

# **DECONFIGURATIONS:**

**The practice of repetition  
as confirmation of (re)productive (art)works**

by

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## **SUMMARY**

This study will argue that visual art and the making of images share much with other languages. If writing can be deconstructed, visual imagery can be *deconfigured*, for figuring an image is much like structuring a sentence. The process of deconfiguration however relies on repetition. Deconfiguration therefore denies any claim of a primary creator. It will be argued though that deconfiguration remains creative as it engages the imagination in a process of transference and through association. Moreover, deconfiguration shows how binary opposites are essential in the making of artworks. The repetitive process takes place when the artwork is made and continues during the appreciation and/or interpretation of the artwork. For the interpretation to really deconfigure, it would mean that the image constituted by the artist has metaphorical, allegorical and even symbolical implications. The interpreter will thus always remain a participant in the creative process suggested by the artwork.

### Key terms:

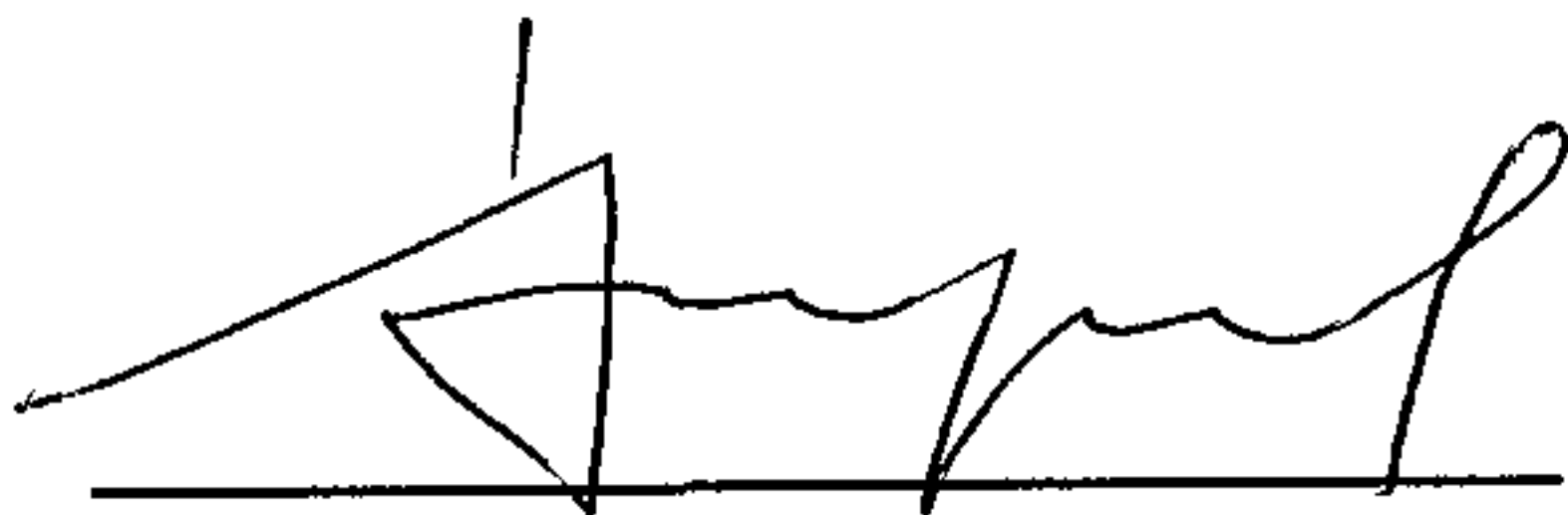
Allegory; archetypal imagery; binary ambivalence; conscious/unconscious; deconstruction; interpretation; interruption; metaphor; modernism; multiplicity/plurality; postmodernism; repetition/seriality.

Student number:

461-281-7

## DECLARATION

I declare that *DECONFIGURATIONS: The practice of repetition as confirmation of (re)productive (art)works*, is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pieter J. Swanepoel', written over a horizontal line.

Pieter J. Swanepoel

November 2002

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We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author – God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.

*Roland Barthes*♦

## INTRODUCTION

Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce to you: *DECONFIGURATIONS: The practice of repetition as configuration of (re)productive (art)works*, a written text which forms part of an investigation which also contains a corpus of paintings. If, at this early stage, I have to present you with a premise, and if a 'premise' in its traditional form is indeed a 'declaration of intent' (a clear, precise and specific purpose), then I have to immediately return (already at the cost of repeating myself) to the title of this text as a starting point for this investigation, this (re)reading.

As a written text, this dissertation entitled *DECONFIGURATIONS: The practice of repetition as confirmation of (re)productive (art)works*, sets out to identify, first and foremost, what its title constitutes, namely 'the promise of a premise'. The text looks at *deconfiguration* and at *repetition*. *Repetition* is approached in particular *as a process* of practice, as something that can only be truly realised by being done, by *being engaged in*, as compared to something *observed objectively*. If any (promise of a) premise should be identified it must surely be that the study of *repetition as a working process (practicing repetition)*, reveals itself as not only being re-productive in the pejorative modernist sense of the word, but as *being essential in any working process*, be it the making of art or of anything else for that matter.

If the written text bobs and weaves, if it does not seem purposefully clear and precise and specific, it does so because of its affinity with *deconstruction (deconfiguration)* and in relation to the (art)works it might hope to repeat. Herein, moreover, lies a *rationale*: the *working process* of the text follows the working process of the paintings presented as part of the study as a whole.<sup>1</sup> While the paintings were constructed around an 'earlier painting' – which cannot be said to be an 'original' as it was surely appropriated from a source of vast historical data<sup>2</sup> – this later series of paintings changed considerably during the making process. The 'earlier

painting' (an image of ocean and sky) was *deconfigured* so that the later paintings may look rather different from the earlier 'prototype'. Yet, the image-content of the 'earlier painting', its denoted message if you like (the 'picture' of ocean and sky), remained the most obvious repeated element. But then even the series of paintings, remain open to change, not only through interpretation, but also through physical configuration. Ultimately various series of paintings can be broken up to interact/interphase/interchange with one another. The *methodology* followed in the making of the paintings (the *working process*) is therefore repeated in the written text.<sup>3</sup>

The same can be said of the text and the chapters or subsections within the chapters of the text. The 'complete' text reflects the 'whole' exhibition, while chapters may echo series of paintings and subsections within chapters in turn might mirror 'units' within the series of paintings, and so forth. Furthermore, should the text at times suggest 'obvious' narrative interpretations, such narratives could be edited (cut and pasted), in order to make up other narratives. While the words may not change once the text appears in print (like the images in the paintings may not change once they are painted), *sections could easily be cut and shifted in any deconstructive (in this case deconfigured) reading*. And this is most likely how the text should be read, not only from the point of the text itself, but also from the point of the paintings that the text engages with.

What appears in one chapter of one section will crop up somewhere else, perhaps in a slightly altered form, but as a repeated element nonetheless. What appears in one painting will appear again, in a repeated form in another painting. It could be argued that one of the most blatant narratives to be read within this repetitive process would be that of 'an evolution towards form'. But then again, any such alleged 'evolution' would soon, within the process of *deconfiguration*, implode upon itself to once more trigger a non-narrative process towards what might appear to be chaos. The image or constructed form, would therefore suggest a



rather classical western method of working 'from the general to the specific', or 'from chaos to order', as can be found in many creation myths.<sup>4</sup> If this process of *repetition as confirmation of productive work* is followed throughout, not as an end to itself, not identified as a cause but as a symptom, it will transform itself *ad infinitum* through what has been identified as *deconfiguration*. As a process of continuation rather than the finitude identified with figuring, deconfiguration includes not only an evolution towards form, but also a devolution away from form. The narrative here would then be that of the *deconfiguration* of an oversimplified creation myth: deconfiguration constitutes both order and chaos as co-dependents – it moves from the general to the specific as much as it shifts from the specific to the general; it does not favour one or the other.

Neither this written text nor the (other) painted texts can be read at a singular glance. Although we may be accustomed to thinking that we take in things at a glimpse as 'Master Readers' of 'Master Narratives', we find more, or other fragments of information with each new glance or viewing. This process of viewing and re-viewing (a close-reading) is contained within deconfiguring as a process of figuring and deconfiguring. No text can therefore be read all at once. It has to be read backwards and forwards, from the outside inwards and from the inside outwards. All probable narratives suggested at first, must be reviewed, reversed, mirrored, interrupted, deconfigured in order for the text to expose itself. In this process this text, attached to, yet apart from its other, unfolds (releases) itself. In the method of reading the method (process) of the (re)making (deconfiguration) is already apparent.

If ever there was a *theory* tested, then this contribution might as well be it. But the theory then, what is it? Simply, that each repetition repeated (each figuration deconfigured), presents a varied form of that repetition. And what are we to conclude (if we were to allow ourselves the luxury of such finality)? That there is nothing new or groundbreaking or earth



shattering about this possible theory; that it has been done before and will be done again. Even testing the theory relies on the theory being deconfigured. And also, at the mercy of verification, that this theory does not stand for, or that it does not replace something else, as in the case of a metaphor, but that it *becomes that something else* through the practice of repeating itself.

The *FOR(E)WORD* sketches very broadly. It is an under-painting in a palimpsest of many paintings, yet one painting repeatedly over-painted (painted over). If anything, the *foreword* contains the promise of the premise. It deals with 'discernable parallels', with links between the artworks and the written text, with the possible double agenda of the text looking in upon itself while at the same time reflecting upon the paintings it appears to be referring to. In the foreword mention is made of philosophers like Barthes, Derrida and Wittgenstein; psychologists Lacan, Freud and Jung are also noted, all because they were encountered, not followed,<sup>5</sup> while the art works and the text were being made. Artists such as Kandinsky and Maholy-Nagy are moreover quoted to qualify the participation of intuition, that imaginary link in the creative working process.

'Contextualisation' within the working of repetition is also considered, in particular the fact that deconfiguration constitutes a process not of origination, but of repetition. The underlying premise then (that which was promised but still not delivered), is a postmodern undercurrent following the notion of simulacra as proposed by imminent French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard: there is no original, there is only repetition. Within such non-mechanical repetition, fragmentation is nonetheless inevitable. It is even alleged that deconfiguration functions within the process of shifting from one fragmented content to another. In a sense this process remains binary, shifting or switching between chaos and order.

Each chapter is structurally subdivided into shorter divisions, as each series of paintings is subdivided into separate units. A constant shifting takes place between units or divisions, making it possible for any and every hermeneutic<sup>6</sup> reading to constantly change meaning. The territory is one of perpetual shifting, as much as clouds as well as waves constantly change shape.<sup>7</sup>

In the title of this text, 'the practice of repetition', while being a *confirmation* (the promise of a premise), is at once an affirmation of being productive. Even the word *confirmation* contains within itself an act of repetition, as it would be impossible to confirm something, without repeating what is being confirmed. Corroboration, affirmation, confirmation, verification, all depend on repetitive notion (motion). Even so, the bracketed prefix as it appears in the subtitle, '(re)', once more confirms the repetitive status of being productive through repetition. Here the shifts obviously take place within the paradigm of repetition.

What follows is that such confirmation concerns (art)works. Again, through dis-placing the word 'art' by means of parenthesis, its status is disenfranchised to what could constitute a secondary or an added meaning. Read without the bracketed words we read of a 'confirmation of productive works', but as a second reading we realise that the 'confirmation [is] of *re-productive art-works*'. Thus meaning is revealed not through a first (uninterrupted) reading, but through a re-reading, through a reading reliant on slippery terrain.

At the same time, the 'headline' of the title (the title *proper*, the Master Title) reads as upper-case (visually emphasised typography) DECONFIGURATIONS and *not as re-configurations*. This, read together with the 'sub-heading' obviously implies that the repetition takes place within the process of deconstructing figuration.

*CHAPTER ONE* is a *forewarning*. It precurses the premise, perhaps it is the premise; it prefigures the process of deconfiguration, first through establishing a working definition of the neologism *deconfiguration*. It seeks such a definition in denotative as well as connotative meanings attached to the word deconfiguration; it therefore deconfigures the word deconfiguration. In doing so it notes allegorical, metaphorical as well as symbolical ordering implicit in the term. The fact that an image can be constituted as a figure which may in turn be symbolical, gives rise to the notion of an imaginary capacity which in turn ties in with the slippery ground that postmodernist readings tend to engage in. Deconfiguration is hence indebted to a Derridian reading of deconstruction.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it is a language among many other languages, not more or less important than any other language.

Obvious distinctions between modernism and postmodernism are also touched upon within this chapter, not least of all the modernist notion of authenticity and its alliance with originality. This is indeed one of a number of myths deconstructed by postmodernism, and according to my argument it is most obviously exploited through repetition. It is moreover noted that the die-hard modernist myth of originality persisted despite the fact that the (hypocritical) modernists continuously engaged with repetition while at the same time calling anything repetitive inauthentic.

The second part of *CHAPTER ONE*, Making (it/the) work, looks more specifically at modernism and how repetition functioned within a modernist tradition. I argue that the 'process of making' revered by many modernists, while being highly repetitive, is a re-generative process. I then note that the images figuring in the paintings that I made as 'the practical component of this study' could be read as metaphorical of this re-generative process of making.

Because someone would traditionally be held responsible for the making of artworks, the artist (in this case, myself) is also mentioned. It is made



clear though, that despite modernism having followed the tradition of the hero artist, even if only through tracking the psyche of the artist by means of psychoanalysis, the author here denies himself any authority or any particular in-depth investigations into issues of identity. This, despite the fact that the artwork remains an undeniable extension of a personality. I believe that the relationship between artist and artwork should be one of equal opportunities, similar to a democratic attitude needed between practice (making) and theory (contemplation). Again, this approach is affiliated to postmodernism, rather than modernism, as it considers the only (possible) point of origin in an artwork to (perhaps) be identified in its making. But then such making could have followed on contemplation, whereas contemplation is traditionally thought of as following on the process of making.

The imagined image (copied) looks at how I became involved with the process of repetition through repainting a particular image of the sky and ocean. I also mention how my paintings might fit within a tradition of sea paintings.

Traditional modernism investigates more particularly the appearance of the image of the sea in modernism as well as in postmodernist painting. The underlying principle maintained in this part of the investigation is once again that there can be no true authenticity. (This may be *part of the premise*, but not *the premise*). While the making of an artwork remains re-productive, as much as pictures reproduced as mechanical copies remain reproductive (reproductions), the appreciation of the artwork continues this process of re-productivity. Against this background it is assumed that the artist remains a facilitator rather than an originator. What distinguishes the process of art making from mechanical reproduction is that the artwork functions metaphorically, thus setting in motion a process of infinite processing through imaginative participation. The written text and the painted artwork thus remain co-dependents.

In For format's sake, the formal shape of the picture plane and the shift from an earlier rectangular to a later square format is discussed from my own experiential point of view. The square as a potential unit within a repetitive format, links with the repetitive palimpsest-process of painting over (an earlier version of) another painting. From a more objective, psychological point of view, the square also remains indicative of a search for a centre, while formally it can be read as symbolic of order and stability. It is noted that the modernists already liked using the square as a format, and that the postmodernists continued with this tradition.

*CHAPTER TWO* considers the role of repetition within the art making process. It looks at the historical link repetition has with postmodern theories of simulacrum.<sup>9</sup> Within a historical context the earliest derogatory tone in terms of repetition is found in the notion of 'imitation' as argued by Plato and Aristotle, which was moreover closely associated with things not 'as they are' but 'as they appear' to be. It is argued that the artist's repetitive 'mark making' during the process of making an artwork, formed the basis of the importance the Renaissance gave to the so-called 'artist's hand', which by further implication gave rise to the humanist ideal of the 'genius artist'. This short historical overview is absolutely essential in following later arguments around tradition and how imbedded repetition is within the western tradition of art making.

Repetitively painting brush strokes follows directly on the first, introductory part of *CHAPTER TWO*. It is noted that already during the Renaissance, when a 'rough and unfinished manner' was preferred to a smooth finish, the 'artist's hand' was revealed through the exposure of the 'loaded brush' or the 'loose brush stroke'. It follows that during modernism the loose brush stroke would become an island onto itself within the paradigm of art-for-art's sake. By extension repetitive mark making in modernism reveals an insatiable appetite for repetition, resulting in the mark making becoming the content of art. The argument furthermore suggests that what remains to be identified is how repetition as a



necessity of the creative act, should be considered the content of the artwork (though it is surely not the premise). While the brush stroke remains a sign on the surface of the picture plane, repetitive patterns of art making remain under the surface of modernist paintings. It is argued that such underlying repetitive patterns would therefore reveal the individual imagination of the artist through the art making process.

The same 'smooth transition' found in the first sub-section of this chapter following on its introduction, can be noted in The square root, the second sub-section of *CHAPTER TWO*.<sup>10</sup> The obvious logic is that the square format is as much a sign of repetitive behaviour, as was the repetitive brush stroke. If the repetitive brush stroke identified the individual artist, the square format identifies an artistic period, namely modernism. The argumentation therefore still follows a historical path.

Within modernism the defiance of the brush stroke as a sign of the artist's identity, while in some cases still clinging to the artist's gestures, is identified with the 'disinterested' approach. This idea links with the square format as a metaphor for objectified abstract form. Within early postmodernism the square became a popular format among Op artists and Conceptual artists.

In Repetitive themes and series the notion of repetition is considered from its broader perspective: repetition can be found in brush strokes and in pictorial format and it can also be located in themes and compositional design. Furthermore, while artists may repeat others or traditions, they also repeat themselves.

In The painting in the mirror it is argued that painting is not dead at all (while being a promise, this is not the premise). As in the case of my own paintings, the continued tradition of painting, steeped as it is in modernism, yet informed also by postmodern notions of deconstruction and simulacra, is justified by the fact that the paintings act as theoretical

comments, through the use of repetitive practice, upon its own existence. The paintings mirror the theories of the paintings that in turn mirror the practice of painting.

In this section it is also alleged that painting has never been a 'reflection of an outer reality', that it has always constituted 'the act of painting'. As such, that which remains outside the painting (although it may be depicted in the painting) remains forever apart from the act of painting, simply through the act of reflection. Reflection then implies an added value, more than what is 'represented' within the picture plane.

While the bulk of *CHAPTER TWO* aims at putting the practice of painting as a repetitive practice within a historical context, the last section, namely The painting in the mirror, already refers to the particular artworks that form the 'practical' part of this study.

*CHAPTER(part) THREE(3)* addresses the paintings I made, firstly contextualising them within a 'personal', though objective history (This is not the sea), following on to possible subjective interpretations of the works. Each series of paintings may be linked to a postmodernist notion, although such identification can by no means be seen to be exhaustive or ultimate, as even such notions could be applied interchangeably. Rather than reading the series from *Series One* to *Series Three*, the three series first discussed will be read backwards. In considering the painted series (the artworks) thus, the text supports notions like 'reading', 'rereading', 'inversion' etcetera.

My personal encounter with a postmodern exhibition concerned with issues of authenticity, appropriation and the like, is mentioned as a possible motivation for the works I ended up making for this study. The fact that I chose the sea as a pictorial theme for the paintings is linked to both the romantic and the popular. I am however not interested in making in-depth studies of either notions of 'the romantic' – be it 'classical

romanticism' or 'neo-romanticism', nor of the notions of 'popular culture' or to try and drag 'new technology' in by the hair in order to fallaciously justify my current artworks. At the same time I admit that these notions remain contributory factors in my working process. If and when such notions are detected it should be clear that they continue to be peripherals in the study of deconfiguration (as a repetitive practice), which is my main concern here. Both the romantic and the popular could be considered as essential ingredients in my attempt at representing 'democratic' artworks to be appreciated by more than an elite, this despite (or perhaps because) of interpretation's reliance on context. This follows the argument that the contextualisation of a painted image, however many times repeated, would influence or even determine the appreciation or understanding of the image. In essence, this does not differ from our appreciation and understanding of other common languages, such as the written (or spoken) language, or psychoanalysis as a language of interpretation. Even our way of understanding has in a way undergone a democratic process; to ensure that whatever is 'read' can be understood according to a 'multiplicity of variables'. We therefore conclude that meaning shifts each time we change context.

On the surface an image usually presents us with an immediate reaction; we attach meaning according to what appears in the picture. Such an immediate reaction, in particular as far as pictures are concerned, may deal at first with literal meaning. In most cases we would soon (upon 'reflection') also tend to want to read 'something deeper' into a painting, even if its reference is pictorial, particularly within a 'high art' tradition. Within modernism most 'deeper meaning' was read according to psychoanalysis (Freud and Jung) or new religiosity (Blavatsky and Steiner). Such readings would agree with matters like the 'unconscious', the 'intuitive', or the 'spiritual'.

The 'naturalistic' or 'pictorial' image therefore never remains literal, but enters the territory of the metaphorical, an area particularly explored by



postmodernism. Although often associated with a romantic tradition, the image of ocean-and-sky becomes a metaphor for constant change, for flux – once more linking up with an 'open-ended' or democratic reading instigated by deconstruction and propounded by postmodernism.

The second section of *CHAPTER THREE, Journey to (/from) the center*, looks at the poststructuralist notion of the proposed absence of a *center* or *origin*. This is done specifically because compositionally most of my paintings evolve around a center. As such it once more echoes an established tradition of western art, namely that of central perspective as established during the Renaissance.

It will be noted moreover, that while separate paintings within the various series of paintings evolve around a center, even the various series seem to refer to centrality. According to Foucault the search for an origin divides rather than unifies, while Arnheim claims that central perspective involves a paradox. An example of how centrality, or the symbolic search for a center appears within a series of repetitive imagery is then cited. It is also noted that such references to centrality as an intertextual link between various paintings within one series, extend its meaning metaphorically through its symbolic reference to mirroring. One image mirrors the structuring of centrality, but mirroring is also a metaphorical content for the image of the water mirroring the sky. The image therefore comments on the theory used to describe it. The link between image in visual and written or spoken language remains obvious. Images reflect the text while the text reflects the images.

This section also explains how prefigured structuring within a process of deconfiguration in considering multiplicity of meanings, remains open to infinite possibilities rather than finite readings. Moreover, any preconceived schema may in the end form part of a postmodernist strategy of looking into modernist notions such as mimesis or authenticity. This emphasizes the fact that there can be no ultimate original or

authentic artwork, as much as no ultimate center or origin can be identified for sure. By extension, the notion of a center or origin remains in the mind of the interpreter, attaching meaning according to a particular context.

Any interpretation, as in any artwork (or the making thereof), relies on a previous artwork (or its making). Even if an origin were to be found in 'the making', that is in the imagination of the one responsible for the making, such an ordinary person (artist) would rely on 'outside' stimulation for making artworks. Productivity therefore depends on re-productivity. Despite modernism's denial of the influence such re-productivity had on its own art making, despite its relentless search for, and claims of authenticity, deconfiguration, as a postmodernist working method, exposes the power of re-productivity as a productive working method. It is argued that productivity and reproductivity should be seen as complimentaries and not as opposites. This forms part of postmodernist arguments of the use of metaphor rather than restrictive literal language. Again, it is argued that even the literal and the metaphorical should function as co-dependants in a synchronistic manner.

In the third section of *CHAPTER (part) THREE (3)*, Plurality/multiplicity becomes the postmodernist issue applied. It is noted that while repetition and mirroring still operates within this series, there is also a play on multiplicity, namely that certain elements will vary, despite others remaining constant. Another element that appears more obvious in this series is that of bracketing, or framing, which entails that some paintings now bracket or frame other paintings within the series.

This particular series takes the sunset/sunrise as its extended image; hence, it involves a further postmodern notion, namely that of 'popular culture' and its implications of democratizing art to include the broader public, which is typical of the mass media profile.



On a purely formal pictorial level it is noted that the horizon line shifts between the images appearing within this series. The interrupted horizon, or the shift in the depicted height of the horizon, links with the postmodern notion of disruption.

The next section of this chapter entitled *Modus Interruptus*, approaches the notions of interruption, or impediment, or failure, directly in its very first sentence, which is not a sentence in the proper sense of the word, but rather a fragment of a(n) [incomplete] sentence. Again, the very fact that the text, as a theory in practice, as a methodology, follows the method of the paintings it interacts with, should not be overlooked. Three possible interruptions are mentioned at the outset: that of the object, that of the picture plane and that of the image from the surface. Such interruptions, as revealed through discontinuity, while being typical of modernist literature, are furthermore given as a site of the unconscious.

Despite *Series One's* appearance of being the most literal of the three series, it is nonetheless interrupted in a number of ways, as noted above. But while the 'narrative' of the series gets interrupted throughout (each unit in the series can stand as a separate painting), the series still suggests its own indefinite continuity as more units can be added onto either side of the series. Moreover, two series appear within this one series: one of the sky, the other of the ocean. The sky seems even more monotonously repetitive than the ocean. One regular (what is below) is interrupted by another regular (what is above) in order to establish an irregular. As 'below' is interrupted by the 'above', the 'deliberate' (intentional) is interrupted by the 'accidental' (unintentional). A perpetual switching, or a co-operation between chaos and order is supported once more. Integral to understanding the ambivalence in the process of figuring and deconfiguration is the question: what happens when the conscious switches places with the unconscious, or then, how do we intentionally create an accident? It is furthermore suggested that a nostalgic feeling of loss is experienced by becoming aware of such interruptions.

*CHAPTER THREE* concludes by briefly considering the two (composite) paintings that complete this study. These two paintings are also serial, but not as obviously (linear) serial as was the case with the other series. Imagining the truth looks at the two triptychs within which a central (rectangular) painting is flanked by four square units on either side. These 'outside' panels, each made up of quadruplets, act as bracketing (framing, but only on two sides) the image in the middle. The 'central' or 'master' painting is however not bracketed or framed by the 'above' or the 'below'.

CHAPTER FOUR is a conclusion of sorts. In its first section, All together now, the common link between the written word and the painted image is established once again, as was done in CHAPTER ONE (this common link of text and paintings or of language and written text therefore brackets this text). It is suggested that as in a language game, where the removal of a word from a sentence would cause new meaning, the removal of a painting from a series could likewise alter meaning. It is furthermore believed that true deconfiguration relies not only on the artworks as separate entities or as series, but also on the participation of the public who receive the works. The works are therefore structured to invite those hoping to appreciate the works, to continue the process of deconfiguration by making other 'combinations' or 'series' from those suggested by the artist.

(Perhaps the promised premise is in this strategy after all: that nothing is what it appears to be at first, even the formal structuring is done in order to suggest that it should be deconstructed. As the artist figures the image, the image deconfigures; as the theorist figures the theory, the theory deconfigures; as the receiving public deconfigures theory and image, the premise configures. The premise may then not be a promise after all, nor even a threat, but a simple strategic process of subversion in which even the subverted subverts itself. Hence configuration – the process of establishing that which is figured – is deconfigured. Such deconfiguration can best be read through studying the repetitive processes present in the making of artworks. The very artwork therefore contains its own deconfiguration.)<sup>11</sup>

*Series One* presents guidelines for possible deconfigurations within this particular series, which in turn consists of other, smaller series or units. It is admitted that this series of seven paintings was indeed (strategically) conceived as two separate, smaller series (of four and of three) to be exhibited inter-dispersed in order to effect interruption as one series of seven paintings.

*Series Two* can similarly be made up of separate series (one triptych; two diptychs). Again, it will then be apparent that this series of seven was conceived as units interlinking with(in) other units, in which the imagery become totally abstracted the further away it moves from the central picture of the sunset/sunrise. Deconfiguration here echoes modernist abstraction through fragmentation.

*Series Three* signifies linking through coupling and/or mirroring, and as such the seventh painting can be said to be the painting in the middle, thus returning us to the notion of de-centering. Alternative (binary) deconfigurations of the series of seven is suggested, while it is noted how *this series shows links and affinities with the other series.*

Even The Two Large Triptychs (each consisting of nine units), while already appearing as three separate paintings each (within which smaller units appear), can therefore be deconfigured.

In Regenerative Deconfigurations it is argued that 'deep' or 'true' deconfiguration occurs when units from separate series begin to interchange with units from other series. This interchange can happen through identifying similarities or through the exploitation of dissimilarities. Either way, each repetitive shift will create other contexts, new meanings, transforming what was already available from the beginning, into something which was perhaps overlooked. This is the space within which metaphors function. Moreover, it is argued that allegory, even more than metaphor, transforms 'things of everyday acceptance' into 'purposeful



forms'. What was already there from the beginning attains added meaning through deconfiguration.

It could be argued that the exhibition as a whole can also be read as an allegory and that in terms of Jung's archetypal symbols, the imagery as a whole reflects a cosmos, a material as well as a metaphysical world. While the (represented) imagery of clouds and water represents the unconscious and the indefinite, it needs the material form of the artwork to manifest as such. The conscious and the unconscious, the material and the metaphysical may *appear to be* binary opposites, yet they are co-dependants.

It is concluded that deconfiguration cannot be forced and must be spontaneous and that it functions in 'forever becoming', rather than in being. Becoming moreover always changes according to what it becomes.

*(in)CONCLUSION* is a very brief soliloquy. It is a conclusion that argues that there can be no conclusion, that whatever conclusions we reach, will be overturned by our next conclusion. This premise is at the heart of deconfiguration as a postmodern process. Whatever destination is reached remains a brief pause before the making, the investigation into the making, the deconfiguration as a practice of repetition, continues.<sup>12</sup> To then conclude with a premise would be wrong, I promise.

## Endnotes: Introduction

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† Barthes 1979:146.

<sup>1</sup> It is absolutely essential to realise that this written text does not function independently from the paintings. Nonetheless, as a text – inasmuch as the paintings can also be called a text – the written part of this study, while dealing with theoretical as well as practical issues pertaining to the paintings, follows methods of deconfiguration as set out in the paintings and the text. This was done particularly in light of the fact that this study for a Master in Visual Arts is a *practical* study (a study of a *practice*). The way I understand this is that whatever theory is studied or proposed, must be put into practice, and putting it into practice would mean applying it to the practical work undertaken for the study. Even so, this text follows the same creative process used during the making of the paintings. Rather than merely discussing or analysing or debating theoretical issues suggested by the paintings, the text continues the process triggered by the paintings.

<sup>2</sup> According to Barthes (1979:146) “The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of cultures”.

<sup>3</sup> The *rationale* is contained in the *working process*, while the *working process* might be just another way of referring to the *methodology* which was followed, a methodology of practicing theory by putting theory into practice.

<sup>4</sup> Valuable information concerning matters of ‘chaos and order’ as it appears in creation myths can be found in the psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. Marie–Louise von Franz, another Jungian analyst, wrote extensively on creation myths while Erich Neumann applied many of Jung’s ideas in the field of art history.

<sup>5</sup> Here again it is necessary to note that none of the philosophers or psychologists mentioned will be studied in depth, as this text is not concerned with supporting or underwriting a specific theory of any particular one ‘guru’ or ‘movement’. Without wishing to discredit any ‘gurus’ or ‘movements’, it must nonetheless be clear that they warrant mention only insofar as their ideas will support a general argument regarding deconfiguration and the practice of repetition as applicable to the paintings discussed.

<sup>6</sup> It may be of interest to note Hans-Georg Gadamer’s understanding of hermeneutics, which he described as “the theory and also the practice of understanding and bringing to language the alien, the strange and whatever has become alien” (Johnson 1984:10-11).

<sup>7</sup> Within the image of ocean and sky – of water and of clouds – a binary already appears, namely that of above and below. The shifting between above and below, between the liquid of water and the vapour of sky (i.e. between two states of being), furthermore bears



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witness to the close ties between theory and practice. Both water and clouds constantly change shape, depending on the environment in which they appear. The same can be said of the paintings and the theories substantiating the paintings.

<sup>8</sup> Deconfiguration is not a method designated to figuring out deconstruction per se. This is after all not a study on Derrida or deconstruction; perhaps it can best be described as a study of looking into a study of itself. As such it may share a lot with deconstruction, but then it could be argued that it shares a lot with a number of other worlds.

<sup>9</sup> I will not attempt to rewrite or even summarise the notion of simulacrum as propounded by the likes of Baudrillard. Suffice it here to refer the reader to Baudrillard's *Simulations* (New York: Semiot(e), 1983).

<sup>10</sup> The thought in the last sentence of the section is picked up in the first sentence of the following section. In poetry such a transitory link would be referred to as an enjambment. While 'transitions' between some paintings within certain series may be more severely disrupted, 'visual enjambments' similar to the linkage noted between the sections of this written chapter can also be identified in the paintings.

<sup>11</sup> This is a comment on my own text by myself, and not a quotation from another source. Within parentheses and typeset as it appears here, it is a midway mark between the self and the other, the theory and the comment on the theory. Moreover, it continues with the play between what is presented and what is represented; the play is therefore also between the text and the endnote (this note), extending, amending and/or deconfiguring the text, the theory of the text, the comment on the theory of the text etcetera. The question as to whether the premise ought to be/is a strategy and/or whether deconfiguration is a strategy (containing the premise), remains unanswered. So be it.

<sup>12</sup> In explaining how Heidegger understood repetition as a philosophical principle, Patricia Johnson makes the following statement:

To understand repetition is to understand that life must be grasped in its wholeness. This cannot be done by stopping life at one point and doing an archaeology to explain that point. Existence is temporal and so ongoing. To grasp the whole is to grasp an end point and make it a beginning (1984:5).

That way is my *will*, I trust  
In my mind and in my grip.  
Without plan, into the vast  
Open sea I head my ship.

All is shining, new and newer,  
Upon space and time sleeps noon;  
Only *your* eye – monstrously,  
Stares at me, infinity!

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

## FOR(E)WORD

From hereon in: foreward. Forward the foreword – not dissimilar, but as homophones not quite synonyms either.<sup>1</sup> One wor[l]d is (simply) not enough.

If this text is a beginning, a departure, then it is an end also, an arrival. But it might as well be neither – or perhaps it is both. Both together. Inside and outside. Synonym and antonym. Discernable parallels. As much as synonyms are repetitions, this text repeats what the art works discussed here, may represent; similarly, the art works are repetitious of this text. Still, both texts (written and painted) remain an investigation – a looking into what it is that is being repeated, how it repeats, perhaps even why it repeats, i.e. the text, the art works; the art works, the text; the text other texts, the art works other art works; the text other art works, the art works other texts. Moreover, in particular, these paintings are paintings investigating these paintings: this text is a text investigating this text.

The visual approach of the body of the work discussed here, repeats among other things literary and semiotic methods and theories, by way of a structural and post-structural, process. In effect, it is the written language that is the vehicle for the process of 'looking into'. Even when repeating what others before me have already claimed, I would agree that the literary and the visual are languages that function among similar lines, yet each with its own peculiar characteristics. The paintings I made function as a language then, and although any language may be considered a mode of communication (a *communion of modes*), it relies not only on statements of literal meaning. This means that the metaphor is integral to the language used. Things might, more often than not, mean something *more* or *other* (extra=outside) than the way in which it is

presented, or appears to be presented, in a(ny) language. This, despite the intentions of the author.

While author and reader from a binary point of view, comprise opposite sides of the scales within a dramatic context, they are the necessary characters needed for conflict, that is, required for discourse. The course taken in this investigation (a dis-course) will therefore (hopefully always) be from (at least) both (all?) ends. If, in the process I call on 'recognised experts' or 'past masters', I do so, always with the suspicion that they (those others from whom I take my cue) may soon be discredited for being false prophets of institutions bent on setting trends, barking up rules or drawing blinds on flickering shadows against distant cave walls. But even this (*blind*) following of 'authorities' cannot be prevented when one hopes to engage in any meaningful relationship with tradition, and more particularly with the tradition of repetition.

One such 'authority' I shall call upon is Roland Barthes, whose one certain claim to fame was his conviction about 'the death of the author' and who held fast to argumentation about the 'self contained text'. Another voice called to witness would be that of Jacques Derrida who petitioned for the 'process of writing' (*écriture*) and whose particularly open ended belief in the significance of the 'outside-text', could come in handy when demonstrating how much of what is being done and said – even now – can be found in the work of others. Against the backdrop that an image is just another text, or that the visual is yet another language, we can obviously not escape the intricacies that research concerned with language, has brought to light.

Similarities with language games as noted in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, could also be found in visual art works. While this text and the artworks it engages with are concerned with matters like language games (be they visual or literal), it also seeks to investigate modernist and



postmodernist notions of the authentic or original versus the copied or inauthentic – hence the pre-occupation of the artworks and the text with repetition, once again an element found in both verbal or written language as well as in visual language.

Without becoming too embezzled in psycho-analytic jargon, it should be considered that in order for repetition to reach its ultimate conclusion, there is the return of self, the looking of self into itself once the objectification or the rapture that occurred during what Jacques Lacan, following on Sigmund Freud, called the 'mirroring phase'.<sup>2</sup> It would be necessary to admit that the self has to once again harmonise with itself in order to complete the process that Carl Gustav Jung referred to as 'individuation'.<sup>3</sup> The repetition of the self, of that which the self has observed of itself, standing outside of itself, yet at the same time admitting to itself that which is of itself, would in a text like this then result in the self quoting itself. Hence the scattered remarks from the notebooks made during the making of the works.

In being analogous to imagery in general, as well as to the presentation of the images as encountered in the paintings in particular, the text inverts the idea of the image illustrating a text. It strives throughout to show the co-dependence of text with image, yet not necessarily of the particular singular image as presented in its many synonyms.

During this investigative text reference will be made to literary as well as painterly methods. For as much as words often tend to paint pictures, pictures instinctively crave words. The formal structures used to make up sentences (to make sense of arbitrary words) can also be traced in the structuring of visual art works. A body of art works then, as put forward in a formal exhibition, constitute something similar to a book in which such sentences, made up of (words) elements, are arranged (configured) in order to be presented in a structured way. But as much as the book does

not stop with its formal structure, the exhibition or the paintings at the exhibition should in no way be limited by its imagery or its formal configurations. In fact, this investigation will show that it is within the structuring of such formalities that the repetitive element comes into its own right and that repetition should serve to free the text from its formal constraints. It is here that the receiver is constantly reminded of the active (participatory) role that the reader plays in the reading of a text;<sup>4</sup> moreover, it is within the text itself that signs are to be found, suggestive of contexts, in which such a text may or may not function in a particular or relative way. But then, such context, within which the text must appear to come into its own, may seem like an outside, a framework without which the text would have no meaning. Yet, in order for the text to function (to work), the outside (context) gets drawn into the text as much as the text spills over into the outside. Inside and outside: both sides together.

Does this *for(e)word* then, stand outside the word, in front of the word, in preparation of the word, or is it in itself (in a word) a wor(l)d inside the word, giving insight into the word? Does it lead on, in any linear or other manner of narrative understanding towards its own conclusion, on (in) to an (here-ever) after word? This much remains to be seen.

According to Wassily Kandinsky "The execution is of the greatest importance in the work of art, it is through this, in large part, that intuition manifests itself and creates the essence of the work" (Chipp 1968:361). For Kandinsky this meant more than the physical presence of the actual material work of art. He was moreover influenced by Rudolph Steiner's statement in *Theosophy*: "Just as we call the revelation of physical things "sensation," we will call the revelation of spiritual things "intuition"" (1994:51). According to another great teacher of modernist art, László Maholy-Nagy,

The intuitive is most accurately understood as a speeded-up, subconscious logic, parallel to conscious thought in all save its greater delicacy and fluidity. Usually the deeper meanings so often ascribed to the intuitive more properly belong to sensory apprehension. Here resides the ineffable. This kind of experience is fundamentally non-verbal but it is not inarticulate to the visual and other senses. Intuitive in the verbal universe is always potentially inexplicable. Intuitive in the plastic sense, in all the arts, including poetry, is a matter of never, probably, capable of conscious verbalization (1947:68).

Despite this inability to clearly express that which cannot be explained, one would nonetheless want to argue that such 'intuition' could itself be the result of a total environment within which the artist operates, admitting in a sense that the environment - the context - rubbed off on the artist, infiltrated the being of such a maker of works of art – almost as if through osmosis – to finally manifest itself through this 'intuition' in the making of the work.<sup>5</sup>

Even so, different people from different times, and from varied backgrounds, attach different meanings to the same words.<sup>6</sup> The same word repeated in another context, used by the same person, will even change its meaning according to the situation.<sup>7</sup>

We therefore need to consider what may be a key element in the dissertation presented here: both what is being said (written) and made (painted), have been done before. It is in the repetition of what has been done, it is in this *process of work (this work in progress)* and the reworking (no, *rewording*) of this work, that the deconfiguration takes place (functions: reprogresses).<sup>8</sup> Deconfiguration is a product of repetition, but it is a product only through being a constant process of execution. It is both method and product. As method it is irreplaceable in the process of transformation (through re-progression). It is both method and product, both image and word; it consumes while being consumed. Such transformation is not only affected by, but even occurs within/during the



very act of deconfiguration – in fact, it is the act of deconfiguration to transform any previous configuration. Deconfiguration is thus a process/method, method/process of transformation and is integral to creativity. Creativity/transformation would not be possible in the absence of deconfiguration; deconfiguration in turn depends on repetition.

It must also be understood that such repetition is not merely mechanical, though it might at times seem so – especially from a ritualistic perspective. None the less, any practice of repetition often results in what could appear to be fragments. One repetition might set off another in a direction quite different from what was initially presented as repetition. And so repetition feeds upon repetition, more often than not in a linear or hierarchical or chronological manner. As part of deconfiguration, repetition occurs rather as if in a dream, in a haphazard and disorderly way, perhaps presented now in one context only to later (or earlier) – sometimes quite unexpectedly – (have) crop(ped) up again in a different context, even (disguised) in another (synonymous) form. This happens to images or objects taken from one context and reconfigured in another context, as has been shown clearly by the pro-modernist method of collage,<sup>9</sup> or in for example Marcel Duchamp's use of the readymade. It obviously also happens to words that might mean one thing within one structure, but when scrambled may end up in another sense or sentence, meaning something quite different. It is through this feeding upon each other, through this interdependent consummation, through such intricate intercourse that deconfiguration presents itself. And it is through deconfiguring any such intercourse, through being within the act of this intercourse, that new meanings, meanings 'other' than what they were before, will be manifested.

This text can be cut, spliced, shifted (radically edited) so that paragraphs from one section might be interchanged or swapped around by paragraphs from other sections, so that one chapter might be read before another,



from back to front perhaps, even while reading paragraphs from other texts, even while looking at images integral or external to this text.<sup>10</sup> But then it will be obvious that the emphasis on particular meanings will of necessity also shift, for this is exactly how and where deconfiguration functions. It is in the shift – it may indeed be the very slippage of the shift – that deconfiguration deconfigures, whether it is willed or through sheer serendipity.

In the reading (investigation/analysis) of the text due consideration should therefore be given to the matters mentioned here. To recapitulate: what may seem similar might be dissimilar; outsides might turn in, what is up becomes down - thus the vice is in the versa; the literal becomes a metaphor, the unseen revealed, the visible fades; the image is a manifestation; the word is weak for pictures as images crave comment; all comments are secondary, all images copies; authenticity relies on repetition; repetition deconfigured scrambles logic; to be lost is to find; to unveil is to conceal; to search is to stumble; to stumble is to stutter and to stutter is to repeat uncontrollably, backwards and forwards.

For now, from here (on/out) towards in then.

## Endnotes: For(e)word

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† *Toward New Seas, from The Gay Science:1974:371.*

<sup>1</sup> In his introduction to *The Wake of Deconstruction*, Harold Sweizer notes that Barbara Johnson, in her texts on postmodernism and deconstruction, makes use of “the playfulness of words, their alliterations and duplications” not as a means of establishing identity, but rather to “mark the fortuitous and subversive nature of signification” (Johnson 1994:2).

<sup>2</sup> Lacan believed that “We have only to understand the mirror stage as *an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*” (1997:2).

Taken from a postmodernist point of view Steven Connor argues, “We are in and of the moment that we are attempting to analyse, in and of the structures we employ to analyse it. One might almost say that this terminal self-consciousness ... is what characterises our contemporary or ‘postmodern’ movement” (1995:5).

While for Lacan mirroring meant the objectification of the self, the postmodernist sees reflection as a return to the self, even in cases where the identity of a text relies on the text turning in on itself.

<sup>3</sup> Jung described individuation as a ‘process of centring’, although he was careful to point out that such centring had nothing to do with our general notion of the ego. In explaining the process of individuation, Jung referred to ‘Indian wisdom’ in order to contrast the process with our Western way of thinking. Jung wrote: “... the experience of the self has nothing to do with intellectualism; it is a vital happening which brings about a fundamental transformation or personality. I have called the process that leads to this experience “the process of individuation”” (Humbert 1996:62).

<sup>4</sup> Taken to an extreme pragmatist philosophers such as Richard Rorty argue that ‘texts and their meanings are just what you suppose they are, as it suits your convenience’ (Cunningham 1994:50).

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<sup>5</sup> The same has been said of the interpenetration that has happened between a text and theoretical comment on the text. Geoffrey Hartman pointed out how in Derrida's *Glas*, writing of text and theory contaminated one another (Connor 1995:216).

<sup>6</sup> Iain Chambers notes that, "languages are not autonomous. They are integral to the 'social construction of reality'" (1990:8).

<sup>7</sup> Such relative readings tend to dissolve claims of absolute authenticity, as "What emerges is not 'authentic' to any single point of origin, explanation or metaphysical axiom, but seeks rather to be authentic to a particular set of historical circumstances and associated possibilities" (Chambers 1990:6).

<sup>8</sup> Chambers sees such repetitive practice as a positive sign in postmodernism. He argues,

what can be proposed is a putative shift or movement that is not beyond or away from the past but rather involves a circulating back on it, a return, a stepping back down into its details, earlier silences and margins, into its previously 'blank' spaces and hidden networks, in order to extract from it a more extensive sense of the possible (1990:9).

<sup>9</sup> When explaining grammatology, Derrida notes the interweaving of various elements (texts) into one text. He argues that the process is similar to that of a collage.

Each cited element breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the same fragment incorporated into a new whole, a different totality ... Thus the art of collage proves to be one of the most effective strategies in the putting into question of all the illusions of representation (Foster 1985:88).

<sup>10</sup> This may still form part of Derrida's reading of *contamination*. He writes, "I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set" (Foster 1985:90).

## CHAPTER ONE: FOREWARNED

It is the revolutionary crisis, the compelled striving for "something entirely new," that causes history to become veiled in myth.

*Harold Rosenberg*



The war is not without rules, but the rules allow and encourage the greatest possible flexibility of utterance.

Jean François Lyotard<sup>⊕</sup>

### Go figure

Deconfiguration is to figuring what deconstruction is to structuralism; when: figuring is to structuralism what figure is to structure.

Dictionary definitions indicate a number of meanings for the words *figure*, *figuring* and *figuration*. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*<sup>1</sup> the word *figure* designates "an external form", "an image or likeness", or it could even mean "the appearance of a certain impression".<sup>2</sup> Figuration then would include *the act of making* such "an external form", or "image" or "likeness of appearance", when: in any 'making' there is 'a structuring of'. It remains important though that the noun, *figure* (whence the verbs *figuring* and *figuration* are derived), by its very own significance, extends its meaning beyond the literal. The initial association with external form or likeness includes "the *appearance* of a certain *impression*". This not only suggests, but indeed contains in its essence the element of metaphor, of meaning extending beyond the literal or outward appearance. Figuring and figuration therefore link with *the way things are made to appear or look*, not necessarily with the way they are. Figuration, through its obvious association with appearance, thus suggests its own internal visual metaphor for the way things are made to appear without it necessarily being a true reflection of the reality it seems to be representing.

Moreover, the verb *figuration* constitutes either/or, a, "the act of formation", b, "a mode of formation", and/or, c, "a shape or outline". Under *figuration* is also understood "allegorical representation", while

*figurative* means “metaphorical, not literal” or it could even be understood as “emblematic, serving a type”.<sup>3</sup>

At the risk of labouring the issue, one last point, namely the word *figura*, the Latin root of the word figure. *Figura* is defined as “a person or thing representing or symbolizing a fact etc”, which brings us back once again to *representation*, with the added implication of the *symbolic* order. And as far as symbolism is concerned, we may bear in mind how Cornelius Castoriades figured the symbolic imaginary. Firstly, he noted that in everyday language “we speak of the imaginary when we wish to speak of something “invented” – be it an “absolute” invention ... or a slippage or displacement of meaning” (1984:9), and then secondly,

The profound and obscure nature of the relation between the symbolic and the imaginary becomes apparent as soon as one reflects on the following: the imaginary must reflect the symbolic, not only in order to be “expressed” – this is self-evident – but in order to “exist,” to move beyond a merely virtual state of existence. The most elaborate delirium, like the vaguest and most secret phantasm, consists of “images,” but those “images” are present as representations of something else, and so have a symbolic function. But inversely, symbolism presupposes an imaginary capacity. That is to say, it presupposes the capacity to see in a thing what it is not, or to see it other than it is (1984:9,10).

Castoriades concluded, “[t]he imaginary’s decisive hold on the symbolic can be understood in terms of the following consideration: symbolism supposes the capacity to establish a permanent connection between two terms such that the one “represents” the other” (1984:10). Thus we can be lead to understand that within the word figure, and its related structural variants figuring and figuration, we deal with something more, something other, indeed something represented through an image(/anary).

Against this background the act of deconfiguration would be a *critical evaluation/analysis* of figuring and figuration.

This would agree with postmodernist readings for which it would be hard to imagine that once a figure is in(/de-)scribed (depicted/made into an image), or rather signified (made significant by constituting a presence), it would be nigh impossible to believe that such a figure could have a (/an independent) life all of its own, functioning that is, in isolation. The line that any deconstructive/ post-structuralist/ postmodernist<sup>4</sup> interpretation would take, is exactly that any such isolation would signify an attitude of restriction, a closing off rather than a poetical opening up of metaphorical extension, leading on to the allegorical and even entering symbolic territory. Instead of limiting itself to one language, to one particular way of expression, the postmodernist prefers multiplicity as its mode of configuration. When asked to explain deconstruction, which we see today as part of postmodernism although most certainly not as synonymous, Derrida – though unwilling to give a readymade definition - responded:

I think it consists only of transference, and of a thinking through of transference, in all the senses that this word acquires in more than one language, and first of all that of the transference between languages. If I had to risk a single definition of deconstruction, one as brief, elliptical, and economical as a password, I would say simply and without overstatement: *plus d'une langue* – more than one language, no more of one language (Kamuf 1991:241).

Deconfiguration, in its affirmation of the 'open text' and its insistence on multiple languages, therefore links with postmodernism through the likes of Lyotard and the late (post-)structuralism of Roland Barthes who claimed that

there is no meta-language; or rather, there are nothing but meta-languages: language on language, like an apple turnover with no fruit, or better still, for no language has a permanent hold over the other (Thody 1983:128).



Here we are already afforded the opportunity of detecting one of the primary differences between postmodernism and modernism. Modernism, through its insistence on formalism in particular, was guilty of perpetrating absolutist, dead-end categorizations.<sup>5</sup> In its quest for independence from all other forms of science and art, modernism (supported by a much revered troupe of rebellious avant-garde artists) did everything in its power to determine boundaries according to which its very own aura of authenticity could be defined. It ended up being rather unavailable, or if at all available, it was the domain of a chosen, an exclusive elite – a quite esoteric field accessible only to the initiated few.<sup>6</sup>

While postmodernism may in more than one way have followed on the traditions of modernism as has been pointed out by both proponents and critics of postmodernism, including Hal Foster, Jürgen Habermas,<sup>7</sup> François Lyotard,<sup>8</sup> Charles Jencks, Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard and many others, postmodernists were nonetheless engaged in changing certain shortfalls identified within modernist ethics<sup>9</sup>. For one, it scrapped the 'exclusivity' clause of modernist (master)law. In doing so, it has often been accused of allowing an 'anything goes' kind of approach. Yet, its democratic attitude of inclusivity could be seen as not only a critique on a modernist shortfall, but as an attempt at improving on a stifling situation. Moreover, postmodernism also exposed another pertinent modernist restriction, namely modernism's contradictory denial of the fact that it could be productive without being obsessed with negating everything of the past in order to claim an authentic identity. And so postmodernism went about deconstructing modernism's great myth of authenticity through the elicitation of in particular technology, which, according to the likes of Frederic Jameson "replicates [and] reinforces the logic of consumer capitalism" (Sarup 1988:145). Rather than simply rejecting such old ingrained myths, postmodernism opted to slay the dragon by getting in under its skin. It therefore debunked these myths by not only analysing



but, by indeed practicing the very structures it aimed at exposing (tracing its figurations) - and in doing so it deconstructed a number of the patterns established by modernism.

The above may sound like an oversimplification of the many complexities that make up modernism and postmodernism, but it is sketched briefly only in order to highlight the goal of this dissertation. Despite modernism's brave – if fool hearted – attempts to show that they were doing what had never been done before, the one underlying principle that they blindly ignored (or perhaps desperately suppressed) was that of repetition. To the modernists, and to many postmodernists following in some of the tracks laid down by modernism, repetition was an evil. It seems ironic that even Carla Gottlieb in her book *Beyond modern art*, should stick to this criticism when she claims "the artistic effect is usually a copy of a natural effect instead of a retranslation of nature into artistic terms. *Originals are always more stimulating than copies*" (my italics)(1976:316). It was exactly modernism's argument (one that followed very much in the ancient Greek traditions), that repetition was counter-productive; or rather, to repeat meant to be re-productive instead of being productive. As much as the factory worker, during the industrial revolution, had become reproductive when compared to the productivity of earlier craftsmen, 'fine artists' (once they became institutionalised) guilty of reproduction were mere craftsmen and not really artists responsible for 'original designs'. Those capable of work which was rooted in authentic, first hand experience were considered 'fine' artists.

Despite all this the modernists repeated themselves endlessly. Only, they would not admit to it. The fallacy of the 'aura of authenticity' propagated by Walter Benjamin and others, was dealt a telling blow when the postmodernists repeated – in both theory and in practice - what the modernists had on offer and in the process exposed modernism's hypocrisy concerning repetition. While not necessarily concerned with theories of

debunking modernist fallacies, Andy Warhol took a leading role in the methods of repetitive practice. Not only would Warhol copy what was readily available, he would copy what was already copied by someone else, only to copy his own copies of someone else's copies once more. Warhol was of the opinion that "Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way," declaring, "... everybody should be like a machine ... because you do the same thing every time. You do it over and over again" (Harrison & Wood 1996:731).

We labour in vain to describe a person's character, but when we draw together his actions, his deeds, a picture of his character will emerge.  
Goethe ♦

### Making (it/the) work

Whatever criticism Clement Greenberg has had to endure, he did admit that modernism was not possible without tradition:

... I cannot insist enough that Modernism never meant anything like a break with the past. It may mean a devolution, an unravelling of anterior tradition, but it also means continuation.

Nothing could be further from the authentic art of our time than the idea of a rapture of continuity. Art is, among many other things, continuity. Without a past of art, and without the need and compulsion to maintain past standards of excellence, such a thing as Modernist art would be impossible (Harrison & Wood 1996:760).

Repeating, in the rather traditional and laborious form of painting, much of what the modernists and the postmodernists did and said, therefore means that I once more track this path of continuation. I may also still be involved with what Donald Kuspit referred to as 'modernist traditionalism'. He believes that "Modern traditionalist artists ... walk their tradition as a tightrope, testing its strengths and weaknesses" (1993:54). He qualifies though:

But this traditionalism consumes traditions in the very act of appropriating them. In Modern traditionalism there is never any surrender to tradition, but rather a negation of it in the very act of affirming it. For in it tradition remains a quotation, a bracketed identity existing to be studied abstractly for its ideational topography.

Modernist traditionalism, then, is not a reversal of the familiar Modernist antitraditionalism, but rather an extension of the Modernist interest in the conventions and structures that permit us to speak of having an artistic identity and style – any identity and style at all (1993:54).

Even being so intensely aware of the making of the painting, thus locating the life of the art form in the *activity* that the artist engages in when making an artwork relies on past *practices* clearly exploited by modernists. In its more radical form, Richard Serra would say: "I do not make art, *I am engaged in an activity*, if someone wants to call it art, that's his business, but it's not up to me to decide that. That's all figured out later" (my italics) (Meyer 1972:166); French painter Jean Dubuffet developed his verbal notions about his art "during the very act of painting". For him "the process comes first and are not affected by theoretical aims" (Rosenberg 1983:87).

But what could I possibly gain from repeating the tradition of repetition? Perhaps I could highlight a particular point, one that needs re-cognition: that repetition, even as used in figuring, is far from being the evil, degenerative form it was made out to be by modernism and maintained by some critics of postmodernism. In fact, the paintings I made will show that repetition is an indispensable part in the process of *what is being made* (according to the Greek, *poësis=making*), to function re-generatively.

It is therefore only through gaining insight into the actual making of the art (in *the process* of the making), in the *deconfiguration* of the figuring, that any possible theory of deconfiguration will manifest itself. But it should already be suggested by the paintings, namely what was physically figured by the one responsible for its making, will constantly deconfigure itself when confronted by itself. In this shift, this slippage, this gap, the mirroring can be observed. Above all, in this deconfiguring the figure (image/imagination) is re-inscribed to be born(e) again.



The paintings presented are thus on one level a pictorial manifestation of some of the many theories concerned with modern and postmodern art. In making the paintings, I was certainly looking for an image or figure representative of the very nature of the making of art as currently experienced. I was also, without a doubt, always thinking about, considering, toying with and even writing notes on possible theoretical justifications for what I was busy with while in the process of making the art works.<sup>10</sup> In this way the paintings were questioning its very own function/validity. But these paintings are *not* illustrative of any *one* particular viewpoint or language or theory. At the same time it should be obvious through its very (decon)figuration, that the paintings are nonetheless constantly engaged in *a number* of (though by no means all) debates of current and past discourses on art.

The whole exhibition/display/installation is being conceived in visual terms. What does it look like, how does it unify/fragment on a visual plane in order to convey the concept. So that the whole concept is conceived as being visual – ultimately even as being a pictorial metaphor for the (possibly abstract) concept underlying it all. The creation of the concept happens on a visual plane. The image does not arise from the concept – the concept arrives from the image (01.06.2002 @ 10:55).<sup>11</sup>

At the end of his 'Lives', Vasari included a 'Description' of his own works.<sup>12</sup> While I hope not to force any overt autobiographical data on you, it should become clear throughout that the practical part of this investigation remains the basis of all I have set out to discuss. And in this *practice*, in this *making* of the paintings/texts, I certainly acted as the mover. The reader will hence be addressed in the personal voice of the artist. It follows that the identity of the artist responsible for the art works will somehow shine through in the works as well as in the text commenting on, referring to, participating in the works, particularly if methods of rigorous deconstructive analysis are to be adhered to. It was Picasso who said, "I paint the way some people write their autobiography" (Golding 1994:113). This may not be particularly true of the way I go about things, but if all

works (I like the word works) are texts anyway, at least as proposed by gurus of deconstructive postmodernism, then the written body (here I prefer *text*), referring to the paintings (here I prefer *works*) are as much part of the texts as is the person who is responsible for both text and works.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps we have become too conditioned by modernist methods of analysis, steeped as they were in the psychoanalysis of both Freud and Jung. After all, it was of Abstract Expressionism – one of high modernism’s pet ‘movements’ – that Rosenberg would say that the image the painter would end up with in his artwork, would not be a pre-conceived image, but “the result of [an] encounter” (1960:25) with the canvas. The artist was no longer outside the canvas, but became part of the very artwork, through his actions during the making of such an artwork. In light of this, we can also understand Rosenberg’s claim that, “A painting is an act inseparable from the biography of the artist” (1960:27). We may even sympathise with him when he notes, “As Stevens says of poetry, “it is a process of the personality of the poet” (1960:27). Rosenberg however added, “But the psychology is the psychology of creation” (1960:29). From these statements it should become clear that *the process of the creation takes the place of the personality of the Author/Artist*. Or, in other words: the personality of the maker/artist is contained within (perhaps revealed through) this process. Despite not being completely shut out, while perhaps being part of a sub-text, even within the shallowest of cracks in the varnish, the works that I present here are not directly concerned with issues of identity, i.e. they were not painted in order to expose or show its maker’s being.<sup>14</sup> If anything, these paintings were made to lay bare the process of the making, and in this case the process occurred through repetition. If any personality is revealed in the process, then so be it.

Not that the issue of the identity of the author does not occupy central stage in modernist and postmodernist debates. During Cubism’s analytical

phase, for example, neither Picasso nor Braque signed their paintings and it was later often difficult to tell the works apart or to ascribe a particular 'master's hand' to any specific painting – which for connoisseurs is the stuff of dreams, not that it concerns us here. What does concern us is that this process of the denial of authorship agrees with Barthes' thoughts on the death of the author. Moreover, it obviously engages in issues of power and repression as scrutinised by Michel Foucault who warned against the valorisation of the author as an ideological construct when he claimed that "[t]he author is the principle thrift in the proliferation of meaning" (my italics) (Harrison & Wood 1996:927). It is in an effort to stem such unnecessary proliferation of meaning on the part of the (self-)constructed identity of the Author (the capitalised Artist – the self made genius) that I would, rather than showing how personal experiences of ultimate intimacy may have lead to the making of particular paintings, subsequently imbuing such works with profane meanings, leave most interpretation up to you, 'the other', outside the process of the writing of the text.<sup>15</sup>

Consider for example that an artist like Paul Cézanne was criticized for being too theoretical about his work or trying to illustrate his theories of art in his paintings (Greenberg 1965:56). Cézanne in turn criticised Emile Bernard for spending too much time on theory when he wrote him in a letter, "The artist must guard against that literary spirit which so often leads the painter off his true path ... Literature expresses itself by abstractions, whereas paintings, by means of outline and colour, gives concrete shape to sensations and perceptions ... Don't be an art critic! Just paint, and you will be safe" (Elgar 1974:210). Others, like Monet, apparently also had "a horror of theories" (Levine 1986:65).

In a way I may be guilty of both, i.e. in sometimes trying desperately hard to illustrate the theories I may have about art, while at other times refusing to put forward any theoretical speculations on what I do. It remains difficult to say which comes first, the artwork – here I would include both



work and text - or the theory, for which I include both text and work. It seems particularly true here that "the modern script is born simultaneously with the text" (Barthes 1979:145). Accordingly I have to conclude that theory and work operate like inter-dependents, even as co-dependents. The one can hardly be said to be complete without the other.

Nevertheless, I imagine that the artwork has a life of its own (it comes into being through a primary process of making) whereas the theory of art depends on art for its existence (it comes into being through a process of contemplation/reflection). And yet, while I imagine the artwork standing alone (by itself), I keep suspecting that it always needs a (referential) context (not that such a context can ever be said to be finite or stable), in order to be read or interpreted. Whatever context I may have constructed or used (in the case of a theory appropriated or illustrated), nothing can ensure that the author's intentions will be 'respected' or agreed upon during reception or interpretation. How interpretation links with intention is similar in a sense then to how theory and practice relate to one another.

The relation between intellectual knowledge and visual representation is frequently misunderstood. Some theorists talk as though an abstract concept could be directly rendered in a picture; others deny that theoretical knowledge can do anything but disturb a pictorial conception. The truth would seem to be that any abstract proposition can be translated into some kind of visual form and as such become a genuine part of a visual concept (Arnheim 1974:157).

The reading of this (written) dissertation (text) therefore necessitates the study of - or at least the looking at - the artworks made by the artist (I am of the opinion that one could most likely still appreciate the paintings without having read this text, while the same cannot be said of the written text).<sup>16</sup> It is understood and of the essence that the images of the paintings presented, are part of the very conviction of spirit in which this investigation was approached: while we may accept that nothing is what it seems (already Hume's crisis),<sup>17</sup> repetition (a postmodern paradigm?) may



be the key to understanding and overcoming problems (or crisis) encountered during our investigations. Still, as postmodernism has shown, it remains impossible for any sense of understanding to be constant, as change is effected with every repetition. Each repetition will appear among other things, other references, within changed/shifted spatial-temporal environments. In this sense every 'new' repetition becomes a 'unique glimpse' or a 'possible truth' or an understanding relative to the environment/context in which it appears. At the same time, such glimpses of 'truths' or possible understandings can be gained from either 'original' or 'copied' art work, particularly in light of the fact that the very essence of any such art work, its *fons et origo*, cannot be traced to the point of absolute certainty - provided that we agree that such an origin is neither in a divine abstract nor in an authentic self.

The closest we can perhaps come to locating an origin, may be in imagining it. Imagining, according to its very semantic structure, would involve imagery. And so we return to the figurative in the process of deconfiguration. Imagery (as a visual language), within our postmodern context, has become such a dense strata that it would be impossible to put forward images without it already having appeared somewhere else in another form or context - or even within the same context/format. Appropriation in turn may therefore be read as just another form of repetition.

Besides, the imaginative should be traced not only within the text/work as presented to an audience, but in the *making* of the work/text itself - indeed in the *process of the making*. This process depends on and manifests itself through repetition. The workings of the metaphor, the use of the figurative within the concrete format of literal language, also occur within the *practice* of the work. It is an integral part of the making of the text itself and it would therefore only seem logical to try and trace the locus within the works - even if only as a point of departure.

The works, more particularly the images or the figures inscribed within the works, become then the literal signs signifying the metaphorical. According to David Novitz "... we have considerable reason to insist on the distinction between metaphorical and literal discourse ... literal meanings ... [are] crucial ... to ... comprehension of metaphor" (1985:107). The image that comes into being as a result of (practicing) work, therefore remains integral to the eventual metaphor made manifest by the painting. That the metaphor remains (parasitic) host to the sign signified by the image as imagined in the work, is in agreement with the 'free play of signs' proposed by Derrida, and perpetuated by Novitz, that "each sign signifies some other conception which is in itself a sign, and so on, indefinitely" (1985:104).

The actual making of these paintings was therefore approached from a rather pragmatic level. In order to understand the process followed, the paintings and how they were conceptualised and made (*structured*), will be discussed. Speculating, not prescribing, what they might possibly mean will form part of this discussion. It would then be possible to try and determine if these paintings were indeed meant to be of any significance other than being paintings made to be hung on walls for decorative or whatever other purposes (*function*). Both subjective and objective points of view will have to be considered in order to show that while structure may be influenced by function, it is by no means limited or determined by function. In other words, as protagonist I shall present my side of the process while at the same time placing it within the context of possible broader readings of the works.

If, to continue with Aristotle, all art and literature are imitation, then what we have here is the imitation of imitating.

*Clement Greenberg*<sup>‡</sup>

### The imagined image (copied)

The *image* appearing in the painting(s) is one that has been painted often enough before, by other artists as well as by myself. Simply put, it is an image of ocean and sky. In fact, the response triggered when I first repeated the image (after I had copied it off an assembled photograph) prompted me to investigate the occurrence of the repetition of a particular image. The person who bought the first painting was disenchanted when he discovered that I had 'copied' his original work and sold 'the copy' to someone else. In my client's view I committed some sort of treason. He was nonetheless convinced that the 'copy' was not as good as his 'original' painting once he had seen the copy, which strictly speaking would not make it an authentic copy. Nevertheless, I decided to make more copies of this specific image in an attempt to gain better insight into the whole debate regarding the copy versus the 'one-off'. To make such copies would obviously imply repeating not only what others had done before me, but also what I had done myself.

Although the practice of repetition is only one of the concerns that I have been investigating in my own art making process over the past two decades, it remains an issue that cannot be ignored. What I ascertained - not that anything less should have expected - is that repetition is nothing new to the art of painting, that it has a long tradition all of its own, that in fact, it forms the backbone of much of what has come to be the tradition of Western art. It could even be argued that without repetition, there would be no tradition. One of the main reasons why much of what modernism set



out to be (as far as the establishment of some sort of 'authentic presence' is concerned) turned into a rather miserable failure, is because the modernists – in their insatiable quest for renewal – were lax to admit their own repetitive practices. In order to try and prevent repetition, (which they somehow thought was lodged in the image, in the figure presented on the ground) they rejected the figurative image. But by working on the surface in trying to change the essence of art, the modernists failed to realise that the underlying current (that of repetition), remained untouched. In spite of forwarding abstraction in an effort to try and escape repetitive imagery, repetition continued within the structuring and the figuration of these works. But I digress.

The painted image which triggered my investigation and which I so repeatedly painted was simply an image of the ocean and the sky. There is of course a strong tradition of maritime painting, which reached a high point in the Netherlands during the Golden Age of the seventeenth century when the oceans became the great trade routes for those in search of great economic prospects. Such riches were however reliant on the conquering and colonisation of other, strange exotic lands. At the time, the ocean became a means of shifting boundaries, a way of stepping outside of one's own, narrowly defined (structured and framed) boundaries and of giving free reign to man's voracious appetite for knowledge and possession.

The great tradition of maritime painting would later also inspire a large number of Romantic paintings which all have as theme the sea. Romantic paintings, preoccupied with the ocean, range from Caspar David Friedrich's *Monk at the sea*, where the ocean acts as a metaphor for immeasurable longing, to Joseph Mallord William Turner's vast body of sea paintings. Most of these maritime paintings include ships. A smaller body of seascapes without any vessels on it was nonetheless also painted. Maritime paintings were moreover painted for a variety of reasons.



While we may typically hope to ascribe certain (clichéd) characteristics to Romanticism, it can be shown that notions or principles like "a love for the supernatural, the extravagant, the fantastic and the irrational" or "a tendency to use melodramatic forms [of] emotional expression" (Massey 1964:397-8), could very easily be countered with proof of rational research and accurate representation of natural forms. Thus "The supposedly fantastic Novalis was a scientist, and on more than one occasion declared that more can be accomplished with reason than with the most exalted fancy"(Massey 1964:403). According to Massey "every period has its Romantic and Classical side" (1964:407).

Similarly, to consider Turner's Romantic paintings of the sea simply as metaphorical of the inner turmoil of a particular period in history<sup>18</sup> would be short sighted. While Turner's paintings may seem to be imbued with 'stormy emotions' and although he himself may have been fond of what he called 'sentiment', John Gage notes that "Turner spoke of the art of landscape almost entirely as if it were a field for quasi-scientific investigation" (1969:118). Thus, while on the one hand "Turner denied the possibility of reducing his use of colour to rules" (1969:109), he nonetheless, in many of his lectures, relied on "science as the informant of perception, and with perception at the same time as a corrective to theoretical information" (1969:111), and "throughout the 1810s and early 1820s Turner's interest in, and contact with, contemporary activities in the sciences increased" (1969:113). At the same time Turner found even Goethe's theories on colour "too rigid a framework" (1969:116), as he would later develop a colour-symbolism "concerned with the three primary colours because he believed that they were the essence of natural structure, of the same order as the basic geometrical forms" (Gage 1969:117).

Every use of language is inappropriate, for we know nothing, we but  
dupe ourselves with images. Metaphors all!

*Amédée Ozenfant \**

### Traditional modernism

Within the modernist tradition artists like Emil Nolde and Edvard Munch depicted acidic seascapes, while Monet painted a number of impressionistic views of the ocean, particularly from a high vantage point. Apart from oblique references to 'swimming in an ocean of white' by Kasimir Malevich<sup>19</sup> and a select few of Piet Mondrian's paintings referring to the sea, where the ocean still appears in a number of modernist works, most notably in the works of Surrealists such as Salvador Dali and René Magritte, the image of the ocean qua ocean remains elusive.

On occasion however some postmodernists returned to the theme of the ocean in their art works. There are for instance the occasional abstractions such as *Night Sea* (1963) by Agnes Martin and Günther Uecker's *Ocean* (1970), which is not quite a painting in the traditional sense of the word,<sup>20</sup> but an 'image' of the ocean none the less. Even the American Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein opted to present seascapes in a rather abstract manner (Lippard 1977:126), while the German artist Gerhard Richter painted several hazy, soft edge seascapes, as in *Seestück* (1969). The various graphite drawings and meticulous copperplate engravings by Vija Celmins, *Big Sea #1* (1969), etc.,<sup>21</sup> concentrated on close-ups of the surface of the ocean whilst Setsko Karasuda painted the ocean in a photo-realistic manner, as depicted in *Summer Day* (1978),<sup>22</sup> and Sarah Krepp made paintings of the sea in which the painted imagery were related to word play and to sound as seen in *Re(a)d Sea/See Blue* (1999) as well as *White*

*Noise – Sea Music (1999)*.<sup>23</sup> Within the body of works that I have painted over the past twenty years, the image of the ocean appeared in a number of guises, moving more and more towards the image which is currently being exploited, namely an 'empty' ocean under an overcast sky.

What we are looking at here, in order to gain background knowledge regarding a tradition consisting of the works of other artists and of self, relies entirely on reproduced images. Our revered archives are therefore not accurate reflections of so-called 'originals' at all. These so-called originals have been processed and scaled down many times in order for us to use them for our own purposes. This means that the historical knowledge of the subject under investigation, namely the seascape, depends on a whole chain of reproductions (or representations in the true sense of the word) of what was already (re)presented by artists in the past. But for now, we are not that much concerned with matters of authenticity, as with the *tracing* of a tradition of imagery reflecting the ocean.

To look at reproductions (mechanical copies) of those art works that the artist copied either from photographs or from other art works constitutes the theoretical basis upon which any theory regarding repetition as being bound to the reproductive practice is founded. The very act of the reader/viewer when considering such reproduced pictures would in itself be a further reproductive act. But this 'reproductive act' need not remain reproductive only, because in the provocation of various combinations of a multitude, the artworks engage the spectator to become a participator in the process followed by the 'original creator' (artist/maker) of these art works. Moreover, this process continues. Even if the spectator draws his/her own conclusions, carrying on with his/her own private investigation or informed by his/her own personal agenda, the act of reproductivity remains in a process of flux, not one of stagnation. The importance of the artist is not dependent on the founding of some original revolutionary



motive such as the reinvention of the wheel!, nor to prove the procreative power of productivity, or to capture anything of particular significance to hold up to an ignorant audience, but rather in inspiring consciousness of the multifaceted aspects of repetition as it appears through the imagination integral as well as external to these art works.

Antonio Gramsci believed

There are the 'neologists' or 'jargonists', those who alone are able to relive the memory of the creative moment (and usually it is an illusion or recollection of a dream or fancy); then there are others who belong to more or less large cliques (who have a corporate jargon); and finally, those who are universal, in other words national popular! (1985:112).

I cannot imagine representing one of these camps only, although I do at times undoubtedly participate in one or in all of them. Still, I find myself much more in agreement with Paul Klee's dictum concerning the artist: "He neither serves nor rules - he transmits" (Waldo-Schwartz 1977:5). The artist then remains a facilitator inasmuch as the repetition remains mediatory, "even as language brings along with it the mediating structure of awareness..." (Norris 1991:95).

In this process of art making, there is already a dialogue, or what Ricoeur referred to as a 'discourse' between artist and artwork. In the work of art this process also takes place between thought and material as well as between conscious and unconscious. It follows that in the appreciation of the artworks the metaphorical discourse continues as appreciation signifies *ususre* – in the Derridian sense - and it is according to *usure*, which is in itself a process of re-production, that "every definition of metaphor itself [is] metaphorical" (Lawlor 1988:183).

The starting point of this interrogation of pictorial repetition and its repercussions thus remains within the paintings, while at the same time the

paintings may be parasitic of a lived reality, that reality is figured through imaginary representation in the paintings. Another 'language', an 'outside language' in the form of the (this) written text furthermore acts as facilitator, as a welcome go-between, in this constant switching between maker and user, producer and consumer.

It then also follows that if the text functions as reproductive of the body of work (corpus), the work also performs as reproductive of other works in which the metaphor already appears as (re)produced (yet interrupted by the imagination) of the/an artist. At the same time the work as reproductive of work, (the artwork as copy of the artwork), turns in on itself. In the event of the artwork being a negation of the origin, the reproductive work that is reproduced, becomes a clear negation of the negated. Still, a contradiction remains, namely that the artwork as reproductive of other artworks, as reproductive of itself or of the making of an artwork or even of a reproduction of itself, does not deny the existence of the artwork. Neither does it eradicate the author. Rather, the whole process places emphasis on the presence of the (traditional) artwork (painting on canvas) in spite of the absence of a traditional notion of authenticity.

The idea of creating a symmetry would thus indicate some kind of climax in the task of accepting the unconscious and in incorporating it in a general picture of the world.

*Carl Gustav Jung* ≈

### For format's sake

The making of the artwork also relies on the not-making of the work, as the outside text may be informative of the text. Therefore, the edges or the physical limitations of the work which acts as witness of where the image in the picture ends, also has a bearing on the continuation of the work – particularly in light of the fact that the work can be said to never end, to continue indefinitely.

The earlier work, which portrayed images of the ocean and the sky<sup>24</sup> and from which the current series was appropriated, was painted according to the older traditional format of the rectangle, thus emphasising the horizontal quality of the picture of the ocean. However, this series soon shifted to the square format. Although I will later return to the appropriation of the square as format (see *CHAPTER TWO: The square root*), it might be of interest to note a point or two regarding the use of the square format, considering my own particular, almost instinctive relation to this format.

On the one hand I am not quite sure why I chose the square as a format for this particular image, but I might at least speculate on a number of possibilities that could have influenced me in this regard. I suspect, firstly, that the shift from rectangle to square was rather instinctive. I realise that this is pure conjecture, but I am prepared to take full responsibility for such uncorroborated statements. On the other hand I could argue – and possibly prove – that the square is a format I am familiar with, not only because it became popular during modernism and maintained its popularity during postmodernism, but more particularly because it is a format I



worked with during the 1980's when I was pre-occupied with another landscape series, namely the depiction of mountains. I furthermore stuck to the square format for an extended period during the 1990's. In hindsight I realise that it was a popular format then, especially amongst some prominent South African landscape painters in the Eastern Cape with whom I felt a rather kindred spirit. I also suspect that I preferred the square for its obvious central symmetry.

Moreover, I saw the potential of the square as a unit within a larger format, that is, as a piece in the puzzle, as a microcosmic smaller picture within a macrocosmic bigger picture, as a piece that fits into a larger grid. The square thus lent itself to configurations and reconfigurations, something that has intrigued me since I realised that each individual painting contains within itself many other paintings, and because I over paint paintings containing similar themes in order to produce a palimpsest.<sup>25</sup> The whole notion of over painting falls within the wider confounds of repetitive painting, with repetitive mark making even if the action is unconscious or automatic. This notion ties up with the old adage that 'the artist ever only paints one painting'. While it may be an affirmative action in the sense of repainting the under painting in order to improve the earlier form of the (under)painting, it can also be seen as a negation of the (under)painting through the process of erasure or deletion.

Finally, I resolved to use the square format for the three separate series as the square seemed like a true neutral or even democratic format, favouring neither the horizon of the ocean nor the vertical of the skies. At the same time it is a format loaded with tension,<sup>26</sup> yet it also dissolves into its own internal visual conflict by means of its geometrical stability, with the gaze somehow always ending up in the centre. Considering the visual psychology of the square, Rudolph Arnheim wrote:

[whatever appears within a square] is influenced not only by the boundaries and the centre (sic) of the square, but also by the cross-shaped framework of the central vertical and horizontal axes and by the diagonals (...) The centre (sic), the principal locus of attraction and repulsion, establishes itself through the crossing of these four main structural lines (1974:13).

As much as the format does not favour any particular corner or side, the paintings in the series can therefore be set up and/or read in a number of different ways rather than having to follow an obvious horizontal narrative. This shifting suggested by the square format supports the possible sub-text of a romantic nostalgia regarding the loss of the origin or centre as suggested by its metaphorical and symbolic extension, of the actual image depicted in the paintings. "A square constructed from a central point is an *imago mundi* ... the division of the universe into four horizons," wrote Mercia Iliade (1959:45). Jung again speaks of "the idea of the quaternity of the unconscious" (1974:293-94), linking the quaternity with dreams and the imagination.

The use of postmodern jargon further assists any probable analysis or reading or interpretation of such a content framed by the square.<sup>27</sup> I use this mainly to illustrate how theoretic language concerned with the explanations of the artworks, remain not only integral to the understanding of the works, but do indeed function through the *usure* of context, particularly the continual configurations, reconfigurations and indeed even deconfigurations - to ease any path or metaphor which might be suggested by the artworks.

Finally, one of the main events of the spectacle of deconfiguration is the field of authenticity, which lies at the heart of modernism. In the form of the square, the modernists, and more particularly the postmodernists, had already figured the theoretical basis of a cultural practice (such as painting) that would expose the naively held myth of the aura of authenticity.



Fig 1. Emil Nolde, *Tropical Sun*, 1914.



Fig 2. Pieter Swanepoel, *Over the Edge*, 1991.

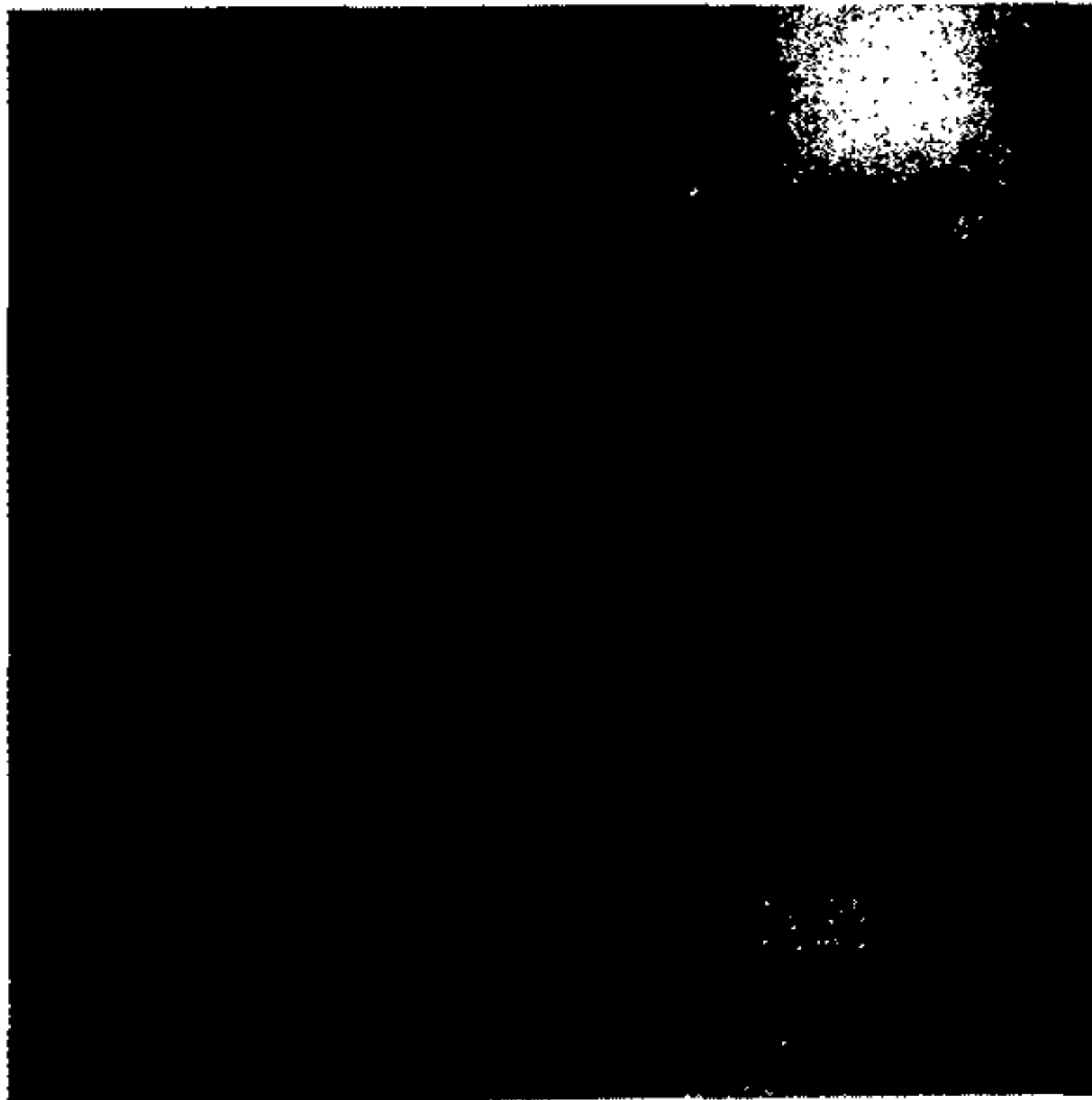


Fig 3. Gerhard Richter, *Seestück*, 1969.



Fig 4. Piet Mondrian, *Ocean 5*, 1915.



Fig 5. Vija Celmins, *Drypoint - Ocean Surface (Second State)*, 1985.

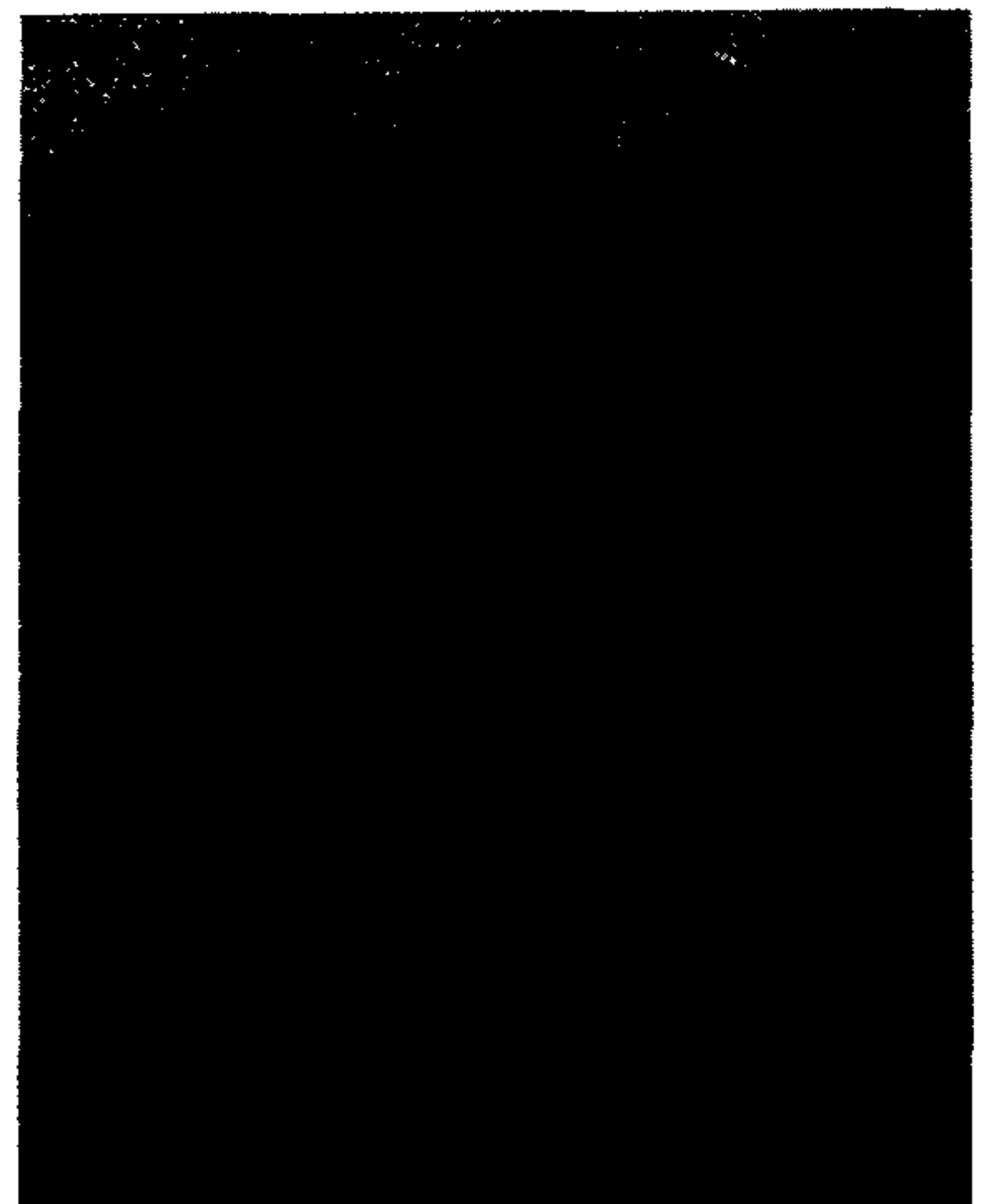


Fig 6. Pieter Swanepoel, *Still Sea*, 1998.



## Endnotes: Chapter One

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<sup>0</sup> Rosenberg 1960:156.

<sup>9</sup> Sarup 1988:120. The full quotation concerns Lyotard's attitude towards language games, as a follow up on what Wittgenstein said, and runs as follows:

In a discussion between two friends the interlocutors use any available ammunition ... questions, requests, assertions, and narratives are lauded pell-mell into battle. The war is not without rules, but the rules allow and encourage the greatest possible flexibility of utterance.

<sup>1</sup> Each quoted sentence or phrase in this section (Chapter One), concerning dictionary definitions, comes from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (ninth edition).

<sup>2</sup> To a modernist artist like Piet Mondrian every form, even every line, was representative of a figure (Chipp 1968:351).

<sup>3</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (ninth edition) remains the source for all quotations here.

<sup>4</sup> I agree with Madan Sarup, who at times uses the terms postmodernism and post-structuralism synonymously (1988:118); but I also agree with Linda Hutcheon's argument that "in dealing with the overlappings of theory and practice we need to go beyond the now obligatory association of the postmodern with the poststructuralist" (1991:226).

<sup>5</sup> According to Habermas, "Our sense of modernity creates its own self-enclosed canons of being classic" (Foster 1985:4).

<sup>6</sup> Habermas argues that once "[t]he autonomy of the aesthetic sphere ... [became a] deliberate project", the relationship between art and its public also changed. From this he concludes, "This modernist transformation was all the more painfully realized, the more art alienated itself from life and withdrew into the untouchableness of complete autonomy" (Foster 1985:10).

<sup>7</sup> For more clarity on this issue see Habermas' essay, "Modernity – An Incomplete Project", as it appears in Hal Foster's *Postmodern Culture*, 1985:3-15.

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<sup>8</sup> Lyotard, hoping to identify something peculiar regarding postmodernism's strategy, writes: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodernism* as incredulity towards metanarratives" (Cahoone 1996:482). Such 'narratives' must moreover be seen as more than a literary form. Fredric Jameson emphasised that "narrative is really not so much a literary form or structure as an epistemological category" (Sarup 1988:141). Still, Lyotard agrees that postmodernism simply repeats a lot of what already occurred during modernism. For Lyotard postmodernism is therefore guilty of repeating the past, instead of overcoming it. Thus Lyotard argues that "It [postmodernism] is undoubtedly a part of the modern" (Callinicos 1989:16), whereas Charles Jenks called postmodernism a double coding, which includes modernism while adding a rather undefined "something else" (Callinicos 1989:14).

<sup>9</sup> According to Hal Foster, one of postmodernism's main strategies is "to deconstruct modernism not in order to seal it in its own image but in order to open it, to rewrite it; ... to rewrite its universal techniques in terms of "synthetic contradictions" (1985: IX).

♦ Quoted in Steiner, 1994:95.

<sup>10</sup> Hence the "notebooks" and "studio notes" (also see endnote 11).

<sup>11</sup> *Studio note*. These notes were often done on scraps of paper, attached to a clipboard hanging on the studio wall. The notes were therefore written "in the heat of the moment", that is, taking time off while actually painting. In this sense the notes were the most direct thoughts derived from the paintings, while it could on the other hand be argued that the paintings were approached with, or influenced by such thoughts. Nonetheless, they formed an integral part of the practice of the making of the paintings.

The *studio note* differs from the *notebook* in that the notebook was almost like a diary kept over some two years while working on this study.

<sup>12</sup> Although this sentence is derived from George Bull's introduction of Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (Vasari 1987:10) it has not been placed in inverted commas, in order to honour the spirit of defiance of those thieves of the thoughts of others who stole from the rich to give to the poor and still got away with it. Nonetheless, in jotting down this note, I admit to my own cowardice in this regard by paying my respects according to sound academic practice, albeit in a slightly underhanded manner.

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<sup>13</sup> At the same time it should be noted that this theoretical dissertation and its companion practical component, are not concerned in particular with issues of identity. That the author's 'hand' lurks in the shadows of these texts goes almost without saying. But I agree with those who claim that the artist as maker of a particular form of 'cultural expression', or whatever other name art may go by, takes no special precedence over any other maker. Nor could an authentic personality type qualify the artist as a being of special significance. And anyway, I agree fully with Hans-Georg Gadamer, that "Not only occasionally, but always, the meaning of a text transcends its author; that is why understanding is not merely reproductive, but always a productive enterprise as well" (Dallmayr 1984:168).

<sup>14</sup> It would take a separate dissertation to take on the issue of identity as encountered in postmodernism. Suffice it for now to note that while some (most notably the previously marginalized) engage fully with the issue of identity, others (hoping to undermine a paternalistic history) refuse becoming involved in this particular issue. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenk argue:

The issue of identity is precisely the ground on which feminism and deconstruction part company, for deconstruction aims to undo essential selfhood where feminism recognizes the political necessity of affirming subjective agency. In deconstruction, identity has no priority of authority; subjectivity is the inevitable aftermath of a play of cultural forces...(Johnson 1994:28).

Barbara Johnson notes how "Derrida renders epistemologically groundless *all* identities" as "[his] analysis carry with them a clear imperative against structures of domination" (1994:29). Similarly, the process of deconfiguration does not privilege one form over another form, or one image over another image.

<sup>15</sup> This approach is part and parcel of Barthes' theory on the 'death of the author', according to which he argued that 'no one person' or 'source' or 'voice' owned a text, but that a text existed only because of its reading. Accordingly, to overthrow this myth of the Author as a kind of God who is responsible for the creation of the text, we need to understand that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (Barthes 1979:148).



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<sup>16</sup> “B) Text: Consisting of notes and references to paintings, i.e. a text on works presented. Question: Can this text be read without the paintings? At this point, no.” (*Notebook*. 2001/02/20:120 @8:55).

In rereading the *Notebook*, “I asked myself the question whether the text at that point could be read without the paintings (p.120). Now I wonder whether the text can in fact be written as a kind of manual to the paintings, i.e. the text, the reading thereof, will add meaning to the paintings” (*Notebook*. 2001/06/14:184 @ 09:36).

<sup>17</sup> Kearney 1988:165-167.

‡ Greenberg 1972:7.

<sup>18</sup> Irving Massey made a point of showing how a ‘Romantic period can hardly be identified within a concise historical framework, “since the “Romantic Movement” is identified with very different periods in different countries” (Massey 1964:406).

\* Ozenfant 1952:175

<sup>19</sup> In his essay, “Suprematism”, Aaron Scharf quotes Malevich as proclaiming: “ I have emerged into white. Beside me, comrade pilots, swim in this infinity. I have established the semaphore of Suprematism. Swim! The free white sea, infinity, lies before you” (Richardson & Stangos 1974:138).

<sup>20</sup> Instead of using paint, Uecker, who was “one of the leaders of Group Zero around 1962” ‘painted’ with nails on wood as part of continuing efforts to ‘discover’ new artistic materials. *Ocean* was described as, “long lines run over the surface vertically because the nails are spaced nearer one another in this direction than across the work. The lines are slightly irregular suggesting the ripple of waves on a quiet summer day. Over the centre of the field lies a large pale shadow, and in the centre of this shadow is a stronger concentration of darkness in the shape of an almond. One can visualise a cloud reflected in the water, or the wind caressing the ocean, or a boat creating a disturbance in the pattern of the waves around it” (Gottlieb 1976:121-23;12).

<sup>21</sup> See Goodyear 1981:140, Fig 78.

<sup>22</sup> Goodyear 1981:108:34.

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<sup>23</sup> New American Paintings 23, 1999:84-86.

~ Jung 1974:245.

<sup>24</sup> The painting was entitled *Come and Gone*. For more on this see page 97, Fig 22.

<sup>25</sup> "Now working on 2 x "Small Shiny Ocean" paintings on black ground. Reflection of light on sea ... Small prototypes for a bigger one. Fairly monotone paintings. First one blue & black & white – dramatic/romantic cloudy sky. Second one perhaps just black & white with a darker, less dramatically contrasted sky. Paintings are all square. Perhaps do two more..." (*Notebook*. 2000/08/06:7).

The paintings mentioned (2 x "Small Shiny Ocean") don't exist any longer; at least not as independent images. Other paintings were painted over them, so that X-rays or other modern technology may reveal what they looked like. They were not documented (photographed) before they were painted over either.

<sup>26</sup> "The potential of the square to extend in all directions: left right top bottom south north east west – even forking off from the four corner points etc." (*Notebook*. 2001/05/25:158)

<sup>27</sup> This ultimately stable format as frame, through its very ambivalence emphasises the fact that, as Derrida noted, "No border is guaranteed, inside or out" and that hence "no meaning can be fixed or decided upon" (Sarup 1988:60).

## CHAPTER TWO: PRACTISING PAINTING

History books are being rewritten all the time. It doesn't matter what you do. Everybody just goes on thinking the same thing, and every year it gets more and more alike.

*Andy Warhol* \$

Within any artwork, as in any painting, the act of repetition plays a major role, even if only on an abstract/formal compositional level. This can be ascribed to the very *process of making, the labour of art* which asks for repetition: one brushstroke follows upon another brushstroke, follows on countless brushstrokes to make up patterns of colour, form, line, texture, tone etcetera. Moreover, repetition takes on many forms. Within the postmodern context, repetition forms part of those debates regarding issues of mimesis as well as theories of simulacra as propagated by Jean Baudrillard.<sup>1</sup> Historically it would be impossible to speculate on how and where the practice of repetition first appeared within art. We can hardly imagine the earliest visual expressions which are now considered art, to have been without repetitive motifs, particularly in light of the fact that such early art forms are believed to have been intimately connected to religious ritual which in itself functions on repetition.



Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or a substance: a hyperreal.

*Jean Baudrillard* ©

### The (unreal) historical tradition

Despite Linda Hutcheon's protestations that Baudrillard's emphasis on simulacrum "is too absolute, too dogmatic for the provisional and decentered (sic) phenomena it pretends to describe," she nonetheless admits that "[t]he impact of Baudrillard's view ... has been immense" (1991:229). She adds, "[f]or some, the simulacrum has rendered questions about "the real thing" at once obsessive and irrelevant," agreeing that "postmodern questions about "the real thing" are indeed obsessive" (1991:229). Relating this very issue to history, Hutcheon further notes that "[t]he "real thing" has, however, had a problematic relation to art ever since Plato. What postmodernism does is not only to remind us of this, but also to investigate our amnesia" (1991:229).

In terms of the tradition of Western art as well as possible philosophical speculations regarding the identification of aesthetic qualities within the Western art tradition, we need to turn to the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato. Although neither philosopher wrote extensively on visual art as such, their scattered remarks have become part of the Western tradition of aesthetics. Firstly, it should be remembered that the Greeks did not distinguish between, what the (later) tradition came to call (fine) art on the one hand, and craft on the other hand. Rather, Aristotle made no real distinction between "a flautist or a sculptor or any artist", or, "joiners and shoemakers" (Hanfling 1992:5). This is most likely because the word we translate as 'art' corresponds to the Greek *techné*, from which the word

technique is derived, which refers to technical skill (Hanfling:5). While Aristotle and Plato may have differed on whether art was "essentially a reasoned or productive state" (Plato) or that it was due to "a state of inspiration and possession" and therefore "not by virtue of skill (*techné*), but by a divine power" (Aristotle), both agreed that the making of art relied on imitation (Hanfling:5). Hanfling writes:

According to Aristotle, the poet was to be regarded 'like the painter or other maker of likenesses'; all of them, he held, were aiming to 'represent things ... either as they were or are, or as they are said or thought to have been, or as they ought to be' (1992:6).

The fact that artists were imitative, caused Plato to relegate the poet, like 'some other imitative artist' (Bosanquet 1960:18), sixth in his ranking of human occupations. It becomes clear then, that in the earliest beginnings of what would later become an established tradition, the making of art through imitation or representation was considered inferior to other activities such as solving mathematical or metaphysical problems or acknowledging what a carpenter chose to make. For Plato the physical, outer reality would at best remain symbolical only of an inner reality or truth. But even then Plato suggests that, "...metaphysically, art is a second nature, only in the sense of being an incomplete reproduction of nature" (Bosanquet:18). A well-known polemic against representative art can be found in Plato's *Republic* where the ultimate conclusion is drawn namely that the painter, while not yet a 'creator' may be called a maker, but even then Plato qualifies "... that we may fairly designate him as the imitator of that which the others make" (Bosanquet:24). The painter, like the poet, is "thrice removed from the king and from the truth" because he imitates not from nature, but from what others have made before him. Furthermore, it is argued that the painter does *not* imitate things *as they are*, but *as they appear* (Bosanquet:24-25).

We know that during the Middle Ages art productivity became formalised to the point of absolute rigid stereotypes. The iconoclasm of Byzantium ended up by being "excessively formalistic and monotonously repetitive" so "that even in essentials the icons of the Greek Orthodox monasteries were still being painted in the same manner in the seventeenth as in the eleventh century" (Hauser 1977:127). It was only during the Renaissance with its great blossoming of learning, that the ancient Greek philosophies were revived. It was during this time that the artist's hand, i.e. the artist as an individual creative force, was first acknowledged. It was also during this time that the schism first appeared between what would be called crafts on the one hand and art on the other hand. Against this backdrop the practice of repetition became questionable.

While it is noted that the use of so-called model books, which were commonly found in the artist's workshops in the Middle Ages was still in use during the *concento* and that "Copies after other works undeniably played an important role in the creative process, offering lesser talents a repertoire of forms to adapt and greater talents stimulus to invention," it is nonetheless argued that "model books could never be the source of originality" (Maginnis 1995:37). It is also agreed that patrons demanded much from artists, such as exemplary craftsmanship as well as the use of only the best materials to further an established reputation. They also expected "invention and originality ...[as]... distinguishing traits of the great painter" (Marginnis 1995:30-32).

During the Renaissance this resulted in the attention given to the artist's hand or style. According to Paul Barolsky "around 1500 writers began to speak more explicitly of the painter's touch, the touch of the hand" (1995:5), which in turn is related to the artist's style. The Italian word for style, namely *maniera*, is "a term derived from *manus*, the Latin for hand" (1995:5-6). Barolsky points out that "The artist's self-consciousness emerges around 1500, in sculpture" and can be detected in the acceptance



of works of Michelangelo which would earlier have seemed *non finito*, or unfinished, in other words works in which the toolmarks still show, clearly marking the "progress of the [artist's] hand through stone" (1995:6). Barolsky argues that "Michelangelo's toolmarks on stone are equivalent of Titian's brushstrokes on canvas, petrified gestures of the hand" (1995:9). It was propagated even then, by Vasari amongst others, that the artist's individual genius, could through sheer inventiveness and not just as a follower or copyist of others, be detected in such 'gestures of hand'. Vasari's story of the copy by Andrea del Sarto of Raphael's portrait of Pope Leo X is related as an example of how not even "a perfect forgery, even imitating the dust on the surface of Raphael's picture" could be as good as the original picture executed "by Raphael's hand" (Barolsky 1995:5). Thus a tradition was introduced purporting that an artwork 'from the artist's hand' only was worthy of being called art, with the added proviso that such an artist was worth his reputation, which implied that he did not copy other artists. In other words, it was expected from the true master artist to be a great craftsman, as well as being inventive and original.

To copy and/or to repeat would eventually, during the postmodern era, become central to the debate on simulacrum. Within this context one would argue that to copy is a preliminary form of repetition. As we have noted, there is firstly the notion of copying from nature, according to which nature is the great master to be followed. Secondly, one artist (the apprentice) may copy from another artist (the master) in order to be educated. Of these two forms of copying which for part of the repetitive practice, the first mentioned notion was still acceptable during the Renaissance and perhaps even slightly more respectable during Hellenic times. However, once a Renaissance apprentice left his master's workshop to become an independent member of a guild, it was expected of the artist to avoid repetitive behaviour such as copying. Even copying the compositional design of another artist was held to be in bad taste. The masterpiece was recognised as being as unique as possible. Hence the

authority of the genius or master artist became fully entrenched in the myth of the authentic, original artwork. This tradition continued right up to modernism when all efforts were made to ensure the authenticity of a modern masterpiece.

But however hard even the modernists tried, they could not escape the inevitable practice of repetition, of copying what has been done before. Traces of repetitive behaviour cannot necessarily be found in pictorial representation any more, but can be traced in the materials and techniques (*techné*) employed by these artists. Take the brushstroke as an obvious example.

It is the art obtained by the practice in each art that can truly be called Art.

*JMW Turner* \*

### Repetitively painting brush strokes

The freedom of the brushstroke, or the 'loose' or 'loaded brushstroke' in which the action of the artist's personal gesture is allegedly revealed, has received substantial attention in the history of art. Art historian Franz Wickhoff for instance detected a looseness of brushwork in Roman decorative paintings that he considered central to *illusionism* (Gombrich 1976:7). Elsewhere Gombrich notes that Vasari considered artists who worked in a 'rough and unfinished' manner, superior to those who neatly finished off their art works (1972:193). Vasari praised Titian's later works in particular for being "executed with crudely daubed strokes and blobs in such a way that one sees nothing at close quarters, though they look perfect from a distance" (Gombrich 1972:195). The 'loaded brush' continued to hold the fascination of those artists who followed: artists like Frans Hals, Diego Velazquez, Rembrandt Van Rijn and Peter Paul Rubens were all believed to be exemplary for the way in which their roughly painted surfaces became intelligible from a distance. Art theorist and critic Sir Josua Reynolds even praised his rival John Gainsborough for these very qualities (Gombrich 1972:196-202).

Later on the so-called loose brush stroke was to become central to the 'painterly' style according to which the viewer became aware of the artist's working method. This approach certainly contributed towards the eventual loss of pictorial reference, a trend which gained serious momentum with Claude Monet (think of his *Impression Sunrise*) and which culminated in the work of Jackson Pollock. In Pollock's 'action paintings' the actual brushstroke gets lost in the artist's gestures during the process of creating



the artwork. Here the viewer becomes conscious, not only of the artist's hand, but indeed of the artist's actions. The very attention drawn to the brushstroke as an 'event' of significance on the one hand refers to identity whilst on the other hand it reveals a repetitive practice which lay at the heart of early modernism.<sup>2</sup> For artists such as Monet, Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh and others, all of whom, in one way or another, made use of the laborious methodology of incalculably repeated brush strokes, this repetitive performance may obviously have verged on compulsive obsessive behaviour.

It is often argued that the advent of the camera necessitated the notion that painting would not be seen as an image only but rather as an image re-produced, an image made by the artist, crafting away via brushstroke upon brushstroke. But then it is equally true that most of what seemed pictorial in the paintings of the Renaissance and thereafter, were hardly ever only pictures either. Any iconologist worth his/her weight in pictures would be quick to point out the many implied metaphorical, allegorical and even symbolical meanings, which abound in works that would be considered mere 'pictures' by the layman. This includes the most well known paintings of the Renaissance as well as the landscapes, still lives and other paintings executed by the artists during the Golden Age of seventeenth century Dutch art.

What appears below the surface of modernism in particular is not only the practice of painting as a rather self-conscious act, but more importantly, the flat surface structure which may at first seem to deny 'content' in the traditional sense and as mentioned above. The methodology, which was applied in the making of the paintings, reveals an underlying network, which strongly relied on an almost insatiable, though often suppressed, appetite for repetition. It can be presumed then that as much as the artist must be conscious of the fact that he/she is making a painting, a consciousness must also arise regarding the repetitive motion involved in

the creative act. The public should remain conscious of the fact that they are looking at a painting, even if that painting does not depict anything in particular, anything other for instance than in it being a painting or perhaps representing the process of making such a painting. Surely no spectator would be naïve enough to think he/she is looking at something real (other than the object of the painting being a real object), even if the painting does indeed depict someone or something instantaneously recognisable as such. What might not be evident, is the underlying pattern according to which the artist crafted the artwork, as a kind of sub-conscious plot, simply because it does not necessarily appear as a pictorial figure on the surface (ground) of the painting as such. The fact that modern methods of detection such as x-rays could reveal such *patterns* is not important. What is important here is the *pattern*, according to which each individual artist works, which might be of relevance to the understanding of identity, i.e. those aspects that might be considered the identification of an artistic *style*.

While it may be argued that in many paintings the brush stroke can be identified as clearly as fingerprints, the woven mesh of brush strokes could be replaced by other potentially pattern forming elements, elements that may be so abstract that they cannot remind the viewer of nature, and could therefore be said to be not naturalistic, but geometric, man-made forms. At the same time such geometric patterns could be so universal in their appearance that they are devoid of any particularity other than the self contained references to geometric, man-made forms. And yet, it could be shown that the maker (the painter), does not leave his/her trace on the painting apart from being part of a creative enterprise in which the imagination, as manifestation of the personality, is said to play its part. This would indeed be one of the very aims of modernism: namely to reduce art to its formal, underlying geometric structures as consciously decided upon by the artist, not dictated by, or derived from nature. Thus, in order to be identified as authentic, the painting remained a reflection of the inner being of the personality (identity) of the artist instead of a

representation of an aspect of nature. The idea of authenticity of the artwork is therefore part and parcel of the concept of authenticity of the (artistic/imaginary) presence of the artist as personality.

Even in the denial or in the absence of the brushstroke as was practiced by those artists of the Renaissance who worked in the mannerist tradition, as well as by those modernists who were considered 'post-painterly abstract' artists, where all possible traces of the artist's hand via the brushstroke was eliminated, the practice of repetitive pattern which replaced the brushstrokes, would abound. One of the areas in which such geometric figuration was to appear, was in the actual square format used for paintings during modernism and postmodernism.



Fig 7. Claude Monet, *Impression Sunrise*, 1872.



Fig 8. Paul Cézanne, *Mont Ste Victoire*, 1904-6.



Fig 9. Vincent van Gogh, *Olive Tree Grove*, 1889.

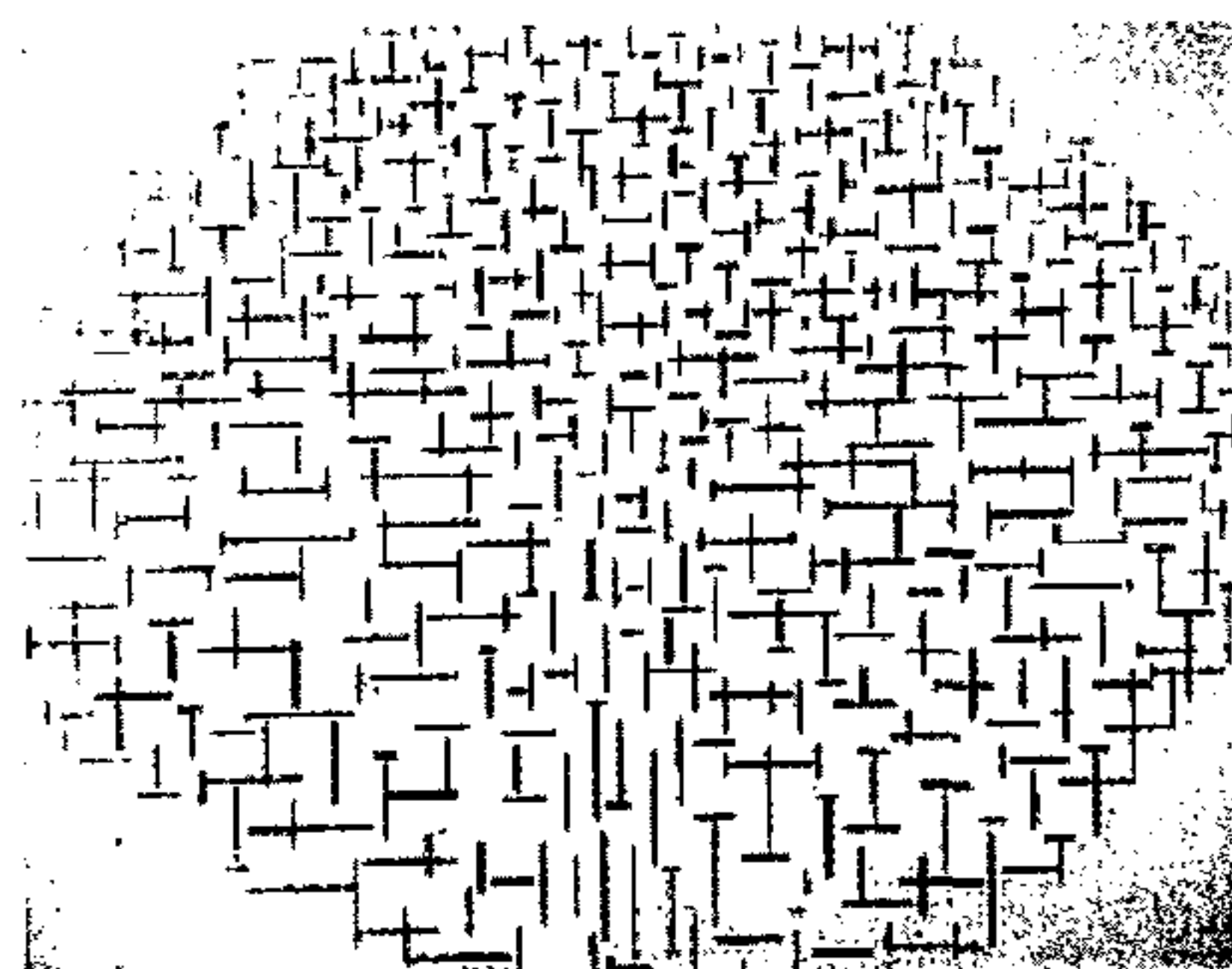


Fig 10. Piet Mondrian, *Ocean and Pier*, 1915.



Naturalissimum et perfectissimum opus est generare tale quale ipsum est.

*Lucretius* ♦

### The square root

Mondrian defied the brush stroke. His 'mature masterpieces' were painted in flat primary colours. But even if he escaped repetitive brush strokes, he used formal patterns such as strokes of line and primary colours, repetitively. In paintings and drawings such as *Ocean 5* (Fig 4) and *Pier and Ocean* (Fig 11) he criss-crossed short broken lines to suggest oceanic rhythms and patterns. Later he developed abstract geometric shapes and used simple squares and rectangles to compose paintings such as *Victory Boogie-Woogie* (1943-44) and *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (Fig 13), works that would become a trademark for the De Stijl period in art history. Mondrian claimed of course that he had stripped painting of all personal and emotional remnants by using only vertical and horizontal lines as well as primary colours in order to attain a level of abstract spirituality that was meant to transcend 'pictoreality'. According to this approach, which clearly foreshadowed the so-called 'disinterested' approach of the later Abstract Expressionists and others, the use of any angular lines (or brush strokes) would have made paintings too emotional.

Op-artists such as Bridget Riley and Larry Poons would furthermore offset this tradition of objectified formal elements to exploit perceptual conditioning and the possibilities of spectator manipulation through the use of purely optical elements rendered onto canvas. Both Mondrian and Riley used the square format for a number of their compositions while Bauhaus *Meister* Joseph Albers, investigated certain principles of colour theories by way of a whole series of square paintings entitled *Homage to the square*.

Most scholars would agree though that the Russian painter Kasimir Malevich first exploited the square format as vehicle and metaphor for sheer objectified abstract form.

Before modernism, the square was hardly ever used as a format for painting. Whatever the reasons, and there may be many, the modernists used the square in all its glory. According to Aaron Scharf the square is the perfect geometrical form that is not found in nature, hence the Suprematist's regard for the form (1966:137). It fits in perfectly with the modernist mindset which was geared towards renewal at all costs<sup>3</sup>; it defies any reference to nature and dissolves the traditional problem of mimesis: by not being pictorial at all it cannot be accused of being a copy of any material form. According to Malevich, "In 1913, trying desperately to liberate art from the ballast of the representational world, I sought refuge in the square form and exhibited a picture which consisted of nothing more than a black square on a white field," (Chipp 1968:342). If anything, the square represents a spiritual state of being in its endeavour to free itself from material reference.

For Malevich, who sought an absolute spiritual experience in art, "The black square on the white field was the first form in which non-objective feeling came to be expressed [Fig 11]. The square = feeling, the white field = the void beyond this feeling" (Taylor 1992:82). Adrian Henri commented on the work as follows: "The square, for him, was a perfect form; perfection needed no variety" (1974:16). While both Malevich (Figs 11 & 12) and Mondrian (Fig 13) were avid readers of the theosophical writings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Rudolph Steiner, Malevich insisted on the emotional basis of art. Wassily Kandinsky, another abstract painter impressed by theosophy and anthroposophy, on occasion also used the square format.

As mentioned earlier, Albers used the format as a strict formal frame for his investigations into colour during the 1960s (Fig 14). Other artists, among

them Max Bill and Frank Stella, who worked along similar lines, would use the square as format for a large number of their paintings. Their 'style' would later be identified as 'post-painterly abstraction' (Lucie-Smith 1979:94-118). Nor can the dazzling works of op-artists Victor Vasarely (Fig 17) and Bridget Riley (Fig 15) be overlooked in this regard, as both used the square in and for numerous works. During 1957 Jasper Johns, who would later be known as one of the icons of Pop art, painted his *White Target* on a 30 x 30 inch canvas.

During the transition between modernism and postmodernism, a vast number of artists from various 'movements' all indulged in the square format for whatever reasons. The square would, for example, remain a favourite with the minimalists, of whom Albers is said to be an early protégé. The Conceptual artists of the 1960's and 1970's who were forever presenting dematerialised objects as fragments of unity and who were greatly influenced by linguistic theories also showed a great affinity towards the square format. Whether they worked in two-dimensions or in three-dimensions, on floors, on walls or out of doors, artists such as Carl André (Fig 19) and Sol Lewitt more than frequently squared up to the occasion. In 1967 Lawrence Weiner inverted the square format by 'emptying' it of its material content in his 914 x 914 cm work entitled *Removal of the Lathing or Support of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall* (Meyer 1972:218-219). Two years later the absence of a material content within the framed square was further exploited by amongst others, Jan Dibbets in his *Perspective Correction* exercises (Meyer:120-21), while Bruce Nauman presented a square of steel with a hole in it entitled *Dead Centre* (Celant 1969: 92). To complete the circle of the square, Ad Reinhardt would follow Robert Rauschenberg who first painted a series of black and later white paintings in the early 1950's. Reinhardt painted his own monochrome black square, entitled *Abstract Painting No. 9* in the early sixties (Fig 18: the date is given as 1960-66).



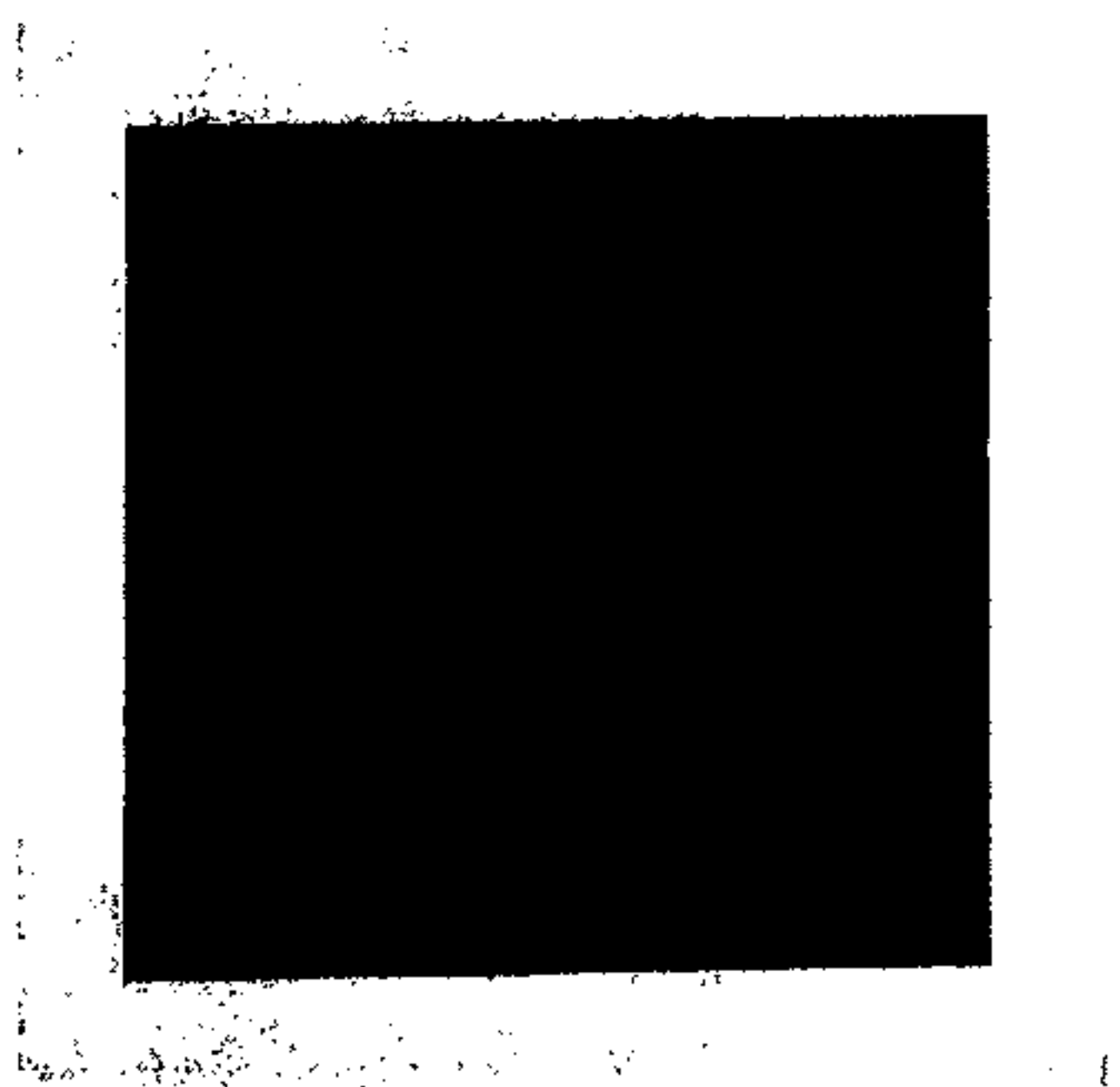


Fig 11. Kasimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1913.

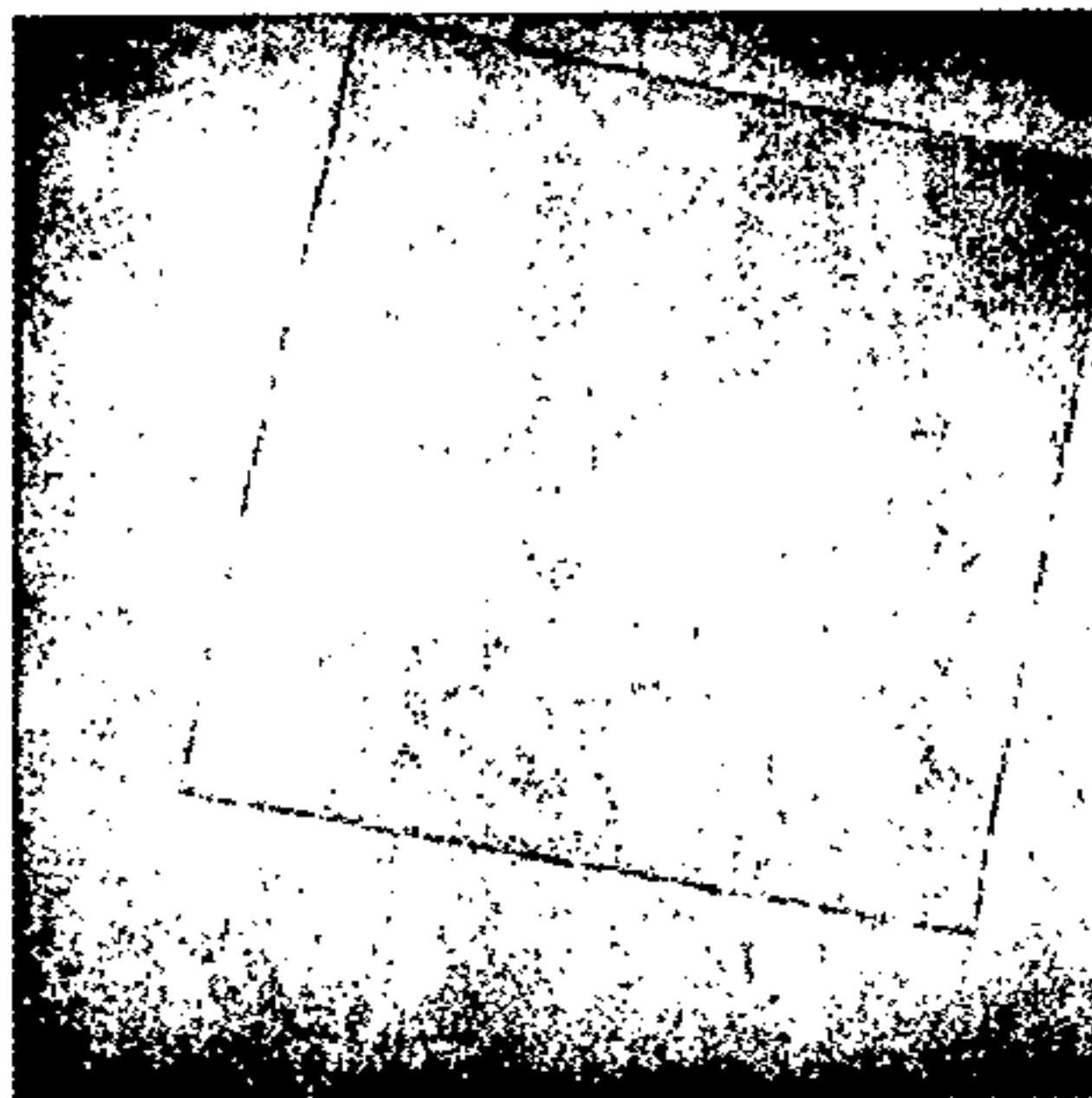


Fig 12. Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918.



Fig 13. Piet Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1942-43.

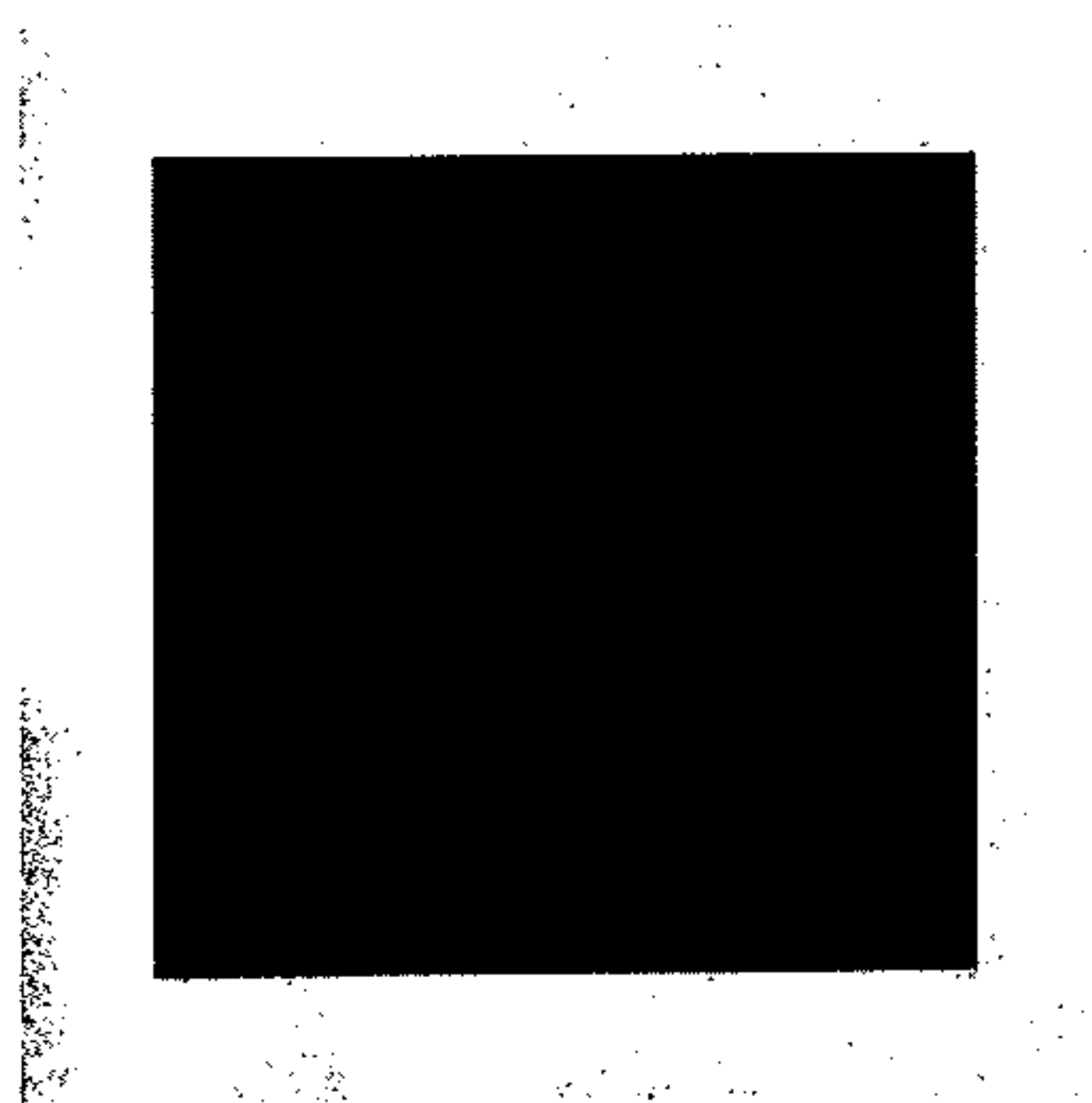


Fig 14. Joseph Albers, *White Line Square XIII*, published 1966.

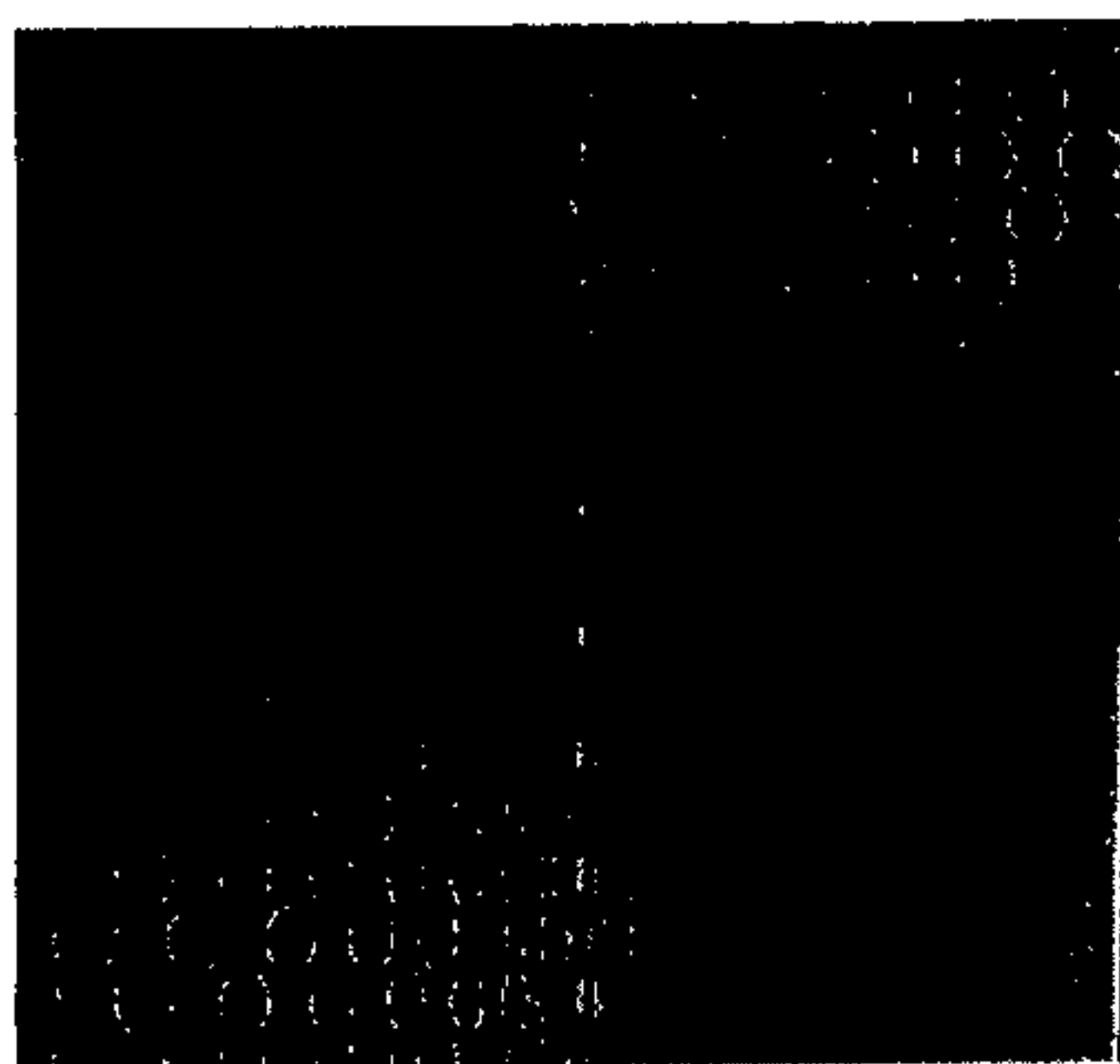


Fig 15. Bridget Riley, *Balm*, 1964.



Fig 16. Agnes Martin, *Night Sea*, 1963.

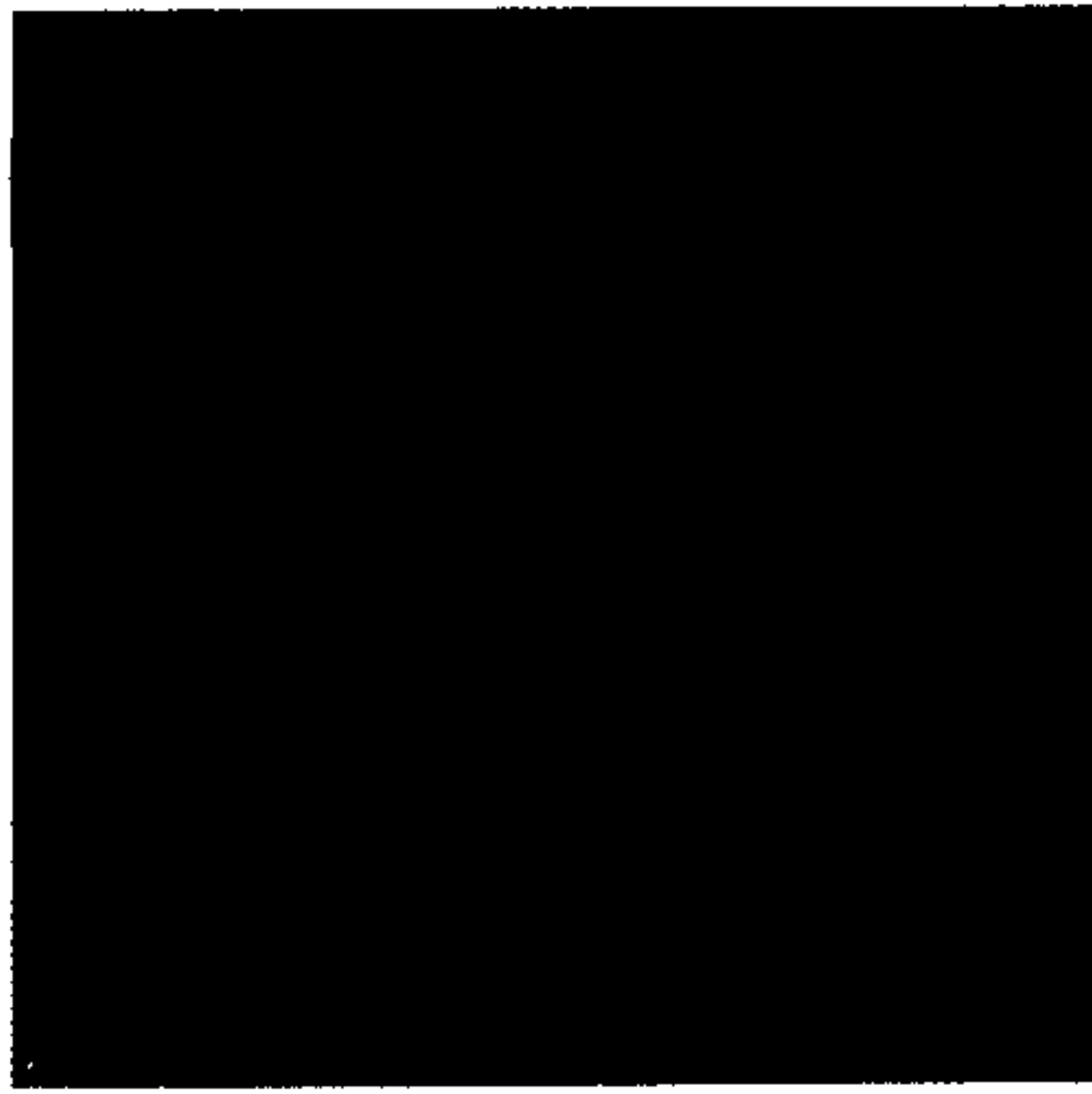


Fig 17. Victor Vasarely, *Vega Nor*, 1969.

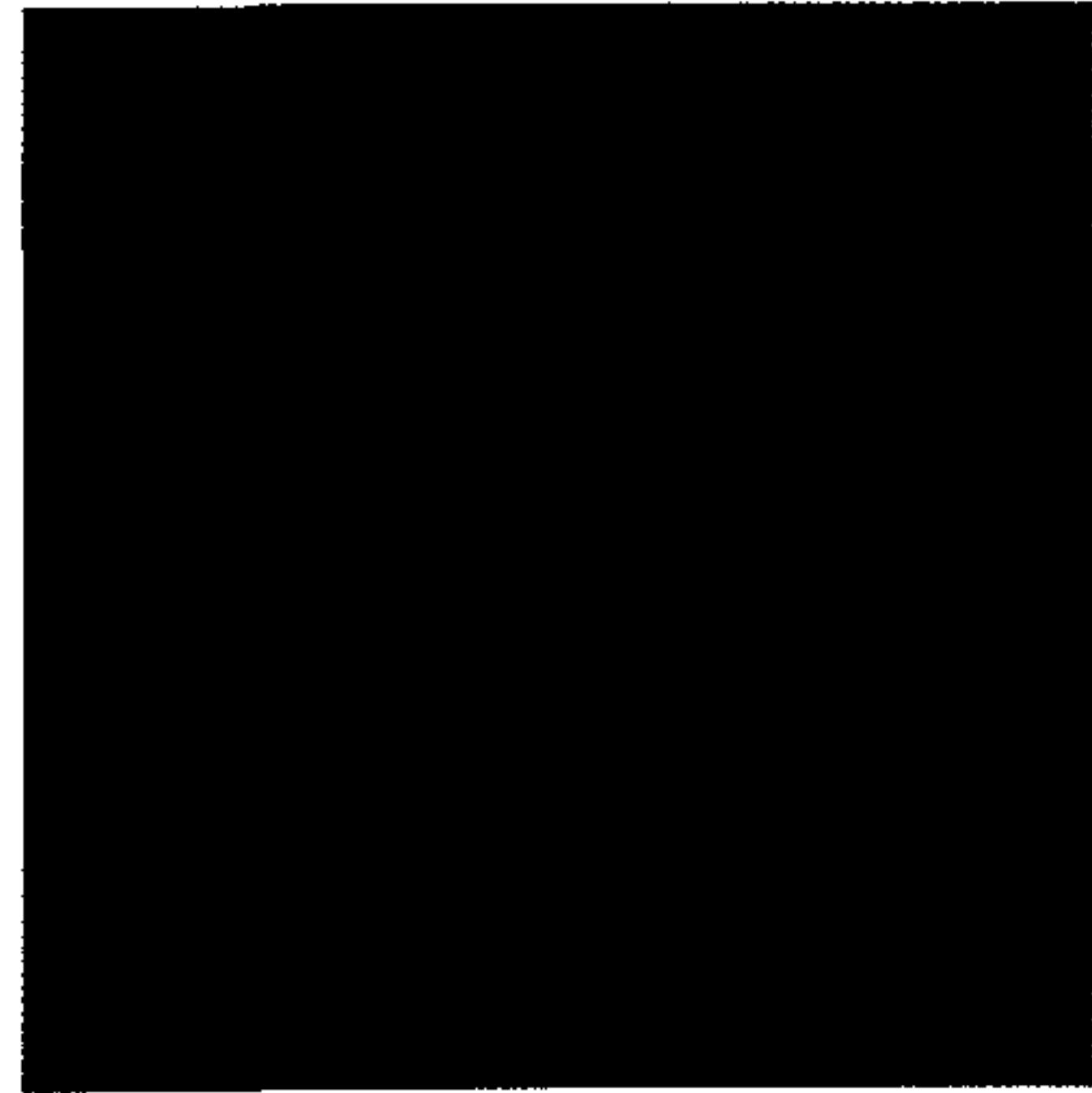


Fig 18. Ad Reinhardt, *Abstract Painting No. 9*, 1960 – 1966.

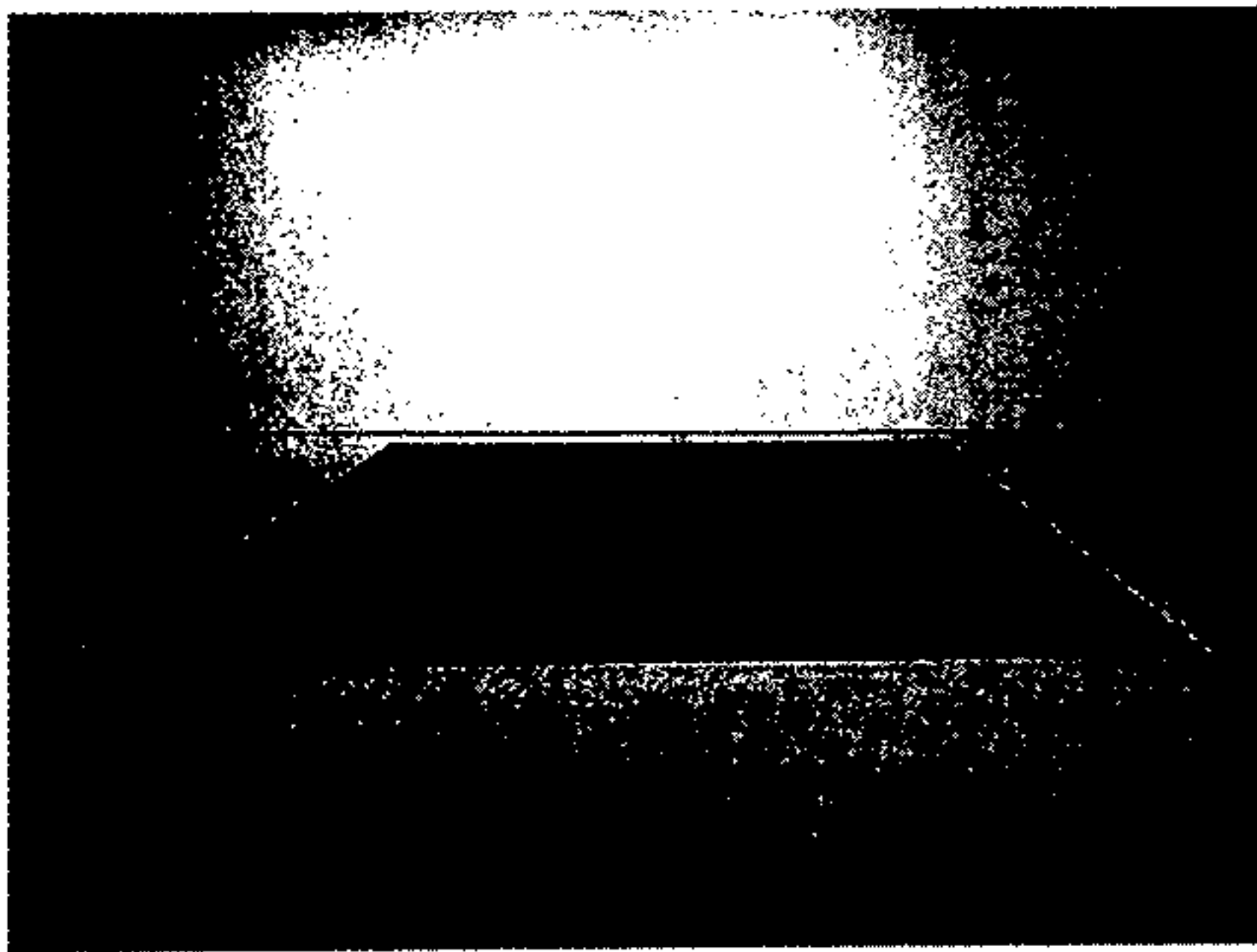


Fig 19. Carl André *10 x 10 Altstadt Copper Square*, Düsseldorf, 1967.

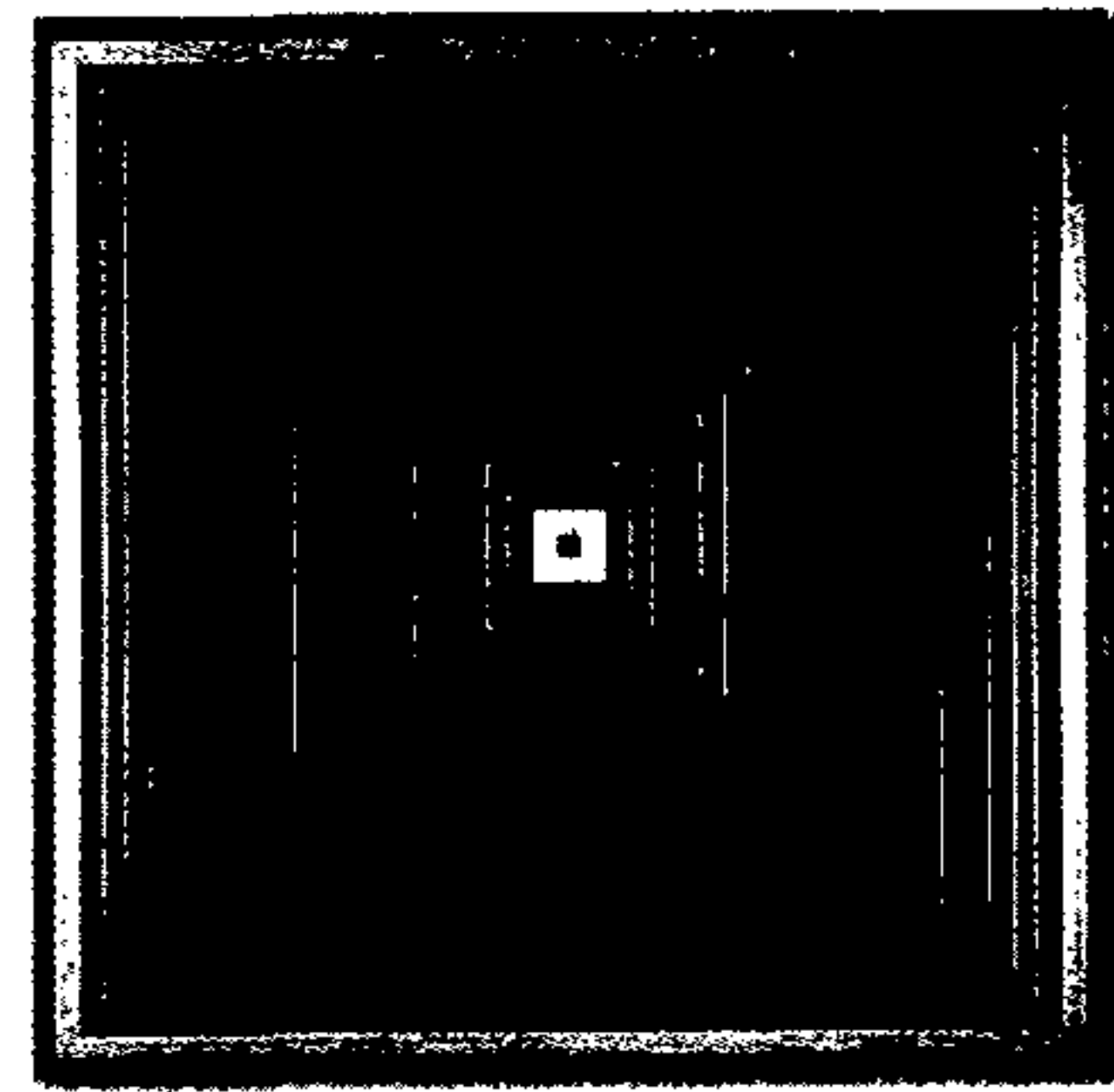


Fig 20. Frank Stella, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, 1974.

The other is related only to the other: the other repeats.

*Maurice Blanchot* ®

### Repetitive themes and series

While the modernist painters from the very beginning may have been very weary of copying those who came before them, they would, in a rather nihilistic way, soon end up copying themselves. Not only were they ritualistically repeating brushstrokes, but they also chose 'themes' that they would repeat over and over again, whereby one could deduct that there was hardly anything original in their choice of subject matter. Even the compositions, or the structure of the designs of their paintings, clearly illustrated this inclination towards repetition.

Furthermore, it could be argued that in the practice of painting certain themes predate modernism by centuries, as it can be shown that 'great masters' of the past preferred particular genres above others. But then it must be admitted that while the modernists tried to break with the academic limitations of tradition, they actually continued in this tradition of the repetition of certain themes. When we look at Monet for example, hailed by many as one of the fathers of modernism, we cannot but note how blatantly he repeated himself. Monet, moreover, always acknowledged his debt towards his predecessors: "I consider Eugène Boudin as my master ... I owe everything to Boudin," he wrote in a letter (Levine 1986:66). In fact, he was so in awe of the 'master' who came before him, that he "thought it terribly audacious on my part to do that [paint the cliff at Etratat] after Courbet, who did it admirably," yet he insisted, "but I will try and do it otherwise" (Levine 1986:70).



Neither was Monet simply busy with what Levine called "a retrospective-*cum*-prospective structure" entailing a "reseeing of something already known in the past, as well as anxiously anticipated redoing in the name of something not yet born into the future" (1986:67), he also repeated his own motifs or themes or imagery over and over again. While other great artists have done so before him, no one repeated themes or motifs on the scale that Monet would apparently tirelessly repeat himself.

Firstly, Monet repeated subject matter or themes, and secondly he copied works he himself had done before, at times making more than 40 copies in a series (Hines 1997:88). The most obvious of themes covered by Monet include the 'Rouen Cathedral', 'London's Waterloo Bridge', the 'Grainstacks', 'Landscapes with poplars' and various versions of lily-ponds in his garden. It has often been argued that such repetitive practice was a result of the artist's obsessive need to record reflections of changing time, i.e. as images of the same scene depicted during different times of the day.

A number of other early modernists can be cited as having had favourite themes or motives. Van Gogh painted his own portrait many times over, which is in line with the very Dutch tradition in which Rembrandt painted his large number of self-portraits. Van Gogh also pursued a number of other themes as well as particular forms, most notably that of sunflowers, olive trees and cypresses. There are no less than four portrait paintings of Madame Roulin, all entitled *La Berceuse*, all in the same pose, with similar wallpaper in the background and all of them were painted between January and March of 1889. This is also true of Paul Cézanne's work. Cézanne not only painted the same fruits over and over again in still lives (a favourite early traditional theme with Cézanne) but he also developed a particular obsession with *Mont Sainte-Victoire* which he painted and sketched an extraordinary number of times in a variety of media. Both Van Gogh and Cézanne are also known for having copied the works of others, Van Gogh in particular for having repeatedly copied not only a number of paintings by

his predecessors such as Eugène Delacroix and François Millet, but also for having copied the work of his contemporary and friend, Paul Gauguin. Other 'masters' of modernism, such as Pablo Picasso, did likewise: not only would he at times copy particular works of other artists, he would also appropriate their styles as well as working and reworking certain images, themes, motives over and over again.

There are also those artists such as Marcel Duchamp who publicly abhorred works that were not 'original' in the authentic sense of the word, but whose very selective method of the readymade, relied solely on the appropriation of 'found objects'. What is rather ironic about Duchamp's case is that he himself would on various occasions make 'replicas', in other words, literal copies, of his 'original' readymades after they were lost. Postmodernists also find Duchamp absolutely irresistible and it would make an interesting study in itself to gauge how many times Duchamp's 'original' *Fountain*, had been copied by not only Sherrie Levine and Mike Bidlo, who incidentally created a whole exhibition based on the urinal, but by scores of other artists also.

We are in a time between times and a place which is no place. Here our reflection must begin.

*Mark C. Taylor*<sup>3</sup>

### The painting in the mirror

Painting is not dead; neither is the artist a corpse. On the contrary, while perhaps contributing towards an investigation that may seem like a post-mortem, paintings about paintings will necessitate acts of retroactivity. In the process of self-investigation, painting remains alive and well and seeking out other forms of life in its effort to determine its own needs. Thus the process of revival by means of self-reflection<sup>4</sup> may be seen as the reincarnation of painting. Any resurrection of underlying principles, any archaeological methods of exposing the structures/strictures upon which such works rely, will in its course of necessity also revive the identity of the maker. But it should be kept in mind that the creator is no master of any one universe but simply a participant in the greater event of making (creation).

My paintings should bear out the theories<sup>5</sup> that underlie them. They may stand in (place of/for) the theories; or they could perhaps be disguised in the form of symbols reflecting theoretical debates. Even so, the works under discussion are not theories in themselves, they are paintings and as paintings/artworks, they remain active participants in any/all possible theories concerned. Because paintings are open to interruption of interpretation via theoretical modes, it follows that if these paintings are surrogate theories, they will become interpretations/interruptions (raptures) of themselves. This then is the painting in the mirror.



But the painting is not, nor has any real art ever been, merely a kind of mirror held up to reflect a reality. The viewer has been well aware, since time immemorial, that the artwork is just that, an artifice. It is something that came into being through a process of making, and not by way of nature. Surely, during prehistoric times people like the ancient San rock artists of Southern Africa, did not for one second confuse the imagery they painted on rock faces with whatever it was that were depicted in such paintings. Similarly, in classical Greek theatre the actor acted while holding up a mask, unambiguously stating to an audience that what was being viewed was not reality, but an art form. This meant that while the audience may have been reminded of reality throughout the performance of such a drama, or while being surrounded by paintings on rock faces, there was nonetheless also the realisation that what was presented in an artistic form, hinted at something more than what may have been 'copied' from an 'outer' reality.

Therefore, if the artwork signifies something, and if it can be said to signify that something through *usure* of the representation of the picture, then obviously it signifies something other than the picture, for the picture remains a mere reference or a representation of something other than the reality represented in such a picture. That which is implied but not explicitly signified exists outside the picture. Such implied meanings may on the one hand remain forever removed, outside the reality the picture might be representing. Moreover, to reflect on something, is already removed from the reflected object or thing. The pictorial image thus remains a vehicle, which the viewer might use as a referent or guide for reaching certain conclusions during the process of interpretation.

Should the artwork still be described as a mirror of sorts, the mirror clearly reflects more than meets the eye. What we see is not what we get; in fact, through the reflective quality of the artwork, we get more than what we bargained for. Talk of added value, of the ramifications of implied social

messages by sharing in a popular culture, of contamination, interpenetration, and of self-cannibalisation all confirm that we are sure to receive more than an existing reality, which is reflected back at us.

We can agree then that there is certainly more than what meets the eye, even when looking at a painted image of the sea. Neither surface nor structure, nor representational image, either literal or metaphorical, whatever figurative or explicit meaning is attached, can stand alone or claim authenticity in the satisfaction to gain any sort of appreciation of the paintings.

I certainly cannot explore all possible meanings behind the image as it appears in its painted form on the canvas, but I would like to venture some likely points of entry into the art works as texts of information concerned with theoretical grounds.

## Endnotes: Chapter Two

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§ From 'Interview with Gene Swenson', in Harrison & Wood 1996:733.

<sup>1</sup> In his book *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), French social theorist Jean Baudrillard argues "it is no longer possible to separate the economic or productive realm from the realms of ideology or culture, since artefacts, images, representations, even feelings and psychic structures have become part of the world of the economic". Baudrillard moreover grounds everything in the notion of production. To Baudrillard "what underlies every social and economic system, what forms its secret identity-principle, is its 'mode of production'", so that everything happens according to "the abstraction of the exchange of material products" (Connor 1995:51). According to Baudrillard everything within this system functions under the law of the code of exchanges, a code that in turn regulates signs. He moreover believes that it is important that "the code no longer refers back to any subjective or objective "reality", but to its own logic" (Connor 1995:52).

In an essay entitled *Requiem for the Media*, Baudrillard attacks the mass media because the code according to which it functions denies any response or exchange (Connor 1995:53). It is against this background that Baudrillard would later take up his theories of 'simulacrum' according to which he continues his arguments "about the capacity of the mass media to neutralize dissent simply by representing it, to the claim that nothing can resist the conversion of reality into empty signs. We live in an age ... in which signs are no longer required to have any verifiable contact with the world they represent"(Conner 1995:55). The ultimate conclusion reached is that *representation*, under pressure of the mass media and hence within a postmodern context, "bears no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Conner 1995:56). "Alongside this ... is a compensatory attempt to manufacture [reality], in 'an escalation of the true, of the lived experience' ... in other words, the cult of the immediate experience, of raw, intense reality, is not the contradiction of the regime of simulacrum, but its simulated effect" (Conner 1995:56). Finally, Baudrillard coins the term 'hyperreal', for this 'manufactured reality', or the "manufactured objects and experiences which attempt to be more real than reality itself" (Conner 1995:57).

© Easthope & McGowan 1994:203.

\* Quoted in Gage 1969:17.



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<sup>2</sup> Not that the 'loose brush stroke' did not make its appearance earlier on in art, as was noted of the Renaissance artists and later the seventeenth century Flemish artist Frans Hals, but was later popularised as central to the so-called 'painterly style'.

\* Jung 1974:297. Here Jung quotes an alchemist's dictum, translated as, "The most natural and perfect work is to generate its like".

<sup>3</sup> According to Malevich "The square seemed incomprehensible and dangerous to the critics and the public ... and this, of course, was to be expected" (Chipp 1968:342).

® Quoted in Chang 1999:184.

\* See Mark C. Taylor's *Erring, A Postmodern A/theology*, in Cahoon 1996:514.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Hutcheon sees such self-reflexivity as a revisionist strain in postmodernism, which often goes together with parody and irony. She writes: "Such self-reflexive, parodic interrogating of history has also brought about a questioning of the assumptions beneath both modernist aesthetic autonomy and unproblematic realist reference. The entire notion of reference in art has been problematised (sic) by the postmodern mingling of the historical and the self-reflexive" (1991:225).

<sup>5</sup> David Bohm points out that, "The word 'theory' derives from the Greek 'theoria', which has the same root as 'theatre', in a word meaning 'to view' or 'to make a spectacle'. Thus, it might be said that a theory is primarily a form of insight, i.e. a way of looking at the world, and not a form of *knowledge* of how the world is" (1983:4).

## CHAPTER (PART) THREE (3)

AND WHEN THE DAY ARRIVES  
I'LL BECOME THE SKY  
AND I'LL BECOME THE SEA

AND THE SEA WILL COME TO KISS ME  
FOR I AM GOING  
HOME

NOTHING CAN STOP ME NOW

*trent reznor* <sup>▽</sup>

In micro-physics one finds also that there is not a single type of particle which does not have its antiparticle.

Marie-Louise von Franz<sup>®</sup>

### This is not the sea

During the early 1980's, a time I would like to see as the height of postmodernism, I was struck by an exhibition<sup>1</sup> which was engaged in certain quite astute issues, namely *the copy* or *the fake* and/or *the authority of authorship* as experienced in the creative process. A number of paintings on display were titled with the prefixed phrase of 'this is not', which is a denial or a negation, while at the same time it is a self-conscious recognition of being in a state of denial. A copy of a Kandinsky painting, taken from a commercial postcard and not from the original work, would be entitled *This is not a Kandinsky*, and so forth. As such these titles were obviously derived from René Magritte's *This is not a pipe*.<sup>2</sup> The point of the exhibition – or at least one of its aims – was clearly to illustrate that we could never be sure of what we see. While Magritte's painting of a pipe reminded us that we are looking at a painting of a pipe and not a real pipe was definitely ironical in stating the obvious, many of the paintings on exhibit at the exhibition entitled, *Homage Demontage*, were ironical in that they looked like or even parodied the paintings of great masters while at the same time admitting that they were faking it. There was certainly a double irony in this, an irony so self conscious that it negated the very irony it parodied.

Since that time, I remained intrigued by the theoretical premise namely that any painting of whatever reality it hopes to represent or reflect, will always remain exactly that, a representation or reflection trapped within the given framework of reference. A painting of the sea, entitled *This is not*



*the sea*, does not in any way defy the fact that it is a painting; rather it reiterates the very medium of objectification constituting its existence as a painting. To entitle such a painting, *This is not a painting of the sea*, would propel the issue one step further. But then that would be rendering literary assistance onto the paintings.



*Ceci n'est pas une pipe.*

Fig 21. René Magritte, *This is not a Pipe*, 1928-96.

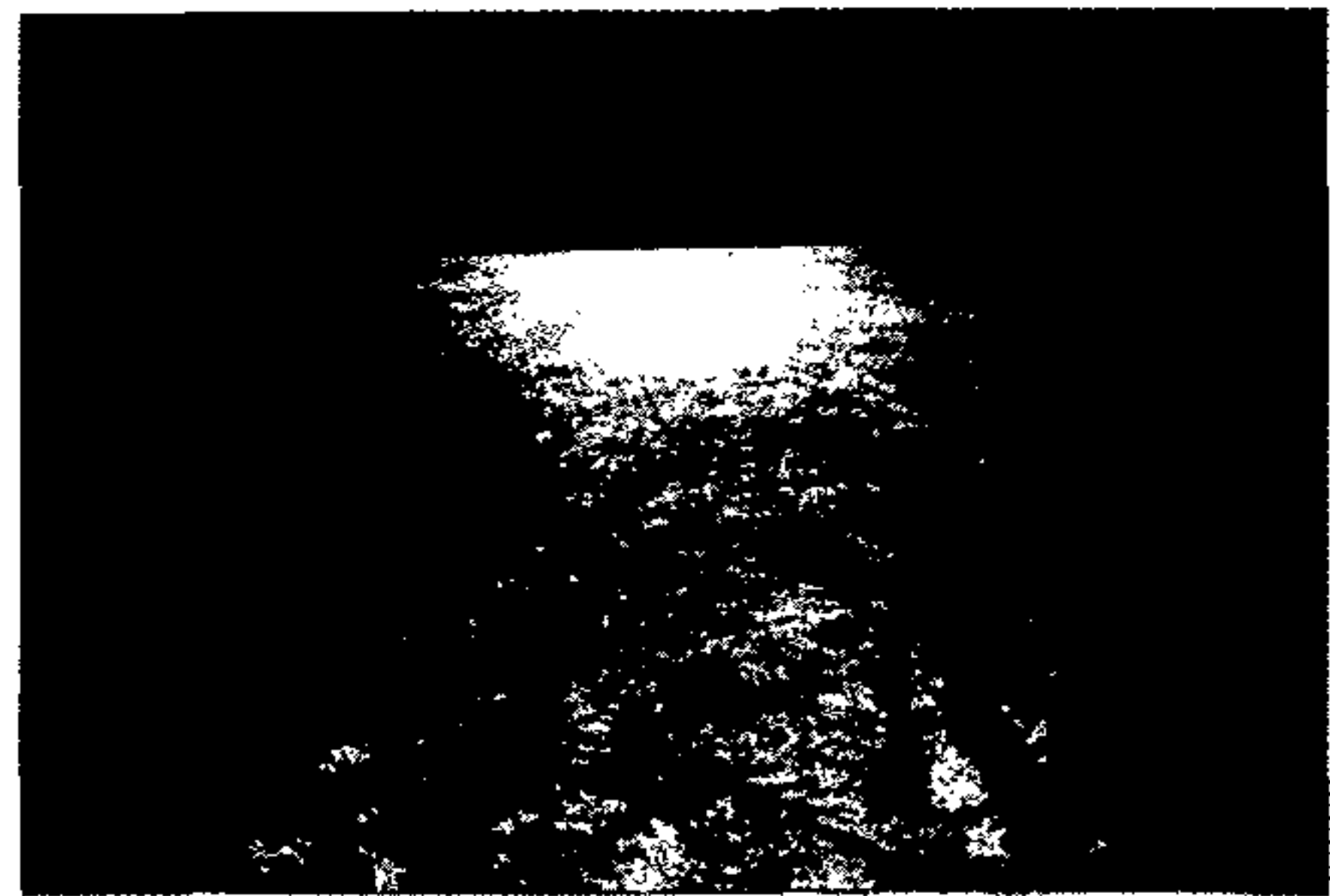


Fig 22. Pieter Swanepoel, *Come and Gone*, 1995.

The fact is, the picture remains. No matter how processed it appears as image via other images, or through association with other (con)texts, or how it was technically made, the image that remains is what most people - both the informed and uninformed - should generally recognise as a picture of the sea and of the sky. I very consciously chose the theme of the sea, as this theme carries with it a very long and pertinent tradition of (romantic) popularisation, even more so than landscape painting. If there was any initial intention on my part as the painter, it was to paint an image that a vast majority of people, even across as many cultural barriers as possible, would recognise as being an image of ocean and sky. I do of course realise and admit that other consciously intentional metaphorical or symbolical contents of implied or even unintentional meanings may well come into play in any analysis of such works. I insist that this can only enrich the work. Unfortunately I cannot vouch for any specificity in whatever such possible interpretations might be. Maurice Merleau-Ponty spoke of "the inevitable plurality of interpretations," (Harrison & Wood: 750) and Duchamp, when referring to art critics, concluded: "Each of them gives his

particular note to his interpretation, which isn't necessarily true or false, which is interesting, but only interesting when you consider the man who wrote the interpretation, as always" (Cabanne 1971:42). Or as Greil Marcus noted from a consumerist point of view: "Once ideas go into receivership, there is nothing that cannot be done with them" (1997:272). Placing such matters within a more particular context, art historian Ernst Gombrich emphasises a common link between artist, public and socio-historical environment.

Every tradition develops an idiom or (to use contemporary jargon) a code in which certain features of visual reality can be recorded or encoded. Once the attention of the artist and of the public has become focused on a certain method for suggesting reality the painter is likely to watch out for those effects he can best express in this system (1976:28).

Or seen from a slightly different angle it can be argued that,

...in order for the prophet's discourse to be more than a personal hallucination or the credo of an ephemeral sect, favourable (sic) social conditions must have shaped unconscious leanings over an indefinite area, and prepared them for the "good news." The prophet himself works in and by established institution (*l'institué*), and even when subverting the latter, he draws support from it (Castoriades 1984:28-29).

What cannot be ignored then is that any image, which is repeated in a context different from that of the very image which is repeated, shall of necessity regarding proximity and each reappraisal, take on 'other' meanings relative to each specific framework of reference. That any such 'extra-relative meanings' may be quite arbitrary remains to be seen. Here I feel myself much closer to arguments related to *language theory* as put forward by Ludwig Wittgenstein who claimed, among other things that, "Our knowledge forms an enormous system. And only within this system has a particular bit the value we give it" (1988:411), and, "Just as in writing we learn a particular basic form of letters and then vary it later, so we learn first the stability of things as the norm, which is then subject to alterations" (1988:476). But despite hints of structuralism lurking in the

background, it would be sensible to also take note that psychologist Erich Fromm claimed that even in behavioural psychology (a discipline previously plagued by being rather deterministic), the old 'either-or' position was replaced by a 'more-or-less' formulation. Fromm writes: "The model for this view is continuum, on the one end of it (almost) complete determinism, on the other end (almost) complete learning." In support of his argument he quotes F.A. Bach: "The final form of any response is affected by a *multiplicity of variables ...*" (my italics) (Fromm 1982:111).

One would possibly be able to conclude that the 'particular bit [of] value' we find within such 'multiplicity of variables', is what constitutes meaning. We would hence invariably tend to read meaning into every bit of variable, including what could seem to be a preconceived format, be it structural, figurative, pictorial; be it metaphorical, allegorical or symbolical.

With my paintings, the ramifications of content concerning the actual represented image of the ocean could imply primeval symbols and archetypes<sup>3</sup> as put forward by Carl Gustav Jung who spoke of "the nocturnal sea of the unconscious" (1966:122). This would lead to Marie-Louise von Franz's clarification that "All creative impulses originate in the unconscious" (1995:69). Moreover, according to Anton Ehrenzweig "In the oceanic state the superego's aggression against the ego is at last neutralised (sic). The surface ego no longer resists the pull of the deep. Dedifferentiation is no longer felt as a danger. Reason has learnt to accept gestalt free 'open' structures" (1967:196). In this sense then the image of an ocean could be representative of or commenting on creativity and/or the origins of creativity. Taking this view beyond psychology and into matters of spiritual significance, Blavatsky wrote:

In their primitive characters these two were the first Cosmic Duad, *Nut*, "space or Sky," and *Nu*, "the primordial waters," the Androgyne Unity, above whom was the concealed BREATH of Kneph . . . The immutably Infinite and the absolutely Boundless can neither will, think, nor act (Taylor 1992:76).



Returning to a more mundane vision, the representation of the sea could be interpreted as signifying the constant geographical shifting of repetitive wave upon wave, the fact that things change all the time even though they may seem to stay the same. From this perspective the image would appear to illustrate Alphonse Karr's much quoted truism, "The more things change, the more they are the same".<sup>4</sup> This train of thought would, of course, trigger a series of its own traditional images.

The metaphor of waves furthermore carries with it a myriad of possibilities borne out by popularised idiomatic expressions of emotion, like 'waves of fear' or 'waves of joy' or 'wave upon wave' etcetera, most of which in turn implicates the continuum of time: an endless sea forever shifting/changing. But as already noted, these points remain mere speculation in light of relative boundaries, which is not imposed by the artwork, but rather by *a priori* attitudes of interpretation during reception.<sup>5</sup>

Another quite obvious interpretation could be that the depiction of the image of ocean and sky and of light (reflected off/) on (shifting/shimmering) water is indicative of uncertainty, which is captured (framed/depicted) in the (constantly changing) waters. If the painting is not definitively metaphorical, it is metaphorical in its assumption of being the very antitheses of the so-called 'captured moment'. This aspect is mostly identified with photography and popularly (arguably, wrongly) ascribed to the serially repetitive paintings of Monet.<sup>6</sup> The sky then is one of misty clouds, not of any particular identifiable cloud formations as favoured by other painters of clouds such as Robert Cozens and John Constable. While such misty skies may recall a tradition of Romanticism as favoured by Turner or Friedrich, it supports the general atmosphere of uncertainty.

Both ocean (-shifting-) and sky (-changing-) favour the same basic premise of (constant) instability. At the same time the age old dictum of the alchemist may be recalled: "As above, so below," which contrasts with the suggested underlying content of instability, i.e. while the composition of symmetrical centrality should indicate absolute stability, the pictorial content of constantly changing skies and ocean suggests the opposite.



Fig 23. JR Cozens, *The Cloud*, c 1785.

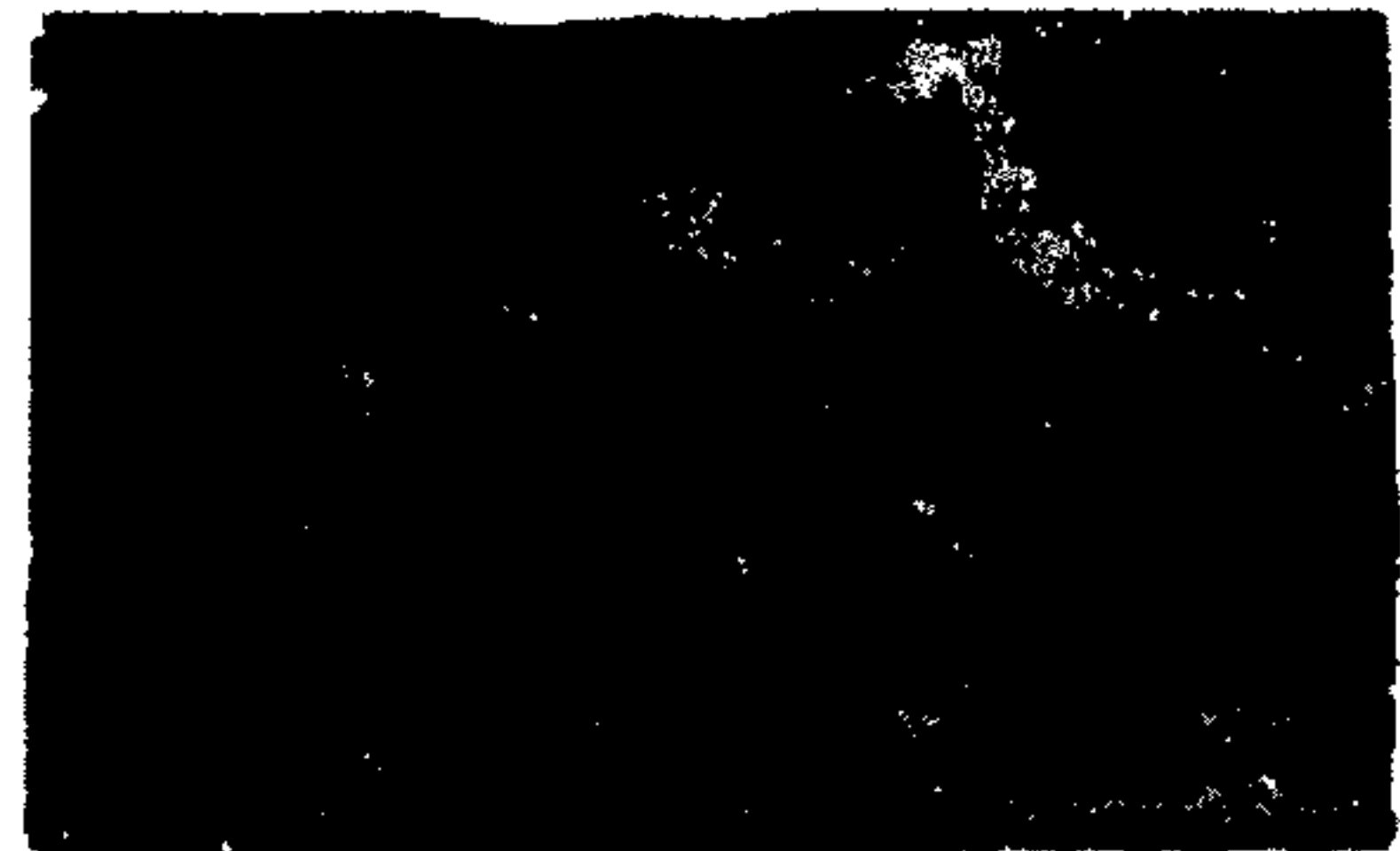


Fig 24. John Constable, *Cloud Study*, 1822.



Fig 26. CD Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, c 1818.

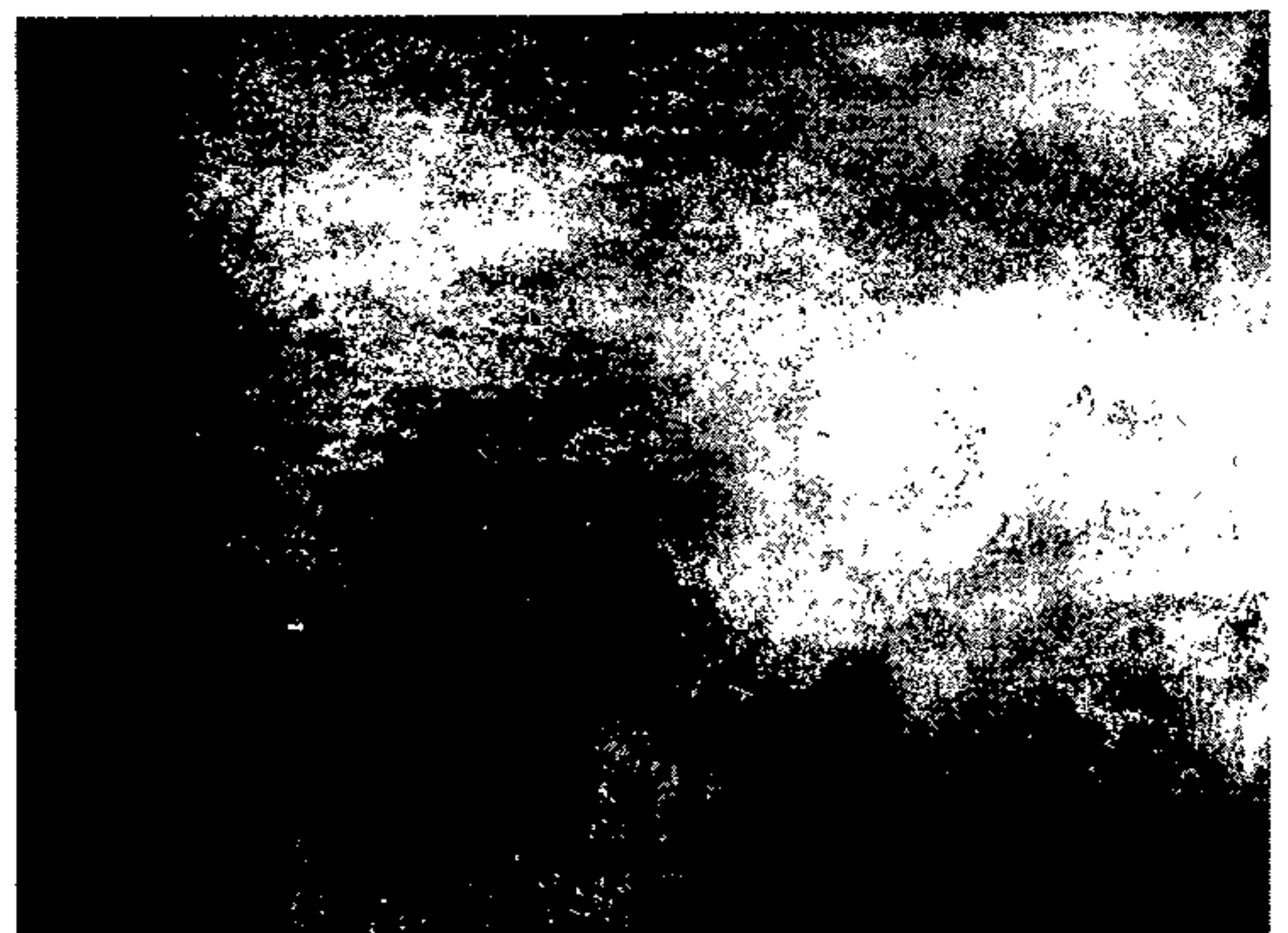


Fig 25. JMW Turner, *Sun Setting over a Lake*, c 1840.

The beginning, in which everything is still one, and which therefore appears as the highest goal, lies at the bottom of the sea in the darkness of the unconscious.

*Carl Gustav Jung* ♥



## Journey to(/from) the centre

Poststructuralists like Jacques Derrida<sup>7</sup> have argued that we live in a decentred universe, that there is no central point of origin. According to Michel Foucault, Nietzsche's entire search for an origin (*Ursprung*) would result in the realisation that there is no timeless, secret essence behind things. Foucault believed that for the genealogist "What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity" (Cahoone 1996: 363). Even so, even if we were to agree that we cannot place our finger on that one, particular, original central spot. No matter how often we walk the circle, the centre will always evade us. We seem to not be able to keep searching for the very epicentre, a core, that something which was there "in the beginning".<sup>8</sup>

It will be noted that in most of my paintings the actual depiction of imagery is often composed around the central area of the square picture plane. By utilising this practice I am repeating a tried, tested and favoured tradition in Western art as was practiced and perfected during the Italian Renaissance in what was to become known as 'central perspective'. It is interesting to note that Arnheim points out that "Central perspective involves a significant paradox". He explains:

In an actual pictorial composition ... the perceptual status of the focal point is ambiguous. The tangible centre (sic) of the spatial framework at which the draftsman aims with his ruler is at the same time the vanishing point, which by definition lies in the infinite, where the parallels meet (1974:297).

At times the centrality in my paintings is as obvious as the picture plane, which is split horizontally across the middle. At other times the split may be vertical, in the use of light shimmering vertically (in a traditional one point perspective fashion) over the ocean. Most often the centrality relies on the crossing of vertical and horizontal elements. Furthermore, by working with the format of the square, the tension between diagonally opposite corners

on both horizontal and vertical planes are emphasised to create an epicentre. The eye of the viewer always returns to the middle of the painting. This compositional element can be interpreted as an effort to express the metaphorical "myth of the eternal return", as noted by among others Friedrich Nietzsche and Mercia Eliade.<sup>9</sup> It could furthermore be seen as supportive of the archetypal symbols of origin as previously mentioned. Moreover, as Arnheim showed:

Finally, it should be observed that central perspective portrays space as a flow oriented toward a specified end. It thereby transforms the timeless simultaneity of traditional, undeformed space into a happening in time – that is, a directed sequence of events. The world of being is redefined as a process of happening (1974: 298).

The compositional element of centrality extends to this series as well. As much as each single painting can be read as an independent painting, it shares commonalities with other 'individual' paintings. None the less, most paintings are to be presented as being part of the series dependent on the notion of repetition. Within the series of images in *Series Three (black and white only)*,<sup>10</sup> the central picture of light is flanked by two slightly darker pictures that are in turn flanked on their outsides by even darker pictures. This series is completed by two almost black paintings on the (outer) edges (left-right) of the series. Each single painting is based on the same simple central composition depicting the same basic scene: light reflected off water – with the light being concentrated on the middle of the ocean, fading towards the outside edges of the picture. Water (ocean) makes up the lower part (half) of the composition while the upper area is occupied by the cloudy sky.

This series can be read from the outside inwards, or from the inside outwards; either way a certain visual centrality is maintained. Philosophically such images may even suggest an ontology of apparent polarity, of black and white, of entrance and exit, of appearance and disappearance, of birth and death. At the same time it obviously refers to mirroring and, as such all seven paintings are linked to the overarching

theme of reflection found in the very image of each painting. What is above – the light through diffused clouds – is reflected in the dark waters below. Above refers to below and below to above. Similarly, the paintings constantly refer to one another; as much as each painting may be said to be self-referential as well as inter-referential.<sup>11</sup> One can also detect a persistent dichotomy present in one image reflecting an Other image, while at the same time reflecting upon itself. Parallel similarities, twin identities, as well as differences can hence be identified.<sup>12</sup> This inter-textuality of imagery continues its metaphorical path in reflecting on theories of mirroring so that 'the centrality of form/structure' obviates its linkage with 'the painting in the mirror'.

As far as the language/image link is concerned, the paintings are often analogous to stylistic traits found in written texts. Thus *polarity* is often employed as a literary method of dramatic contrast, whereas *imagery* is commonly called upon as a method of clarity. Therefore, while the spoken or written word depends on literally descriptive passages to call up *imagery* in order to emphasise meaning, the image referring to language by means of analogy to structural formats used in language, in turn admits its debt, or rather its allegiance to language. As much as this text reflects upon those images, those images reflect upon this text.

Whilst working on this series, I configured the scheme as noted above: a painting in the middle, with a painting on either side, with a painting on either side, with a painting on either side, making up a total of seven paintings for the series suggesting that such a series could repeat itself ad infinitum. The schema decided upon, can be depicted as follows:



The central painting **(a)** is the only truly singular painting in the series, as **(b)** on either side of **(a)** has a companion piece, a copy appearing on the other side of **(a)**. A similar exercise occurs with paintings **(c)** and paintings **(d)**. While **(c)** does not look the same as **(d)** or **(d)** the same as **(b)** or



**(c)** and so forth, paintings **(b)**, **(c)** and **(d)** all have similar looking paintings (copies) of themselves. This "pairing of singularity and multiplicity, of uniqueness and reproduction", to use Rosalind Krauss' phrase, (Krauss 1981:64) often operates as a poetical device in systems of rhythm and rhyme. Here it is used as a visual device to set a rhythm reminiscent of the very rhythm of the ebb and tide movement of the waves of the ocean, whereas the cyclic light/dark dichotomy remains a reminder of day and night, of birth and death. Moreover, the fact that the series can be inverted at its outer edges, to continue once again, furthermore suggests a cosmology of an eternal, an infinite rather than a temporal, finite.

Within the context of language the obvious relation to bracketing can surely not be missed. As the central image **(a)** is bracketed by **(b)**s, the **(b)**s are bracketed by **(c)**s which are in turn bracketed by **(d)**s. The central **(a)** is bracketed three times: the total of seven units is made up of three couplets and a fourth single. The added up three and the four total makes up the seven in total. At the same time the one, being central, remains as one. These brackets occurring within brackets are visual similes of quotations within quotations, that is, of the quotation used in a text as having been extracted from a quotation already used in another text. The use of such secondary quotations once more refers to the absence of an original, a primary. Yet, the primary image, the picture in the centre, the one from which the others come into existence through division, remains. Ultimately then we are left asking where this singular, central original comes from; what is the original from which it was copied. We may then remind ourselves of Baudrillard's theories concerning simulacrum namely of a copy of a copy in the absence of an original.

The configuration of a mirror schema (in this case very formal, very constructive) is just another indication of one possible pattern that can be detected in the process of repetition, or of a copy or of mimeses and simulacrum. As such it remains part of a strategy commenting on, and

participating in the notion of the loss of authenticity (not quite identity) through second, third or fourth generation copies.

While each and every one of these paintings can be said to be 'originals' in having been painted by the artist, they are not originals in image or concept. Not even the approach of repeating one image to exploit the fallacies of 'original' or 'authentic' artworks, as having originated from the 'master's hand, is an original approach. But to understand the tradition of the West's understanding of originality, as linked particularly to the imaginary capacity of the individual, we need to turn to the distinction made between what is considered productive and what is re-productive. It is here that a judgement is made which is cardinal to the understanding of canons of Western aesthetics.

Richard Kearney summarises Immanuel Kant's famous distinction between the 'productive' and 'reproductive' faculties of the mind as follows:

The reproductive function enables the mind to connect the diverse impressions of the senses in reinstating a preceding perception alongside a subsequent one, thereby forming a sequence of perceptions. But this reproductive role is in turn guided by a more fundamental role which provides the 'rule' according to which certain combinations of perceptions are preferred to others independently of their empirical order of appearance. And it is this *autonomous* act of synthesis which Kant ascribes to the productive imagination (Kearney1988:170).

Being autonomous according to this schema implies an origin in the subject, rather than the object, i.e. the subjective information applied to the objective information received or confronted, makes it unique. But simple interference of subjectivity on the perceived object would not be enough. A synthesis between outside (extrinsic) and inside (intrinsic) is needed to create an authentic experience and this synthesis is the imagination. One fact remains though, on a scale of one to two, the reproductive remains part of the Platonic tradition of mimeses according to which the imagination remained outside the self to be grounded in a copy whose origin depended on a divine being. On this scale, the reproductive

equals two whereas the productive, being reliant on an authentic self, independent of a divine origin or intervention, comes first. This concept is seen to rank 'higher' on the hierarchical scale of 'good taste' as supported by Greenberg in his condemnation of kitsch. According to Kant's value judgement, the intervention of the imagination is what unites the objective material world with the subjective being.

In his essay, *Regressive Reproduction and Throwaway Conscience*, Donald Kuspit vehemently criticised a group of artists for allowing 'mechanical reproduction' to take its course without intervening in any way (1993:405-415). Kuspit warned that "to inhabit the reproductive representational mode completely is to inhabit a socially controlled machine of creativity, or to accept social manipulation of creativity" (1993:411), following on the tradition of Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno. At the heart of this argument remains the assumption that the reproductive will always be inferior to the productive, and that to copy, which is in essence all that mechanical reproductive intervention (read machine, e.g. camera) can do, would always remain reproductive rather than productive.

It is obvious that Kuspit is versed in the Kantian ideas of productivity to which he adds his interpretation of Benjamin and Adorno's dialectic of the mass produced as a threat towards the 'aura of authenticity'. Kuspit even quotes Erich Fromm to support such argumentation:

The world outside oneself can be experienced in two ways: reproductively by perceiving actuality in the same fashion as a film makes a literal record of things (although even mere reproductive perception requires the active participation of the mind); and generatively by conceiving it, by enlivening and recreating this new material through the spontaneous activity of one's own mental and emotional powers (Kuspit 1993: 413).

But then Fromm has the insight to add, "When reproductive perception is totally lacking, man has only his imagination. Such an individual is psychotic and cannot function in society" (Kuspit 1993:413).



It is here that I as the artist find consolation for my argument, namely that there is nothing wrong with the re-productive process, as it cannot be equated in any way with the un-productive. The denial of the productive capacity of the reproductive, or of exclusively considering the productive as an effect of the imagination could, according to the discipline of psychology, lead to psychosis. When this argument is extended to modernism it comes as no surprise why modernism could not make the grade it set for itself. Krauss notes that modernism, through its discourse of originality, repressed and discredited "the complimentary discourse of the copy" (1981:64).

It is this complimentary (other half) that needs to be included in order for a degree of synthesis, or synchronicity, to be attained. Once both the authentic and the inauthentic, the productive and the reproductive actively participate, metaphor starts functioning and with one metaphor leading to the next, deconfiguration is effected, setting off a regenerative chain of events.

According to Derrida any literal form is due to our tendency to be restrictive. For postmodernists literal language disintegrates to become metaphor. Considering that metaphor is "a figurative form of speech discourse" (Novitz 1985:101), it could be read as non-literal, whereas the literal use of words and images remain the opposite of metaphor. What should be realised is that the two are co-dependents. As much as the metaphor cannot do without the literal signifier, it can be said that the literal cannot be generative without the metaphoric intention. When these two seemingly binary opposites co-operate in the same work, the *angst* for reproductive productivity will cease.

According to Von Franz: "Sometimes a new realisation (sic), if it is a very essential and important one, comes from within *and* without ... and is what one then calls synchronicity," (1995:73).

**Fig 27. Series Three (black and white only).**

Each separate canvas, 61 X 61cm.

Acrylic on canvas. Seven pieces in total.

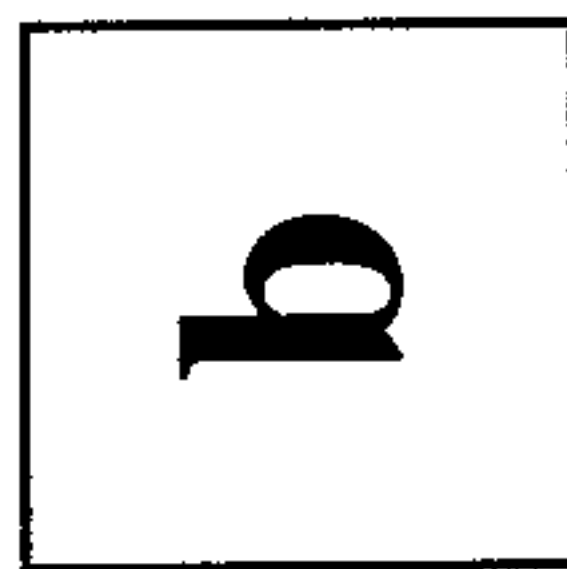
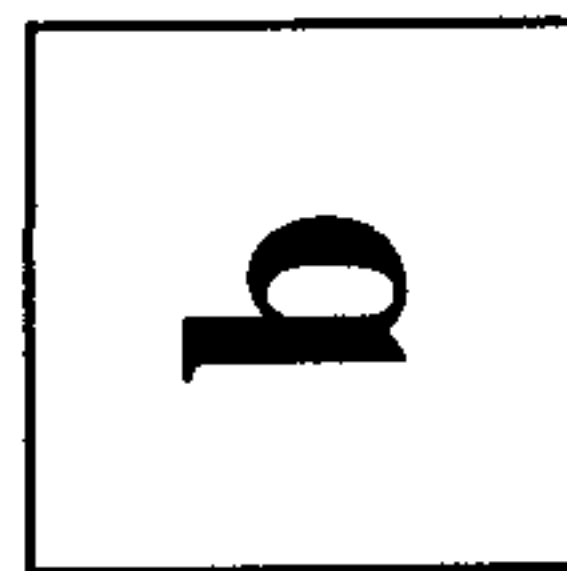
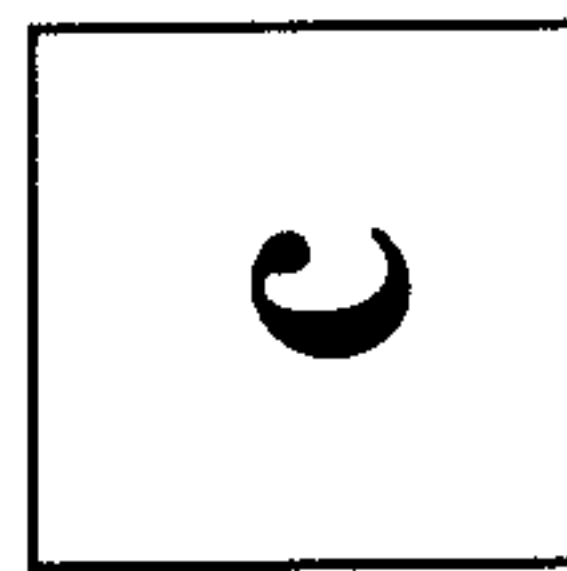
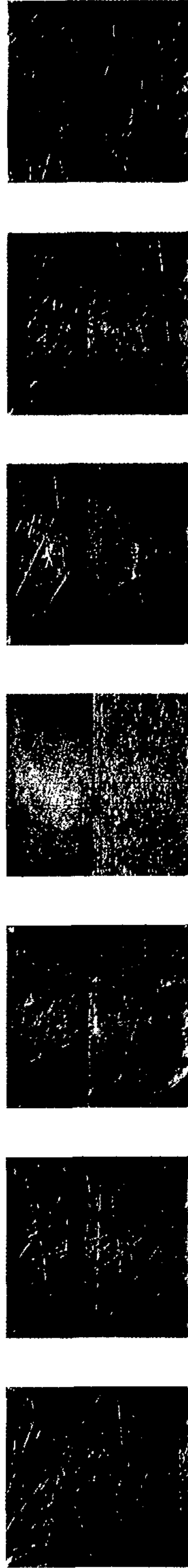


Fig 28. (*Black and White Only*)





In the series there are no individual works. Yet, at the same time - and in this lies its paradox - each separate picture in the series becomes an event in itself when isolated. Thus the singular becomes indispensable in the plural\*.

### Plurality/multiplicity

In *Series Two*, coupling still takes place but according to a more varied schema. While repetition still occurs, even in the form of mirroring as in *Series Three*, there is now also more of a variety within the repetition. Three panels make up a central triptych. Within each panel of the triptych certain visual elements appear independently of the other paintings in the triptych, while some visual data remain general to the three paintings of the unit. The triptych unit forms the central part of another series of seven paintings.

The two paintings on either side of the triptych are mirrored fragments of one another. These two paintings have been taken out of the context of the series of seven paintings, and exhibited as two paintings by being joined in the middle to make one (rectangular) painting. They thus also serve as either bracketing the central triptych or they can stand independently as a diptych. These paintings are in turn bracketed/flanked by two more units in the series of seven pieces making up *Series Two*. The last two outside paintings are reminiscent of the paintings in *Series Three*, not so much in colour or composition, as in the fact that they appear similar (perhaps even as copies of/) to one another.

The mirroring continues. Whereas the colouring in *Series Three* remained on a scale of black and white with gradients of grey, the paintings in *Series*

*Two* range from dark (purple-blue) tones to red, orange and bright yellows, to gold, to synchronise with the theme of the paintings.



Other shifts (changes), indicative of plurality and multiplicity, also occur. Firstly there is the central theme of the sunset/sunrise over the ocean. Within the Western landscape tradition, and more particularly within maritime paintings, many sunsets/sunrises have been painted. The Romantics in particular favoured sunsets, as was the case with Turner, whose prolific output as a painter of both landscapes and seascapes, includes a substantial number of sunsets/sunrises in various materials and guises. Furthermore, Monet's *Impression Sunrise* — which caused such a furore when first exhibited, not least of all for its chaotically loose brushwork — continues the theme of a sun, through clouds, close to the horizon line. Needless to say, the theme of the sunset/sunrise would later become so popular that it was demoted to the ranks of mass produced kitsch art.

The three central paintings in *Series Two* therefore engage in a range of traditional aesthetics, spanning the Romantic, the outrageous anti-traditionalist as well as the blatantly popular. While the very theme of the 'seascape' has proved a bestseller recipe for 'how-to-paint' manuals, it is included here as a sign of democratising art, as an obvious endeavour to inclusivity, engaging not only institutionalised high-art expertise, but also a mass audience.<sup>13</sup> The core image of the ocean and the sky remains, only this time the imagery is certainly (melo)dramatised. It can thus be argued that an appeal is made to include the common imagination and that this particular series hints at a democratisation of art through the use of easily accessible imagery as can be found in travel brochures and the like, rather than limiting itself to the higher grounds of an elite informed by institutionalised art.

Kearney (1991:229) points out that the postmodern author Milan Kundera blames the mass media for reducing the world to over simplifications. Kundera gets his knife into kitsch, which he claims to be the "translation of the stupidity of received ideas (*idées reçues*) into the language of beauty and feeling" (1991:229). Kearney writes, "Kundera fears for what he sees as the global domination of a fake mass-media culture, based on conformity and an absence of creative imagination" (1991:229).

Yet, the appropriation and use of the popular everyday is widely believed to be one of postmodernism's major assets. Andreas Huyssen has the following comments on Pop art:<sup>14</sup> "Pop in the broadest sense was the context in which a notion of the postmodern first took shape, and from the beginning until today, the most significant trends within postmodernism have challenged modernism's relentless hostility to mass culture", arguing that "The ire of the postmodernists was directed not so much against modernism as such, but rather against a certain austere image of 'high modernism'..." (1986:188-89).

The theme of the sunset (or sunrise, for as sheer imagery it remains highly ambiguous) furthermore indicates the passage of time. The sunset is imminent of change. If there is a sunset, it follows that night is approaching, that visibility will be affected, for under the veil of darkness, things no longer look the same. It is in the presence of light that we can recognize that which is familiar to us. While perhaps a clichéd romantic image, the sunset nonetheless carries within itself a sense of precognitive nostalgia: already the day is spent, forever lost and we are faced with the prospect of the dark unknown.<sup>15</sup>

This series, even in its central triptych, shows obvious signs of interruption.<sup>16</sup> If the central triptych is to be isolated, the sky of the three paintings will continue through each separate work; not so with the ocean

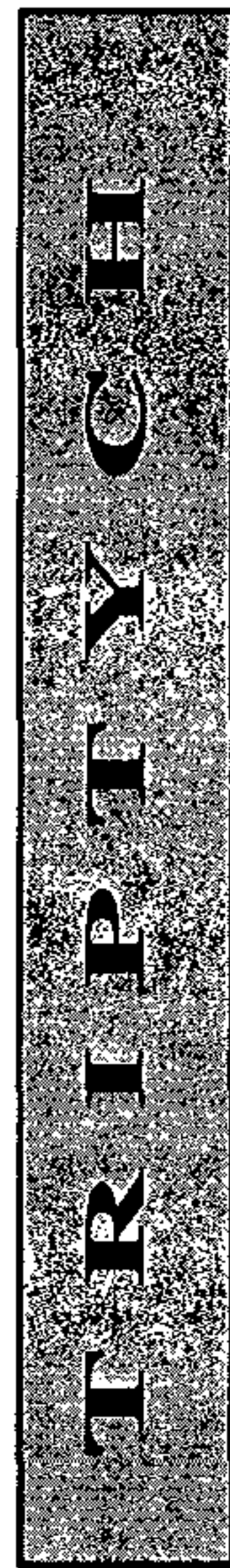


which in every painting appears as a single ocean reflecting the sunset on its waters.<sup>17</sup>

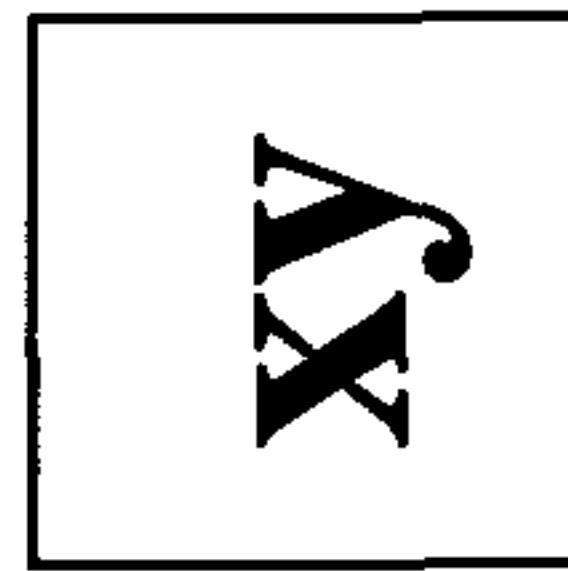
Another shift that occurs is to be found in the horizon line. In the central triptych the ocean makes up roughly one third of the painting, whereas it makes up some two thirds in the diptych of the series. In the two 'far' outside paintings the horizon disappears altogether. Taken out of context, seen in isolation, it would be difficult to figure the patterning of golden paint brushstrokes as anything representing the ocean. Not that it would matter then, as these panels were painted to be able to stand independently of the rest of the works in the series. In fact, these two outside paintings could even be seen completely apart from one another. They do not even constitute a true diptych. Furthermore, the colour gold remains a thorn in the flesh of any reproductive printing process. Whereas the triptych may reproduce quite well as a sunset/sunrise, the diptych will undoubtedly lose some of its aura of authenticity during reproduction in print. Reaching out to the farther edges of the sunset series, the outside paintings, which are also the most textured of the paintings within this series, will thus take on a life almost of its own. Whether they are presented as 'authentic' oil on canvas paintings, produced by the hands of the artist or whether reproduced mechanically, either through photography of any other technological medium, they remain paintings produced through a series of repetitions.

**Fig 29. SERIES TWO**  
*(Sunrise/Sunset)*

Each separate canvas, 61 X 61cm.  
 Acrylic on canvas. Seven pieces in total.

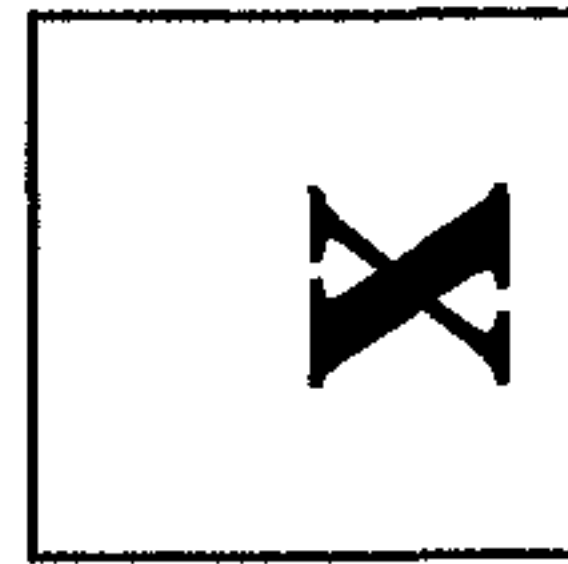


SUNSET



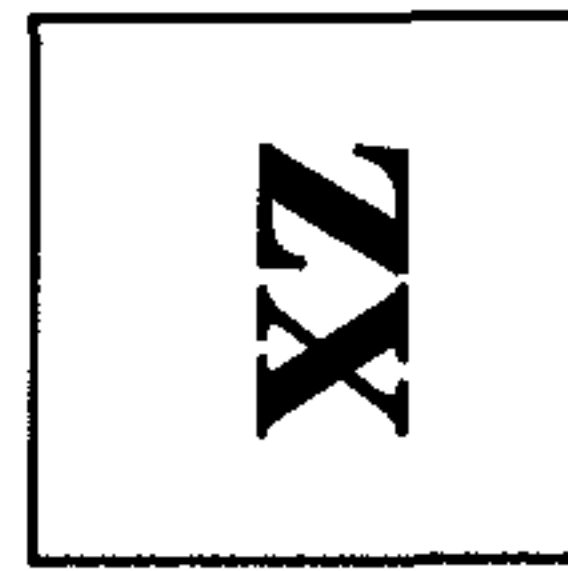
OCEAN left

SUNSET

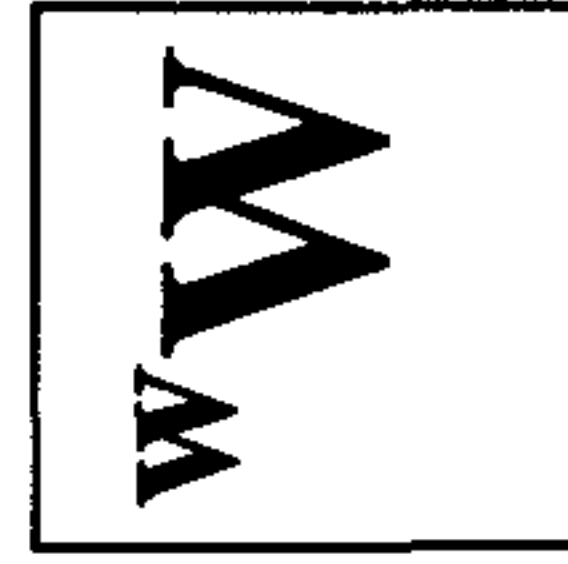


OCEAN centre

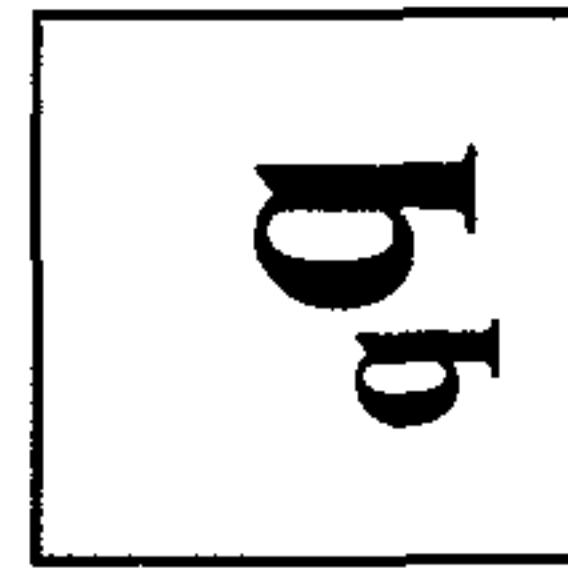
SUNSET



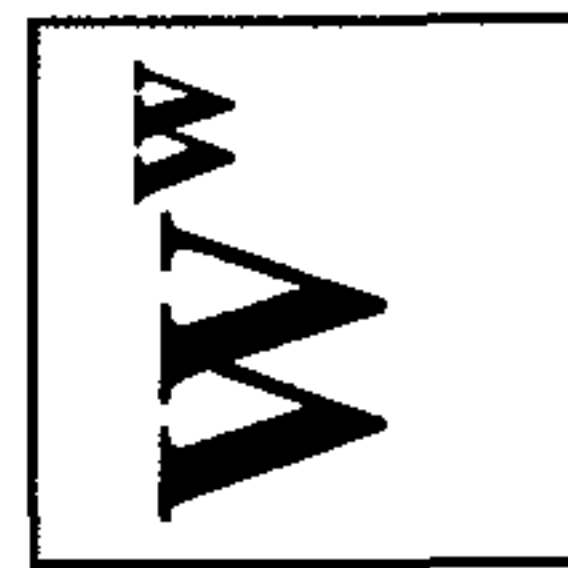
OCEAN right



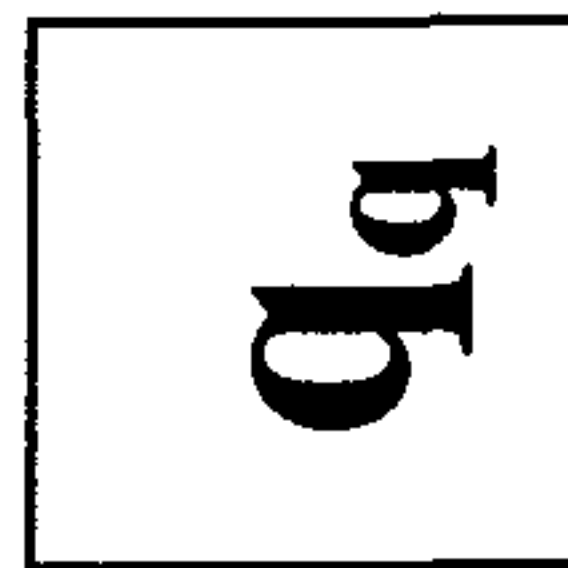
High Horizon  
right



Gold Water  
right

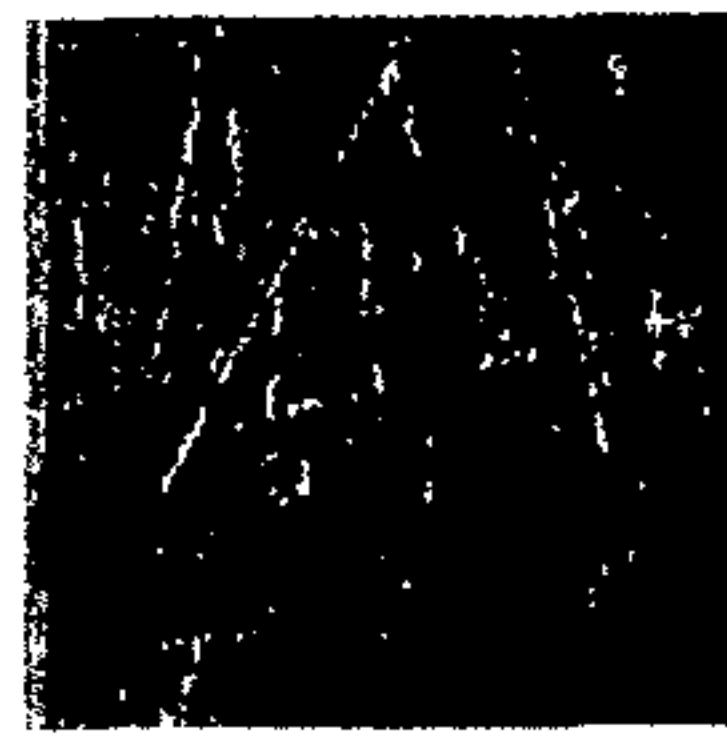
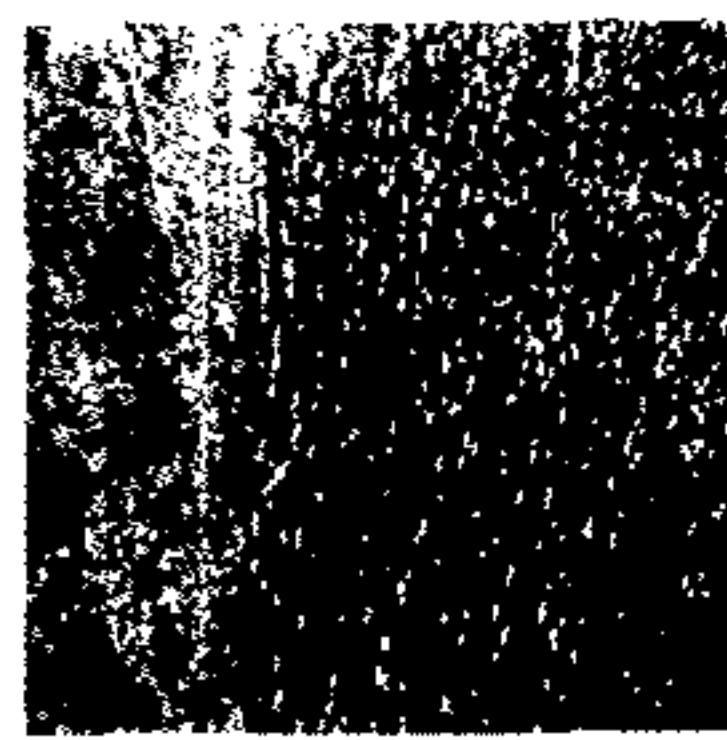
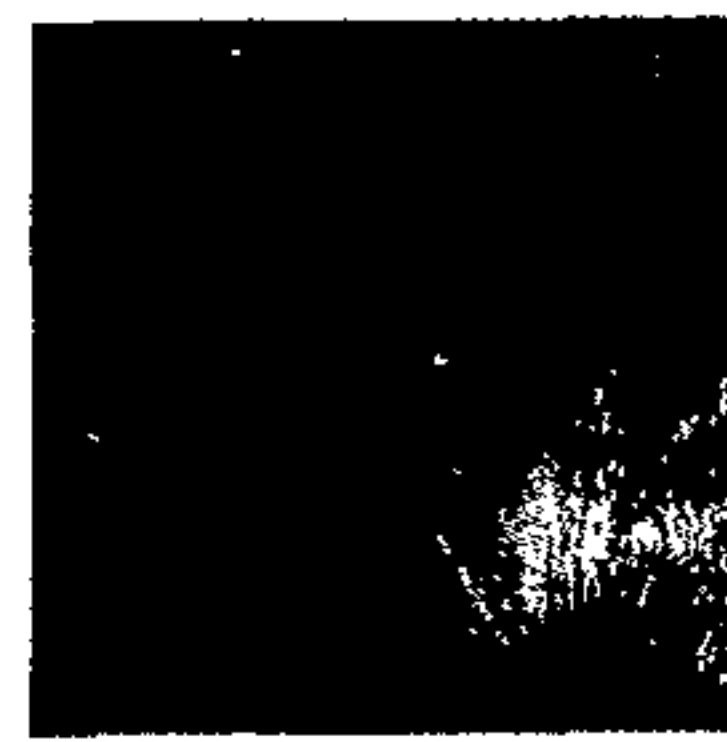
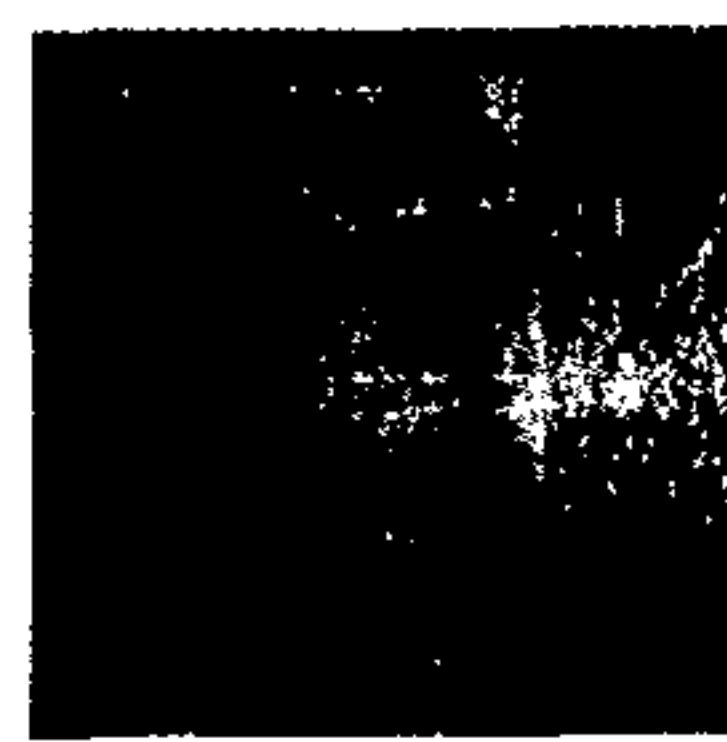
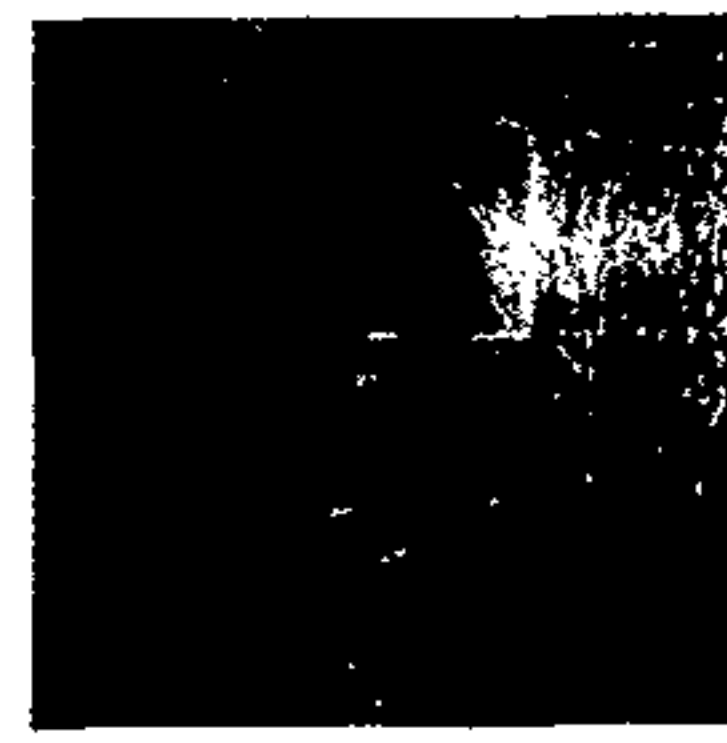
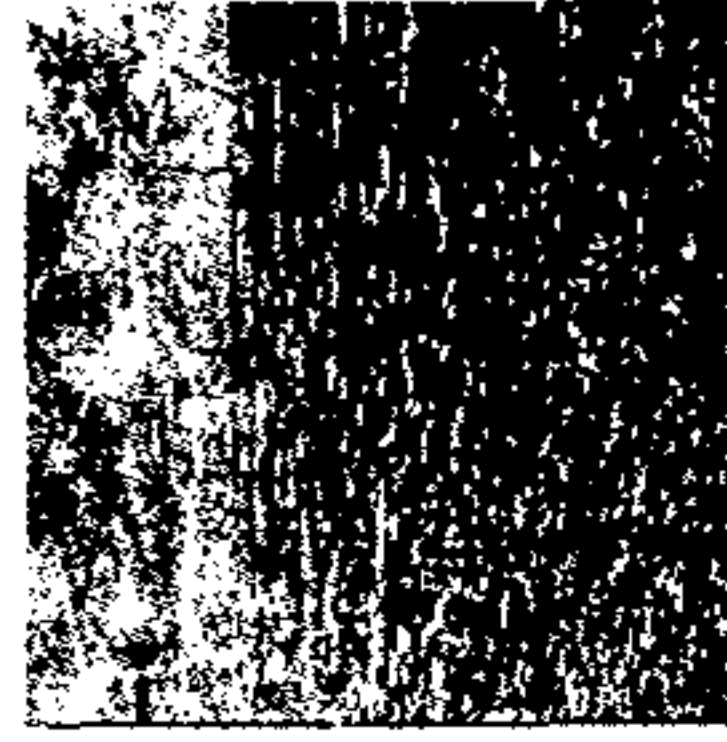
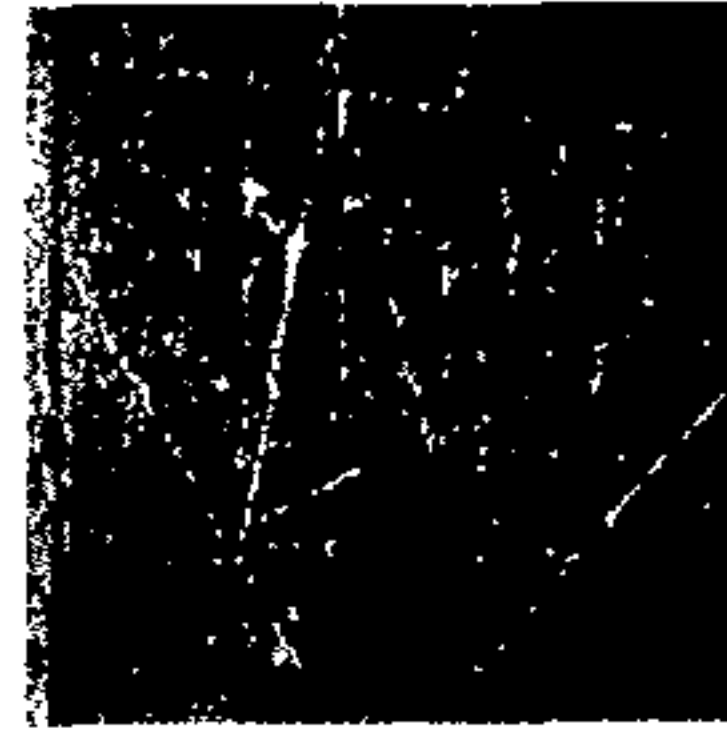


High Horizon  
left



Gold Water  
left

Fig 30. (*Sunrise/Sunset*)





Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles. Freud is attracted by this phenomena, and it is there that he seeks the unconscious.

*Jacques Lacan* <sup>∞</sup>

### Modus Interruptus

One: Interruption of composition in images being broken up into fragments, different pictures. Deleuze and Guattari write: "Every object presupposes the continuity of a flow; every flow, the fragmentation of the object" (Cahoone 1996:405). This statement is echoed by physicist PCW Davies, who claims: "The notion that time flows in a one-way fashion is a property of our consciousness. It is a subjective phenomenon and is a property that simply cannot be demonstrated in the natural world. This is an incontrovertible lesson from modern science ... A flowing time belongs to our mind, not to nature" (Cahoone 1996:669).

Two: Interruption of the actual picture plane when damaged; marks and scratches across the image to reveal what is underneath, the ground or under painting, the mistakes corrected, the process of the palimpsest, the making of the work - though discreetly.

Three: Even the separation of image and surface, one of the very aspects Greenberg criticised Monet for - for operating on different levels (1965:43) - refers to interruption. In this case (reading it as interruption), despite being inextricably bound, despite indeed being true co-dependents, the image can be said to be one thing, the surface another.

If ever there was continuity between modernism and postmodernism, it must be the fact that already during modernism one of its determining characters was its obsession with fragmentation. According to Alex Callinicos, spatialisation (sic) in modernist literature is characterised by a "juxtaposition of fragmentary images torn out of temporal sequence" (1989:19).

The question that remains though is whether such possible manifestations of metaphors perpetuated by these paintings and the texts surrounding the works, do in any way reveal the identity of the artist responsible for the artwork. In other words, could these interruptions be seen as signs from a signified or are they simply brought upon the works by arbitrary, accidental, coincidental influences?<sup>18</sup>

"Discontinuity," writes Lacan, "is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon – discontinuity in which something is manifested as a vacillation" (1991:25).

According to Krauss "[the] double appearance ... seem to spell the breakdown of the principle of spatio-temporal uniqueness that is a prerequisite of logical narration, for doubling tends to destroy the possibility of a logical narrative sequence"(1983:17). This brings us back to Lyotard's postmodernist crisis defined as an "incredulity towards metanarratives".<sup>19</sup>

Narratives are of course identified mostly with literary works. Within the body of work (corpus) presented here, *Series One* is perhaps the most literal of all the works, or at least it should appear so on the basis of it featuring recognizable imagery throughout. The series is nonetheless rhythmically (repetitively) interrupted (fragmented). While it reads from either left to right, right to left, centre outwards or centre inwards, the possible narrative(s) that it suggests, constantly interrupt one another.

Perhaps they could be seen to be in conversation with one another, indeed as metaphorical of discourse. Even so, the suggested narrative or dialogue seems to be without beginning or end as each separate image (phrase/word) could continue indefinitely on its (horizontally) lineal path.<sup>20</sup>

Reading the works from left to right, the series starts with an image of a dark ocean, followed by a picture of clouds, followed by an image of the dark ocean, followed by clouds and so on to end once again with an image of a dark ocean. In looking at the series as a whole though, it soon becomes clear that it cannot be read in a narrative literary way. The two 'outside' paintings here, once again show a darkening towards its far outside edges (to the left and right), while gradually lightening towards its 'inside' edges, thus establishing a link with *Series Three*. Whereas the changes from dark to light/light to dark in *Series Three* are more radical, they appear subtler or even repressed in *Series One*. Moreover, the lightening towards the centre continues in the other two 'dark ocean' images within this series. Should the 'dark ocean' images be removed and shown together, there would be a gradual lightening towards, or from within (depending on which way we are looking at it) the centre.

This lightening/darkening towards/from within the centre does not occur in the three cloud paintings (as inter-dispersed images), which make up the rest of the series. On a mundane level these paintings seem quite superficial to effect any interruption. But then so does the breaking up of the image of the 'dark ocean' into four square panels. The colouring of the three cloud panels, with their somewhat quasi-Latin title, namely *Corpus Damnum*,<sup>21</sup> remain more even in tonality.

The whole series, like most of the other paintings in the other series, illustrate serious physical damage or violation on its very 'upper/outer surface'. Cracks, scratches, spills and patches and other 'distracting' marks, and in some cases even reminiscent of possible reparation bear witness to



the fact that these images have been tampered with. Not only have they been interrupted in their arrangement within the series but these paintings were also (obviously) not kept under 'ideal' conditions. All mutilation of visual content as well as surface remains purely artificial, as a reminder to the viewer/recipient that the imagery to be interpreted, form part of art works which were created through an interrupted process of construction and destruction, creativity and chaos, figuration and deconfiguration.

Underneath it all, constantly competing for attention, is (what may once have been realistically rendered), imagery of cloud and ocean. If these paintings were simply a series of abstract formal elements or marks shown to be affiliated with one another in a manner of tiling, the whole process could have been quite different. But now the image remains, from underneath all the (irregular) diagonal lines, the scratches and cracks, the multiple layers of discoloured varnish, the archetypal image of a cosmos of ocean and sky still shines through.

There is nostalgia here, signs of an almost desperate attempt to preserve the fragments of a scattered tradition, containing not only the damned imagery based on mimeses, but also the condemned abstractions and expressions of objectified emotions as found in modernism.<sup>22</sup>

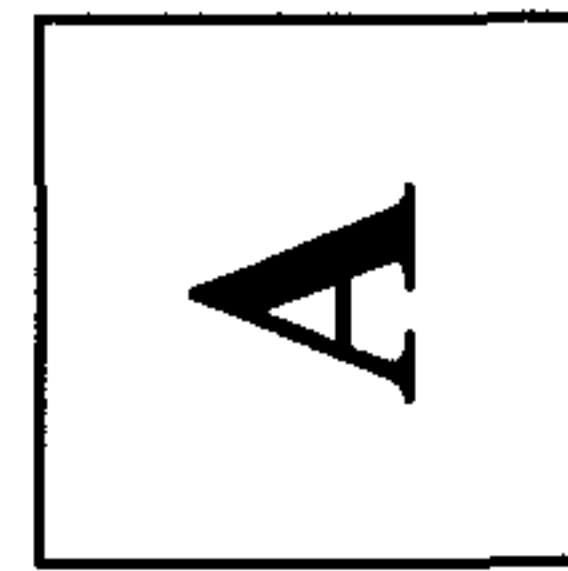
The pictorial interruption between sky and ocean remains obviously binary, switching between alternatives, suggesting a constant flux of either or, which could even signify and outside and an inside, a consciousness and an unconsciousness, a switching between the deliberate (intentional) and the accidental (unintended), between the forced and the natural, the superficial and the unaffected, order and chaos. There is thus also a further formal link disclosed through the artist's intentional making of recognizable imagery (the painting of clouds and ocean) and what seems intentional interruption/interference in the damaging of the canvases through folds, scratches and so forth.

The whole process of figuring and deconfiguration remains ambivalent. So much of the wear and tear, the damage, the impediment and failure is intentionally put forward as something consciously crafted in its own right, *only to appear as if the real thing*, the real damage having been done by time. But how many of these marks, these signs of wear, are due to accidental rapture? The same binary ambivalence between intentional/unintentional, conscious/unconscious can obviously be (applied to/) found in the actual imagery inasmuch as the images in the paintings are believed to represent clouds and water, although not any particular cloud formation or a specific ocean for that matter. The very pictures therefore reflect (represent, through revelation upon scrutiny/analysis), the artist's ambivalent stance towards the making of representational/figuratively recognizable, imagery.

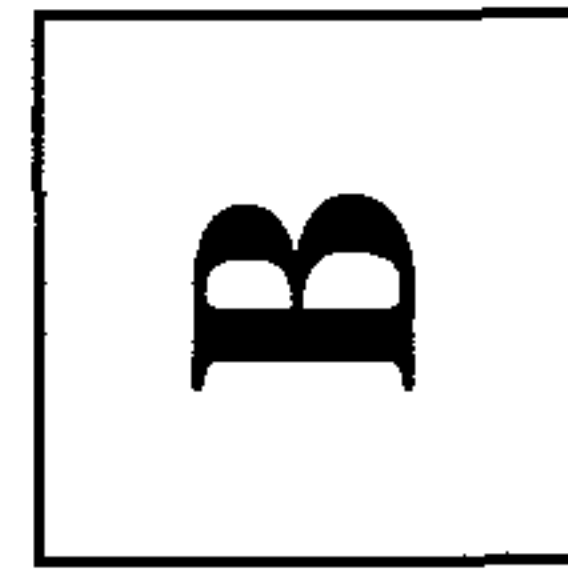
The interruption of any possible code of understanding through a probable linear narrative, while being made obvious through the serialisation (breaking up into square units) of the imagery of two parts of sky and water, is moreover in the binary content of the figuration (of sky above and water below) which is continued in a rather more arbitrary and even 'chaotic' manner in the damage done to the canvases. It is in all these gaps, between surface and image, between above and below, between one serial part and another, that the nostalgic, the feeling of loss, once again surfaces. For it is through the process of re-vision, of looking at these images once more, through these marked interruptions, that the eye of the beholder becomes aware of the process of making that must have taken place (inside/intrinsically) during the creation of such an art work. But it would obviously never be possible to grasp completely, what went into this process of making. One is therefore left with the feeling of loss, and with the nagging sense of need, the craving for forever, for always wanting to know more of what has slipped between the tongue and the lip.

**Fig 31. SERIES ONE  
(MODUS INTERRUPTUS)**

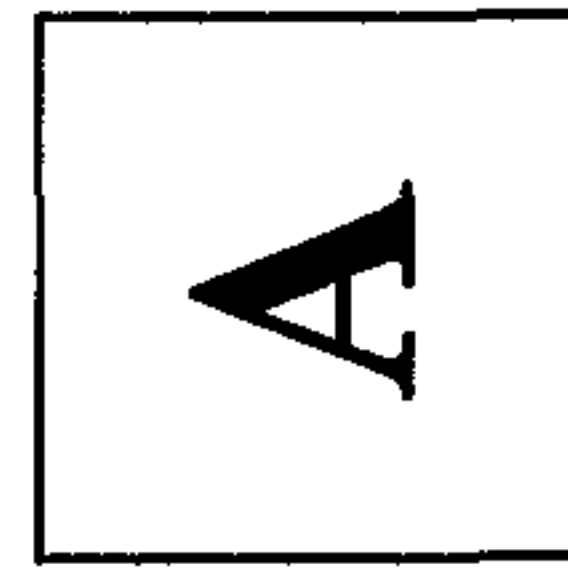
Each separate canvas, 65 X 65cm.  
Oil on canvas. Seven pieces in total.



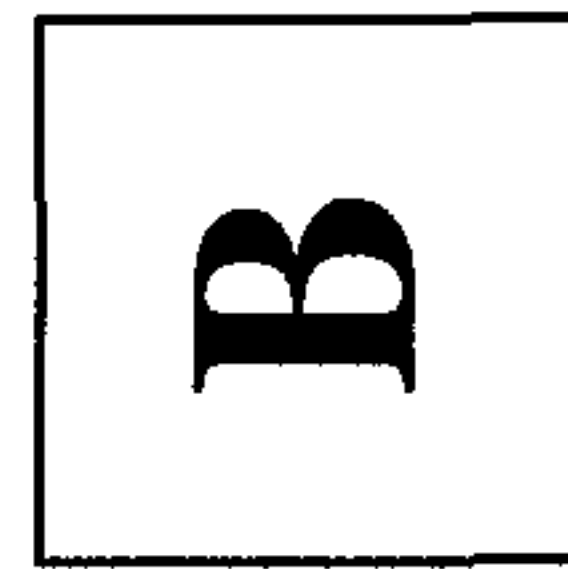
**Dark Ocean  
Far left**



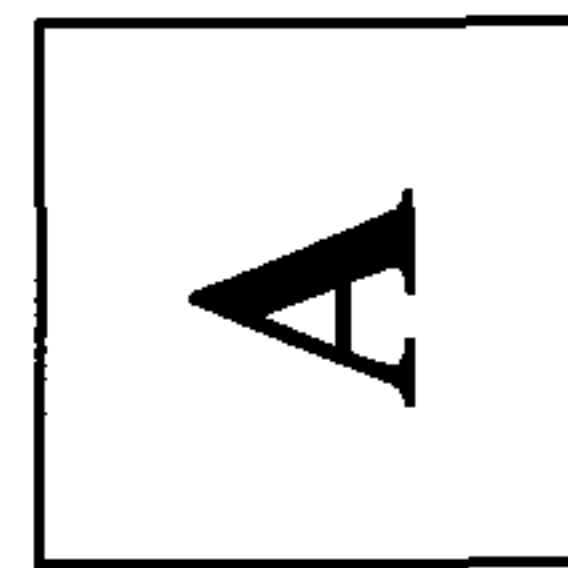
**Clouds  
Left**



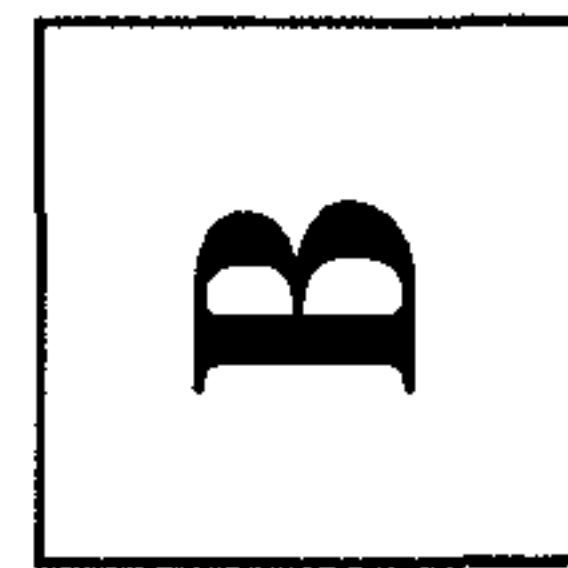
**Dark Ocean left**



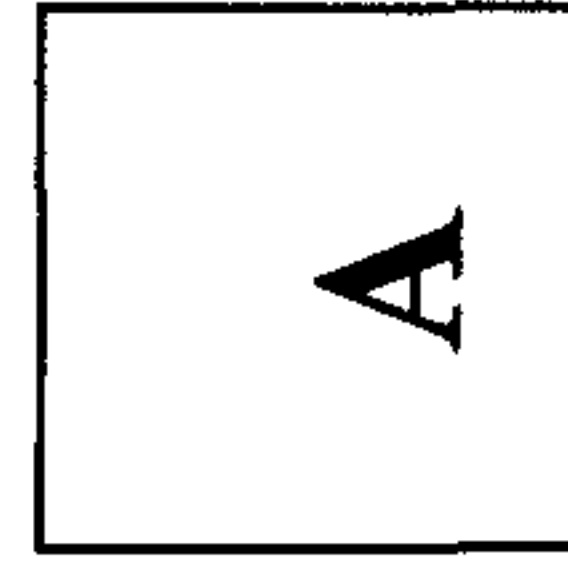
**Clouds centre**



**Dark Ocean right**



**Clouds  
Right**



**Dark Ocean  
Far right**



Fig 32. (*Modus Interruptus*)



### Imagining the truth

The two final paintings are triptychs, each containing a central unframed panel (rectangular) that can be separated from the two side panels. The two side panels can be presented side by side as diptychs. Each separately framed diptych contains two quadruples, each in turn made up of four 'tiles', and framed as an individual 65 x 65 cm painting.

The central painting is one of ocean and sky (as in the original painting, entitled *Come and Gone*, (Fig 22), upon which this whole overall exhibition was based), while the 'tiles' within the two separate diptychs contain either ocean and/or sky. The one large triptych is painted in silver and black, the other is painted in black and gold. This could be a sign of alchemical significance, as the alchemists are believed to have tried to turn 'base metal' into gold.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand silver could signify mercury, a metal associated with thought or swiftness of mind. Furthermore, the equality of sky and ocean in these works, recalls yet again the alchemical phrase: 'As above, so below.'<sup>24</sup>

In both these triptychs the colours (gold and/ or silver, as well as black) may be symbolical or indicative of a metaphysical state of being.<sup>25</sup> The imagery in the painting also transcends its obvious material or literal meaning. Thus the image in the painting remains a physical manifestation (a translation) of one reality (one language) into another. Through such translation, through such parallel shifts, the imaginary becomes the real and the real is translated through the imagination. The making of the image was therefore interrupted, not only through its physical fragmentation, or by being divided or damaged, but also while moving (shifting) from one world (the real), to the next (the imaginary), to yet another (the interpretive) and once again through another form of imagination (that of the receiver, the viewer) etcetera.

## According to Alfred Adler

By imagination we mean the reproduction of a perception without the presence of the object itself which gave rise to it. In other words imagination is reproduced perception: — another evidence of the creative faculty of the soul. The product of imagination is not only the repetition of a perception ... but it is an entirely new and unique product built upon the basis of perception ..." (1946:49)

The two large triptychs therefore still seem to oscillate on a kind of binary scale, although any such possible (scale of) measurement remains part of the conviction that even within (what seems like a limited field or scope) imagination on the one hand and reality on the other, whatever is configured, becomes deconfigured when a shift of context appears. How far or how much this shift or change will deconfigure an original or initial form depends not only on imagination but also on the material translations that occur between one form, or even one image, and another. The material and the imagination remain two sides of the same coin and not two opposing, binary players in the game. This is most acutely apparent within the process of making, whether such making can be identified as an initial, early or even ordinary making (which, as we have seen can hardly ever be), or in the process of participation through interpretation for instance; it is above all integral to the working process of each and every deconfiguration.



## Endnotes: Chapter Three

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▽ Lyrics of the song *LA MER*, © Trent Reznor (Nine Inch Nails), 1999, from the disc *THE FRAGILE*.

▣ Von Franz, 1995:119.

<sup>1</sup> I saw the exhibition *Homage Demontage*, in Utrecht during December 1988 where American artists Sherrie Levine, Mike Bidlo and Sturtevant together with European and 'East-block' artists such as Gerard Päss, Milan Kunc, Erró, Alexander Kosolapov and others presented paintings that commented on modernism. Some artists copied 'masterpieces' of modernism (Levine and Bidlo), some referred to modernism's political history (Kosolapov), whilst others appropriated typical modernist 'elements' of design or abstraction in their own re-interpreted art works (Päss, Erró).

I wrote an article on this exhibition entitled "Vals is nou al byna eg" (transl. "Fake is now almost real"), which appeared in the following year in the Afrikaans news magazine, *Insig* (June 1989:28-29).

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Printz writes: "The reality status of painted objects has been a subject for artists throughout history, and our century [the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that was] is no exception. Consider for example Magritte's *The treachery of Images* ... The point, of course, is that this is not a pipe ("Ceci n'est pas une pipe") but a painting of a pipe instead" (1991:37).

<sup>3</sup> Jung's idea or definition of the 'archetype' was rather specific, although he saw an archetype as something difficult to define. Nonetheless, he put the archetype at the opposite pole of instinct. He saw 'instinct' as "an inborn disposition to physical reactions" (Von Franz 1995:60). Although Jung considered archetypes as part of a 'psychoid aspect', sometimes even transcending the field that we call psychic, he conceded that, "archetype constellated within a synchronistic phenomenon has the aspect of *being able to appear as an arrangement of outer material facts*" (my italics) (Von Franz 1995:60-61). According to Von Franz, Jung believed that the archetype could not be truly represented, as "we have no immediate inner image of it". Subsequently, archetypes were considered *unanshaulich*; "what we can observe are archetypal images, from which we conclude that there must be such a thing as archetypes which we cannot imagine in themselves" (Von Franz 1995:118). Erich Neumann however argued that "The archetypes of the collective unconscious are intrinsically formless psychic structures which become visible in art" (1974:82).

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The archetype remains evasive or difficult to describe precisely because it appears first in the unconscious. In order for it 'to appear' or 'be named', it has to be brought into the conscious. This may seem contradictory, simply because one will have to become conscious of such an archetype in order to bring it into the conscious. Nonetheless, once the unconscious archetype crosses the threshold between the unconscious and the conscious, it is no longer quite what it was when it was still part of the unconscious. Von Franz notes that, "When a content from the unconscious surfaces, there is the tendency for it to try and break through not on a symbolic inner level, but rather on the level of concrete reality" (1995:150). Von Franz however also warns that any such physical or material manifestation "is meant to be understood symbolically" (1995:151). Archetypes, once they have manifested in the material, need to be interpreted as symbolical.

<sup>4</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (second edition) 1985:284:7.

<sup>5</sup> Considering our constant need for interpretation, it could be worthwhile to note that Nietzsche wondered

... whether all existence is not essentially actively engaged in *interpretation* – that cannot be decided even by the most industrious and most scrupulously conscientious analysis and self-examination of intellect; for in the course of this analysis the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and *only* in these. Rather has the world become "infinite" for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that it may include infinite interpretations (1974: 336).

<sup>6</sup> Much has been said about the impact photography had on Impressionism, particularly as the popularisation of photography coincided with the dates generally given for the art historical period known as Impressionism.

In order to clarify this matter to some degree, a summary seems in order. The generally accepted date for photography's introduction to the world is 1839, long before the Impressionists made an impact on the art world. This early date is given, as it was the year in which Louis-Jacques Mandé Daguerre, William Henry Fox Talbot as well as John Hershell all presented the world with their 'drawings in light' (photographs) – this despite the fact that Daguerre and Nicéphore had been collaborating on experiments as far back as 1816 (Frizot 1998:23–29).

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Although art historical periods are always difficult to date, Impressionism is said to have started in April 1874. It was during this time that an art exhibition (set up in the studios of the, by then celebrated photographer Nadar) of artists whose works were rejected by the French Salon that Monet exhibited his painting *Impression Soleil levant*. This painted image inspired the journalist Leroy to dub the whole group of rebel artists as Impressionists (Rewald 1973:309-340).

There are a number of reasons why the Impressionists are associated with photography. The most popular notion is that Impressionism, like photography, was interested in capturing time. According to Arnold Hauser "Impressionistic thinking finds its purest expression in the philosophy of Bergson, above all in his interpretation of time – the medium which is the vital element of Impressionism (sic). The uniqueness of the moment, which has never existed before and will never be repeated, was the basic experience of the nineteenth century ..." (1962, Vol 4:212). It would be difficult to overlook the intimate proximity of this notion to what people would popularly agree to be the essence of photography namely that of 'capturing of the moment'.

John Rewald is one art historian who believes that Monet's studies of haystacks, poplars, the façade of Rouen Cathedral and others, as painted during different times of the day, was because "He [Monet] ... strove to attain instantaneity" (1973:562). One could therefore interpret Monet's repetition of a particular scene as being motivated by a need to capture different instants, much like a camera would do. Hence the link with photography becomes blatantly obvious. Moreover, in the series of fifteen paintings of haystacks, which Monet exhibited at Durand Ruel's in 1891 (Eadweard Muybridge first showed his 'serial' photographs in Paris in 1881), the artist claimed that he was inspired by his discovery that "the effect of light changed continually" (Rewald 1973:562). Again, we must understand that photography as both technical exercise and as art form relies greatly on 'the effect of light'. Indeed, as any introductory guide to photography will enthusiastically divulge, the first half of the word photography, 'photo', is derived from the Greek 'photos', meaning light.

It may be true then that "The mechanical genesis of these [photographic] images, and the literalness of power they confer, amounts to a new relationship between image and reality" (Sontag 1977:158) and that such a relationship may have indirectly impacted on Monet's working methods. And despite artists at the time perhaps "finding it expedient to hide the fact of their use of photographic material or its influence upon them" (Scharf 1986:106), particularly in light of the medium being severely criticised by the likes of



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Baudelaire and Zola, it remains to be shown exactly how and where Monet made direct use of, or reference to photographs during the painting process.

♥ Wilhelm & Jung 1979:101.

<sup>7</sup> Hinging on Derrida's deconstructive methods and the new French noun he used namely *différence*, Derrida's working process relies on endless deferral (and not referral as was the case with structuralism), as an accentuation of the unstable nature of signs. At the heart of this is the fact that "Structures for Derrida have no centre, because they are structures. It can make no sense to speak of the 'centre' of a language or any other system. These systems are in constant 'play'" (Sturock 1993:150).

<sup>8</sup> When referring to a centre as a point of origin in terms of archetypal symbols, we are inevitably lead back to creation myths. From a Jungian perspective myths can be traced back to archetypes, while archetypes, or the archetypal reality, must always be seen in close relationship with primordial images (Neumann 1974:158). A primordial reality is related moreover to the idea of unification, of synchronising different aspects of reality within one central area, that of the self. Von Franz points out that in early creation myths, not only does the material come from the (four) corners of the world, but the first man – being in the centre – reached from one end of the world to the other end (1995:158). According to Eliade "... every religious man places himself at the Centre (sic) of the World and by the same token at the very source of absolute reality" (1959:65).

<sup>9</sup> Iain Chambers points out that Nietzsche's concept of the 'eternal return', was investigated by Pierre Klossowski in the 1950's (Chambers 1990:128, footnote 27). Chambers writes:

Nietzsche's drastic re-evaluation of appearances and his insistence on their 'truth', that is on the fundamentally constructed and fabricated character of the world, drew him to elaborate his celebrated idea of the eternal return. For if we live in a world, that is, a world of *our* making, in which there is no ultimate foundation of nature or being, then there can be no 'original', no zero point, or day of creation, from which everything commences. There is only the secular (and social) infinity of reproductions, of copies of copies, of simulacra. Our very being, without guarantees of origin, is qualified by the 'eternal return' of being, which is a parody of origins, a simulation (1990:62).

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This may be one interpretation of the 'eternal return', and a mundane one at that. For another, more profane qualification, let us turn to Mercea Eliade who theorises that "for religious man of the archaic cultures, the world is renewed annually" in an effort to recover "its original sanctity, the sanctity that it possessed when it came from the Creator's hands" (1959:75). In order for renewal to take place, man has to return (constantly/annually/eternally) to a time before time began. Moreover, as Eliade points out, the 'true eternal return' can be seen in the constant repetition of destruction and re-creation, which is "the eternal repetition of the fundamental rhythm of the cosmos" (1959:108). He then argues that the cosmic cycles (yugas) of India and the conception of circular time of the Greek philosophers of "the late period" were all expressions of the *myth of the eternal return* (1959:107-109). Eliade finally believes that man's need to repeat himself through works of art, through what had already been achieved by the gods, is an ultimate manifestation of the eternal return (1974:32).

<sup>10</sup> The 'title' in brackets remains tentative, derived literally from objective perception, stripped of narrative, yet pregnant with implications. During the original planning stages of the series, it was entitled *Breathe (Contract – Expand)*. At that stage the series was planned to contain ten paintings (*Notebook*. 200/08/11).

<sup>11</sup> Not that such referral should be seen as a "closed system whose value lies in its coherence, of the kind argued for by Barthes" (Butler 1987:56), as each new reading, each other combination, would make relative the interpretation of a previous reading, assuring rather that discourse continues. Still, as Butler explains, "The relative firmness of ... structure will be important for the interpretation of metaphor as it would be important to see how one part of a conversation of text would be relevant to another" (1987:1).

<sup>12</sup> Butler refers to Barbara Johnson's use of "the Derridian notion of 'difference' to show that within the text, 'the difference between entities ... are shown to be based on a repression of differences *within* entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself", arguing that "deconstruction attempts 'to follow the subtle, powerful effects of difference already at work within the illusion of a binary opposition'. We tease out 'warring forces of significance within the text itself' so that where we had expected to find unity we may find division" (1987:73).

\* *Studio notes*. @ 10:00: 2001/12/05.

<sup>13</sup> Any effort at democratising art through plurality remains typically postmodern. In politics pluralism has been identified with liberalism: "it promotes the idea that society contains a



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number of different political and religious tendencies which harmoniously co-exist. This idea implies that all tendencies are of equal merit, are all valid" (Walker 1993:88). The use of the word pluralism in the arts "implies that the cultural experience offered by art is neither better nor worse than that offered by the mass media. In other words, the hierarchical conception of human culture – in which fine art occupies the apex – is denied" (Walker 1993:90).

Agreeing on this definition of plurality as acceptable would be in stark contrast to modernist tendencies in which a very clear distinction was still made between high and low culture. Frankfurt school philosopher, Theodor Adorno, clearly criticised what he called "the culture industry" (what we today refer to as mass culture or popular culture), for its attempts at being on equal grounds with serious or pure art. "Light art has been the shadow of autonomous art. It is the social bad conscience of serious art", wrote Adorno (Walker 1993:76).

<sup>14</sup> It is today generally agreed that Pop Art was initiated out of the materials of mass culture. John A. Walker refers to someone such as Roy Lichtenstein who plundered mass culture to the point where "Non-commercial' fine art appears to have become commercial, applied art" (1993:26). Andy Warhol, of course, took fine art's intimacy with mass culture one step further. By using commercial silkscreen techniques instead of painting his repetitive canvases by hand, he introduced the reality of mass production – aimed at mass consumption – into the world of fine art.

<sup>15</sup> This possible interpretation is by no means explicit, but rather implied. In tracing darkness through the absence of light, it would be easy to read darkness on the one hand, suggesting chaos (thus we return to the theme of the 'eternal return') or as a symbol of death. Investigating death as it appears within a postmodern context, would take us via Freud's theories of the principle of the 'death instinct', which would in turn expect of us to see how postmodernist theorists like Baudrillard applied Freud's theories.

Charles Levin, for example, suggested that "[Baudrillard] sees the evolution of structural models of meaning as a process of social disintegration", which, according to Levin, would be a rather "peculiar interpretation of Freud's death instinct" (Fekete 1984:47). But when interpreting Baudrillard's interpretation of Freud's death instinct, Levin claims that for Baudrillard, "the death instinct is Freud's unconscious idea of a destructive principle that is inevitably brought into play when the trend of formalization, implicit in all culture is "automised,"(sic) and set apart from the ambivalent symbolic process from which it derives" (Fekete 1984:51). Levin concludes, "Baudrillard's response is a flamboyant



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inversion in which the death instinct appears as the *return of the symbolic*, threatening the internalised (sic) perfection of self contained systems” (Fekete 1984:51).

Similarly, any attempt at interpreting this quite formally structured series of paintings as implicitly symbolical of a death instinct, would be following on the postmodernist theory of the *return of the symbolic* as identified by Baudrillard.

<sup>16</sup> Interruption as part of the process of deconfiguration and more particularly central to another series of paintings, will be picked up in the next section, under *Modus Interruptus*.

<sup>17</sup> Here the interruption occurs within a structure that seems continuous. Moreover, what continues is the theme of polarity, of an above and a below. Also, while the sky is linked to enable one to read the sky within the three separate units as one sky, the ocean is linked in that the image basically remains the same picture of the light emanating from a sunset/sunrise, reflecting off the water. But a shift takes place nonetheless. In the ‘central’ panel the reflection on the water is in the centre of the composition, whereas in the panel to the left the reflection moves to the ‘outside’ of the frame, as is the case with the reflection in the panel on the right, which moves to the right of the frame. Hence mirroring appears here as supporting division or polarity.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan 1995:25.

<sup>18</sup> This seems to be one of the conclusions drawn by Foucault who was always evasive about the autobiographical role of the author (see his essay “What is an Author”, in *Aesthetics* 1998: 205-224), and who agreed with Nietzsche’s notion that in any search of an origin, the conclusion must be that there is no origin behind morals or truth or knowledge in general and that anyone “[e]xamining the history of reason” will learn “that it was born in an altogether “reasonable” fashion – from chance” (Foucault 1998:371).

<sup>19</sup> See *Chapter one*, footnote 17.

<sup>20</sup> Derrida claims that, “language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness, brought back to its own finitude at the very moment when its limits seem to disappear ...” (Cahoone 1996:337).

<sup>21</sup> These three images (cloud series) were exhibited as an independent triptych during a group exhibition in 2000 (*Arts Alive*, Pretoria). Because of the quite severe damage

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inflicted on the initial image of clouds (the canvases were 'processed', i.e. scratched, folded, bent, cracked, retouched etc. before finally varnished and re-stretched), the title at the time indicated a body (corpus) of three works of damned (rejected - in the sense that they were so badly damaged, abused), paintings.

<sup>22</sup> Here an element of historical consciousness can be seen as part of postmodernism's ambivalence as identified by Linda Hutcheon who believes that postmodernism's paradoxical or contradictory nature is lodged in being identified with "the age of now, of the present" on the one hand, while on the other hand possessing also "a historical consciousness mixed with an ironic sense of critical distance" (1991:201). As such Hutcheon maintains that postmodernism "is always a *critical reworking*, never a nostalgic "return". Herein lies the governing role of irony in postmodernism" (my italics) (1991:4).

<sup>23</sup> This has been refuted as misunderstanding, as "the genuine alchemists were not in pursuit of worldly wealth or honours. Their real object was the perfection, or, at least the improvement of man" (Waite 1970:11).

<sup>24</sup> Baigent and Leigh point out that, "According to the *Emerald Tablet*, 'the above comes from below, and the below from above – the work of the miracle of the One'. In the more widely circulated translation, 'that which is above is like that which is below, and that which is below is like that which is above'. This premise has often been abridged to the simple formula 'As above, so below'" (1997:26).

<sup>25</sup> According to the symbolism of alchemy, silver signifies the supernatural (Waite 1970:11), whereas "Mercury is said to be the water of metals, "in which, by mutual alteration, it assumes in a convertible manner their mutations." According to the alchemist Trévisan, "Gold is simply quicksilver coagulated by the power of sulphur" (Waite 1970:129).

## CHAPTER FOUR: AND MORE

Each time this, this drawing, this stroke, this splash, this colour. Each time unique, irrepeatable: what the signs of discourse cannot be.

*Jean-Luc Nancy*<sup>4</sup>



Each level of reality is a perfectly plausible representation of the present, but it also alludes to a previous world of painting or myth.

*Charles Jencks* †

### All together now

All the paintings as discussed, each to a lesser or greater degree, can stand as single, individual, even independent paintings. This would constitute one way of looking at them, perhaps hoping to attach one particular meaning to each of them. But then we know that such isolation or efforts for absolute understanding is hardly possible. Therefore, the fact that these works link up with one another<sup>1</sup> through commonality, interference, harmony or discord, or whatever other means as already suggested or still unsaid, is another way of looking at them, another way of investigating them, unravelling them, in short, another interpretation. There is obviously a constant discourse within the collection of these works as put forward for the exhibition. Furthermore, the different series associate with each other in various ways. This can be seen as the intertextual activity of the works, which truly operates within the environment of deconfiguration and which, to my mind, is essential to the operative method of repetition in triggering poetic and metaphorical meaning.

These paintings (interrupted or interfered with as they already are), could be re-appreciated repeatedly, deconstructed and reconstructed in form as well as in content. Broadly speaking, the works consist of two 'groups' of paintings. Within each group there are different series. Thus, one 'group' consists of three series of seven paintings. Another group is made up of two works, each consisting of a triptych, each in turn made up of a large central panel and eight smaller panels. But as each panel could be considered an individual painting (of which a repetition will appear either within the same work or within other works within this group and/or within

works from the other group), individual paintings appear within series while all series *come together* within one, grouped exhibition. Fragmentation and unification therefore, function as co-dependents: the coming together depends on the splitting apart as much as the chaos is said to be imperative for the establishment of order.<sup>2</sup> Thus, and this is crucial, each order, each structure, each *figuration*, of whatever format for whatever interpretation, remains forever open to *de-configuration*; the process being dependent on re-petition in order to re-figure, to be re-read or re-interpreted, in short, re-vision through de-(con)figuration.

Breaking up the three seven series works and reconfiguring them, even internally at first, would imply that other meanings would be attached (extracted), outside of what would at first be noted within a configured series. By moving the visual patterns within one particular series, the content is altered. By removing paintings from one serial work, another (reduced serial) work could be structured and other (fractured) sets of series could be configured. To interchange units (pieces) from various series would continue the 'game'<sup>3</sup> of deconfiguration, but would never take it to an ultimate conclusion, as ideally, each conclusion would trigger yet more deconfigurations.<sup>4</sup>

While some serial works may seem more set in their structural ways (more formal in their syntax, if you like), others, exactly because of the way in which they were figured, lend themselves better to deconfiguration. In the end the meaning or deconfiguration of each work is not determined by a singular, final artwork (a 'masterpiece'), but by the imaginative participation of the public who receive the work. Each person confronted with the works is therefore – through the very configuration of the work – invited to participate in its re/de-configuration. Even if the separate paintings within one particular series are not physically moved/shifted, the interactivity among the paintings on a visual-conceptual level should activate a similar interactivity from an audience.

Some of these deconfigurations include the following possibilities:<sup>5</sup>

### **Series One**

To counter the back-to-front reading of the three separate series of paintings discussed in the previous chapter, we will now proceed from *Series One*. This series is identified through its mode (*modus*) of interruption (*interruptus*) and its quite literal representation of recognizable imagery.

Rather than being one long horizontal line (*flat* narrative), this work can obviously be presented as two separate series (disrupted, simultaneous multiple narrative).<sup>6</sup> The one series will now be a triptych containing the clouds and the other series a quadruple containing the four ocean pieces put together. The two series can nonetheless still be exhibited as one work, made up out of more/multiple units (strictly speaking: paintings), while configured as two separate series combined to create one work which is different (perhaps in a logical or narrative structure), from the original singular linear series. As a triptych the three cloud pieces could, for example, be placed above the four ocean pieces (fig 33, p 142), rather than being inter-dispersed as initially conceived.

Although planned as a series of interrupted images consisting of several panels or units in total, this series was initially painted as two separate, independent series as described above. If taken apart (split), the four images of ocean link up with one another on the edges closest to one another, according to a specified order. Arrows were drawn on the back of the canvases to indicate how these four paintings would 'logically' link up to form one long image in which the width (length) would be four times its



height. The three remaining cloud images, while less specifically defined, were similarly marked at the back to link up according to another specified (still horizontal) structure (fig 33, p 142).

The fact that this series could (would) be split into two separate series is therefore already suggested in the imagery itself. While it should be apparent from the outset, when exhibited as one series of seven paintings, that the series consists of two parts by means of 'iconic' imagery, the viewer should realise this either through intentional visual scrutiny, or in a less conspicuous, unconscious manner.

What is clear, despite, or rather because of the figuration of that which is the represented, even if considered as copied from nature, is the interruption between ocean *below*, and sky, *above*. This intentional figuration extracted from an observed outer reality namely nature, serves to qualify the artist's notion of optically indicating 'differing' through physically dividing the picture plane by means of a horizon line to overtly mark the distinction between what is above it and what is below. To continue the horizontal process the separate images (initially confined to the democratic square format) are placed in a long, yet interrupted, flat line. Similarly, to divide the already disrupted horizontally emphasised structure into two distinct parts in which one occupies an above and the other a below, would follow the obvious division noted when the image is first seen. The interruption of the horizontal series by means of inter-dispersed imagery from two worlds (above and below) is therefore not accidental, but specifically figured to indicate *the mode of structuring* (that of *deconfiguration*) followed by the artist.

Whether such obvious division can be read as symbolical (or metaphorical) of hierarchical oppositions, the one being set above the other, the other containing qualitatively more units than the one, or found to be binary

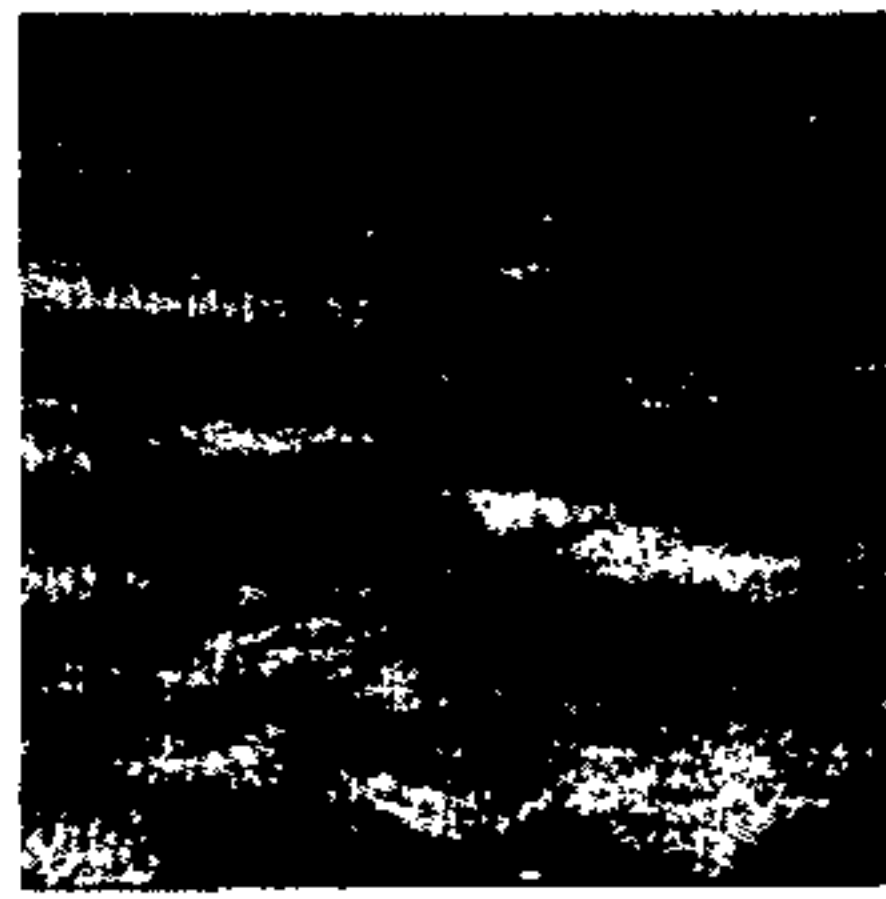
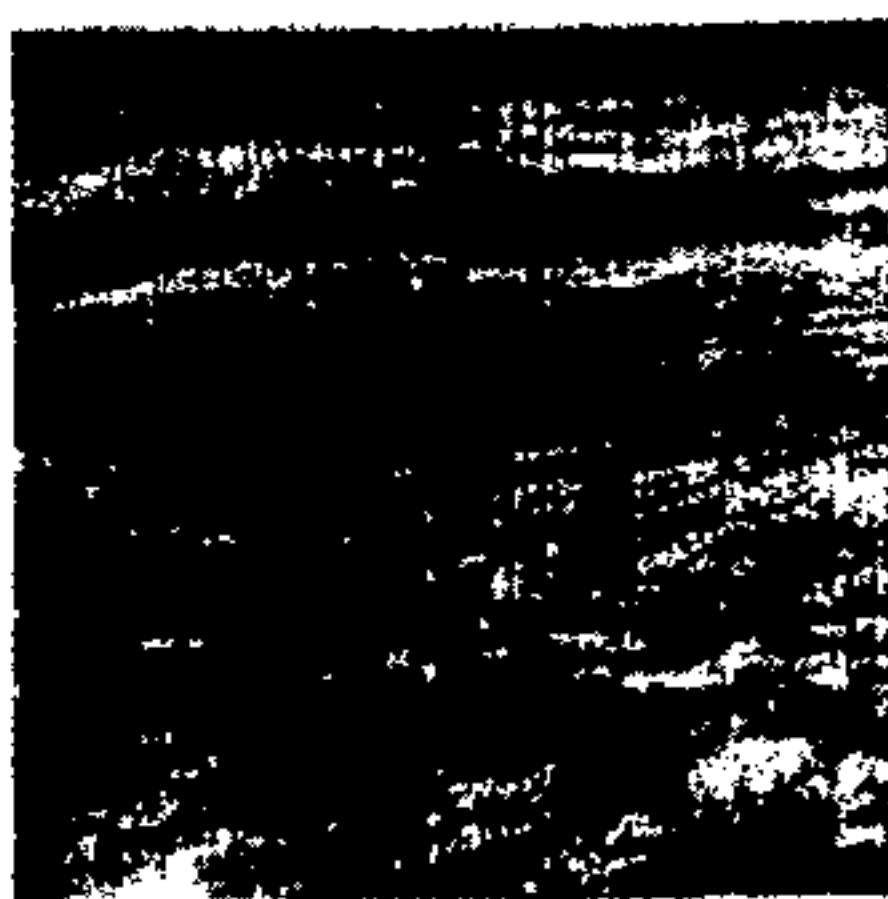
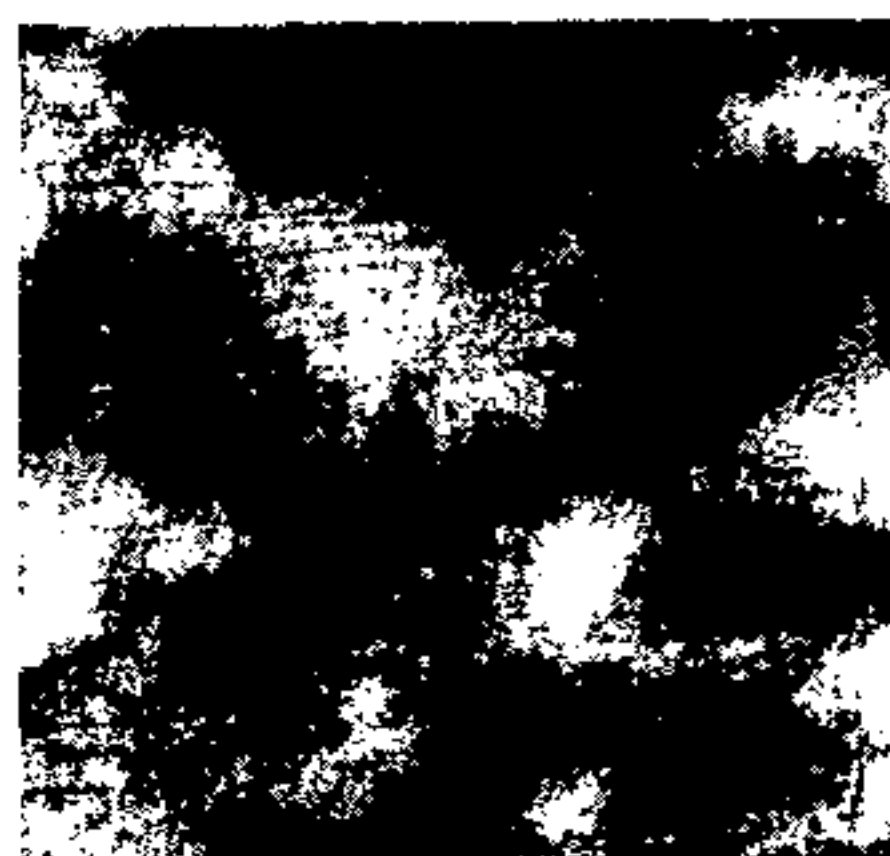
opposites like spirit and body, inside and outside, subject and object and so on, remains to be unravelled through processes of interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

There is yet another way of separating this series, a way that could also be followed in *Series Three* in particular, as well as in *Series Two*, although differently there, and that is through the *removal* of the central image namely the painting in the middle of a seven series that would consequently be flanked by either three 'pairs' or by two triplicates on either side. In this case the central painting is a cloud image. According to the 'original' configuration of the two parts (one three, the other four) to form a unity, the deconfiguration would mean that the central panel **b** shifts out, is removed, amputated, sold, or whatever. Either two smaller series of three each or even smaller units (one of four **a**'s, another of two **b**'s) will then remain. Thus either: one as **aba** and another echoing **aba** (fig 34, p 143), or alternatively **aaaa** and **bb**, or otherwise, **aa**, and then **ab** and **ba**.<sup>8</sup>

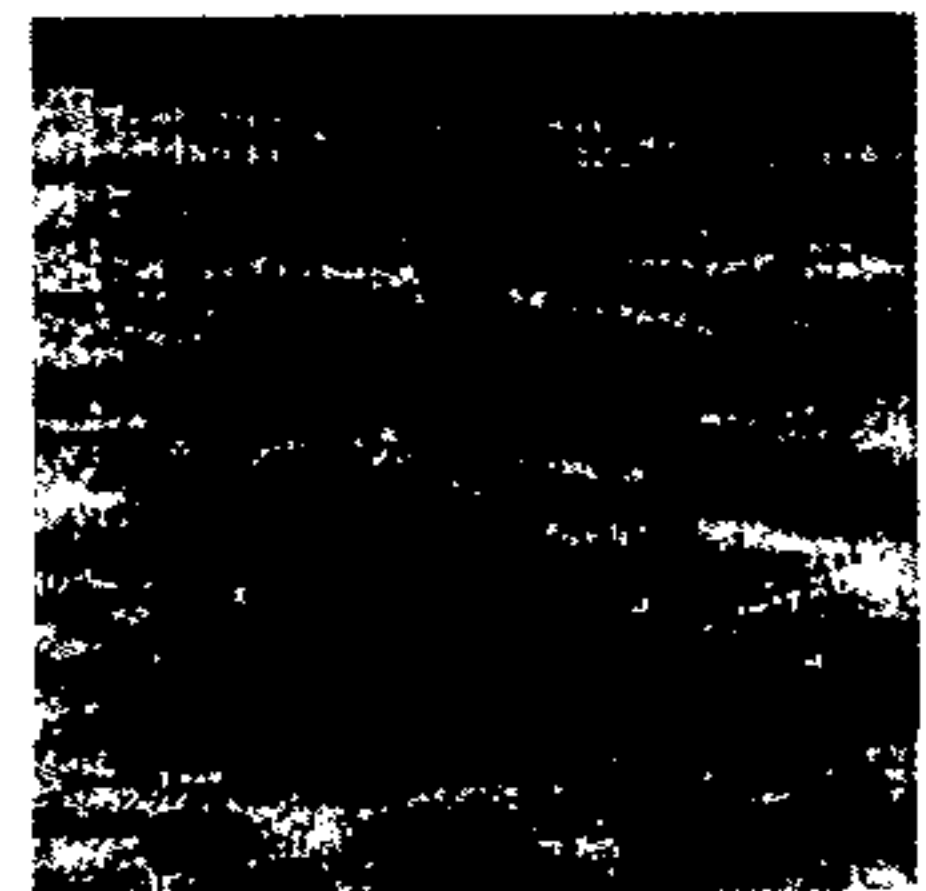
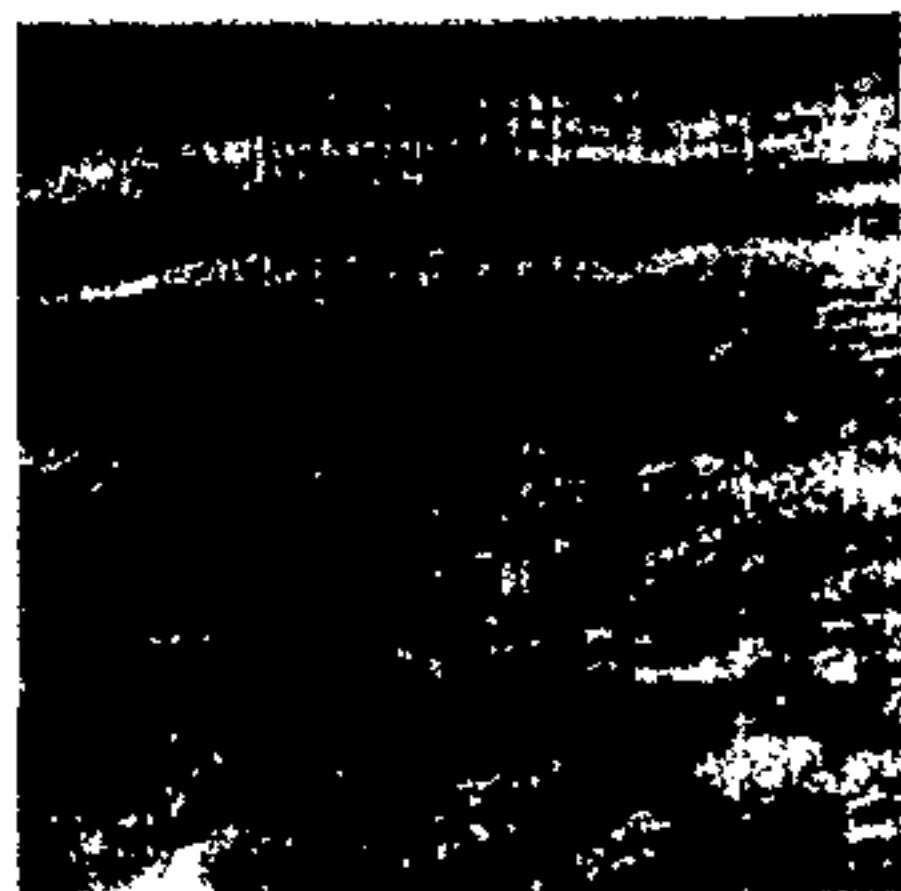
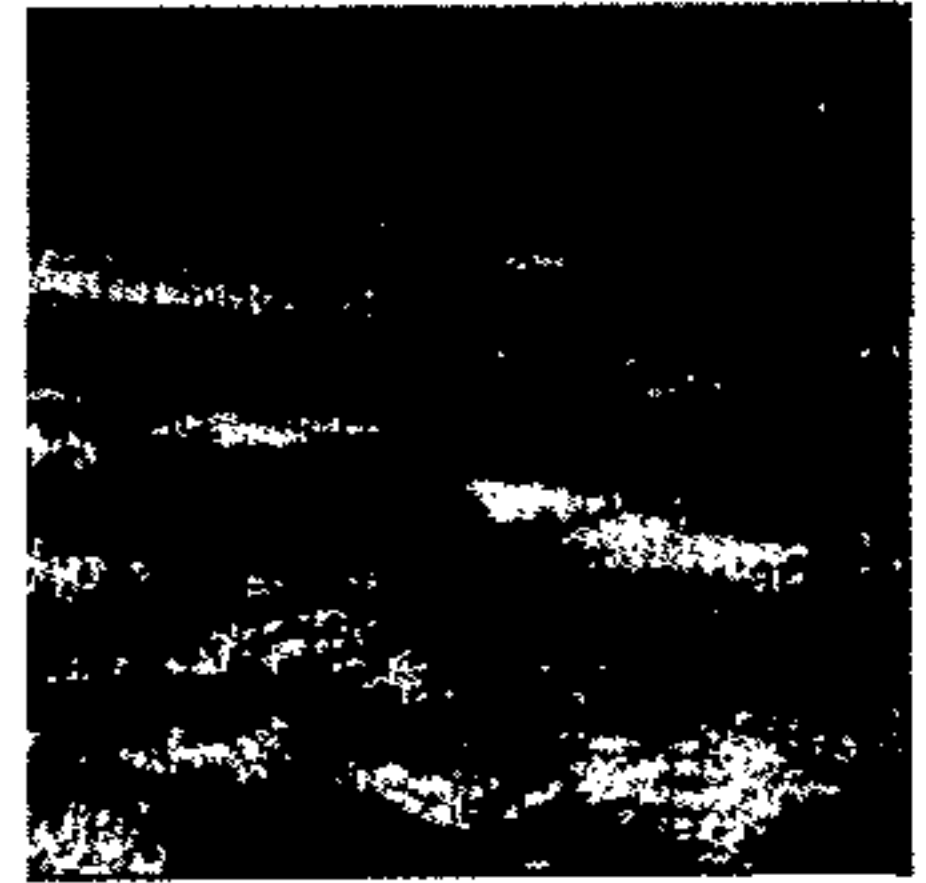
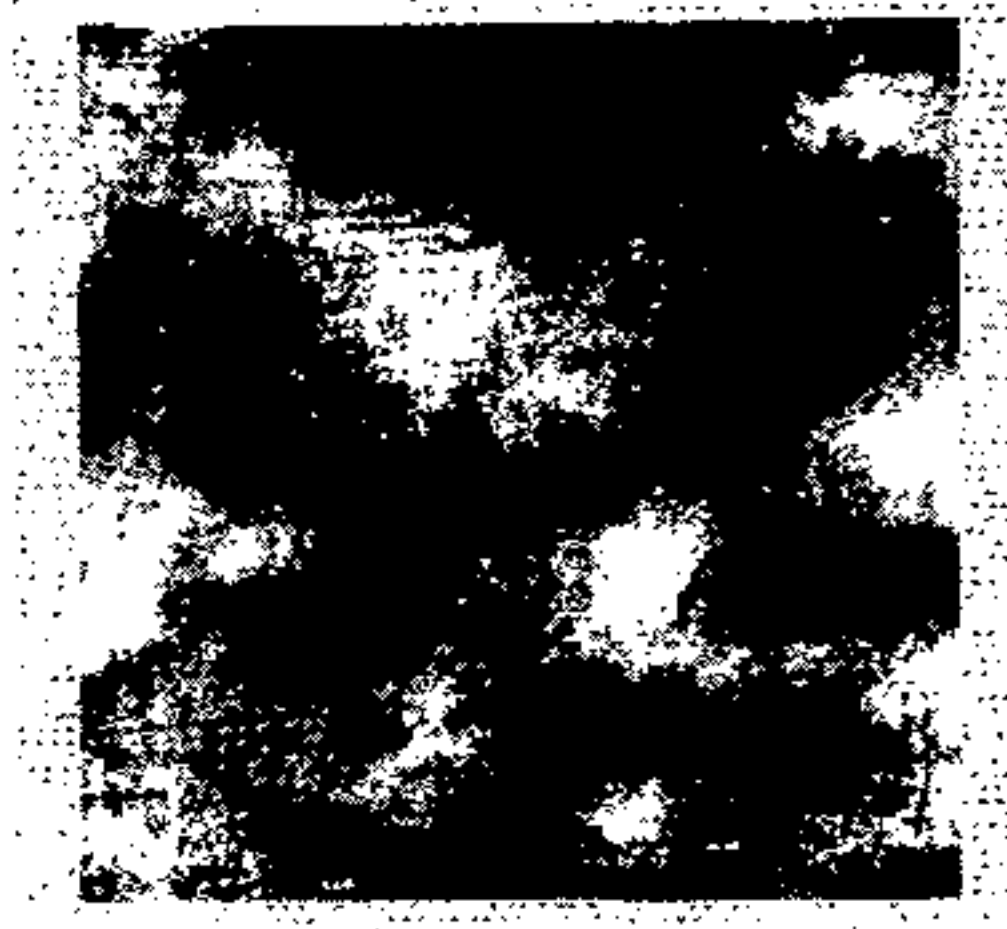
The process of deconfiguration through interruption or then fragmentation does not stop here, as paintings **aa** on either side of the central **b** could be placed next to one another (*inside edges touching*), while the other two **aa** paintings (from the farthest edges of the primary configuration), could also be placed touching sides. They could also be turned upside down and linked via their bottom edges with the bottom edges of the two 'central' **aa** paintings. This would make a four panel painting (an extended square) in which two of the **aa** paintings from the initial configuration remained in an upright position while another two were turned upside down, to form a mirroring effect below of what appears above. It is rather amusing how the total image (while a little jarred, or staggered, or displaced etc.), reminds one of a whirlpool or vortex, that is, an image in flux, in constant movement (fig 35, p 144). Moreover, the reference to above (the sky) is removed so that all that remains is that which is below. Although we might agree that in terms of represented imagery, what we are looking at is an

image of the surface of the ocean, the whirlpool or vortex is suggestive of being drawn into the surface below. The *image of the vortex* might be read as (seen as) suggesting that interpretation should be a process of looking into, indeed a process of scratching to reach below (to go deeper) than the (material/pictorial) surface. Such an image would then be a clear illustration of how the text comments on the theory.

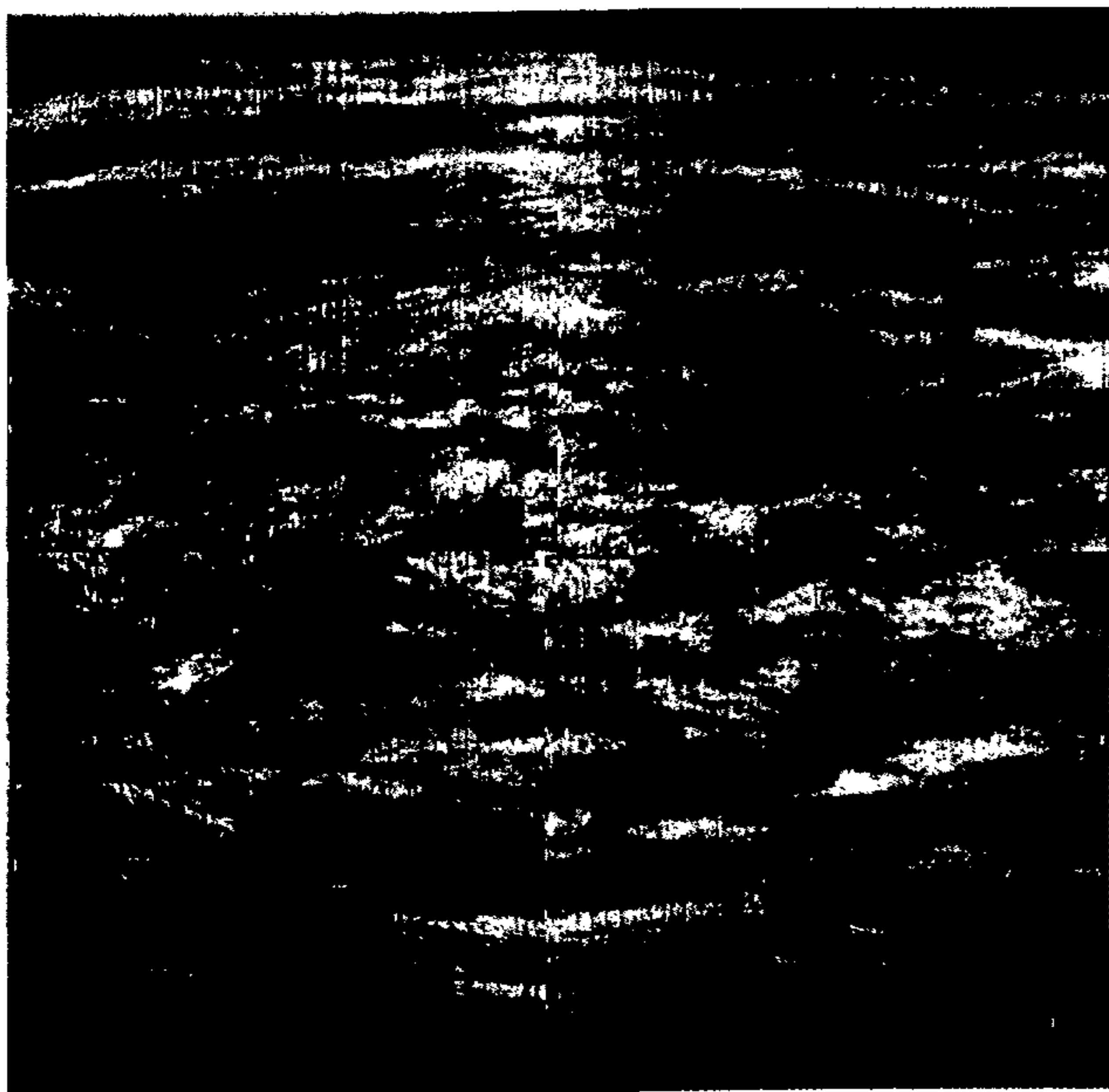




**Fig 33.** *Above and Below.*



**Fig 34.** *Horizontal Interruption.*



**Fig 35.** *Vortex*



## Series Two

The postmodern notion most easily identified in *Series Two* is *plurality/multiplicity*, a notion most often associated with the political context of democracy.<sup>9</sup> As already indicated, this series contains a central triptych and two distinct diptychs, to make up three separate groupings/series within the one seven series. Here *Series Two* shows greater flexibility than was the case with *Series One*.

Moreover, in this series the imagery is interdependent (linked) in a manner that differs, yet sometimes agrees, with other images within this series, as well as through linkages with other series. Firstly, the three central panels share one sky, while containing independent, yet similar, oceans reflecting the light from the sunset sky (fig 36, p 148). Now the central triptych shows interruption (in the ocean) as well as continuation (in the skies of the three paintings, when joined together to create one sky). Moreover, the ocean shows clear repetition in imagery. Variety is however introduced into such repetition through the 'shift' or 'slippage', as the reflection on the water moves to the left (in the left panel) and right (in the right panel) while remaining in the middle (in the central panel).

Secondly, once we move to the 'outside' of the central triptych, an obvious vertical shift takes place: in the two panels on either side of the central triptych, the horizon line moves upwards (fig 37, p 148). Whereas a fiery sky occupies some two thirds of the picture plane in the central sunset/sunrise triptych, with the rather radical upward shift of the horizon line, the situation is reversed: the image derived from water now dominates the picture plane. Also, these two panels, which can be seen as a unit split vertically down the middle, are obviously joined together at their inside edges to make an image (a close-up) of light reflected off water (fig 39, p 149). Joined like this, they create an independent diptych. Apart from the change in horizon line, a shift in colouring takes place. The dominating

reds and yellows from the central triptych become more yellow in this diptych.

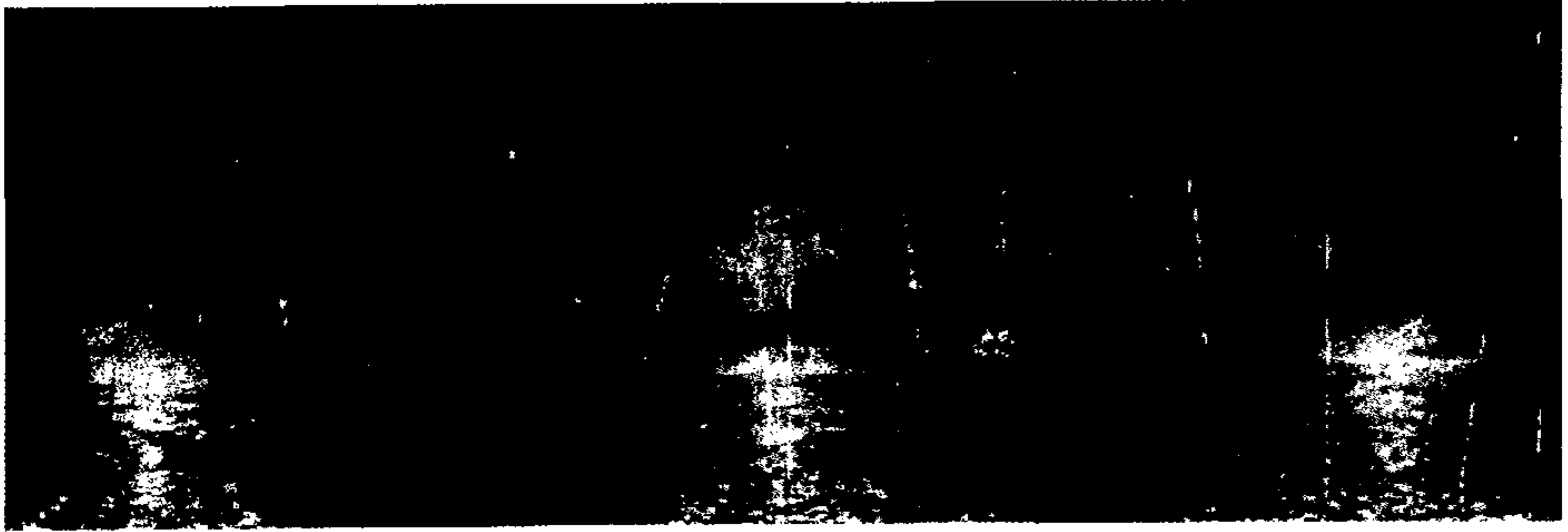
By way of its imagery these two paintings are attracted to one another via their common outside edges, which become inside edges when joined together. When these panels configure as part of the seven images of *Series Two*, they nonetheless remain apart through the central rectangular triptych. When removed from the configured series of seven, and placed tightly against one another, to be exhibited as a separate painting (diptych), these two outside paintings, despite forming one image (in which the left more or less mirrors the right and vice versa) still shows the mark of the split, the rapture right down the centre of what has now become a rectangular image, where its width is twice the length of its height.<sup>10</sup>

The two remaining paintings (in the original configuration placed at the furthest extremes of the horizontally configured series), are the most independent units, although they remain close copies (almost replicas) of one another (fig 38, p 148). The rift or division of differentiation and parallelism through simultaneous similarity features most prominently here. At the same time a process of erasure through over-painting also features strongly, as the image of reflected light is now presented through the abstraction of almost monochrome golden paintings. The most obvious distinguishing factor between these two ('outside') paintings is the surface damage or interruption. This aspect is of course true of all the paintings and while such apparent arbitrary (yet intentional) markings or scars are never the same in any one painting, they nonetheless, rather ambivalently, remain the link between these and all other paintings. For example, sometimes scratches, folds or marks are carried through from one panel to another; at other times they may abruptly discontinue to side with disruption rather than continuation.

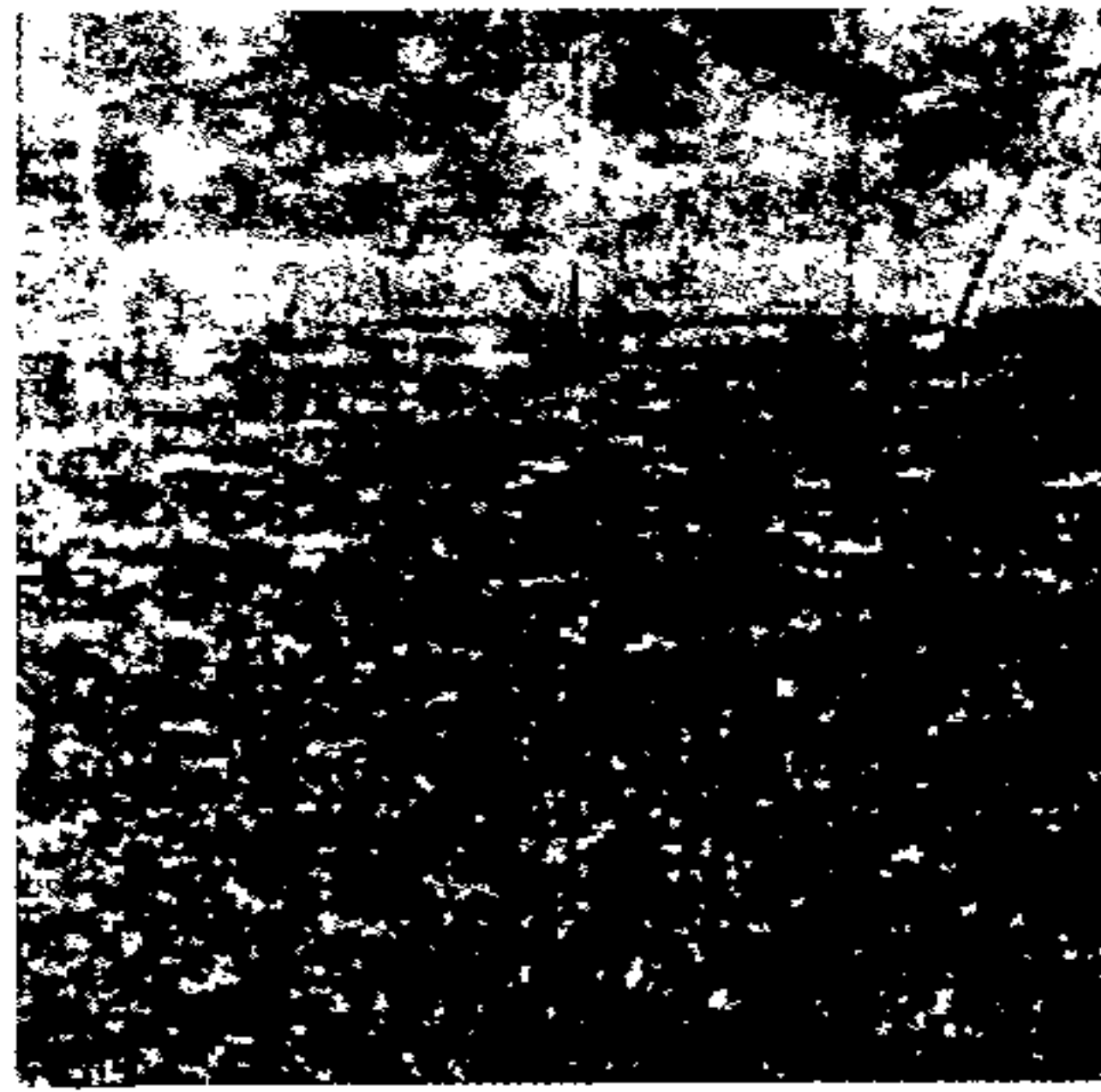
The process of abstraction as practiced by modernists is moreover evident in the seriality of these seven works. Once again the narrative element within the series does not read from left to right, but rather from the centre outward, or intertextually. Thus, whereas the central image of the sunset/sunrise (shared across the sky, though interrupted, though mirrored/reflected in the water) remains more or less 'realistic' (we can at least recognize a sunset/sunrise scene), the two panels on the outside of the central triptych, echo the textured patterns of repetitive brushstrokes as found in the works of Monet for instance, or even in Pollock's gestural marks. The allusion to the artist's personal hand (the brush stroke of the artist as sign of the authentic masterpiece) can thus be read as reminiscent of endeavours to unify content and form on the one hand, while on the other hand the artworks in this case might be seen as a parody of modernism's obsession with authenticity. Whilst these two joined paintings show a rather literal allegiance with the central sunset/sunrise triptych as being a picture of light reflected off water, the two almost monochrome golden outside panels, particularly when seen in isolation, that is each as an individual, authentic, independent art work, hardly look like a close-up of light reflected off water. Yet, this is what a narrative reading would imply, even if read from the inside out. When seen in conjunction with the other works, therefore through re-approximating it to a context from which it was originally re-moved, such abstract monochromes nonetheless retain a degree of naturalism. Read in this way then, (obliquely literal), the process of reading from the inside outwards, would obviously also become inverted to ensure that any further re-reading would be able to deconfigure endlessly.

Moreover, as should be obvious from this section, configurations and intertextual readings of this particular series would appear far more varied than was the case in *Series One* where variations of imagery and colour were more limited. This point supports the notion of multiplicity/plurality as expressed through repetition.





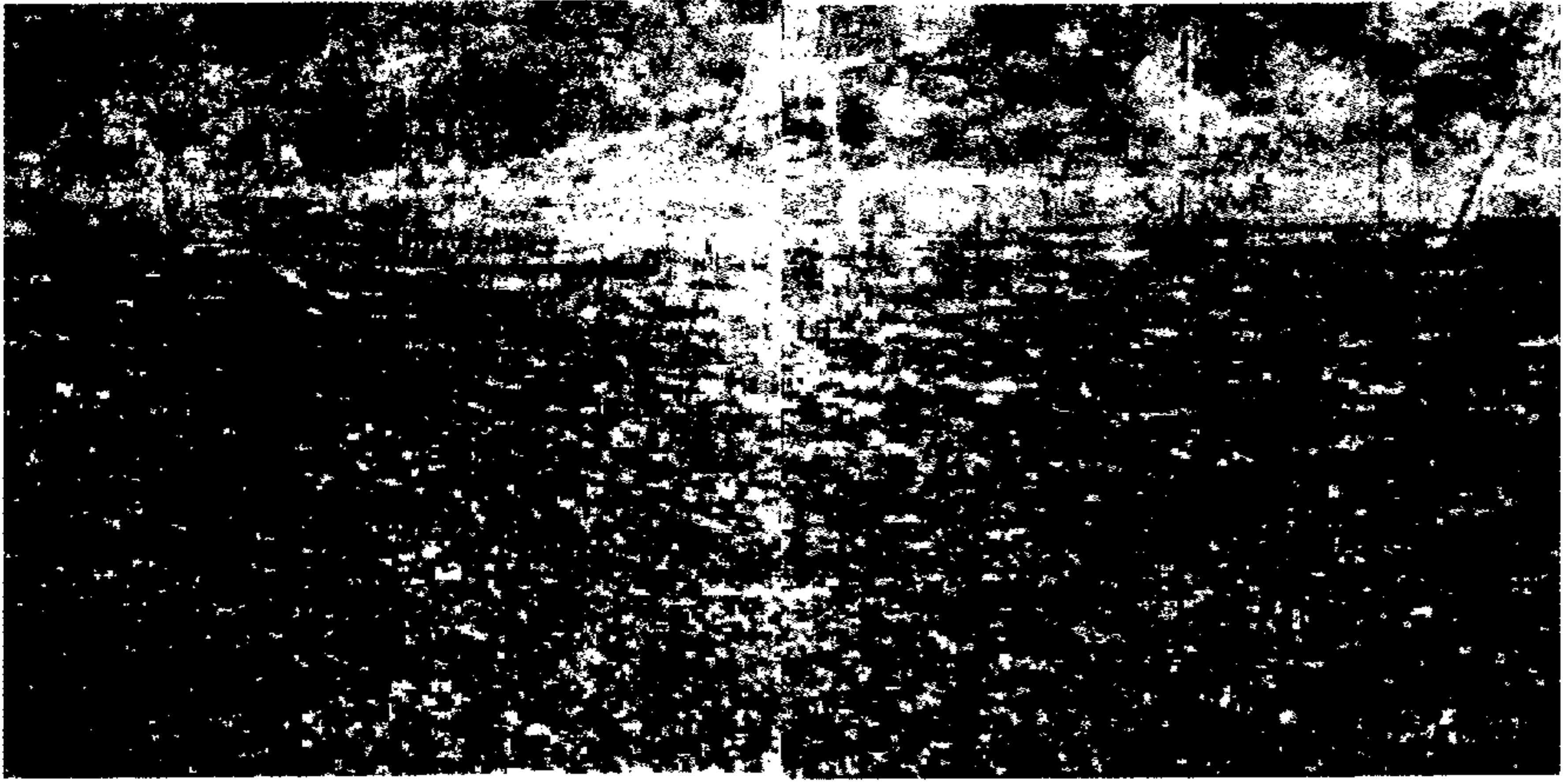
**Fig 36.** *One Sky Three Seas.*



**Fig 37.** *The Mirroring: Imminent Split.*



**Fig 38.** *Abstract: Separation.*



**Fig 39.** *Central Reflection.*



**Fig 40.** *Authentic Single.*

### Series Three

*Series Three* takes as its theme light and darkness (*Black and White Only*), the centre from which it extends, or towards which it moves, and how the process of light to dark/dark to light can be seen as a process of mirroring. Again, a number of 'themes' are identified within one overarching aspect. In the written text this series already links up with *Chapter Two*, where the theme of death is noted as part of *The painting in the mirror*. More information concerning the centre or decentring as a postmodernist notion can also be found in *Chapter Three*.

The process of deconfiguration continues in the structuring of this series, this time consisting of one central painting and three diptychs, which are copies of one another, though not exact replicas.<sup>11</sup> Reconfigured (according to a scheme of couplets), we immediately have three series and a single to make up the total of four (figures), signifying once more the square format used to imply centrality as a point of origin. Although the images here are tonal variations of the one central image, it can be said that four pictures (as much as four series – although the singular central image must then be seen as a series!) appear. However, no final formal configuration of all four reconfigured works, when put together, will, in this case, configure as a collective square. At the same time, if anything is to be removed from the series of seven, it would be the odd one out, the central (significant original) panel or unit, as was the case with *Series One*. This 'forced removal' of the 'centre' suggests an obvious commonality between *Series One* and *Series Three*. Not only does *Series One* link up with *Series Three* by means of pictorial association, but also through the formal configuration within the series.

As a deconfiguration the group can be exhibited in triangular form, in which case it will obviously signify a hierarchy of form/origin. To realise this, the gap or separation between associated couples will also be affected. The central image **a** will be placed at the top. The two **b**'s will follow below (a gap of one panel placed between them), while the two **c**'s



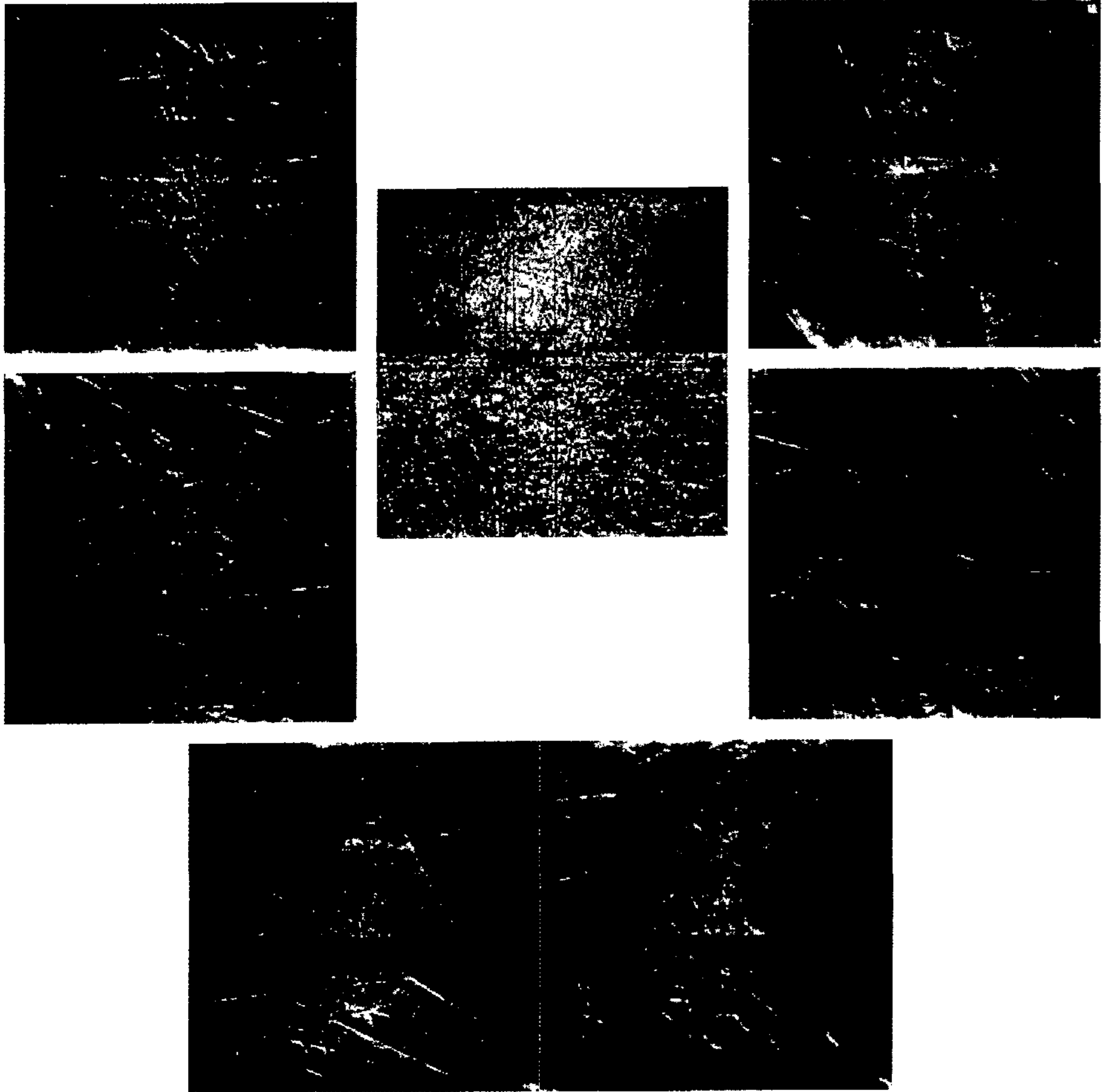
flanked by the two **d**'s (each time with a gap of a panel placed between them), will form the base of the pyramid (fig 41, p 152). Alternatively, the visual format could be switched to form a column when the two **c**'s are separated from the two **d**'s when they end up right at the bottom. Within such vertical deconfigurations works could also be switched. For example, **d** and **c** as cross referents or flipped upside down and the two **c**'s upside down linked with the two bottom **d**'s the right way up (fig 42, p 153).

*Series Three* then also links up with *Series Two* in the visual suggestion (of narrative form) and being read from the inside outwards and/or the other way around. This reading is furthermore supported by the use (or absence) of colour in the units. Firstly, these paintings are monochromatic, simple black-and-white paintings; secondly they are darkened at the edges, as individual works as well as segments within a complete series. Once again, one cannot miss the links between these series. This time reference is made to *Series One*, which is affiliated particularly with the 'water panels' where the images also darken towards their outside edges, and is only read as such in the complete series of seven paintings or as a sub-series of four water paintings.

In the case of *Series Three* the darkening is more severe. The further we move away from the centre the darker it becomes. Moreover, the series is dominated by its darkness. There are simply more dark paintings than light ones. A murky varnish applied to the uppermost surface of the paintings assists such radical darkening. One can imagine that during a clean-up process (a process of erasing that which veils the image), the murky varnish would be stripped first and, if the process continues, one would possibly arrive at a white canvas.<sup>12</sup>

Within *Series Three* the black and white once again serves as a reminder of binaries or of the duality of light and darkness, of above and below, ebb and flow, birth and death, or even in the duality between subject and object or of the unconscious and the conscious.<sup>13</sup>





**Fig 42.** *Divide Unite.*



If we are to approach a text, it must have an edge.

*Jacques Derrida* <sup>v</sup>

### The Two Large Triptychs

The two large triptychs are each made up of nine paintings; a larger central painting, which departs from the square unitary format used in the other three series, flanked by two quadruples, each made up of four square paintings following the square format of the three seven series. The three series of seven therefore makes up a collective triptych, while the two large paintings make up two more triptychs, resulting in three triptychs of which two follow one particular configuration or format, while the third (or the first) is made up of three series of seven paintings each. The large triptychs address the artistic pre-occupation with containment (framing) more particularly than was the case in any of the other series.

### ***The First Large Triptych***

In the first triptych, originally titled *The Golden Age of Grand Illusion*,<sup>14</sup> the central, rectangular canvas appears on a stretcher frame (hidden from the eyes of the spectator), while it is flanked, i.e. framed on two sides (its edges), by four paintings on either side. The image in the central painting is also the image that is central to the whole exhibition, namely that of sky and ocean – itself an image obviously divided into two parts. On the one side of this 'unframed' image of sky and ocean, is a group of four paintings of the sky, while on the other side a quadruplet of square paintings depicts the ocean. Any resemblance or reference to either sky or ocean is however obviated only by reference to the central panel. Each panel, each separate painting within a group of four flanking the central (or master) painting, would in other words appear rather abstract when separated from the core

image with which it is figured. This clearly suggests the loss of meaning of any particular fragment when parted from its original setting or reference. Even a symbol (extracted) abstracted in this way is likely to turn into something meaningless, unless it is brought once again into proximity with another context.<sup>15</sup>

The framing of each separate square painting furthermore supports this tendency towards fragmentation or forced separation. Not only is the sky separate from the ocean in the central image, but the sky is broken up into four (repetitive) pieces; the same happens to the ocean, but sky and ocean are clearly interrupted by the central painting appearing *between* the two quadruplets. Moreover, while the framing of the artwork may traditionally be thought of as lending a 'finishing touch' to the artwork, a sign of finitude, the framing here constitutes an ultimate interference. The quadruple square sky paintings are grouped together and framed together to make up one third of the triptych, yet each square sky painting is also framed individually within the framed group to encompass one quarter of the third of the triptych. The same applies to the four ocean paintings: each one is framed individually and also framed as one painting. The whole exercise of framing the framed seems like a desperate attempt to contain the dissipation of the centre, the core, or the master image.<sup>16</sup>

Does it really matter then, whether the centre remains central, whether the artwork is a 'masterpiece' to be classified among the greats? Should it be seen as part of the fine art tradition, or is each separated piece – even if it appears as a square piece of golden painted canvas,<sup>17</sup> fit for use by any interior decorator, to be appreciated within whatever context it could fit into? Is it therefore not the context rather than the artwork that gives it meaning?

Rather than presenting the viewer with any readymade answers, the artwork, whether as collective or as a singular entity, raises questions by engaging in the very theories triggered by the art works.<sup>18</sup>

### ***The Second Large Triptych***

In *The Second Large Triptych* the debate continues, but what seemed to have been a logical order in *The First Large Triptych*, is upset within *The Second Large Triptych*. The participants (separate, singular square paintings) in the two quadruplet paintings flanking the central painting are now mingled: sky and ocean (or its painted fragments) appear together within one quadruplet. Each panel of four now contains two sky and two ocean paintings. What appears as a separate 'above and below' in the central painting, are now mingled with the side panels. Not that it should make any difference which side is depicted as above and which as below (which is top and which is bottom) when these pieces are presented as fragments or pieces copied from an original, central, master work. Even as repeated pieces belonging to a configured work, they can be rearranged (mingled) to participate in the figuration of a particular (deconfigured) work.

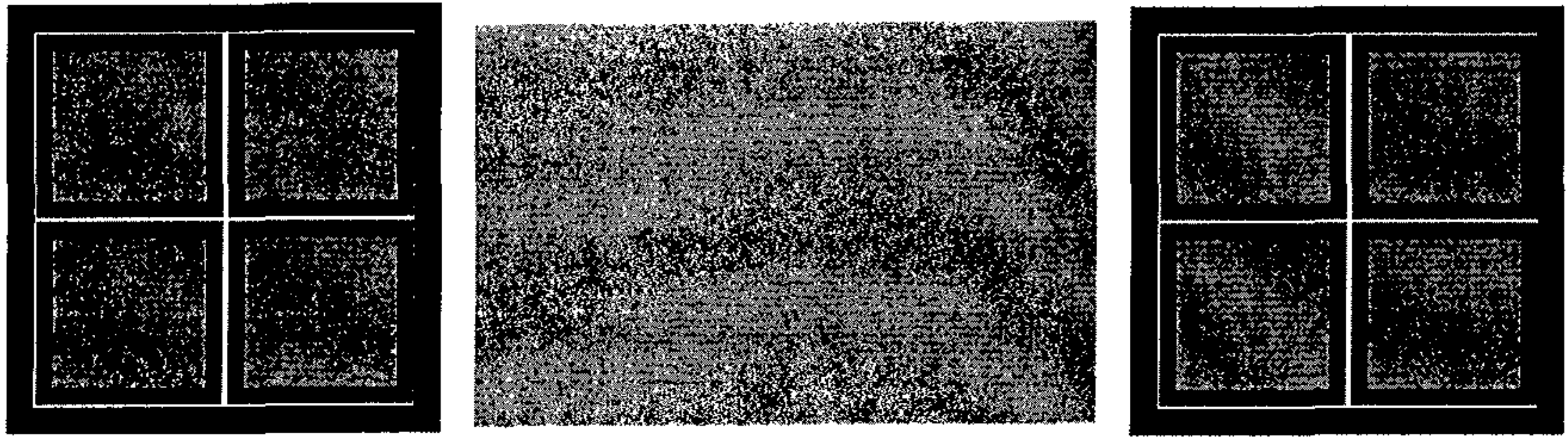
The colour changes from monochromatic gold to monochromatic silver. There could be symbolic signification in this, particularly when interpreted from within a context of alchemy. Alchemists were obsessed with the putrefaction of gold. Arthur Waite notes how the alchemist Morien argued that, "Those who assert that common gold is not the matter are in error. Gold is one. No other substance under heaven can compare with it. Gold is the noble seed of our art. Yet it is dead. It needs to be unloosed, and must go to water" (1970:28-29). At the same time silver is identified with mercury – mercury being the metal associated with 'swiftness of mind'. Furthermore, Jung draws attention to the influence of alchemy on Jacob Böhme's mysticism where Böhme speaks of Mercurius being the active



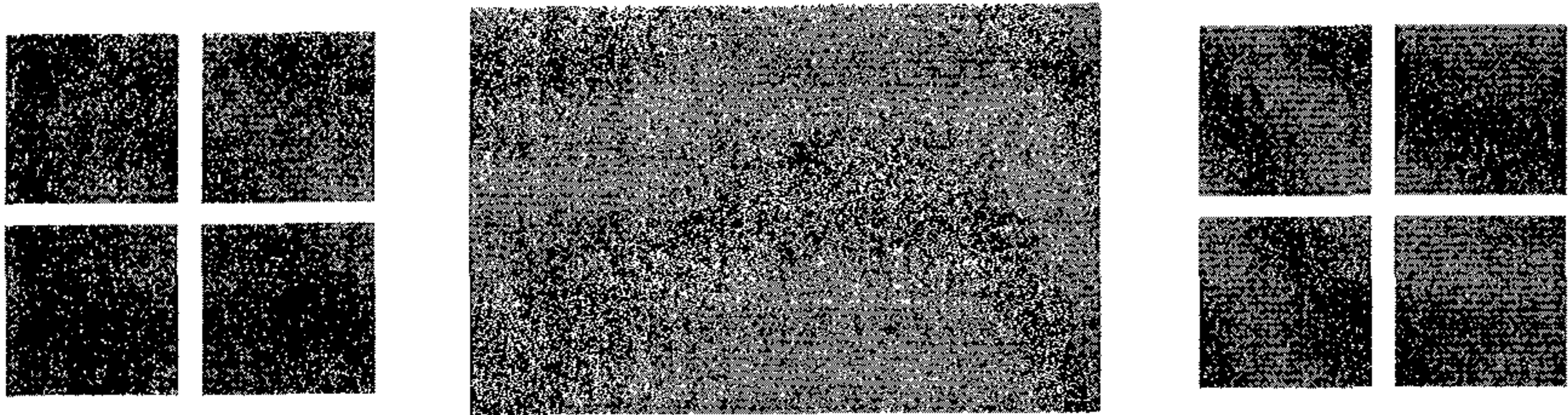
agent in the birth of the "golden child" (Jung 1974:240). Such conjectures remain speculative if not confusing, yet are integral to deconfigurations in its reliance on the chaotic in the creative process. In the words of Lao-tzu: "The meaning that you can think of is not the meaning" (Jung 1996: 102).

The process of framing in this triptych is a reversed configuration of the framing process in *The First Large Triptych*. The central panel, containing the referent or the 'master copy', is now the framed artwork while the side panels are not. This allows for these side panels, these peripherals, uninhibited as they now appear and devoid of the imprisoning of the tradition of demarcating the edge with the frame to interact freely with other images from other series. Even so, in a move, which is a strategy to revenge the referent, the unframed units, which until now were limited to bracketing (framing only the horizontal sides), may want to shift all around the edges of the central panel.

The answer to configuring these emancipated units, must be that they could be set up to appear figured (or deconfigured) as works contextualised (or decontextualised) according to the will and whim of the spectator. Or at least, the separate paintings as active participants in the figuration of a collective (serial) artwork would signify the participation of the viewer/spectator. What these paintings may have originally meant and how they were eventually understood, came into being through deconfiguration: explicit and implied meaning; meaning constructed and meaning construed. The artwork hoping to force images or concepts or theories or intentions onto the viewer or spectator or receiver, would simply be a dead end. All the artwork can hope to do is to suggest possible innuendos, probable scenarios of seductions while it would remain up to the spectator not to necessarily complete but to indeed continue the process of repeatedly moving/shifting one image, one concept, one theory over or under or within or without another image or concept or theory or context.



**Fig 43.** *The Two Large Triptychs.*





### Regenerative Deconfigurations

Finally, true (deep) deconfiguration occurs when the process of switching, interchange and the like invades the various works to figure other series, not limited by number (three x seven) or (four and one and four), content (sky or ocean) or colour or tone – all of which remain rather literal, hoping to find an understanding in the conscious structuring of meaning. Moreover, it is in the (unconscious ritual of) repetitive switching between one and the other, displacements and interruptions, wear and tear, use and abuse, vision and revision that the true value of repetition as an – dare I say – absolute necessity manifests itself as a regenerative operation. Thus the work, even the materialised image depicted in the work, in turn manifests the constant need for transformation – each repetition, by virtue of the fact that shifts occur during such repetition, shifts that approximates the repeated with an other repeated, each such repetition manifests change (however slight), not for the sake of change, but due to its deconfiguration.

According to Erich Neumann “The creative process is generation and birth as well as transformation and rebirth,” agreeing with the Chinese saying: “Transformation is the creation of creating” (1974: 202).

We need to consider also whether such transformation activates deconfiguration and ultimately whether deconfiguration concerns the revelations of metaphor or whether it does not indeed trigger the return to narrative meaning through allegory, rather than through mere metaphor. To obtain clarity on the issue of allegory, art historian Fred Orton (1994: 114) quotes Edwin Honig: “The double purpose of *making* a reality and making it *mean* something is peculiar to allegory and its directive language.” Honig notes that rather than imitating an already available reality, “allegory gives new dimension to things of everyday acceptance,



thereby converting the commonplace into purposeful forms". Honig concludes:

And so one may say that the language of allegory makes relationships significant by extending the original identities of which they are composed with as many clusters of meaning as the traffic of the dominant idea will bear. In this way allegory as an extended trope may include functions of all the other tropes – metaphor, irony, metonymy, and synecdoche. (Orton 1994:114)

Orton adds that although "... allegory can be regarded as a twice-told tale: it other speaks a pre-text, an anterior narrative or visual image", and that while "The allegorical mode never aims to hide its lack of invention, especially with regard to its pre-text or pre-texts", he nonetheless insists that "The pre-text in allegory is not just a good idea taken, borrowed or quoted from some other place; it's not just an appropriated resource; it is, in a way, the original truth or meaning. Allegory takes over a truth or a meaning and adds to it not to replace it but to 'supplement' it" (1994:116-17). According to Orton "Understanding allegory as a special kind of appropriation of a pre-text, supplementing it while constructing itself as another text, enables us to understand allegory as a mode of critical commentary or critical reading of a text" (1994:117). He goes on to show that allegory links within traditional rhetoric with metaphor in that it can be described as "a metaphor introduced into a continuous series, thus defining allegory as a kind of "extended metaphor" (Orton:117). Having briefly explained the difference between *trope* ("a play on single words") and *figure* ("[a play on] whole groups of words, or sentences, and even paragraphs") Orton, once more taking his lead from Honig, thus believes:

Allegory 'does not exhibit devices or hammer away at its intentions ... it beguiles the reader with a continuous interplay between subject and sense', image and meaning. It is the most self-reflexive and critically self-conscious of modes and its aim is to make its reader correspondingly self-conscious. The locus of meaning of any allegory is the reader (Orton:117).

To return to the actual paintings, and to the exhibition as a whole. As much as each painting within a given series can be detached to be read as (a fragmentary/metaphorical) an independent picture or painting or work of art, or text or document or reflection, all the series can be read together as one whole (allegorical) work. The symbolical implication can of course be described also in archetypal terms as put forward by Jung. The imagery as a whole then reflects a cosmos constituting the more definitive material world on the one side, as well as the metaphysical, immaterial substance on the other. Both clouds and water though, as primary imagery within each separate painting, but also as repetitive overall theme, will from a symbolical point of view favour the indefinite, the imaginary, even the Romantic notion of a spiritual realm over the basic material form constituted by the work of art or painting. It has to be said then, that the spiritual or subconscious or indefinite, depends on the material form for it to be manifest. To be read it needs a well-defined or structured material body.

What may at first appear as binary opposites are therefore from the very beginning co-dependent elements of one process, two sides of the same coin, so to speak. The interchange works both ways. As much as imagery may be read from its literal point of view from left to right, right to left, or from the outside inwards or from the inside outwards, as much as what is above is also below and vice versa, the material image (the picture) depends on the imagination of its maker to come into being. In like manner the imaginary needs the material image in order for it to appear, to configure, to manifest.

It is not without a touch of irony then that one can come to realise – as I did in the course of this research work – that deconfiguration cannot be forced, but comes into being at best when created spontaneously. Whether the artwork can therefore be said to develop a life of its own, such livelihood depends on maker and receiver alike. Whatever names or

phrases or quotations we would like to attach to it, configuration and its counter-balance (like the conscious and the unconscious) are both always there. Both, together... And more.

If the maker depends on an existing reality from which extraction or appropriation were to take place, then the viewer, interpreter, critic or whoever wishes to interpret or find meaning in the works, needs to participate in the process of the deconfiguration of configuration. Although this process may seem fragmentary, interrupted, on its very surface (varnish) structure to be incessant even in its *usure*, the endless process of making will continue to be infinite and/or unfathomable for those engaged in the process of making (creating/producing) and re-making (re-creating/re-producing). What the viewer 'sees' in the clouds, what the reader 'reads' in the waters, does not complete or conclude the (art) work, but follows in the process concerned with what the artwork forever becomes. It is in this 'forever becoming', rather than its mere being, that deconfiguration reveals itself in the picture of water (ocean) and clouds (sky): indefinite light (transfused through a multiplicity of oblique angles), reflected nonetheless in (on/off) water forever moving/shifting/changing, endlessly redefining (defying its previous) borders (shores).



## Endnotes: Chapter Four

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<sup>4</sup> Chang 1999: 195.

\* Quoted in Connor 1995: 89.

<sup>1</sup> These works also link up with other paintings I had painted even before I started on this 'project', whether such paintings were of sea and sky or whether they were landscapes depicting deserts. The fact is, this collection of paintings (this body/corpus) is a fragment of a greater body of works (oeuvre/opus), as much as separate paintings within this collection link up with one another.

<sup>2</sup> The Bible describes the creation as a process where God created from chaos. It reads: "When God began creating the heavens and the earth, the earth was at first a shapeless, chaotic mass, with the Spirit of God brooding over the dark vapours" (*The Living Bible*. Genesis 1:1). Jung notes that for the alchemists chaos referred to "the *massa* or material *informis* or *confusa* which contained the divine seeds of life ever since creation" (1974:218) and how "if the life-mass is to be transformed a *circumambulatio* is necessary, i.e., exclusive concentration on the centre, the place of creative change" (1974:219). For the alchemists the aspect of chaos was moreover identified with darkness and "The Cloud of Unknowing". Following on the fact that "In the language of antiquity the cloud also had a double meaning, being sometimes compared to confusion or unconsciousness" (Von Franz 1991:208), it is argued that this "darker and confused state" is necessary as it is "the beginning of alchemical work" (Von Franz 1991:208).

<sup>3</sup> Some philosophers such as Paul Feyerabend and Richard Rorty believe that "an optical language game ... figures the world according to its own temporarily favoured models or metaphors" (Norris 1994:7), while others such as Francois Lyotard, following on Ludwig Wittgenstein, stress "the open multiplicity of language games, [as] each disposing of its immanent criteria and none having the right to adjudicate over any other" (Norris 1994:12).

<sup>4</sup> Not reaching any conclusions, or not searching for any understandings, even in the process of interpretation, could certainly lead to what has been referred to as "a Quinean predicament of radical uncertainty" (Norris 1994:17) and to what has been critically called a relativist attitude, an approach closely identified with deconstruction and postmodernism (Norris 1994:18). "And so it comes about – as Putman remarks – that the relativist in fact winds up by tacitly denying the intelligibility of any language but his or her own" (Norris 1994:19).

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<sup>5</sup> It should not be overlooked that most of these alleged 'interpretations' put forward by myself, rely on either postmodern theories or very often on Jungian psychology as well as alchemical references. It is not my intention to consciously draw attention to either similarities or differences between these two approaches; they are simply fields of personal interest that I was researching while in the process of making the paintings. These 'interpretations' are not as comments but rather as an extension of a process of conversation, of communication; moreover it should not be read as my forcing authoritarian content upon the reader.

<sup>6</sup> It remains inaccurate to describe these works as narratives, as the images do not seem to be successive of one another. One image does not follow on another to unfold, step-by-step, frame-by-frame, the tale told or the mystery solved. Rather, as mentioned in *Chapter (part) Three (3)*, the works can be read in any direction. It would therefore be a better idea to read the works as systems or structures as defined by Sturrock who notes that "A system, like a structure, is formed of elements which coexist; it cannot be formed of elements which are successive"(1993:6). While Sturrock's comment may come from a structuralist linguistic perspective, it remains important to note that the works under discussion, while functioning within a set structure or system rather than as a set narrative, are nonetheless so structured to counter the very need for structuring. Rather than simply following structuralism, it parodies structuring.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this aspect see *Series Three*, fig 27-28, p 110-111 and endnotes 9 and 11, p 130-131.

<sup>8</sup> It would be ignorant to overlook the similarity of such visual structuring with rhyming structures found in formal poetry. This is unfortunately not the time, nor the place to bring *poesis* into the picture. It serves here only to suggest yet another avenue of interpretation, even as Gombrich suggests of the poetic itself: "Similes, metaphors and the stuff of poetry no less than myth testify to the powers of the creative mind to create and dissolve new classifications" (1973:313), or as Ricoeur is said to have believed (following Roman Jakobson) "that the "poetic function" of language does not so much "obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous"" (Dallmayr 1984:159).

<sup>9</sup> Multiplicity however functions within a far broader context than politics. In fact, it can be considered a spin-off of fragmentation, a notion that we today ascribe unconditionally to modernism as can be found in what is popularly identified with Cubism – the multiple viewpoint. Moreover, in the psychology of Lacan the subject "became just a locus of multiple shifting and transient subject-positions" (Norris 1994:3). It is within this context



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that postmodernism attempts to re-evaluate – at times even through parody – the meaning of multiplicity within a contemporary environment.

<sup>10</sup> Here I must confess to being 'accidentally' influenced by a visual document used as reference for the original painting. The painting was based on a 'composited' or 'joined' photograph consisting of two images photographed as separate side-by-side frames. Already when I joined the two photographs they did not 'fit perfectly' next to one another, mainly because the sea constantly moves (shifts) and when you capture one frame – even now! – to follow on to another – even immediately after – the waves had already moved/changed/shifted, the light already changed. Still, I joined the photographs together and in most cases ignored the 'shift' caused through joining.

During an early phase of what I came to call the painting project, i.e. the practical part of this MVA study, I in fact painted an image of a reflection on water split in half. In this case the image was rather abstract such as the two paintings flanking the sunset/sunrise triptych. Only, the split that now remains eminent through two separate units being joined together was actually painted in on one square canvas.

<sup>11</sup> The units were indeed painted as couples, where I would literally work interchangeably on two paintings at a time, thus trying to copy one from the other, switching between the two units all the time. During the initial stages the imagery in the coupled units (paintings) remained quite close to one another. As the process of 'processing' (the wear-and-tear 'damage' done to the paintings) wore on, scratches, folds and other markings as well as repetitive layers of murky varnishing caused the images to vary from one another. At this stage I still tried to control the tonality of the images, that is, I tried to keep them together as couples in terms of tonal value while realising that the surface 'damage-and-repair' would render 'accidental' variety to the imagery.

<sup>12</sup> This implication of stripping the dark away or adding more darkness would result in obvious reference to Kasimir Malevich's Suprematist canvases of either *White on White* (fig 12, p 85) or his *Black Square* (fig 11, p 85). Jasper John's early white canvases (inspired by a process of 'erasure') already done during the late 1950's and Ad Reinhardt's *Abstract Painting No 9* (fig 18, p 86) form part of a postmodernist revival of Malevich's 'originals'. Despite *Series Three* having an image inscribed on the canvas rather than being abstract, the square format of the paintings of Malevich and Reinhardt is recalled.

<sup>13</sup> When talking about the duality between object and subject Von Franz refers back to the dark side (*nigrido*) or the destructive aspect of the unconscious, which she considers essential in the process towards consciousness. She writes, "... we can say that this dark



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world underneath is the unconscious because it is the unknown; it is that which I cannot penetrate with my mind and say I know what it is. The "unconscious" is a concept which simply refers to that which is not clear to the consciousness". She notes how in alchemy "There [were] two aspects, two ultimate unknowns" identified as "psyche and matter". According to Von Franz's argument "By definition the unconscious is ... something psychological of which we cannot become conscious" unless it manifests in matter, which is, according to Von Franz, exactly what "creates the whole conflict between the inner and the outer" (1991:146). These two aspects, the inner and outer, the light and the dark, the unconscious and the conscious, are co-dependents. As much as the psyche needs the material for the unconscious to manifest, the material needs the psyche for creative insight. "Enlightenment can come from that dark place; that is, if we direct the ray of consciousness upon it, if we warm it up by our conscious attention, then something white comes out ... the enlightenment which comes from the unconscious" (Von Franz 1991:147).

∇ Kamuf 1991:256.

<sup>14</sup> I originally gave this title when the work was intended for an exhibition in mid 2001. (The title was jotted down at 18:05 on 2 June 2002 as a 'studio note'.) The title was derived firstly from the colouring used for the painting at the time. The second part of the title is simply a short phrase from a song by David Bowie that has stuck with me since I first heard it. It is off his album *Station to Station* where he refers rather cynically to our age as "the age of grand illusion". The first part of the title refers to one of the nodal points in history during which, according to my reckoning, another age of grand illusion existed, namely the Dutch Golden Age. It was during this time that the Dutch as part of the West, conquered parts of the world where they dominated the indigenous people they encountered. In other words, it is a direct link with our colonialist past in South Africa. The tradition of grand maritime paintings was also firmly established during this time. While the painting currently under discussion depicts an 'empty ocean' without any explicit signs of shipping, not to mention colonisation, the colour in which it is painted, namely gold, implies on the one hand the reference to a peak period (a golden age) as well as the gold mined in the colonised country.

When the painting was later exhibited at a group exhibition addressing issues of land (2001: UNISA), the title was translated into two parts of which the first was Dutch - *De Goue Eeuw* - and the second German (*Die Grösse Täuschung*), both languages of the colonisers of Africa. Despite the fact that many people would not grasp the actual meaning of the title, the intention was to have it as 'loaded' as possible, suggesting that there is more to the painting than the rather damaged image presented on its surface.

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<sup>15</sup> This is typical of a semiotic approach towards language. Umberto Eco notes that Buysens considered a word as having a specific meaning according to how that particular word related to other words within a sentence. A word taken out of context and isolated would lose all meaning (1991: 21).

<sup>16</sup> It has been said that, "aesthetics is always about the limit between the inside and the outside of the art object, and hence it is always a discourse on the frame" (Brunette and Wills 1989:103). Hence it is argued that the frame is one of the most obvious endeavours to create unity of the elements within a pictorial representation. But to even talk about a "within" part of a picture, would indicate an inside and an outside. Such a division would first be indicated (perhaps arbitrarily) by the edge of the picture. While this already constitutes "where the picture ends", a frame would emphasise the division between the created picture/painting, the reality inside the picture, and the reality in which the picture exists. "A painting exists in the world of visible objects and thus, in order to differentiate itself as "figure" from its "ground", it requires the explicit space of negotiation that the frame provides", writes Peter Brunette and David Wills (1989:105). Creating unity or order by means of a picture frame would be to add something superficial through mechanical means, particularly considering Derrida's statement: "*There is framing, but the frame does not exist*" (Brunette and Wills:100).

<sup>17</sup> One is inevitably reminded of "the fully fledged Monochrome paintings" which Yves Klein started in 1955 (Hopkins 2000:79); or it could of course be argued that the golden units here are "mottled" (as in commercial 'paint techniques') and not at all as monochrome as the works produced by Klein and Rauschenberg among others.

<sup>18</sup> It has been noted that while modernism, in becoming very self conscious, already looked at how practice and theory were linked. It is however added that, "The postmodern debate makes this interrelationship even more complex" (Connor 1995: 81). Connor tracks this so-called self-awareness in modernism to Greenberg's search for painting's 'prime characteristic' (1995:82) through Michael Fried's identification that one of the essential principles of modernism was its "absorption in itself" (Connor 1995:84) to philosopher Stanley Cavell's declaration that "Whatever painting may be about, modernist painting is about painting" (Connor 1995: 86). Connor also argues that in Derrida's writing such self absorption reaches a climax in a text like *Glas*, where theory and text become interchangeable through what is referred to in postmodern jargon as 'contamination' (1995:214-16).

Spontaneous experiences of meaning ... are relatively rare, if we disregard initiation experiences of a different structure as occur in religious ritual. For most people the question of meaning becomes the starting point for a long and hazardous night sea journey.

*Gerhard Adler*<sup>ø</sup>



## **(in)CONCLUSION:**

"To conclude, ladies and gentlemen, (hastily) I'd hate to conclude."

Conclusions are too much like Hercule Poirot calling all the suspects to the parlour, a Columbus fumbling through his notebook while mumbling about his missus to enlighten all and sundry of the dead certain preambles of current events, or of a heroin induced Sherlock turning to the doctor to reveal the elementary and obvious facts so brutally overlooked. No, any conclusion, I am afraid, might inspire in me an awe gigantic enough to flee the scene of the crime. I would rather retract than conclude. And yet, and yet...

All statements of conviction carry within themselves the seeds of fruition and each fruit may in turn be seen as a conclusion of that initial germ. But then I take refuge in the fact that even the eventual demise of an organism so sprouted, will mean a return. Such a return, while perhaps never again in its previous incarnation, remains a return none the less, a repetition repeated. To conclude in such an environment would then be to pause, to ascertain, perhaps to briefly gather whatever may be needed in the next port of anchor.

And even when adrift on an empty ocean with only the repetitive sound of wave upon wave and perhaps the faint rumbling of distant thunder in the clouds gathering overhead, we may find – having looked down into the dark, unfathomable depths of the waters, having looked up at the eternal skies, having looked all around at the endless horizon – that much repetitive speculation may lead to more speculative repetition. It is here that we may pause ... briefly.

Before moving on, once more.

## Notes

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Ø Adler 1989:74.

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