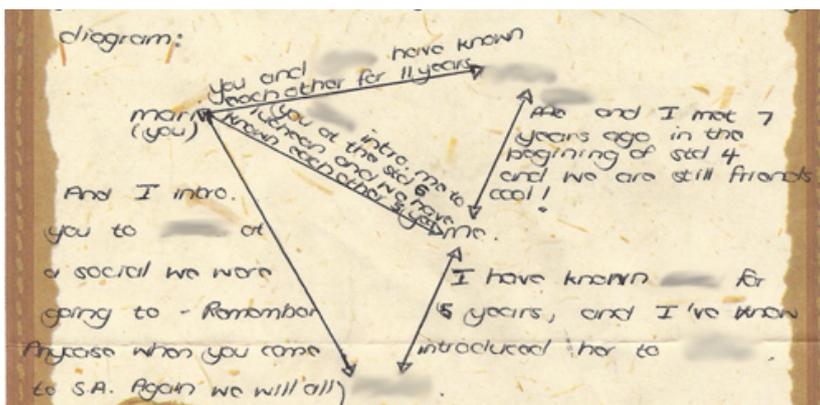
[...] an Icon of intelligible relations ... [and although it has both symbolic and indexical features as well] ... is nevertheless in the main an Icon of the forms of relations in the constitution of its Object (Peirce 1933:4.531).

Peirce's definition describes what Jacques Bertin refers to as *representational graphics* (Bertin 2011:173). Bertin distinguishes between different types of representational graphics and divides them into four categories: diagrams, networks, maps, and symbols. I will discuss the first three categories - diagrams, networks, maps – below, and symbol later in this chapter under the section *Symbolism in type and image*.

Bertin (2011:173) defines a diagram as usually constructed in a line and occupying one dimension of a plane. It can be reorganised and allows the viewer to process information in a short time. For instance, a drawing is classified as a diagram: "[w]hen all the correspondences on the plane can

be established between ... all the divisions of one component ... and all the divisions of another component” (Bertin 2011: 50). For example, a graph illustrating the stock trends will have two components: price and date. A correlation between a date and price can be found and marked and a correspondence, if there is one, can be observed.

Networks are two-dimensional drawings that allow: “rapid transcription of verbal analysis of the information” (Bertin 2011:173). A drawing is classified as a network: “when the correspondences on a plane can be established among all the divisions of the same component” (Bertin 2011:50). For example, before a drawing can be made, a designer must ensure that there are correspondences between components and that they can ‘converse’ with one another. A network, then, is the simplest way of representing this ‘conversation’, with the fewest intersections. In one letter I received (fig 43), a friend made a network drawing to show how she and three of her friends - including me - are connected to one another and to her and for how long we have been connected. In this network, she has put herself in the middle because she is drawing the network from her perspective and indicates how everyone is connected to *her*.



43. KC9807, diagram of friendship connections (1998).

Bertin (2011:51) classifies a drawing as a map “[w]hen the correspondences on the plane can be established among all the divisions of the same component [and] arranged according to a geographic order” (Bertin 2011:51). Unlike a network, a geographic representation cannot be reordered randomly. A map can thus only be simplified by limiting the correspondences. Peirce (1933:3.419) defines a map as: “a diagram showing localities”. The simplified map of South Africa on the postage stamp in fig 44 acts exactly according to Peirce’s definition: the white highlighted area shows the geographic location of the tree being represented in the image. In this example the map has both indexical properties and symbolic properties: it is a pointer sign to the geographic location and also represents aspects of the location - such as the baobab tree - which can be found in the Northern parts of Southern Africa.



44. SAPO, *Adansonia digitata*, Northern Transvaal Province – Tourism Series (1995).

Since diagrams employ many signs simultaneously, Peirce insists that a diagram is not a *pure* icon. We frequently forget that a diagram is abstract, - it is a *copy* - and we interpret it as *the real thing*:

[T]here is a moment when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears, and it is for the moment a pure dream (Peirce 1933:3.362).

The graphic representation of the London Underground routes (fig 45) has become synonymous with the intricate network of underground pathways and stations. But it remains an abstracted and simplified representation. The real routes - as shown on a map of London (fig 46) - are more complex and the routes and distances between stations are accurate.



45. Royal Mail, *Design Classics Commemorative series, London Underground Map by Harry Beck* (2009).
46. Accurate map of London Underground.

The significance of this graphic representation (network) is highlighted by its appearance on a British postage stamp. The postage stamp representing this network is simultaneously a *commemoration* of Harry Beck's drawing of the London Underground (1933) and a *graphic representation* (network) of the London Underground system. The diagram of the London Underground routes (icon) conveys no information about the underground routes unless some indexical sign makes us interpret it as iconic of the London underground. Only someone who knows that the logo in the bottom right represents the London Underground and that the words next to the dots on the diagram represent the stations would interpret the diagram as iconic of the underground.

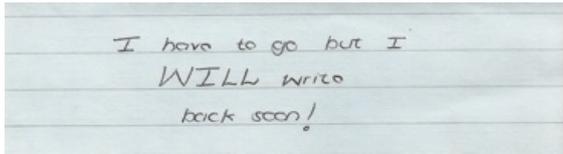
4.3.3 Metaphor and figurative language

Figures of speech (tropes) - such as metaphors - allow us to see things in terms of other things, or may render the unfamiliar more familiar. Tropes may thus be essential to *understanding* (Chandler 2007:125):

[H]owever they are defined, the conventions of figurative language constitute a rhetorical code, and understanding this code is part of what it means to be a member of the culture in which it is employed. Like other codes, figurative language is part of the reality maintenance system of a culture or sub-culture. It is a code which relates ostensibly to *how* things are represented rather than to *what* is represented (Chandler 2007:125).

When creating meaning in letters and postage stamps *what* is being represented is equally important to *how* it is being represented. Using tropes in *texts* - such as repetition (alliteration), comparison (metaphor, simile) and exaggeration - can identify underlying thematic frameworks. Tropes can thus *act* iconically.

Icons are recognizable in certain graphological links between a handwriting trait (signifier) and character mode (signified). For example, the word 'long' can be written illustratively to show how 'looooooong'; the writer means; your fish was 'big', but mine was 'BIGGER'; or a rabbit could 'hop hop hop hop' away into its burrow. In contrast, the writer's choice to style typography differently from what we would expect can force the reader to see words differently. For example, the word 'thin' is written in bold as **THIN** then the linguistic properties signified would contradict the visual properties of the type.



47. KC9809, I have to go but I WILL write back soon! (1998).

Typographic choices frequently only emphasise a word's importance and bear no deeper meaning. In fig 47 the word "WILL" is emphasised by being written in capital letters. The iconic use of type illustrates that the writer does not seem to be making a light comment, but rather seems to be serious about the statement: the writer will *most definitely* write again soon.

Although metaphors can highlight similarities or differences between concepts or objects, these comparisons must nevertheless be learnt because metaphors differ between cultures:

While metaphors are instances of semiosis in which hidden or unnoticed similarities or affinities are brought to light, a topical conception of metaphorical significance suggests not so much the compelling disclosure of such similarities or affinities, as heuristic intimations (Michelucci & Fischer 2011:162).



48. SAPO, *Masakhane Campaign*, (1995). Offset lithography on perforated postage stamp paper, 14.25 x 14in.

The Masakhane postage stamp (fig 48) discussed in Chapter 2 shows a group of ethnically diverse people building a metaphorical 'wall' of the South African flag. The message conveyed is that a new, unified, nation can be created by *building together*. But some knowledge of South

African socio-political history - and what it means to build a wall - is needed to understand the full message portrayed on the postage stamp.

Or take the metaphoric expression “time flies when you’re having fun” (fig 48). This expression does not literally mean time can fly, but expresses how quickly time can pass – fly - when one is busy or distracted. This writer is apologising for having not written in a while since time just ‘flew’ too quickly leaving no time to write. The reader must be acquainted with this expression - or at least have a concept of what ‘time’ and ‘flying’ mean - to interpret this apology.



49. BL9908, “Time flies when you're having fun” (1999).

Creative typography is not limited to experimenting with letter sizes, weights, and styles: the writer can also change the shape and colour of a word in such a way that the word becomes a visual metaphor. Thus the writer could have presented the expression “time flies when you’re having fun” more creatively as only image or as word and image (fig 50).



50. Mari Retief, *Time flies* (2016).

When handwritten type is used iconically and indices are manipulated to express meaning, written type begins to act *visually*. Words can become visual metaphors:

Viewed from either side, from the standpoint of the visual or the verbal, the medium of writing deconstructs the possibility of a pure image or pure text, along with the opposition between the 'literal' (letters) and the 'figurative' (pictures) on which it depends. Writing, in its physical, graphic form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal, the 'imagetext' incarnate (Mitchell 1994:95).

Manipulating words and images, so that they become visual metaphors to illustrate an idea more clearly, may *endow* them with iconic characteristics. Their visual presentation *resembles* the concept or object to which it is being referred thereby creating a *likeness*. Although Peirce focuses on metaphor when discussing hypoicons, it seems that the concepts of *likeness*, *comparison* and *representation* represent a *parallelism* (Peirce 1932:2.277). As observed in the section on imitation/onomatopoeia (4.3.2), other forms of figurative language may express parallels since they generally also use a form of analogy to suggest a likeness between two - often contrasting - concepts or objects. Roland Barthes (1977:44) suggests that "no sooner is a form seen than it must resemble something: humanity seems doomed to analogy."

Chandler concurs: using tropes is unavoidable. Tropes are part of our daily communication process and English speakers create novel metaphors daily (Chandler 2007:127). Van Leeuwen (2005:33) argues that many metaphors: "may once have been innovative but are no longer. We do not even think of them as metaphors. They embody our everyday reality". For example, when we send an email we refer to sending someone a *mail*, or we *post* an article online. These actions have nothing to do with writing a

letter, placing it in an envelope, adding a postage stamp and posting/mailing it through a postal system. The words and images have become metaphors for sending and receiving correspondence:

[M]etaphor is a key principle of semiotic innovation ... The essence of metaphor is the idea of 'transference', of transferring something from one place to another, based on a perceived similarity between the two 'places' (van Leeuwen 2005:29-30).

Metaphor is thus a multimodal concept. Tropes reflect how we understand reality and allow us to see things from new perspectives. Following Jakobson, Chandler (2007:125) suggests that:

[a] trope such as metaphor can be regarded as a new sign formed from the signifier of one sign and the signified of another ... The signifier thus stands for a different signified; the new signified replaces the usual one (Chandler 2007:125).

Like Peirce's unlimited process of semiosis, tropes generate imagery with connotations over and above any literal meaning. "Once we employ a trope, our utterance becomes part of a much larger system of associations which is beyond our control" (Chandler 2007:124).

The metaphor is as much a symbol as it is an icon: "stated more exactly, its symbolic function is not necessarily submerged in, or eclipsed by, its iconic work" (Michelucci & Fischer 2011:162). For instance, when abbreviations of country names¹⁶ are used, the abbreviation, although

¹⁶ Often only the country's initials are used since this saves space on the postage stamp so that the typography does not interfere with the design. Initials also solve the dilemma of which language to use. South Africa chooses to use either just English, both English and Afrikaans or just RSA. The face value (denomination) must be expressed in the official currency of the country or territory of issue, with or without the currency symbol, either as a number or through other identifying characteristics (UPU 2013:C.12). The UPU does not specify what these characteristics are, however I interpret it as using terms such as 'standard mail'. Standard postage applies to an average-sized letter (for example, DL) or postcard that is sent through South Africa's Ordinary Mail Service. "The Ordinary Letter Mail service is the standard postal service with set delivery standards from the time of despatch to arrival at the point of delivery" (SAPO Post office rates 2016/2017:2) (<https://www.postoffice.co.za/ContactUs/Questions/Postalrates.pdf>)

classified as a symbol, may become iconic when it is used as a 'logo'. For example, 'RSA' - Republic of South Africa) - to represent South Africa (fig 51):

A symbol ... can become an icon when it receives a noticeable degree of typographical definition or is placed in a prominent and isolated position" (Scott 1995:8).



51. SAPO, *Christmas* (1996).

4.4 SYMBOLIC NATURE OF TYPE AND IMAGES

The previous two sections on the indexical and iconic natures of postage stamps and letters have focused on individual elements (or layers) of type and images to show how different meanings can be created. This section will show how these different layers of meaning work together to create symbolic meaning and narrative.

4.4.1 Symbolic marks

Unlike diagrams, networks and maps, a symbol is a drawing in which there is a correspondence between the viewer and the drawing and between elements in the drawing:

Diagrams, networks and maps permit us to reduce information to its essential elements, by internal processing; whereas symbolism, like

language seeks only to resolve the problem of external identification, through immediate recognition (Bertin 2011:51).

The ability to understand the correspondence in symbols is through acquired habits: the reading of symbols must be learnt and can never be universal (Bertin 2011:51).



52. SAPO, *Creation of South African Post Office* (1991).

For example, the SAPO logo on the postage stamp in fig 52 is a symbol of the postal system in South Africa. It is also symbolic: it commemorates the founding of the SAPO in 1991. In this postage stamp *meaning* thus functions on multiple symbolic levels: first, the postage stamp is a symbol of communication; second, the post office logo is a symbol of the South African postal system; and third, the logo *placed on* the postage stamp symbolises the important role the SAPO plays.

The cancellation mark is another postal symbol that has become universally recognised. Its purpose is to verify the legitimacy of a postage stamp and that correct postage has been paid, thereby allowing a letter to be posted. As objects, cancellation marks are therefore symbolic representations of the authority of the postal system and government: it endorses their rules and regulations. Since it is illegal to re-use postage stamps, cancellation markers are one of the security techniques employed by the postal system to limit postage stamp fraud. Other security techniques include using special inks and/or paper.



53. Apple email icon.



54. BL9908. Hand inked cancellation mark (1999).

The content of cancellation marks is also symbolic. The electronically printed, everyday cancellation marks are usually general post office messages and advertisements which portray official views and wishes. The manual or hand-stamped cancellation marks usually only show the date and place from which the postal item was sent. These marks seem so ordinary that one rarely thinks of them as ‘designed’ or ‘symbolic’. The iconic shape a cancellation mark makes - usually two concentric circles with information inside - is recognisable worldwide (fig 53 & 54). The iconic *cancellation-mark-over-a-postage-stamp* image represents the idea of correspondence and has become an iconic symbol of communication through writing, whether electronic or hand-written. These ordinary marks, however, because of their conventionality, reinforce the *system* representing the post office and the government behind it. A postal item must obey the system to be posted.

4.4.2 Type

Unlike Saussure, Peirce classifies ordinary words as symbols.¹⁷ For Saussure, the significance of words is based on relationships: they are made up of a signifier and a signified. As with Saussure's signifier, Peirce argues that an actual word does not identify, or actualise, the 'thing' being spoken or read about; rather, the word conjures up an idea, association, or connection with the word. For Saussure, this relationship creates a *sign*; but Peirce sees the endless possibility of symbolic interpretations which words and their associations can create.

In addition, Saussure did not regard the *mode* of written type as important in deciphering the meaning of a sign (Saussure 1959:68). He argued that it is the linguistic words in a letter that carry meaning rather than *how* the words are written. The same word in different font or handwriting is still the same word and could be interpreted as the same sign. For Saussure, the material form of the word is thus irrelevant. However, contemporary theorists: "acknowledge that the material form of the sign may generate connotations of its own" (Chandler 20017:52). The material form of a word is thus relevant:

For a long time, typography saw its role as one of transmitting the words of authors as clearly and legibly as possible, without adding anything of its own to the text. Today it is changing into a semiotic mode in its own right, and beginning to add its own, typographically

¹⁷ "All words, sentences, books, and other conventional signs are Symbols. We speak of writing or pronouncing the word "man"; but it is only a replica, or embodiment of the word, that is pronounced or written. The word itself has no existence although it has a real being, consisting in the fact that existents will conform to it. It is a general mode of succession of three sounds or representamens of sounds, which becomes a sign only in the fact that a habit, or acquired law, will cause replicas of it to be interpreted as meaning a man or men. The word and its meaning are both general rules; but the word alone of the two prescribes the qualities of its replicas in themselves. Otherwise the "word" and its "meaning" do not differ, unless some special sense be attached to 'meaning'" (Peirce 1932:2.292).

realized meanings, alongside and simultaneously with those realized by the author's words (van Leeuwen 2005:26).

In the past, the goal of humanist designers was to standardise type. Eliminating any visual distractions, such as serifs or decorations, enabled type to be read silently and as effectively as possible. This created: "the uniform aspect to which we are accustomed and which, in fact, has allowed printed texts to be read silently, quickly, and unambiguously" (Lapacherie 1994:67). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:17) develop this idea further:

Writing is itself a form of visual communication and paradoxically, the sign of the fully literate social person is the ability to treat writing completely as a visual medium – for instance by not moving one's lips and not vocalizing when one is reading, not even 'subvocalizing' (a silent 'speaking aloud in the head', to bring out the full paradox of this activity).

Typography's goal is to display visual type effectively to convey the right message. Large sections of informational type thus should be written with as little distraction as possible for the content to be absorbed effectively by the reader. This is the primary goal of handwritten letters and postage stamps. For this reason, the UPU has typographic criteria,¹⁸ such as clear,

¹⁸ The 24th UPU Congress (Geneva, 2008) decided to include the following optional points concerning postage stamp illustrations in the form of a commentary in the Letter Post Regulations. Postage stamps may contain: the official emblem of the member country or territory of issue; the word "Postes" (Postage) in Roman or other letters; an expiry date; the year of issue; in the case of a personalized stamp, an image or portrait of a living person; in the case of a personalized stamp, the logo or emblem of a private company; any mark allowing digital reading of the stamp for commercial or postal routing purposes; the name of the artist; the name of the printer. As the subject of intellectual property rights, postage stamps may also contain: copyright, by including the copyright sign ©, indicating ownership of the copyright and mentioning the year of issue; a mark registered in the territory of the issuing member country or territory, by including the registered trademark symbol ® after the mark. The sale of or trade in postage stamps is a purely internal matter. Each State shall make provision for it in the light of its own position in this matter (decision C 16/Paris 1947).

legible type. More expressive typography on postage stamps is part of the pictorial image.

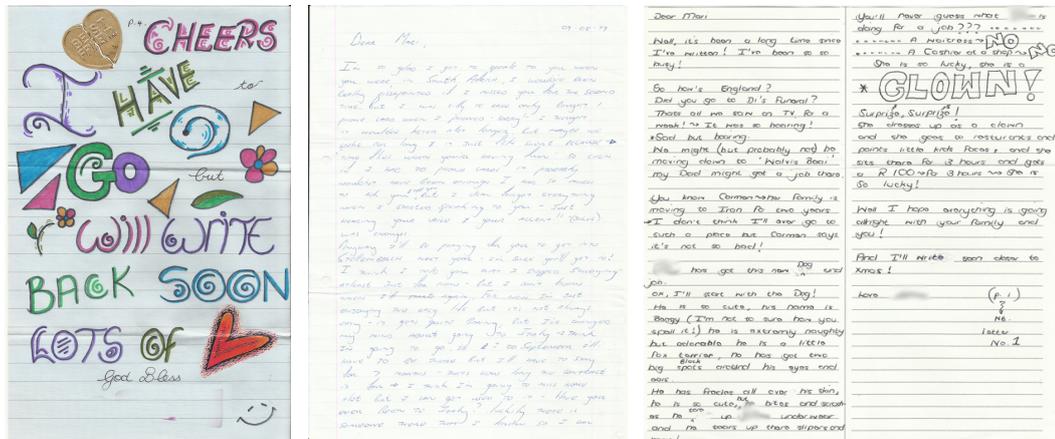


Fig 55. KC9901 (1999). 56. BL9908 (1999). 57. KC9711 (1999).

Expressive type on letters, however, has multiple purposes: decorative, figurative or for emphasis. Each of the three letters in fig 55, fig 56 & fig 57 is written differently: the first letter is written expressively; the second letter is written uniformly; and the third letter is a combination of expressive and uniform writing. All three convey information, but in different ways. The first letter's typography does not add to the meaning of the text: the typography is merely decorative and expressive. The writer desired no emphasis on certain words nor a deeper symbolic or iconic meaning with the colours, fonts and typographic layout: the main goal was to look fun. The second letter is written completely uniformly; its main goal is merely to convey information plainly. The third letter, although also written mostly uniformly, has some typographic variation. The words "NO", "NO" and "CLOWN" are written larger to emphasise their importance. Although decoratively drawn, these three words add meaning to the text. The writer is not merely saying these words: it is almost as if they are being shouted.



58. SAPO, *New Constitution* (1984).
 59. SAPO, *World Design Capital Cape Town* (2014).

In this research, I have treated creative typography on postage stamps incorporated in the illustration as part of the pictorial image and not as informational typography. But there are some postage stamps that blur the typographic boundaries between pictorial image and information. One such example is the series of postage stamps of the South African *New Democratic Constitution* (fig 58). It is a visual metaphor because the typography is designed in such a way to look like an official, government document. It is simultaneously symbolic of post-apartheid by displaying South Africa's *New Democratic Constitution* and an index to the South African government. It is an informational postage stamp: using a magnifying glass one can read the words printed on it.

In contrast, the postage stamp featuring a quote from Nelson Mandela¹⁹ - the first democratically elected president of South Africa - is designed to be inspirational, not symbolic (fig 59). Although the quote is important, the quantity of type is less than the constitution stamp and the layout appears less formal and typography more expressive. The font choices for the country name and monetary value on both postage stamps suit the style of the 'pictorial' design. I am unsure of the artist's motivation behind the font choice of serif over non-serif but suggest that it was aesthetically motivated. Perhaps the artist wanted a font that carried with it feelings of

¹⁹ "The postage stamp designs by Tamryn Elliot is [sic] the result of a stamp design competition organised by the Philatelic Services of the South African Post Office" (van Niekerk 2014:10).

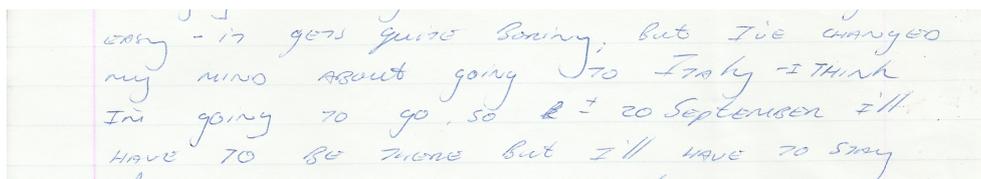
sincerity and believability? A sans-serif would perhaps have been too casual for the gravitas a quote from Mandela requires.

Letters - unlike postage stamps - are not designed. If one looks more closely at the above three letters (fig 55, fig 56 and fig 57) it is obvious that they, like most personal letters, are not designed or planned. There are words crossed out and other mistakes. Most letters are 'just written': they are spontaneous conversations on paper. Paradoxically, the many books available on *how to write letters* has had a great influence on the style of the modern, personal letter (Henkin 2006:109). These books stress the importance of "spontaneous effusion of sincere feeling from one person to another" (Henkin 2006:109).

Hand-written letters are generally written in simple hand-writing, using a black or blue pen. "Printed words on a page are barely noticeable. As soon as reading begins, our perception of typography ends" (Lapacherie & Lehmann 1994:67). This does not imply that the look of the type of such texts does not mean anything but rather that these 'generic' choices seem to carry the meaning of 'conventional' and perhaps 'dependable'. The letter is like a conversation with a friend.

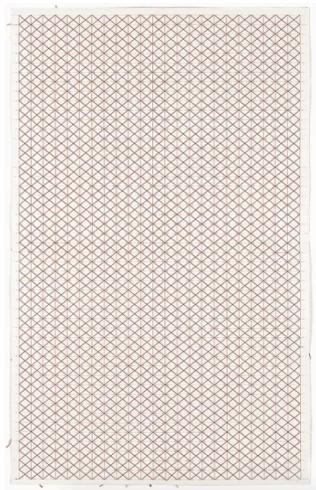
4.4.3 Communication and the changeability of meaning

Letters and postage stamps also function as a full system of communication: they *represent* their writers and countries of origin (sources) and *communicate* a message. Chandler (2007:198) notes that when writers write, they are also written. The same can be said of postage stamps: in a sense the narratives on them become narratives of its country of origin.

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in blue ink and reads: "copy - it gets quite boring, but I've changed my mind about going to Italy - I think I'm going to go, so ± 20 September I'll have to be there but I'll have to stay".

60. BL9908, "I've changed my mind about going to Italy" (1999).

As representations, a series of postage stamps can reveal important decisions and events in South African history. Similarly, letters can reveal day-to-day decisions made by their writers. Each decision made causes a chain of events - events that shape lives and countries. The excerpt in fig 60 shows a last-minute decision that had a great impact on the writer's life: "[b]ut I've changed my mind about going to Italy – I think I'm going to go, so ± 20 September I'll have to be there" (BL9908 1999). While he was there, he was 'scouted' and invited to practise with the French national rugby team. Thus, he played rugby for France for several years and still lives there. This one decision had a ripple effect on his future.



61. Kim Lieberman, *The Incredible Chain of Events* (2002).

Kim Lieberman, a South African artist, is fascinated by the consequences that follow a single action. Her work explores the interconnectedness of messages given and received through the mail. She calls this art medium "post art". In her artwork *An Incredible Chain of Events* (fig 61), she hand-

stitched through the tiny perforations on blank postage stamp sheets with silk thread. Lieberman writes that:

[...] somehow, being conscious that there are a myriad of possibilities we could choose, makes our actions seem less casual and more causal [...] For as long as there has existed a chain of events, each of these events has been pivotal in creating our lives as they are today. We are patterned together from the past and generate patterns that lead into the future (www.artthrob.co.za).

This concept of being patterned together is also visible when observing every postage stamp ever released in South Africa. As discussed in Chapter 3, the pictorial images on postage stamps make visible aspects of past, present, and future national identity. Looking back, we can see how decisions have influenced a nation's future.

But looking back is not a simple process: meaning can change over time and we interpret information based on our knowledge of the past. The letters I wrote and received between 1996 and 1999 were communication between high-school children. They were written and interpreted from the viewpoint of teenagers. But when I re-read them today, twenty years later, many of the letters seem silly or superficial. I cannot read the letters now in the same way as I read them then: I cannot erase the knowledge I have gained since I was a teenager. The interpretation of symbols and their meaning cannot help but change over time since people and society are constantly evolving:

Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols. We think only in signs. These mental signs are of mixed nature; the symbol-parts of them are called concepts. If a man makes a new symbol, it is by thoughts involving concepts. So, it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow. *Omne symbolum de symbolo*. A symbol, once in being, spreads

among the peoples. In use and in experience, its meaning grows (Peirce 1932:2.302).

We interpret messages in the context of the information we have available to us, be it given by the artist or writer, or drawn on our own past experiences. For instance, much of what is written in the letters between Brink and Jonker is left open to interpretation, their messages limited by the words on paper. Jonker suggests that communication, without physical presence, is impossible:

[E]verything [is] exaggerated and out of context, because there are only words, without facial expressions or the touch of a hand²⁰ (Ingrid Jonker quoted in Galloway 2015:5) [own translation].



62. SAPO, 6th Definitive Edition (1993).

Images on a definitive stamp edition are usually generic because meaning is dependent on interpretation and heuristics: they represent a general, relatively unchanging view of its issuing country. For instance, at first glance the images on the sixth definitive edition (fig 62) might suggest no deeper meaning: a rhinoceros is a rhinoceros and a tortoise is a tortoise. But other meanings emerge when one asks the question *why* these

²⁰ “[A]lles vergroot en uit verband, omdat daar net woorde is, sonder gesiguitdrukking of die aanraking van ‘n hand.”

animals were chosen for the postage stamps. The tortoise is indigenous to South Africa. It is also an endangered animal as are the other animals that form part of this postage stamp edition. The postage stamp is thus both a social awareness campaign and a proof of payment. Moreover, because these animals are unique to South Africa, their images are an effective advertisement to promote the diversity of South African wildlife for the tourist industry. These postage stamps fulfil the requirements proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:41) that: “[i]n order to function as a full system of communication, the visual, like all semiotic modes, has to serve several representational and communicational requirements”. The sixth definitive edition thus *represents* South Africa and its endangered animals; simultaneously, it *communicates* a message of social awareness and pride in wildlife diversity.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter unpacked the different layers of meaning making in postage stamps and letters. Application of Peirce’s theories on icon, index and symbol has allowed exploration of postage stamps and letters as expressive forms of communication. This demonstrated that they use similar strategies, despite being different modes of communication and using different tools/instruments, such as figurative speech/imagery, typography/handwriting, illustrations, and diagrams.

The similarities in meaning-making strategies emphasise the importance which society puts on telling a story in terms everyone will understand. Tropes, such as metaphors for example, allow viewers to understand a concept by relating it to their own experiences of it. But tropes are culturally and socially learnt. Thus creating a globally understandable message is difficult. A reader can only interpret a message based on his/her own storehouse of knowledge and the information a writer/artist

reveals. Without the physical presence of the artist or writer to explain, all *readings* of a *text* are merely interpretations and all narratives are limited.

Modes also limit postage stamps and letters: “The drastically reduced surface area of the stamp image requires extreme concentration of component elements” (Scott 1995:6). Messages received are thus unavoidably affected by their rhetorical modes, although meaning is not dependant on these. Our socially and culturally learnt behaviour determines how we ‘read between the lines’ and has an unavoidable effect of our understanding and interpretation of messages on postage stamps and in letters.

It is largely because the reading of signs is subjective and limited by circumstance, that many semioticians argue that signs should not be studied in isolation. This chapter has illustrated how context is a crucial factor: many signs have different icon, indexical and symbolic properties depending on the context of their *reading*. The abbreviation ‘RSA’ can be interpreted as an indexical pointer to South Africa, an icon (like a logo) for South Africa and a symbol of South Africa.

This chapter has unpacked parts of the semiotic landscape embedded in postage stamps and letters. Chapter 5 will deal with the practical component of this research. Although these chapters can go some way towards making sense of their narratives, these understandings remain fragmentary. In fact, narratives will always be fragmented: the changeability and interpretation of signs means that our understandings are always partial and provisional.

CHAPTER 5

Practical Work

1.1. INTRODUCTION

My practical work explores further Peirce's theories on icon, index and symbol. As discussed in previous chapters, the meaning embedded in postage stamps derives from carefully planned structures. In contrast, although personal, hand-written letters do need to adhere to specific grammatical rules, meaning tends to flow from a more spontaneous source. Peirce's architectonic approach to semiotics has influenced the systematic way I have approached the practical component of my research. In Chapter 2 I briefly discussed Kant's definition of architectonic as the art of constructing a system. Kant believed that our knowledge should not be unconnected: it should be organised and interrelated in a rational way.¹ My practical work thus reflects a 'system'. I have organised the postage stamps and letters I received in a rational manner to highlight their interrelated parts and thereby to find connections between them as part of a semiotic system.

Chapter 3 contained a discussion on narratology. It identified the semiotic elements in a signifying system and their relationships, functions and connections with one another within the *whole picture*. The research highlighted how these relationships are important because of what they can reveal about a narrative. The first step involved in uncovering these connections in my practical work was to re-type the 54 hand-written letters I had received. This allowed me to analyse the content digitally without the distraction of the creative element of the letters. I then digitally scanned the 54 letters, their envelopes and the 75 postage stamps on the envelopes. By converting the letters and postage stamps to tables of data,

¹ See section 2.3.4, page 28.

I removed their personal element. I created, in a sense, information systems that would allow comparison and deconstruction much like Peirce's theories on semiotics allows deconstruction of meaning. Deconstructing the 54 letters into their basic alphanumeric characters and individual words enabled me to identify relationships, functions and connections that I might otherwise have missed. Deconstruction in this way makes visible the elements involved in meaning-making. By unpacking letters and postage stamps in my practical work, Peirce's theories on icon, index and symbol allow me to explore how meaning is created.

1.2 A VISUAL SYSTEM

My approach to the practical component of this research derives from a graphic design perspective which seemed the best fit for the systematic approach I have adopted. Graphic design is effective in visualising data, information, networks and systems. Jacques Bertin (2011:2), a French cartographer, defines information visualisation graphic design as follows:

Graphic representation constitutes one of the basic sign systems conceived by the human mind for the purposes of storing, understanding, and communicating essential information. As a 'language' for the eye, graphics benefits from the ubiquitous properties of visual perception. As a monosemic system, it forms the rational part of the world of images (Bertin 2011:2).

In a monosemic system the meaning of a sign is known before it is observed; for example, a legend next to a map. In polysemic system, meaning is deduced from a collection of signs; for example, an abstract painting. Bertin notes that "this distinction is fundamental because it

suggests the true purpose of ‘graphics’ in relation to other forms of visualisation” (Bertin 2011:2).

When Bertin refers to networks, diagrams and maps, he writes about monosemic graphic representations and not all aspects of graphic design. For example, *meaning* in logos and infographics is deduced from a collection of signs. The legend frequently forms part of the graphic and does not stand separate as a *key*; for example, in Nicholas Felton’s work, which will be discussed below. Bertin argues that for a monosemic system to be employed “for a certain domain and during a certain time, all the participants come to agree on certain meanings expressed by certain signs, and agree to discuss them no further” (Bertin 2011:3). By this he means that any sign that is used so widely that it becomes instantly recognisable may conform to a monosemic sign system. This relates to Chapter 2 where I discussed visual metaphors.² It could be argued that a graphic representation of a postage stamp conforms to a monosemic sign system since its meaning is generally known instantaneously.

This instantaneous interpretation, however, only pertains to the postage stamp shape and not to its visual illustrations. The *meaning* in postage stamp illustrations or handwritten letters is not known beforehand usually: it must be deduced. Even though some postage stamps do have a title - a type of legend - underneath the image, this only describes what the image is *of*, and not its meaning. Whereas the previous chapters have focused mostly on polysemic systems, my practical work explores both monosemic and polysemic systems of meaning in postage stamps and letters.

I have adopted a monosemic approach to my exhibition: I display my work in an archival manner and draw inspiration from postage stamps and

² For example, postage stamps, with their rectangular shape and perforated edges, have become an internationally recognisable shape.

letters as archival material. In an archive, old and rare postage stamps and letters are often displayed in glass boxes, in glass-topped tables or in drawers. My exhibition adopts a similar monosemic approach: each artwork has a legend/description next to it and is numbered like archival material.

The American artist, Mark Dion (1961-), applies a similar approach to his exhibition *Tate Thames Dig* (1999) at the Tate Gallery in London. Dion and a team of volunteers combed the Thames foreshore, near the Tate Gallery and Banks Power Station, during low tide “looking for fragments of individual and ephemeral histories. London's location, its growth and its fortunes can be attributed to the Thames. The two sites yielded a wide variety of artefacts and tokens of life” (Fiske & Bottinelli 2002). The artefacts were carefully cleaned and categorised in ‘archaeological’ tents (Fiske & Bottinelli 2002). They were organised according to type; for example, bones, pottery or metal. Dion displays antique and modern items together leaving the viewer to draw his or her own conclusions (fig 63 & 64).



63. Mark Dion, *T07669* (1999).



64. Mark Dion, *T07669* (1999). (detail).

This lack of distinction is an important aspect of Dion's approach and he resists the reading of history as a necessarily linear progression. The only differentiation is a geographical one, the two sites retaining their individual identities. The lack of historical categorisation suggests a subversion of standard museological practice. Viewers are free to create their own associations, to trace histories across time, not necessarily in a linear direction (Fiske & Bottinelli 2002).

As discussed in previous chapters, postage stamps and letters can also trace histories across time. Similarly, some of my work comments on the changing narratives which my postage stamps and letters reflect over the period 1996 to 1999.

Bertin (2011:16-164) notes three functions of graphic representation: to record information (inventory); to communicate information (simplified drawings or messages); and to process information (graphics used for processing). Displaying my visual process and research in an archival manner (a form of inventory) is a means to communicate and process the information as well as to comment on the historical importance placed on letters and postage stamps. It thereby also comments on the ability which letters and postage stamps have to reveal aspects of social, cultural and political history. Indeed, much of the world's history is based on evidence from personal letters, official correspondence and other archaeological artefacts. I regard the letters and postage stamps which I received as personal artefacts – documents about my social, cultural and even political history. Like Dion's, my practical work explores the different connections which these historical documents can generate.

1.3 FRAGMENTED NARRATIVE

I used an application called *Processing* to create a digital video for this project. The creators of this application describe it as “a flexible software sketchbook and a language for learning how to code within the context of the visual arts” (www.processing.org). I used the 54 letters I had re-typed to create a data table with the frequency of every word sent and received.

The grid structure of these database tables mimics the large, perforated sheets of postage stamps (fig 65). These tables create an archive (or index) for the information sent and received. I created frequency graphs to compare the data and search for patterns. For example, in each of the 54 letters I tabulated the occurrence of each ‘meaningful’ word such love, strength, patience, family or smile.

	BL_00-01.txt	BL_99-07.txt	BL_99-08.txt	BL_99-09.txt	BL_99-10.txt	BL_99-12_card.txt	BL_99-12.txt	1_97-02.txt	KB_97-02.txt	KC_99-02_1.txt	NH_96-12_Note.txt	NH_96-12.txt
a	2	22	6	20	3	2	12	3	4	8	2	6
able							1					
about		1	1				2		1	1		1
absolute										2		
accent			1									
actually				1								
address		1		1							1	1
africa		3	2	2			1	3	4			
african		1					1					
after		2		2					1			
afternoon								1				
again			1	2				1		2	1	
against							1					
ages												1
ago		1		1								
airport				1								
all		2	2		1		3		2	1		2
almost										1		
already								1				
alright												1
also			4	1	1		1		1			
always		2	2		1		1					
am		2	3					1		2		
an							1					
and		3	2		1			9	12	11		6

65. Data table of word frequency per letter (detail).

Using this table, I wrote a short program in *Processing* to analyse the data and to draw frequency graphs of the occurrence of each word in each

letter (fig 67). I created positive space where the frequency graphs overlapped one-another and negative space where they did not overlap (fig 66). In this positive space, I masked a random postage stamp from the 75 postage stamps I received. The graph of each randomly selected word reveals a portion of the stamp image below. The more words are selected, the more of the image is revealed. Since the letters I received arrived over a period of 38 months, the program randomly selected 38 words and displayed a graph showing the occurrence of each of those 38 words over 54 letters. The video selects a new set of random words and stamps every 0.5 seconds and plays endlessly. The effect is like sound waves moving across a screen, almost as if the words are being read aloud.



66. Mari Retief, *Fragmented Narrative* (2016) [video still].

```

mask_final_04 | Processing 3.1.2
13 void setup() {
14   size(1920, 1080, P30);
15   frameRate(2);
16   //noLoop();
17   table = new Table();
18   table = loadTable("all_words_all_letters.csv", "header");
19   background(255);
20
21   for (int i = 0; i < numFrames; i++) {
22     String imageName = "stamp_" + nf(i, 2) + ".jpg";
23     niceImage[i] = loadImage(imageName);
24     //println("stamp_" + nf(i, 2) + ".jpg");
25   }
26
27   fw = niceImage[0].width;
28   fh = niceImage[0].height;
29   dw = width - fw;
30   dh = height - fh;
31
32   randomImage = int(random(10));
33   graphicalMask = createGraphics(fw, fh, P30);
34
35
36

```

67. Excerpt of code from *Processing* application.

Only a portion – a fragment - of the image on the postage stamp is revealed at a time. The random, endlessly changing, fragmented images on the screen allude to the fragmented nature of narrative. The higher the frequency of a word received, the larger the curve on the graph, the more of the image is revealed. Conversely, the less a word occurs, the smaller the curve and less of the image is revealed. Narrative acts in a similar fashion: the more information we receive, the more of the story is revealed. The converse is also true. But no matter how much information we receive, narrative is still fragmented and reliant on the source of information, just as we are reliant on the Processing program to reveal a portion of an image. Peirce writes that an artwork “always represents a fragment of a larger whole. It is broken at its edges” (Peirce 1931:1.176). The words we receive in a letter are not known until we open the envelope. Nor do we know which words will appear on the screen: the content is a surprise and a fragment of the writer’s life. Postage stamps are also fragmented narratives – glimpses into a country’s narrative.

My video also explores these relationships and connections. This project investigates the idea that our actions cause a myriad of possibilities – a chain of events each determining a different outcome or pattern.³ The 38 words on the screen can be randomly generated in 38! different ways.⁴ The Processing program I wrote does not allow a word to be repeated amongst the 38 randomly chosen words. The words are also displayed, top to bottom, in alphabetical order. These restrictions comment on the grammatical rules that need to be followed when writing a letter. Coherent sentences need order; words cannot be written in a completely random manner. If allowed to be repeated, the 38 words could be combined in 38³⁸ number of ways.⁵

³ Chapter 3 discusses a last-minute decision made by a friend that had a great impact on his life and rugby career.

⁴ 38! = 523,022,617,466,601,111,760,007,224,100,074,291,200,000,000

⁵ 38³⁸ = 1,461,501,637,330,902,918,203,684,832,716,283,019,655,932,542,976



68. Camille Utterback & Romy Achituv, *Text Rain* (1999).

Camille Utterback is an American artist whose work explores random and ordered text. In her interactive installation entitled *Text Rain* (1999), viewers play with the falling text of a poem. The text responds to motion and can be caught, lifted and released to fall again (fig 68). The viewer is also interacting with the words on the screen. If participants accumulate enough letters along their outstretched arms, or along the silhouette of any dark object, they can read words and phrases formed by the falling letters. These processes obscure the existing narratives and create space for new comparisons and connections - new, future narratives - to be formed.

Utterback pushes the boundaries between art and technology. In her artist's statement, Utterback (www.camilleutterback.com) acknowledges her focus on "bridg[ing] the conceptual with the corporeal ... between the abstract realm of ideas and the corporeality in which we live and interact with these ideas". I resonate with her reasons for working with computer code:

I find it essential to engage with the digital medium at the level of code and electronics. By writing my own software and designing my own interfaces I free my work from the limits and

assumptions of commercially based tools and products. Only at this level can one truly sculpt the medium. An understanding of the language of code and computation allows me to reject normal data structures in *Liquid Time* – where I deconstruct the video frame as a unit of display, or repurpose those structures in *Drawing From Life* – where the image becomes text characters themselves (www.camilleutterback.com).

Like Utterback's *Text Rain*, my video explores the mappings of connections. Letters connect people. These connections can be mapped. They can be mapped geographically, or merely verbally. What words/phrases connect people? Which words are chosen to be communicated, and why? What is the visual result?

Utterback's work invites the viewer to interact digitally with the text which in turn invites a different way of seeing the text. Although my project is not interactive, re-typing the letters enabled me to engage with the text on a different level than when I first received them. Similarly, interacting with the hand-written letters on a technological level in my process allowed me to see the information they contained from a new perspective.

This digital, and impersonal, format used in this project contrasts with the materiality of postage stamps and letters: it comments on how this very personal method of communication is disappearing as email and social media are chosen over hand-written letters. The random, computer-generated, words also allude to predictive text and word-suggestions where technology helps to write letters and messages. Like Utterback, I regard working with technology as “particularly relevant to our contemporary culture as we aim to grapple with the ramifications of virtuality and our increasing relationship with the interfaces and representational systems of our machines” (www.camilleutterback.com).

1.4 PORTALS

This project explores the themes that are illustrated and written about in postage stamps and letters. Four writers have granted me permission to use their letters in my research. Thus, of the 54 letters I received, I can use 22 letters in more detail. I have created 22 artist's books (fig 69 and 70) from these 22 letters. I have based the layout of the books on the format of a DL windowed envelope.⁶ This format allows me to explore the concept that letters and postage stamps provide *windows* or *portals* into their narratives. The format reinforces the idea that letters allow a look inside a small part of someone's life – a glimpse into their narrative.



69. Mari Retief, *Portals* (2017).

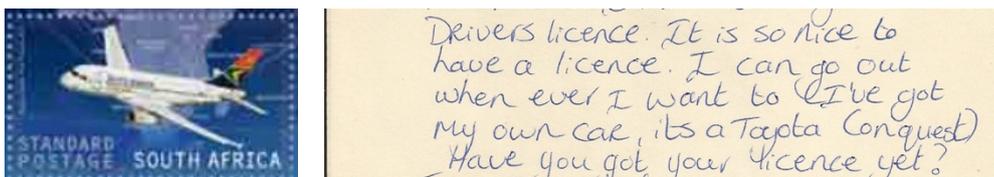


70. Mari Retief, *Portals* (2017).

The inside pages of the books each have a small window in the bottom corner in the same position as it would be on an envelope. The windows on each page are the same size and in the same position, and overlap to allow a 'portal' from the front of the book through to the back. The inside pages are made from 200 gsm Fabriano Academia paper. The use of white cartridge alludes to the use of general, white bond paper used for most letters and envelopes. The inside pages fold open in a tunnel book

⁶ A DL envelope is 110 mm by 220 mm in size. An envelope with a window generally has a small rectangular opening in the bottom left corner that is covered with a transparent material such as glassine or polystyrene film.

format to further reinforce the tunnel/portal aspect of the windows. The pages are joined on one side only so that one can page through the book. This reinforces the idea that letters are stories on paper, like novels. The windows are made from glassine paper.⁷



71. SAPO, *International Flight routes* (2017).

72. JN9912, "I've got my own car, [it's] a Toyota Conquest" (1999).

Each inside page represents a different theme or topic of conversation. The SAPO website divides postage stamps into eight themes under the philately section: everyday (definitive); proudly South African; presidents and people; nature and science; arts and heritage; sports and events; buildings and architecture; planes, trains, and automobiles (www.virtualpostoffice.co.za). To compare the narratives on postage stamps with those in letters, I searched through these 22 letters to see if I could find the same themes. I discovered that the topics of discussion found in postage stamps are like those found in letters. For example, a postage stamp may celebrate its country's airlines⁸ (fig 71) whereas a letter writer may be excited about a new car (fig 72).

In each of the 22 letters I highlighted the words and concepts that correspond with postage stamp themes. I then drew connecting lines between each word and concept with the same theme, thus creating a

⁷ Glassine is a semi-transparent, PH neutral paper that is often used in windowed envelopes, for the storage of postage stamps, and between artworks or photos to protect them from sticking to one another. The neutral PH, and slight waxiness, makes this paper perfect for archival properties, and protects artwork and postage stamps.

⁸ The "South Africa's international flight routes" postage stamp issue was scheduled to launch in February 2016, but has been postponed to 2017.

network for each theme. These networks symbolise the postal networks that connect letter writers and the network of connections I had with 15 writers. A group of friends, acquaintances or colleagues are often referred to as one's *network*. A group of computers connected to one-another - such as in an office or the internet, or a mobile phone connection such as MTN, or Vodacom - is called a *network*. One needs to be connected to the internet or mobile data network to send emails or chat on social media platforms. Facebook, for example, advertises that we should "connect with us on Facebook". The key word here seems to be *connect*, or to form a *network of connections*. This project also explores the concept of a network of connections.

Each book represents one letter; the eight pages inside each book represent the eight themes used to classify postage stamps. On the back page of each book I have printed the letter associated with that book. On each glassine window, I have drawn a network of lines connecting the words related to the theme of each page. The pages that did not have words for a theme were left blank. The networks rest on top of the letter. The semi-transparent nature of glassine means that the letter cannot be seen when all eight pages overlay it. But, as the pages are turned and the quantity of pages over the letter lessens, the letter becomes more visible. This attempts to allude to how distance can distort a message. In one of her letters Ingrid Jonker writes that words can lose their meaning and can be misinterpreted without the physical presence of the writer (Galloway 2015:5). The books expand with a concertina spine so one can increase or reduce the distance. The layers become more - or less - clear when looking through the *windows*. The greater the physical and emotional distance between two writers, the more vague the narratives become and the letters less frequent. Even when the book's pages are pressed tightly together the layers remain opaque. This illustrates how the lack of the writers' presence allows only a window into what they see. I wrote the letter's title in the top corner opposite the window. The words are written in

a dotted format font to suggest electronic cancellation marks over postage stamps. These cancellation marks are also printed in the corner opposite the windows of envelopes.

0	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	A	B
C	D	E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L	M	N
O	P	Q	R	S	T
U	V	W	X	Y	Z
				I	
				Start	Stop



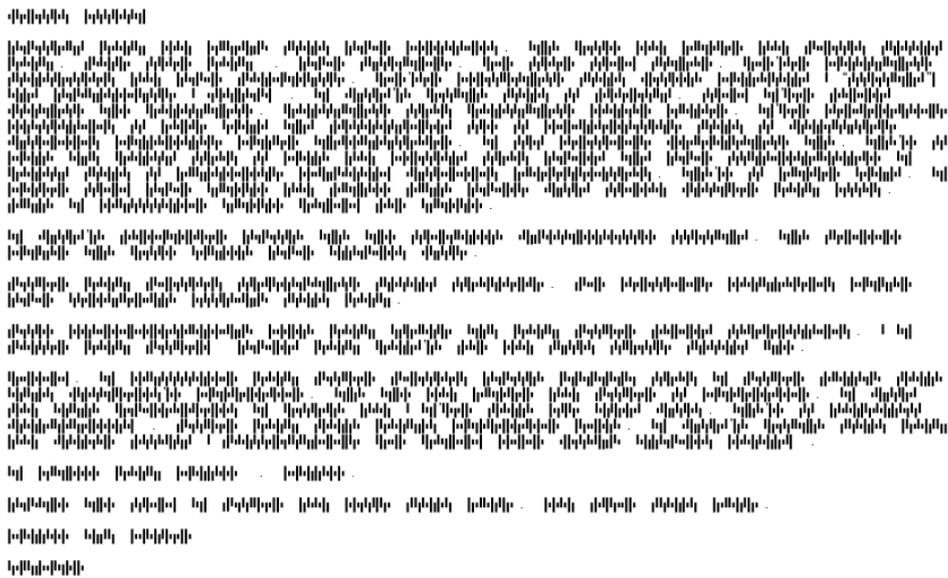
73. Mari Retief, font created from Royal Mail 4-State Customer Code (2016).

74. RM9707, Royal Mail 4-State Customer Code code on envelope (1997).

Small barcodes are printed on the envelopes, usually in the bottom corner next to the window. The Royal Mail uses these barcodes, called RM4SCC (Royal Mail 4-State Customer Code), to enable envelopes and delivery points to be sorted easily by high-speed machines (fig 74). Generally only the postal code is printed, and not the whole address. The envelopes I received while living in London had these sorting codes printed on them on their arrival in England. Each letter of the alphabet and number from zero to nine is associated with a four-stripe barcode. I created a true-type font with the barcode (fig 73). I drew each letter in illustrator and converted each letter to a font character. This font can now be installed on any computer and used in any word-processing program. I then used this font to print the titles on the 22 books.

The book covers are made from brown paper similar to the paper frequently used to wrap packages for postage. The title is hand-lettered with white gouache on the brown paper. I created a code for each letter to

preserve the letter writers' anonymity. I used the barcode format for the title of each book, thereby further obscuring the identities of the writers. The letter on the last page is also printed in this barcode font to obscure the information it contains (fig 75).



75. KC97112, Letter displayed in *Barcode* font (1997).



76. Antique letter sorting table.

The 22 books are displayed at the exhibition in a sorting box similar to a letter sorting table. Letter sorting tables are originally found in post offices and allow someone to sit and organise letters by destination (fig 76). The categorised letters would then be placed in sections on the bookcase. The

table I have built for the exhibition is smaller than the examples below. The box I built allows the books to be sorted according to writer and date of arrival. The bookcase only has 22 sections and arranged like a bar graph. There are four 'columns', each with a different number of sections, depending on how many letters each writer wrote. For example, column one has two sections, column two has three sections, column three has 14 sections and column four has three sections. The column order is determined alphabetically and each section has a reference code. The books are displayed categorically in an archival manner - further reference to the importance of the organisational nature of the post office and the archival nature of letters and postage stamps.

1.5 WORDS MATTER

This project explores - through the creation of a density map - the visual effect of the grand total of words I received in the letters, as well as the unique words (choice of words). I listed all the words I received in a database, together with each word's total word count, and then arranged them in order of frequency, from most to least. The most-used word is "I". This should not be surprising perhaps since the letters I received are all personal narratives: personal letters are primarily about "I". The second most frequent word was "the" - generally accepted to be the most frequently used word in the English language. The third most frequent word in the letters is "you". These findings seem significant for two main reasons. The frequency with which the word "the" is used seems to confirm the notion that personal letters need to follow grammatical rules, although not necessarily strictly. The frequent use of "I" and "you" seems to confirm the notion that personal letters are a form of conversation on paper between two people.

Peirce's theories on *type*, *token* and *tone*⁹ also analyse the amount and the type of words used in conversation or document. Peirce suggests a word count is an acceptable mode of judging the amount of content in a document or book. Although the word *the* is used twenty times per page on average, Peirce notes that *the* is merely one word, not 20 different words, although it appears 20 times in the document. He differentiates between the two different methods of counting the word *the*. When all the words in the document are counted (*the* x 20) Peirce calls these words 'tokens'. But when only the unique words are counted (*the* x 1), the words are called 'types' (Peirce 4.537). Tokens are generally unique, "[s]ingle object[s] or thing[s] which [are] in some single place at any one instant of time" (Peirce 4.537). They refer to something specific, for example, such as car, house, cup or dog. Types are generally more abstract. The word *the* is not an entity: it does not physically exist, but "only determines things that do exist" (Peirce 4.537). Peirce adds a third element that he calls tone, which is "[a]n indefinite significant character such as a tone of voice" (CP 4.537). But *tone* of voice becomes irrelevant when analysing data. Hence this project focuses on the *type* and *token* relationship of the words in my letters and not *tone*.¹⁰

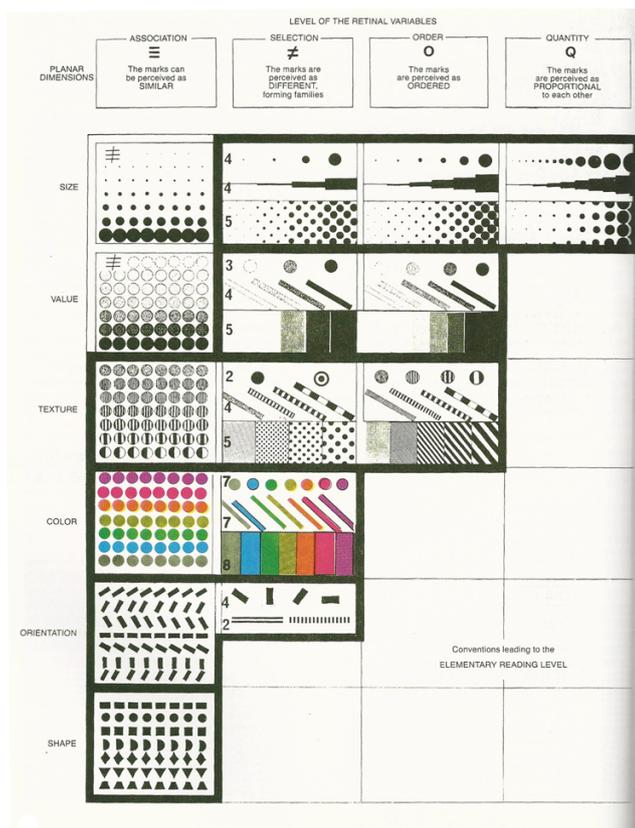
In general theory, *type* and *token* are often used to analyse and clarify the meaning of words, especially in fields such as programming¹¹ and

⁹ Although this research focuses on Peirce's object trichotomy, I still feel it is important to discuss briefly another of his trichotomies: his representamen (sign) trichotomy. As discussed in Chapter 2, Peirce argues that representamen (sign), object and interpretant are the three semiotic elements (also a trichotomy) that together explain the process of semiosis.

¹⁰ Tone of voice, as has been discussed in this research, is difficult to judge in a letter since one can only *interpret* a letter given the visual and verbal information received. Since this project uses data and presents the words in an impersonal manner, they do not have a tone of voice as they would have had when read in their original format in the letters.

¹¹ In programming *type* and *tone* are often referred to as *class* and *object*. *Class* can be a group (or set) of unique objects. *Types* can be seen as a group of words and not as unique words (*tokens*). Processing defines objects as "instances of classes [and] a class [as] a grouping of related methods (functions) and fields (variables and constants)" (www.processing.org). When I started this project on word frequency I created a

typography. The 54 letters I received contained a grand total of 16,143 words (types) of which a total of 1,892 words were unique (tokens). In printed typography, especially moveable type, groups of individual letter forms (types) are combined to make up words (tokens). For this project I also wanted to explore the unique mark making characteristics of handwriting and hand inked cancellation stamps. For me the beauty of density maps lies in the differences in marks that define different areas of data. Bertin refers to visual variations applied to the graphic representation of maps as *retinal variables* (fig 77). He classifies these as: size, value, texture, colour, orientation and shape. Bertin's theories on retinal variables are too extensive to discuss in detail in this research. I will thus only focus on texture and value, those variables significant to this project.

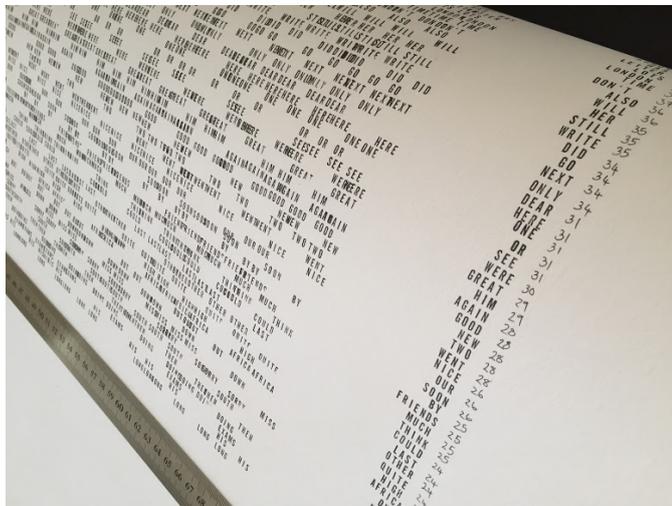


77. Jacques Bertin, Level of the retinal variables (2011).

Processing program which analysed the word count in the letters and created a density map. Each unique word was interpreted as an object by the *Processing* program and then grouped together in a class to create (or output) a visual impression of the density map.

Bertin defines value variation as “the continuous progression which the eye perceives in a series of [greys] ranging from black to white” (Bertin 2011:73). Texture variation is:

[T]he sensation resulting from a series of photographic reductions of a pattern or marks ... [f]or a given area and with a regular pattern, these reductions increase the number of marks, without causing the value of the area to vary (Bertin 2011:79).



78. Mari Retief, *Words Matter* (2017).

I drew inspiration from old printing techniques using moveable type and the hand stamped cancellation marks. Hand stamped letters - when spaced equally - result in little value variation. I used an office hand stamp that allowed me to create my own words from a tray of small letters. I stamped the words by hand using a black office stamp pad on a large roll of 200gsm Fabriano Artistico 0.75 m by 10 m (fig 78). (Postage stamps are often cancelled by a simple hand stamp and black inkpad). Each word is stamped on its own line as many times as it occurs. For example, “I” is stamped 843 times in one row. This creates a large map showing the density of words from most frequent to least frequent. The word - and the frequency with which it is used - is written by hand next to each row of

words as a type of ledger or key. This creates a long density map. The words that occur most frequently are stamped over one another to create a dark texture. The words that occur least frequently are dispersed with white space between them. Using a hand stamp with individual letters in this way is much like the original letterpress methods used when postage stamps were first introduced.

This artwork creates an impression of the sheer volume and choice of words contained in the letters I received over four years. Retinal value begins to vary when the space between the letters is increased or decreased. The spatial variation - especially when there is no space and letters are stamped over one another - creates texture changing the value degradation from dark (black) to light (white). The long piece of paper, fading from dark to light, is like a density map of significant words used.

Danesi (2004:81) also writes about maps:

[A] map can be defined, semiotically, as a text involving all three basic types of signification processes – indexicality, iconicity, and symbolism (Danesi 2004:81).

In its broad sense, a map is an indexical text: it indicates where a specific element is in the greater picture. A map is iconic: it presents elements in relation to one another. Maps also function on a symbolic level: they can only be interpreted using learnt notation systems (Danesi 2004:81). Although both Bertin and Danesi refer to geographical maps in their applications of semiotic theory, I suggest that their interpretations are applicable to the map I created. The density map does not show the geographical location of the words, but it does indicate their hierarchal position. Maps are a visual means to order, communicate and process information. This density map is indexical: it indicates where each word is in the greater picture of all words communicated. It is iconic: each word is represented in relation to other words and results in a hierarchy. This map

also acts symbolically: the viewer needs prior knowledge of how value and texture can be used to indicate density levels on a map, as well as knowledge of how to read the key next to the map.

1.6 (RE)PRINT

For this project, I explored the unique mark-making nature of cancellation marks further by tracing each cancellation mark - both hand stamped and electronic - on the 54 letters I received, and then transferred the drawings onto lino that had been cut into 4 cm circles. The circles mimic traditional hand-stamped cancellation mark shapes. I traced the cancellation marks with all their imperfections, such as missing symbols, missing lines, and smudges. Each cancellation mark is unique since the ink quantity, pressure and position are not always consistent. I then ran the lino carvings through a printing press with and without ink. This resulted in a unique print or embossing: since the turning speed of the hand wheel varied, the amount of ink on the prints differed and the lino circles sometimes moved slightly as the printing press rolled over them.

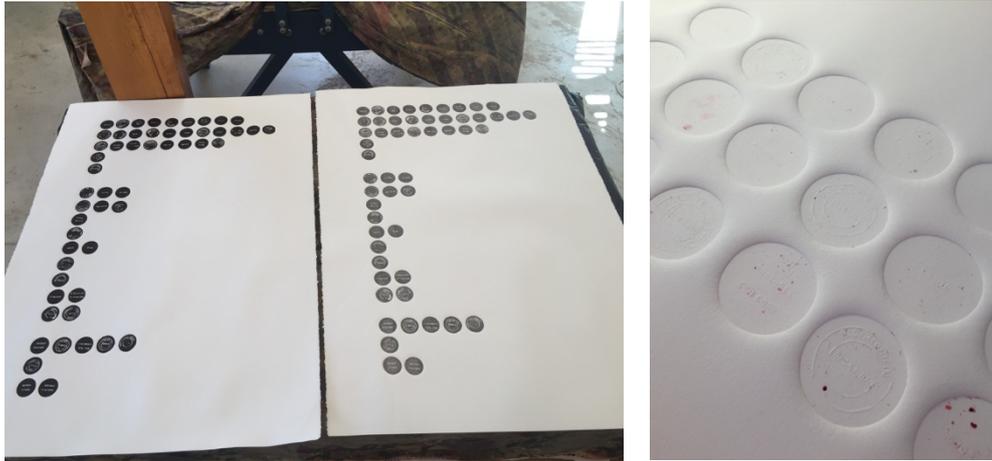


79. Mari Retief, Lino cut circles and sealing wax prints (2017).

Some of the embossed circles have small fragments of red wax on them. Before I decided to work with printing and embossing, I had experimented with making lino cut impressions in red sealing wax (fig 79). I tried various

traditional and current sealing wax recipes until I created a combination of both modern and old techniques that yielded the best shape and detailed impressions. The uniqueness of each wax seal reinforced the uniqueness of each cancellation mark and alluded to the private nature of a sealed letter: if the seal is broken, the message has been tampered with. In addition, a seal is a unique signature that is used to authenticate the origin and validity of the contents of a letter, similar to the way that signatures are frequently used to validate a document. Cancellation marks similarly authenticate the validity of a postage stamp: they are a seal/stamp of approval.

I eventually discarded the sealing wax route. Although I had sealed some of the letters I had written with a wax signature, I had not received any sealed letters. I continued with the theme of system and data analysis instead. I have chosen to arrange the cancellation mark carvings in the order - by month – that I received them. The prints start at the top and decrease in quantity towards the bottom as I began to receive less and less letters. My friends in South Africa continued with their lives and, since they had had no guarantee they would see me soon, their letters gradually stopped. Interestingly, those writers who gave me permission to use their letters are also those who continued corresponding with me until this period in London ended in 1999. They continue to stay connected to this day.



80. Mari Retief, *S96D99* (2017).
 81. Mari Retief, *S96D99* (2017) [detail].

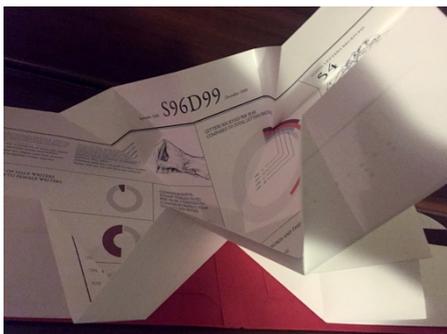
The final work is a triptych: two prints and one embossing (fig 80 and fig 81). The first paper was rolled through the press with a fresh coat of ink. The second paper was rolled through immediately after the first. I used the same coat of ink and this resulted in a lighter print. The third paper was rolled through with no ink. This left only an embossing of the carvings. The three prints - moving left to right - from dark to lighter to an embossing - symbolise how a strong connection at the beginning of a correspondence fades as time passes until eventually the connection is only a memory, an impression in the mind. The embossed paper, flecked with sealing wax, suggests how memories linger. At the end of a correspondence - when the letters stop - the words in the letters will always be there and, with them, the memory of the connection. When I first moved to England my friends and I were eager to write but, over the years, this eagerness diminished until only a small number of friends continued to write. This triptych symbolises the gradual fading of connections over time. The triptych reads both vertically and horizontally: as the quantity of letters decrease (vertical), so does my connection with friends and home (horizontal).

1.7 S96D99

I gathered a significant amount of data during this process of exploring and unpacking the parallel narratives of postage stamps and letters. Inspired largely by Nicholas Felton, the author of several personal annual reports, I have created an infographic book that shows my process of deconstructing postage stamps and letters. Infographics is generally defined as the visual representation of data or information. This infographic book (fig 82 and fig 83) illustrates the data and information I have documented over the course of this research in an aesthetic and simplified manner.



82. Mari Retief, *Infographic book* (2017).



83. Mari Retief, *Infographic book* (2017) (detail).

Felton is an information designer whose work focuses on the representation of personal data. Felton has meticulously documented his own behaviour throughout the year, starting in 2005 and continuing until 2014. Felton documented mundane activities - such as how many cups of

coffee he consumed, to whom he spoke and how many emails he sent etc. At the end of each year he documented the data he had collected into an annual report. According to an article on the exhibition *Virtual Identities* (2011) in which Felton participated:

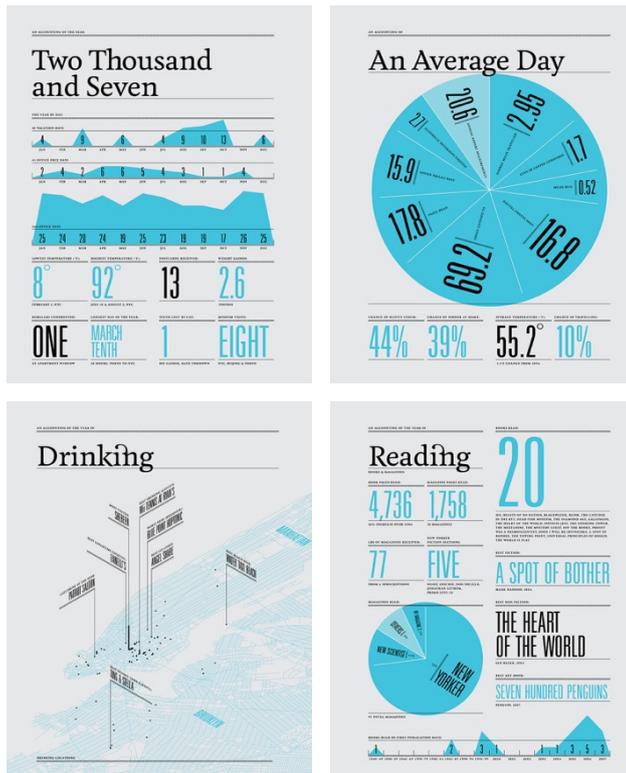
Felton has become a trendsetter in the world of infographics ... His Annual Reports have contributed to a new online trend known as "lifehacking": the practice of gathering and statistically analysing the various everyday facts of one's life (www.strozzina.org).

Felton presents his annual reports in a sewn-stitched, 203 mm x 244 mm book. My infographics are also presented in a book: 450mm x 300mm when folded open and 160 mm x 220 mm when closed. The pages inside are folded in a Turkish map¹² style. The data on postage stamps and the data on letters are represented on different pages, but with similar layouts. This format mimics the concept of parallel. The book illustrates data such as original location of letters; average age and gender of writers; average number of letters sent; average word count per letter; longest letter and shortest letter et cetera.

My book, like Felton's work, is not a static representation of mundane data:

What [Felton] creates is a conceptual work in infographic form. Unconscious behaviour and preference patterns become legible, giving us a better understanding of even the most hidden aspects of our identity (www.strozzina.org).

¹² This type of fold is colloquially called the *Turkish map fold* technique, but I am unsure where the name originates from. I have found a similar technique called the *palm foldable sheet*, which was patented (US2525937A) in 1950. <https://www.google.com/patents/US2525937>



84. Nicholas Felton, *Annual Report* (2007).

Fig 84 - a selection of pages from Felton's 2007 Annual report – shows how Felton analyses his daily life in detail. In the examples above, Felton analyses his travel, reading and drinking habits. Felton's data revealed surprising information about his daily habits. For instance, he noted how much coffee he consumed, "calculat[ing] that his daily habit was equivalent to nearly seven lethal doses of caffeine" (www.feltron.com).

My research analyses the everyday information I received in the form of letters and postage stamps. The letters are about other people's everyday facts and the postage stamps reflect everyday facts about South Africa. The data is significant in my life with respect to how many letters I received; from whom; from where; their length; and when I received them. It also indicates how many postage stamps I received and from which editions.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter takes the theories discussed in the previous chapters and applies them practically to find connections between the elements of postage stamps and letters. The ethical decision to remove all personal details - thereby focusing only on the data they produced - enabled me to find connections and similarities between postage stamps and letters I might otherwise have missed. Peirce's semiotic theories proved particularly applicable here. Many of his theories involve deconstruction: the process of stripping down concepts to their single constituents and then re-ordering them to find new connections. I have attempted this in my practical work: I have stripped the postage stamps and letters down to data and then re-arranged them in search of significant connections.

I have explored these significant connections visually in the five projects I completed. I have used a variety of old and modern methods to experiment with the multimodality and mixed-medium nature of postage stamps and letters. These methods also allowed me to focus on different aspects of their narratives and to view them from new perspectives.

The insights I received would not have been possible had I not analysed the words (data) separately from the original letters. Ordering the information received from my postage stamps and letters to communicate and process information in new ways has allowed me to unpack some of their parallel narratives. It allowed me to explore, from a personal and visual perspective, the semiotic landscape created by these postage stamps and letters.

The decision to apply a systematic approach to my practical component has not excluded an element of spontaneity. The creation of any artwork invariably takes unexpected turns from the moment of inception to

completion. Similarly, the finished letter or postage stamp is also frequently a product of a good measure of spontaneity. Spontaneity is especially prevalent in informal letters, unlike formal letters which tend to be more structured. I have argued that informal letters - such as personal letters - are similar to conversations between people. My research has found merit in this argument, especially since the most common word in the letters was "I" and the third most common was "you". This finding seems to show that writers mostly write about themselves (personal narrative) but often direct the letter at the recipient; this seems to imply a conversational method of writing.

Another observation was that the writers who continued to write until my stay in London ended in 1999 did not write the longest letters; theirs were shorter and more informal, further reinforcing the conversational nature of personal letters.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to use semiotic and narrative theory to unpack the layered meanings related to postage stamps and handwritten letters and to explore their similarities. Peirce's theories on icon, index and symbol provided tools to deconstruct the data for this research: the 54 letters and their accompanying 75 postage stamps, which I received when I was living in London from 1996-1999. I explored the public and private narratives contained in this personal collection in particular, and in South African and international postage stamps and letters in general.

This research focused on South African postage stamps and letters for two reasons. First, I have found no academic research which applied semiotic theory to South African postage stamps nor any type/image comparisons using both postage stamps and letters as a tool. Second, these letters and postage stamps hold personal significance. They are archival objects from my history and of an era that has come and gone: they represent my teenage past as well as a time when letter writing was still a common form of distance communication.

This research found that although postage stamps and letters, arriving together, narrate two sets of stories in parallel, there are also similarities in the process of creating and interpreting meaning. As indexes, postage stamps and letters are pointers to their sources and proof of their existence. Handwriting and cancellation marks can be seen as identity pegs, or graphological markers, to their sources. As icons, postage stamps and letters represent aspects of their sources and may behave metaphorically. The illustrative nature of images on postage stamps and handwritten words in letters enable them to act as visual metaphors. Postage stamps and letters have thus become icons /metaphors representing written

communication. As symbols, postage stamps and letters both represent their sources. Their words and images may be ideological narratives, symbolic of events they want to share and commemorate. The use of various elements - such as typography, diagrams, illustrations, colour - all contribute to meaning. Icon, index and symbol, acting individually and together, create many levels of meaning on both postage stamps and letters. For example, country abbreviations or signatures are simultaneously an index and recognisable icon to their source, as well as a symbol of what their source represents.

Peirce's architectonic approach to semiotics has complimented my systematic approach to both the theoretical and practical components of this research. Systematically ordering and processing the data I gathered from the postage stamps and letters allowed me to unpack some of their parallel narratives. Treating the letters and postage stamps as both personal and impersonal objects of communication - by studying their narratives as well as the data I collected - revealed data patterns that match some theoretical discussions. For instance, I explored the concept that letters are conversations on paper. The frequency with which the words "I" and "you" were used in the personal letters suggest that this concept of the conversational nature of letters is valid. The small variety of commemorative postage stamps I received substantiates the SAPO's comment about the unsuccessful marketing strategies of commemorative postage stamps. Finally, the decrease in the number of letters I received over time highlights the notion that connections are difficult to maintain over distance and time.

It is generally accepted that postage stamps and letters are objects of communication. This research has shown that postage stamps are more than forms of franking and the words in handwritten letters are more than transparent signifiers of information. Taken together, they are multimodal bearers of signs:

[H]uman societies use various modes of representation and each mode has, inherently, different representational and meaning-making potentials (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006:41).

Interpretations are affected by heuristics. Cultures develop specific sign-systems. As a result, verbal and non-verbal communication methods are always coded and only seem transparent because the codes are known already. It is thus important for both postage stamps and letters to use sign systems that are understood cross-culturally.

The meaning embedded in postage stamps and letters both rely on the conscious construction and reading of signs. This research has shown that narratives are planned: narrators construct narratives with signs that best convey the intended messages. Moreover, letter writers and postage stamp artists both employ similar methods and tools to emphasise meaning in narratives. Typographic and grammatical decisions can be made to emphasise or de-emphasise the importance of specific type; figurative language and imagery can be used to add new layers of meaning to words and images; colour and texture can be used expressively; and diagrams can be used to simplify concepts. Letters and postage stamps are not randomly designed. Letters tend to be more spontaneous creations, while the consciously chosen themes for postage stamps are commissioned by their country's Postal Officials.

This research has explored the notion that both postage stamps and letters reflect identity. Their messages are those of self and national promotion. They reflect the "I": a personal "I" and a national "I". Writers *choose* how to express themselves through letters and governments *choose* how to express a nation's character through postage stamps. Both can thus be forms of propaganda: the goal, most often, is to represent "I" in the best possible light. I argue that the difference is that postage stamps have a very public narrative and letters have a very private narrative. Postage stamps can be likened to speeches and adverts, whereas private letters are like

intimate conversations. Private letters reflect identity most clearly: the most commonly used word in the 54 letters I received was “I”, and “you” was the third most commonly used word.

This research has found that the narratives in postage stamps and letters should not be studied in isolation, but rather studied collectively as a system of narratives. When a postage stamp or letter is approached as an isolated entity, it produces a single narrative which in turn produces an isolated opinion. When viewed collectively, however, postage stamps and letters both create overviews or grand narratives.

The research also revealed how the narratives in postage stamps and letters are culturally determined, and that meanings can change over time. For instance, the *Memin Pinguin* postage stamp series revealed how the interpretation of signs and meaning differs between people and how opinions change as people and society evolve. The same is true for letters. The way I now read my personal collection of letters differs markedly from the way I read them as a teenager. Similarly, the correspondence between Jonker and Brink: the knowledge we have acquired since they were originally written affects our reading of them. One can therefore study these changing interpretations, or myths, in postage stamps and letters not as isolated connotations, but rather as ideological narratives. Barthes' concept of myth and Peirce's theories on the infinite sign emphasise the significance of changing interpretations and how one idea could lead to another.

This research has shown that since the narratives of postage stamps are constructed and subjective, they are merely fragments (windows/portals) of 'the greater picture'. Moreover, since interpretation is subjective, their narratives are fragmented. The postage stamps and letters I received revealed limited insight: I was limited by the quantity of letters I received during the time of my stay in London (1996 – 1999) and the postage stamps on them. This research was further limited by the small number of writers

who granted me permission to use their letters in this research, and the small variety of postage stamps I received. The research revealed that these limitations were significant for at least two reasons. First, the small variety of postage stamps revealed the SAPO's unsuccessful commemorative postage stamps marketing strategy; and second, the small sample of writers I could contact emphasized how connections fade over time. The small variety of postage stamps I received questions how successful postage stamps can be in their role as miniature ambassadors to other countries. My small sample did not reflect the greater picture of the potential that South African postage stamps can represent. The fragmented nature of narrative can be seen in both my collection of letters and the limited variety of postage stamps: both reveal only selected information.

The existence of commemorative postage stamps emphasise how the roles of postage stamps have changed since their creation: they are no longer merely proof of payment, but have become collector's items. Their collectability is emphasised even more since the popularity of electronic communication has grown and the need for handwritten communication has decreased. Letters have almost become 'vintage'. Neither stamps nor letters are important vehicles of communication anymore. Garfield writes that since the birth of the personal letter, "the letter hasn't really changed much in all that time. But now we may be at risk of letting it change irreversibly" (Garfield 2013:236).

Peirce's theories have provided an effective framework from which to unpack the layers of meaning in postage stamps and letters and explore their semiotic landscapes. The practical and theoretical components for this research have unpacked and compared the layers of meaning in postage stamps and letters. This research has also captured aspects of the unique relationship between postage stamps and letters: a relationship that is fading. I have argued that their public and private narratives are dependent on one another and always arrive in parallel. This research has not studied

postage stamps and letters in isolation, but rather as a semiotic system by unpacking their layers of meaning, and finding similarities. I have argued that postage stamps and letters are multimodal bearers of signs and have explored their multimodality in both the practical and theoretical components. It has not been the intention to reinforce the different modes of communication offered by postage stamps and letters, but rather to unpack and compare, from a personal perspective, their many layers of meaning.

APPENDIX

The data used for this research was gathered from a personal collection of postage stamps received from South Africa while living in London during the years 1996 and 1999. This appendix serves as a source for this data to which I refer in both the practical and theoretical components of this research. As described in chapter 5, the 54 handwritten letters that I received were deconstructed by retyping them on the computer, counting the postage stamps and letters, analysing their words and images and comparing their data.

1 GENERAL DATA COLLECTED ON LETTERS

This section serves as a collective overview of the data gathered from the letters I received.

Total letters	54
Total writers	13
Male	1
Female	12
Total word count	14,208
Unique words	1892
Total character count	160,862,976
Average letters per writer	4,15
Average words per writer	1092,92
Average words per letter	263,11

Table 1. General data collected.

YEAR	LETTERS RECEIVED	POSTAGE STAMPS RECEIVED
1996	9	8
1997	24	34
1998	9	18
1999	12	15

Table 2. Letters and stamps received per year.

	RM	MK	KD	KC:JN	KC	KB	JN	J	I	CP	CH	BL99	BGU	BGR	TOTAL
BELLVILLE										1	2				3
BLOEMFONTEIN	3														3
DURBAN												3			3
PRETORIA		3		1	16	2	5	3	5				1	2	38
RUSTENBURG			5												5
ROBERTSON											1				1
STELLENBOSCH	1														1
TOTAL	4	3	5	1	16	2	5	3	5	1	3	3	1	2	54

Table 3. Letters received per city/town in South Africa.

2 POSTAGE STAMP THEMES COLLECTED

This section of data focuses on the postage stamps I received as a collection and compares the quantity of themes received to the quantity of themes in print from 1996 to 1999. The postage stamps I received are highlighted in table 4.

YEAR	Years before 1996	1996	1997	1998	1999
POSTAGE STAMP EDITIONS	6th Definitive Edition (English / Latin)	6th Definitive Edition (English / Latin)		Redrawn - 6th Definitive Edition (English)	
	1995 Masakhane	African Cup Soccer	Motor Car Centenary	Year of the Tiger	UPU/Mail Delivery Vehicles
	1991 Creation of South African Post Office	City of Bloemfontein	HONG KONG '97/Lion	Sea Rescue Institute/Ships	Year of the Rabbit
		CHINA '96/Year of the Rat	Water Conservation	SAPDA '98/Leopard	Famous Ships
		Paintings/G.Sekoto	Naval Anniversary/Ships	World Cup Soccer	AUSTRALIA '99/Ships
		Youth Day	Freedom Day/Elections	South African Antiquities	AIDS Awareness
		Comrades Marathon	Year of the Ox/SAPDA '97	Raptors/Birds	IBRA '99/Elephants
		CAPEX '96/Parliament Building	Cultural Artifacts	Arbor Week/Trees	SAPADA '99/Steam Locomotive
		Atlanta Olympic Games	Water Birds	Christmas	Workers' Day
		New Constitution	Buildings/PACIFIC '97	World Post Day/Hawk	T.Mbeki/Inauguration
		Merchant Marine/Ships/Safmarine	Cattle Breeds	ILSAPEX '98	Order of St. John/N. Mandela
		Women's Day	Antarctic Wildlife	Whales	National Arts Festival
		World Post Day	E.Sontonga/National Anthem	Ice Cream Truck/Clover SA	Traditional Wall Art
		Christmas	CAPETOWN '97	Human Rights	CHINA '99/Rock Paintings
		BLOEMFONTEIN 150/Ships	World Post Day/Mailboxes		JOPEX '99/Flowers
		Nobel Laureates	Christmas/SANTA		Migratory Species/Animals
					Boer War #1

Table 4. Postage stamp editions received (highlighted) compared to total postage stamps printed during 1996 and 1999.

3 DECONSTRUCTED LETTERS

This section focuses on the data collected in more detail. The words in the 54 letters were retyped and arranged in a table (table 6) from most frequent to least frequent to explore which were the most popular. Table 7 shows a detailed section from the word frequency table that represents each word per letter.

i	801	soon	26	remember	12	spelling	8	being	5	feeling	4	earth	3
the	488	by	25	said	12	won	8	blue	5	form	4	email	3
you	423	friends	25	sure	12	world	8	both	5	friendship	4	evenings	3
and	381	much	25	thought	12	february	7	box	5	games	4	exact	3
to	378	think	25	told	12	actually	7	break	5	guess	4	face	3
a	363	could	24	too	12	address	7	clothes	5	heart	4	fact	3
it	281	last	24	wait	12	already	7	coming	5	history	4	food	3
in	206	other	24	wish	12	beautiful	7	dancing	5	ice	4	forever	3
for	187	quite	24	almost	11	best	7	decided	5	isnt	4	forgive	3
is	184	high	23	an	11	better	7	definitely	5	kind	4	forward	3
have	172	africa	22	big	11	boyfriend	7	different	5	later	4	free	3
so	171	out	22	card	11	bye	7	east	5	learn	4	funny	3
of	158	down	21	holidays	11	church	7	else	5	lessons	4	future	3
that	153	miss	21	letters	11	couldn't	7	enjoyed	5	looks	4	hadnt	3
we	153	sorry	21	lovely	11	each	7	enjoying	5	making	4	half	3
my	148	south	21	lucky	11	find	7	evening	5	match	4	hands	3
but	137	then	21	made	11	group	7	exam	5	meet	4	happened	3
was	134	doing	20	met	11	having	7	excellent	5	merry	4	happening	3
are	99	exams	20	probably	11	its	7	except	5	need	4	hatfield	3
me	99	his	20	start	11	least	7	finished	5	nothing	4	head	3
on	93	long	20	working	11	luckily	7	freezing	5	oh	4	impossible	3
at	92	after	19	years	11	make	7	front	5	paint	4	insurance	3
your	86	believe	19	always	10	money	7	gave	5	part	4	introduced	3
your	82	more	19	any	10	morning	7	gets	5	picture	4	italy	3
all	76	must	19	anyway	10	parents	7	gone	5	post	4	jokes	3
this	69	say	19	boys	10	partner	7	hair	5	practice	4	known	3
can	67	some	19	called	10	kid	7	hand	5	put	4	late	3
got	63	them	19	dad	10	sent	7	idea	5	questions	4	leaf	3
really	63	way	19	everything	10	such	7	lately	5	rain	4	license	3
she	59	back	18	few	10	sweet	7	leave	5	realised	4	living	3
he	57	days	18	god	10	than	7	leaving	5	restaurants	4	loony	3
love	57	life	18	happy	10	these	7	makes	5	room	4	loved	3
like	56	over	18	heard	10	watch	7	means	5	says	4	luck	3
now	56	december	17	moment	10	yet	7	midmar	5	seed	4	mail	3
there	56	birthday	17	old	10	afrikaans	6	might	5	shopping	4	man	3
year	56	didn't	17	phoned	10	anymore	6	months	5	side	4	many	3
get	55	little	17	received	10	around	6	moving	5	sil	4	mine	3
well	55	never	17	since	10	biology	6	newsletter	5	something	4	month	3
what	54	thank	17	their	10	came	6	olympiad	5	sometimes	4	natal	3
very	53	would	17	today	10	cousin	6	onto	5	stayed	4	nervous	3
be	51	busy	16	want	10	dog	6	party	5	stop	4	normally	3
hope	51	cute	16	weeks	10	everyone	6	photo	5	strange	4	opened	3
not	51	feel	16	friday	9	felt	6	played	5	telephone	4	opening	3
school	50	guy	16	ago	9	grade	6	pretty	5	theatre	4	ours	3
how	49	hear	16	anything	9	hey	6	red	5	thing	4	parcel	3
if	49	no	16	bad	9	hopefully	6	seem	5	times	4	parcels	3
just	47	take	16	bless	9	hotel	6	sick	5	true	4	performed	3
they	47	bit	15	boring	9	kids	6	sounds	5	tv	4	piece	3
as	46	dad	15	enjoy	9	let	6	sunny	5	typing	4	playing	3
do	46	guys	15	fax	9	live	6	suppose	5	university	4	pool	3
from	46	hi	15	finally	9	looking	6	swimming	5	use	4	postcard	3
going	46	home	15	fine	9	maths	6	tea	5	valentine	4	pottery	3
am	45	send	15	first	9	menlyn	6	took	5	waitress	4	problem	3
because	45	thanks	15	fun	9	missing	6	until	5	watched	4	professional	3
day	45	us	15	girls	9	mother	6	van	5	watching	4	proud	3
had	45	week	15	hot	9	music	6	wouldnt	5	weekend	4	read	3
been	44	work	15	keep	9	news	6	yes	5	winter	4	report	3
up	44	before	14	lost	9	ok	6	march	4	without	4	rooms	3
know	43	come	14	maybe	9	own	6	april	4	worked	4	saying	3
christmas	42	england	14	people	9	prefects	6	monday	4	yesterday	4	season	3
when	42	even	14	present	9	pretoria	6	absolute	4	yourself	4	sending	3
about	41	getting	14	started	9	rest	6	absolutely	4	september	3	set	3
has	41	havent	14	stay	9	restaurant	6	accounting	4	november	3	share	3
letter	41	house	14	subjects	9	right	6	anyone	4	wednesday	3	shirt	3
lots	40	lot	14	team	9	rugby	6	apologise	4	saturday	3	small	3
london	39	matric	14	three	9	science	6	appreciate	4	able	3	socks	3
time	39	phone	14	together	9	second	6	arent	4	afternoon	3	sore	3
don't	37	tell	14	while	9	seems	6	away	4	clean	3	sort	3
also	36	things	14	who	9	should	6	ball	4	alone	3	sotho	3
will	36	which	14	whole	9	social	6	bed	4	although	3	speak	3
her	35	class	13	july	8	squash	6	bigger	4	black	3	special	3
still	35	dance	13	another	8	standard	6	books	4	bloemfontein	3	spell	3
write	35	ever	13	bought	8	studying	6	bored	4	book	3	spend	3
did	34	every	13	cold	8	stunning	6	brilliant	4	boy	3	spoke	3
go	34	family	13	cool	8	subject	6	business	4	braai	3	square	3
next	34	left	13	end	8	surprise	6	call	4	breakfast	3	stage	3
only	34	number	13	enough	8	swim	6	changed	4	bunch	3	standing	3
dear	31	off	13	far	8	teacher	6	classes	4	car	3	starting	3
here	31	please	13	found	8	thinking	6	clean	4	centre	3	stellenbosch	3
one	31	same	13	girl	8	though	6	close	4	closer	3	stickers	3
or	31	saw	13	hours	8	tired	6	couple	4	club	3	stopped	3
see	31	seen	13	look	8	weather	6	delicious	4	comes	3	stress	3
were	30	writing	13	mean	8	where	6	dirty	4	commission	3	supper	3
great	29	english	12	mom	8	wonderful	6	does	4	computer	3	supposed	3
him	29	friend	12	most	8	wow	6	doesn't	4	cream	3	swam	3
again	28	guess	12	movies	8	written	6	done	4	cricket	3	taken	3
good	28	holiday	12	name	8	may	5	durban	4	cut	3	teachers	3
new	28	into	12	once	8	june	5	eat	4	danced	3	teddy	3
two	28	job	12	pair	8	art	5	excuse	4	desk	3	temperature	3
went	28	movie	12	passed	8	asked	5	expensive	4	drink	3	term	3
rice	26	myself	12	past	8	autumn	5	experience	4	due	3	test	3
our	26	night	12	short	8	beginning	5	eyes	4	during	3	tests	3

Table 6. Total words received in letters.

tomorrow	3	envelope	2	parts	2	tiny	2	beach	1	chinese	1	double	1
tonight	3	especially	2	pass	2	totally	2	beauty	1	chocolates	1	doves	1
tour	2	essays	2	patient	2	tois	2	begged	1	choose	1	drawer	1
tuckshop	3	extra	2	pen	2	trafalgar	2	begging	1	choosy	1	dream	1
used	3	fairy	2	perfect	2	training	2	begun	1	choreographer	1	dreams	1
virus	3	fall	2	phoning	2	travel	2	behind	1	chosen	1	dried	1
walking	3	fantastic	2	photos	2	trees	2	belated	1	circle	1	drive	1
wants	3	father	2	pieces	2	tried	2	bell	1	city	1	driver	1
weird	3	feels	2	pigs	2	trust	2	below	1	civies	1	drops	1
whether	3	fell	2	pitch	2	try	2	benoni	1	classrooms	1	drunk	1
white	3	fish	2	place	2	tuesdays	2	besides	1	cleaning	1	duck	1
works	3	flat	2	places	2	turned	2	bet	1	clearing	1	dude	1
yippees	3	flight	2	play	2	twice	2	between	1	clock	1	dundee	1
january	2	flu	2	players	2	uncomfortable	2	bible	1	cloth	1	dying	1
sat	2	forget	2	plays	2	usual	2	bikes	1	cloudy	1	earlier	1
sunday	2	forgot	2	point	2	version	2	birds	1	coast	1	earn	1
thursday	2	four	2	pooped	2	voice	2	birthdate	1	cockroaches	1	earning	1
account	2	fox	2	poor	2	wake	2	bits	1	collection	1	ears	1
adorable	2	french	2	portfolio	2	wasnt	2	blind	1	comfortably	1	edgars	1
advice	2	frying	2	potchefstroom	2	weight	2	blood	1	commitment	1	eldest	1
african	2	funeral	2	presents	2	werent	2	blow	1	company	1	electricians	1
afterwards	2	furness	2	previous	2	why	2	boarder	1	complained	1	element	1
along	2	gala	2	prince	2	wisdom	2	boat	1	complaining	1	embarrassing	1
amazing	2	garfontein	2	production	2	wondering	2	body	1	complicated	1	ended	1
arrived	2	geography	2	project	2	woolworths	2	boffy	1	complications	1	ending	1
arte	2	geometry	2	promise	2	worried	2	boiling	1	compulsory	1	ends	1
ask	2	george	2	promotion	2	worry	2	booked	1	confirmed	1	enrichment	1
asking	2	german	2	quickly	2	worse	2	booklet	1	confused	1	enrolled	1
ate	2	germiston	2	rainy	2	wrote	2	boots	1	confusing	1	entire	1
athletics	2	gold	2	rather	2	younger	2	born	1	congrats	1	entrapment	1
average	2	grades	2	reaches	2	yours	2	bottles	1	conjunction	1	envy	1
bag	2	gran	2	reading	2	yuppie	2	boxing	1	conquest	1	era	1
bank	2	grow	2	real	2	sun	1	boyfriends	1	consists	1	errors	1
bear	2	headmaster	2	recently	2	tuesday	1	braais	1	constantly	1	essence	1
became	2	hearing	2	relax	2	above	1	bracelet	1	contract	1	euro	1
become	2	heaven	2	remembered	2	accent	1	bragging	1	convenient	1	eva	1
biggest	2	hemisphere	2	results	2	accepted	1	brains	1	convent	1	eve	1
bites	2	hold	2	river	2	accounts	1	brakes	1	conversation	1	eventually	1
block	2	holding	2	roses	2	achievement	1	brats	1	convert	1	everybody	1
bottom	2	holds	2	run	2	achievements	1	breaking	1	cook	1	everywhere	1
broken	2	homework	2	running	2	acting	1	breather	1	cooking	1	examiner	1
brothers	2	horrific	2	save	2	activities	1	bribed	1	cooped	1	example	1
buddy	2	huge	2	scared	2	addition	1	bride	1	correspondence	1	excited	1
buy	2	important	2	seize	2	admit	1	bright	1	costs	1	exciting	1
cares	2	invited	2	seniors	2	adoption	1	bring	1	cottage	1	exercise	1
carry	2	irritating	2	serious	2	adult	1	brings	1	country	1	exhausted	1
case	2	jelly	2	settled	2	advertising	1	brink	1	counts	1	expect	1
catching	2	job	2	settling	2	aerobics	1	british	1	course	1	extremely	1
caught	2	kitchen	2	shakespearan	2	affair	1	broke	1	court	1	faces	1
cause	2	largest	2	sharks	2	affordable	1	bronkhorstbaai	1	coward	1	facts	1
caused	2	laughing	2	shoes	2	afternoons	1	brooklyn	1	crashing	1	fahrenheit	1
cd	2	leap	2	shop	2	agencies	1	brother	1	crawl	1	fair	1
celebrate	2	learnt	2	shorter	2	agree	1	brought	1	create	1	fairly	1
cell	2	legal	2	showed	2	airports	1	brown	1	cross	1	falling	1
certificate	2	lekka	2	silver	2	ale	1	brushes	1	crow	1	famous	1
champagne	2	liar	2	similar	2	algebra	1	build	1	cruise	1	fan	1
charge	2	licence	2	single	2	alive	1	building	1	cry	1	fancy	1
chatting	2	lives	2	sits	2	alright	1	builds	1	cuddly	1	farwell	1
checked	2	lobster	2	sitting	2	amount	1	bum	1	currie	1	fast	1
child	2	locker	2	skating	2	amused	1	bummer	1	cutest	1	fat	1
chilly	2	looked	2	skin	2	ancient	1	bumped	1	daisy	1	fault	1
chose	2	lord	2	someone	2	angry	1	bunker	1	dare	1	favourite	1
click	2	lunch	2	sometime	2	anniversary	1	buns	1	date	1	feasts	1
clown	2	machine	2	somewhere	2	answered	1	burden	1	daylight	1	features	1
college	2	mainly	2	song	2	anywhere	1	burnt	1	deadly	1	fees	1
comment	2	major	2	sooner	2	apollo	1	butt	1	dearest	1	fence	1
concentrate	2	male	2	sounded	2	apparently	1	butterfly	1	decide	1	fetch	1
considering	2	management	2	southern	2	application	1	cable	1	decides	1	fetched	1
control	2	meeting	2	speaking	2	approx	1	cake	1	deciding	1	fibreglass	1
convinced	2	mentioned	2	stand	2	argued	1	cakes	1	degrees	1	fifth	1
coxswackie	2	message	2	starts	2	arrange	1	cambridge	1	demandad	1	figure	1
crazy	2	millions	2	staying	2	arranging	1	camp	1	depends	1	fill	1
cup	2	mistakes	2	step	2	arrive	1	cannot	1	depressing	1	filled	1
dates	2	modernised	2	store	2	article	1	captain	1	depth	1	fillet	1
dead	2	mouse	2	story	2	artwork	1	cards	1	despair	1	final	1
death	2	moved	2	straight	2	asleep	1	career	1	desperate	1	finals	1
decorations	2	naughty	2	string	2	assume	1	cashier	1	dessert	1	finding	1
denim	2	neighbour	2	stuck	2	assume	1	cats	1	destinations	1	fireworks	1
deputy	2	nerve	2	study	2	attack	1	cds	1	detention	1	firms	1
died	2	nights	2	stuff	2	awkward	1	certain	1	developed	1	frsts	1
difficult	2	north	2	sunningdale	2	baai	1	challenging	1	diagram	1	fisherman	1
discovered	2	nursery	2	super	2	baby	1	change	1	dialled	1	fishng	1
disgusting	2	office	2	talk	2	badge	1	charity	1	diet	1	fitness	1
doctor	2	officially	2	talking	2	bait	1	chasing	1	difference	1	fix	1
draw	2	oink	2	teams	2	bake	1	chat	1	digs	1	fixed	1
dress	2	open	2	teeth	2	bangy	1	chatter	1	dinosaurs	1	flies	1
dresses	2	overseas	2	terribly	2	banned	1	check	1	disappointed	1	floods	1
dumb	2	package	2	terrier	2	bar	1	cheeks	1	disappointment	1	floor	1
early	2	pages	2	thames	2	barely	1	cheer	1	disaster	1	flown	1
easy	2	paper	2	theme	2	basically	1	cheese	1	disasters	1	fluffy	1
economics	2	park	2	thursdays	2	basketball	1	chef	1	disastrous	1	following	1
either	2	parties	2	timetable	2	batchelor	1	chemically	1	disgust	1	fond	1

Table 6. (continued).

fool	1	indoors	1	mission	1	possibility	1	scary	1	struggled	1	uplifting	1
forest	1	induced	1	modern	1	possible	1	scene	1	studios	1	useful	1
forgiven	1	information	1	mondays	1	possibly	1	scratches	1	stunned	1	using	1
forgiveness	1	injury	1	monster	1	posted	1	sculpture	1	stupid	1	utterly	1
formed	1	inside	1	mood	1	postpone	1	seating	1	success	1	veld	1
frame	1	interested	1	moon	1	pounds	1	seconds	1	suddenly	1	vicious	1
framed	1	interests	1	muffs	1	pouring	1	secretary	1	sugar	1	vienna	1
freckles	1	invite	1	murals	1	powers	1	seemed	1	suicide	1	view	1
freedom	1	involving	1	murcury	1	practical	1	self	1	suits	1	vinniger	1
friendly	1	iran	1	museums	1	practised	1	sell	1	summer	1	violets	1
frozen	1	iron	1	musical	1	praclising	1	semi	1	sunglasses	1	viruses	1
full	1	ironing	1	mutual	1	prayed	1	sends	1	sunset	1	visit	1
fundraising	1	irresistible	1	nailpolish	1	praying	1	senior	1	supplies	1	visited	1
gain	1	italian	1	nasty	1	preparation	1	serves	1	swear	1	vocabulary	1
galas	1	jersey	1	neat	1	preparing	1	service	1	system	1	void	1
gallery	1	jingle	1	necessarily	1	pressure	1	setting	1	tables	1	volksie	1
game	1	jobs	1	neck	1	princess	1	seven	1	taking	1	volume	1
garage	1	jogging	1	nedbank	1	printer	1	shame	1	tale	1	vomiting	1
garden	1	joined	1	neither	1	private	1	sheep	1	tarts	1	wacky	1
gardens	1	joys	1	newspapers	1	problems	1	shirts	1	tasted	1	walied	1
gathering	1	knit	1	nightmare	1	professor	1	shock	1	tastes	1	walvis	1
gauteng	1	juicy	1	nighly	1	profit	1	shocking	1	teaching	1	wanted	1
gee	1	keeping	1	nike	1	promotions	1	shops	1	tears	1	warm	1
gift	1	keeps	1	nine	1	prompt	1	shorts	1	teas	1	warmer	1
ginelli	1	kept	1	noddylant	1	provincial	1	shoulders	1	technicon	1	warned	1
ginger	1	kilograms	1	none	1	psychologists	1	shouting	1	technology	1	wash	1
gino	1	king	1	normal	1	pub	1	show	1	television	1	washing	1
give	1	kiss	1	northanger	1	public	1	showing	1	tension	1	water	1
glue	1	kissed	1	note	1	pudding	1	shy	1	terrific	1	waves	1
golds	1	knees	1	noticeably	1	puddings	1	sign	1	text	1	wedding	1
gorgeous	1	knit	1	nowhere	1	pulling	1	silence	1	thawing	1	welcome	1
gorilla	1	ladder	1	numb	1	pump	1	silences	1	thicker	1	wherever	1
gospel	1	land	1	nuns	1	puppy	1	silly	1	thin	1	wherever	1
gotten	1	lasted	1	nutly	1	purchase	1	singer	1	thinks	1	whiskey	1
greek	1	lastly	1	occasion	1	puzzle	1	sister	1	third	1	win	1
green	1	lateral	1	official	1	queen	1	six	1	those	1	windy	1
grill	1	laughed	1	often	1	queenstown	1	sixteen	1	thoughts	1	wise	1
groenloof	1	law	1	oil	1	quick	1	skate	1	thousand	1	witbank	1
groom	1	lazier	1	okay	1	quiet	1	skies	1	threatened	1	wiz	1
gross	1	leader	1	older	1	rack	1	skills	1	thumbs	1	wizard	1
guidance	1	leafs	1	olives	1	radio	1	skip	1	tide	1	wonder	1
guilty	1	league	1	onwards	1	rained	1	slaving	1	tidy	1	word	1
gym	1	lear	1	opera	1	raining	1	sleepers	1	timeshare	1	words	1
hall	1	learner	1	option	1	ran	1	slipped	1	timing	1	wore	1
ham	1	learning	1	orange	1	rands	1	slippers	1	tippex	1	worries	1
hamburg	1	leaves	1	orchestra	1	raspberry	1	slippery	1	titanic	1	wracking	1
hampton	1	lens	1	order	1	rave	1	smelly	1	toe	1	wrongly	1
hamster	1	lesson	1	organise	1	ready	1	smiley	1	toenail	1	yay	1
handwriting	1	liberty	1	organising	1	realise	1	smoking	1	tons	1	yeah	1
hardly	1	lifetime	1	others	1	realising	1	smoothing	1	top	1	yellow	1
harrods	1	likes	1	outside	1	realistic	1	snooker	1	topic	1	youth	1
hasn't	1	liking	1	outsirts	1	rebel	1	snoopy	1	topics	1	yucky	1
hate	1	list	1	overnight	1	receive	1	snow	1	toe	1		
hates	1	lived	1	overs	1	reception	1	soaps	1	touch	1		
havoc	1	lonely	1	owed	1	record	1	socials	1	tough	1		
headed	1	longer	1	page	1	recovered	1	sold	1	towels	1		
heads	1	lose	1	paid	1	rectangle	1	sole	1	towering	1		
health	1	loves	1	painting	1	refusing	1	songs	1	toyota	1		
hearn	1	low	1	paintings	1	register	1	sons	1	toys	1		
heat	1	lower	1	paints	1	rejected	1	souls	1	track	1		
hello	1	luncheon	1	pale	1	relationships	1	space	1	train	1		
helped	1	lying	1	pants	1	relieved	1	spain	1	travelled	1		
hers	1	macho	1	paragraph	1	reminds	1	species	1	travelling	1		
higher	1	mad	1	parent	1	reply	1	spent	1	treated	1		
highest	1	main	1	pastor	1	retirement	1	spent	1	tree	1		
hilarious	1	mammoth	1	pathetic	1	return	1	split	1	tremendously	1		
hipster	1	manager	1	pay	1	returned	1	spitfire	1	trip	1		
hire	1	mandatory	1	peasant	1	returning	1	split	1	trippy	1		
historical	1	married	1	pens	1	rights	1	sports	1	trustbank	1		
hit	1	mask	1	per	1	rink	1	spots	1	truworths	1		
hits	1	massive	1	performances	1	ripped	1	spring	1	trying	1		
hoop	1	material	1	period	1	roast	1	squad	1	tummy	1		
hop	1	matrics	1	permit	1	rolls	1	standards	1	turkey	1		
hoping	1	matter	1	personality	1	romantic	1	stands	1	turn	1		
hospital	1	maturity	1	philology	1	rose	1	star	1	turns	1		
hospitals	1	maximum	1	physiology	1	round	1	stares	1	tushie	1		
houses	1	meaning	1	piano	1	rustenburg	1	stars	1	twist	1		
however	1	meant	1	picked	1	ryders	1	starters	1	types	1		
howzit	1	medium	1	pictures	1	safe	1	state	1	unbearable	1		
human	1	menlo	1	pig	1	saint	1	stations	1	unbearably	1		
hung	1	mess	1	pine	1	salads	1	stays	1	unbeaten	1		
hunkiest	1	messed	1	pitt	1	salary	1	steak	1	uncertainty	1		
hunting	1	methodist	1	pity	1	sand	1	stick	1	understand	1		
ideal	1	middle	1	plant	1	sardine	1	stiff	1	underwear	1		
ideas	1	midsummer	1	playground	1	sardines	1	stock	1	unfair	1		
image	1	mile	1	poeding	1	satn	1	stood	1	unfamiliar	1		
immediately	1	million	1	poem	1	satisfactory	1	stopping	1	universal	1		
immune	1	mind	1	poetry	1	saved	1	stores	1	unlike	1		
improve	1	mini	1	policy	1	saving	1	storm	1	unopened	1		
improves	1	minute	1	ponds	1	savings	1	stressed	1	untidy	1		
include	1	minutes	1	pools	1	sawed	1	stressful	1	update	1		
incredibly	1	missed	1	positon	1	scarcely	1	strops	1	updated	1		

Table 6. (continued).

WORDS	i	the	you	and	to	a	it	in	for	is	have	so	of	that	we	my	but	was	are	me	on	at	with	your	all	this	can	got	really	she	he	love	like									
RM9905	4	3	4	3	2	3		4	4	1	2			1		1			1	1	3	1	3	1	1	1						2										
RM9812	15	9	3	12	6	4		4	4	2	3	2	6	3	2	2	5	3		1	3			3	3	3	1	1	2					1								
RM9707	31	47	14	46	17	29	16	26	7	9	10	3	15	14	26	10	4	9	18	3	5	11	5	11	6	3		3					4	7								
KD9801	8	2	8	2	1	3		1		1	2		1			1							3			1	1															
KD9706	27	9	8	3	8	10	8	6	5	3	2	2	4	3	4	3	2	6	2	2	6	3	2	1	3	3	1	2						2	1							
KD9703	19	14	4	5	9	9	3	7	4	6	1	2	6		5	4	1	3		2	4	4	4	2	1	4	1	1	4	2	1	3	1									
KD9701	14	9	9	3	6	11	8	5	3	3	4	5	3	2	2	4	1	5		1	2		2		1	2	3	4					1	1								
KD9611	11	6	7	4	7	9	7	3	4	1	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	1	2	2	1		1		2	1	2				3	1									
KC9809	10	4	4	2	6	4	3	2	2	1	6	1	2		1	2	2	1	1			1	1							4				2								
KC9808	2	8	1	4	3	5	5	1	1	1			2		2	1	3		2	2		3					1							1	4							
KC9807	8	6	6	7	6	3	1	4	5	3	3	1	1		5	1			2	3		3	2	1	1		1							1								
KC9801	34	17	19	9	11	8	14	6	6	9	10	10	2		1	7	2	4	3	4	3	3	2	4	4			2	4	1				1	1							
KC9712	22	12	6	7	7	6	5	2	1	2	11	3	3	3		2	2	2	1	3		6	2	1		1						1			1							
KC97112	5	2	2	4	2	1	3	3		3	2		2	1	1	1	1	1	1								2									2						
KC97111	8	1	5	11	6	11	4	5	11		9		1	2	1	5	1			1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2		2				6	8	1							
KC9704	9	6	19	7	5	4	7	2	1	1	6		1	1	1	4	1	3	1	1	1		1	4	1								1			2						
KC9703	9	2	7	1	2	2	3		4	3	3	1		4	4	7			2				2		2											3						
KC9701	25	12	5	10	16	9	12	4	1	2	3	3	6		6	2	6		2	1	4	2	2	1	1	3		2								1						
KC9612	24	5	13	10	6	13	11	9	4	4	2		3	1	2	5	2	3	3	3	2	1	4	4	1	1	1	2		3	3	2				2	1					
KC96122	22	6	3	7	5	7	8	3		1		5	2	1	2	5	2	7		2	2	2	2	3		1	2		2			2	1	2		1						
KC96121	41	15	16	10	14	14	22	14	10	8	3	3	3	1	2	12	9	4		3	3	5	6	9	1	1	2	5	1	6					2	3						
KC96112	34	23	16	9	14	8	5	6	3	3	5	4	4	1	2	6	12	2	3	3	1	4	2	2	1	1	5	2				1			1	2						
KC96111	16	9	13	8	11	9	4	3	3	1	5	5	3		4		2	1	4	5		1	1	3	3											1	1					
KB9702	18	7	14	12	6	4	3	12	5	4	6	3	1	5	4	3	1		3	6		3	1	2	2		2								1	7	1	1				
KB9612	10	8	3	6	2	2	1	4	1	4	2		1	2		4	3	2	2		2	2	1		1	2		1						2	1	1						
JN9912	17	7	15	4	9	10	9	2	9	4	8	5	2	2	4	1	2	2	2	1	1			1	4	1	5	3	2							1	2	2				
JN9711	32	13	23	18	12	19	1	4	9	9	4	15	8	13	8	7	5		4	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	5	7	8					1						
JN9701	30	20	25	15	12	16	6	6	9	6	7	4	5	10	12	6	3	6	5	2	6	3		3	2	1	3	4	3	1							2	4				
J9703	32	25	8	17	18	13	9	4	11	7	5	12	5	8	3	1	5	14	1	7	5	1	8	2		7	3	1	4	4	7	1				2						
J9702	37	27	15	33	18	17	12	6	10	15	5	12	9	11	8	9	5	17	5	6	4	7	4	1	6	5	2	6	5	6	2					1	2					
J9611	13	18	5	11	13	18	6	3	6	11	2	4	4	11	4	4	3	4	1	6	5	6	4		5	1	1	2	4	5	8					1	2					
I9704	16	9	13	3	8	2	12	1	4	4	3	5	4	4	1	2	5	2	2	1	3			3	4		4	5									2	2				
I9702	14	7	2	9	6	3	6	4	2	3	1	4	3	4	1	1	1	3	2		3	4		1		2	1	3									1					
I9701	22	11	11	11	10	9	7	3	4	2	4	9	1	2	3	1	3	3	4	1	1	1	1	2		2	1	4									1					
I9612	24	10	8	16	8	7	6	4	5	4	5	4	4	6	4	5	4		4	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	4	3							2	2	2	2				
BL9908	40	11	18	2	21	6	12	8	10	3	9	11	4	6	8	2	8	3	1	5	1	3		2	2		4	1	3	3							1	1				
BL9907	47	32	25	3	30	22	16	11	13	8	6	11	13	10	11	9	12	5	5	6	4	2	7	4	2	6	4	2	3	2							1	4				
BGU9704	11	16	8	4	5	6	5	3	7	8	4	3	1	5	1	2	3		4	3	4	1			1	2	2										1	1				
BGR9712	26	23	12	17	15	16	9	2	5	3	7	4	10	3	5	4	7	2	2	2	4	4	9	4	8	4	3								1	1	1	4				
BGR9702	5	6	10	5	6	3	5	4	2		3	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1			2													4	2		1	1

Table 7. Words received per letter (detail)