PRESENTED IN THIS BOOK IS DOCUMENTATION OF THE WORK PRODUCED DURING 1987-90 WITHIN THE MASTER OF FINE ARTS COURSE AT THE SCHOOL OF ART, UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA.

NOVEMBER, 1990.

IAN BROWNE

I would like to than the staff, my family and friends for their support throughout the course. A special thanks to my supervisors, David Stephenson and Ted Colless.

DOCUMENTATION

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PROPOSAL

Many of my photographed situations are temporarily created for the moment of shooting. After being attracted to the original scene, I then proceed in changing the scene with careful and precise placement of props, building materials, pipes, steelwork and so on. Viewed from any angle other than through the camera the scene appears only to be a jumble of shapes.

By doing this I am not aiming to document the scene as I found it but to break down the association and functions of real world objects within the scene. Changing the spacial relationships by juxtaposing objects in appropriate places within the foreground and background I attempt to challenge the assumptions made by the viewer. Having previously worked with flat, two-dimensional black and white images in a city environment, I found that moving to the country allowed much greater oppurtunity for me to take advantage of its particular quality of light and space.

I choose to use colour primarily for it's aesthetic appeal, but also in many photographs as an aid in creating visual ambiguities. I was attracted to work in colour after coming in contact with the work of photographers such as Joel Meyerwitz, John Pfahl, Stephen Shore, William Eggleston and Michael Bishop.

Through the next two years I would like to develop my current work. This may involve the use of multiple images. The same scene could be photographed with an interval of time between images to show variable light conditions. The connection of forms and changes in perspective between scenes would hopefully produce spacial tension between images and an impression of time. Impact could be enhanced by playing with size and scale firstly, of the scenes themselves, and secondly, of the finished prints.

The current environment that I'm working within, although being conducive to my present work, is isolated and therefore does not offer the stimulus I feel is necessary for me to develop new ideas and techniques. I feel that at present I would gain from the influences of external stimuli.

DOCUMENTATION

The commonly held attitude towards a photograph is to accept it as a surrogate slice of reality, which by its mimetic nature asserts a reading of objective truth. This misconception presupposes photographs are neutral, thus elevating the photograph to a position of unquestionable authority.

Through conundrums of perception my visual work challenges these assumptions. The major focus of this challenge is inspired by my fascination with the deceptive nature of photography. Linked to this fascination is a concern to explore the relationships between representation and construction, reality and fantasy, illusion and reason.

I use photography in preference to other mediums because of its perceived close association with the truth. As Barthes states,

> *"paintings can feign reality without having seen it. Discourse combines signs which have referents of course, but these referents can be and are most often 'chimeras'. Contrary to these limitations in photography one can never deny the thing has been there."*

Without this relationship my visual work would lose its persuasive edge. Not only does this edge depend on the authenticity of the real but it also depends on a tension: an

unresolved tension which arises from the inability to make a distinction between the real and unreal, fact or fiction.

My work comes from observed experience: an awareness of lived space and its affect in shaping personality. In the city architectural structure gives space a particular character. My work deals with a certain aspect of this urban environment. This aspect concerns itself with signs of fixity, stability and production; signs that exist in the industrial wasteland on the fringe of the city.

In a sense these concerns are to do with the constructed environment. For example through introduced elements such as discarded building materials, the evidence of construction is emphasised. The purpose of this emphasis is to question notions of reality : a reality based on construction and myth. The worlds I fabricate are illusionistic. The space which exists within them is abstracted; it confronts the viewer by not only its inpenetrabilty but also its instability. The viewers gaze is caught in a labyrinth of multi-dimensional space. Only occasionally, through gaps in the foreground where there exists the distant detail of vegetation, is the viewer's vision allowed to escape.

This confrontation hopefully draws attention to both the considered and arbitrary order which people impose on the world; in Western culture, an order which forms grid like structures. These structures divide and fragment inhabited space thus forming barriers that confine and direct movement

to the existing pathways of the physical. Not only does this system of ordering exist on the physical level but also in mental realms as well. In fact this system can be extended to encompass the conceptual framework of reality. Associated with these notions of construction and fragmentation is a sense of alienation.

With this approach to construction, the sections of reality that I photograph become commodities of production. These sites form the base material for my constructed worlds of fantasy. Through the re-photographing and reorganising of props many versions of the same scene can exist. In many cases, to get the version I want, I revisit the site, reorganise or change the introduced elements, and then re-photograph the site with its new combination of elements.

While stylistic shifts and format changes understandably may have occurred during the course of my M.F.A. programme, I feel nonetheless that there exists within the development of my work a logical continuum at both conceptual and visual levels. As a result I feel that my visual work has moved towards a clearer representation of my concerns.

At the beginning of the course, my visual work grew directly from my proposal. This work, as it still does, dealt with visual ambiguity and the urban landscape. Through these elements I wanted to create an alienated hinterland of illusion and mystery; a landscape where the mixture of architectural

surfaces and introduced elements combine to form a geometrically ordered world of precision; a world full of contradiction where one feels the limits and gravity of an imposed order but also a world in which fantasy provides the viewer with an avenue of escape. In these worlds, presented reality exists in a state of tension, fluctuating between stabilty and chaos.

At first, on both techincal and formal levels, the resolution of my objectives posed problems. As already mentioned, what was, and still is important was the fact that these worlds had to be believable. Therefore, I felt that there should be as little manipulation carried out in the darkroom as possible. As a result, the construction of these illusionistic worlds had to take place on site in the real world. My earlier attempts to construct on site were less successful as the methods of construction made any illusion look contrived. In these earlier works, the qualities of disorientation and enstrangement which I was looking for were obscure.

For example, I had intended to approach the construction of these works in a similar manner to the work I had done prior to the course but after a period of time I found it necessary to revaluate my strategies. These earlier landscapes were too chaotic in composition. By having too many elements with ill conceived placement, space became less ambiguous and too disjointed and therefore less threatening. With this confusion, fantasy became no longer plausible and the effect I wanted

of an overriding sense of measure gave way to random order. What was needed was simplicity: a more subtle juxtaposition of illusion and a sense of the real.

From this realisation I used the multiple images in a different way. Instead of panning the camera to create a realistic panorama, I photographed multiples of the same image, sometimes changing the introduced elements in each image. Then in the darkroom I flipped the negative so as to form a composite panorama of the same image. In some cases there may be a sequence of both panned and repeated images. The purpose of this strategy is to create a fragmented version of reality, that through its modular construction evokes a sense of both dislocation and alienation. In this situation space itself becomes fractured; multiple vanishing points set up an underlying pattern causing space to bend in a kaleidoscopic way.

My second paper "Metaphysical Painting" brings together certain other aspects of my concerns. They deal with my fascination for the unexplainable, the unfathomnable, and the things that still seem magical: things that our rational and logical society tries to deny. For me, these qualities can be suggested through the deceptive powers of photography.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK

All visual work throughout the course was shot on a tripod with a large format view camera. This type of camera

allowed me, through adjustable controls (horizontal and vertical tilt), a degree of flexiblity in manipulating the rendering of perspective. Furthermore this camera's large negative size (5"x 4") gave my images the resolution that was needed to make my landscapes more realistic.

All works were printed on 30" roll paper. I chose to print on this large paper size so as to intensify the impression that these landscapes through their size took on some of the scale of the real; a magnitude that hopefully would challenge the viewer.

Initially, the panoramas were to be framed as one piece with no gap between each image. However, I found with this method of framing that attention was drawn to the dividing seam because of the differences between each image. As a result, the quality of seamlessness which I wanted was to a degree negated. Finally, I decided to frame each individual image with a thin black border. In some ways, this thin black border echoes the black frame of the negative. This had the effect of taking attention away from the joints and also emphasised the methods of modular construction used in my work.

In figure 1, an earlier example of my visual work, the diversity of both colour and introduced elements causes competition between the structural components, resulting in a less ordered, more chaotic and an overly contrived

composition. In figure 2, a more recent version of the same site, there is a refinement of the application of introduced elements. Composition is less confused and more unified through the careful placement of fewer visual props. Space also is more distorted through the changing of camera position between the shooting of the left and centre panels. Consequently, I feel that this more subtle bringing together of visual elements enhances the sense of illusion, creating in the viewer a heightened emotional reaction.

In what way has my period of study influenced the planned direction outlined in my original proposal? As already mentioned, I feel that the basic direction of my work has kept to the objectives of this proposal. Through the theoretical and visual investigation carried out during the course, I feel that my approach to art making is more considered. My investigations, such as the one into Georgio de Chirico's imagery, exposed new and relevant issues. Issues such as alienation, confinement, fragmentation and fantasy opened up a far more involved agenda than was originally conceived in my proposal. In many ways I think this deeper understanding of the complexities of my art practise is positive. However, this gaining of knowledge is a trade-off against which innocence and a sense of play is to a degree lost.

LIST OF WORK

1.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	210cm. x 750cm.	1987
2.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	910cm. x 2180cm.	1990
3	Untitled.	colour photograph.	860cm. x 1360cm.	1990
4.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	920cm. x 2950cm.	1988
5.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	950cm. x 1515cm.	1988
6.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	890cm. x 2380cm.	1989
7.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	900cm. x 2800cm.	1990
8.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	900cm. x 2170cm.	1990
9.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	900cm. x 1430cm.	1990
10.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	935cm. x 3020cm.	1988
11.	Untitled.	colour photograph.	920cm. x 2980cm.	1988

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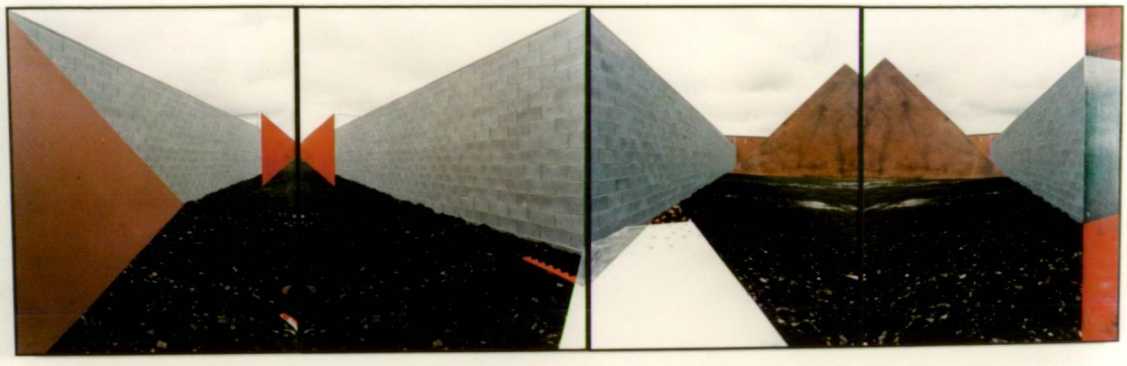
3.



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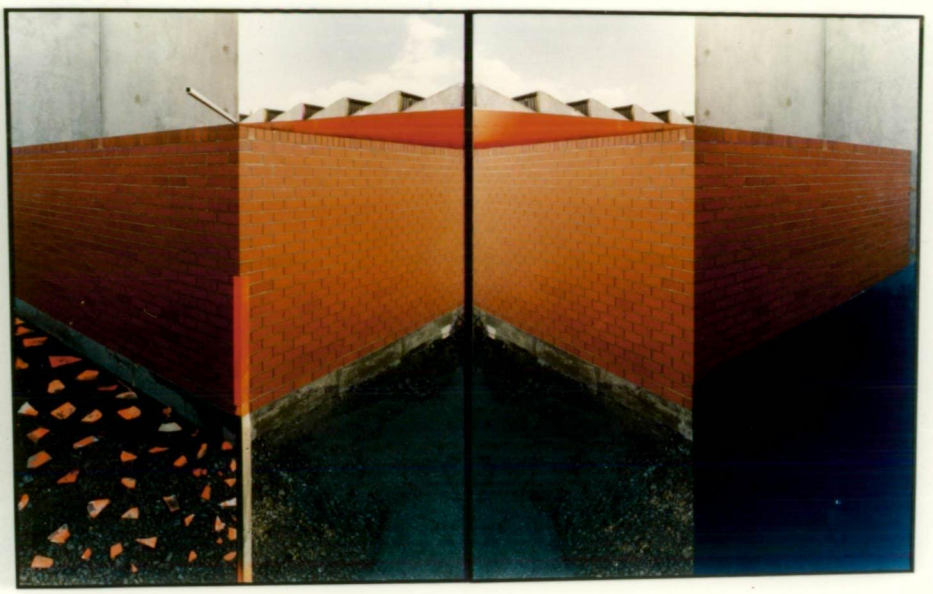

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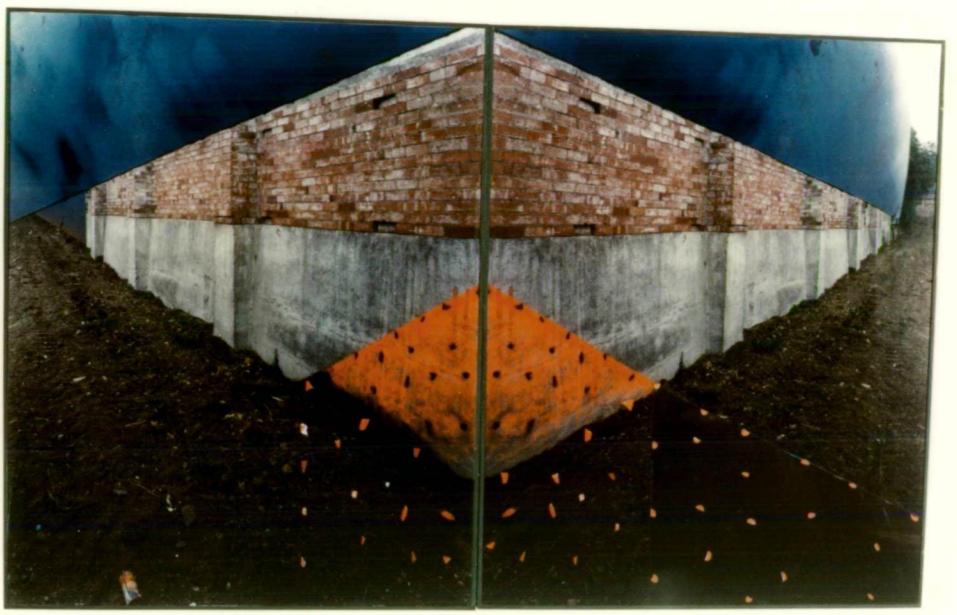

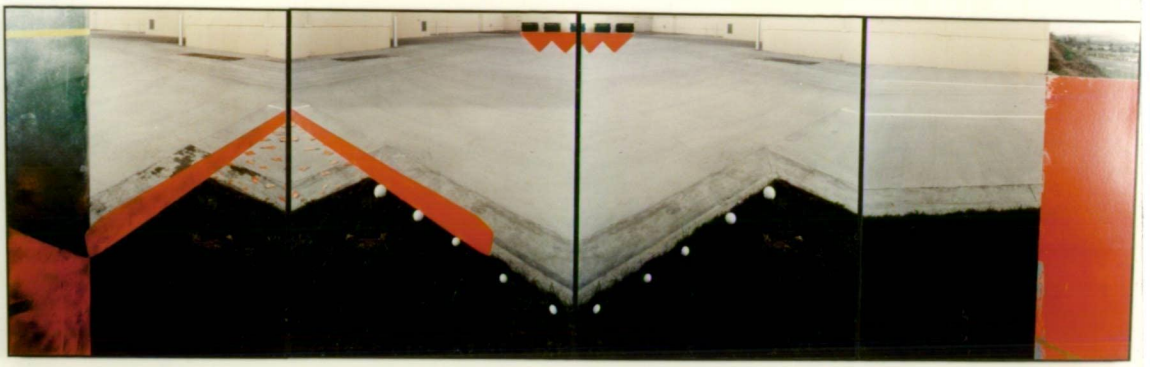

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Paper 1.

DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

IAN BROWNE
OCTOBER 1990

THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

What does this really mean? The title seems to suggest by its morbidity and finality that the conclusion drawn from its understanding is one that may not be an easily accepted one. Why should this be? As will later become more apparent, the author is central to the way we perceive of ourselves in society, and from where and how we construct our own specific understanding of reality.

What will also become apparent further on, is how language forms the basis from which we construct our reality and how its meanings are incorrectly assumed to be fixed. Even from the most apparently unambiguous of statements can be found examples of different interpretations of the language. The following well known expression shows the ambiguity and multiplicity of language. For example, "I know you truly believe what you thought I said, but I want you to know that what I said is not what I meant" This brings us to the notion of how we easily accept the ideology which is conveyed to us;

> *"Idealism depends on notions of 'human essence' which somehow transcend and operate (indeed, causes) the social system, and are not constructed in the system. The idealist deformation of thought' mobilises notions of 'mankind' and the 'human' as the specific language using entity. They underline the idea of identities which pre-exist the individual entry into social relations ... The*

> *idealist assertions underline the fundamental assumptions of bourgeois ideology with its necessity / will to present society as consisting of free individuals, whose social determination results from their pre-given essences like 'talented', 'efficient' ,'prolifigate', etc".* [1]

This statement by Coward and Ellis lays out the idealistic concept that artists are romantic mystical figures who transcend time and place and also projects the artist as a free individual who is the source of creative meaning. This underlines the basic misconception of how the modern identity is considered to be constituted outside the structures that define culture and elevates the artist to a privileged position, one of heroic magnitude, and hence the attitude, "artist as rebel, artist as hero, artist as shaman".

The idea of the artist as a unique and gifted individual is historically, in the terms of ideology of art, a more recent notion. This developed during the Renaissance with the growth of the competitive merchant class and also with the rise of the Humanist ideas in philosophy and religious thought. Prior to this change in ideology artistic production centred around communal lines based in guild workshops where the artists were considered craftsmen and worked as

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1Coward, Rosand and Ellis, John: Language and Materialism, Routledge and kegan Paul, London. 1977 p2

part of a collective. Associated with, and as a result of the loss of the traditional, secure patronage of Pre-Modern society, was the growth of the dealer, curator, critic system which placed the artist in a much more precarious position. The consequence of this marginalisation was that the artist and his product were presumed not to be caught up in capitalist economic relations, ie. the circle of consumption and production. Instead the artist's way of working is seen to be uniquely different and as a result his product considered a transcendent object, or in other words, not having the same "practical value" of other consumables. Wolff argues against this belief by saying that indeed artists are no different from any other worker in the capitalist system. For example why should the manufacture of a painting be considered to be any different to the manufacture of an automobile? Without delving into the respective values of either, it is more important to question the ideology by which the value is determined. The myth of the artist as a free agent is substantiated by over looking the fact that artists do actually make a living out of their work. This is shown in Wolff's reference to Vazquez were she writes;

> *"In the long run, as Vazquez argues, even artistic work comes under the general law of capitalist production and becomes regarded as merchandise (p.86); many artists will work as wage labourers (in industry and advertising for the media), and the rest have to resort to the market to sell their work.*

> *The latter will be 'freer' to pursue their own creative inclination...".*[2]

She on goes to quote Vazquez where he states;

> *"The artist is subject to the tastes, preferences, ideas, and aesthetic notions of those who influence the market. In as much as he produces works of art destined for a market that absorbs them, the artist cannot fail to heed the exigencies of this market: they often affect the content as well as the form of a work of art, thus placing limitations on the artist, stifling his creative potential, his individuality".*[3]

However this has always been true. In Pre-Modern art the artist consciously adhered to the public ideologies of his time. Only in the 19th Century has the Western artist, through the denial of convention, consciously attempted to work outside his/her social system. With the Romantics, the artist became a social outcast , akin to martyrs, starving in the pursuit of higher ideals and this led to the romantic notion of the individualistic hero image, located outside the power structures of bourgeois society (social and economic). Further to this, or maybe as a result of this popularly accepted ideology, the artist now perceived himself as the conscience of society.

Up until the end of the 19th century art was considered a primary form of communication. It was the main generator of

2 Wolff, Janet: The Social Production of Art, Macmillan Publishers Ltd, London. 1981p 18

3 Vazquez, Adolfo: quoted by Wolff, op cit. p 18

public symbols. As the society's ideological standpoint shifted to elevate the individual and his private aspirations, the a notion of artist/author as creator, reached its pinnacle with the Avant- Garde. The aim of the avant-garde was to prepare the way for vast change but because it could only be understood by the educated sector of society had no real effect on action, only on sensibility All his/her attempts have been consumed by the market and as a result he/she eventually becomes the beneficiary of the rebellious event.

By following Janet Wolff's argument, that artists indeed do not survive as free individuals outside existing structures, leads to the position that the traditional means of viewing the artists is an incorrect one and therefore his/her position needs to be re- examined.

Recent work by theorists studying the areas of linguistics and anthropology (cultural studies) have forced us to rethink man's or more specifically the artist's/author's relationship to the structures that make up culture. The emphasis on research has shifted from the artist as fulcrum of thought to now be placed within the structure and examined only as one of its parts. The research now looks at how;

> *"We live in a world of signs, and signs about signs. A growing awareness of this situation has involved*

> *modern man in a momentous change of perspective which has gradually forced him to accept that in such a world 'reality' inheres not in things themselves, but in the relationships we discern between things; not in items, but in structures"*[4]

This brief summary by Terence Hawkes defines the issue with which the structuralists and semioticians have become concerned in their efforts to understand the reality of linguistic structures. Structuralism and semiotics and their methods of analysis, opened up new avenues of thought from which to attack the myth of the author as determinant and a fixed source of artistic work and its meaning. According to this approach;

> *"... a line of text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the message of the Author- God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotation drawn from innumerable centres of culture"* [5]

This quote helps disclose how authors refer unconsciously to other texts thereby undermining the illusion that their work is a closed structure projecting a transcendent meaning from

their source, the author. Kristeva introduces[6] this term as

4 Hawkes, Terence: Structuralism and Semiotics, University of California Press, Los Angeles. 1977 abtract back page

5 Barthes, Roland:'The Death of the Author', In Image- Music and Text, Fontana/Collins, Glasgow. 1977 p146

the inter-textuality of a text. In other words the author calls upon vast reserves of echoes in similar text that make up a considerable proportion of the immense history of writing. This process is not one of *"repetition therefore, but rather a limited exploitation of the plurality of language, through a controlled process of echoing and recalling"* [7]. This argues against the traditional approach that bourgeois ideology supports. If you were to believe the notion of authorship you would reduce the text to a monolithic reading resulting in an exclusion of all that has gone before. The irony of humanistic notions are reflected in the statement that;

> *"the author becomes the punctual source of the text (thus writing out history and society), the meaning of the text is what the author intended, albeit (so the productivity of language and the autonomy of the text are censored)"* [8]

Inter-textuality applies both to writing and reading. The reception and interpretation of a text depends upon the social context of both the author and reader. The text is the meeting of the historical contexts of both author and reader in all reading is historcally relative and it is constructed by the reader as much as by the author. Objective meaning cannot be reached. Once the author has fixed the meaning in the text, it

6 Coward and Ellis: op cit. p52

7 op cit p 52

8 op cit p63

will alter because of changing and different positions that subjects have in relationship to language. Robert Weiman[9] defines literature as a dynamic entity which refers to its reciprocal quality, that is, its relationship of "*past significance and present meaning*". This brings us to the polysemic or polysemantic nature of text, paintings and all cultural products. The polysemic nature of cultural products is referred to as the ambiguous way in which text is interpreted. It is as a result of the previously mentioned dynamics of text that the relationships to the structure are continually in a process of change and, hence, objective readings cannot be reached.

This then moves us to semiology which is concerned with the study of complex codes and structures that go to make up culture. Semiology helps us to understand the polysemantic nature of cultural products. Semiology aims to take in;

> *"any system of signs whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and the complex association of all of these, which form the content of ritual convention or public entertainment; these constitute if not languages, at least systems of signification."* [10]

For every form the artist uses there is a limited number of

9 Weiman, Robert: quoted byWolff, op cit. p108

10 Barthes, Roland: Elements of Semiology, Jonahan Cape, London.1964 p9

corresponding systems of signs. The basis of semiotic analysis is the sign and its function in a code. Every message both linguistic and non linguistic is made of signs. These messages are decoded by their receivers. We can be shown by semiology that ideology is indirectly reflected in cultural products such as paintings novels and so on. These are represented in aesthetic codes which restrict the authors or artists to certain existing rules of form and representation. Pierre Macherey writes that "*the Author certainly makes decisions, but ... his decisions are determined*".[11] In other words the author has at his/her disposal the materials of literary technique and form but these shape the intended direction of the artists reflections. This reveals to us that the author does not have a franchise over the meaning of text and dispels the romantic, humanist notions of the author being central to the creation of meaning within a text. If the author is not the sole source of fixed meaning of the text, it then follows that the author must move from centre stage and take a place in the shadows of the audience (as can be seen later, Barthes sees the audience as central to constructing the meaning within text). By accepting this view, it can now be seen that the text contains and expresses meaning that is additional to the intended meaning of the individuals who created them.

11 Macherey, Pierre: A Theory of Literary Production, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. 1978 p48

Once the bourgeois notion of the dominance of the author is dismissed where does the author's position lie and what purpose does he or she have? Barthes answers this question when he writes;

> *"A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where the multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text unity lies not in its origin but in its destination ... The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author".*[12]

This could be taken as an extreme point of view, leaving the once dominant position of the author as an insignificant position, not greatly influential to the ultimate fixation of the meaning of the text. The extreme position Barthes takes, transfers from the traditional notion of the authors dominance to placing the importance upon the reader which leads onto his concern with contemporary criticism and its attempts to constuct the meaning of text. He goes on to write that;

> *"to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on the text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well.*

12 Barthes: op cit 1977 p 148

> *the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' - victory to the critic."* [13]

Barthes is implying that conventional criticism plays into the hands of an ideology which uses the forms of representation that society gives itself. This aims at a closure of the troubling plurality of language. Conventional criticism "*defines the limits for and works to fix the individual, with certain mental horizons*".[14] We need to expose ideology at the moment it is produced. By killing off the Author Barthes hopes to expose the rules of the game and in doing so liberate the text from a single, monolithic meaning.

In his article "What is an Author", Michel Foucault develops Barthes' critique of the notion of authorship. Foucault points out that the author's name is used as the means of classification of literary and artistic works. Foucault is not arguing for the return of the traditional humanist notion of the author, or artist, who is at the centre of creation of meaning. Rather, he is seeking to analyse it as a historically specific conept which serves certain social funtions. He states that;

> *"the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It*

13 op cit p 147

14 Coward and Ellis: op cit p74

> *should be considered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its interventions in discourse, and its system of dependencies ... In short the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse." 15*

So far I have followed the dissertations of Wolff, Barthes and Foucault in an attempt to de-mystify the traditional humanist approach to man (as subject). Both Barthes and Foucault challenge and ultimately dismiss the author from its position of pre-eminence. Barthes replaces the author's vacated position with a self-governing, self determining structure. Foucault, on the other hand, allows the author to remain in his/her position only to serve as a figure head, a token gesture which forms part of the larger subject (which includes the reader) and enables a basis for classification to be made.

This generally follows the line of thought the structuralists and functionalists have of society, that is, that society is structured and functions as an entity with all sections working to sustain one another and the society as a whole. This approach tends to give priority to the structure taking away any responsibility that the subject may have. This ignores the author as subject . To help answer this problem and come to some sort of conclusion, one needs to examine

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15 Foucault, Michel: ' What is an Author', Language, Counter-Memory, Practise, Blackwell, Oxford. 1977 p28

the association between agency and structure. Here I intend to follow Janet Wolff's brief and straight forward account of this complex issue. Wolff uses Althusser's ideas to deal with the problems concerning people as constituted subjects in and by ideological and social practices. As Wolff writes;

> *"Althusser formulates this proposition regarding the constitution of subjects by stating that ideology hails or interpolates concrete individuals as concrete subjects. The way in which individuals are addressed as subjects (with a name, and by distinguishing and significant characteristics, which are socially defined) is a function of ideology. Although ideology itself is constituted by the category of the subject, in its turn it constitutes individuals as subjects."*[16]

Wolff then clarifies this by giving an example of Althusser's work in which it is explained how the *"individual is always already a subject, even before he is born"*. [17]This is shown, for example, by the fact that a baby inherits its father's name at birth, thus positioning it by specific familial ideology in society. Wolff adds that subjects are also constituted in material practices resulting in the fact that there is no subjective essence which escapes social or ideological constitution.

Althusser's theories correctly perceive subjects as being

16 Wolff: op cit p130

17 op cit p130

constructed. However, there are problems with the theory in practice as it presupposes an empty subject without referring to any of the mechanisms which help form it. This is where the work of the psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan, helps in a specific way to overcome the problems associated with Althusser's construction of the subject in ideology. Lacan uses Althusser's theories as the starting point from which to explore the relationship of the subject to the structure. Lacan uses this base as the means of explaining the weaknesses found in Althusser's own theories. Lacan moves to a re-examination of Freud's discoveries of the unconscious to help consolidate what are the actual mechanics involved with the relationship between the subject and the structure which is represented by language. It is important to understand this because once the subject enters into language, Lacan proposes that the subject is also positioned in the symbolic order and hence located in material and social structures.

The family unit and the early development of the child, is used as the basis of this examination of positioning the subject. The child is confronted with terms specific and directed to its sex and as such learns to be distinguished as either male or female, son or daughter as the case may be. Combined with this is the perpetual exposure of both the male and female child to a patriarchal society, where the

language differentiates between the roles that the children are subjected to and hence positions them in the social and material practices of culture. The point that can be gleaned from this study is that the unified, self determining subject whose motivations are from within can be replaced by a complex, de-centred subject whose position is determined by external factors and is influenced by the structure. The value of Lacan's psychoanalysis can be seen by acknowledging that:

> *"The erratic and devious presence of the unconscious, without which the position of the subject cannot be understood, insists on heterogeneity and contradictions within the subject itself. Therefore it provides the rigorous criticism of the presupposition of a consistent, fully finished subject, and of the social sciences that base themselves on such a presupposition."* [18]

At this point it is now possible to conclude that the reign in criticism of the author as central figure in the fixing of meaning of a text is over. From the preceding argument can be seen how the author was given his place in society by the romantic notions formulated out of the rise of bourgeois ideology. Looking firstly at the location of artistic production we exposed the fallacy that it is different to any other processes of production; secondly, revealing the polysemantic nature of cultural products in effect we undermine the asumption that the meaning of a text can be identified with

18 Coward and Ellis: op cit p94

the authers intention. Thirdly re-evaluation of psychoanalytic theory has given a greater understanding of how a subject is positioned in ideological, social and material practices.

The preceding arguments have dethroned the author from an elevated position (although where he/she is now placed is unclear and unresolved), and have attempted to place "structure" as the all determining factor of systems of discourse and representation. If this were true this would give unlimited license to the *"language and sign systems, which are seen not only to constitute subjects, but also to constitute the real world which they represent".*[19] This would in effect take any determining power away from the subject.

For me the "Death of the Author", has the significance of developing, through the process of examination of the author's relationship to culture, a better understanding of the affects of ideology practise and hence allows us to be more aware of the influences that direct our destiny.

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19 Wolff: op cit p134

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Paper 2.

METAPHYSICAL LANDSCAPES

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During the course of my M.F.A. programme, I began to notice certain similarities between my own photographic work and some of the paintings by Giorgio de Chirico. In a general sense these similarities are to do with spatial ambiguity and a atmosphere of alienation. My aim in this paper is to explore the enigmatic circumstances of de Chirico's scenes and the way in which his paintings suggest an unfathomable realm; a realm which a rational and scientific world view cannot fully comprehend or catagorise.

If I am finding an affinity between my own work and de Chirico's, it lies in the aesthetic qualities evident in his more famous work, in particular "The Day of the Fete", "Mystery and Melancholy of the Street", "The Great Metaphysician" and "Apparition of the Chimney". These qualities include formal techniques such as geometric abstraction, and a cubist - like compression of the picture plane. In both de Chirico's and my own work there is a lack of human presence which gives the viewer a feeling of enstrangement and dislocation.

De Chirico's metaphysical paintings suggest that in order to gain a true understanding of reality one needs to transcend the physical appearance of the world. His investigation is one of depth, it tries to discover the essence of things by going beyond the identification of surface detail. While physical impact of the real is important, his art is profoundly anti-realistic. Symbolic meaning is accumulated by questioning conventional boundaries of thought with conundrums of perception and sensation. Such visual ambiguities invest de

Chirico's manipulated objects with latent or immanent powers. This suggests the existence of a more profound spiritual level, which de Chirico called the metaphysical.To understand the ramifications of this position, especially in relation to the spiritual connection, it is important to analyze the circumstances that arise from visual ambiguity.

De Chirico believed that to produce significant metaphysical art reason had to be transcended. The artist could only go beyond reason by freeing his or her consciousness from the cultural determinants found in memory and will. De Chirico's observation could be related to Schopenhauer's conditions for original ideas that;

> *"one has to isolate oneself from the world for a few moments so completely that the most commonplace happenings appear to be new and unfamiliar and in this way reveal their true essence."*[1]

Hence this act of aesthetic perception brings forth moments of clairvoyance which help generate a metaphysical experience by emptying the mind of all its preconceived notions of reality. In this situation conventional relationships are forgotten, thus allowing for the removal of the contemplated object from its original context. This creates a disjuncture which heightens the object's significance. Visual focus is then intensified through one's awareness of emotions that reveal new aspects of the object's existence. The mysterious power of the object to evoke such an experience is similar to the unspecified powers inherent in archaic spiritual awareness.

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[1] Schopenhauer, Arther: quoted in ' Giorgio de Chirico: The Sources of Metaphysical Painting in Schopenhauer and Nietzche' Art International Feb-March. 1983 p55.

> *"The experience of an "unspecified power" is generally accepted as an essential part of archaic religious experience. Archaic man tends to perceive his environment as kinds of power. This numinous power is the original sense of the sacred "a quality of existence separating the unusual and extraordinary from the usual and ordinary."*[2]

Certain aspects of this archaic religious experience are reflected in de Chirico's writings. These writings speak of everyday encounters which suggest metaphysical experiences. De Chirico establishes the identity of this experience, by describing the strange emotions aroused when an object appears unexpectedly in unfamiliar surroundings. In this case he uses furniture which is found on the street whilst being transported from one house to another. As de Chirico states:

> *"the pieces of furniture then appear in a new light, they are reclothed in a strange solitude, a great intimacy grows between them, and one could say that a strange happiness hovers in the space they occupy."*[3]

This strange sight inflects in de Chirico an intense state of sensation; a sensation of passion that realises sublime manifestions. These passions can be linked to an emotional response that provides archaic man with spiritual nourishment. For example in both de Chirico's and archaic

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[2] Rabinovitch, Ceila: "Surrealism and Modern Relgious Consciousness", The Spiritual Image in Modern Art, ed. Kathleen J. Regier, The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton. U.S.A. p151

[3] Giorgio, de Chirico: "Statues, Furniture and Generals", Metaphysical Art, ed. Massimo C. Thames and Hudson, London. 1971 p151

mans case, revelation of the metaphysical depends upon a kind of confrontion that leads to exaltation through shock. This shock, as seen in de Chirico's circumstance, is generated by the surprise of unexpectedly finding an object in an unfamiliar setting. Within these circumstances an ambiguous presence, caused by finding things out of place, breaks the continuity of mundane space. This ambigious presence introduces a perceptual emphasis; eliciting a particular fascination in the beholder by charging objects with a mysterious potency. Rabinovitch believes that owing to this mysterious potency objects acquire a bizarre internal life ; an obscure and elusive force which induces through a quality of sensation, feelings of awe. The response engendered by these particular circumstances can be seen as the representation of a breakthrough into the consciousness of earlier states of being. As explained by Freud;

> *"It seems as if each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive man that none of us has passed through it with out preserving certain residues and traces of it and that everything that now strikes us as uncanny fulfills the conditions of touching those residues of animistic activity within us and bringing them to expression."*[4] *(sic)*

The uncanny and its relationship to the animation of objects with a non-rational, inchoate power, breaks the boundaries between vernacular and occult meaning. As a result a pure logical explanation of the uncanny and its affect on the viewer is difficult, although it can be said that its affect is

[4]Freud, Sigmund: "The Uncanny", The Complete Pschological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol.XVII, Hogarth Press, London. 1961. p240

provoked through a sense of disorientation by suspending recognition of the mind's habitual image of things. Consequently in an uncanny situation the mind's attempt to reply is negated by visual contradiction. As a result, the mind resonates with a non-rational response. And as already mentioned an uncanny encounter like de Chirico's creates a psychological focus charged with mystery, the significance of which is obscure and unspecified. The opaqueness of this experience, created by reference to obtuse meaning, touches the viewer in an immediate proximity, it draws him in but at the same time, leaves him at a distance. The mind is left in a state of ambivalence, where it responds with both fascination and fear.

Impelled by the desire to communicate the deeper existence of a metaphysical world, de Chirico painted landscapes pregnant with an enigmatic presence. De Chirico fabricated from familiar objects an alien and unfathomable world of contradiction and subversion of expectations. Such an illusionistic world is neither real nor unreal. As with the furniture unexpectedly found in unfamiliar surroundings, tension and disorientation is imposed on our normal experience of reality through a disturbing sense of the "uncanny".In this situation, the observer suffers feelings of enstrangement and dislocation which ultimately leads to the moods associated with melancholia. What remains in the beholder's mind is an inner tension: an intense feeling which implies through the suggestive powers of the "extraordinary", metaphysical connections. De Chirico's

intervention into the banalities of everyday life serve to refer or give gesture to the existence of something beyond reality. It is a representation of the absence of that something which perpetually eludes definition.

De Chirico illustrates his abstract notions by assembling incongruous elements drawn from reality. These elements intermingle to form a world of misplaced proportions. Positioned in their new combinations such elements do not appear realistic but rather look as though they had been positioned on stage, in a premeditated order. De Chirico's settings are bathed in an 'autumn sun, warm and unloving'[5] it has a late afternoon slant giving colour an exaggerated, rich luminosity. As a result, an entirely new artificial looking landscape is created. Yet even though these landscapes look artificial, most of the settings are based on the piazzas and arcades found in the towns of provincial Italy. The most obvious feature of this architecture is its neo-classical style. This is not the classicism of antiquity, but the bare and pared down structures influenced by Modernism. Arcades lack the mouldings and decoration of the classical counterparts. The precise delineation, hard-edged treatment of form, and the lack of surface detail, provide de Chirico's landscapes with a framework of geometric purity. This emphasizes the profoundly static nature of his compositions. However, the fragile peace induced by this static quality only seems to exist as a lure to give us a false sense of calm.

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[5] Hughes, Robert: " The Threshold of Liberty" Shock of the New British Broadcasting Corportion, London. 1980 p 217

This deception is dissolved by a tension created through distortions of perspective. De Chirico's manipulations put the viewer in an unsure position, whereby his gaze is caught in a labyrinth of multi-dimensional space. The stability and order of architectural structure is virtually negated. The tilted plane of the ground contradicts the logic of a building's gravity. Buildings look as though they should slide from their foundations and only survive by their pinning within the geometric order of the picture plane. Space is either compressed or unnaturally stretched. Vanishing points exist, but arbitrarily placed on the surface of the painting. Space becomes a dynamic entity charged with hypnotic power. Reality exists in a state of tension, fluctuating between order and instability.

To some extent the mystery found in de Chirico's landscapes is created by their uncertainties produced through such visual ambiguities. These ambiguities exist because of the contradictions created between what we expect to see and what de Chirico's representations allow us to see. Our vision expects a certain interpretation of visual information because of the restrictions placed upon us by the contractual agreement written into the accepted and conditional modes of perception. Once these conditions are challenged our ability to decipher visual information is impaired. Consequently, if one doesn't conform to these conventions, the sense of order which we impose on the world becomes unclear. As we have seen, one such law which de Chirico challenges, is a method of observation called perspective. For the system of perspective

to operate, it depends on a static viewpoint of a single observer. In this position the viewer conforms to a co-ordinate system that connects him to space through proportional depth. Proportional depth allows the viewer to measure his "here" against the world out "there". It is a system of reference that enables us to function in the physical world. Manipulation of this system disrupts the viewer's relationship to space, our co-ordinates of reference become ambiguous. The viewer may feel uncertain about his position because his relationship to space becomes ambiguous. In extreme cases he or she may suffer the feeling of vertigo.

De Chirico's manipulations of perspective causes beguiling disjunctions of space, the mysterious nature of the dimensions of his painted worlds seem unreal. The visual ambiguities of these unreal worlds create an emotional disturbance, an anxiety which comes from the loss of security that unified perspective would otherwise give; an anxiety, but also an uneasy sense of wonder with the discovery that there is still something magical left in the world. If we feel some alarm when we look at a de Chirico painting, it's because we are encountering that which is unexpected. De Chirico's scenes are composed of actions sealed off from each other: sealed in fragments of time. This fragmentation creates an odd sort of drama to the scene, one in which we feel an event might be about to happen, but which we must admit will not occur. We are put in a state of suspense, where things hang in the balance. Our desire to know the motive and outcome will not be fulfilled. De Chirico leaves us to ponder the enigmatic

signs of his landscapes: such signs as looming shadows, windows which proffer blind stairs and faceless mannequins *"...are grouped following a clearly meditated order, turning towards us as if they had something to say, a message to transmit".*[6]

But what is transmitted is silence. This is not a silence that refers to the absence of something, but rather to a defective presence of something. It's not the absolute silence of absence but a fragile poignant silence. It is not the refusal to speak but the inability to speak, which arises from a state of suspense. This suspenseful silence challenges us to respond. But what response is appropriate? It expects something from us. Susan Sontag speaks about this response to the challenge of silence;

> *"...something is always happening that makes a sound (Cage has described how, even in a soundless chamber, he still heard two things: his heart beat and the coursing of the blood in his head). Similarly, there is no such thing as empty space. As long as a human eye is looking, there is always something to see. To look at something which is empty is still to be looking, still to be seeing something - if only the ghosts of one's own expectations. "* [7]

What do we see in de Chirico's "emptiness" ? Strict linear and cold, smooth, metallic surfaced construction combine with multi-dimensional and distorted space to create an airless

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[6] Marcel, Jean:The History of Surrealististic Painting, trans. Simon Watson Taylor, Weidenfeild and Nicolson, London. 1960. p47

[7] Sontag, Susan:"The Aesthetics of Silence", in Sontag, Styles of Radical Will, New York. p10

climate. Human existence appears almost impossible. De Chirico's landscapes appear as lonely desolate places, virtually uninhabited except for the occasional distant figure. There is brooding stillness, like that before a violent storm. A psychological weight of impending doom is hanging in this atmosphere. Time seems frozen, there is a state of urgency. As a result the onlooker is left feeling uneasy. One doesn't only feel this with the onset of a storm. The uneasiness we feel with an onset of a storm arises from our expectations, of a violent affect about to happen. While there is an element of this in de Chirico's scenes, it doesn't entirely account for the emotional mood his scenes create. There is something unfathomable and uneventful in de Chirico's world, which is not unlike the silent depth below the ocean's surface. We are overwhelmed by the ocean's imagined immensity and also disturbed by the unknown elements lurking in its dark and myserious depths. In these circumstances, the spectator senses the negative presence of something . This thing always stays at a distance no matter how close we think we may get. We feel its aura but cannot speak or describe its affect. *"The effect is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign"* [8] This situation evokes notions of the ineffable. The silence which falls into this gap resulting from the incapacity to name, alludes to a vague zone, which lies beyond the certainty of reasoned meaning.

The extent to which de Chirico is involved with the notion of the ineffable can be described more specifically as a

[8] Barthes, Roland: "Camera Lucida", trans. Howard R. Fontana Paperbacks, London. 1984. p51

transition from a knowable world to an unknowable one. In this transaction, silence becomes an element in dialogue: a form of speech which gives gesture to the existence of other worldly dimensions. Such gestures give authority to de Chirico's metaphysical assumptions. As reflected by Lotz;

> *"behind the tranquil surface of matter, behind it's rigid and regular habits of behaviour, we are forced to see the glow of a hidden spiritual activity."*[9]

This luminous sight transcends what is concrete and definite and suggests a world which may promise the infinite and the absolute.

De Chirico's metaphysical inquiry attempts to provide spiritual release by testing existing limits of the human condition. This inquiry focuses its attention on an attempt to break away from the constraints of the concrete world. The conditions of the concrete are defined by definite structural boundaries. The geometry of this world sets up barriers which confine and direct. Movement throughout its space is determined by the existing organizational system. This system is represented as a complex set of codes and conventions. These codes and conventions *"impose a grid of the permissable upon the field of the possible."*[10]

De Chirico directs his challenge to the concrete by attacking its structural framework. This challenge is initiated at the

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[9] Lotze, Rudolf Herman: quoted in "The Sources of Metaphsyical Painting in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche", Art International Feb-March. 1983. p54

[10] Burgin, Victor: "The End of Art Theory", The End of Art Theory, Macmillan Education Ltd, London. 1986. p158

point where paradoxes of perception are used to produce the enigmatic circumstances of his landscapes.These paradoxes attack the structural framework of the concrete by underpinning the codes and conventions which support its representional language.

Normal usage of language, with its dependence on symbolic order, communicates meaning by a system of signification which unites signifier and signfied. This system guarantees all the codes and conventions of representational language. De Chirico disrupts this system by breaking up the continuity of physical and conceptual space. This disruption is carried out by prising open cracks that form fault lines in the apparent seemless surface appearance of the concrete. These cracks don't allow signifiers and signfied to align. Any message transmitted from this cracked space arrives in unrecognizable codes. Consequently, this indicates a disjuncture or rupture where language loses its affectiveness to communicate. Language is lulled into an inert state. Simultaneously the crack fills up with silence and by doing so, inspires our imagination to lead us down its cavity away from the concrete, towards a world of many dimensions, a world of the infinite.

Silence's power to suggest the existence of this world is illustrated by the fact that speech closes, it fills the gaps, while silence does the opposite by suggesting an opening.In other words, in the world of the concrete, language constructs an order with defined structural dimensions. The sounds of

this language echo, giving form to the space of the world, giving co-ordinates which define scale and size. In the absence of sound, silence makes the dimensions of the metaphysical world seem infinite. The immensity of this silent world takes complete hold of us.

> *"There is nothing like silence to suggest a sense of unlimited space. Sounds lend colour to space, and confers a sort of sound body upon it. But absence of sound leaves it quite pure and in the silence, we are seized with the sensation of something vast and deep and boundless."* [11]

This investigation into the enigmatic nature of de Chirico's landscapes has lead me to the discovery of a silent, cracked space. Contained within this space is the inspiration to dream; here we drift in the space of fantasy no longer connected to the earths gravity. The trajectory of this drift transports de Chirico to a metaphysical vantage point; a position from where the world can be envisaged in new light.

The ambiguous nature of my photographic landscapes induces in the viewer a feeling of bewilderment. Out of this particular emotional state there grows a sense of the extraordinary.

Through mystery and ambiguity de Chirico challenges the existing limits of the human condition Without mystery and ambiguity the challenge slows. As Meaghan Morris reflects through Baudrillard;

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[11] Bossco, Henri: quoted in "The Poetics of Space" trans, Maria Jolas, Beacon Press, London. p43

"...the terror of the all-too- visible, the voracity, the total promiscuity, the pure concupiscence of the gaze; the violence of a civilisation without secrets. A fatal condition: "if all enigmas are resolved, the stars go out ... if all illusion is given up to transparency, then the heavens become indifferent to the earth".[12]

[12] Morris, Meaghan: "Room 101 or a Few Worst Things in the World", Seduced and Abandoned, ed. Andre Frankovits, Stonemoss Services, Sydney. 1984 p75

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