THE CONTESTED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART HISTORY AND VISUAL CULTURE STUDIES: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

by

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SUMMARY

Title of dissertation: The contested relationship between art history and visual culture studies: a South African perspective
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Summary:

The disciplinary anxiety that has emerged between art history and visual culture studies increasingly dominates academic research and institutional practice both in global and South African contexts. The research posed here explores the contested relationship between the discipline of art history and the newly-emerging field of visual culture studies. For, despite the fact that art history has already transformed itself due to ideological pressures, this transformation is evidently no longer sufficient to ward off the visual cultural onslaught. Since the disciplinary boundaries between art history and visual culture studies intersect - or, more aptly, collide - this research examines whether these two fields are complementary or antagonistic endeavours.

The proliferation of multitudes of ambiguous visual images, perpetuated by the rise of new media technologies, has complicated image production and consumption. As a result, a critique of all image-making technologies - including art - has gained momentum in light of the increasing entanglement of images with human existence. In particular, this research argues that art history can no longer maintain its allegiance to hierarchical distinctions between images, nor can it rely on traditional art historical methodologies only in its analysis and interpretation of images. This research proposes that art history visual culture studies can critically analyse the ideological functions of images in our postmodern era more appropriately than traditional art history is able to do.

Key Terms:

art history; visual culture studies; new art history; interdisciplinarity; disciplinary boundaries; visuality; images; vision; mimesis; ocularcentrism; visual technologies; practices of seeing; visibility/invisibility; pedagogy.

OPSOMMING

Titel van dissertasie: Die betwiste verhouding tussen kunsgeskiedenis en visuele kultuurstudies: 'n Suid-Afrikaanse perspektief
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Akademiese navorsing en institusionele praktyke in sowel Suid-Afrikaanse as globale kontekste word toenemend gedomineer deur die dissiplinêre spanning wat tussen kunsgeskiedenis en visuele kultuurstudies bestaan. Die betwiste verhouding tussen die dissipline kunsgeskiedenis en die ontwikkelende veld van visuele kultuurstudies word deur hierdie navorsing ondersoek. Want, ten spyte van die feit dat kunsgeskiedenis reeds vanweë ideologiese druk herskep is, is hierdie transformasie oënskynlik nie meer voldoende in die afweer van die visuele kulturele aanslag nie. Aangesien die dissiplinêre grense tussen kunsgeskiedenis en visuele kultuurstudies oorvleuel - of, meer gepas, bots - poog hierdie navorsing om te bepaal of die twee velde komplimentêre of antagonistiese ondernemings is.

Die proliferasie van 'n magdom dubbelsinnige visuele beelde, aangedryf deur die groei van nuwe media tegnologieë, het die produksie en verbruik van beelde gekompliseer. In die lig van die toenemende verstrengeldheid van beelde met die menslike bestaan, is momentum verleen aan die kritiek rondom alle beeldskeppende tegnologieë, insluitend kuns. Hierdie navorsing hou voor, in besonder, dat kunsgeskiedenis nie meer getrou kan bly aan die hiërargiese verskille tussen beelde nie en nog minder kan staatmaak op tradisionele kunsgeskiedkundige metodologie opsigself, in die analisering en interpretasie

van beelde. Hierdie navorsing stel voor dat die ideologiese funksie van beelde in ons postmoderne era meer toepaslik geanaliseer kan word deur kunsgeskiedenis visuele kultuurstudies, as deur tradisionele kunsgeskiedenis.

Sleutelkonsepte:
kunsgeskiedenis; visuele kultuurstudies; nuwe kunsgeskiedenis; interdissiplinariteit; dissiplinêre grense; visualiteit; beelde; visie; mimesis; okularsentrisme; visuele tegnologieë; praktyke van visie; sigbaarheid/ onsigbaarheid; pedagogie.

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LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FET:	Further education and training
LO:	Learning outcome
LPG:	Learning programme guideline
NCS:	National curriculum statement
OBE:	Outcomes-based education
RNCS:	Revised national curriculum statement
UNISA:	University of South Africa

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and aims of the study

Since the mid-1990s, interest in visual culture has increasingly been filtering into academic programmes and publications and has been the subject of debate at conferences, courses and in academic journals. Based on the books published since then dealing with the topic of visual culture, it has become evident that Norman Bryson, Michael Anne Holly and Keith Moxey (1994); John Walker and Sarah Chaplin (1997); Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998, 1999); Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (1999); and Malcolm Barnard (1998, 2001), to name but a few, have all accepted the presence of visual culture as an important field of academic research.[1] That said, it is also clear from the responses to the "Visual culture questionnaire" - published in *October* (1996)[2] - as well as papers presented at "The Clark Conference" (2001),[3] that the relationship between visual culture and art history remains a controversial topic.

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[1] Bryson, N, Holly, MA & Moxey, K (eds). 1994. *Visual culture: images and interpretations.* Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press; Walker, J & Chaplin, S. 1997. *Visual culture. An introduction.* Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press; Mirzoeff, N (ed). 1998. *The visual culture reader.* New York & London: Routledge; Mirzoeff, N. 1999. *An introduction to visual culture.* New York & London: Routledge; Evans, J & Hall, S (eds). 1999. *Visual culture: the reader.* London: Sage; Barnard, M. 1998. *Art, design and visual culture: an introduction*. London: Macmillan; Barnard, M. 2001. *Approaches to understanding visual culture*. New York: Palgrave.

[2] This notorious issue of the journal, *October*, invited responses from a wide range of intellectuals working in disciplines related to the field of visual culture. The questionnaire generated heated debate and revealed not only criticism, but also scepticism, particularly regarding the potential threat posed by visual culture studies to other existing disciplines. Elkins (2003:18) has summed up those responses by stating that "the general tenor of that forum … was that visual culture is a disorganised, possibly ineffectual, illegitimate, and even misguided extension of art history and other disciplines".

[3] The dialogue initiated at the conference held in May 2001 at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Massachusetts, aimed to bring together three disciplines concerned with visual representation; namely art history, aesthetics and visual studies. See Holly, MA & Moxey K (eds). 2002. *Art history, aesthetics, visual studies* for published papers delivered at the conference.

Agreement on a favourable term by which to refer to this “emerging discipline” (Brown 2003:1), “field of study” (Walker & Chaplin 1997:1), “movement” (Bal 2003:6) or “enterprise” (Mirzoeff [sa]:[sp]) has proven equally problematic. Essays, articles, books and university courses across the globe which deal with apparently similar issues refer to their courses as 'cultural studies', 'visual studies', 'visual culture', 'visual culture studies' or 'visual and critical studies'. Hence, it must be accepted that visual culture studies is itself a constructed term which is defined in diverse ways within the contexts of specific discursive spaces.

While many authors highlight the distinctions between the terms ‘visual’ and ‘culture’, others use them interchangeably, particularly ‘visual studies’ and ‘visual culture’. William Mitchell (2001:6), for example, distinguishes between ‘visual culture’ (which he understands to suggest an “anthropological concept of vision as artificial, conventional and artifactual”) and ‘visual studies’ (which he considers to be too vague, as it could mean “anything at all to do with vision”). For Mitchell (2001), ‘visual culture’ ought then to be regarded as both the field and the context simultaneously, so as not to remove the field of study from its content and historical specificity. In contrast, Walker and Chaplin (1997:1) unfasten ‘visual culture’ from ‘visual culture studies’, by defining the former as “the field or object of study” and the latter as the discipline. Evidently, by distinguishing between these concepts, an attempt has been made to eliminate confusion between the ‘project’ and its field of study. Following Walker and Chaplin (1997) rather than Mitchell (2001), Mieke Bal (2003:5) argues that, if the field cannot be distinguished from the academic discipline, “it becomes impossible to examine your own presuppositions”.[4] While acknowledging that reference to disciplinary status is still problematic, in this research, I use the phrases as Walker and Chaplin (1997) suggest, mainly as this is convenient for avoiding confusion with regards to what is meant. Therefore, throughout this research, the use of the

[4] Bal (2003:5) makes this distinction clear by comparing the field of ‘visual culture’ to that of religion, in that if religion is the field, then theology is its “dogmatic intellectual circumscription”, and ‘religion studies’ is the academic discipline.

term, 'visual culture studies', should be understood as referring to the presumed academic 'discipline', while 'visual culture' denotes the object of study.[5]

Elkins (2003:1) offers his own interpretation of the three expressions, 'cultural studies', 'visual culture' and 'visual studies', by distinguishing between 'cultural studies' and 'visual studies' on the grounds of the countries of their respective origins and key authors in each category. *Cultural studies*, for example, originated in England in the late 1950s, while *visual culture* is mainly an American movement and is far younger than the former, according to Elkins (2003:2). The term 'visual studies' is the most recent of the three, having emerged only in the mid-1990s (Elkins 2003:4).[6]

While acknowledging that a definition of visual culture studies is dependent on the ideological position of its author, this field can, nevertheless, be defined as an endeavour which - certainly on one level, at least - embraces popular culture as an urgent area of study. This can be deduced from much of the research already done in the field which largely reflects Mirzoeff's (1998:3) contention that "visual culture is not just a part of your everyday life, [but] *is* your everyday life". Therefore, the premise on which research in visual culture rests, is that popular culture is unavoidable and essentially a site of struggle in which identities are constantly shaped and reshaped (Brown 2003; Mirzoeff 1998, 1999; Bryson, Holly & Moxey 1994; Walker & Chaplin 1997; Evans & Hall 1999; Barnard 1998, 2001; Duncum 2002; Rogoff 1998). By this account, human experience is now increasingly being regarded as intertwined with the cultural environment where images and artefacts are invested with meaning and pleasure (Mirzoeff 1999). Accordingly, the study of (popular) culture has been recognised as a site that requires critical interrogation.

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[5] As a further note on terminology, where authors refer to 'visual studies' (Elkins 2003, Bal 2003) I presume that to be the equivalent of 'visual culture studies' and will use it as such except within a direct quote.

[6] To add to the complexity of the issue of terminology, Elkins (2003:7) predicts the use of yet another expression, *image studies*, as a synonym for visual studies.

Seth Brown (2003:1) provides a useful overview that regards the scope of visual culture studies to be:

> the study of images and visual realities as cultural constructions that can be read and interpreted. These images engage the observer in a feedback loop in which the looker brings his desire, judgements, preconceived notions, and cultural knowledge to bear on the image. The object in turn affects the observer, provoking desire, thought or fear.

In the same way, Mitchell (2002:237) defines visual culture studies as "the study of the social construction of the visual field, and the visual construction of the social field". From these definitions, visual culture studies can be regarded as an academic project that is interested in "everyday seeing", or "vernacular visuality" (Mitchell 2001:3, 2002:247), which is unavoidably tethered to common culture. This implies that the focus in visual culture studies is distinctly different from art history which has traditionally analysed only certain 'art' objects that represent so-called legitimate culture (Tavin 2003:197). At the same time, however, Brown's (2003:1) reference to "images", "visual realities", "object" and "observer" may threaten art history as these appear to overlap both visual culture studies and art history's fields of study. It would seem that, for the moment, both fields are concerned with visual images and their interaction with the (subjective) observer.

While the disciplinary status of visual culture studies remains unresolved, numerous definitions have positioned this new academic formation as "inter- or multidisciplinary" (Walker & Chaplin 1997:1),[7] "cross-disciplinary" (Wolff 1999:1),

[7] Equally, authors might define each of these terms differently. For example, Roland Barthes (1984:71) contends that the terms 'interdisciplinarity' and 'multi-disciplinarity' are not synonymous endeavours. Accordingly, he argues that 'interdisciplinarity' is the act of creating a new object that is not already located within another discipline and maintains that interdisciplinarity is *not* simply the grouping of various other disciplines around a subject. Walker and Chaplin (1997:1), on the other hand, conflate the terms 'interdisciplinary' and 'multi-disciplinary' by defining these as hybrids which have "formed as a consequence of a convergence of, or borrowings from, a variety of disciplines and methodologies …".

"de-disciplinary" (Mitchell 2001:17),[8] "post-disciplinary" (Mirzoeff 1999:4), "trans-disciplinary" (Duncum 2002:14) and as an "indiscipline" (Mitchell 1995b:541). Notwithstanding its uncertain taxonomy, visual culture studies is forging ahead into the academy, dislodging and rupturing institutional conventions and disciplinary boundaries.[9] As a result, the history of art, the way it has been recorded traditionally, its relevance to contemporary cultural life and, particularly, its proper object of study, are increasingly under scrutiny. The interrogation of art history has currently even led to the replacement of art history by visual culture studies in the subject 'Visual Arts' in South African secondary-school education in the FET (Further Education and Training) phase, to be implemented in 2006 (Department of Education 2005a).

Admittedly, the discipline of art history may have already been extensively revised. A revisionist approach to traditional art history occurred from the 1970s in what Jonathan Harris (2001:1) refers to as, a "social history of art history", where art historical investigation began to focus on visual representations from new critical perspectives. Critical approaches to gender and sexual identity, as well as the interrelatedness of new social and political movements - like feminism and gay and lesbian rights activism - led to a critique of established modes of representation in art. Marginalised voices, previously kept silent by the valorised canon, contested the familiar reductive formulae involved in art historical practice, resulting in a disruption of inherited historiographic legacies. By the mid-1980s, based on the theories provided by perception theory, psychoanalytical theory, sociology, political thought, structuralism, semiotics, postcolonial theory,

[8] Mitchell (2001:17) describes a "de-disciplinary" operation as one that occurs below the disciplines. This means that visual culture studies, by way of analysing "everyday seeing" (Mitchell 2001:3), finds its topics in the "bracketed out" (Elkins 2003:20) parts of the conventional disciplines of art history. According to Elkins (2003:20), visual culture studies "scavenges" for its topics in "the realm of non-artistic, non-aesthetic and unmediated or immediate visual images and experiences".

[9] There is little consensus on how visual culture studies is to be conceived in the academy. Authors can merely agree that visual culture studies is problematic, in that the parameters of the field of study are unclear, and the most suitable location for topics dealing with visual culture studies is uncertain. In short, practical issues concerning; the name of this discipline or interdiscipline, who should teach it, and what courses are required, have raised differing viewpoints.

feminism, cultural theory and deconstruction, the emergence of “new art history” (Rees & Borzello 1986), “radical art history” (Werckmeister 1982), or “critical art history” (Harris 2001:35) became apparent.

Harris (2001:3) regards the “fundamental questioning of the nature of capitalist and imperial nation-states” undertaken by new critical perspectives in academic discourse in general since the 1970s, as a catalyst for the radical developments also evident in art history. In particular, the earlier intellectual interrogation of culture led to developments in cultural studies as a field of study, whereby, amongst others, the broader field of visual media in popular and mass culture was critically interrogated. The founding of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS) in 1964 by Richard Hoggart, assisted by Stuart Hall, reflected the so-called ‘cultural turn’ taking shape in the humanities at that time, whereby critical investigation began to centre on the dominant theme of culture (Chaney 1994).[10] Cultural studies focussed on class, and later, gender and race inequalities (Storey 1996:5). According to Harris (2001:287), the main focus of intellectuals working in cultural studies, both at the Frankfurter Schule[11] as well as the BCCCS, was to find ways to understand contemporary society, particularly with regard to the relationships between culture, society and politics, with a predominantly Marxist approach.[12]

According to John Fiske (1996:115), cultural studies is concerned with “the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial societies”. This means that the formulation of meaning is considered to be inextricably linked to culture and, ultimately, to social structures which are “held in place by, among other forces, the meanings that culture produces” (Fiske 1996:115). These meanings include

[10] This overview is necessarily brief. See Simon During’s Introduction, in During, S (ed). 1993. *The cultural studies reader*. Second edition. London: Routledge for a more comprehensive account.
[11] The Frankfurter Schule was established after the founding of the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) in 1923, at the University of Frankfurt (Agger 1992:4,5).
[12] Among the most notable cultural theorists were Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) in Italy and Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) in France in the 1930s; and Raymond Williams (1921-1988) and E.P. Thompson (1924-1993) in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s.

social experiences, as well as constructions of identity, which enable individuals to make sense of themselves and the nature of their social relations in the capitalist societies in which they live. Cultural studies then analyses social relations in terms of social power; of dominance and subordination; of hegemony and ideology; and looks, in particular, at culture as a site of constant struggle in the Gramscian tradition.

While popular culture is not the only object of investigation in cultural studies, John Storey (1996:1) argues that, it is nonetheless "central to the project of cultural studies". Cultural studies may then be regarded as a political project which is wholly informed by ideologies, in terms of their capacity to structure, shape and inform texts. This leads Janet Wolff (1999:5) to maintain that cultural studies, as informed by ideology, is grounded in sociology and that sociologists have much to contribute to the debates concerning cultural studies. Wolff (1999:2) identifies a new concern with "new historicism, the new art history, [and] post-colonial and feminist approaches to literature and culture". These critical discourses consider the role of culture in visual reception and interpretation. Consequently, cultural studies cannot be regarded as entirely distinct from visual culture studies.

Since the investigations provided by cultural studies and radical art history both focus on all forms of cultural production present in the complex societies of industrial and consumer capitalism, Harris (2001:287) suggests that both endeavours shared a "similar causal connection to the political radicalism of the 1960s". It may then be argued that visual culture studies developed from the critical discourses emerging in cultural studies and new art history. This leads Mitchell (1995b:542) to consider whether or not visual culture studies may be understood as the "visual front" for the cultural studies movement. Likewise, Deborah Cherry (2004:481) maintains that visual culture studies' emergence can be tracked alongside developments in cultural studies. In this sense, then, "visual culture [studies] may be understood in response to, even as a resolution of,

conflicts which beset art history …" (Cherry 2004:481). When understood in this way, the so-called 'crisis of the discipline' of art history may then be regarded as one impetus behind the emergence of visual culture studies.[13]

At the same time, visual culture studies may also be connected to earlier art historical endeavours. Michael Baxandall's, *Painting and experience in Renaissance Italy* (1972), and Svetlana Alpers', *The art of describing* (1984), may be said to be more visual culturalist in outlook than they are about the *history* of the art they describe (Cherry 2004:481). Focussing on the mechanism of the eye, the microscope and camera obscura, as well as map-making and experimenting, Alpers (1996:26) explains that her analysis of vision, image-making devices and visual skills aimed to treat these "as cultural resources related to the practice of painting". Alpers examined visual culture in a way that distinguished the visual from text, in that it is considered as central to the representation of the world. Focussing on visual literacy and visual pleasures, Alpers' approach centred not so much on the *history* of Dutch art as on the Dutch *visual culture.* Evidently, visual culture was already topical amongst practitioners of art history as early as the 1970s and 1980s, although this type of approach encountered "some suspicion" (Cherry 2004:481) in the traditional field of art history.

While the so-called 'new art history' has attempted to address the intense criticism against 'traditional' art history's developments, histories and formative texts, it would be erroneous to conclude that new art history has resolved its disputes and coherently redefined itself. Despite the fact that art history has constantly been transforming itself, this evidently does not suffice to ward off the visual cultural onslaught. For, if the concept 'art' is constantly changing, how can a discipline still unproblematically refer to itself as 'art history': the history of art? The disciplinary classification of art history and visual culture studies, in terms of

[13] This crisis is well-documented in art historical literature over the last three decades. For instance, an entire issue of *Art Journal* (1982) was devoted to the theme of, *The crisis in the discipline*.

their respective objects of study, namely 'art' and the 'visual', has been neatly sidestepped in most debates and now urgently requires investigation. Therefore, this research offers a background on the debate concerning the relationship between art history and visual culture studies by posing specific critical questions regarding the status of both fields.

The research posed here explores art history's relationship to visual culture studies by considering whether the latter is, as Chris Jenks (1995:16) suggests, merely an extension of the former? Can the assumption that "within the academy, visual culture is a term used conventionally to signify painting, sculpture, design and architecture" still be justified (Jenks 1995:16)? Does this mean that visual culture studies is merely a "late modern broadening of that previously contained within the definition of fine art" (Jenks 1995:16)? What kind of history has art history produced about its object of study and what kind of object is now at the heart of art history? Is it still possible to define 'art'? Are the interests of art history and visual culture studies similar, complimentary or in opposition? Why are art historians investigating the broader domain of visual culture and what does this mean for art history? Finally, the question raised by Linda Nochlin (2002:9) concerning "just what should be on the agenda for art historians of the future" is further explored in this study. Ultimately, whether or not art history can justify its continuation as the history of art, or whether it ought to find some other way of escaping the discriminatory practices embedded in its defining principles, is investigated. In other words, should art history become visual culture studies, particularly within the context of South African art education?

The aims of this study are therefore:

- To explore discourses surrounding 'vision' and 'visuality' as these concepts relate to the increasingly technologised image production and reproduction in contemporary visual culture and art history; (i.e. to

investigate the socio-cultural construction of vision and the endorsement of aestheticised modes of seeing).

- To problematise the construction of the canon of art through an ontological and epistemological investigation of disciplinary and methodological art historical practice in order to explore the disciplinary boundaries between art history and visual culture studies.
- To explore and suggest alternate tactics for future curricula in art history in the South African context that may adequately address the broader sphere of visual culture without subscribing to hierarchical distinctions based on notions of value and, simultaneously, avoiding a total dissolution of disciplinary boundaries.

I am aware that the debate concerning the disciplinary borders between visual culture and other disciplinary fields is an equally contentious issue. For example, visual culture also overlaps with media studies, film studies, social studies, literature studies and cultural studies. However, the discursive scope of this research will extend only to the issues at stake regarding the contested relationship between art history and visual culture studies and will not attempt to include any other fields into the arguments presented here.

1.2 Theoretical framework and methodology of study

The contested relationship between the discipline of art history and visual culture studies is the focus of this dissertation. For this reason, the theoretical framework within which this study is situated rests predominantly in discourses of the methodologies which underpin art history and visual culture studies respectively. As no empirical testing is undertaken on the academic formation of visual culture studies, the study remains speculative and exploratory in nature.

Consequently, the literature study relies primarily on those texts which account for the procedures and priorities of the two fields. Whereas this is quite easily achieved with regard to art history, the same is not true for visual culture studies. Since visual culture studies cannot be regarded as a formal 'discipline', nor does it subscribe to a generally agreed upon methodology, the dissertation relies, to a great extent, on the discourse that has, thus far, been created around visual culture studies in demonstrating certain arguments.

For instance, John Walker and Sarah Chaplin (1997), Deborah Cherry (2004) and James Elkins (2003) provide beneficial overviews of the emergence and formation of visual culture studies as an academic endeavour. In addition, the anthologies compiled by Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998, 1999); Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (1994) and Malcolm Barnard (2001) are informative texts which shed light on diverse approaches which have, thus far, been undertaken in the analysis of visual culture. Many of these texts, but in particular Barnard (2001), Elkins (2003) and Kevin Tavin (2003) list the objects under investigation in visual culture studies.

Equally, the critical examinations of disciplinary issues with regard to visual culture studies offered by William Mitchell (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2001) and Mark Poster (2002), provide useful insights on the disciplinary debate. Several questions raised by the respondents to the notorious *October* (1996) questionnaire, concerning the disciplinary status of visual culture studies and the future of art history, are further explored in this dissertation. Drawing on François Lyotard's (1979 [1984]) criticism of 'grand narratives', or 'metanarratives', Rodowick (1996) maintains that disciplinarity itself is currently under suspicion. In one sense, art history itself can be regarded as a 'metanarrative' which is now 'under attack' by visual culture studies. Therefore, this debate is firmly positioned in a postmodern discursive framework and, subsequently, also within the current critique of the status of knowledge in post-industrial societies.

In contrast to the 'insubstantial' literature that characterises visual culture studies, art history has developed from a well-defined theoretical foundation. While I do not attempt to document the entire 'history of art history' in this dissertation, a broad overview of the main theoretical approaches is necessary to track developments in the discipline. The overviews of the methodologies of art history, provided by Laurie Schneider Adams (1996) and Vernon Minor (1994), serve merely to establish a background on the various historical manifestations of the methodologies of the discipline of art history. More specifically, the insights given by W. Eugene Kleinbauer (1971), Karen Skawran (1976) and Erwin Panofsky (1938) regarding the definition of art, art history and the aims of the art historian, demonstrate that these constructions are embedded in utopian Modernist ideals. For this reason, Immanuel Kant's (1790 [1952]) contribution to the development of the category 'art', and the aesthetic theories which came to underpin Modernist art history, are integral to the arguments posed in this dissertation. To counter these universalising theories on art, Jacques Derrida's (1976:157) concept of the "logic of supplementarity" demonstrates the hierarchical distinction that was created between art and visual culture and which must now be overthrown. Art has, after all, traditionally been contrasted with whatever (visual) images threatened its privileged domain.

Developments in the new art history - or more appropriately, 'radical art history' - are well-documented by Jonathan Harris (2001) within his overview of the 'identity' of this critical movement. Following on the so-called 'crisis of the discipline of art history' which has been articulated in various discourses since the mid-1980s, Harris' account acknowledges the involvement of both collaborative and antagonistic elements within this movement. These are also identified in the winter issue of *Art Journal* (1982) which was dedicated to contributions concerning methodological and ideological problems in art history. The arguments voiced by O.K. Werckmeister (1982) and the guest editor of the issue, Henri Zerner (1982), provide useful perspectives on the problems which have plagued art history since the emergence of new critical perspectives in the

1970s. Donald Preziosi (1989) also makes reference to these authors as he 'rethinks' art history. In addition, the June (1996) issue of *Art Bulletin* comprised articles that articulate the problem of the canon of art, particularly as voiced in the essays by Christopher Steiner (1996) and Adrian Rifkin (1996). In light of new perspectives in art history discourse, Janson and Janson's (1997) definition of art is used to demonstrate the persistence of earlier delimiting categories.

Due to his specific emphasis on the problem of vision as wholly infused by the "Cartesian perspectivalist scopic regime", Martin Jay (1994:435) provides an instructive account of the primacy accorded vision in the modern era. Jay (1994) indicates that the cultural preoccupation - even obsession - with visual probing and enhancing natural vision and ocular apparatus, reflects a consuming interest in the visual world. Assisted by these technological advancements - for instance the camera obscura, and photography - Western artists have aimed at representing the world mimetically. In this way, as Jay (1994) demonstrates, artists have endorsed a particular aesthetic mode of seeing. This overview is particularly useful in light of the visual complexity of contemporary human experience, or visuality, as voiced in much visual culture discourse (Mirzoeff 1998, 1999, 2002; Mitchell 1992, 1994, 2002; Duncum 2002; Rogoff 1998). Whereas these authors however assume that the visual has gained supremacy over text in contemporary life, Poster (2002) disputes this claim, arguing that 'ocularcentrism' has always governed human interaction with the environment.

Ultimately, none of these authors deny that visuality is complicated by new visual technologies which increasingly dominate in cultural life. Not only is the proliferation of images in society aided by technology - thereby affecting art, as argued by Walter Benjamin (1936) - but, as Mitchell (1992) and Birgit Richard (2002) point out, images are no longer 'trustworthy'. In this sense, images are constantly 'shifting' as their meanings are constantly being transformed. No longer adhering to the modernistic trust in unity, coherence and meaning, these postmodern images celebrate incoherence, as voiced particularly by David

Harvey (1990). Since digital images are now endlessly mutable, art history's analytical procedures - which are traditionally modernistic and, therefore, idealistic - are, subsequently, being challenged.

Consensus on the most appropriate route for art history to take remains somewhat elusive. While the *National curriculum statement: grades 10 - 12 (general): visual arts* (Department of Education 2005a) insists that, in South African art education, art history be replaced by visual culture studies, both art historians and art educators globally remain divided on this topic. While Paul Duncum (2001, 2002) and Tavin (2003) clearly agree that there is an urgent need for the analysis of contemporary images in (visual) art education, clarity on the most appropriate approach for dealing with the visual evades consensus. For example, a close reading of Bryson, Holly and Moxey (1994) and Mitchell (2001) reveal their opposing views on the aims of such a course. The alternate paths, respectively suggested by Brent Wilson (2003) and Moxey (1996), for (re)directing art history's 'course' in the future, are, in my view, far more beneficial.

1.3 Overview of chapters

This introduction provides an overview of the main aim of the study; namely, to explore the relationship between art history and visual culture studies in order to ultimately draw conclusions on the future disciplinary status of these two fields. In this introduction, I have shown my own awareness of the territorial warfare that has erupted between art history and visual culture studies. This dissertation is thus based on the assumption that reshaping the discipline of art history is unavoidable; particularly in light of the possible marginalisation of art history as an academic discipline in South African institutions. I argue that an urgent reappraisal of the nature of this discipline as a historical field of study is required.

The next three chapters (Chapter 2, 3, 4) deal with three issues that I have identified as fundamental to the 'crisis' which has occurred in art history since the 'emergence' of visual culture studies. These are: *the image*, *the disciplined image* and *the future of the disciplined image*. This division loosely draws on - but is not limited to - the "threads" also identified by Tavin (2003:119), according to which visual culture may be positioned as "phenomenological", "substantial" and "pedagogical". Following this division, I first explore postmodern contemporary cultural experience as unavoidably entangled with images and affected by practices of seeing. Secondly, I analyse the 'substantial' range of objects listed as sites of interest in visual culture studies in contrast to art history. Finally, I explore potential pedagogical routes in visual culture studies programmes.

Chapter 2 therefore focuses on the nature of contemporary image production, proliferation and reproduction in order to illustrate that the inundation of the extraordinary array of visual images in postmodern culture is problematic for the discipline of art history. This positions visual culture studies as phenomenological, in that it describes how present-day experience, subjectivities and consciousness are affected by, and through, images. To demonstrate this argument, key issues in visual culture studies, which are the concepts of 'vision' and 'visuality' as active contributors in cultural production, are investigated. Images are undeniably the site at which visual culture studies and art history converge. This part of the investigation centres on unpacking how vision has come to dominate human experience. Moreover, I explore how images, in turn, have constructed vision through a process of 'visual learning', or 'learning to see'. Consequently, Chapter 2 aims to interrogate the construction of vision through the visual - or, *sight seeing through the visual.* A common thread linking this investigation is the consideration of the ways in which art history has been complicated as a result of the production, distribution and consumption of increasingly technologised visual media.

Chapter 3 explores the concepts ‘art’ and the ‘visual’ as the foundations of art history and visual culture studies respectively, in order to analyse their disciplinary segregation. The “substantial” (Tavin 2003:201) scope of the constituent parts of visual culture studies is explored as problematic for the discipline of art history, since, not only do their objects of study overlap, but their selection processes also differ extensively. Art historical theory is investigated to determine what is currently meant by the constructed category ‘art’ through an analysis of the historical endorsement of the canon. Moreover, the methodologies that have traditionally, and also currently, been employed in art historical analysis are explored and contrasted with those used in visual culture studies. Finally, the disciplinary status of each respective field is investigated, with a particular focus on how art history and visual culture studies are to be (re)defined within academic structures.

Chapter 4 investigates the implications for art history of art historians increasingly analysing topics from the wider domain of visual culture (for example advertising, cinema, music videos, television, the Internet, cyber-culture, etc.). Why is art history specifically the platform from which these investigation are made? Pedagogical issues concerning how ‘the disciplined image’ (art history) could be analysed and interpreted in the future are explored within the context of South African education. Centring on the question of art history’s possible dissolution as an academic field, this part of the research explores the possible replacement of art history by investigations into popular visual experiences, which, in “critical pedagogy” (Tavin 2003:197), are presumed to be more relevant to students than art works associated with the museum realm. While the replacement of art history by visual culture studies has already occurred in South African visual art education, I investigate the implications of such an approach. In an attempt to evade subscribing to certain postmodernisms in which differences dissolve into total relativism, the possible future of art history in the academy, alongside - or amalgamated with - visual culture studies, is explored.

1.4 Conclusion

While the disciplinary status of visual culture studies as yet remains vague and inconclusive, this research assumes that a critique of the broader domain of the visual will persist 'somewhere' in pedagogical endeavours. This assumption is based on the wide-ranging literature dealing with topics not generally taught in art history courses. By the same token, art history may be in urgent need of redefinition. Ultimately, while we may acknowledge that we are currently in a moment of transition in which a paradigm shift is taking place, we might also agree with David Carrier (2002:257) that "no one as yet really knows how this transition will work itself out". Therefore, this research is crucial to a deeper understanding of the sometimes awkward, even antagonistic, relationship between art history and the study of the field of visual culture and attempts to offer a perspective on how art history might 'work itself out'.

The broad aim of this research can accordingly be summed up by paraphrasing the artist, Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), who highlighted the idea that, although we know where we have come from; where we are and where we go from here remains somewhat unclear. A critique of visual culture, through the analysis of contemporary images in mass culture, may appear to marginalise art history as a disciplinary field. For example, according to Walker and Chaplin (1997:36), in most contemporary institutions, an account of the history of art now places little emphasis on pre-modern art styles. Equally, Elkins (2003:9) has determined that "older art" is generally dealt with in art history, while new images and media are appropriated by new departments or Film Studies, resulting in "ongoing friction between art history and visual studies". Has earlier art - Greek, Medieval, Renaissance, etc. - become irrelevant? This research aims to explore future possibilities for art history that will hopefully lead to a balanced approach to the analysis of visual representations of all kinds - so-called 'high' and 'low' - and across visual media.

In this endeavour, the following chapter explores image production and consumption in postmodern culture. The broadening of visual technologies is shown to complicate the way that art historians analyse their objects of study, ‘art’, while, at the same time, affecting human experience in general.

CHAPTER 2

THE IMAGE: SIGHT-SEEING THROUGH THE VISUAL

I crave, I long for Abstinence from
Images, for every Image is bad.
(Roland Barthes, quoted in Jay 1994:435)

2.1 Working through visuality

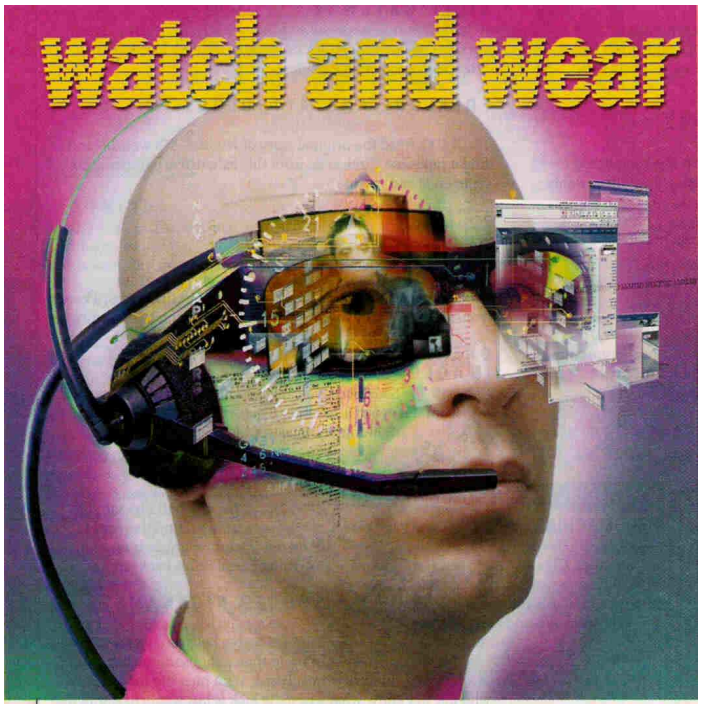

Figure 1: *Mobile Assistant IV*
(TIME 2001:42)

The Mobile Assistant IV (MA-IV) (Figure 1), which Ghosh (2001:40) describes as "basically a wearable computer", was produced by Xybernaut, a small Fairfax company, in 2001. A full-colour VGA screen - about the size of a postage stamp - is suspended in front of the eye and a keyboard strapped to the wrist. While walking around the office, one can send e-mail, write articles, or surf the Web at the same time that reality literally merges with virtual reality.

Sceptics of the MA-IV within the industry scoff at the notion that 'wearables' will become a consumer product. Since the MA-IV has exactly the same functionality as a laptop, one question that arises is why anyone would want to surf the Net, or play a computer game, while walking around? However, when 'wearables' are mass produced and marketed with a certain 'look' and 'feel', they *will* become a consumer product, irrespective of their utility, for we live in an age of "hypervisuality" (Mirzoeff 2003:1) in which the complex intersection of seeing and being seen - or 'watching' and 'wearing' - characterises modern life. This is the manifestation of visual culture and it can no longer be ignored.

In the context of the entanglement of contemporary life and visuality;[14] articles, textbooks and academic discourse on the topic of the visual onslaught of our time, are increasingly dominated by the cliché that 'contemporary life is more visual than ever before'. For example, Mirzoeff (1999:1,4) postulates that "modern life takes place onscreen" and that "human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever before". Likewise, Duncum (2002:15) contends that more than at any other time in history, we are living our everyday lives through visual imagery, while Ernst Gombrich (1982:137) asserts that "ours is a visual age" and that "we are bombarded with pictures from morning till night". In the same vein, Irit Rogoff (1998:14) insists that "the centrality of vision and the visual world in producing meanings, establishing and maintaining aesthetic values, gender stereotypes and power relations within culture" are all problematic issues arising from contemporary visuality.

The premise on which these assumptions rest, is that contemporary life is somehow based progressively more on the visual than in the past and that ours is a "culture of … images" (Richard 2002:214). The presumed ascendancy of the visual in contemporary human experience - or, visuality - reflects Mitchell's

[14] Jay (1994:9) defines the term 'visuality' to mean the "distinct historical manifestations of visual experience in all its possible modes", thus implying the entanglement of vision and cultural variables. Vision can be regarded as culture-based: thus, *how* we see is a learned and highly contextual practice.

(1994:11-34) contention that a "pictorial turn"[15] has occurred. The notion that images are more fundamental to contemporary culture than concepts or, as Alexander Duttmann (2002:101) puts it, "that images have become predominant … and have replaced words", is thus the basis upon which visual culture studies defines its theoretical frameworks.

For instance, Mitchell (1996:82) maintains that the most important aspect of visual culture studies "is its emphasis on the social field of the visual, the everyday process of looking at others and being looked at". A useful definition for visual culture studies is to regard this endeavour as "the study of the social construction of the visual field, and the visual construction of the social field" (Mitchell 2002:237). In visual culture studies, therefore, the constructed nature of both the viewers and the creators of visual images, as well as the images themselves - as they are encountered in visual experience - are under investigation. By this definition, visuality is thus taken to be constructed in culture as visual culture, while simultaneously recognising the visual workings of a "sensory mechanism" that is our "inherent visual nature" (Van Eeden & Du Preez 2005:8).

The notion that images increasingly pervade every aspect of contemporary human existence cannot be disputed, as is illustrated by the invention of 'wearable computers' (Figure 1). Aside from the vast plethora of art works and print media advertisements, as well as mass-media publications (which are predominantly visual), television programmes, cinema, the Internet, traffic signs and billboards - to name but a few - that cannot be avoided in daily life, Jay (1994:1) points out that visual metaphors also colour written and, by extension, spoken language. Thus, "the ocular permeation of language", as well as "visually

[15] It should be noted, however, that Mitchell (2002:241) has since revised this notion, now arguing that "the supposed hegemony of the visible in our time … is a chimera that has outlived its usefulness".

imbued cultural and social practices", have led many commentators to assume, and critique the "ocularcentrism" of our age (Jay 1994:3).[16]

While Mirzoeff (1999) and Duncum (2002) argue that images have never before been more prominent in daily life than in this era, it cannot be denied that the need, desire, or compulsion to create images, and to be surrounded by images, is not unique (or only problematic) to the modern age. Poster (2002:67), for example, disputes the supposed 'new' dominance of the visual, when he argues that we do not use our eyes more so than we did in the past and draws on an example of how distance was measured in the Middle Ages.[17] Furthermore, Jay (1994:5) also maintains that the privileging of sight over the other senses is not a uniquely modern phenomenon, arguing instead that the development of our visual capabilities, at the expense of other senses, is based in evolution, meaning that human interaction with the environment has played a role in the development of sight.[18] Whether or not we agree with Horace's notion (quoted in Gombrich 1982:140) that "the mind is more slowly stirred by the ear than by the

[16] Jay (1994:3) indicates that there are currently several variations of this neologism. While Jay (1994:3) uses the expressions "ocularcentric" and "ocularcentrism", he acknowledges the use of alternate variations, including "oculocentric" or, the less frequently used term, "ocularocentric". These terms all refer to the domination of the visual in culture.

[17] According to Poster (2002:67) "a standard of measure in certain villages was how far one could see a red bird in a forest. To the people of the day who used this expression, the distance it designated was something quite specific, as useful as saying a certain expanse is 50 yards". In this example, Poster (2002:67) shows that Middle Age societies had far better developed visual skills than contemporary twenty-first century people. His point is that humans today are not more visual than they were in the past, but only that "different visual regimes" are now at play (Poster 2002:67).

[18] Therefore, the premise that the contemporary era is *more* visual than any other may be an unstable foundation for visual culture studies, as it may be argued that ocularcentrism - or the domination of visual sensory experiences in human life - is not unique to the modern era. For example, the centrality of the visual in spiritual practices during the Middle Ages, and the resultant desecration of images by the Iconoclasts in the eighth century, is suggestive of the highly visual character of society at that time. Medieval Christendom used visual representations of Biblical stories to educate the illiterate masses. Equally, the light streaming into Gothic churches through the stained glass window designs was a symbol of divine illumination. Although the Reformation, with its iconoclasm, marked a decline in Christian imagery in Protestant churches, the result was not that the production of images declined, but only that art functioned differently thereafter. For, while the ties between the visual arts and religion began to disintegrate, and Protestantism no longer required - or desired - the visual arts to assist in the spiritual education of its followers, images were merely put to other uses; predominately political and social (Jay 1994:36-46).

eye", it cannot be denied that images occupy a critical space in contemporary everyday life.

In the twentieth century, French theorists regarded vision and visuality as problematic, leading to the 'denigration of vision' (Jay 1994) and, subsequently, to "an antiocularcentric discourse" (Jay 1994:16).[19] This may be due to a widespread assumption that, as Mitchell (1996:73) explains, "images have a kind of social or psychological power of their own" which has led to an increasing "rhetoric of the power of images". For example, Guy Debord (1994:26) identifies the commodity of images as "ruling over all lived experience" and, thereby, dominating, what he terms, the "society of the spectacle". In the same manner, the proliferation of images by technological means prompted Baudelaire (quoted in Jay 1994:122) to critique the "cult of images" as early as the nineteenth century. Furthermore, cultural criticism has shown that we live in a culture of "surveillance" (Foucault 1977) and "simulacra" (Baudrillard 1988:167), in which "scopic regimes" (Jay 1994) of race, class and gender govern the production and reproduction of images.

Consequently, images, their relation to vision and how they function in culture, have come to be regarded as problematic. Not only is the abundance of visual *images* that constantly surround and shape our lives an important topic of discussion in visual culture studies, but also the very enigma of *visibility* (and by implication invisibility) and the significance of *seeing* itself. This has led the South African art historians, Jeanne van Eeden and Amanda du Preez (2005:6) to conclude that one of the central issues in visual culture studies is visuality, or, the "complex relationship of simultaneously seeing and being seen".

Since artists are concerned with image-making, and art history with the interpretation of images created by artists, surely visual culture studies and art

[19] Jay (1994:264) identifies Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty as suspicious of the Cartesian perspectivalist gaze. Through their "radical questioning of the ocularcentric bias of the dominant tradition" (Jay 1994:264), these thinkers argued in favour of a new ontology of sight.

history must, consequently, have a common interest in images? Ultimately, it is now a question of whether art history and visual culture studies analyse *the same* images and if so, whether or not they analyse these images in the same way. In addition, how art history and visual culture studies deal with vision respectively must be explored. In what way does visuality complicate the relation between art history and visual culture? Thus, the concepts of 'images' and 'vision', as they intersect within the interests of art history and visual culture studies, are analysed in this chapter.

2.2 Images: mutation and dissemination

Images unquestionably inhabit the site (or *sight*) at which art history and visual culture studies converge. The impact of digital and electronic inventions on contemporary visual media has, according to Mirzoeff ([sa]:[sp]), necessitated "the unprecedented re-evaluation of the history of modern and postmodern visual media". The *interface* of the consumer with visual technology - that is, as Mirzoeff ([sa]:[sp]) explains, "the issues arising from the interaction of viewer and viewed" - is what concerns visual culture studies. Phrased differently, Mirzoeff (1999:3) argues that visual culture studies is "concerned with visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer".

As a result of their mutual interest in images, not only are the disciplinary boundaries of visual culture studies and art history complicated, but questions now also arise as to the methodological approaches taken by each. While a democratic approach may be said to govern the selection of images for analysis in visual culture studies, rendering distinctions between 'high' art and 'low' art redundant (Storey 2001:5-15),[20] critique of this debate will not be lodged in the

[20] While Elkins (2003), Bryson, Holly and Moxey (1994), and Walker and Chaplin (1997) argue that visual culture studies challenges the distinctions between 'high' art and 'low' art, Mitchell (2001) and Poster (2002) consider these distinctions to be a "crucial topic within visual culture" (Mitchell 2001:15).

current discussion.[21] Rather, this investigation explores how electronic and digital media which, while crucial to the visual culture studies 'enterprise' (as they are manifested in mass media), simultaneously increasingly filter into art-making practices. Thus, the effect of digital media on the visual arts, and the displacement of the autonomous artist as a crucial topic of investigation in the art historical process, are investigated alongside the issue of the extended proliferation of art in society through mass production. The purpose of this investigation is to ask whether authorship is justified as a method of art historical investigation amidst the proliferation of art within this 'culture of images'.

Although procedures and methods have been revisited at various stages in the development of art history,[22] this discipline has, to a greater or lesser extent at various times in its history, prioritised the concept of a stable, singular, extraordinary image created by an individual artist as crucial to its endeavours. When Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) gave a predominantly biographical account of the artists mentioned in, *The lives of the most excellent painters, sculptors and architects* (1550), the foundation upon which art history as "an intellectual and scholarly investigation of specific works of art" (Kleinbauer 1971:1) would later develop, had been laid.[23] Anecdotal information pertaining to the lives of the artists was the focus of this documentary approach. Subsequent analyses of form, content and context - or, as Kleinbauer (1971:37) distinguishes, "intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives" - would focus on the description of the inherent qualities of the work of art, categorisation of successive styles, aesthetic significance, iconographical meaning, as well as social, cultural and intellectual

[21] The problem arising from this debate, that is, the problem of delineating and maintaining disciplinary boundaries between art history and visual culture studies based on their objects of study, is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 3.

[22] According to Kleinbauer (1971:1), art history came into being about 400 years ago. Since then, this discipline has evolved in response to academic pressures. Most recently, "new art history" (Rees & Borzello 1986), also referred to as "radical art history" or "critical art history" (Harris 2001:35), has taken an interdisciplinary approach to the critical interpretation of art.

[23] Vasari's (1550), *The lives of the most excellent painters, sculptors and architects,* was, according to Edwards (1999:3), the earliest full account of Renaissance art which proposed that the artist is conditioned by historical circumstances, landscape and milieu. His contextual method may be said to have given rise to the "standard way that art history has organised and presented artists" (Edwards 1999:3).

determinants in artistic production. In short, art history has, to a great extent, privileged the artist as an extraordinary (or genial) creator of man-made objects of value from within a particular historiographic situation and a valid contributor to the interpretation of the work.

However, due to the development of new methods and processes that distance the artist from direct involvement in the production and final execution of the art work, this method may no longer be possible. In the current age of, what Mitchell (1992:7) has termed "electrobricollage", neither authenticity nor attribution are justifiable research methodologies on their own. This is because new "synthetic images" (Virilio 1994:62) are increasingly created by employing digital imaging processes which seamlessly utilise the methods of appropriation, transformation, reprocessing and recombination in the construction (and reconstruction) of images. This is demonstrated in the South African artist, Usha Seejarim's (born 1974), video work, *The opposite of illustration* (1999) (Figure 2).[24]

Figure 2: Usha Seejarim, *The opposite of illustration,* 1999.
Video still.
(Usha Seejarim [sa])

[24] It should be noted that, at this point, I am merely interested in the title of the work and the medium employed by the artist. An in-depth critical analysis will accompany later arguments.

Employing a variety of media and techniques in the creation of her art works, ranging from paintings, sculptures and photographs to videos, Usha Seejarim utilises various digital processes to convey complex messages. In fact, the very intangibility of the video image serves as an extension of her message which explores the ineffability of everyday experience, or 'everyday seeing'. The title of this work immediately poses a complex challenge for traditional art: the displacement of the artist from direct involvement in the creation of the work. The use of a video camera to create an art work illustrates the emergence of 'new media' into the realm of 'art'.[25] While the artist's tools have arguably always developed side-by-side with technological advancement,[26] rapidly changing visual media in our highly technologised culture, has all but removed the artist from direct involvement with the creation of the art work. Thus, technology displaces hand-rendered art works, resulting in what can be described as, *the opposite of illustration*.

The replacement of the 'artist's hand' by technology - or, more accurately, a computer - was first evident in the mid-1950s, when a mechanical drum scanner was used by the National Bureau of Standards in the United States of America to trace variations in intensity over the surfaces of photographs (Figure 3). The photomultiplier signals which resulted from this process were converted into arrays of 176 by 176 binary digits, while oscilloscope displays (Figure 4) were produced making pattern and shade electronically processable into digital information (Mitchell 1992:4).

[25] According to Lev Manovich (2001:19), new media are popularly listed as the following: "the Internet, Web sites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMs, and DVD, virtual reality". In addition, he suggests that new media includes any instance where the computer has been employed in the production, exhibition, distribution and storage of images.

[26] The progressive development in paint and supports has, of course, greatly influenced painters. The Renaissance invention of oil paint by the Flemish painter, Jan v. Eyck (1390-1441) in 1420, for instance, led artists away from fresco painting. Subsequently, the invention of acrylic paint in the early twentieth century, due mainly to a need to combat the effects of atmospheric conditions, would also affect artists' painting techniques (Smith & Ten Holt 1987:50).

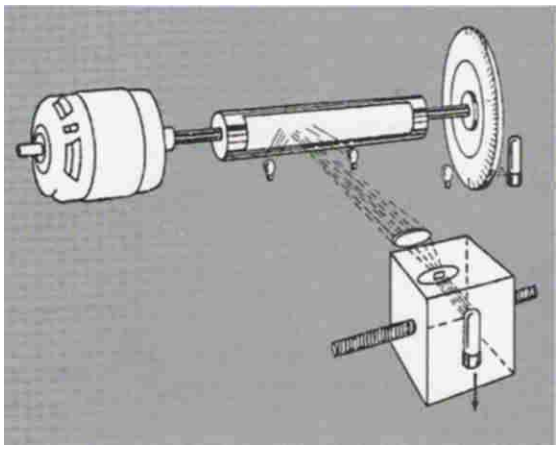

Figure 3: First scanner
(Mitchell 1992:4)

Figure 4: One of the first digital images.
(Mitchell 1992:4)

By means of this technology, computer-generated art is a less 'hands-on' experience than drawing, painting and sculpture; the artistic process is now situated in the realm of visual perception and cemented in a cerebral experience which is ultimately devoid of the sensuous considerations and tactile qualities associated with traditional art media.[27] Removed from the sensory, and more firmly grounded in the intellectual (or conceptual) realm, the artist works through the mechanical devices of monitors, central processing units, a mouse or digital pen, which not only establish a physical barrier between the artist and the work,

[27] In a "post-photographic" era (Mitchell 1992:225), digitally manipulated images are different from mainstream photographs which inherently resist extensive reworking due to technical difficulties, time constraints and general photographic practice. Digital processes consist of recording intensities in a visual field by means of scanning devices; selecting pixels and assigning arbitrarily chosen values to them; and employing three-dimensional computer-graphics techniques, both extending the tradition of mathematically calculated perspective - first begun with Brunelleschi, Alberti, and the Renaissance painters - and subverting this concept of fixed viewpoint. By means of subdividing the picture plane into a Cartesian grid of cells (pixels), images are encoded digitally and manipulation seems infinite. In this sense, the artist, working in a virtual 3-D space, can truly be a master of illusion: the artist now has control over lighting, texture, camera angles, movements and expressions. Ratner (quoted in Bersson 2004:121), a computer artist and painter, aptly sums up this new dispensation: "Computer-generated special effects have transported the human consciousness to areas unimagined in any previous time".

but also an emotional detachment. The act of creating art works, as well as the concept of the artist as image-maker - through direct human intervention and intentionality, and by means of the manipulation of physical materials - is systematically eradicated in this process. This is certainly evident in Usha Seejarim's, *The opposite of illustration.*

This dilemma of artistic process aided by technology is, of course, not a new question, but was spawned already in the nineteenth century, when technological advancements led to uncertainty about what could stand as 'art'. Invented in 1839 (Berger 1980:48) by Louis Daguerre (1789-1851), a French realist painter, and William Fox Talbot (1800-1877),[28] an English scientist, photography literally means *drawing with light,* and can thus be described as *the opposite of illustration*.[29] When artists began specialising in black-and-white photographs, the debate over whether or not photographs were 'art', and a photographer an 'artist', had begun to surface.[30] Those opposed to photography as 'art' justified their argument with the statement that photography is mechanical technology and, therefore, automatic rather than artistic. Since the artist's hand did not directly create the image, the image could not stand as art.[31] The often quoted French history painter, Paul Delaroche (1797-1859) (quoted in Jay 1994:136), upon seeing the Daguerreotype, is said to have declared that "from this day on, painting is dead". More recently, Mitchell (1992:20) has contended that the computer-processed electronic image has superseded the fixed image of the photograph, displacing photography in the same way that painting had been displaced 150 years earlier.

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[28] Jay (1994:125) credits Joseph-Nicéphore and Isadore Nièpce with the invention, and later perfection, of the first fixation of an image on a pewter plate that had been made sensitive to light with bitumen.

[29] Whereas the camera obscura had still required that the artist copy the reflected image onto paper, Daguerre and Talbot developed a light-sensitive surface that fixed the image.

[30] Examples of 'artists-turned-photographers' are Gasper-Felix Tournachon (also known as Nader) (1820-1910) in France, and Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) in England.

[31] Although photography's usefulness in journalism, industry and science was duly recognised, it was not included in art exhibitions at the *Palais des Beaux-Arts* in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century. The moving picture and film challenged the definition of the concept of art even further in the late nineteenth century.

Digital processes allow many 'artists' to author an image. Consequently, it is virtually impossible to establish, with certainty, the provenance of a digital image, since image files are ephemeral and are made to be reused. In addition, not only can images now be copied and transmitted instantly, they also cannot be examined for physical evidence of tampering. Endlessly mutable, the digital image evades closure. This has led to, what Mitchell (1992:17) describes as the "new uncertainty about the status and interpretation of the visual signifier". For, as Richard (2002:211) suggests, "an image no longer tells more than a thousand words - images seem to offer many views from different angles". This means that the signifier has become unstable in the sense that "shifting images" which dominate the postmodern age cannot be regarded as "firm" entities but, rather, contribute to "rhizomatic" structures (Richard 2002:211).[32] Therefore, as Richard (2002:212) maintains, the current problem with images is not that they are complex or multi-layered, but that they contain no hidden truth - they are pure surface - as they "push aside other images".[33]

What is the implication of such an understanding of images for art history? Is it, true, as Richard (2002:212) contends, that "art history has misinformed us that there is a singular image"? Art history's strategy considers the art work as the object of investigation in itself - an isolated object that bears some kind of meaning to be uncovered. Conversely, the current operation of images in society

[32] Unlike the eye which can never fix the appearance of something, the camera removes and preserves one sight from a flow of appearances. Violently disrupting the flow of temporal duration, the split-second action/appearance is captured and preserved – rendered devoid of meaning. A photograph rips a scene out of its original context and is then shown to an audience who possesses no prior knowledge of its context.

[33] Mitchell (1992:225) explains that photographs "were comfortably regarded as causally generated truthful reports about things in the real world, unlike more traditionally crafted images, which seemed notoriously ambiguous and uncertain human constructions". However, according to Roland Barthes (1977:15-31), the text or caption that accompanies a photograph, projects a new connotation into the image, rending the photograph anything but a truthful or reliable report. In this way, Barthes (1977) argues, the context of publication as well as the accompanying text legitimates and produces 'myths', or ideologies, which function to support prevailing structures of power. Thus, a multiplicity of meanings - or what Storey (2001:70) describes as the "polysemic nature of signs" - is mobilised through the cultural practices in the construction of myth and counter-myth. Precisely because photographs, in the guise of reality, are believable in a way that paintings, drawings and sculptures are not, people more easily shape their lives on what they see in photos, on the movie screen, or TV screen, than on what they see in art.

is characterised by appropriation and exchange where, as Mitchell (1992:190) explains, "facts seem indistinguishable from falsehoods and fictions and … immanent paradox continually threatens to undermine established certainties". In other words, the uses to which images are currently put, combined with their potential to function as propaganda and obscure other images, must be integrated in an operation that Richard (2002:215) proposes will consider "what other images are behind the one that is visible". Phrased somewhat differently, this would be to ask "which images do others make invisible?" (Richard 2002:215). Is it not then equally crucial to critique art history's contribution to the 'invisibility' of certain images?

The visual signifier is, thus, not only problematic on the grounds of its uncertain authorship, but also as a result of its mobilisation (and mutation) on the information superhighway. The production and reproduction of images through extended visual technologies[34] has given art history more awkward questions to deal with. For, if images are not regarded as "singular" (Richard 2002:212), but rather as constituting "image neighbourhoods" (Richard 2002:213) in which "uncertainties about the meaning of the … image" (Richard 2002:213) abound, can art history's aim of finding the 'truth' behind the image still be justified? For this aim can never fully be achieved, since, as Rogoff (1998:22) quite rightly argues, "what the eye purportedly 'sees' is dictated to it by an entire set of beliefs and desires and by a set of coded languages and generic apparatuses".

The traditional concept of an art work that is stable and unchanging in terms of its meaning is now increasingly being replaced by the recognition that images are infinitely mutable. A digital copy, unlike a photograph of a photograph and a photocopy of a photocopy, is entirely indistinguishable from the original. For art history, the new digitised images are problematic in terms of the epistemological and methodological foundations of the discipline, for which original authorship

[34] Visual technologies should be understood, as in Mirzoeff's (1999:1) terms, as "any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision".

has always been a valid entry point. The authenticity of digital images is compromised through their continual and uncontrolled manipulation. While Emily Apter (1996:26) points out that "appraisal, inventory, patronage, provenance, reproduction, authentication, appropriation, copyright, insurance, and censorship" have always been "crucial to the practice of art history", these concepts may no longer be useful to art history on their own. For, in the light of the abundance of electronically generated images, how can Kleinbauer's (1971:1) assumption that, "regardless of the medium of expression, a work of art is a unique, homogenous … irreplaceable, nonreproducible … individual whole", be sustained? New digital media have complicated such issues for art history. As Mitchell (1992:52) quite rightly states, "notions of individual authorial responsibility for image content, authorial determination of meaning, and authorial prestige", can no longer be indisputably justified.

The tools of digital imaging are described by Mitchell (1992:7) as "felicitously adapted to the diverse projects of our postmodern era", since these processes involve fragmentation, indeterminacy and heterogeneity. The fixed image of photography (and painting) has been superseded by the electronic image. In the late twentieth century, images entered a new phase of artistic production in terms of their alignment with postmodernist discourses of parody, malleability and irreverent pastiche. Privileging heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the reconstruction of identity, postmodern images reflect the attitude of distrust of totalising "metanarratives" (Lyotard 1979 [1984]:xxiv). Celebrating incoherence rather than modernism's trust in unity, coherence and meaning, the limitless possibilities implicit in electronic technologies are reflected in Seejarim's work, *The opposite of illustration*. The blurred, indeterminate image is fragmented and illogical, and may be said to reflect the unfixed and destabilised, or "reconfigured eye" (Mitchell 1992:85) of technology. Furthermore, Seejarim's representation of what is visible through the rear window of a motor car on a journey to and from work illustrates Paul Virilio's (1994:63) "paradoxical presence". The long-distance "telepresence" (Virilio 1994:63) of the thing depicted - the real-time image -

dominates the thing represented, thereby "turning the very concept of reality on its head" (Virilio 1994:63). The journey, constantly replayed, dominates the actual event, as if it were currently taking place. This is the electronic, mediated image of postmodernity.

As proponents of visual culture studies assert, the interrogation of visuality has become crucial at a time when everyday life is increasingly intertwined with mass media, massification, popularisation and urbanisation. Surrounded by swarms of images, clones and copies, the new habitat of society is literally, as Robert Hughes (1980:324) suggested as much as two decades ago, a "forest of media" 'conspiring' against the various ways that art has been previously experienced. In this way, the 'new media' of photography, film, video and digital processes have changed the course of art; the process of art appreciation and the viewers of art.[35]

This was already evident in the nineteenth century when the development of high-speed presses and photographic half-tone printing processes ignited a rapid acceleration of image production.[36] Available and accessible, the photograph heralded the start of Walter Benjamin's (1936 [1970]) "age of mechanical reproduction", in which the general population was afforded visual experience and opportunities previously reserved for the elite. Profoundly applicable to industrial capitalism, the usefulness of photography's methods in a vast range of activities was immediately seized upon, for both public and private use. For example, John Berger (1980:48) notes that "[w]ithin a mere 30 years of its invention as a gadget for an elite, photography was being used for police filing,

[35] Image production and dissemination in the pre-industrial era was limited by time constraints (in terms of their physical production) and difficulty (in terms of their replication). Before the invention of printing in the fifteenth century, images served ritual or aesthetic purposes, and were few and scarce (Mitchell 1992:82). With the advent of printmaking in northern Italy in the mid-fifteenth century, the process of disseminating knowledge and expanding social consciousness was markedly accelerated. Subsequently, the mass produced image became accessible and freely available.

[36] Mitchell (1992:82) quotes William Ives, who found that "the number of printed pictures produced between 1800 and 1901 was probably considerably greater than the total number of printed pictures that had been produced before 1801".

war reporting, military reconnaissance, pornography, encyclopedia documentation, family albums … news reporting and formal portraiture", amongst others. In this way, through the formation of image archives, such as illustrated encyclopedias, magazines (The National Geographic), slide collections, police archives, (serving predominantly to inform rather than as part of ritual or aesthetic purpose), people's knowledge of the world came to be derived mostly from pictures. In the twentieth century, with the promise of offering direct access to the 'real', photography thus "replaced the world as immediate testimony" (Berger 1980:48) and became a public and supposedly democratic medium. This means that, not only is the visual experience democratised through the invention of photography, but it is also technologised.

Concern over the proliferation of art in the mass media was already voiced at earlier moments in the twentieth century. For example, Berger (1972:32) wrote that:

> [f]or the first time ever, images of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free …. They surround us in the same way as a language surrounds us. They have entered the mainstream of life over which they no longer, in themselves, have power.

Similarly, Benjamin (1936 [1970]:222) argued that new mechanical processes had already caused a revolution in the way art was experienced in his time, as the mechanical reproduction of art works renders them increasingly accessible and ultimately destroys the uniqueness of the original. Examining the loss of the aura and authenticity of an art work through mechanical reproduction, Benjamin further argued that artworks were being designed with the specific intention of being reproducible.

Today, copies of art works (fine art, sculpture, photographs), originally created within a specific cultural and historical context, are appropriated, manipulated and released again into contemporary popular cultural life. Museum art is at a definite disadvantage, confirms Hughes (1980:364), who states that traditional art

"cannot be as vivid, as far-reaching, as powerfully iconic as TV or print [newspapers, magazines, posters]". Today, our primary experience of art is through the copy and, to a large extent, the copy has gained supremacy over the original. Thus, 'mediated' experiences triumph over 'immediate' experience. The effect of this is that the original meaning is multiplied and fragmented (Berger 1970:19).

Extending Benjamin's treatise on the implications of mass production on the artwork, Harvey (1990:346) contends that "advances in electronic reproduction and the capacity to store images, torn out of their actual contexts in space and time, for instantaneous use and retrieval on a mass basis" have complicated image production and consumption in the postmodern age. Harvey (1990:348) argues that capital and money power, based in new social class formations, define the symbolic order through "the production of images for everyone" and demand new cultural forms as a distinguishing mark of social identity.[37]

The confluence of art and mass media, as recognised by Marshall McLuhan (1964), reflected the choice of subject matter of certain twentieth century artists and movements. In Britain, following the discussions among artists, art historians and critics associated with the Independent Group in the 1950s, the critic, Lawrence Alloway, initiated the concept of a "popular art /fine art continuum" (Livingstone 1990:33) to broaden the sphere of subject matter. In this way, the Pop artists - also referred to as Neo-Dadaists - aimed specifically to close the chasm between art and everyday life. This critique of the products of mass culture was also evident in America. When Andy Warhol (1928-1987), Jasper Johns (born 1930), Robert Rauschenberg (born 1925) and Claes Oldenburg (born 1929) 'elevated' mundane images of commercial mass media, so as to equate them with 'art', the status of 'high' art as a revered image/object was

[37] The digital image is emerging, as Mitchell (1992:55) puts it, "as a new kind of token – differing fundamentally from both photographs and paintings – in communicative and economic exchanges".

thereby thrown into contention. The ready-made - initiated by Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) - was the ultimate protagonist in the collapse of 'visual signifier' and 'signified'.[38] Through their repetition, enlargement or reduction of 'popular' images, the Pop artists commented on mass culture and the construction of cultural meanings.[39] In this sense, art was in dialogue with everyday life, rather than with itself.

[38] Revisionist historiography positions Marcel Duchamp, not so much as Greenberg's marginal artist to the pursuits of modernism, but rather as a reactionary against modern art through anti-visual projects. For, ultimately, Duchamp challenged all traditional assumptions about art.

Figure 5: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*,1917.
Ready-made. 61 cm.
(Adams 2002:914)

When he submitted the work, *Fountain* (Figure 5), to a New York exhibition, Duchamp was not only commenting on actual and painted fountains in Western art, but was also advocating an idea of anti-art, a pessimism about what was accepted as art as well as the establishments and power structures represented by art. In this work, the hand of the artist is eradicated, with the signature as the only evidence of the artist's presence. Duchamp's 'readymades' questioned the distinction between representation and presentation by decontextualising the object from its recognised position in everyday life and recontextualising it in the museum. The "insufficiency of the decontextualized image" in Duchamp's readymades can, according to Krauss (quoted in Jay (1994:163), be equated with the photograph, since, in both cases, an object is isolated and "physical[ly] transposition[ed] … from the continuum of reality into the fixed condition of the art-image".

[39] For instance, Andy Warhol's, *Two hundred Campbell's soup cans* (1962), and *Elvis* (1962), as well as Roy Lichtenstein's, *Whaam* (1963).

Figure 6: Robert Rauschenberg, *Retroactive I*, 1964.
Silkscreen ink on canvas.
(Bersson 2004:590)

Rauschenberg, in particular, embraced the mass media images that pervaded contemporary life, by depicting endless combinations of images appropriated from television, print, photographs and commercials, as well as an array of objects that constituted American culture in the 1960s. Related and unrelated media images collide with each other in works such as *Retroactive I* (1964) (Figure 6), symbolic of the way in which images are experienced in close succession in everyday life. The split-second image-changes one experiences when paging through a magazine, or flipping through TV channels, are reflected in this composition, where President John F. Kennedy, centrally placed, is surrounded by swarming images. Could the Pop artists not then be considered early cultural critics, and Pop Art as one of the springboards of the theme of

culture – or the 'cultural turn' (Chaney 1994) – in academic discourse?[40] Artists' general interest in the commonplace subject matter and form, as opposed to more traditional representational and realistic styles and the adversarial avant-garde, exposed art as bound to visual culture. Therefore, the critique of art lodged against it by the Pop artists may, to a certain extent, be regarded as the catalyst for the analysis of the visual in culture. As a form of information communication, art must be considered *as* media, and therefore very much part of the broader field of visual culture.

The abundance of images in contemporary cultural life, as well as advanced visual technologies that permit constant "qualitative transformation" (Rosenberg 1985:6), necessitate an interrogation of what Mirzoeff ([sa]:[sp]) terms "hypervisuality". Whereas art historians are concerned with the interpretation of individual art works in relation to artist and cultural context,[41] the visual culture studies "enterprise" (Mirzoeff [sa]:[sp]) focuses its enquiry on the "globalisation of hypervisuality" (Mirzoeff [sa]:[sp]), that is, the world-wide domination of the visual in cultural and social practices. In the same manner, Mitchell (2001:8) argues that, in visual culture studies, the visual field is recognised as a "field of anxiety, fantasy, and power", in which "social differences manifest themselves most dramatically". In this sense, then, visual culture studies takes a broader view of images, while art history centres on individual art works. In its democratisation of visual experience, visual culture studies then addresses the issue of contemporary visuality, with visual art as only one area of concern. While Mitchell (2001:3) asserts that "art history is not concerned with ordinary practices of seeing … [that] lie outside … artistic image-making", visual culture studies *is* interested in the ways of seeing constructed through aesthetic conventions. This implies that an aesthetic way of seeing, endorsed through accepted modes of

[40] Note that Rauschenberg's, *Retroactive I*, was created in the same year that the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS) was established by Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall (Chaney 1994:15).
[41] The South African art historian, Karen Skawran (1976:4), confirmed this when stating that "the primary concern of the art historian is the work of art of the past which he aspires to analyse and interpret".

representation in art, can be exposed through a close investigation of vision as 'visual learning'.

2.3 Vision: learning to see

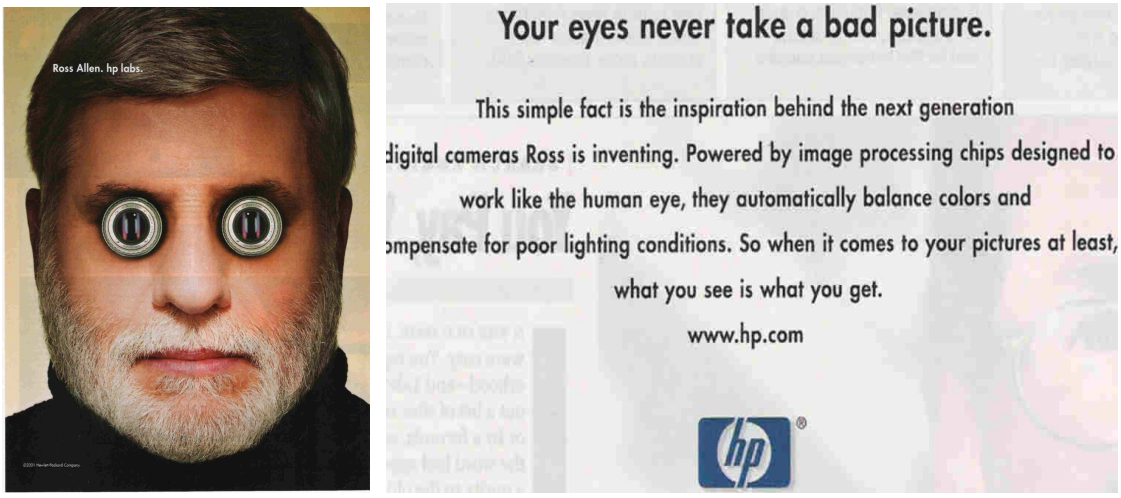

Figure 7: Advertisement for Hewlett Packard
(TIME 2001:49,50)

Since time immemorial, technological inventions have been driven by the desire, amongst others, to extend the human capacity to see, that is, to enhance natural vision. From oil painting to television and the Internet, visual technologies have sought to improve human access and mediation of the real. Since, as Hewlett Packard informs us, "your eyes never take a bad picture" (Figure 7), today's digital cameras are apparently designed to "work like the human eye" and improve the possibilities of vision.

The dramatic effects of this cultural preoccupation with visual probing are evident in what Mirzoeff (1999:7) terms the "diagnostic medical gaze". By means of complex technology, internal organs can be imaged as visual patterns describe everything from brain activity to the heartbeat (Mirzoeff 1999:7). The invention of the telescope, the microscope, the flat, silver-backed looking glass, the camera

obscura, the photograph, and the stereoscope[42] all reflect a cultural obsession with sight. More recently, digital, satellite, and surveillance cameras all serve as evidence of this consuming interest in the visual world. While privileging spectatorship, visual technologies may be said to have dominated the modern era, while simultaneously fostering, what Jay (1994:435) terms, the "Cartesian perspectivalist scopic regime".[43] The modern era is marked by an overwhelming interest in the development of ocular apparatus. Mainly due to the visually infused practices of the Enlightenment, normal perception has, thus, come to be disciplined and enhanced.[44]

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[42] A stereoscope is a device that allows two photographs of the same subject, each taken at slightly different angles, to be viewed together, thereby creating an effect of depth and solidity.

[43] According to Jay (1994:69), a "vigorous privileging of vision" marks the beginning of the modern era dominated by the scopic regime of "Cartesian perspectivalism". Descartes is generally credited with formulating the modern epistemological habit of seeing ideas or *representations* in the mind (Jay 1994:70). Although Descartes sought a link between what our eyes sense and what the mind sees, he argued that the images formed in the brain are not perfect reproductions of external reality, but are a result of the reading of signs. For example, Descartes (quoted in Jay 1994:76) maintained that, "following the rules of perspective, circles are often better represented by ovals rather than by other circles; and squares by diamonds, rather than by other squares". Jay (1994:81) contends that Cartesian philosophy was "particularly influential because of its valorisation of the disembodied eye …". An extension of this was the typical Cartesian trust in only what could be seen with the eye, based on Descartes bias for a spatial rather than temporal ontology.

[44] The scientific gaze that was turned on the world in the seventeenth century inspired an interest in the study of nature through "sense experience" (Barnard 2001:21). The increasing empirical life view that echoed modern scientific experimentation was also reflected in an interest in the active potential of vision. The empiricist approach in scientific experimentation is effectively portrayed in Joseph Wright's, *An experiment on a bird in an air pump,* 1768 (Figure 8), showing a visiting scientist (the modern magician) providing dramatic entertainment to a wealthy eighteenth century family. The scene reflects the explosion of progress and discovery made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in wide-ranging scientific and technological fields.

Figure 8: Joseph Wright, *An experiment on a bird in the air pump,* 1768.
Oil on canvas. 72 x 96 cm.
(Adams 2002:709)

In light of the prominence of vision in modern Western culture, critical debate has interrogated the implications of sight having become the "master sense of the modern era" (Jay 1994:543). For instance, Mirzoeff (1999) and Mitchell (2002), regard actual seeing - including the biological functioning of the eye - as constructed (or learnt) and, therefore, as problematic.[45] Our ability to see is thus regarded as influenced by socio-cultural circumstances; a process which may be referred to as 'visual learning'. For example, Marshall Segall's (1976:100) research shows that perception is linked to cultural factors and previous visual experiences. This means that the "residues of previous sensory experiences" (Segall 1976:100) immediately and unconsciously affect the perception of every subsequent visual stimulus.[46] Visual experience may, then, be regarded as flexible, a product of past experience and future expectations, and not simply a given.[47]

As a result, it has become evident that the cultural dimension of vision must be made problematic and obvious in the analysis of images. For, it is now the case, as Mirzoeff (1999:1) quite aptly contends, that "seeing is a great deal more than

[45] For instance, see Sacks, O. 1995. To see and not see, in *An anthropologist on Mars*. New York: Vintage Books. The author, a neurologist and writer, relates a story of a 50 year old man who, having been blind since childhood, undergoes an operation that restores his sight. Notwithstanding his new visual abilities, the man struggled to once again conceive his world and what he saw had no coherence. This example demonstrates that visual learning supports human existence; that visual experience supports perception.

[46] Segall (1976:100) terms this activity, "stimulus relativism". This means that perception is regarded as not solely stimulus-determined. Rather, as Segall (1976:100) explains, "every stimulus is judged, evaluated, and otherwise perceived by being compared, consciously or not, with the residues of previous sensory experiences" (Segall 1976:100).

[47] For instance, the viewing public's initial rejection of the discoveries made by the Impressionists in portraying coloured reflections and coloured shadows, attests to the premise that images affect vision. Gombrich (1982:27) maintains that "the public had to learn to see" these paintings, which, at first, did not look convincing. Having looked at an Impressionist painting of coloured shadows, the viewers, to their surprise, could verify them in nature. Largely influenced by the invention of the camera, people began to see differently, and the visible was given new meaning (Berger 1972:18). The Impressionists pursued a scientific approach, attempting to reproduce the experience of light and colour as it is imprinted on the retina. Seemingly unfinished, with sketchy brushstrokes still visible, the paintings showed blurred forms and unblended juxtaposed colours. In Impressionist art works, the *experience* of sight, through the depiction of the fleeting, temporalised glance, therefore, with an awareness of the embodied quality of vision, was privileged at the expense of subject matter.

believing these days". Thus, what we know and what we believe affects the way we see things. It is, therefore, not so much that seeing is believing, but rather that believing is seeing. Consequently, it is certainly not the case that "what you see is what you get", as Hewlett Packard contends (Figure 7).

For Mitchell (2002:232), seeing and vision must now be interrogated in a task he calls "showing seeing". This process constitutes not only a critical investigation into the socially constructed nature of visual life, but also an interrogation of the construction of vision through culturally endorsed modes of representation. This kind of approach acknowledges that, as Gombrich (1982:12) states, there is a "relation between visual perception and pictorial representation", or, seeing and showing, in Mitchell's terms. As Berger (1972:10) points out, "every image embodies a way of seeing". Consequently, the 'way of seeing' of the creator of the image is reflected in the choice of representation. Phrased somewhat differently, Wartofsky (quoted in Jay 1994:4) contends that "human vision is itself an artefact, produced by other artefacts, namely pictures". This means that perception ought to be regarded as a result of historical and cultural changes in representation, which ultimately would also require the acknowledgement that sight is a learned activity.[48]

In this sense, then, a critique of vision must necessarily interrogate art as a catalyst for the construction of a certain kind of perception. Consequently, an inquiry into art history's role as advocator of cultural values, through the endorsement of a particular 'way of seeing', may now be unavoidable. For, if historical changes in representation, combined with scientific and technological progress, have constructed Western perception, then the values embedded in artistic conventions must be interrogated to expose their construction of the viewing audience. This kind of campaign would analyse the parallel relationship

[48] That sight is not automatic, but a learned activity, is verified by Deregowski (1971:27-33) who demonstrates that uneducated Zambian women had difficulty in matching realistic pictures with the objects they represented. Therefore, the understanding of images is shown to be dependent on the greater experience of other pictures.

of images to vision and lead to Mitchell's (2002:232) "showing seeing" or, *sight-seeing through the visual.*

Western art has undoubtedly been in the service of the cultural obsession with the visual world, as is evident in the mimetic tradition[49] that has dominated from much of Western art or for two lengthy periods until the twentieth century. Positioned in striking juxtaposition to Seejarim's, *The opposite of illustration* (Figure 2), Karl Friedrich Schinkel's (1781-1841) nineteenth century painting, *The invention of drawing* (1830) (Figure 9), illustrates two important points. Firstly, it demonstrates that the ancient Greeks prioritised the art of drawing realistically from the visual world and, secondly, it shows the artistic convention of an aesthetic way of seeing.

Figure 9: Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *The invention of drawing,* 1830.
Oil on canvas.
Von-der-Heydt-Museum, Wupperthal.
(Mitchell 1992:1)

[49] The term 'mimesis' is derived from the Greek *mimEsis,* and *mimeisthai,* meaning imitation or mimicry. In art, mimesis is the imitative representation of nature and human behaviour. For an account of mimetic representation in art - as interpreted in the work of Plato (that art is twice far removed from the real in its representation of the ideal world) and Aristotle (that art is the representation of nature as it should be) - see Hassan Baktir (2003), *The concepts of imitation in Plato and Artistotle.*

The origin of painting is described by Pliny the Elder (23AD-79AD), author of *Natural History* (77AD), as uncertain since, "some Greeks claim that it was discovered in Sicyon, others in Corinth; but there is universal agreement that it began by the outlining of a man's shadow" (quoted in Mitchell 1992:227). The mythic tale, told by Pliny the Elder, claims that a young woman, distraught that her lover was to leave, drew a silhouette on the wall around the shadow of his face; the shadow having been cast by the lamp.[50] Though the Greek tradition of image-making was certainly not the first evidence of such practices, it is the mimetic tradition that has dominated Western art that is important here.[51] Countless classical stories retelling instances where artists deceived their patrons, confirms this preoccupation with the imitation of reality. For example, Apelles (c. 352BC-308BC), in his capacity as court painter, is believed to have painted a portrait of Alexander the Great's (356BC-323BC) horse, Bucephalus (date unknown), that was so accurate that the real horse whinnied at the portrait. These are the first accounts of a cultural preoccupation with the re-creation of reality through a perfect illusion - or mimesis - of the perceptual world.

[50] In Greek legend, the origin of sculpture, as depicted in Figure 10, is attributed to a woman of Corinth. After tracing the shadow of her lover's face cast on a wall, her father filled in the outline with clay which he then fired.

Figure 10: Joseph Wright [of Derby], *The Corinthian maid,* 1782-1784.
Oil on canvas. 41⅞x51½ in.
(Adams 2002:9)

[51] Prehistoric peoples have left an abundance of visual traces of both their existence and their cultural preoccupations. Across extremely diverse and distant cultures, these ancient images indicate that their creation was always closely related to spiritual beliefs, mystical rituals and cultural practices. The accurate, or mimetic, representation of nature was, however, evidently not their express aim.

The tradition of natural illusionism that has dominated art, developed from the classical Greek artists, who, according to Jay (1994:22), "privileged sight over the other senses". The depiction of the Greek gods as naked, and in idealised human form, suggests their bias for visual clarity and transparency (Jay 1994:24). This tradition was to govern artistic practice into the nineteenth century. The dominance of the visual, and Plato's celebration of sight (though not of the mimetic arts), resulted in the elevation of the visual in Western culture and the privileging of vision in Western thought.[52] Gombrich (1982:11) suggests that it was mainly in ancient Greece, but also later in Renaissance Europe, that artists strove "systematically, through a succession of generations, step by step to approximate their images to the visible world and achieve likenesses that might deceive the eye". Hence, the concept of art, as based in the technical skill of achieving naturalistic illusionism and rendering nature accurately, came to be privileged in art.

The fifteenth century discovery of perspective (the technique of rendering three-dimensional space onto the two-dimensions of the canvas) aided the pursuit of the accurate depiction of illusionistic space in art.[53] For example, Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) perspective study for *Adoration of the Magi* (1481) (Figure 11), depicts the preoccupation with space as a visual microcosm duplicating the invisible macrocosm created by God. A new artistic order (and scientific order)

[52] The ancient Greeks privileged sight over the other senses and regarded sight as external, thus creating a distinction and distance between the observer and the object of his gaze (Jay 1994:23). The ocularcentrism of Greek thought paved the way for the distinction between subject and object and "the belief in the neutral apprehension of the latter by the former, a distinction so crucial for much later thought" (Jay 1994:25). Plato's equation of the sun and the eye, as well as the Greek belief that the eye transmits and receives light rays, leads Jay (1994:30) to conclude that "there was a certain participatory dimension in the visual process, a potential intertwining of viewer and viewed", anticipating later philosophical discourses on visual experience.

[53] Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) is credited with inventing linear perspective, a mathematical system based on the observation that objects that are further away are seen more clearly than those closer to the viewer. By perceiving the picture plane as a window, and the edges of the picture as the window frame, the viewer sees the depicted scene through this window. The use of orthogonals that converge at a vanishing point makes this illusion convincing. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), in his 1435 treatise, *Della Pittura,* elaborated on Brunelleschi's breakthrough (Gombrich 1982:20).

became the naturalised visual culture, resulting, in part, from the differentiation of the aesthetic from the religious (Jay 1994:52).[54]

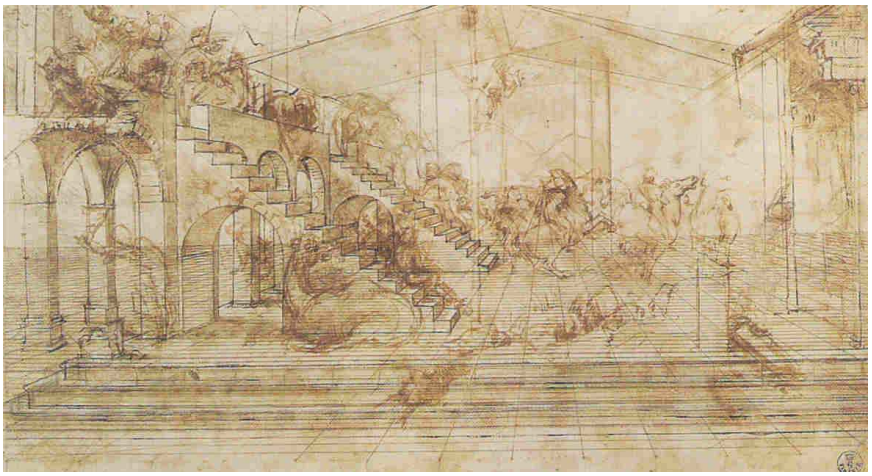

Figure 11: Leonardo da Vinci, perspective study for the *Adoration of the Magi,* c.1481.
Pen, bister, and wash. 16.5 x 29.2 cm.
(Adams 2002:508)

Centring vision on the eye of the beholder, perspective replaced the Medieval assumption of multiple vantage points in depictions of a scene. Visual facts could now be gathered and stabilised within a unified field.[55] Hughes (1980:17) argues that perspective is an 'ideal view', as if "seen by a one-eyed, motionless person who is clearly detached from what he sees", where the spectator becomes a god with the whole world converging on him as "the Unmoved Onlooker". In this sense, the eye is distinct from the viewed field, just "as the brain is separate from the world it contemplates" (Hughes 1980:17). In *Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 11), the picture itself converges onto the eye, reflecting the convergence of the orthogonals within the picture onto the vanishing point. Jay (1994:54) likens this

[54] According to Gombrich (1982:21), the development of this system was presupposed by a shift in the expectations and demands of the public who insisted on the representation of a sacred event set on an imaginary stage as if through the eyes of an eyewitness. In contrast to present postmodern images that show the interrelatedness between the viewer and what is viewed, the Renaissance artist, by concentrating on the rules and procedures for achieving perspective, was able to explore space more than the subject or objects in it.

[55] Medieval art had remained schematic (and, in a sense, unproblematic to the medieval viewer), since the conventional depiction of images was based on codes and symbols that depicted *what* happened and not *how* it happened (Gombrich 1982:16). The visual world of medieval life was experienced symbolically: material objects were thought of as symbols of spiritual truths and were not acknowledged for sensory pleasure.

to a pyramid, whose apex is mirrored in the opposite direction. Therefore, the beholder becomes the privileged centre of perspectival vision, suggesting an increasing consciousness of individuality. Perspectival conventions offer no visual reciprocity, as everything is focused on the eye of the viewer as the unique centre of the world. Furthermore, the use of perspective reflected the assumption that what was visible in the perceptual field was a homogenous, regularly ordered space, a rational visual order, awaiting duplication.[56] Jay (1994:57) argues that the notion of space as uniform, infinite and isotropic, is the pivotal difference between the dominant modern world view and its various predecessors.[57]

A return to Seejarim's work, *The opposite of illustration* (Figure 2) and Schinkel's, *The origin of painting* (Figure 9), can illustrate the opposing modern and postmodern paradigms of sight/vision. Schinkel's rendering of illusionistic space through the distribution of figures in the foreground and middle-ground to establish depth, combined with modelling effects (*chiaroscuro*), conforms to the mimetic tradition in painting. The work reflects the subject/object distinction, creating a distance between the observer and the object of the gaze. On the other hand, reflecting current visual phenomena where, as Apter (1996:26) explains, "boundaries between spectatorial ego and image collapse", Seejarim's video immediately immerses the viewer in the scene. While viewing the moving image, the subject/object distinction is subverted. With no attempt at contrived

[56] The Albertian grid on visual space in paintings is reflected also in the active search for dominating and controlling the earth through the visually charged curiosity and scientific empiricism of the eighteenth century. A more visually active mode of reasoning - through experiment and visual witnessing - privileged sight over other senses in the acquisition of legitimate knowledge. This idea dominated social and scientific practice into the nineteenth century.

[57] Jay (1994:58) argues that this notion is "congenial not only to modern science, but also … to the emerging economic system we call capitalism", since the Renaissance period, particularly in Florence, is marked by inventions such as double-entry bookkeeping, the Hindu number zero, the florin, or "imaginary money", and a rational division of labour. The principles of mathematical order on which these inventions are based, reflect (or are reflected through a causal relationship) the new rational visual order encapsulated in perspective. Arguing that the development of perspective and capitalism are not entirely separate phenomena, Jay (1994:59) demonstrates that the oil painting as commodity came into its own in the Renaissance period. In so doing, objects of no significant value, placed in a visual field, gained aesthetic potential and "exchange value" (Jay 1994:59).

perspectival illusionism, the image is situated in real time - a direct replaying of the actual event. In this way, the viewer becomes a moving part of the moving image.

Seejarim's work is preoccupied more with the act of seeing than with what is seen, an act she describes as "seeing but not seeing" (quoted in Jamal 2003:70). Documenting a journey to and from work, Seejarim attempts to record what Lefebvre (quoted in Jamal 2003:70) referred to as "the invisible visible", and what Benjamin (1936) considered the auratic power of the everyday or the inconsequential. Hence, this image depicts that which cannot be seen. The image itself exists only due to the existence of technological devices that can be used to obtain evermore arresting images. Far beyond the actual capacities of the human eye, the actual event in real time would have lasted a fraction of a second and would therefore be totally 'invisible' and unmemorable. Mainly exploring the issue of flux, and fascinated by the elusive nature of time, Seejarim's work can be read as a critique on the significance of sight and vision as epistemological cornerstones of Western culture and philosophical thought. Furthermore, the work brings attention to technological developments in current art-making practices, as well as the enigma of the visible/invisible matrix, a crucial topic in visual culture studies (Mirzoeff 2002, Mitchell 2002).

Removed from actual visual experience, in linear perspective the viewpoint is static, unchanging and monocular. It presumes a fixed eye, as opposed to actual embodied vision which is not at all atemporal, but rather made possible by two active, stereoscopic eyes. Virilio (1994:61) describes the physiology of sight as dependent on the movements of the eye "which are simultaneously incessant and unconscious (motility) and constant and conscious (mobility)". The pictorial application of linear perspective is a uniquely Western phenomenon which can be regarded as a contrived grid with no reference to true and lived sensory experience. This is what Seejarim's work aims to show. Her work demonstrates that neither the eye, nor the head, is ever still in relation to the visible object

(Hughes 1980:17). Continuously restless and flickering involuntarily, each view is fractionally different from the previous. Truly "a mosaic of multiple relationships" (Hughes 1980:17), *The opposite of illustration*, shows that vision itself is never totally fixed.

While painting, drawing and sculpture led to the cultivation of an aesthetic way of seeing, through the endorsement of a naturalistic mode of mimetic representation, more technologically-inspired methods, such as video and photography, proved equally helpful in representing the world. The demand for the acquisition of objective knowledge through observable facts generated a demand for images that objectively portrayed reality.[58] This, in turn, led to the increasing production of scientific and technical illustrations, combined with the increasing fascination with the camera obscura (Mitchell 1992:82).[59] Fuelled by the Western obsession to achieve lifelike illusions, and to chart and reproduce physical reality, the camera obscura (Figure 12), forerunner of the camera, made it possible to create an image of reality by means other than painting, drawing and sculpture.[60]

[58] The emphasis in the social sciences on objectivity, and the utilisation of the same methods as the natural sciences, led to the treatment of facts as 'things' independent of individual experience (Barnard 2001:22). Theorists such as Auguste Comte (1798-1857), for example, argued that human behaviour could be explained in terms of causes and effects, through observation and measurement; therefore, objectively. Similarly, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) argued that laws of human nature and society (which he understood as being the same as the laws of nature) were the key to explaining human behaviour (Barnard 2001:22,23).

[59] Camera obscura literally means 'a dark room' (Origins in shadows [sa]:[sp]). Leonardo da Vinci was the first to notice that when light is passed through a small hole into a dark room, an inverted image appears on the opposite wall. The astronomer, Johan Kepler (1571-1630), invented a portable camera obscura in the seventeenth century which resembled a tent (Adams 2002:786).

[60] Painters such as Paul Sandby (1730-1809) and John Constable (1776-1837) attempted to represent the world more 'photographically' by utilising the camera obscura as a viewing instrument. Striving for an objectively accurate representation of nature embedded in scientific naturalism, these artists, influenced by developments in photography, democratically represented everyday life through a scientific and mechanical approach. In painting, the aim of scientific truthfulness led to the establishment of the naturalist art movement of the mid-nineteenth century in England and France.

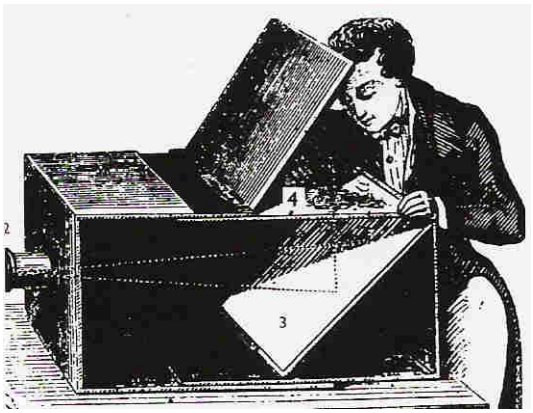

Figure 12: Camera Obscura, c. 1650.
(Bersson 2004:155)

The nineteenth century invention of photography introduced a 'way of seeing' that united science and art, and, once again, very specifically reflects the cultural value imbued on mimesis.[61] The mimetic powers inherent in photographic processes attest to the cultural preoccupation with extending the possibilities of vision (also evident in a variety of scientific fields, such as botany and astronomy), and reproducing objective truth in reality.[62] Furthermore, the invention of 'drawing with light', instead of with material - therefore, the opposite of illustration - can be described as the culmination of a "mechanistic mode of visual perception and mental ordering" (Arguelles 1975:[sp]) - or a technological way of seeing.[63] This had been preceded by a "naturalistic mode of visual perception" (Arguelles 1975:[sp]), or an aesthetic way of seeing. The general public were quickly and effortlessly seduced by photography's method of mechanical documentation. It was the presumed ability of the photograph to capture reality with objective precision that captivated the public. As in the

[61] Virilio (1994:63) defines traditional pictorial representations of *reality* as "formal logic", and photographs and cinematic representations as *actual* and "dialectic". *Virtualities* of the videogram, hologram and digital imagery are designated the term, "paradoxical logic" (Virilio 1994:63).
[62] The camera was almost immediately referred to as the mirror of the world (Jay 1994:126). Furthermore, Daguerre himself had already become famous as a master of illusion in achieving *trompe l'oeil* effects in painting. This fact reinforces the argument that technology and artistic intention developed side by side.
[63] According to Baudelaire (quoted in Jay 1994:122), the mechanistic mode of consciousness was a necessary precedent for industrialisation and, what he referred to as, a "cult of images" which describes the proliferation of images by mass production (already discussed previously).

classical stories of artists who portrayed reality with such visual accuracy that audiences were easily fooled by their illusions, contemporary cartoons demonstrated a similar frenetic attraction to the mimetic powers of photographs.[64]

Virilio's (1994:63) "dialectic logic" is the image of photography and film with the realisation that images were not timeless.[65] The contradiction of linear perspective (that images of reality were arranged for a single fixed spectator) was exposed by the camera when this technology showed that the idea of passing time could not be separated from visual experience which was always relative to the situatedness of the viewer (Berger 1972:18).

In general, technological advancements in the nineteenth century affected socio-cultural and economic circumstances and, in turn, affected 'ways of seeing'. At the same time, an aesthetic tradition, previously based largely on the representation of the landscape, was superseded by a fascination with the metropolis and aspects of city life. Within the machine-formed environment of the

[64] For example, Nadar's, *Satire on Daubigny's Les bords de l'Oise* (Figure 13), shows a swimmer about to dive into a painting that was based on a daguerreotype.

Figure 13: Gaspard-Félix Tournachon (Nadar), *Satire on Daubigny's Les bords de l'Oise (The banks of the Oise)*, 1859.
(Bersson 2004:159)

[65] Sontag (quoted in Berger 1980:50) contends that: "a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask". Furthermore, a photograph is described by Bazin (quoted in Jay 1994:126) as "an image of the world … formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man". While the image is not reality, this view considers it to be perfectly analogous with reality. The current proliferation of press photographs, the way they function in the media and their alteration and appropriation by means of increasingly advanced digital processes, render such notions insufficient.

city, travel became faster and the stable fixed position of the 'seeing eye' was destabilised. Hughes (1980:12) describes this destabilisation as:

> … the succession and superimposition of view, the unfolding of landscape in flickering surfaces as one was carried swiftly past it, and an exaggerated feeling of relative motion (the poplar nearby seeming to move faster than the church spire across the field) due to parallax. The view from the train was not the view from the horse. It compressed more motifs into the same time. Conversely, it left less time to dwell on any one thing.

Visual experience in the nineteenth century was being altered and the cultural conditions of seeing were starting to change, not least through the viewing position of the subject and the view which confronted the subject. More than a century later, the view from the rear window of a car - as in Seejarim's, *The opposite of illustration* - would show the destabilisation of Mitchell's (1992:85) "reconfigured eye" even further. In the nineteenth century, it was the view *from* the Eiffel Tower (1889), and not the view *of* the tower from the ground below, that marked this turning point in visual experience. Rising a thousand feet from the ground, the view over Paris was of a flat conglomeration of pattern: once invisible roofs, alleyways and streets now made visible to the viewer. The sight of frontality and pattern, and not perspective recession and depth, was, according to Hughes (1980:14), "one of the pivots in human consciousness".

Inspired by the flatness of Italian frescoes, Japanese woodblock prints and patterns of *cloisonné* enamel, Modern art - although already underway before the completion of the Eiffel Tower - depicted flat, patterned space in order to show that the canvas itself was a surface covered with colours (Hughes 1980:14). Thus, space, conceptualised as essentially flat, yet containing movement and abstraction, interested the artists of the early twentieth century. The magnitude of technological and scientific accomplishments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in an accelerated rate of change in human experience, which simultaneously demanded new forms of expression and new 'ways of seeing'.

In the twentieth century, the distinction between viewer/viewed or subject/object imploded. Albertian one-point perspective was eradicated by the Cubists, Futurists and Vorticists, who challenged assumptions about how we see (Jay 1994:159). Subverting previous reigning notions of fixed vision in a unified, rational field, the Cubists asserted that the viewer, and what is viewed, are interrelated in the same field. Since the eye and the object of its gaze inhabit the same field, they will "influence one another mutually and reciprocally" (Hughes 1980:17).[66] In painting, perspective, modelling and mimetic conventionalism were on the wane, and the world was viewed as a field of shifting relationships between viewer and viewed, the subject interwoven with the rest of the universe, thereby overcoming the distinction between subject and object. The fixed visual field of linear perspective was replaced by artworks showing many possible views of the object being depicted.

2.4 Art history and visuality

In current visual experiences, we are constantly surrounded and bombarded by images. Although the assumption that the visual is more dominant in contemporary life than in the past cannot be justified, at the same time, it cannot be denied that contemporary images are *different* from images of the past, in terms of *how the eye perceives them* and how they *operate* in cultural and political life. The technological mode of representation, which now increasingly dominates visual experience, has led to what Poster (2002:67) quite rightly contends are "different visual regimes" that require new means of interpretation. One can certainly not disagree with Elkins (2003:131) that, in this age, "we are … more *adept* at the visual than any preceding culture" [emphasis added].

[66] This relativeness of seeing was already evident in the late work of Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) which takes into account the process of seeing and questions whether or not this really is what you see. For example, in *Mont Ste-Victoire* (1906), hesitation, doubt and uncertainty become as much a theme of the painting as the trees, rocks and sky.

Consequently, it is no longer possible to ignore the question of how visuality impacts on the discipline of art history.

Art is unquestionably affected by visuality, since, by means of technology, art moves seamlessly through visual culture, thereby challenging the ontological foundations of the concept 'art'. The proliferation of images of Leonardo da Vinci's, *Mona Lisa* (1503), in the mass media is a case in point. This image has appeared in advertising campaigns - glossing the pages of commercial magazines, on calendars and postcards, on album covers and book covers, or repeated in postage size proportions in art works. Harold Rosenberg (1985:3) even claims to have seen "a Mona Lisa belt buckle in colour". The art work no longer finds itself solely in the art gallery and the viewer does not have to go to the Louvre in Paris to view this famous work. This is the new visuality; reality has become transformed into images. The image is no longer a representation of reality, it is not merely mimetic and there is no definite distinction between subject and object, but, rather, the image has become reality.

Jay (1994:543) argues that, "from one perspective, postmodernism has seemed the apotheosis of the visual, the triumph of the simulacrum over what it purports to represent, a veritable surrender to the phantasmagoric spectacle rather than its subversion", what Jean Baudrillard (1988) has called the "hyperreal" world of simulations. For Baudrillard, the postmodern era is a culture of the 'simulacrum' in which there is no distinction between the original and the copy. Thus, the separation between the real and the imaginary continually implodes and reality and the simulation are experienced as if they were the same. Reality has been effectively transformed into images.

Beyond the problem of complicated image production, the status of the visual in contemporary culture through an investigation of sight as perceptual experience, social practice and discursive construct, is now also necessary. Both reflecting and constructing world views, art requires a critical analysis of its powerful

connection to cultural production. In this regard, art's relation to visual representation in a broader sense, or what Mitchell (2001:3) terms "vernacular visuality", must be interrogated. This approach would be aligned with Gombrich's perceptions in his investigation of the psychology of visual perception in everyday seeing. In *Meditations on a hobby horse or the roots of artistic form* (1963:5), he maintained that all art is "image making … rooted in the creation of substitutes", and that "an image is not an imitation of an object's external form but an imitation of certain privileged or relevant aspects … [of] certain privileged motifs in our world to which we respond …". In *Art and Illusion* (1968:140), Gombrich argues that artists' experiences of the world condition their creation of "re-interpreted images". Thus, art works originate from other works experienced by the artist. In the same way, current art-making practices are influenced by the broader visual culture, whilst simultaneously influencing visual culture.

Since contemporary life is increasingly entangled with complex images (that are endlessly mutable, accessible and freely available), the discipline of art history may be on shaky ground. Traditional distinctions between mass media, mass culture, kitsch, commercial art and fine art, can no longer easily be justified. The questions of disciplinary boundaries between art history and visual culture studies and, ultimately, how 'art' can be defined, are interrogated in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3
THE DISCIPLINED IMAGE: FENCES AND FRIENDSHIPS

My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours'.
(Robert Frost 1914)

3.1 Do good fences make good neighbours?

Due to the systematic expansion of visual culture studies as an academic endeavour, the discipline of art history has steadily been forced to the brink of a precipice. This has largely been motivated by the unavoidable entanglement of each respective field's "object domain" (Bal 2003:11; Preziosi 1989:xiii). As a result, art history's disciplinary status, interdisciplinary boundaries, its procedures and priorities are, once again, being questioned.[67] Across wide ranging literature dealing with the so-called, "crisis in the discipline" (Preziosi 1989; Werckmeister 1982; Zerner 1982; Rifkin 1986; Rees & Borzello 1986; *October* 1996), it has become increasingly evident that art history has largely been thrown into disarray, leaving its practitioners polarised in the debate concerning the scope of its object of study - visual art - as well as the methodological assumptions which have traditionally underpinned its strategies. It may now even be suggested that the identity of the discipline of art history is in a much-needed state of transition. This statement is moreover true in the South African context.

The submissions by various scholars who responded to the, now infamous, *October* (1996) questionnaire, serve to evidence the fact that art history and visual culture studies have not yet settled into a comfortable co-existence.[68] The responses that were submitted suggested that: 1) visual culture studies is an

[67] That art history itself has always been controversial or unstable as a discipline is confirmed by Preziosi (1989:11) when he states that "there was never a time when the nature of the object domain or the roles and functions of art were uncontested".
[68] Among those who responded were art and architecture historians, film theorists, literary critics and artists.

interdisciplinary project that is more anthropologically than historically based; 2) visual culture studies encompasses a broad set of approaches; 3) contemporary life is entangled with complex (visual) images which are bound to specific media discourses and 4) the shift toward the interdisciplinarity of visual culture studies parallels similar shifts within art, architectural and film practice (*October* 1996:25). From these statements there is no question that a critique of disciplinarity, with particular reference to the history of art, is required in light of the emergence of visual culture studies.

Ultimately, it may no longer merely be a question of art history adapting and changing due to ideological and disciplinary challenges - as may be said to have occurred with the emergence of the 'new art history' approximately two decades ago - but rather to question the premises upon which art history itself is based. It may, after all, be argued that, if the concept of art is problematised to the extreme, and art history deals with the problematised concept, what is left for art history but to mourn the death of the traditional construction of art? Should art history concern itself exclusively with the history of the concept art or should it acknowledge that the basis for its study, namely the limiting category 'art', may have been eclipsed by visual culture? Phrased somewhat differently, it may now not only be the case of a crisis *in* art history, but also a crisis *of* art history.[69] This means that, as Henri Zerner (1982:279) had already pointed out two decades ago, on the one hand, art history ought to be "re-examined, rethought [and] restructured", while, on the other, "the specific definition of art [has become] less and less workable".[70] If the definition of art history's object domain is assumed to be problematic, how can art history then unproblematically be preserved as an academic discipline?

[69] This statement somewhat rephrases the chapter title, "A crisis in, or of, art history?" in Preziosi, D. 1989. *Rethinking art history: meditations on a coy science.* New Haven: Yale University Press.
[70] Here, Zerner (1982) was commenting on the general tenor of the articles published in the 1982 winter issue of *Art Journal,* which was devoted to the theme of "The Crisis in the Discipline". In his editorial statement, Zerner (1982:279) deduced that commentators were generally disillusioned with the academic discipline of art history which he suggested had been reduced to "an uninspired professional routine feeding a busy academic machine".

Through a close examination of the intersection of visual images within the traditional disciplinary boundaries of art history and current discourse in visual culture studies, I aim to show that art history must, once again, urgently redefine its object of study, or risk relegation to the study of so-called “older art” (Walker & Chaplin 1997:36) which perpetuates Western canonical traditions. Alternatively, is it possible that to uphold art history as an autonomous discipline in the academy may no longer even be desirable? In my endeavour, I question Robert Frost’s early twentieth century (and perhaps Modernist) assumption in the poem, *Mending Wall* (1914), that “good fences make good neighbours”, which implies that boundaries are indispensable to agreeable existence, and, instead, ask whether boundaries are even necessary in ensuring disciplinary longevity. Surely, the notion that “good fences make good neighbours” - predicated on the assumption that good neighbourly relationships are only possible when territorial boundaries are well defined - can no longer unproblematically be defended within the context of the disciplinary dispute which has now arisen between art history and visual culture studies. Since the latter may be said to have ‘invaded’ the ‘territory’ of the former by appropriating its subject field, visual art, the question of the disciplinary status of each field, as well as their distinctive interdisciplinary protocols, have been challenged. This has given rise to the renewed interrogation of the history of art, its proper object of study, the way it has been recorded and its relevance to contemporary cultural life.

I first analyse art history’s traditional territorial claims by exploring the historical canon of art history, and the constructed category of art which has given shape to the discipline itself and demarcated its frontiers. Admittedly, the definition of art has always been subject to contestation; yet, evidence suggests that the basis of this contested category has persisted, even in the midst of revisionist discourses. Currently, the category ‘art’ is even further challenged by visual culture studies.

This leads me to an ontological examination of visual culture studies, which I demonstrate has filtered into the space of problematic visual production in

postmodern culture. The mass production of images and the increasingly technologised cultural productions of everyday life, which are so at odds with so-called 'high' art and 'high' culture, have given impetus to the crisis art history now faces. For, visual culture has surely infiltrated the 'edges' of art history. This has resulted in the marginalisation of traditional art history (if reference may still be made to such a concept) which is now seen to have become antiquated. In this way, art history has come to be regarded as a contested terrain of previously unquestioned, neutral truthfulness which has been bound to a body of objective knowledge, as defined by the epistemological foundations of its disciplinary regimes.

Viewed from the context of disciplinary conventions and structured academic knowledge, contemporary visual images may now, in a sense, be regarded as "indiscipline[d]" (Mitchell 1995b:541). How, after all, can the well-defined categories of 'art' and 'non-art' unproblematically accommodate the new kinds of disembodied contemporary images? Conversely, does this mean that art history ought to study art exclusively, while new media technologies become the 'turf' of visual culture studies? Ultimately, this question can only be answered once it can be established whether the interests of visual culture studies and art history are similar, complimentary or in opposition. This can be determined by, first and foremost, investigating how each field defines its object domain.

3.2 Art history: turf-policing

As an academic discipline in the humanities, the history of art history is undeniably linked to structures, or 'metanarratives' that have 'permitted' and legitimated certain practices. In this sense, art history may be described as reflecting a modernist, panoptic sensibility, since art history, as Preziosi (1989:7) puts it, "[has] lash[ed] together several nineteenth-century dreams of scientificity … [which have been] a factory for the production of sense for modern Western

societies". In this way, the "metanarrative" (Lyotard 1979 [1984]:xxiii) of art history has, through a process of active selection and exclusion, produced the "favourite subjects" (Elkins 2003:34) - or canon - of the discipline.[71]

Still firmly cemented in traditions of technical skill, connoisseurship, aesthetics, beauty and hierarchical value, the future of art history remains clouded by the controversies of its past. For, as a humanistic discipline that developed largely in the late nineteenth century, art history's assumptions are embedded in an utopian Enlightenment conception of an autonomous subject capable of knowing both the world and itself (Moxey 1999:1).[72] In this sense then, art history has produced, sustained and perpetuated humanistic (and Westernised) values, through the ideological operation of inclusion and exclusion of objects within the context of the discourses of modernity. This has led to the "ideological naturalising" (Edwards 1999:2) of certain objects as rightful representatives of legitimate (Western) culture, while others have been demonised.[73]

Largely shaped by the premise of so-called good taste and values which have been promulgated since art history's formation as a professional discipline, these

[71] Guillory (quoted in Edwards 1999:9) argues that the idea of a canon "has its roots in the ancient Greek word for reed or rod and implies a rule or a law". The concept of the canon can be related to Christianity and the preferred texts in Christian teaching, chosen according to a process of active selection and repression. In this way, some works are deemed as worthy of inclusion, while others are excluded and even criminalised.

[72] The general attitude of Enlightenment philosophy stems from a belief in time as progressive (change is good and therefore progress is desirable); that the ability to regulate one's own life lies within the individual's rational consciousness; that goodness is at the essence of human nature; and that humans should strive to act autonomously in relation to society through the correct application of their rational intelligence (Anderson 2003:60).

[73] The canon of art can be described as "a relatively fluid body of values and judgements about art that are subject to constant dispute and redefinition" (Edwards 1999:4). For instance, in the eighteenth century, the scholar, Sir Joshua Reynolds claimed that Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Raphael (1483-1520), Antonio Correggio (c. 1489-1534) and Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530) were the canonical painters. In contrast, Michelangelo is currently still included in books on art, while Correggio and del Sarto are virtually totally excluded, and other artists, like Titian (1487-1576), have now gained more popularity (Edwards 1999:5). In other words, as Edwards (1999:5) has argued, "canonical judgements are … regularly subject to contestation, revision and change …". Among these are the contestations that have now been voiced by feminist, Marxist and postcolonial discourses which have challenged the structures according to which the canon was even made possible.

long-standing ideas about what art is, have nevertheless endured.[74] Therefore, the category 'art' cannot be set apart from the discipline of art history, which has traditionally not studied all images, but only those assumed over time to represent "legitimate" (Tavin 2003:197) or sophisticated culture ('art' in other words). Is the existence of 'art' then merely an "illusion" as Susan Buck-Morss (1996:29) suggests it might be?[75]

The "art-idea" (Buck-Morss 1996:29) is undeniably associated with the belief that "aesthetic value depends on a universal human response" which can presumably be gauged by "the community's most sophisticated members" (Moxey 1996:57). In this sense then, "the notion of Art itself or of the aesthetic as an ontological object in its own right" (Preziosi 1989:15) can be attributed to widely accepted art historical practices. For example, according to Erwin Panofsky (1938:102), the object of investigation in art history - a work of art - "always has aesthetic significance" and "*demands* to be experienced aesthetically". While works of art may also be "practical", in the sense that they are "vehicles of communication" or

[74] For example, surveys of Western art, such as - Adams, LS. 2002. *Art across time.* New York: McGraw-Hill; Cornell, S. 1983. *Art: a history of changing style.* Oxford: Phaidon Press; Gardner, H. 1980. *Art through the ages.* New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich; and Janson, HW & Janson, AF. 1997. *History of art*. Fifth edition. London: Thames & Hudson - analyse images produced in prehistoric times (for instance, rock paintings, carvings, tools, etc.) as art. Before the twentieth century, as Errington (1995:28) argues, objects made by primitive cultures, as well as prehistoric civilizations, were considered to be part of material culture and, therefore, the domain of anthropologists, and not art historians. Thus, before Gardner (1980) included these objects in her earliest art history survey textbooks, the study of these items was scientific in nature, as opposed to art historical (Errington 1995:28). It was only once anthropologists, such as Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-), "made it legitimate to have an interest in religion, thought, consciousness, and meaning" (Errington 1995:30) that anthropological theory began to radically change. In this way, these images then *became* art.

[75] Alternatively, has the "art-idea" (Buck-Morss 1996:29) been preserved mainly due to market capitalism? Edwards (1999:10), for example, maintains that the inclusion of art works into the canon has, for much of the twentieth century, had much to do with the commodity value of the art work, which is founded on the idea that "high market value is based on individuality and genius". The mythic idea of the artist as eccentric individual who challenges social norms, combined with the notion that the art work has significant worth - based on provenance, attribution and authentication - has largely contributed to this situation (Edwards 1999:10). In this way, Edwards (1999:10) maintains that, in a capitalist society, the art market has been one of the main reasons for the longevity of the canon. Equally, Errington (1995:30) has argued that an important reason for the change in attitude toward primitive images, and their later inclusion in art historical research, may be ascribed to economic factors. When primitive art was officially institutionalised and the Museum of Primitive Art was opened in 1957 in New York, this kind of cultural production was then considered as a legitimate area of art historical research (Errington 1995:30).

"tools", the *idea* of the work of art according to Panofsky (1938:103), is always balanced by an interest in *form*. Therefore, art works are not "mere[ly]" (Panofsky 1938:103) functional and can, in this way, be distinguished from other objects. The work of art as a "man-made object demanding to be experienced aesthetically" (Panofsky 1938:105) can, thereby, apparently be distinguished from other objects on the basis of the intention of the creator.

This definition of art draws upon the Kantian notion of aesthetic experience as a "defining instance of the Human … [or the] bridge between Nature and Spirit" (Preziosi 1989:15). In his seminal document on modern aestheticism, *Critique of judgement* (1790), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) renegotiated the polarisation of reason and sensibility - of thought and taste - while developing a philosophy concerning what constitutes fine art and how art should 'properly' be engaged with. For Kant (1790 [1952]:[par]1,2), beauty is the guiding principle in the definition of art and the aesthetic experience is presumed to be a powerful (and undeniable) category of human response and subjectivity. This is based on the belief that the viewing subject is naturally endowed with an "inward eye" (Gracyk 2004:5) which can immediately perceive beauty. This view assumes that "the judgement of taste … is not a cognitive judgement, and so not logical, but is aesthetic …" (Kant 1790 [1952]:[par]1). In this way, Kant distinguishes between aesthetic experience and moral judgements, in that the aesthetical is seen to be equated with intrinsic beauty, while the ethical, or moral, is equated with the sublime. By linking art with taste and beauty, as well as with the sublime, art came to be regarded as something which gives pleasure and pure enjoyment to the viewer/subject (Kant 1790 (1952):[par]1,2). Consequently, Kant accorded a significant and independent role in subjective human experience to the aesthetic response.

Understood within the context of an epoch in which patronage was determined by the taste of (religious or secular) courts and the upcoming bourgeoisie, Kant's formulation of the concept art reveals its underlying discriminatory dimension.

This was due mainly to the influence of the European bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, who were highly influential in the validation of only certain kinds of objects as art. These art objects, reflecting the elitist taste for luxury and splendour, were selected as affirmations of the wealth of the affluent social class (Hughes 1980:366). Jean-Honoré Fragonard's (1732-1806), *The swing* (1766) (Figure 14), illustrates this point.

Figure 14: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The swing,* 1766.
Oil on canvas. 88.9 cm x 81.3 cm.
(Adams 2002:714)

Commissioned by a French baron, the work depicts a world of fantasy and escape, a typical theme of the art works commissioned by the aristocracy in the

late eighteenth century. As a result, a canon of art works, recognised as embodying the highest values of a culture (propagated by Johan Winckelmann [1719-1768] as that which is representative of the *style* of a culture),[76] were considered worthy of emulation (Minor 1994:90). The power of this canon has endured and been maintained by the systematic exclusion of large bodies of work which are considered non-canonical and, therefore, inferior.[77]

As Moxey (1999:1) points outs, a revision of the idea of subjectivity and the "epistemological status traditionally associated with positivistic scholarship" has led to the questioning of the presumed objectivity of foundational epistemology, on the basis of its "middle-class prejudice"; "the dominance of white races"; "masculinist bias" and its identification with Western culture. Yet, even in the light of "politically inspired" (Moxey 1999:1) forms of interpretation - such as gender studies, ethnic studies, cultural studies and postcolonialism - art history, and the

[76] Winckelmann initiated an art analysis based on the historical context of the work. More interested in an "immediate and sensory knowledge of reality" (Kultermann 1993:49,57), Winckelmann linked works of art to their broader contexts. Kultermann (1993:49,57) suggests that this method enabled him to integrate "historical exposition with critical evaluation" in a way that had not been done previously. In his seminal work, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764), Winckelmann developed the concept of analysing artworks in terms of the origin, growth, mutation and decline of a tradition. It was particularly this publication that has afforded him the title, 'father of art history', as he demonstrated an approach based on the belief that style was determined by culture. His contribution to art history is that he rejected the reliance on purely mechanically and rationally supported factual knowledge, focussing instead on the link between the sensual and the spiritual in art, particularly the art of antiquity. Thus, Winckelmann took the study of art beyond the biographical approach of Vasari and the classical tradition, as well as the philosophical views of Plato and Aristotle. Moreover, Winckelmann periodised Greek art and initiated the categorisation of successive styles. This is the foundation of the widely accepted methodology employed in art history, where art works are categorised according to Western period styles .

[77] The historical construction of the category 'art' as mainly products of high value and created by predominately white, Western, male artists, has led to a deficit in the availability of past artistic creations of minority groups, mainly women and non-Western people. To put it plainly, since craftwork and articles of handiwork were historically not deemed worthy of the label 'art', these achievements have been omitted from the canon of art history, and with few surviving records, many have been lost. As an extension of the problem of the marginalisation of women as professional artists, a struggle for them to be taken seriously has ensued. See Chicago, J & Lucie-Smith, E. 1998. *Women on Art.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. Here, Judy Chicago (1998:10) explains how, as an artist, she resorted to the banishment of any indication of her gender from her art and how she adopted a king of "male drag" that was false to her nature as a person. Thus, the works created by women conformed to the predetermined category of 'art'. In addition, mass produced images are still generally regarded as inferior to 'high' art. Thus, CD covers, magazine advertisements and MTV videos are mostly regarded as visual culture or design - or, 'low' art - and are not generally discussed in art history lecture halls.

constructed category 'art', continue to be based on the universal premises of the humanistic tradition. In this way, art history continues to comprise a pre-selected canon of favourite or preferred subjects, organised in an hierarchical system which renders certain types of objects "impure" (Steiner 1996:213) and, therefore, untouchable. Arguably, art history is still primarily concerned with works of visual art that are certified and legitimated by aesthetic traditions and institutional practices which have ennobled certain cultural objects.

The perpetuation of a system centred on the study of 'masterpieces' is very evident in many textbooks which provide overviews of so-called 'art'. For example, Janson and Janson (1997:16), a source still widely used in many art history courses in South African high school and tertiary institutions, describe art as being "an object, but it is not just any kind of object. Art is an aesthetic object. It is meant to be looked at and appreciated for its intrinsic value. Its special qualities set it apart …". Furthermore, Janson and Janson (1997:18) warn that:

> the making of a work of art should not be confused with manual skill or craftsmanship. Some works of art may demand a great deal of technical discipline; others do not. And even the most painstaking piece of craft does not deserve to be called a work of art unless it involves a leap of the imagination.

This limiting definition clearly derives from Kant's (1790) earlier aesthetic theories, as well as Winckelmann's (1763 [1972]:89) concept of beauty as intrinsic to the experience of an art work. Furthermore, the definition given by Janson and Janson (1997) opposes postmodern thinking, as voiced particularly in the work of Jacques Derrida (1976:157) dealing with the "supplementary", and Lyotard's (1979 [1984]:xxiii) criticism of the "metanarrative". Thus, the Enlightenment's conflation of the aesthetic experience of art with taste and beauty, and the modernist notion of a "common quality of all works of visual art" (Bell 1928:3), are clearly still reinforced by Janson and Janson. It may then be concluded that a canon of art works, recognised as embodying the highest values of a culture, continues to be put on a pedestal in art history and is still legitimated by a so-called "aesthetic glance" (Zerner 1982:279).

Janson and Janson's distinction between art and craft is equally at odds with postmodern and postcolonial discourses. Positioning art as somehow superior to craft and requiring a significant "leap of the imagination" (Janson & Janson 1997:18) in order to *become* art, once again reflects the Western construct of art which has traditionally placed 'high' art in opposition to other kinds of art. In this view, art is only that category of objects whose aesthetic qualities are more significant than any functional aspects. Likewise, the Kantian (1790 [1952]:[par]43) understanding of the distinction between aesthetic art and mechanical art (or handicraft), presumes that the intention of art is to give pleasure to the viewer, while that of craft is only to make identifiable objects. In this view, 'successful' fine art is that which displays genius and can only effectively be produced when the artist is guided by taste (Kant 1790 [1952]:[par]46). Consequently, the Kantian distinction between the fine arts and, thus, between 'high' art and 'low' art, has come to delineate the boundaries of the historical canon of art which are still generally accepted today.

The assumption that 'art' "deserves" (Janson & Janson 1997:18) an elevated position to 'craft' is problematic, particularly in South Africa, in light of the art/craft controversy. According to Coetsee (2002:8), "craft artists have always placed the concepts of functionality and aestheticism on an equal footing", thereby blurring the 'artificial' boundaries between art and craft. Coetsee (2002:9) maintains that, currently, South Africa is experiencing a 'craft art revival', while Sellschop, Goldblatt and Hemp (2002:11) contend that, "in an African context, there is really no distinction between craft and art". Janson and Janson's definition is problematic not only in terms of its elevation of art as more important than craft, but so also in terms of popular culture, which, in Modernism, was neatly contrasted with the 'high' art (avant-garde) of the cultured. This has resulted in the discipline of art history mainly concentrating on the Western tradition, by means of preserving distinctions between 'high' or fine art on the one hand, and applied, decorative, folk, and popular art on the other.

The field of study of art history is therefore not the study of images in general terms, nor is it the study of the art of all people worldwide, but only a compartmentalised portion of art-making practices constituting, mainly, a Western tradition. Its subject, art, is an historical category and, as such, has traditionally been considered a closed concept; unquestionably restricted to those objects whose status as works of art has long been agreed upon. But is it not, as Zerner (1982:279) has quite aptly suggested, that these kinds of distinctions are quite a "dubious" basis for the discipline of art history?

More than three decades ago, Leo Steinberg (1972:91) argued that "the deepening inroads of art into non-art continue to alienate the connoisseur as art defects and departs into strange territories leaving the old stand-by criteria to rule an eroding plain". Without a doubt, this statement still rings true today, since the complex intersection in contemporary popular culture between art and so-called 'non-art' clearly continues to be a controversial issue amongst art historians. While Mitchell (2002:240) claims to have "never found [him]self confused" about the distinction between artistic and non-artistic images, it may be argued that, from the standpoint of traditional art history versus new art history, there is presently still little consensus on this issue.[78] Mitchell (2001:15) maintains that the distinction between 'high' art and 'low' art - which may be described as images in contemporary popular and mass media, as well as any design and craft - is not erased by visual culture studies. At the same time, it has become increasingly clear that there are as many definitions for 'art' as there are

[78] Here, Mitchell (2002:240) is debating the validity of what he calls the "levelling fallacy". He questions the assumption that visual culture studies democratically eliminates the distinction between 'high' art and mass culture, as well as the idea that "the distinctions between media, or between verbal and visual images, are being undone" by visual culture studies. However, he does not elaborate here on his understanding of the difference between art and design, or mass media, (which he distinguishes from 'art'). Since this debate is still rife in the uncertain terrain of the future of art history's field of study in relation to that of visual culture studies, it is an issue which urgently requires clarification. When the art historian, Margaret Dikovitskaya, interviewed Mitchell (2001:15), she posed the question: "If there is no 'high' and 'low' art, how are we to define 'the finest productions of visual culture'?" In response, Mitchell (2001:15) insisted that there definitely still is 'high' and 'low' art. In light of their apparent disagreement, Lansing's (2004:1) comment that there is little consensus on the term 'art' is quite apt.

dictionaries and critics. This is confirmed by Kenneth Lansing (2004:1), who suggests that, currently, it is impossible to logically rule out anything as a work of art, "because the members of our profession, on the whole, cannot say what characterizes a work of art". Nevertheless, art historians and theorists continue to offer solutions for this dilemma with several definitions of art still reflecting a modernist and universalist perspective on the topic. In other words, these definitions still value individualism, geniality and other utopian constructions associated with Modernism in general.

In contrast to Janson and Janson's delimited definition of art, Robert Bersson (2004:v) has argued that all objects, from those of "functional and mass-media art that pervade our daily lives to the creation[s] of … craftspersons, and designers …", are all equally valid in art historical analysis. In *Responding to art: form, content, and context*,[79] Bersson (2004:v) has broadened the field of art to include, not only traditionally accepted examples of 'high' art, but also "CD album covers, magazine advertisements, Internet Web sites, fashion styles, crafts, and product design". The inclusion of these images within the field of study of art history may be said to reflect postmodernism, in that hierarchical categories are, thereby, questioned as the boundaries between fine arts, craft and product design become blurred. From this perspective, justification for maintaining disciplinary boundaries in art history can hardly be established if art history is to analyse such a wide spectrum of visual production.

The inclusion of new viewing positions and attitudes in art historical discourse has, therefore, complicated the neat borders of the traditional canon. Bersson's (2004) approach to art history may be described as revolutionary - if not unique - and is presumably based on revisionist discourses that have challenged the values and interests that determined what was deemed worthy of the valorised

[79] This textbook was introduced in 2005 as the primary resource for first year undergraduate study at the University of Pretoria in the history of art module entitled: Survey of art and ideas. A criticism that has been raised by lecturers against this text is its lack of analytical depth in the works it surveys.

canon (Harris 2001:287). Thus, feminist, Marxist and postcolonial discourses have largely exposed the male-dominated, Eurocentric power relations implicit in the canon, and which have resulted in the exclusion of countless images on account of their class, gender and race.

And yet, the persisting distinctions between ‘high’ art and ‘low’ art have not yet adequately been resolved. Surely art history cannot continue to segregate itself from the wider domain of the visual, for it may be argued that art itself has made such an attempt impossible. As has been demonstrated in Chapter 2, from within art history’s enclosure, some twentieth century artists (for example, those associated with Dada and Pop Art) advocated a distinct pessimism with regard to the establishments and power structures represented by ‘high’ art. By incorporating found objects, as well as popular imagery of commercial mass media (visual culture), into their subject matter, artists associated with these movements challenged the distinction between reality (life) and art. Similarly, the circulation through the media, and reception by the public of contemporary mass produced, digital images that evade traditional notions of the artist as genial author (or creator) who is set apart from others, may have transgressed the disciplinary classification of the distinct category ‘art’. If these images have ‘escaped’ the disciplined boundary of ‘art’, does this mean that they have now entered the ‘turf’ of the broader sphere of visual culture, and, consequently, no longer ‘belong’ to ‘art’?

3.3 The (in)substantial terrain of visual culture studies

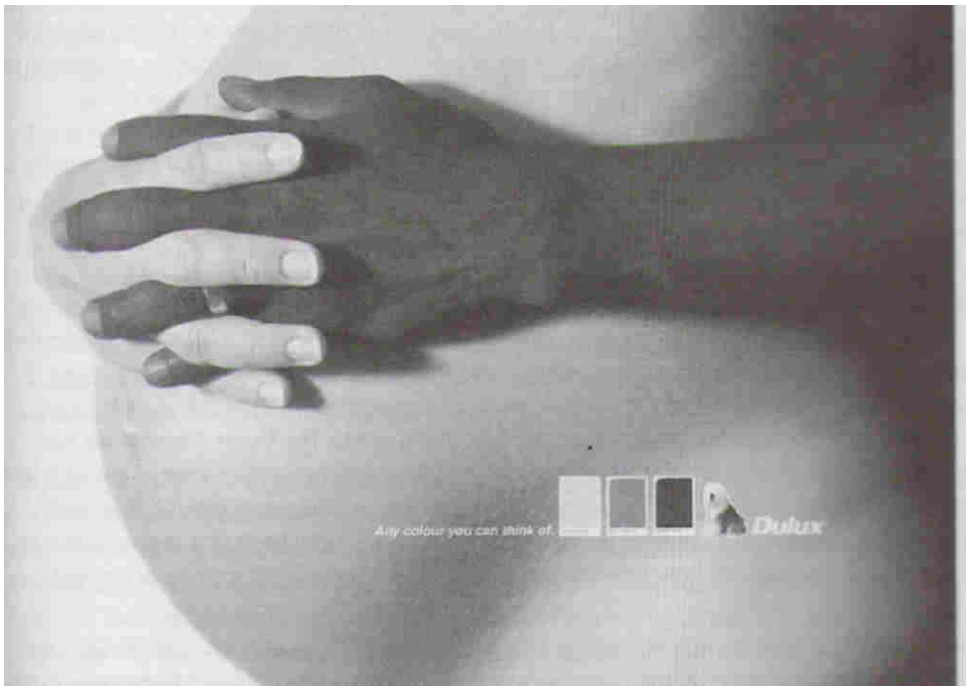

Figure 15: Advertisement for Dulux paint, 2002.
(Van Eeden & Du Preez 2005:31)

Mirzoeff (2002:189) has suggested that "visual culture's stories are ghost stories". This is because, when set up against the 'art' that constitutes the proper object of study in art history, visual culture studies' field may very well be a terrain where only 'ghosts' reside. In other words, visual culture studies attempts to make 'visible' that which was previously rendered 'invisible' by dominant discourses and academic structures. In another sense, the concept of *visuality* entails that aspect of visual culture which is, ironically, *invisible* as a result of human interaction with a hegemonically naturalised social world. In this way, visual culture studies searches "between the visible and invisible" (Mirzoeff 2002:191) in an attempt to interpret a vast range of visual experiences in and through contemporary culture. [80]

[80] The visible/invisible matrix has already been discussed in Chapter 2, as reflected in the video work, *The opposite of illustration*, by the artist, Usha Seejarim.

This means that visual culture studies explores, as Tavin (2003:201) suggests, a "substantial" - and yet insubstantial - range of "images, artefacts, objects, instrumentia, and apparatuses" which appear limitless. Tavin (2003:201) maintains that the "enormous variety of two- and three dimensional things that human beings produce and consume as part of their cultural and social lives" all constitute visual culture studies' object domain. For example, Barnard (2001:2) defines visual culture as including: "fine art (painting, drawing and sculpture, for example), all kinds of design (graphic, interior, automotive and architectural design, for example), and things like facial expressions, fashion and tattooing ...". In addition, package design, typography, body art and comic books are also identified by Barnard (2001:3) within the scope of objects relevant to visual culture studies. Previously, Barnard (1998:2) listed "hairdryers, shavers, … garden design, … personal, public, corporate and popular images, … Internet home pages, newspaper and magazine design …". Elkins (2003:34) lists an even wider variety of subjects, including:

> Las Vegas, Hollywood and Bollywood, depictions of death and violence, international airports, … shopping malls, contemporary fine art such as video and installation, … Barbie, … contemporary curiosity cabinets, … the history of buoys, … utensils made for babies, … reproduction half-hoop rings at Claire's Accessories, AstroTurf, … underwater monopoly, … fluorescent paint, … plaster casts of gargoyles, Ghanian coffins in the shape of chickens and outboard motors, … pink flamingos and other lawn ornaments, miniature golf, … nineteenth-century posters and fliers, book illustrations ….

To these already ample lists, Walker and Chaplin (1997:5) add "advertisements, computer graphics, … films, graffiti, photography, rock/pop performances, television and virtual reality". In addition, Darley (2000:1) contributes "digital films, simulation rides, … music videos, … special venue attractions, … and arcade and computer games". Moreover, at the "Visual Culture/Explorations" conference held at the University of Pretoria in July 2004, the programme included topics as varied as, amongst others: picturesque architecture, film, computers, sex and pop, photography, the news media, philosophy, theory, and 'the sublime and bungee jumping'. In addition, Van Eeden and Du Preez's (2005) anthology

entitled, *South African visual culture*, deals with advertisements (Figure 15),[81] shopping malls, women's military uniforms, *Huisgenoot,* whiteness and male identity, subcultures and digital media, human identity and technological tools, depictions of gay and lesbian peoples in media, as well as cultural production in photography, film and television.

Elkins (2003:36) rightly admits that the visual culture lists seem "hopelessly miscellaneous or happily inclusive, depending on your point of view". Clearly, while many of the "things" (Tavin 2003:201) mentioned include institutionalised art, most are identified from outside the museum realm.[82] From an art historian's point of view, Barnard's (2001:72) inclusion of fine art and design, Elkins' (2003:34) inclusion of "contemporary fine art", "video and installation", as well as the references to "nineteenth-century posters" and "book illustrations", become problematic, as they are topics which have, in any case, traditionally fallen neatly into the category of art history. Moreover, what of the other topics listed by Elkins (2003:34), such as "the history of buoys", "underwater monopoly" and "miniature golf"? Surely these are of little or no interest to the art historian? Conversely, does this mean that visual culture studies investigates any and all visual subjects? Are there no limitations to its field of study?[83] If not, is it then the case

[81] Michael Herbst (2005:31) analyses this Dulux advert from the standpoint that it "plays on South Africa's racial insecurities", drawing an analogy between producing different colour shades through the mixing of paint and the production of different race groups by mixing races. Herbst's (2005:34) point is that the advert, through a process of resignification, ideologically produces supposedly "harmonious racial intermixture" and, in so doing, may contribute to a change in social patterns.

[82] Elkins (2003:12) has determined that the emphasis on 'non-art' images may be due, in part, to the development of visual culture studies from courses in visual communication.

[83] See Haanstra, F, Nagel, I & Ganzeboom H. 2002. A preliminary assessment of a new arts education programme in Dutch secondary schools, in *Journal of Art and Design Education* 21(2):164-172 for a summary of the debate on the question of which kinds of cultural activities to include in an art education curriculum. Aimed at broadening the selection of cultural activities further than the established canon, the new compulsory programme in Dutch schools includes popular culture, such as cinema, pop-concerts and dj-vj-events. The research was aimed at gaining insight into how Dutch teachers select content and whether or not this ultimately served the initial purpose of the programme (i.e. to change the attitudes of students). It was determined that opinions on what constitutes acceptable cultural activities differed vastly among teachers, with "several authors think[ing] that the programme is taught in an overly permissive way" (Haanstra, Nagel & Ganzeboom 2002:170).

that, as Holly and Moxey (2002:vii) have suggested, the field of visual culture studies might have "expanded its range to the point of incoherence"?

Perhaps it should not be some "collection of things" (Bal 2003:8) or "body of materials" (Spivak, quoted in Rogoff 1998:16) that defines the object domain of visual culture studies, but rather the "questions that we ask that produce the field of enquiry" (Spivak, quoted in Rogoff 1998:16). As already pointed out, according to several authors, those questions concern the visuality of contemporary culture, based on the premise that, at present, images dominate over human existence (Bal 2003; Duncum 2002; Duttman 2002; Gombrich 1982; Jay 1994; Mirzoeff 1998, 1999; Mitchell 1994, 1995b, 1996, 2002; Richard 2002; Rogoff 1998). This means that, instead of defining visual culture studies in terms of an object (as is the case with art history), it ought, rather, to be constituted "by the practices of looking invested in any object" (Bal 2003:11).

Consequently, whether or not an object can be investigated from the perspective of visual culture studies, hinges on "the possibility of performing acts of seeing" (Bal 2003:9), or the visual event itself. Thus, visual experience, in all possible modes, or the subjective experience of the visual, constitutes the field of visual culture studies. In this way, visual culture studies can more accurately distinguish itself from the other "object-defined disciples such as art history and film studies" (Bal 2003:9), as it does not name a specific object.

When visual culture studies is engaged with "what happens when people look, and what emerges from that act" (Bal 2003:9), the dual concept of visuality is simultaneously recognised. Mitchell's (2002:237) definition of visual culture studies as, "the study of the social construction of the visual field, and the visual construction of the social field", recognises that visuality is both constructed in culture as visual culture, as well as having a non-cultural component that is

actual seeing.[84] Thereby, the concept of "visual nature" is acknowledged as "a central and unavoidable issue" (Mitchell 2002:237).

For Mirzoeff (1998:9), the visual encompasses a further dimension, which is its "sensual immediacy". This may be described as a power that evokes feelings of awe, admiration, terror, and the like, which can be linked to the experience of the sublime. In the Kantian distinction of the sublime (as linked to the ethical, and thereby, the cultural) from the aesthetical (as linked to the beautiful which is experienced in both nature and culture), the sublime is considered to be "the creature of culture", and therefore, according to Mirzoeff (1998:9), is "central to visual culture". This draws on Lyotard's (1993:71) argument that the "task" of the sublime (in visual culture) is to "present the unpresentable", which means that the postmodern era, dominated by "a relentless visualising" (Mirzoeff 1998:9), is one in which viewers are constantly searching for the sublime - thus, the unrepresentable or 'ghosts'.

Ultimately, if visual culture studies is to be the more democratic and transparent alternative to art history, then it ought to interrogate all visual events without discriminating between those that are more or less appropriate. In practice, this may not be easily achieved. According to Elkins (2003:45), despite the substantial object domain, visual culture studies evidently has "a distinctive politics far from its ideal of ecumenical interest in the sum total of image production". This means that, if visual culture studies continues to define itself in terms of an object, it will inevitably re-establish the very hierarchies it aims to challenge (Bal 2003:27). It may consequently be argued that the selection and exclusion of suitable objects for analysis in visual culture studies may lead to the same "fetishism" (Armstrong 1996:27) that has previously characterised art history.

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[84] What is meant by this, as Jay (1994:5) explains, is that, with regard to the physiology of human sight, "[c]ertain fairly fundamental characteristics seem to exist, which no amount of cultural mediation can radically alter". In other words, this view of visual culture studies may be seen to have an interest in the incessant motions of the eye - its saccadic movements and vestibulo-ocular reflex (Jay 1994:7).

While some theorists are evidently sceptical of developments in visual culture studies, others consider it to be a "project of possibility" (Simon 1992:[sp]). Admittedly, visual culture studies vastly increases the list of sites to be included in theoretical investigation, without discarding institutionalised art, or making distinctions between media. Consequently, Tavin (2003:201) regards visual culture studies as an opportunity which "offers immense possibilities for the field of art education". From the platform of visual culture studies, the wide range of visual material that constitutes students' everyday lives should be discussed in pedagogical curricula, which may ultimately, as Anderson (1990:143) suggests, "be more important to attend to than traditional arts". But, if 'traditional' art then falls within the boundary of visual culture studies, can art history continue to exist as an autonomous discipline, or does art history become subsumed in visual culture studies programmes? Conversely, if art history were to include all these visual ventures, how could it still refer to itself as solely and purely being the history of art? Is it not, in the same instance, then giving up its ground?

3.4 Methodologies of art history

Precisely what constitutes the ground of art history may not necessarily be unproblematically determined.[85] This is due to the extensive development of the

[85] First recognised as an individual field of enquiry in Germany, a full professorship for art history was formally established in 1813 at the University of Göttingen. Among the extensive list of scholars who have contributed to the formation of the discipline of art history are: Alois Riegl (1858-1905), Mav Dvorak (1909-1921), Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945), Aby Warburg (1866-1929), and Adolph Goldschmidt (1863-1944) (Skawran 1976:4). According to Preziosi (1989:9), the first formal appearance of art history in America was in 1874, when a course was established at the Harvard Corporation on the "History of the Fine Arts as Connected with Literature". Skawran (1976:4) contends that in America, art history initially took on an ethical rather than scientific approach, with "these graduate courses … aimed more at training gentlemen than scholars". It was only later - in the 1930s, with the permanent appointment of, for example, Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) - that art history was established as a 'scientific' discipline. In England, art history was only formally established with the founding of the Courtauld Institute of Art Historical studies in 1932, and was predominantly influenced by art critics, such as John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Roger Fry (1866-1934) (Skawran 1976:4). Shortly after, art history was introduced as an academic discipline in South Africa.

discipline which, according to Preziosi (1989:xi), may be compared to "a heavily palimpsested manuscript full of emendations, erasures and marginalia, with innumerable graffiti added by different hands over time". In this sense, then, the 'history of art history' cannot simply be assumed to comprise a coherent set of methodological protocols, or even "some clear and rational agenda" (Preziosi 1989:xi). For, the 'hands' that have inscribed on those 'graffitied walls' do not speak in the same voice, nor do they represent a singular orthodoxy in what may constitute a traditional theory and practice. This is confirmed by Zerner (1982:279) who argues that the "disparate trends" in art history only suggest that it may be more appropriate to regard its theoretical perspectives as "non-aligned", since different discourses have dominated in different contexts. For example, as Preziosi (1989:157) points out, in various discursive spaces, "rhetorical battles" have been waged "between formalism[86] and contextualism,[87] between social history and connoisseurship,[88] [and] between modernist and

[86] As one of the main streams in art history, formalism stresses the significance of form over content in the analytical process. Roger Fry, whose approach was ahistorical, is considered the most influential formalist critic in England. From a formalist perspective, no meaningful connection exists between the work and the artist who created it, nor the culture to which it belongs. The formalist method considers only the formal elements of the artist's visual language - line, shape, space, colour, light and dark, balance, order and proportion, pattern, rhythm and composition - as potentially of interest to the art historian (Adams 1996:16-24). Clive Bell (1928:38) stressed the importance of "significant form" in evoking aesthetic emotions based on the subjective experience of the work. In this view, the aesthetic response, therefore, hinges on the artist's arrangement of formal elements. For Bell (Adams 1996:33), art carries "an inner truth" that enriches life. In addition, Bell assumed that everyone has a natural sense of form.

[87] The other notable stream in art history, contextualism, stresses the importance of content over form. These include various approaches, such as Panofsky's (1939) iconographical method, as well as the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), D.W. Winnicott (1896-1971), and Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). Furthermore, the approaches of Marxist (for example Frederick Antal [1887-1954], Michael Baxandall, Arnold Hauser [1892-1978], Svetlana Alpers [1936-], and T.J. Clark [1943-]) and feminist (for example, Griselda Pollock) art historians, read the art work in relation to its economic and social context.

[88] This is the notion that a connoisseur has 'a good eye' which qualifies him/her to "look at art in an intelligent way" (Minor 1994:129). This is predicated on the assumption that the ability to understand style is possible by developing a broad knowledge of individual and period styles, combined with "intuition, experience, interest, sensitivity, the ability to muse and contemplate in silence" (Minor 1994:133). Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891) and Fry are widely regarded as connoisseurs.

poststructuralist[89] semiologies".

As has already been indicated, art history may be said to have held on to an "idealist theory of art according to which art is an absolute autonomous value that transcends history" (Zerner 1982:279). This view is clearly demonstrated in the contention put forward by the South African art historian, Karen Skawran (1976:5), that "[w]hatever the situation, an art work continues to have aesthetic significance and it communicates independently of its socio-cultural context". For Skawran (1976:5), "historical awareness is not ultimately essential for the understanding of [the] unique qualities" of the art work. In this sense, knowledge of the history of art is not necessary for the enjoyment of art, which, understood in these terms, is abstracted from a specific time and place. On the other hand, Zerner (1982:279) also links art history to an "optimistic form of nineteenth century positivism", according to which it is possible to ascertain a definitive explanation through readily attainable facts. In such a "cause and effect approach" (Zerner 1982:279), the approaches of biography and style (already referred to earlier) were mostly employed in the form of a narrative.[90]

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[89] The formalist's de-emphasis of the author in art historical analysis was taken further after the 1950s when Structuralism emerged in France. The application of semiotics on the visual arts developed mainly from the work of Charles Peirce (1834-1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Extending the approach of the Structuralists (such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty [1908-1961], Meyer Shapiro [1904-1996], Roland Barthes [1915-1980], and Norman Bryson [1949-]), which minimised the role of individual authors in art historical analysis, Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction (particularly, Jacques Derrida [1930-2004]) contradict the biographical method, thereby leading to the so-called "death of the Author" (Adams 1996:133-176).

[90] The biographical method (in other words, one which approaches the work of art in relation to the artist's life and personality), may be attributed to Boccaccio (1313-1375), Petrarch (1304-1374), Dante (1265-1321) and Vasari (see Chapter 2) (Adams 1996:101-132). Conversely, the narrative of progressively changing style concerns "the aesthetic differences between works of art, insofar as they are determined by the selection and composition of formal elements" (Adams 1996:24). In this view, through a disregard of the artist, art history can be anonymous. The earliest reference to art history as a history of style may be attributed to Winckelmann (already referred to previously in this chapter). According to art history as a history of style, art is regarded as inseparable from history and changes in relation to the cultures that produce it. Georg W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) theorised the historical evolution of style and considered each style to give birth to the next in a dialectical process of development. For Hegel (in Kultermann 1993:60), the spiritual connection between art and religion was important, arguing that, in art, we are dealing with "the liberation of the spirit from all determinate, finite form". In the same way, Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945) analysed the shift between the "Classic" style of the High Renaissance, and the Baroque, according to stylistic concepts (Adams 1996:24-25).

Indeed, the discipline of art history was developed from the assumption that "the work of art is in some way a revelation of Being or of a Truth that is already present (in the mind, in culture, and in society)" (Preziosi 1989:15).[91] Therefore, art history has been concerned with discerning the meaning that is revealed, represented or expressed in the work, or, as Preziosi puts it, "hear[ing] the Voice behind what is palpable and mute". For, as Kleinbauer (1971:2) informed us, "Art historians aspire to analyse and interpret the visual arts by identifying their materials and techniques, makers, time and place of creation, and meaning or function - in short, their place in the scheme of history". In the same way, Panofsky (1938:105) considered the art historian (as a humanistic scholar) to be engaged in a "mental process of a synthetic and subjective character: he has mentally to *re-enact the actions* and to *re-create the creations*". This means that the primary aim of the art historian is to uncover the meaning of an art work through a combination of "rational archaeological analysis" and "intuitive aesthetic re-creation", including the subjective (and irrational) appraisal of "quality" (Panofsky 1938:106). If "the subjective [is] accepted as a contributing agent" (Skawran 1976:6) in the interpretation of the art work, it must, at the same time, be assumed that the 'true' meaning of the work is, to a certain degree, untranslatable.

According to Skawran (1976:7-9), the "nature of art history", as defined within the "scope of the art historian", is initially to obtain knowledge about the art work (historical/archaeological, medium, size, authorship, date, state, place). Thereafter, the art historian must make a visual analysis of the work through the emotionally "disengage[d]" documentation of its formal elements, based on a

[91] This is evident, for instance, in the aesthetic theories of Kant who viewed the mind as "an active and constitutive instrument, partly constitutive of the world which it knows" (Kerrane 1971:3). Thus, the observer does not see an objective reality, but the mind itself always enters into that which it already understands.

Wölfflinian[92] analysis of the 'linear' and the 'painterly', as well as format, colour, tone, line and composition in two-dimensional works, and a consideration of volume, mass and space in three-dimensional works (Skawran 1976:7). This approach also involves the analysis of the physical properties of the work (including technique), subject matter (iconography)[93] and its symbolic significance. According to Skawran (1976:8), "one of the most fundamental tasks of the art historian" is an investigation of style, based on establishing relationships between works of art, to create a system according to which works may be ordered and compared. In other words, the modern discipline of art

[92] As a formalist, Wölfflin, proposed a set of formal categories according to which works of art could be understood. The categories that have shaped the discipline of art history were as follows: 'linear and painterly'; 'plane and depth'; 'closed and open form'; 'multiplicity and unity' and 'clarity and obscurity'. This scheme was applied to European art of the High Renaissance and Baroque periods in his influential work, *Principles of art history* (1915), in which Wölfflin characterised High Renaissance art as linear and Baroque art as painterly. Wölfflin went further by applying this mode of analysis to nations and cultures, claiming that different cultures operate within different modes of seeing. He advocated that a national psychology of vision gave rise to visual patterns and used the term *Zeitgeist* to describe the "elusive spirit of a national people and an age", thus declaring the "autonomy of visual culture" (Wren & Nygard 2003:279). Initially, he advocated an anonymous art history, where the artists' characters, lives and personalities were omitted, so that only the cultural context of the work would be examined, on the assumption that the artist's individual style developed wholly out of the culture and age. Later, however, he argued that "artists of genius define each period" (Wren & Nygard 2003:279). Wölfflin's legacy for art lies in this formal approach to visual analysis, based on a set vocabulary of visual description. Wölfflin's influence on art history may be summed up in broadly three ways: he afforded art history disciplinary breadth; he advocated a comparative method of visual analysis; and he insisted on the primacy of vision. As a result, Wölfflin has been described as "the most important theorist of art history" and the founder of modern art history (Hart 1982:292). In another sense, Wölfflin has been regarded as a positivist due to his faith in physical evidence, thereby transforming art history into a science (Holly 1984:51). Employing theories from philosophy, psychology and philology, combined with his interests in the modern art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Wölfflin aimed to support his theories in art history from a philosophical foundation (Wren & Nygard 2003:275-276). Hart (1982:292) describes Wölfflin's philosophical position as "neo-Kantian" as well as "Hegelian", according to which the development of art is regarded as a continual and gradual process, with "neither greater nor lesser periods of artistic expression" (Holly 1984:47).

[93] While Panofsky's concept of iconography and iconology is constructed on the basis of the formal characteristics of an artwork (Summers 1982:302), his primary investigation of a work is through cultural and intellectual determinants. In his seminal text, *Studies in iconology,* Panofsky (1939:1) describes iconology as a "branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form". Therefore, iconography is a contextual approach which considers the circumstances in which art works were made and assumes that art is produced from within specific historical situations. According to this method, the three levels - pre-iconographical, iconographical and iconological - are required in order to understand a work in relation to its larger context. In this way, iconography recognises that the attitudes of a nation, a period, a class or religious or philosophical persuasion are manifested in art.

history may be said to have emerged as a reaction to the Romanticist era of aesthetic discourse in order to demonstrate (by means of a logical and objective discourse) that its practice "was as disciplined and rigorous as any other academically instituted science" (Preziosi 1989:83). But, even as art history developed as a historical science, Preziosi (1989:9) points out that, as a discipline, art history "remained closely aligned with a connoisseurial professionalism, and indeed the two continued to be mutually defining". This ultimately means that, while scientifically proven facts about the art work were considered to effectively determine their meaning, the notion of having 'a good eye' - in other words, that there is some emotionally intelligent way that art can be looked at - continued to shape the discipline of art history.

A revisionist approach to traditional art history may be said to have occurred from the 1970s, in what Harris (2001:1) calls a "social history of art history", where art-historical study began to look at visual representations from new critical perspectives, including gender and sexual identity, and the interrelatedness of new social and political movements - like feminism and gay and lesbian rights activism. These marginalised voices, which had been kept silent by the valorised canon, as already discussed, contested the familiar reductive formulas involved in art historical practice and began to disrupt inherited historiographic legacies. In addition, Harris (2001:3) describes the "fundamental questioning of the nature of capitalist and imperial nation-states" undertaken by these critical perspectives, as a catalyst for radical developments in art history, leading to critical work in 'new art history'. In particular, an earlier intellectual interrogation of culture in general had led to developments in cultural studies as a field of study, whereby, amongst others, the broader field of visual media in popular and mass culture were critically interrogated.

In the South African post-apartheid context, a number of highly sensitive political issues are at stake in such a revision of art history. This becomes particularly complex when attempting to formulate a politically representative and

postcolonial account of art. As Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz (1999:14) point out, due mainly to a legacy of educational restrictions, combined with other forms of discrimination (such as funding and resources), black artists and administrators - and in particular, black women - are sorely lacking in this country's visual arts community. This became particularly evident when their call for papers to be published in the ground-breaking text, *Grey areas: representation, identity, and politics in contemporary South African art,* mainly elicited responses from white South Africans.[94]

Evidently, whilst postmodern and postcolonial discourses have critiqued representation and historicism, the paradigmatically different theoretical grounding of art history continues to guide its procedures (Preziosi 1989:16). Whether or not art history can accommodate the implications of postmodern discourse is undeniably at the centre of the crisis the discipline now faces.

3.5 Method in visual culture studies

Almost a decade ago, Mirzoeff (1998:6) stated that, "visual culture is still an idea in the making, rather than a well-defined existing field". Evidently, academics have struggled, and continue to struggle, to conceptualise this emerging discipline in institutions. This is clear from the following statement by Buck-Morss (1996:29):

> Twice at Cornell over the past decade we have had meetings to discuss the creation of a visual studies programme. Both times, it was painfully clear that institutionalisation cannot by itself produce such a [theoretical] frame, and the discussions - among a disparate group of art historians, anthropologists, computer designers, social historians, and scholars of cinema, literature, and architecture - did not coalesce into a programme. Still, visual culture has become a presence on campus. It has worked its

[94] Atkinson and Breitz (1999:15) admit that, far from their intended aim of publishing a document that would be "as representative of the post-apartheid moment as possible", *Grey Areas*, ironically, represents that moment as markedly unrepresentative.

> way into many of the traditional disciplines and lives there in suspended isolation, encapsulated within theoretical bubbles.

Apparently, there remains little consistency regarding the disciplinary scope of visual culture studies, the assumptions which underpin its methodology and the record of the development of the discipline itself. For example, Elkins (2003:10) has referred to "the current conceptual disarray of the field", while Tavin (2003:199) proposes that, despite the "plethora" of writing on visual culture, this does not necessarily "form a consensus" on what exactly is meant by the term. This is confirmed by the widespread - and somewhat inconsistent - development of visual culture studies in academic curricula. For instance, Elkins (2003:7-14) has established that visual culture studies is configured differently with substantially diverse emphases in the curricula of various universities across the globe from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, to, amongst others, the universities of Calcutta, Mexico, Copenhagen, Norway and Bologna. The European focus, for example, is on the analysis of the visual by drawing on sociology, semiotics, visual communication and anthropology. Elkins (2003:8) indicates that, in the larger American universities, visual culture studies is taught in departments of Film Studies, Women's study, or Media Studies. A similar disparity is evident in South Africa where, at the University of Pretoria, Visual Communication and Art History are taught separately as part of a Visual Studies package. The University of Rhodes has opted for an Art History and Visual Culture course, whereas the University of Cape Town (UCT) now offers a course in Historical Studies, with modules covering a wide spectrum of themes.

The "Visual Culture/Explorations" (2004) conference demonstrated how visual culture is being dealt with in South African academic discourse. At this conference, papers were delivered by intellectuals from various institutions and departments across South Africa, including, "The School of Arts and Social Sciences"; "The Institute of Asian and African Studies"; an "Education Policy Unit"; a "College of Fashion"; an independent Art Historian; an "Institute for Cultural Research"; "The Centre for Advanced Studies"; a "School of Historical

and Critical Studies"; and a "School of Communication and Literature"; as well as Departments of "Visual Art"; "Fine Art"; "History of Art and Visual Culture Studies"; "Arts and Cultural Studies"; "Historical and Heritage Studies"; "Integrated Studies in Education"; "Cultural and Heritage Tourism"; "Anthropology and Archaeology"; "Philosophy"; "Sociology" and "Critical, Historical and Theoretical Studies in Visual Art". Reviewing this list clearly suggests that visual culture studies is an interdisciplinary project that requires widespread "conversations" (Mitchell 1995b:540) across traditional disciplinary lines.[95]

Therefore, while art history has developed from a well-defined theoretical foundation, visual culture studies is simultaneously emerging from different disciplines and is drawing upon numerous theoretical perspectives (Duncum 2001:104; Elkins 2003:25). This is due, in part, to the complexity of visual culture studies which "anchors it to an entire range of analyses and interpretations of the audio, the spatial and of the psychic dynamics of spectatorship" (Rogoff 1998:14). In this sense, the theoretical framework of visual culture studies is mainly concerned with "critical resistance to a society of the 'spectacle' and 'surveillance'" (Mitchell 1995b:542). Elkins (2003:25) has identified the following theoretical perspectives from departments in the humanities that may be of use to visual culture studies in this endeavour:

> History and art history, art criticism, art practice, art education, feminism and women's studies, queer theory, political economy, postcolonial studies, performance studies, anthropology and visual anthropology, film and media studies, archaeology, architecture and urban planning, visual communication, graphic and book design, advertising and the sociology of art.

While art history appears, as intimated by Elkin's (2003:21), to be "methodologically and genealogically" the most important of all the disciplines to

[95] Conversely, Stephen Melville (quoted in Elkins 2003:26) argues that visual culture studies is not interdisciplinary in the true sense of interdisciplinarity, as this cannot occur unless the new field can locate the object of its study (which, if taken as Barthes' (1984) definition claims - that interdisciplinarity is the act of creating a new object that is not already located within another discipline - would imply that visual culture studies must define an entirely new object of study). A further criticism is launched by Rodowick (1996:60) who argues that it is only due to the scarcity of resources in the field of visual culture studies that this field now *appears* interdisciplinary.

visual culture studies, many other disciplines have clearly also contributed to the field. Since visual culture studies examines the "cultural construction of visual experience in everyday life as well as in media, representations, and visual arts" (Mitchell 1995b:540), evidently it requires, not only "conversations among art historians", as Mitchell (1995b:540) points out, but also input from "film scholars, optical technologists and theorists, phenomenologists, psychoanalysts, and anthropologists".

Visual culture studies' concern with the visual complexity of contemporary life is apparent in what Buck-Morss (1996:29) identifies as, the "standard themes" that reappear in courses and publications on visual culture studies. Among these are: the analysis of the society of the spectacle, the simulacrum, the reproduction of the image, scopic regimes, the fetish, the gaze and the machine eye (Buck-Morss 1996:29). In addition, Elkins (2003:32) has identified the following theorists whose writing forms the basis of visual culture studies: Barthes, Benjamin (the reproduction of the image); Foucault and Lacan (envisioning the Other); Debord (the society of the spectacle); Jay (scopic regimes); Baudrillard, Deleuze and Jameson (the simulacrum); Freud (the fetish); Mulvey (the [male] gaze) and; Harraway (the machine eye, or cyborg). These theories - which focus on images, vision, and visuality - have generally been applied to specifically chosen subject matter (see the lists mentioned in 3.3 above) which avoids art history's chronological methodology. In other words, in contrast to art history, visual culture studies, in practice, follows an ideological, social and theoretical approach.

In its privileging of the visual in visual culture, such an approach to images may potentially lead to a "visual essentialism" (Bal 2003:6), or a disregard for the differences between the senses (taste, touch, smell, etc.), which are, admittedly, equally constitutive of meaning in texts. This is evident in many contemporary art works (such as installations for example, not to mention digital works) where sound and text share equal rights in the entire work. In a broader context, the

contemporary subject in a multimedia environment constantly experiences images which are certainly not only visual, but include - amongst others - sounds, movement and still images, as well as other senses, for example, hearing and touch (Poster 2002:68). Therefore, visual culture studies ought to resist hierarchies of the senses, or, as Rogoff (1998:14) suggests, visual culture discourse should not focus exclusively on the visual, but should acknowledge that the "entire world of intertextuality" must be analysed. It may even be necessary to introduce the term "audio-visual culture" as Rodowick (1996:62) proposes.

What has become apparent is that, ultimately, images should not be treated as texts, with the assumption that they could be 'read' in some way. For, as Elkins (2003:128) explains: "images are not language and pictures are not writing". While Mitchell (1995a:209) argues that engagement with the visual should take place on the same level as other texts, this does not necessarily imply that they are the same as other texts. Since pictures demand "equal rights with language [but] do not want to be turned into language" (Mitchell 1996:82), visual language therefore "requires a hermeneutics that acknowledges its particular ontology" (Van Eeden & Du Preez 2005:5). Mitchell (1995b:540) proposes that such an endeavour may require an iconological methodology, which he defines as "the general study of images across media", without discriminating between images. In the same way, Poster (2002:67-70) argues that visual culture studies should be understood as media studies, stating that this will enable a study, not only of the visual image in isolation, but will also include a "definition of the limits of each medium in its concrete articulation".

3.6 On the discipline of 'indisciplined' images

When considering the disciplinarity of 'indisciplined' visual culture studies, the various definitions implied by the concept 'discipline' must be acknowledged. For

instance, Curwin and Mendler (1988:21) argue that "every disciplinary programme has, in one form or another, the following elements: goals, principles, rules, enforcement or intervention procedures and an implicit or explicit evaluation process". This definition regards discipline as a system of rules of conduct or a method of practice; a trait of being well behaved; the act of punishing offenders in order to gain control; and as a formal process for the enforcement of standards governing behaviour. In this sense, the intention of discipline is "to prevent, suppress, and redirect misbehaviour" (Charles 2002:3) in support of a dominant power that essentially has "a desire for mastery and control of its objects" (Campbell 2002:79).

In the same way, an *academic discipline* is generally regarded as a branch or area of learning in which "the object domain consists of consensually categorised objects around which certain assumptions and approaches have crystallized" (Bal 2003:7). Phrased differently, Mitchell (1995b:541) defines disciplinarity as a "way of insuring the continuity of a set of collective practices". Ultimately, an academic discipline is defined by its object of study, the assumptions which underpin its methodology and the record of the development of the discipline itself (Storey 1996:1). In this way, academic disciplines construct "intellectual empires" (Rodowick 1996:59) which regulate their object domains by maintaining and patrolling their borders. By subjecting their objects of study to predetermined rules, disciplines ultimately aim to structure academic knowledge. The institutionalisation of disciplines, then, produces "real structures that permit or impede certain kinds of intellectual work" (Wolff 2002:262).

In institutions it has now become a question of to what extent the "old disciplines" (Rodowick 1996:59) can compete with "new phenomena" (Rodowick 1996:59), such as visual culture studies. The "interdisciplinary practice" of visual culture studies, after all, functions both at the "fringes" of art history, as well as across traditional disciplinary borders (Mitchell 1995b:540). Mainly as a result of the "pictorial turn" (Mitchell 1994:11-34), a number of disciplines - most notably, art

history, literary and media studies, and cultural studies - may be said to have converged within visual culture studies (Mitchell 1995b:540). In this sense, then, visual culture studies has emerged "beneath" disciplinary scrutiny as a field attending to "vernacular visuality or everyday seeing that is bracketed out by the disciplines addressed to visual arts and media" (Mitchell 2002:247). In this way, visual culture studies is indeed a new phenomenon that is increasingly pressurising more traditional disciplines.

If visual culture studies acknowledges the complex visuality of contemporary culture (as argued in Chapter 2) by analysing images in general and across media, can long-standing notions of what constitutes the discipline of art history be upheld? Indeed, Cherry (2004:482) suggests that visual culture studies may even have been "triggered by the failures of art history to engage with contemporary and recent art, to connect to the everyday, to address the investment of the present in accounts of the past, or to address its elitism". This would be to regard visual culture studies as a necessary departure from art history.[96] Ultimately, it may be argued that visual culture studies can only define itself because art history has already been defined.

Alternatively, is it rather the case, as Rodowick (1996:59) has postulated, that, currently, disciplinarity itself is "under suspicion because of an internal critical and philosophical pressure"? This is due largely to Lyotard's (1979 [1984]) critique of regimes of knowledge that were produced by modern foundationalism, as previously discussed. Lyotard (1979 [1984]:3) has argued that "the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age". A postmodern critique

[96] Many authors have used art history to define what visual culture studies is not. For instance, Elkins (2003:21) maintains that "both conservative scholars and those that associate themselves with visual studies tend to emphasise the distance between the two fields". This has become evident when, as Elkins (2003:17) suggests, authors, such as Mirzoeff (1999) and Heywood and Sandywell (1999), "do not so much define a new field as they define their differences from existing fields, especially art history". For example, Mirzoeff ([sa]:[sp]) describes visual culture as "a wide range of visual media beyond the usual medium-based parameters of academic disciplines (i.e. film studies, art history)".

of the stability and order that is supposedly maintained in modern societies exposes these ideals as inherently flawed. In contrast to modernism, postmodernism privileges "heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse" (Harvey 1990:9). In response to the so-called "crisis of narratives" (Lyotard 1979 [1984]:xxiii), and in an attempt to redefine cultural discourse, several interdisciplinary 'projects' emerged in academic discourse in the 1970s.[97] Interdisciplinarity can be understood as "call[ing] into question what counts as a single discipline or as academic expertise" (Nead 2002:7). According to Nead (2002:7), the development of "new intellectual sites" may be attributed to interdisciplinary projects which "draw[ ] together … intellectual materials and protocols".

Consequently, it may be argued that, as a result of 'the postmodern condition' (Lyotard 1979 [1984]), visual culture studies has quite understandably emerged as "a new intellectual site" (Nead 2002:7). The interdisciplinary project of visual culture studies may, therefore, be understood within the postmodern context of "intense distrust" (Harvey 1990:9) of established modes of thought - or 'metanarratives' - such as art history and other disciplines.[98] In this sense, visual culture studies "looks like an outside to art history", as it questions art history's long-standing assumptions of 'high' and 'low' culture, or "visual art versus visual culture" (Mitchell 1995b:542), by vastly opening up the visual field of enquiry to

[97] For instance, interdisciplinary projects include deconstruction, feminism and women's studies, semiotics, Marxist and psychoanalytic criticism, as well as work in media and mass culture (Mitchell 1995b:540,541).
[98] In addition, Mirzoeff (1999:1) understands visual culture studies' emergence as a direct result of the heightened visuality that characterises postmodernity.

include vernacular images and popular mass media.[99] When this happens, does visual culture studies threaten the autonomy of the discipline of art history? If disciplinarity itself is questioned, as suggested by Rodowick (1996:59), and visual culture studies is the more 'acceptable' field, in that it "names a problematic rather than a well-defined theoretical object" (Mitchell 1995b:542), does this imply that art history may have been "superseded" (Elkins 2002:25) by visual culture studies? Or, alternatively, can art history 'survive' the visual cultural onslaught?

According to Mitchell (1995b:541), the alternative would be to regard visual culture studies as an "indiscipline" which does not veer into the kind of interdisciplinarity that has thus far emerged in several academic departments.[100] By 'indiscipline', Mitchell (1995b:541) is referring to a break or a rupture, when "continuity is broken and the practice comes into question". In this sense, visual culture studies comes to be understood as a field whose portal lies in the "turbulence or incoherence at the inner and outer boundaries of disciplines" (Mitchell 1995b:541). As confirmed by Nead (2002:7), far from achieving "an easy complementarity" between disciplines or "provid[ing] additional support for the same campaigning ground", this kind of interdisciplinarity encourages "critical engagement", "resistance" and "strain". Ultimately, such a project cannot be subjected to disciplinary regimes. Consequently, if these practices were to

[99] Pointing out that the assumption of visual culture relating mainly to popular culture is not entirely correct, Elkins (2003:94) includes "recent avant-garde art ... which is not at all popular in the way mass media are ... [and] documents (the visual appearance of passports, bureaucratic forms and tickets)" in a description of what this field encompasses. As a further note on the presumed erosion of hierarchies in visual culture studies, Elkins (2003:52) maintains that "the view that high and low are wholly mixed, and therefore no longer exist as such, is more a rhetorical stance or an assumption than a condition…". Citing the emphasis placed on *particular* adverts for investigation in visual culture studies courses, Elkins (2003:53) argues that "if the field were really level … then scholars interested in advertising would study all adverts equally, indifferent to whether they are ambiguous, innovative, complex, or politically engaged". Therefore, value judgements are clearly still made by academics, and the subjects used as examples are inevitably linked to the interests of the individuals who are presenting the courses, or, alternatively are chosen according to their usefulness or convenience to demonstrate certain arguments.

[100] According to Mitchell (1995b:541), to "be interdisciplinary" has come to be regarded as a 'good thing' in institutions, based on the assumption that interdisciplinarity means to "have mastered more than one discipline".

provide the impetus for visual culture studies, it could therefore not ultimately be disciplined.

If visual culture studies is to be regarded as 'indisciplinary', combined with its resistance to "totalising narratives" (Lyotard 1979 [1984]:xxiii), surely it can no longer be desirable to define visual culture studies within academic structures. As Mitchell (1995b:542) has suggested, it might be "unfortunate if visual culture were to become a professional or disciplinary option too rapidly, or maybe at all".[101] Perhaps it is only if visual culture studies were to remain an "outside" (Mitchell 1995b:542), not only to art history but also to academic 'policing', that it could most appropriately resist traditional regimes of knowledge.

Somewhat differently, Elkins (2002:93) has argued that "it was never enough to claim that visual culture is ill defined *by nature* because it is interdisciplinary". Instead, interdisciplinarity need not be regarded as "an obstacle to self-definition" (Elkins 2002:93). Evidently, the issue of whether or not visual culture studies can conclusively be defined as a 'discipline', 'indiscipline', or 'interdiscipline' evades consensus.[102] For instance, Bal (2003:5) maintains that the answer to the question of whether or not visual culture studies is a discipline, is, at the same time, both 'yes' and 'no'. On the one hand, visual culture studies "lays claim to a specific object and raises specific questions about that object" (Bal 2003:5), and could then to be considered a discipline. On the other, its object "cannot be studied within the paradigms of any discipline currently in place" (Bal 2003:6),

[101] In the same manner, the "academisation" (Agger 1992:5) of cultural studies has been contested (Hall 1996; Green 1996). According to Stuart Hall (1996:285) and Ben Agger (1992:5), cultural studies should not strive for institutionalisation which may very well be "a moment of profound danger" (Hall 1996:285). Similarly, Green (1996:54) suggests that the formalisation of cultural studies would not serve its initial purpose, which is a critique of the claims and omissions of historical disciplines.

[102] Although Elkins (2003:29) maintains that visual culture studies will eventually "end up defining itself as a discipline", as this will inevitably be necessary in order for it to be taken seriously, Bal (2003:6) refers to visual culture studies as a movement rather than "either a discipline or a non-discipline", even predicting that "it may die soon".

which means, then, that visual culture studies cannot acquire the status of an autonomous discipline.

Nevertheless, it is now ultimately a question of how art history defines itself within, around or alongside visual culture studies. For, if it is, as Mitchell (1995b:541) has proposed, that postmodern images - including those considered to be art - should rather be considered as "indiscipline[d]", it may, then, also be suggested that art history's attempt to 'discipline' an image, through the construction of an assumed autonomous category, 'art', is no longer possible.

3.7 Critical links between art history and visual culture studies

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

Robert Frost, "Mending Wall", (1914)

Is visual culture studies that mysterious "something … that doesn't love a wall"? When compared to art history, visual culture studies may appear to redress elitist assumptions embedded in the limiting definition of 'art', since visual culture studies lays claim to the broader context of the visual by analysing the ways in which viewers are constructed through the visual (Elkins 2003:24). While art history has traditionally 'railed in' its objects of study through 'turf-policing', based on ongoing modernist notions about style, aesthetic value, and expression, visual culture studies subverts those defining principles. By democratising the analysis of visual experience, visual culture studies addresses the broader sphere of visuality. Indeed, Bal (2003:5) maintains that it is art history that has given rise to visual culture because the former has "largely failed to deal with both the visuality

of its objects – due to the dogmatic position of 'history' – and the openness of the collection of those objects – due to the established meaning of 'art'".

Walker and Chaplin (1997:5) identify art history as the pivot around which departments of visual culture were established in the 1990s. Evidently, when the field of topics explored in art history courses began to broaden, "the adoption of the umbrella heading 'visual culture' was a logical response to a greatly expanded subject matter" (Walker & Chaplin 1997:5). Nonetheless, as Mitchell (2001:3) explains, "Art history is not sufficient because it focussed - quite appropriately - on the history of art …. Visual culture addresses a much broader field … [and] visual art is just one area of visual culture". This means that art history can be included in visual culture studies, but at the same time, art history is not visual culture studies.

Does visual culture studies then not inevitably marginalise art history to the teaching of "an apparently old-fashioned, essentially European canon of artists", as suggested by Elkins (2003:21)? Should "older art" (Walker &Chaplin 1997:36), in other words pre-modern art, become the primary focus in art history, with the result that art history is more suitably associated with departments of anthropology and the Classics (Elkins 2003:21)? This has already become evident in universities that now offer courses in various versions of 'visual culture studies'. Elkins (2003:9) has determined that "older art" is generally dealt with in art history and new images and media are appropriated by new departments, or Film Studies, resulting in "ongoing friction between art history and visual studies."

Alternatively, should art history expand its borders to include contemporary visuality? From both within and beyond the confines of what is traditionally classified as art, revisionist discourses have necessitated a re-examination of the category art. This has led to an 'opening up' of the canon and to permitting certain previously marginalised art forms, referred to by Steiner (1996:213) as "the new and late arrivals", to slip inside. Has the concept 'art', then, already

escaped its disciplinary borders? From the perspective of its professionals, a closed canon risks total dissolution as its rivals encircle and invade it, while a totally open canon risks expanding beyond cohesion. Evidently, the fence has *not* come down entirely, but the territory has certainly broadened, expanded, or been reconfigured. It may even be the case that, in some instances, the fence is now so wide that it has attempted to include the whole territory of the visual while still referring to the encampment as 'art history'.

While art history redefines itself, a sense of antagonism can be detected from either side of the 'disciplinary fence'. As proposed by Elkins (2003:23), when viewed from the perspective of visual culture studies, art history may appear 'old-fashioned', "elitist, politically naïve, bound by older methodologies, wedded to the art market, or hypnotized by the allure of a limited set of artists and artworks". On the other hand, according to Appadurai (quoted in Elkins 2003:23), art history mistrusts visual culture studies' "theory (too French), its topics (too popular), its style (too glitzy), its jargon (too hybrid), its politics (too postcolonial), its constituency (too multicultural)". In other words, traditional art historians are sceptical of visual culture studies' apparent random selection of objects and methods, its disregard for historical complexity, its "simplified notion of visuality" (Elkins 2003:23), the blurring of the boundaries between media and an apparent mockery of the notion of value.

Mitchell (2002:234) has suggested that the "disciplinary anxiety" caused by visual culture studies may be unnecessary if art history is considered to have *already* been visual studies. However, as discussed above, art history, as it currently stands, cannot be assumed to be guided by the same theoretical objectives as visual culture studies. This is due mainly to the view by scholars working in visual culture studies who, as Wolff (2002:259) acknowledges, "tend to be dismissive of the pre-critical (traditional, ahistorical, positivistic) work they believe characterises

the older disciplines" such as art history and aesthetics.[103] Ultimately, if art history continues to be defined by Modernist assumptions, it is rather likely, as Bal (2003:5) has quite rightly pointed out, that visual culture certainly cannot be regarded as "the province of art history". Therefore, it is now necessary to investigate how visual culture studies and art history may rightfully be conceptualised in academic structures, as surely the complete replacement of art history by visual culture studies is not desirable. In such a relativistic approach, all distinctions between images would be erased. By the same token, the persistence of delimiting hierarchical categories by which images are defined - and according to which 'art' has some intrinsic special quality - is equally undesirable. Therefore, in Chapter 4 various possibilities for 'the future of the disciplined image' are explored.

[103] Yet another dilemma stems from the issue of disciplinarity. This dilemma concerns the question of who would teach courses in visual culture studies and who could claim specialist knowledge in the field of visual culture studies, since this field reaches across several disciplines. Walker and Chaplin (1997:1) claim that, "to overcome the implied requirement that academics become expert in a range of disciplines, it has been proposed that scholars from different disciplines should teach in teams". With financial constraints and a lack of resources already afflicting the academy this may not necessarily be a viable option.

CHAPTER 4
THE FUTURE OF THE DISCIPLINED IMAGE: PLOTTING A COURSE

4.1 On 'lapsed art historians'

In their recent publication, *South African visual culture,* Jeanne van Eeden and Amanda du Preez (2005:1) describe themselves as "lapsed art historians". Evidently, at the eighteenth annual conference of the South African Association of Art Historians held in 2002, their research interests were "slightly at odds with … [the] topics and emphases" (Van Eeden & Du Preez 2005:1) of other papers presented at the conference. This self-identifying 'label' indicates their "close, yet awkward, relationship to art history", since their topics and methodologies somewhat "transgress" the traditional disciplinary protocols of art history (Van Eeden & Du Preez 2005:1). They are, however, not alone in these 'transgressions'. Suspicious of traditional art history's shortcomings, many art historians worldwide are increasingly adapting their teaching programmes to include the wider sphere of visual culture.[104] Already a decade ago, Bryson, Holly and Moxey (1994:xv) admitted that "the ideas about which [they] [thought] and [wrote] seemed at odds with the traditional canon in which many of [them] were schooled".

The aim of this chapter is the exploration of existing curricular and pedagogical problems that have already arisen in programmes which have attempted to 'discipline' images, whilst also predicting potential problems which may arise in the future. Such a study has been necessitated by the disciplinary anxieties referred to in Chapter 3 that have arisen between art history and visual culture

[104] For example, at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, the *Art history & visual culture* course aims to "introduce students to a diverse range of visual images and objects" and focuses on both 'Western' and 'non-Western' art, as well as "popular forms of culture" (Rhodes University 2005:[sp]). Concerned less with chronologically structured art history arranged according to periods and styles, this course takes a thematic approach and deals with "areas of controversy" rather than the transmission of a "vast bulk" of facts (Rhodes University 2005:[sp]).

studies and which now urgently require resolution. Not only is art history's 'turf' firmly positioned in the territorial space of visual culture studies, but its continued commitment to the essentialist premises on which the discipline was originally founded is still in contention. Therefore, as Thomas Crow (1996:35) so aptly puts it, art history is currently a "field of inquiry under siege".

As already indicated, the reason for this current 'state of siege' may be ascribed to suspicions that have emerged over the past three decades concerning traditional art history. These suspicions hinge on the following assumptions: that the discipline still primarily relies on connoisseurial judgements of value; that distinctions between 'high' art and 'low' art continue to govern the inclusion and exclusion of works into the canon; that aesthetics remains associated with universalising judgements; and that art history has failed to interrogate its own role in the construction of vision. Consequently, what may be described as the "weakness of art history as a critical discipline" (Alpers & Alpers 1971:437*)* urgently requires interrogation. Moreover, it cannot be denied that the disciplinary parameters of art history have largely been "fossilized by its allegiance to an ahistorical and, therefore, 'natural' notion of cultural values" (Moxey 1996:59). The suggestions made in this chapter are hence based on the premise that the discipline of art history urgently requires redefinition.

4.2 Art history at the crossroads

A critique of the potential futures of the 'disciplined image' (as I have chosen to refer to art history), requires acknowledgement of the emerging critical discourse of visual culture studies which has, in some respects, attended to particular problems that have plagued art history in the past. For instance, instead of preserving art history as the history of art, it has been suggested that a democratic approach to images may be achieved through the study of "a history of images" (Bryson, Holly & Moxey 1994:xv). According to this project, by

studying all images in terms of their cultural and ideological meanings instead of their aesthetic value - which is the basis of the canon of art - all hierarchical distinctions between images would be erased. While Bryson, Holly and Moxey (1994:xvi) argue that art history ought to urgently depart from "the history of art as a record of the creation of aesthetic masterpieces", Mitchell (2001:15), in contrast, insists that art history should not be replaced by the history of images. Evidently, authors are divided on the topic of whether art history and visual culture studies are "distinct, antagonistic, or complementary enterprises" (Cherry 2004:479). A central topic in this debate concerns the question of whether art history and visual culture studies can "sustain separate existence[s]" (Buck-Morss 1996:29), or whether "the production of a discourse of visual culture entails the liquidation of art as we have known it" (Buck-Morss 1996:29)?[105]

Admittedly, the discipline of art history is increasingly being superseded by visual culture studies in various institutions. Recently, this has also become evident in South African visual arts education. For instance, art history has been replaced by visual culture studies in the newly approved FET phase curriculum for the subject, 'Visual Arts', which will be implemented from 2006 (Department of Education 2005a).[106] While visual culture studies may easily be perceived as a "postmodern blueprint for the emancipation of art history", Crow (1996:35) suggests that such a notion may merely be a fallacy. This is supported by Mitchell (2001:15) who acknowledges that art history and visual culture studies deal with entirely distinct issues. Therefore, Mitchell (2001:15) "has no interest in 'replacing' the history of art with the history of images". In his view, art history ought to continue to distinguish between 'high' and 'low' art, while visual culture

[105] The question Buck-Morss (1996:29) raises is that, if artists are regarded as "sustain[ing] the critical moment of aesthetic experience", then, is visual culture studies the platform from which that aesthetic experience can be recognised? I argue that if art history continues to reduce aesthetic experience to a universal response, it will always remain in conflict with visual culture studies. But, if art history were to recognise the uncertainty - even, indeterminacy - of aesthetic response, which would imply giving up its allegiance to the connoisseurial idea (exclusivity), it could more appropriately accommodate the new images of contemporary society.

[106] See Learning outcome 4 (LO 4), in Department of Education. 2005a. *National curriculum statement: grades 10 - 12 (general): learning programme guidelines: visual arts.* April. This topic is dealt with in greater depth further on in this chapter.

studies ought to deal, not only with images, but also with seeing in general, which may ultimately prove to be beyond the scope of art history. In this sense, visual culture studies cannot supersede art history, nor can it emancipate this discipline.

Nonetheless, art history and visual culture studies inhabit a contested space, both in tertiary institutions and increasingly in school curricula, as has become evident in art education discourse and in critical pedagogy.[107] For example, it has been suggested that "anything from the entire realm of visual culture" (Wilson 2003:227) should be included in art education curricula, rather than limiting the content to only certain art objects believed to represent legitimate culture. This view rests largely on the premise that, "while art educators place art from the museum realm at the centre of their curricula, their students are piecing together their expectations and dreams through popular culture" (Tavin 2003:197). Similarly, Mirzoeff (Profile Nicholas Mirzoeff 2004:[sp]) contends that "students live in a visual culture in a way that is wholly natural to them". Therefore, the purpose of a course in art history and visual culture studies ought to be the defamiliarisation of visual culture which has become 'transparent' through familiarisation. This would require, as Rogoff (1998:22) puts forward, an acknowledgement that "visibility does not equal transparency", for it is only when the familiar once again becomes strange that it can be engaged with on a more critical level.

[107] The uncertain boundary between visual culture studies and art history is evident in the rise in individual courses in visual culture studies that are now being more frequently offered in a wide range of existing departments across the globe. The programmes in different universities can be largely independent of one another so that their methods and results vary widely (Elkins 2003:25).

It cannot be denied that visual culture - or, visual literacy[108] - is a necessary field of study if the aim of education is to foster critical and reflective thinkers. Yet, it should not be assumed that 'the future of the disciplined image' has, thus far, been conclusively mapped out.[109] A number of "paths" (Moxey 1996:57) have tentatively been suggested for 'the future of the disciplined image', as art history moves toward, alongside, or away from visual culture studies. For example, Moxey (1996:57, [emphasis added]) has suggested the following:

> There seem to me to be at least two paths open, and both of them are better described under the rubric of visual studies than art history. First, the discipline could concern itself with the study of all images. It could study the image-making capacity of human cultures in all of their manifestations. On this model, visual studies would pay attention to all image-producing cultures both past and present. It would study digital and electronic imagery along with comic strips and advertisements without making qualitative distinctions between them….
>
> Alternatively, and more advisedly, the discipline might concern itself with all images for which *distinguished cultural value* has been or is being proposed. Such a model would respect the tradition on which the discipline was founded, namely that certain objects have been and are given special cultural significance … .

Moxey's (1996:57) first 'path' proposes a model that would evade hierarchical distinctions between the objects of study on the basis of their presumed quality

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[108] Mirzoeff (Profile Nicholas Mirzoeff 2004:[sp]) argues that, in the twenty-first century, visual literacy "will be as fundamental as reading and math literacy" due to the increasing primacy of the visual image in life. But, one must tread carefully when conflating 'visual literacy' with the goal of visual culture studies. In fact, the visual literacy envisioned by visual culture studies cannot be equated with the visual literacy which generally emphasises pictorial composition and colour in a kind of formal analysis of the image. Elkins (2003:125-127) stresses that there is a substantial difference between the visual literacy taught in high schools and colleges in the twentieth century and the visual literacy proposed by visual culture studies, as the latter concentrates on the "social construction of vision, the relation between seeing and saying, the lack of natural images and the necessity of interpretation, and the involvement of the viewer in what is seen" (Elkins 2003:127). In other words, visual culture studies "look[s] beyond fine-art expectations" (Elkins 2003:18) and is not interested in analysing the formal elements and principles which have traditionally been analysed in 'visual literacy' courses.

[109] Indeed, whether or not visual culture studies ought to be mapped at all is an equally contentious issue, one which Wilson (2003) has offered insights on. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Wilson (2003:222) suggests that visual culture is best understood, not as a hierarchical system, but rather as a rhizome "because of its interlocking mass of laterally spreading roots, nodes, and shoots". A rhizome, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987:7), cannot be mapped or diagrammed, as this would be a pointless endeavour since the only result would be over- simplification of the intention.

and value. However, Moxey (1996:57) acknowledges that this approach would inevitably lead to such a vast spectrum of topics being studied that it may be impossible to determine the pedagogical agenda of such an enterprise, let alone gauge the results. Therefore, Moxey (1996:57) proposes that the second model - which is based on the selection of only those images for which "distinguished cultural value has been or is being proposed" - is a more appropriate alternative. While Moxey (1996:57) argues that the second model would "respect the tradition on which the discipline [of art history] was founded", is it not precisely those 'founding' elitist assumptions concerning legitimate culture that must now urgently be challenged? For, who will decide what sufficiently constitutes objects of "distinguished cultural value" (Moxey 1996:57), and whose culture will be valued in such an exercise of selection and exclusion?

Suggesting a somewhat different perspective on the topic, according to Wilson (2003:224-225), there are four, instead of two, alternatives for 'the future of the disciplined image'. Firstly, we could continue to "do as we do now" (Wilson 2003:224) by merely retaining the status quo. This implies that art education ought to continue to ignore contemporary art as well as (popular) culture, which "many teachers still think … is kitsch" and, therefore, "the enemy of high art" (Wilson 2003:224). The second option may result in the addition of examples of contemporary art and popular visual culture in the same structured curriculum which will continue to focus on the previously approved topics.[110] Wilson's (2003:225) third option would be the complete de-structuring of curricula, resulting in the random selection of topics by both teachers and students, from the vast realm of contemporary art and popular visual culture. Finally, in an attempt to avoid succumbing entirely to the popular, but also rejecting the first

[110] The examples of these topics given by Wilson (2003:224) are the "elements and principles of design, …(the) study of post-impressionism, … drawing, painting, prints, sculpture, crafts and handicraft …", which already constitute the Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) programme in the United States. This approach to art education, established by the Getty Centre for Education in the Arts, provided a 'map' of the art world based on an art museum concept of art education. This map showed the art world almost geographically by plotting relationships between individual art works, the ways in which they are created and interpreted, and how they may relate to other works of art, the sciences and the humanities (Wilson 2003:224,225).

two options, Wilson (2003:225) suggests that a more appropriate "pedagogical tactic" may best be articulated as an "intertextual play" - or "para-site" - between conventional content and student-generated topics from popular culture. In this way, students could engage with contemporary art and popular visual culture of their own choice, in a space 'between' the school and these other realms (Wilson 2003:225,226). I now undertake an exploration of the issues encompassing each proposed alternative in greater depth.

4.2.1 Maintaining the status quo

To maintain the status quo would also require adherence to the assumption that "worthwhile art education" is only that kind which supports art works that reflect presumed "timeless aesthetic qualities" (Wilson 2003:224). Therefore, broadening the canon to include contemporary media and popular (visual) culture would be undesirable. This view is supported by Ralph Smith (1992:75) who "take[s] the development of an appreciation of the excellences of outstanding works of art to be the core of art education …". While Smith (1992:83) acknowledges that the scope of the current curriculum ought to include "non-Western cultural traditions", according to his view, these traditions must, nevertheless, be subjected to "the values of the Western cultural tradition". Moreover, according to Smith (1992:75), the selection of those 'other' cultural traditions "worth dwelling on" must be based on the identification of "artistic excellence in all civilizations".

Critical of popular culture, Smith (1992:77) suggests that the task of art history ought to be to "combat the hegemony of the merely contemporary and its constricting effects on mind and sensibility". According to Smith (1992:77), the "major monuments of Western culture" provide "the young" with "important background knowledge for future aesthetic experiences". Apparently, aesthetic experiences do not reside in the realm of popular culture. Equally, Werner Busch

(2002:3) argues that the relinquishment of the distinctions of quality and value that accompany a democratic analysis of everything visual - which is essential in a 'history of images' approach - "imposes a real threat on the core aspect of art history". According to Busch (2002:3), "the art of describing aesthetic experience" is that "core aspect" of art history which must be upheld.

Admittedly, one should not demonise the art works that have traditionally comprised the canon. As Edwards (1999:5) argues, "as long as we continue to find it valuable to look at … works of art, some framework of comparison and evaluation is unavoidable" (Edwards 1999:5). According to Edwards (1999:5), "it is a serious problem of many recent critical perspectives that much of the art that they champion in opposition to the canon looks, when set against this art, insipid, uncompelling and just plain bad". However, such an argument, once again, assumes that the value of the aesthetic tradition is only enshrined in canonical art.

As already indicated in Chapter 2, it may be argued that aesthetic experience itself is culturally based.[111] Following Barron (1963), Don Brothwell (1976:11) argues that: "As psychological testing has shown, our approval of certain art may be as much a socially-determined approval of good-breeding, or religion or authority, as a true reflection on the art work …". In the same way, in Chapter 2, I argued that the perception of visual stimuli is primarily dependent on former perceptual experiences. For instance, Marshall Segall (1976:107) has identified cross-cultural differences in visual perception; a fact which may be ascribed to the influence of the visual environments with which humans are engaged.

[111] Pickford (1976:162) demonstrates that there may even be a connection between "the temperamental qualities of introversion/extraversion, and stability/instability of personality" and aesthetic preferences. For example, his research proved that there is a tendency for extroverts to favour geometrical-abstract paintings, while introverts favour non-geometrical art.

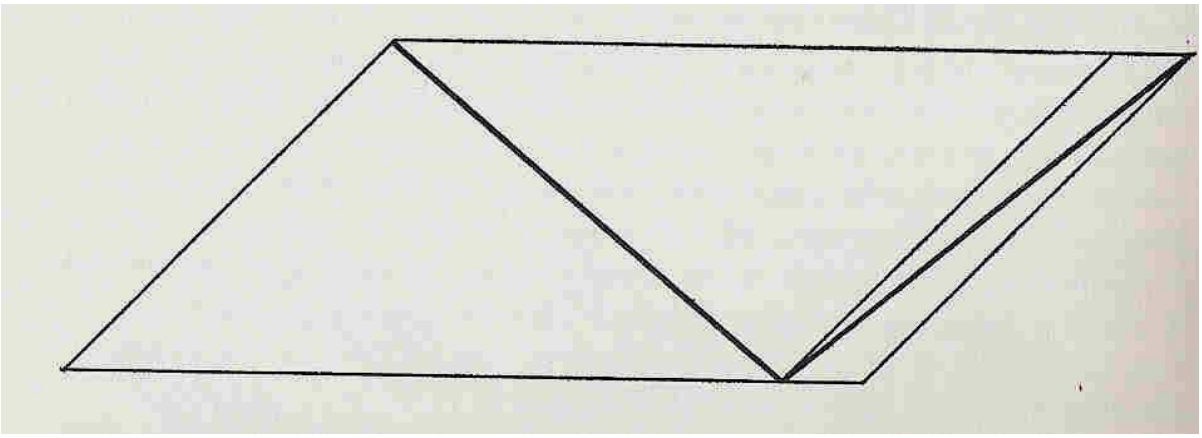

Figure 16: The Sander Parallelogram
(Segall 1976:108)

This means that in Western societies, which may be described as highly 'carpentered' environments (in other words, consisting of many buildings and rectangular objects), perception of the Sander Parallelogram[112] (Figure 16) will occur according to the rules of linear perspective. Consequently, the left diagonal appears longer than the right since it is perceived as if receding into pictorial space. However, according to Segall's (1976:110) research, the "inference habit", whereby acute and obtuse angles are interpreted as right angles extended in space, will not be visually learned by those cultures living in environments where man-made structures are limited - otherwise referred to as 'uncarpentered' environments. The implication of this research for art is that, if perception is shown to be influenced by "inference habits" (Segall 1976:110), and different cultures are exposed to different visual environments and visual experiences, then, perception (or 'seeing' in Mitchell's terms) cannot be regarded as universal. In the same way, aesthetic response cannot be regarded as "allegedly accessible and obvious to all" (Moxey 1996:58), but can only be regarded as

[112] Gestalt psychology studies the appearances of visual patterns and configurations (Pickford 1976:154). Segall (1976:108) explains that the Gestalt psychological explanation of the Sander Parallelogram is that all viewers will *inevitably* read the left heavy diagonal as longer than the right, although they are equal, due to the way in which the human nervous system is structured. According to this theory, the illusion "is a product of certain hypothetical neural forces" (Segall 1976:108).

"specific and local" (Moxey 1996:57). As a consequence, any reductive formula by which to relate art history to the appreciation of presumed universal aesthetic qualities may be impossible and, in fact, dubious. Thus, non-Western visual culture cannot be subjected to "the values of the Western cultural tradition", as Smith (1992:83) would have us believe. Surely different analytical tools and concepts are required when dealing with diverse visual cultures?[113]

4.2.2 A 'dash' of visual culture

Wilson's (2003:224) second option is the revision of the traditional canon of art history. Such an approach would entail enlarging the existing canon in order to accommodate certain images from the wider domain of visual culture. This view is supported by Duncum (2001:104), who considers that broadening the range of objects of art history, and thereby enlarging the canon, should now be the "prime task" of art educators.

Evidently, many art educators have already employed this tactic in their programmes. This may be due to a widespread belief - particularly by so-called "art-historians-turned-'visual-culture'-enthusiasts" (Bal 2003:11) - that art history urgently needs "the connotation of innovation and cutting edge" (Bal 2003:11). Edwards (1999:11), for example, maintains that, in Britain, many art historians have attempted "to expand the range of art objects studied". In many cases, however, this has merely resulted in an amendment to the use of terminology. For, as Edwards (1999:11) explains, the words 'ideology', 'power' or 'desire' might now replace words like 'exquisite', 'delightful' or 'genius' when dealing with the same set of objects. Consequently, the focus of many so-called 'revised'

[113] This was a challenge which confronted the South African curator and writer, Steven Sack, when compiling, *The neglected tradition* exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1988. The exhibition, which aimed at exposing the work of previously 'neglected' black artists, required a consideration of whether to write about black art "as a separate category", or whether to "insert it into the 'mainstream'" (Sack 1988:7). Furthermore, Sack (1988:7) was obliged to consider whether the art works "should be displayed separately or incorporated without concern for racial categories, simply in terms of artistic categories".

courses - or, new art history - is still on the same individual artists, periods and institutions, with the art work as commodity remaining at the forefront. In this way, 'new' art history merely offers "a modernised version of traditional art history", since this tactic "only develop[s] new ways of valuing and appreciating the standard list of artists and objects" (Edwards 1999:11). Likewise, Cherry (2004:479) maintains that this 'tactic' amounts to "little more than rebranding", while Rifkin (1986:158) views the new art history as "an anxious liberal stratagem to market a faded product in a new package". In the same manner, according to Nead (2002:8), new art history may be summed up as "the pointless pursuit of novel ways of interpreting the same old canonical works of art".

Consequently, while postmodern theory has critiqued procedures employed in the traditional selection of art history's objects of study, evidence suggests that the new art history may not be 'new' enough. For, as Moxey (1996:56) asserts, "far from choosing to do business as usual or transforming itself in the light of poststructuralist theory, art history has typically played it safe". While established methodologies[114] "paradoxically … rub shoulders" (Moxey 1996:57) with 'newer' critical discourses[115], art history continues to subscribe to universal notions of aesthetic value. Therefore, it can be assumed that the discipline of art history has not undergone significant change, despite claims to the contrary (Roskill 1989). And even if new art history were 'new' enough, it is still called the *history* of art. Nead (2002:8) suggests that "the history of art has, paradoxically, proved to be remarkably unselfconscious about the main elements of its name - that is, how its objects of study are defined and what kind of history it has produced as a result". If this is the case, is it then even possible that the "oneiric, anamorphic, junk-tech aesthetic of cyber-visuality" (Apter 1996:27) can adequately be accommodated in the traditional discipline of art history? If, after all, art history primarily relies on established methodologies, are these limiting frameworks the most suitable terrain from which to analyse these 'new' kinds of images?

[114] For example, the analysis of form and style, as well as iconography.
[115] For example, feminism, gay and lesbian studies, and postcolonial studies.

Perhaps this tentative solution to the limitations of (traditional) art history - that is, the change in terminology but the continuing allegiance to universalising notions of aesthetic value - is based on a fear of what may be lost if the canon were to expand beyond control. For, as Bal (2003:11) argues, expanding the object domain of art history may inevitably bring with it "the risk of losing in in-depth understanding what is gained in scope". Time constraints and the inclusion of an infinite range of content, may lead to the superficial analysis of that content. On the other hand, broadening the scope of the discipline may unavoidably lead to the abandonment of previously included content. Furthermore, since this option runs the risk of opening up the discipline of art history to incoherence, the selection of 'suitable' cultural artefacts for pedagogical analysis may be equally unavoidable. Ultimately, as already indicated, it may not even be desirable to simply add new objects to "the old map" (Wilson 2003:220) of art history.

4.2.3 Visual culture studies, not art history

If it is neither feasible to insert additional objects into the traditional discipline of art history, nor desirable to continue adherence to traditional art historical structures, should art history, then rather be replaced by visual culture studies? For, surely as Buck-Morss (1996:29) proposes, art history cannot "sustain a separate existence, not as a practice, not as phenomenon, not as an experience, not as a discipline" within a visual culture discourse. In other words, it may be necessary for art history, as we know it, to cease to exist. This is because, as was demonstrated in Chapter 3, visual culture studies' methodological approach is substantially different from that of (traditional) art history.

While not excluding art from its object domain, visual culture studies analyses images in terms of their ideological implications - that is, in terms of how they construct seeing and thereby construct identities. Phrased differently, the object

domain of visual culture studies is “not just beyond the sphere of the ‘work of art’, but also beyond images and visual objects to the visual practices, the ways of seeing and being seen, that make up the world of human visuality” (Mitchell 1995b:542). By critiquing the ‘way of seeing’ constructed by art, visual culture studies analyses and interprets images in pursuit of distinctly different goals than traditionally undertaken by art history. In this way, visual culture studies is an ‘outside’ to art history as it critiques art history’s parameters. Therefore, if art history and visual culture studies have very distinct disciplinary protocols, how can visual culture studies completely replace art history? Is it not rather the case that art history ought to revise its elitist stances without totally dissolving into visual culture studies?

Evidently, the South African Department of Education does not share this position, but has instead replaced the traditional discipline of art history with visual culture studies in the subject, ‘Visual Arts’. Consequently, the *National curriculum statement: grades 10 - 12 (general): visual arts* (Department of Education 2005a) (hereafter referred to as NCS), allocates four Learning outcomes (hereafter referred to as LO’s) in Visual Arts with LO 4 being *visual culture studies*. According to the *National curriculum statement: grades 10 - 12 (general): learning programme guidelines: visual arts* (Department of Education 2005b:19) (hereafter referred to as LPG), LO 4 encompasses “a wide range of visual forms and images ranging from fine art, design and craft to popular film and television to advertising to visual data …”. In this way, the emphasis in LO 4: *visual culture studies,* should predominantly be on “local, national, pan African and global contexts” - presumably in that order (Department of Education 2005b:19).

Aimed at encouraging learners to “appreciate the diversity of Visual Arts traditions present in the South African context” (Department of Education 2005b:8), the curriculum aims to challenge the so-called “uncritical repetition of theories about the creation and understanding of artworks, past and present”

(Department of Education 2005b:19). Quite rightly, art history in the context of South African art education has primarily studied "the art of the past" (Skawran 1976:4), and more specifically, has privileged European and American artists and styles. Furthermore, Skawran (1976:10) has pointed out that the study of art history in South Africa has always been complicated by limited access to these original art works due to "our geographical isolation from Europe and its cultural heritage". This has forced art historical research to be mainly undertaken through reproductions. This fact, combined with the emergence of visual culture discourse, has brought the previous art education curriculum into contention. The indigenous art works that surround South African students are undeniably more easily accessible than European and American art works, and can therefore be regarded as more relevant to them. Furthermore, images from popular culture raise issues that pertain to the values and aspirations of students' own culture and may, as Wilson (2003:217) contends, be more relevant "than art and artefacts of previous eras".

In an attempt to redress the discriminatory and uncritical approaches of the past, the new curriculum aims to provide "teachers and learners the opportunity to explore critically and understand Visual Arts in a contemporary way" (Department of Education 2005b:19). A closer review of the LPG (Department of Education 2005b) suggests that the traditional discipline of art history has effectively been erased from the subject, 'Visual Arts', to be implemented in 2006.[116] This means that the chronological development of Western art and architecture has finally been marginalised in favour of, on the one hand, the examination of "the forms of mass media that learners are familiar with, such as magazines and television" (Department of Education 2005b:19). On the other, South African and pan-African visual arts have been emphasised. An overview of the suggested content

[116] Currently, this may be in name only rather than in practice. For, thus far, South African art educators have received very contradictory information on the content of LO 4: *visual culture studies*. For example, a comparison between LPG (Department of Education 2005b:10-23) and *Department of Education: National curriculum statement: grades 10 - 12 (general): orientation: participant's manual: visual arts* (2005c:49.50), reveals that these two documents suggest very different content for LO 4.

for LO 4 reveals that in grade 10, the scope could include local and national popular culture and mass media, as well as the pre-history and colonial period in South Africa and Africa (Department of Education 2005b:21-23). This means that no international art is studied in grade 10.[117] In grade 11, the study of popular culture and mass media extends to different societies and cultures in a global context, as well as South African and pan-African visual arts, once again, and global visual arts, for example, "Western, Asian, Indian, Pacific Rim" (Department of Education 2005b:22). In grade 12, "Contemporary Visual Culture in daily life: the Global Village", as well as "Socio Political Issues in South African Visual Arts"; "Contemporary Visual Arts" and "Contemporary Studies: Western, Asian, Indian, Pacific Rim etc" could be studied (Department of Education 2005b:23).[118]

Prescribing no definite content, neither from traditional art history, nor from visual culture, according to these guidelines, teachers and grade 10 learners in South Africa will literally "wander[ ] about the newly emerging terrain of contemporary art and the vast rhizomatic realm of visual culture", as described within Wilson's (2003:225) third option. If this curriculum were to be followed, "no semester or term would be the same as the last" and "no-one would know … into what territory the next discoveries will take them" (Wilson 2003:225). Instead, such an approach assumes that the topics will "grow" from the "intriguing" discoveries made by "advanced parties of teachers and students" who "become nomads" in the terrain of visual culture (Wilson 2003:225). The danger of adopting such a

[117] Once again, it should be noted that this vague document is interpreted differently by various individuals. This became clear at the University of South Africa (UNISA) "In-service Training Programme" dealing with the NCS, held from 19 - 23 September 2005, for all FET phase educators. The participant's manual (Department of Education 2005c:49,50) sets out a year planner for grade 10, Visual Arts, which is a predominantly chronologically arranged list of art styles with no reference to popular culture or mass media. Clearly at odds with the LPG (Department of Education 2005b:10-23), this year planner generated much confusion and heated debate. The point I am trying to make is that it is impossible to replace art history with visual culture studies if careful consideration has not been given to the differences between these two fields of study.

[118] It is worth pointing out that these vague and contradicting documents concerning the scope of the prescribed content have been the most informative of all the documentation that has thus far been issued to South African art educators since the curriculum was first proposed in the Department of Education's (2003) *Revised national curriculum statement: grades 10 - 12 (general): visual arts* (hereafter referred to as RNCS).

"democratisation of approach" (Busch 2002:3) is two-fold. Firstly, where will the aimless 'wandering' of learners and teachers through the (undoubtedly) "intriguing" (Wilson 2003:225) terrain of visual culture - with no textbooks or guidelines - ultimately lead? Surely, as Elkins (2003:127) postulates, careful consideration must be given to "exactly which interpretative skills and what kinds of images can serve as a useful common ground for an education in images". Secondly, the proposal to include everything visual may bring with it an "anything goes attitude" (Busch 2002:3), and a loss of accountable teaching methodology. Does LO 4, therefore, only set educators up for failure, rather than the success it envisages?

In Chapter 3, I argued that visual culture studies itself is not a well-defined field, but rather one which has emerged, quite recently, rhetorically, rather than in practice. A number of sources demonstrated that it may be impossible to institutionalise the critical 'project' of visual culture studies. Likewise, I argued that if visual culture studies is institutionalised "too rapidly" (Mitchell 1995b:542), inconsistency in method and randomly chosen images may result. Consequently, the 'academisation' of visual culture studies, which is clearly envisaged in the NCS (Department of Education 2005a) - whether in name only or in methodology too - may pose a significant threat for the study of art in the future. Equally, many art educators in South Africa, whose education has been (quite appropriately) grounded in the perspective of traditional art history, do not fully comprehend what is meant by the term, 'visual culture studies', or its intended approach to the visual. Due to non-existent resources in this regard, these educators may have no other option but to resort to traditional art historical methodology when dealing with visual culture.[119] In other words, this means that visual culture studies, in the subject, 'Visual Arts', in the FET phase may be art history as usual.

[119] Admittedly, this statement is a generalisation. The comment is based on the discussion among art educators who attended the UNISA training referred to earlier. In my view, it became clear that art educators seem to misunderstand the concept of visual culture studies, due predominantly to their training in art history as opposed to visual culture studies, coupled with a lack of clear guidance and resources.

4.2.4 'Para-sites'

Wilson's (2003:225) solution to the debate on the topic of the relationship between art history and visual culture studies is a "pedagogical tactic" that allows students to "play with content" which may be "subversive, ideological, and unsanctioned". In this endeavour, Wilson (2003:227) regards the teacher's new role to be that of "negotiator among conventional art, emerging art, and student-initiated content".[120] In the same way that visual culture ought to be understood as a rhizome, Wilson (2003:227) imagines an art education that seeks not to limit the terrain of visual media to be analysed, but rather to broaden the range of media by encouraging student-generated topics drawn from their own field of interests.

By this account, Wilson (2003:227) argues that while "teachers have responsibility for presenting the structured and the conventional dimensions of the artworld", students ought to be challenged to "connect school art content to their own interests". However, Wilson's (2003:225) "para-site" may, once again, though unintentionally, result in the (mis)conception that only 'art' may be examined within institutions, while visual culture is excluded from the intellectual framework of academic curricula. Instead of producing a democratic and open boundary between art and visual culture, the examination of the "structured and conventional dimensions of the artworld" (Wilson 2003:227) may, inevitably, perpetuate existing disciplinary divisions.

[120] The concept of the educator as "negotiator" (Wilson 2003:227) parallels the type of educator that is envisaged by outcomes-based education (OBE) which is gradually being phased into South African education. This is in accordance with educational reforms which have been implemented since 1994 (Killen 2000:vi). The OBE approach emphasises the educator's main role as that of "facilitat[ing] learning rather than to be a source of all knowledge" (Killen 2000:xi). In Wilson's (2003:227) learner-centred approach, learners will learn through "discovery" (Killen 2000:xi) and "inquiry" (Killen 2000:xi), while the educator has "much less *direct* control over what and how learners learn" (Killen 2000:xi).

While there is no doubt that a 'structured' curriculum is more desirable than one that encourages an "anything goes attitude" (Busch 2002:3), Wilson's (2003:225) "para-site" would ultimately be equally undesirable if "straight art history" (Werckmeister, quoted in Mitchell 2002:234) is to be revised. Therefore, I propose that a fifth 'path' ought to be considered in this debate. The field of *art history visual culture studies*[121] may redress the politics articulated through the name of traditional art history while simultaneously respecting certain traditions on which the discipline was founded. This means that art history visual culture studies is an alternative to maintaining the status quo, while it is still neither the addition of a few examples from visual culture, nor the complete replacement of art history by visual culture studies.

4.3 Art history visual culture studies

Ultimately, art has always been visual culture, but through its discriminatory practices, art has been removed from the greater realm of the visual positioning visual culture as its 'other', or its "ghost" (Mirzoeff 2002:189). In order to secure its presence and meaning and to justify its superior status, the category 'art' has always required its opposite (visual culture), or "unconscious" (Mitchell 1995b:543). Visual culture acts as a 'supplement' in the Derridian (1976:157) sense for art history: it is that which has made art history possible, but yet that which has not been formally acknowledged in the field of traditional art history. This means that, according to the "logic of supplementarity" (Derrida 1976:157), the "positive value" - in this case, art - can be understood as defined "only in

[121] I acknowledge that Cherry used the phrase, *art history visual culture,* in 2004 in the title of an article in *Art History* 27(4):479-493. While she did not elaborate on the choice of her title, I propose that a slight modification of this term, to *art history visual culture studies,* is useful for future endeavours in this field.

contrast to whatever threatens or invades [its] privileged domain" (Norris 1987:35). In the same way that speech has been positioned as superior to writing in logocentric discourse, art has traditionally been constructed, not only as the opposite of visual culture, but also as a 'good' kind of visual image "that is inscribed in the soul by revealed or self-authorized truth" (Norris 1987:36).

Conversely, visual culture has been constructed as "both poison *and* cure" (Norris 1987:37) in that, in one respect, it has been considered as "a threat to the living presence" of art, while, in another, it is perceived as "an indispensable means … to record, transmit or somehow commemorate that presence". Surely it is, ultimately, as Mirzoeff (2002:189) suggests, "the time of the ghost, the revenant, and the spectre". Phrased differently, Mitchell (1995b:543) proposes that it is now the time of that "deep and misrecognised self", that is at the same time "both attractive and deadly". Are we not presently in the position to overthrow the previously constructed hierarchies between art and visual culture?

If so, the field of art history visual culture studies can be considered as open, rather than fenced off, from other manifestation of the visual. In such an endeavour, art history may be enriched by visual culture, while, at the same time, art history may enrich other critiques of the visual. If this approach is based on the theoretical frameworks of both the traditional art historical methodologies, as well as new critical investigations (of the identity politics of feminism and postcolonialism, for example) combined with an open and democratic approach to images, art history visual culture can view visual culture as an enriching phenomenon, its necessary 'supplement' (read 'ghost'), simultaneously the same and different. If not, Mitchell's (2002:ix) suggestion that aesthetics is an eighteenth century discipline, art history a nineteenth century one, and visual studies that of the twenty-first century, may foretell the future exclusion of art history from institutional practice as already affirmed by the recently approved FET art education curriculum.

But, if art history can relinquish its allegiance to hierarchical distinctions between visual media, then visual culture studies ceases to exist as a separate field of study fenced off from art history. In other words, art history can democratically investigate the entire visual world as it may choose. At the same time, the theoretical and critical frameworks supplied by history, and enhanced by art criticism, art practice, art education, feminism and women's studies, queer theory, political economy, postcolonial studies, performance studies, anthropology and visual anthropology, film and media studies, archaeology, architecture and urban planning, visual communication, graphic and book design, advertising and the sociology of art will *all* inform art history visual culture studies' practices. Conversely, traditional art history's methodologies can be applied in the analysis of other manifestations of the visual, and not only the established category of art.

Therefore, art history's methodologies should not be employed in isolation when dealing with new visual imagery - or even 'older art' for that matter - but should be adjusted according to the requirements of each unique discursive space. As Molesworth (1996:57) recommends, "it is quite simply necessary" that art history's methodologies now adapt to the new visual imagery. Ultimately, this ought to be viewed as "neither good nor bad, nor [as] cause for anxiety or zealousness" (Molesworth 1996:57). Despite views to the contrary, art history may still be regarded as an important and "essential practice in modern society" (Preziosi 1989:11), and, ultimately, as a methodological bastion.

This does not mean that the distinctions between images need be erased, nor that 'art' as a category should be dissolved. By the same token, such an approach need not deny the existence of art. It merely requires recognition of the diverse functions of images and a critique of how each medium has constructed vision according to cultural and historical circumstances. Mitchell (1992:222) explains this quite succinctly when he states that:

> [j]ust as you must understand the different uses afforded by marshmallows and hammers if you want to perform physical tasks successfully, so you must distinguish between the varying functional capabilities of paintings and drawings, photographs, and digital images produced under various different circumstances….

Likewise, the appropriation of paintings and drawings for the purpose of advertising renders these art works in the service of new functions. As a result, it has become necessary to pose different questions to these images than were appropriate to their original context. What is required in art history visual culture studies in the future is the analysis of images across media, while, at the same time, acknowledging the ontological autonomy of each medium, and even of each image. This will enable a critique of vision *through* art in order to defamiliarise the process of seeing art.

While Preziosi (1989:11) has argued that art history has apparently allowed us to "see seeing" by offering a mirror of the world, it is only with great difficulty that this assumption can be justified when surveying art historical discourse. As I have already demonstrated in Chapter 3, art history has traditionally not investigated the construction of vision, or, as H.R. Rookmaker (1976:182) reiterates, "art historians on the whole have almost never studied the impact of the arts on their society". On the contrary, art historians have mainly emphasised how art works have "reflected political, social and cultural meanings" (Bryson, Holly & Moxey 1994:xv), rather than how those art works themselves have engendered meanings. Now, it is becoming increasingly necessary to interrogate how 'seeing' is - and has always been - constructed through art and visual culture. This type of analytical enterprise would entail an examination of the construction of vision through culturally endorsed modes of representation, or to "show seeing" in Mitchell's terms (2002:232). This is because, if we agree with Berger (1972:10) that "every image embodies a way of seeing", then we also need to unpack how images, or more accurately, 'art', have constructed vision. Ultimately, it is "the work performed by the image in the life of culture" (Bryson, Holly & Moxey 1994:xv) that must be critiqued in art history visual culture studies.

In this kind of endeavour, there is no difference between visual culture studies and art history, with the exception that visual culture studies would appear to be a more accurate term in this regard. Art history, enriched by the divergent analyses of the economic, political, ideological and aesthetic functions of cultural artefacts and ideas, *is* visual culture studies, but, at the same time, it is *not* only visual culture studies. This indicates that the field of enquiry is not delineated by a particular object's conformity to a closed concept of 'art', nor is the field completely open resulting in an incoherent, quagmire of potential objects. Instead, in the amorphous terrain of art history visual culture studies, objects could be selected in terms of the topics that are addressed. Once again, Gayatri Spivak (quoted in Rogoff 1998:16) offers the most useful definition of what might occur in this kind of practice when stating that "it is the questions that we ask that [ought to] produce the field of enquiry and not some body of materials which determines what questions need to be posed to it". Clearly, the concept 'art' is already a too limiting category to define this kind of operation.

4.3.1 The aims of art history visual culture studies

Tavin (2003:208) lists several critical questions that may inform pedagogical projects in visual culture studies. In general, these questions are directed at issues of privilege, power, representation, history and pleasure in the circulation of images. Such a methodology would "require understanding … visual representations as social and political texts, as well as analysing the ethical and political practices of envisioning culture" (Tavin 2003:208). These questions are as follows:

> What images are we currently exposed to in visual culture? What investments do we have in certain images? What are these investments? What do we learn from these images? What do the images not teach? Do these images provide or signify a certain lifestyle or feeling for us? Do these images help mobilise desire, anger, or pleasure in us? Do we believe these images embody sexist, racist, ablest, and class-specific

> interests? What are the historical conditions under which these images are organized and regulated? How is power displayed or connoted throughout these images?" (Tavin 2003:208).

In the same vein, Mitchell (1995a:210) proposes that, instead of replicating the disciplinary weakness of art history - which would be the "transmit[ion] of a specific body of information and values" - the goal of a programme in visual culture studies ought to be "to provide students with a set of critical tools for the investigation of human visuality …". Accordingly, Mitchell (1995a:210) suggests that these critical tools might be engendered via awareness of the following:

> What is an image? (Are all images visual?) How do images function in consciousness, in memory, fantasy, and perception? … How do images communicate and signify? What is the work of visual art? What is the relationship between art and visual culture in general? How do changes in the technologies of visual reproduction affect visual culture?

Similarly, Barnard's (1998) approach emphasises the construction of different 'ways of seeing' and takes a socio-economic and political approach to the analysis of imagery. He considers the organisation of artists and designers into different structures, such as craft guilds, professional societies and unions (Barnard 1998:58-78). In addition, Barnard (1998:79-101) emphasises consumers, markets and audiences, and in particular, patronage systems - such as the church, the state and private commissions. In other words, both accessibility and ownership of visual media are under examination in terms of market relationships such as artisan, post artisan, market professional and corporate professional (Barnard 1998:102-123). In this way, Barnard (1998:166-196) investigates the ways in which cultural producers challenge, remain neutral to, or reproduce the established order. Simultaneously, the consumers of cultural products are analysed in terms of whether or not they passively consume, negotiate or resist the values conveyed by producers of visual culture.

Rogoff (1998:15,16) suggests the following questions:

> Who we see and who we do not see; who is privileged within the regime of specularity; which aspects of the historical past actually have circulating

> visual representations and which do not; whose fantasies are fed by which visual images? … What are the visual codes by which some are allowed to look, others to hazard a peek, and still others are forbidden to look altogether? Can we actually participate in the pleasure and identify with the images produced by culturally specific groups to which we do not belong?

These questions share a similar emphasis on the social construction of visual culture; in other words, visual culture is treated as mediated text. This takes into account both the circumstances that are involved in the creation of images, as well as all the factors involved in the interaction between viewer and viewed. In such a circular approach, images are investigated in terms of their social construction, while the social field is investigated in terms of its visual construction (Mitchell 2002:237). Clearly at odds with traditional art historical methodology, these questions critique the communicative and political role of art and visual culture in general.

Guided by "formalist approaches to painting, thematic considerations of typologies and topologies of art, iconology, the social history of art and the history of material artefacts" (Apter 1996:27) the pedagogical agendas of traditional art history have predominantly been constituted by "varying degrees of chronological or geographical focus" (Preziosi 1989:8).[122] Are such 'traditional' methods in any way relevant to the future of the disciplined image? Surely, if the interpretative methods proposed by Tavin (2003), Mitchell (1995), Barnard (1998) and Rogoff (1998) are applied to all images, then the consideration of the inherent "material dimension" (Armstrong 1996:27) of the image may inevitably

[122] Preziosi (1989:8) argues that this *modus operandi* is based on "curricular packaging that ends to defer or deflect all but the neatest and most economical self-imagery". In the same way, Kleinbauer (1971:14) claims that the arrangement and classification of art works according to "chronological units" and "geographical sectors" is a "vital aspect" of the work of the art historian in order to "restore order and meaning to the mass of works of art".

be marginalised, if not demonised.[123] By focussing mainly on the socio-cultural workings of images, these questions fail to address the *visual* character of the image, or its formal properties. Is it not rather, as Skawran (1976:7) maintains that, instead of being the "clinical and cold-blooded" method that it is perceived to be, formal analysis may, in fact, be "the most sympathetic approach" to a visual image?

Perhaps, at present, what ought to be the 'prime task' is to establish a more balanced approach to studying visual images than has been put forward in the past? By means of an art history visual culture studies approach, images can be explored via established art historical narratives - of formal analysis and technical examination, for instance - as much as through the enquiries concerning the cultural operation of images. According to Nochlin (2002:9), it may even be time to return to biography, now to be understood in a "new sense". This 'new' biographical method could analyse "biography as a history of personal making in the world, within the community and society" (Nochlin 2002:9). In this way, the full range of visual media could be examined in terms of their historical and social specificity and interconnectivity, best described as "intermediality" (Nead 2002:8). As Blaugrund (2002:3) argues, such a methodology ought to link "careful observation with psycho-social-cultural factors [that] will allow students once again to look and read the work of art - not just read into it". Moreover, as Nochlin (2002:9) suggests, a new methodology could emphasise "meditation" in a research process that encourages "musing, thinking, and meditating". This approach may lead to what Buck-Morss (1996:30) describes as "a critical analysis of the image as social object" and a "visual theory" that might enable

[123] Carol Armstrong (1996:27) maintains that the shift from art history to visual culture has resulted in an understanding of "paintings and such … not as particularized *things* made for particular historical uses, but as exchanges circulating in some great, boundless, and often curiously ahistorical economy of images, subjects, and other representations". This has ultimately brought with it the perception that, to regard an object in terms of its "material dimension", is inevitably to "exercise the fetishism of the old art history and thereby to submit to the forces of the market, to the policing of the canon, and to the structures of social and sexual domination that go with them" (Armstrong 1996:27). I argue that one can integrate all approaches democratically without subscribing to the kind of 'fetishism' that discriminates between different kinds of images.

viewers to read images “emblematically” and “symptomatically” and in relation to social life.

4.3.2 A methodology put forward

In Berger’s often quoted text, *Ways of seeing* (1972), images that unquestionably fall into traditional art history’s canon are juxtaposed with popular mass media images. For example, an image of an oil painting, a newspaper clipping, a film still, an advertisement and a press photograph, are all analysed simultaneously (Berger 1972:142-153). In the same way, art history visual culture studies ought to analyse images ‘intermedially’ - thus, across media and in terms of their historical and social specificity and interconnectivity.

While it would certainly be interesting to apply all the questions that were raised above to images in a variety of media to illustrate this point, such an exercise is not possible here. Instead, I analyse only two examples: one which readily subscribes to the requirements of the traditional category art, and one which clearly forms part of the visual culture of high school learners in South Africa. In this way, my intention is to demonstrate that “school art content” (Wilson 2003:227) can be connected to the interests of learners and need not be fenced out of the “structured and conventional dimensions of the artworld” (Wilson 2003:227) or classroom. In my endeavour, I limit the critical questions to only two, although many more can certainly be applied with ease. These two questions are informed by the general tenor of all the approaches mentioned previously, but mainly by Barnard’s (1998) approach, which emphasises the broad circumstances that contribute to the production and consumption of visual culture. Such an approach is particularly, though certainly not exclusively, suitable to the South African context where, as Steven Sack (1988:9) points out, “changes in material conditions, new forms of patronage and the introduction of new educational values” are crucial in the understanding of the work produced by

particularly black South African artists. Therefore, the questions I apply to both works are, firstly, how does the socio-cultural context construct the visual image and, secondly, how does the visual image construct perception? In this way, the analysis can be described as art history visual culture studies, since the analysis develops jointly from both 'the visual' and 'the cultural', whilst simultaneously not demonising the traditional scope of art history.

These discussions are necessarily brief, as the intention is only to illustrate the point that art history visual culture studies ought to be viewed as an endeavour that can spark debate and critical thinking about naturalised concepts. Consequently, although I have argued previously that traditional art historical methodologies should also inform the analysis of the visual (and they are certainly relevant in both examples), I do not employ these here.

4.3.3 Jackson Hlungwani

South African born Bhandi Pavalala "Jackson" Hlungwani (b. 1923) has risen to fame both in this country as well as internationally, in the last two decades, although he has been creating sculptures ever since losing a finger in an industrial accident in 1941.[124] Hlungwani, like many other non-white artists in South Africa, received no formal art instruction. In this sense, then, his works do not conform to any style, let alone aesthetic conventions. The art work he has produced is wholly embedded in his religious beliefs.

After being ordained as a minister, Hlungwani started his own sect which he named, *Jerusalem One Christ*, in Mbhokota, which is also where he now lives. It was here that he built *New Jerusalem* - which has been described as a "Great Zimbabwe like labyrinth of dry packed stone walls" (Hopkins [sa]:[sp]) on an Iron Age site. Built as a place of worship, *New Jerusalem* was initially decorated with

[124] For biographical details on Jackson Hlungwani see Hopkins, P. 2003. Little donkey, in *South African Country Life.* January:68.

many of Hlungwani's sculptures. Referred to by the artist as, "the map of life" (Hopkins 2003:68), the layout of this 'church' was devised as a pilgrimage route through which one travelled from entrance to exit.[125] The main features of *New Jerusalem* were two altars: an *Altar for Christ* and an *Altar for God.* Amongst some twenty sculptures, two well-known works, *Christ playing football* and *Cain's aeroplane* were also housed there (Dodd 1999:[sp]).

Figure 17: Jackson Hlungwani, *Adam and the birth of Eve,* 1985-1989.
Wood. 404 x 142 x 87 cm.
(http://www.universes-in-invers.de/specials/Africa-remix/Hlungwani-2/index.htm)

Hlungwani's work was only 'discovered' in 1984, when Ricky Burnett's exhibition, *Tributaries,* afforded him international recognition (Dodd 1999:[sp]). The *Tributaries* exhibition brought "long overdue recognition to rural artists working outside the parameters of the 'mainstream' South African art scene" (Dodd 1999:[sp]). At the same time, the recognition Hlungwani received as a result of

[125] For a further description of *New Jerusalem,* see Hopkins (2003:68).

the exhibition, eventually brought about the dismantling of *New Jerusalem*. In 1989, Hlungwani agreed to have all the sculptures moved to the art galleries of the University of the Witwatersrand and the Johannesburg Art Gallery (Dodd 1999:[sp]).

The dualistic questions concerning the cultural construction of the visual and, in turn, the visual construction of perception - or 'ways of seeing' - can be examined from a number of perspectives when closely analysing the work of Jackson Hlungwani. In order to fully grasp the uneasy composition that characterises a work such as *Adam and the birth of Eve* (Figure 17), the socio-cultural context in which it was created must be examined. Both the visible and invisible qualities of Hlungwani's art work reflect his exposure to a predominantly rural and impoverished lifestyle, combined with a lack of formal education. Created in a time overshadowed by a long tradition of racial discrimination, the work itself may not posses any overtly political or reactionary message, but, nevertheless, it reflects a very specific epoch and culture, as, under different socio-cultural conditions, the work itself could not have been as it is. (The materials, style and technique, for example, are undeniably affected, particularly by economic factors). In addition, the initial purpose for which these works were made is far removed from art dealers, art markets and art galleries whose involvement can now no longer be excluded from the analysis of the works.

For example, the 'discovery' of previously marginalised artists, such as Hlungwani, by art dealers, connoisseurs and museums, and the subsequent removal of countless art works from their original context, impacts on the image and the understanding of such. For, when Hlungwani's altars were, as Burnett (quoted in Dodd 1999:[sp]) puts it, "reduced to art", they were also stripped of their initial "place-making energies". In this way, the altar, now exhibited in an art gallery, becomes only a "memento" (Dodd 1999:[sp]), and acts as "a reminder of another place" (Dodd 1999:[sp]). While the intended aim of such exhibitions is to redress past inequalities by exposing black artists to a wider audience, the initial

meaning of Hlungwani's work may, in the same instance, become inaccessible to the viewer. This fact necessitates further exploration of the socio-cultural circumstances in which art is produced, exhibited and experienced.

This kind of analysis leads to the second question: how does the image construct perception? When Hlungwani's sculptures 'became' art, in other words, when art dealers recognised the economic potential of these works, an assumed notion of what 'art' presumably must be was immediately affected. This is because when objects that were previously regarded as 'low' art, or craft, 'become' 'high' art, the cultural concept of art, at the same time, is redefined. In this way, art works themselves influence how they are 'looked at' and ultimately defined. In another sense, the art dealer's aim is to produce a viewing (or buying) audience for these art works. When objects move into the consumerist realm of art objects, they are immediately perceived, understood and experienced in a different way, which, once again, inevitably becomes the 'natural' way of looking at these works.

4.3.4 Cellphones and identity

Cellphones - which are consumed and utilised, particularly by teenagers, and, without which they appear unable to conduct their social lives - can quite appropriately be critically examined within art history visual culture studies. This can be achieved in the same way that Jackson Hlungwani's sculptures, created for *New Jerusalem,* could be analysed in terms of how they are constructed by socio-cultural factors, as well as in terms of how they construct perception and, ultimately, have produced consumers. The cellphone, instead of being merely a neutral and useful tool, has a very specific political, economic, social and environmental impact on the society that has produced it. An example of this is the fundamental effect that it has had on communication. At the same time, our prevailing socio-cultural context has created the presumed need for cellphones. Clearly, the supposed 'needs' fulfilled by cellphones render this technology

apparently indispensable in contemporary life. In this way, the cellphone simultaneously affects communication, while communicating its own agenda of control and consumption.

Figure 18: Bekowe Skhakhane, Yanguye, South Africa.
(New York Times 2005:[sp])

According to Sharon LaFraniere (2005:[sp]), Africa is the fastest growing cellphone market in the world, "with one in 11 Africans … now a mobile subscriber" (Figure 18). Despite the assumption that Africans "were supposed to be too poor to justify corporate investments in cellular networks", the cellphone industry has boomed on the African continent, with South Africa contributing one-fifth of the entire growth (LaFraniere 2005:[sp]). Unlike fixed landlines, cellphones are increasingly consumed in view that they presumably are effective social and communication tools that can connect people as they move through various spaces. In this sense, cellphones may be regarded as "nomadic technology devices" (De Souza e Silva 2004:[sp]). Moreover, new developments in the mobile Internet, SMS (Short Message Service) and camera-based phones are increasingly transforming cellphones into communication tools that are undoubtedly becoming more visually-based than aural.

This means that the cellphone is becoming far more than merely a telephone. For example, it is estimated that by 2006, 80% of cellphones sold in the United States will include a camera which allows cellphone users to collect innumerable images, or what the rapidly growing photo website, *Flickr*, calls a photostream (Crouch 2005:[sp]). This is already evident in South Africa, where 'camera-phones' are increasingly marketed as indispensable communication tools as they can send video SMS's instead of text. Moreover, a multitude of images, from games and video-clips to pornography, can be downloaded by simply dialling predetermined numbers. In this way, the cellphone is yet another tool which bombards us with "mediated images" (Mirzoeff1998:6). Far beyond being merely a tool for convenient communication, the cellphone is increasingly becoming a tool for entertainment.

Cellphones have undeniably begun to play a central role in South African society, not least amongst teenagers who send a multitude of text messages on any given day instead of participating in 'real' conversations. As a highly visual and visible tool, cellphones can be interrogated in terms of their role as information communication technologies in the construction of social spaces, therefore in terms of their contribution to contemporary *visuality*. Fast approaching the cultural impact of a mass medium, cellphones both connect and isolate human experience, and have thereby begun to shape how we communicate.[126] But, who is ultimately benefiting from the consumption of cellphones? Whose needs are fulfilled when cellphone usage increases, as is already evident on the African continent?

While the cellphone undeniably influences human communication, it simultaneously communicates its own messages to society. This is done by means of visual 'packaging'. In this way, technology, in general, may be said to have "developed its own, highly sophisticated fashion system" (O'Gorman

[126] For an analysis of cellphone usage in terms of social norms, public and private self and power relations, see Humphreys, L. 2003. *Can you hear me now? A field study of mobile phone usage in public space*. MA dissertation. University of Pennsylvania.

2000:2). Through subtle advertising, cellphones are marketed as seductive, tantalising, irresistible, and status-marking, as is demonstrated by the pink Nokia 3100 (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Nokia 3100.
(www.buyathome.co.za)

According to O'Gorman (2000:2), the impetus behind the increasing culture of "digital peacocking" which we are currently witnessing, is the belief that the more colourful and sleek the tools we display, "the more wired and hip we appear to be". Since teenagers play an important role in the acceptance of new technologies, they are often the target of this type of advertising. Teenagers are easily seduced by the visual packaging of cellphones which have come to be regarded as fashionable items. In this way, through subtle language and fashionable imagery, advertisers are at the same time producing consumers of cellphones.

Furthermore, it may even be argued that “human identity [may] one day be determined by hardware and software aesthetics, and information [may] be controlled by the corporate fashion machines through which it is filtered” (O’Gorman 2000:1). Therefore, the cellphone ‘fashion scene’ ought to be examined as a site of “disempowerment, programmed ignorance, and packaged identity formation” (O’Gorman 2000:1) in order to “demystif[y] the tactics of persuasion and deception that circulate on the [technology] fashion scene” (O’Gorman 2000:6). Such a critical analysis can quite appropriately be conducted within the context of art history visual culture studies.

4.4 Visual empathy

The purpose of these analyses was a demonstration of how art history visual culture studies might ask questions of the visual field through which people live their everyday lives. Without intending to suggest that these analyses are sufficiently thorough for practical use, I would however argue that an approach to images is currently required which, as Mitchell (1996:82) proposes, acknowledges that images themselves might not, ultimately, be fully decoded or understood. While images may be examined to reveal all their possible nuances and meanings, Mitchell (1996:82) argues that what “pictures really want” from us is “what we have failed to give them [which is] an idea of visuality adequate to their ontology”. This would require a kind of visual awareness or even a visual empathy - the acceptance of the image itself with its own integrity. Perhaps what is now needed is to acknowledge that there is always a remainder when dealing with images - an aspect that remains inaccessible, and which cannot be ‘disciplined’.

This means that the aim of future programmes which attempt to ‘discipline’ images, as Rogoff (1998:21) suggests, should not be to create the “good eye” of connoisseurship, but rather to cultivate “the curious eye” in our students. This

curiosity should not be curbed by delimiting categories or rigorous boundaries. Instead, this kind of endeavour ought to recognise that images are not “singular”, as Richard (2002:212) has pointed out, but ought to acknowledge “the uncertainties about the meaning of the … image” (Richard 2002:213). In this way, visual culture studies, though easily perceived as a threat to art history, need only be regarded as an urgently required challenge to institutional canonical traditions. Thus, visual culture studies becomes a useful tool - a theoretical framework - which can inform and challenge all disciplines within the humanities and social sciences without necessarily becoming a separate discipline.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of chapters

As has been argued throughout, fuelled by the inundation of images in contemporary society, and based largely on the Western preoccupation with the extension of sight and visual capabilities, human experience has undeniably become increasingly intertwined with visual technologies, as depicted in Figure 20. As a result, images themselves have become complex phenomena in a world increasingly mediated by commodity images. The production and dissemination of art has not escaped the effects of new visual media. On the contrary, visual art has been greatly aided by technological innovations. In the same instance, the fixed epistemological foundations of art historical methodology have been complicated.

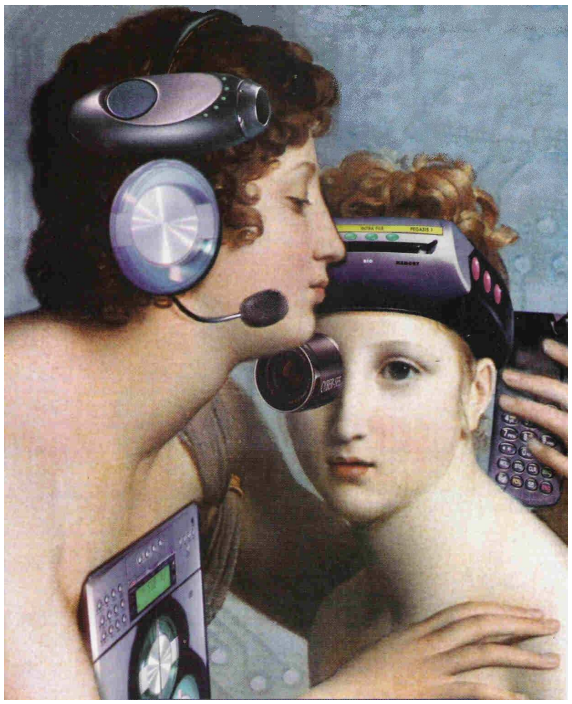

Figure 20: Mark Hess, untitled, 2001.
(TIME 2001: Cover)

During the course of Chapter 1, the background and aims of the study were introduced by briefly sketching the context within which visual culture studies, as an interdisciplinary field, has emerged in various discursive spaces in response to the pervasiveness of the visual in the postmodern era. The discussion illustrated that new critical perspectives, particularly those having gained impetus alongside the developments within the field of cultural studies, led to what has been described as a 'cultural turn' (Chaney 1994) in the humanities. More recently, as previously pointed out, a so-called 'visual turn' (Mitchell 1994) has been recognised.

Owing to the increasing rise of academic journals, publications, conferences and courses dealing with the topic of the visual, the renewed interrogation of the theoretical assumptions which have traditionally underpinned art history's disciplinary protocols has become unavoidable. While revisionist discourses - for instance Marxism, feminism and postcolonialism - have already questioned art history's discriminatory selection of its object of study, resulting in the development of new art history - the emendations that have occurred since then in art history are evidently not sufficient to ward off the onslaught of the complex web of visuality that dominates contemporary (human) life. Consequently, it has become increasingly evident that art history, as an autonomous discipline, may no longer be able to sufficiently interrogate its ever increasingly complex object of study - namely, visual art.

The topic of contemporary society as a predominantly visual culture formed the topic of discussion in Chapter 2. The visual complexity of contemporary human experience was explored by focussing on an investigation of images and vision (both central topics in the visual culture debate) to determine how these phenomena affect the aims and procedures of art history (whose central topic has previously been certain images only). The investigation unpacked the premise on which much visual culture discourse rests, i.e. that contemporary life is progressively more visual than the past. The debates surrounding this premise

were introduced in order to demonstrate that it is not so much a case of the current "ocularcentrism" (Jay 1994:3) of the contemporary era, but rather that we are dominated by different "visual regimes" (Poster 2002:67) than in the past.

The discussion demonstrated that visuality has effectively complicated the underlying assumptions of art history. In fact, the current production, mutation and dissemination of images - particularly through digital manipulation techniques - pressurises, not only the concept of 'art' as a concept distinct from other image-making practices (such as photo-journalism for example), but also the methodological approaches that have traditionally underpinned art historical investigation. For, if electronic images have given rise to a new regard for images as members of complex webs of "image neighbourhoods" (Richard 2002:213), then a revision of previously unquestioned analytical procedures with regard to art is currently necessary. This is due to the ambiguity of postmodern images which challenge the traditional methods of authorship and formalism, as well as invalidating patronage, provenance, attribution and authenticity as analytical categories. Visual culture studies, on the other hand, not only attends to such complex images more appropriately than art history has previously done, but also investigates the construction of sight/vision through an analysis of the entire field of the visual. Therefore, the 'visual learning' - or the construction of a certain kind of perception - that has occurred through the production of art is an important future topic of investigation for art history. This aspect has been highlighted in Chapter 2.

The disciplinary anxiety - even territorial warfare - that has emerged between art history and visual culture studies can be ascribed to the fact that images unquestionably inhabit the site at which these disciplinary fields intersect. In light of this, Chapter 3 posed the question of whether art history and visual culture studies are distinct, complementary or opposing disciplinary endeavours. This investigation took the form of a study of their respective objects of study and the methodologies employed by each. As a consequence of the expansion of the art

world beyond the museum realm, the discipline of art history has undeniably been thrown into disarray as growing ruptures have emerged in the walls that have traditionally cordoned off its subjects. A close examination of the underlying assumptions concerning 'the disciplined image' of art history revealed two important points. Firstly, in many instances, the discipline of art history continues to be directed by a belief in the universality of aesthetic response; and secondly, notions of hierarchical distinctions, as well as the chronological development of style, continue to govern its analytical procedures. Notwithstanding revisionist discourses which have exposed these constructions as prejudiced and discriminatory, I have argued that the discipline of art history has undoubtedly remained firmly cemented in these founding elitist assumptions. An exploration of the literature surrounding art history revealed that, within the discipline itself, academics are divided on the topic of the future of the discipline. A particular issue evading consensus is how the object of study of art history - 'art' - ought to, most appropriately, be defined.

While visual culture studies explores the broader sphere of the visual without discrimination, it nonetheless does not erase the traditional distinctive categories of 'high' art and 'low' art, but rather investigates these as Modernistic constructions crucial to the formation of art history as a humanistic discipline. Therefore, while art history selects its objects of investigation on the basis of their compliance with specified criteria - mostly of aesthetic significance and value - visual culture studies is not so much defined by an object as by the practices of looking invested in any object. In this sense, art history and visual culture studies, as they have progressed thus far, were shown to be distinctly opposing endeavours.

In Chapter 4, it has been argued that art history and visual culture studies can, nevertheless, also be regarded as complementary endeavours. While demonstrating that the *National curriculum statement: grades 10 - 12 (general): visual arts* (NCS) (Department of Education 2005a) has seen fit to doom the

future of art history by replacing it with visual culture studies, I have argued that, in light of global perspectives on the topic, this fate should not necessarily be regarded as the most appropriate option for art history. After considering a number of alternate paths for 'the future of the disciplined image' in art history, I have proposed that *art history visual culture studies* may now be a more appropriate method for dealing with the visual than art history has traditionally been. For, such an approach to images would entail overthrowing the status quo, while, simultaneously, also not entirely ceding art history's autonomy to the popular. On the contrary, certain traditions on which the discipline of art history was founded may thereby be combined with a less discriminatory approach to images. In this way, the field of study of art history can be considered 'open' rather than 'fenced off' from other manifestation of the visual.

5.2 Contribution of the study

This dissertation has provided some perspectives on the contested relationship between art history and visual culture studies in the context of South African art education. It cannot be disputed that few art educators still agree that an art curriculum based solely on the traditionally constructed canon of Western art is feasible in South African visual arts education. This is due to the extensive revision of art history which has already taken place in South Africa; particularly in light of postcolonial discourse. The contribution of this study is specifically in the context of the most recent developments in South African visual arts education, where a particular 'path' has already been chosen for dealing with visual culture. Whereas the NCS (Department of Education 2005a), to be implemented in South African secondary schools in 2006, has prescribed the replacement of art history by visual culture studies, the research posed here has explored a number of alternative global sentiments with regard to this very topic.

The research revealed that, globally, art educators are concerned that the continued disdain for the popular in art education, combined with the assumption that aesthetic experience is universally accessible to all human beings (irrespective of cultural factors), limits the adequacy of programmes which deal with the visual. Secondly, the addition of a few examples from popular culture into art history courses is equally undesirable, as these images would inevitably anyway be studied in terms of traditional art historical methodology. Thirdly, it has been indicated that the complete replacement of art history by visual culture studies, as already manifested in the NCS (2005a), is equally unfeasible since these two fields have very distinct objectives. For, visual culture studies, as argued in this dissertation, cannot liberate art history, nor can it supersede art history. The fourth alternative explored considered the possibility that visual culture could be dealt with mainly as a "para-site" (Wilson 2003:225) whereby students select their own topics. With reference to the approach taken in Dutch secondary schools, it was demonstrated that such an approach is fraught with problems, not least of which, the question of determining suitable topics of investigation and how these ought to be investigated (Haanstra, Nagel & Ganzeboom 2002:164-172).

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The main contribution of this study is methodological. I have proposed that the future of art history may most appropriately be envisioned as *art history visual culture studies*. Traditional art works ought to be investigated alongside contemporary visual culture in an analysis of images across media, while the ontological autonomy of each medium, or even of each image, should be concurrently acknowledged. Such an approach would require that traditional art historical methodologies are selected for their appropriateness to the unique requirements of each task, combined with a critique of vision *through* art, in order to render the process of seeing art unfamiliar. Therefore, art history visual culture studies is a more critical disciplinary endeavour than art history exclusively. At the same time, it is also not the demonisation, or exclusion, of all Western art.

If this approach is based on the theoretical frameworks of both the traditional art historical methodologies, as well as new critical investigations (for instance, of the identity politics of feminism and postcolonialism) combined with an open and democratic approach to images, art history visual culture studies can view visual culture as an enriching phenomenon, its necessary 'supplement' (read 'ghost'), simultaneously both the same and different.

5.3 Limitations of the study

The dissertation has predominantly focussed on a discursive level and literature study rather than attempting to measure the success of applying art history visual culture studies in practice. Therefore, the limitations of this study are such that the proposals remain theoretical and speculative. Ultimately, what is now urgently required is the formulation of a curriculum according to which South African art educators might be able to structure their pedagogy.

A further limitation of the study is that, while debating the South African context, reliance is mainly placed on the critique and application of global visual culture discourse. This is essentially due to a lack of research in this field in South Africa. In particular, it is the intersection of visual culture discourse and critical pedagogy that is substantially under-theorised in the context of South African art education. This is certainly a field of enquiry that requires further research. This study has hopefully put forward some initial ideas about how such a curriculum may be formulated.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

Perhaps 'plotting a course' for art history in the future is ultimately an idealistic attempt to find concrete solutions within modes of thinking that ought to remain

fluid and divergent. For, in this debate, there is certainly not only one 'path' that could be regarded as the most appropriate. The lines of conversation between all parties involved with 'the visual' must remain open if the discipline of art history is to move beyond its previous controversies. Therefore, in this moment of incoherence, uncertainty and indecision, in which the futures of both art history and visual culture studies within academic structures remain unknowable, what is urgently required is the submission of suggestions on the matter.

Ultimately, the shift from the celebration of elitism and the neat divisions, distinctions and categorical certainties of high Modernism, to the mass produced urban culture of movies, advertising, science fiction and the 'sheer entertainment' of postmodernism, should be viewed as neither 'good' nor 'bad'. Though this may not be achieved rapidly enough, currently, art courses urgently require revision so as to facilitate a critical investigation of issues surrounding this shift. This kind of research has become unavoidable in an era where the relationship between producer, product, viewer and society is increasingly complex and multi-faceted.

The role of the art educator in this investigation should not be underestimated and should be investigated in greater depth. As has already been pointed out, it is only with great difficulty that the new NCS (Department of Education 2005a) for visual arts in the South African Further Education and Training (FET) phase can benefit students. Art educators should now respond to the challenge of dealing with contemporary visuality so as to develop curricula that enable students to more critically assess their ever-changing identities within their everyday discursive spaces. As Professor Skawran (1976:11) concluded three decades ago in an inaugural speech entitled, *The relevance of art history as a university discipline*, "it should be one of [the art educator's] chief aims to stimulate in assignments and projects the critical abilities of our students by developing their visual awareness and perceptiveness". As the material milieu of students is increasingly dominated by cellphones, digital cameras, television programmes and music videos, today such a "visual awareness and perceptiveness"

(Skawran 1976:11) can only be adequately achieved if educators, far from maintaining the status quo, support the study of popular culture as a site where subjectivities are constantly being shaped and reshaped. Therefore, if any worthwhile development in art education is to transpire, an urgent re-examination and reconceptualisation of the practices and methodology in critical pedagogy should now be undertaken.

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