



Barthesian Eco/s The fine art of detecting boeuf

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Abstract

This article discusses the means by which a visually creative, artistic language can imitate the communicative abilities of a written/spoken language, making it possible to "read" a work of art as a visual text. Comparing Barthes' critique of myths with Eco's use of denotative and connotative systems leads to the conclusion that, allowing for dissimilarities, the two systems can be read as texts with similar goals. Reading certain works of art through the mediation of Barthesian Eco/s, it becomes clear that a visual language can successfully copy the semantic modes of a social linguistic system and achieve the same ends.

Abstrak

In hierdie artikel word die wyse bespreek waarop 'n visueel skeppende, kuns-gebaseerde taalvorm die kommunikasievermoëns van 'n geskrewe taal kan naboots, om sodoende dit moontlik te maak dat 'n kunswerk "gelees" kan word as 'n teks. Deur Barthes se kritiek van mites met Eco se gebruik van denotasie en konnotasie te vergelyk kan daar tot die slotsom gekom word dat, nieteenstaande verskille, die twee sisteme as tekste gelees kan word met dieselfde doel voor oë. Deur sekere kunswerke te "lees" deur die bemiddeling van Barthesiaanse Eco/s kan tot die besef gekom word dat 'n visuele taalgebruik suksesvol die semantiese vormgewing van 'n sosiaal geskrewe sisteem kan navolg.

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A consideration of visual narrative content

No single, or general, theory exists to accurately define the visual language of works of art; the greatest difficulty arises when one needs to find expression types to define the concepts of a visual language, for there is but one linguistic structure for all the disciplines. Thus van Zyl (1987: 58) warns that the mere use of the term

language, used in connection with images, should be "approached with caution, if not downright suspicion." Terms such as visual literacy, visual texts, and the language of art have become commonplace expressions, and point to a linguistic problem in the sense that, in using terms common to both linguistic systems and

imagery, an unfortunate conflation, and therefore a comparison, seems indicated. Those who maintain that art and language are the same, are opposed by theorists who claim that art must be distinguished from language because of their fundamental differences. These differences include the fact that, although art can be seen as being meaningful, it does not have the capacity to refer to the world, and in particular, that it lacks the expressive ability to produce and reproduce propositions in relation to meaning and truth. References in works of art are suspended, and their communication capabilities do not include expressive and inclusive statements about situational reality. It follows then that, because art does not induce the characteristic mode of mandatory involvement that rightly belongs to language, and despite the fact that art seems to include direct visual references to the world but is not capable of propositional truth values, works of art can only present to the world what *seems* like meaning and significance (Diffey 1990, Messaris 1994). It is thus proposed by some that the language of images is entirely different to the language of texts, and, although these languages complement each other, that one should distinguish between meaning and significance, since the assertive force of the obligatory character of representational texts are not to be found in images. Paradoxically, however, when looking at works of art it becomes

that much easier to discern certain concepts, such as symbolism and imagery (Diffey 1990, Messaris 1994, Petterson 1994, van Zyl 1987). How then, one may ask, is it possible for images to "conjure up a world of almost palpable objects and events despite the many differences between the appearance of the real world and the appearance of any kind of picture, no matter how realistic" (Messaris 1994: 2)?

According to Messaris (1994: 26,40), a study done by Worth and Adair - whose subject was experimental Navajo filmmaking - apparently showed that the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis¹ could not be extended to images, and only strengthened the theory of linguistical relativity as formative of social cognition. This experiment allegedly proved that the two languages of text and image could not be analogous; however, that only seemingly applies to the 'representational conventions', in the use of images, for which analogies with the linguistics of texts are sought. When the 'narrative content' of images is considered, analogies can be found that lead to a Whorfian structuring of the notions of truth and meaning. "I am arguing for an approach that ... sees images for what they are: ... instruments of potential manipulation ..." (Messaris 1994: 122-123). Images act as instruments of manipulation, or structuring and restructuring the meanings that are conventionally communicated through the

¹ The Sapir/Whorf hypothesis, or the principle of linguistical relativity, has been greatly influential in shaping sociological thought. This hypothesis states that a culture's language influences/determines/structures that very culture, its communal everyday life, and hence its conception of reality (Carroll 1967, Hawkes 1986).

use of cultural units, and they do so most powerfully as narrative statements. The premise is therefore not to present the language of images as a strict analogy on a par with the language of texts, but to present the possibilities inherent in works of art (as images). Images are used as a *form of language* that leads back to the descriptive function of a linguistic system, and that reproduces perceptual and conceptual clues; the use of a linguistic system, however erroneously, is believed to refer to real-life situations, ones that social subjects understand and are conditioned to/by; the use of a visual system *copies* the capabilities of the linguistic system, and therefore, through the narrative analogy, reference is made by a visual language to these same situations, objects, and concepts.

This premise is not wholly theoretical, but put into practice on a daily basis, and rooted firmly in the myths of a particular society; this theory-in-practice has also become known as consumer behaviourism. Advertisements typically serve as perceptual and conceptual triggers that activate societal "*myths* of countryside, family, sex roles, work-and-leisure, and so on. To understand [an advertisement] we must bring to it our 'ways of conceptualizing' these topics [or our myths]: if we do not have these myths, the ad will mean something different to us, or may not mean very much at all" (O'Sullivan *et al* 1983: 216). The term *myth* is used here in the same Barthesian sense of being a language that forms a system of

communication carrying the messages or meanings of a cultural structure. Not only are these myths believed as stories about reality and the truth, but the differences that are seen between texts and images influence what one believes about signs and about knowledge. If one distinguishes between meaning and signification (above), as Eco (1976: 4) did in positing a distinction between 'communication' and 'signification', then Hasenmueller's explanation (given below) becomes more plausible. The idea that images differ from texts because of their *privileged relation* to what is believed to be reality "reflects a high value on the semiotic dimension of human experience to a given world of things. Paradoxically, the irrational sense that iconic signs directly presence reality plays an important role in maintaining faith that rational use of arbitrary signs can constitute truth about the world 'out there'" (Hasenmueller 1989: 297). Philosophers of the pragmatist school state, on the other hand, that this arbitrary sign system cannot find the truth 'out there' in an objective world external to the text/work of art, and consequently cannot directly 'presence' reality. They do claim, however, that the truth is *made* (Rorty 1992: 176); thus a sign system *constitutes* reality 'out there'.

Susan Sontag (1992: 52-3), in her flight from an arrogant interpretation of art to preclude determinate meaning, seems to follow this line of thought, yet she deviates considerably from

Rorty's objective in maintaining that experience *sans* content is the meaning of the work. If this be the case, how can one possibly understand any work of art? "What we decidedly do not need now is further to assimilate Art into Thought, or (worse yet) Art into Culture" (Sontag 1992: 55). What Sontag seems to indicate with this statement, is that the experience and transparency of her sensuous surface should *be* the work of art. She emphatically states (Sontag 1992: 55) that it is not the function of the work to be experienced on several levels, i.e. interpreted through the mechanism of external social thought patterns, much less be assimilated into culture as an understood and accepted part of something external to the text. There seems no need to refer a work of art back to a world of objective reality, although one has to keep in mind that, as Sapir (1968: 162) said, individuals do not live in either the objective or the subjective world alone, and an exclusive attempt at an influence free from social conditioning, stemming from any environment alone, would be misleading, for in social action and interaction any single influence from both the social or physical environment is mediated by social forces. Nor need a work of art be assimilated into culture as something objectively external to the text, but it has to be read as subjectively external to the text, in the sense that Hasenmueller (1989: 285) explains it. If the forms of art are intrinsic to objects

(even the work *as* object), then it would have no cultural significance; if, however, these forms are taken to represent human meaning, the work becomes sign, and the interpreter would be "covertly 'reading a text' while he claims to 'describe objects'." This would imply that art cannot avoid being drawn into thought, and hence into culture. "Thus, in the long run, the world out there does impose itself as a corrective to theoretical knowledge" (Turner 1988: 159).

Reading between the lines

When Eco thus makes a distinction between signification and communication, he does so to distinguish between a theory of codes and a theory of sign production; the two theories are compatible because in the communication process (the production of signs) use is made of the codes of the signification system; their possibilities "are exploited in order to physically produce expressions for many practical purposes" (Eco 1976: 4). Thus the privileged relation between images (iconic sign production) and reality can be linked to the semiotic *conditions of truth*, or extensional semantics, that make use of the possibilities of the *conditions of signification* (Eco 1976: 59). Eco's *conditions of truth* do not refer to actual states of the world, but rather to Hasenmueller's *privileged relation* (stated above), and also to Gadamer's *privileged vocabulary*² and whether

² Within Gadamer's *privileged vocabulary* social agents communicate with each other using a shared vocabulary, with the intent of making sense of the objects in, and the events of, their common world, so that ways of speaking may evolve between them that can be readily understood by everyone (Hekman 1986, Whorf 1967).

these are irrational beliefs or not, when this relation/vocabulary names and structures states of the world, even in imagery, that 'degree of extra-referential independence' must be respected and analysed (Eco 1976: 297).

To illustrate this, reference may be made to Fig. 1, which represents a combination of text and image that is not a mere *presentation*, but a *representation* that carries a specific message with the intention of communicating what is not there in reality. In other words, it is an image capable of transmitting a conceptual idea through perceptual clues, or as Eco (1976: 85) states, connotative markers that rely on preceding denotative markers. The iconic content of this

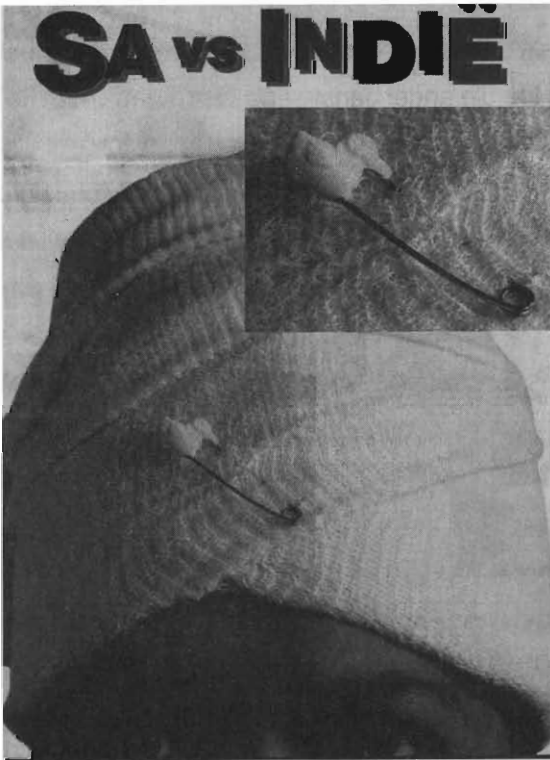


Fig. 1. Advertisement, Rapport (19 January 1997: 15).

figure shows the top of a person's head wrapped in a surgical bandage, and fastened with a clip. Without the context provided by the text (which refers back to socially produced 'states of the world'), the image would be meaningless, but *in context* it signifies a great deal.

The image conveys the message that the South African cricket team will beat the Indian team convincingly. This projected supposition is made possible because, in the context of this particular international cricket series, the darker skin of the person shown, plus the conceptual transformation of the bandage into a turban, tells the viewer that this person represents the Indian cricket team. Whether that statement is true or false has no bearing on the significance of what is being communicated, since the person used in this depiction may not be an Indian subject, and not all Indians on that sub-continent wear turbans; this is an identity stereotype by the other of Indian identity. Furthermore, having established this much, defeat is forecast because the suggested (conceptual) turban is *still* seen perceptually as a bandage, with the connotative significance attached to it of injury/headache. The clip, of course, signals the final connotation: in cricket parlance the whole of the image conveys to the viewer that the South African cricket team will *take out* the Indian team *for a duck*, the ultimate defeat for a cricketer.

If one then accepts that both text and image are social constructions of reality, and if the 'experi-

ence of likeness' that one may find between sign productions and what they refer to is accepted as part of discourse, then this discourse is constitutive of the social world. If one then further accepts that "all discourse is inescapably artificial, the scope of semiotics is very like the scope of postmodern criticism" (Hasenmueller 1989: 297), and this discourse may then include the language or semiotics of imagery as part of that constitutive discourse, because semiotics is seen as a concern with sign production as 'social forces', and "we only know a cultural unit communicated to us by means of words, drawings or other means" (Eco 1976: 65-66). In precisely this way may language become the medium for what has been called a 'labelling process' (O'Sullivan *et al* 1983: 124) that communicates through symbols, and using the language of imagery as such a labelling process would enable one to *read* images as if they were texts because the social dynamic of life and experience representation places art squarely within the ambit of language based culture.

It is in this context that one must view Balmas' claim that artists today have made "progressive efforts to move away from any preference for subject-matter over language and its use" (1983: 32); this is made possible because the *matter* of art is also the *matter* of texts, thus, in both images and linguistics, what is discovered about objects is what is not there in reality (Hasenmueller 1989). According to Reid (1994:

171) rhetorical criticism has now come to include non-discursive elements of visual communication, not least because they call forth discourse-like responses from viewers. To put this Nietzschean return or rediscovery in perspective it must be kept in mind that, according to Ballo (1969: 134), Giotto's dialectic art of rhetorical persuasion predates this return to the knowledge of the consciously fictive in both image and linguistic use. The rhetorical force of the visual narrative styles employed by for instance Giotto, Bosch, and the more modern artists discussed here, although they are consciously fictive, present such plausible alternatives to reality that they draw the viewer into an act of interpretation: "In the act of facing the interpretive dilemmas presented in fiction, the reader or viewer affirms - or is led tacitly to experience - a reliable relationship between text and world" (Hasenmueller 1984: 347-348). The force of this fictive rhetoric is acknowledged by Eco (1984: 146), for he maintains that the textual or visual phrase 'Sacred Heart' is imbued with "an uncontrollable ensemble of mental and affective associations." It seems to be agreed then that because certain images can operate on an emotional plane of affect, these can have great impact on individuals through stimulating the production of meaning that is realizable in everyday reality. As such then visual rhetoric may affectively change myths, feelings, and a frame of mind amongst others, but rhetorical fictions may also effect cognition in the sense of knowl-

edge gained (DeVito 1994, Fiske 1991, Petterson 1994) or in the sense of "upsetting acquired knowledge" (Eco 1976: 284). When viewed in this context images can be seen to convey propositional truths about cultural systems through eliciting a response outside the experiential whole, and even when simply contemplating images a viewer can "read between the lines" (Hasenmueller 1984, Kaulingfreks 1990: 87).

It is this rhetorical force of the narrative aspects of image-making that distinguishes a particular visual language from the art of a general postmodernism, described by some as an art that "... refuses to present something and is proud of the absence of its signs. It searches for emptiness and refuses to speak" (Kaulingfreks 1990: 87). One might wonder how an art that refuses to speak can still give the viewer an opportunity to read between its lines of non-speech, but in stark contrast to this (version of) postmodern theory, are the forms of contemporary art that are described as exhibiting a 'blessed rage for order', an art that wishes to "enforce a standard truth, and to do so through some form of description, exposition or narration. Art now looks for, or to, truth. It aspires to the condition of reason; thus, whatever appearances say, it is essentially conceptual" (Griffiths 1988: 53). Not only has this type of art moved away from artistic subject-matter and embraced the possibilities of a linguistic system, but according to Vattimo

(1988: 53) the avant-garde now "refuses to be considered as a place of non-theoretical and non-practical experience, and instead claims to be a model for a privileged mode of knowledge of the real, a moment of subversion of the hierarchized structure of the individual and society, and thus an instrument of true social and political action." It is argued here that the theories of Foucault and Lyotard are put into practice almost verbatim, for now the "... aesthetic effect in none other than the pleasure felt by the observer when he recognises himself in a picture's visual ideology", says Hadjinicolaou in *Art history and class struggle* (1978); Fuller (1988: 184), who quotes the above passage, wonders why these 'Althusserians' bother with works of art at all, since "their intention seems to be a displacement of the work with a verbal account of it." One may answer Fuller's query by stating that the work he is referring to now seemingly wants to become the *equivalent* of verbal accounts, i.e. copying linguistic possibilities.

A visual appropriation of linguistic semanticism

Eco (1976: 249-250) touches on another aspect of communication derived from images, when he asks: How is it possible to visually represent, not the unknown, but the known? How is it possible to create images that are recognizable as representations of what the viewer would regard as

faithful to reality? His example is Gainsborough's *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (1748), which he describes as a *text*; the complexity of its content is described as a discourse. Whatever one might wish to say about this painting semiotically, in terms of sign-functions and a theory of codes, the fact remains that the painting "does not escape the basic definition of a sign as something which *stands for* something else: for Gainsborough's painting is exactly this, something physically *present* which conveys something *absent* and, in certain cases, could be used in order to mention a state of the world" (Eco 1976: 249-250).

Further to this I argue that Eco provides a link between Gainsborough's *Mr and Mrs Andrews* and Salle's *Sleeping in the Corners* (1985), discussed below, since a painting, if it is to function as a sign-vehicle, "conveys many intertwined contents and therefore what is commonly called a 'message' is in fact a *text* whose content is a multilevelled *discourse*" (Eco 1976: 57). One of the tenets of both deconstruction and postmodernism helps to explain what is happening in these paintings as sign-vehicles: meaning is not stationary or fixed, but is deferred, it moves from one level of signification to another. In the content, as discourse, signifier and signified (sign), signification, ambiguity, and denotation coupled to connotation play important roles, because their respective relations are constitutive of the text, or message, of the work of art. As Hawkes (1986: 141) says of Eco's work in



Fig. 2. Thomas Gainsborough, *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (1748). [Source: Tomory (1969: 194)].

semiotics, signification moves from one level of meaning to another by transforming denoted meaning into connoted meaning, and this process has more than a passing resemblance to Barthes' system for interpreting the myths, or social reality narratives, of a cultural system. It is in this context that I argue for a correlation between Barthes' system and Eco's (below). Not only may the two systems be read as two texts with similar goals, but as each illuminating the intricacies of the other when both are applied to certain works of art.

Barthes' system includes two planes of signification, that of language and myth. On the plane of language is signifier, signified, and sign; on the plane of myth is form, concept, and signification. However, in myth the signifier (form) is created by the signs of the language plane, thus the last term of the language system becomes the first term of the mythical system. Meaning moves on

from the level of the language system to the level of the mythical system; the combination of signifier and signified (sign) gives rise to form, and form, through concept, gives rise to signification (Barthes 1972: 117), a three-step process. Eco seemingly also has a three-step process that can fruitfully be compared to Barthes' system. In the multilevelled discourse content of a visual text, "there are at least three codes, a denotative one and two connotative ones"; what is important is that the (first) denotative code is not correlated with the (second) connoted system, but with the (third) connoted system, this being the destination of the message; the (third) connoted system does not yet exist (Eco 1976: 56-57).

Barthes appears to have a similar correlation: "The third term is the correlation of the first two"; since his system works on two planes, this statement means that the sign is the correlation of the signifier and the signified on the language plane, but on the mythical plane this would mean that signification in myth is the correlation of form and concept (Barthes 1972: 117). The three-step process can be assigned the following Barthesian sequence -

Language plane **A**:

- (1) signifier indicates
- (2) signified, which becomes
- (3) sign and,

Mythical plane **B**:

- (1) form indicates

- (2) concept, which becomes
- (3) signification.

In Eco's system the following sequence applies **C**:

- (1) (first code) denotation indicates
- (2) (second code) connotation, which becomes
- (3) (third code) connotation.

In each system (1) is correlated with (3), while in Barthes' case the whole of sequence **A** forms the platform for the start of sequence **B**, thus (3) mythical signification is correlated with (1) form,

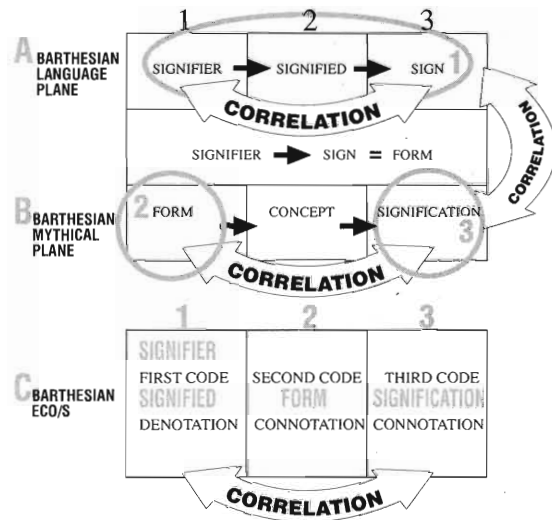


Fig. 3. The three-step process: Barthesian Eco/s.

but *also* with the sum of (1)-(3) of sequence **A**. Barthes' sequence **A** becomes Eco's (first) denotative code, form becomes the (second) connoted system, and mythical signification becomes the (third) connoted system.

What makes such a comparison possible, when in fact they should not quite function in exactly

the same way, is the use of ambiguity, or distortion. "Semiotically speaking ambiguity must be defined as a mode of violating the rules of the code ... the text becomes self-focusing: it directs the attention of the addressee primarily to *its own shape*" (Eco 1976: 263-264). "The relation which unites the concept of the myth to its meaning is essentially a relation of *deformation* ... *myth hides nothing*: its function is to distort, not to make disappear" (Barthes 1972: 121-122). Depending on the work being critiqued/'read' as a text, either or both of these systems may be employed. In the case of Salle's work (cf. fig. 4 below), when both Barthes' and Eco's systems of reading a visual text are put into practice the 'destination' of the discourse (above), or the 'conversational implicature' (below), becomes apparent. This visual destination or implication in the artistic conversation is a *deformed own shape*: it represents an *own shape* because it (mentally) replaces the 'shape'/significance of what one is (physically) looking at, and *deformed* because it has to distort the (real) meaning/significance of the signified/concept/(second code) connotation. The destination/mythical signification (3) deforms (2), that which would 'normally' be seen as the destination of the message, or the connotation of what is being denoted.

The principle of ambiguity/distortion can also be described in the following terms: *lexical ambiguity* is something that most words 'admit of', having two or more definitions (borderline

cases), but a word that "is so used that even with careful inspection of the context, one can understand the word in two or more ways" (Carney & Scheer 1980: 131), is *contextually ambiguous*. It is using words/images out of context in a deliberate way. In the sentence: *a man with a sensual nature has a voracious appetite*, what does the word *appetite* refer to? This word admits of lexical ambiguity and is extensionally vague; despite that, with the aid of an intelligent performance/degree of competence in the use of linguistic/artistic language, one can interpret the word *appetite* as referring, not to a craving for food, but to a craving for desire. Contextual ambiguity, however, produces works of art in an intentionally ambiguous way; (an image of) the visual sentence *a man has a voracious appetite* will be juxtaposed, for instance, with images of sexuality. The normal/accepted meaning of the word *appetite* would present no problem - *appetite* can only refer to food, in the absence of any other referent. But now art *does* provide this referent, the missing link to determine meaning, and completes the lexicographical intension/connotation of the word *appetite*. Images of sexuality juxtaposed with lexical ambiguity in a work of art create a deliberate composite of contextual ambiguity, a situation in which the 'conversational implicature' (Danto 1993: 63) of the work - that which is implicit instead of explicit, must be interpreted by the viewer, as reader of this visual language. Contextual ambiguity allows the artist the opportunity to put Lyotard's (1989:

282) theoretical argument into practice: the commentary keeps its own discourse within the same genre as the one on which it comments - meaning the viewer's understanding/commentary must agree with the message in the work of art. *What* the work says, is the conversational implicature, it is the visual/linguistical link between the word *appetite* and a sexual image. *How* the work says it, is the contextual ambiguity of the work, leaving the viewer with a *choice* between the lexical and contextual ambiguities inherent in the different levels of cognition to be found in the one work. This typical situation might be illustrated by referring to fig. 4.



Fig. 4. David Salle, *Sleeping in the Corners* (1985).
[Source: Honnelf (1988: 177)].

In the work depicted, Salle juxtaposes two very clear images. I argue that the conversational implicature of the work seems to imply that the traditional has already yielded to the contempo-

rary, since the traditional (social norms/values), depicted through the conventional interior and the image of the wayside shrine, is confronted by a non-traditional/contemporary, enigmatically smiling nude figure that faces in the direction of those accepted beliefs of the traditional: beliefs that include the notion of family/bourgeois life, belied through the showing of an empty interior, and the religious belief, which here seems to refer specifically to the body and blood of Christ, signalling the (proposed) empty promise contained in that belief, since the symbolic blood of Christ's promise is here spattered over the traditional in reality. The social/conventional *conversations around the body*, meaning the Christian belief in *My body is your bread and My blood your drink*, are visually contrasted with the contemporary and up-to-date *conversations around the body*, seemingly represented by the nude figure.

Propositional truths upsetting acquired knowledge

Salle's visual rhetoric echoes Barthes' (1972: 122-123) example of a photograph showing a young Negro soldier, dressed in French military uniform, ostensibly saluting the French flag (Barthes' description, although this is not shown on the cover); the ambiguity/distortion seems to be principally contained in the *salute*. Salle's example also juxtaposes two different cultures

(frames of mind, attitudes), with the ambiguity, or element of distortion, being the *conversations around the body*. Barthes' perceived myth of the loyal Negro soldier has one history (narrative) distorted by another; the Negro figure, with its own history separate from the gallicism of the flag and uniform, is diminished (not made to disappear) by the history (narrative) of France. (1) is correlated with (3); denotation (flag, uniform, Negro, salute) is correlated with the (third) connotation that French history is superior to the history of the Negro figure; this is a narrative that does not exist in reality, but exists only as a proposition.

Similarly, Salle's ambiguity can be read as dis-



Fig. 5. Cover, Paris-Match, (25 June - 2 July 1955).

torting the full signifying aspect of the social beliefs and traditions, while, through the active presence of the nude figure (with its own history of (third) connotative significance), replacing social meaning with "the mythical sign in the empty signifying aspect" (Barthes 1972: 122); the history of the social does not disappear, it is distorted by the mythical sign in the (third) connoted system, the history of the Other of the social structure. "Myth is a *value*, truth is no guarantee for it ...", and while the presented meanings of both the Other and the social are equally "there to *present* the form; the form is always there to *outdistance* the meaning" (Barthes 1972: 123). Denotation presents the (second) connotation, but this connotated system *outdistances* both meanings by being correlated with the significance of the myth.

Conclusion

It is thus possible that the visual narrative of certain works of art may be investigated in much the same interpretive manner that Barthes used in *Mythologies* (1957). In this work Barthes saw the cultural structures of the logocentric tradition as myths to be studied and decoded, and described myth as a *language* that forms a system of communication carrying messages. For him the myth was no longer the traditional mystical stories of antiquity or anthropology, but a modern system of signification with a social purpose.

The language of myth (narrative), then, is constituted by already existing meanings - signifieds and signifiers. The myth therefore works on the level of double meaning, the one level portraying the existing meanings (signifier expressing the signified), while the second level is the myth proper, the sign. What produces the myth (and its eventual meaning) is what Barthes called 'a relation of deformation': "in myth the meaning is distorted by the concept" of the myth (Barthes 1972: 122). This is an example of a paradigm change: "a symbol is first of all the destroyer of a prior symbol" (Ricoeur, in Landow 1982: 213). When in operation, the myth has recourse to two signifying aspects. The original meaning (and history of the object/person/idea) is full, while the form is empty. The myth, as sign, distorts the full signifying aspect - thus distorting its meaning and replacing it with the mythical sign in the empty signifying aspect - *which is not there in reality*. This distortion does not obliterate or cancel original meanings; "... they are deprived of memory, not of existence..." (Barthes 1972: 122), since the concept/myth still needs them to function.

Eco (1976: 252) suggests that, in the case of a work of art as a vehicle of communication, the artist/sender creates a 'perceptual structure' that may be regarded, by the interpreter, as a 'coded semantic model', while the viewer/receiver accepts that work as an 'expressive structure'. This means that the viewer of the work "makes his

way *backward* inferring and extrapolating similitude rules, and finally re-constitutes the original percept." To paraphrase Eco, if the addressee is not helped by the sender (in the sense of revealing aspects of socially acquired knowledge), if the *true meaning* of a prior signification in (social) stock knowledge is absent, the painting becomes an inventive transformation (and shifter of paradigms) that leads the viewer towards an 'understanding' of a new content-plane that deprives any prior signification of memory. In other words, the conclusion one may come to when *reading* visual works (such as Salle's), is that the rhetorical narrative of this visual language-game, through its production of the new myth, subverts true social understanding and knowledge (distorts the full signifying aspect) in that it persuades the reader/viewer to accept the authority of the work (the new mythical sign in the empty signifying aspect). To counter such an unthinking acceptance of authority, one should rather employ the insights of both Gadamer (1975: 246) and Derrida (1993: 919). To paraphrase both, an over-hastiness in accepting either one's own or another's authority introduces not only the (real) error inherent in the use of reason, but through abolishing reason in that very acceptance it re-introduces what is very often being criticized in the first place.

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