

A Semiotic Investigation of the Digital: What Lies Beyond the Pixel

This thesis is presented for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main focus work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the implications of new photographic and computer technologies that offer the transduction of modalities. The fundamental argument, here, is that such technologies ‘change’ the process of sense-making resulting in a new asymmetry that informs the visual language of the creative work.

I argue that the processes of language analysis can assist us in the interpretation of multimodal texts and that a digital illustration can be analysed via the theoretical framework ‘built’ from the first linguistic concepts such as those to be found in the texts of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Locke. A semiotic method applied in the context of digital artwork, and developed from the linguistic-semiotic stand-point, is well suited for an examination of the *intermodal relations* (the relations between layers in a multi-layered image file). By examining the layered structures of my images I demonstrate the evident similarity between the disconnection of the components of the linguistic sign on the one hand and the visual sign on the other hand. The analysis of a digital image, especially created for this purpose, is expanded by an investigation that offers a partial reading from an insider’s point of view that involves an image being analysed on the conceptual level. This involves the examination of the *primary internal relations* between the layers of the image, and on the level of expression, the examination of the *primary external relations* between the layers and the narrative of the image.

In its deployment the semiotic method I use investigates the existence and the conditions of a space in which the individual readings from the perspective of outsider and insider might be conceptualized and presents a partial reading derived from an outsider’s interpretation of the same image. After comparing both readings I arrive at the conclusion that the different texts’ modalities have an impact on the degree of the sign components’ disconnection. My conclusion, then, is that an outsider who cannot view the image in its multimodal form assigns sign components in a higher degree of disconnection than an insider who has access to the *intermodal relations* of the image file.

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