'after Titian':

Intertextuality and Deconstruction in an Early Painting by Colin McCahon

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Texts deconstruct *themselves* by themselves, it is enough to recall it or recall them to oneself.
Jacques Derrida, *Memories for Paul de Man*, 1983, Memoria for Paul de Man,
The Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine,
Columbia University Press, New York, 1986

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Any discourse must wrestle with the problem of its beginning and consequently the problem of its origin and of origins in general. Every textual beginning of necessity establishes its non-primary originality by inscribing a principle of repetition, which does not privilege any anteriority, since all beginning does — as Edward Said has so eloquently and complexly argued in *Beginnings*[1] — is repeat itself as beginning. A discourse, it has been argued, is intelligible only in terms of a prior body of discourse which it implicitly or explicitly takes up, prolongs, cites, refutes, transforms, and which it uses as a foundation. Thus a fundamental element of the internal coherence of any text consists in the organisation of systems of recall of other texts and without this 'intertextuality' a text would simply be unintelligible. And, in this sense, the meaning and structure of a text is grasped only through its relation to others of which it may be the realisation, transformation, or transgression. Another way of expressing this is to say that every text stages a pre-text which acts as, or takes the place of, that which the text is supposed to represent or repeat. The use of the term 'intertextuality' to cover these features has become widely accepted in literary circles but, as Jonathan Culler has recently complained, specific analyses dedicated to intertextuality have essentially ended up being a studies of what more traditional stylistic criticism defined as 'sources' of a text and as such connected with the evolution of literary styles.[2] Julia Kristeva who first coined the term in 1966 has more recently re-emphasised that 'intertextuality' must not be seen as an accumulation of influences and textual sources, but is concerned with the complex transformation and assimilation of various texts:

> The term intertextuality denotes [the] transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources', we prefer the term transposition because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic — of

1. Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, New York: Basic Books, 1975.
2. Jonathan Culler, 'Presupposition and Intertextuality' in his *The Pursuit of Signs. Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981; pp. 100-118.

opp. Titian (Tiziano Vecelli),
The Entombment, 1559
oil on canvas 1370 x 1750 mm
The Prado, Museum

3. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, translated by Margaret Waller with an Introduction by Leon Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974; pp. 59-60.

4. Meyer Schapiro, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text*, The Hague: Mouton, 1973.

5. Jacques Derrida, 'Restitutions of the truth in pointing [pointure]' in *The Truth in Painting*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press; 1987: pp. 255-382. The French original is to be found in *La vérité en peinture*, Paris: Flammarion, 1978.

enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its 'place' of enunciation and its denoted 'object' are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated.[3]

It is clear, then, that the fluid metaphors of 'influence' and 'source' are better replaced by the textural network of differential relations contained in the associations of 'texture' and 'weave', but it yet remains to be seen if Kristeva's preference for 'transposition' reflects a more accurate description of such a complex process.

With reference to painting and paintings as texts, it is curious that the phenomenon of intertextuality appears to constitute the nucleus of the research of the traditional disciplines. Art History, until recently, has almost always proceeded by attempting to identify a painting's intertext(s) through the bugbear of influence or by examining relationships with other works, other texts, of the same artist in terms of a chain of cause and effect. What the art historian has not managed to arrive at is the systematic way in which the intertext is manifested in a painting. This is so because until now the connections made have always been singular: such an object can be found in such a preceding or successive relationship and is to be considered as cause or effect of these ulterior or preceding instances of verification; or the links have merely been catalogued as the peculiar types of borrowings of a particular artist. A second problem concerns the very nature of the textual segments selected as transferred. Iconologists spoke of a 'transmigration of motifs', by which they meant the transfer of a represented object from one work to another. The problem with such a theory of contamination of images is the problem of the original and originary text. Meyer Schapiro has argued that Renaissance painting has consistently drawn its motifs from literary texts and that effective response means reading in the painting the story that the painting has attempted to 'translate' into visual images.[4] Schapiro's discussion, however, still favours historical-causal relationships in its reductive search for literary sources of images, rather than shifting attention to the communicative function of their descriptive metalanguage. It is not by chance that the philosopher Jacques Derrida has recently deconstructed a text by Schapiro on Heidegger's interpretation of a painting by Van Gogh, showing how the traditional desire for attribution of classical art history leads Schapiro to commit gross acts of visual misinterpretation (to see in that painting a pair of shoes where in fact there are only two left ones).[5] From the opposite direction to production of images, but still from the point of view of semiotics, it is possible to argue, like Jean-Louis Schefer, that a painting has no other referent or *a priori* structure than the text that finally expresses it, the textual structures of which it is the system. Accordingly to describe a painting, to create what perhaps we should call its 'post-text', is to constitute it. For Schefer the text does not duplicate the painting, it recovers the secret of its generation, and criticism is merely the

writing out of the painting's writing.[6]

In order to verify the specific modes of the pictorial manifestation of intertextuality in an attempt to demonstrate that the phenomenon of intertextuality is not simply a network of sources, more or less explicitly recalled by the painting, but is more fundamentally an architectural principle of the painting as text, it may be fruitful to turn to some recent elucidations of literary criticism.[7] From the position of textual production and an individual author's more or less explicit use of parody, borrowing or revolt, Harold Bloom has advanced a sophisticated psychological interpretation of literary evolution where the intertextual is compressed to a relationship between two individuals − a relationship that is seen in psychoanalytical terms as analogous to that of father and son.[8] Poets, according to Bloom, suffer from an Oedipal 'anxiety of influence', a complex which leads a writer to alter the literary models which she or he reacts to by a variety of rhetorical figures: *clinamen* prolonging the work of one's predecessor or bringing it to its final point or conclusion; *tessera* creating something new but something which calls for a reconsideration of the predecessor's work as a whole; *kenosis* the radical break with the 'Father'; *askesis* purging oneself of the common knowledge that one shares with a predecessor; *apophrades* creating a work that seems paradoxically the source not the result of the previous work (works of literature are never mere memories as Borges says, writers rewrite what they remember and in so doing they paradoxically influence their predecessors). In Bloom's terms literary history is to be viewed as no more than a 'family romance', with each new generation anxious and active to establish its originality on the poetic battlefield of tradition. But this posing of the problematic of intertextuality in terms of the history of the producer of the text, the shifting of emphasis from texts to persons, means that as a theory it is incapable of handling intertextual phenomena on any sophisticated level, since it seeks to uncover an order for intertextuality exclusively in its conditions of production rather than its forms.

On the other hand, forms of intertextuality are exactly what have been examined in detail by the French critic Gérard Genette in an attempt to obtain a functioning and operational model of citation.[9] Genette has proposed the following five textual relationships for which he suggests the name 'transtextuality': *intertextuality* a reduction of the original blanket use of the term but still containing the variants of quotation, plagiarism and allusion; *paratextuality* the apparatus that surrounds the text including titles, subtitles, prefaces, postfaces, forewords, marginal notes, footnotes, epigraphs, illustrations, errata, bibliographies, signatures (including autographs and allographs), even the dustjacket and wrapping in which a text may arrive; *metatextuality* the group of metalinguistic indications that forms the critical relation par excellence in the relation of commentary that links one text to another text about which it speaks but may not necessarily cite or even nominate; *architextuality* the genre competence that is instituted in the text; *hypertextuality* the

6. Jean-Louis Schefer, *Scénographie d'un tableau*, Paris: Seuil, 1969.

7. For a review of current positions see Laurent Jenny, 'The Strategy of Form' in *French Literary Theory Today. A Reader*, edited by Tzvetan Todorov and translated by R. Carter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1982; pp. 34-63; and Jonathan Culler 'Presupposition and Intertextuality', op. cit.

8. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

9. Gérard Genette, *Introduction à l'architexte*, Paris: Seuil, 1979: *Palimpsestes*, Paris: Seuil, 1982: and *Seuils*, Paris: Seuil, 1987. In this later work the paratext is further divided into 'peritext' and 'epitext'.

102

10. Quoted in Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*; p. 102.
11. Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, translated by Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, and Eduardo Cadava, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986; pp. 123 ff.
12. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979; p. 205 and passim.

typological mechanisms of transfer and the relationship that links text B (the hypertext) with the anterior text A (the hypotext). Despite the usefulness and the rigour of Genette's typology, it may well be that the semiotic mechanisms of intertextual recall cannot be effectively studied by empirical methods and do not accurately reflect levels of coherence and cohesion in a work, even if the employment of these in analysis at a certain stage may be desirable. This is so because the mechanisms of repetition extend to the entire text and their modalities are differential. Each element is a mark, but in every new discourse it is *re*marked through its rhetorical relationship with other terms. On another level this is, of course, tantamount to saying that every critical interpretation of a text must likewise treat that text in some manner as an *intertext*. It is also necessary to add that activating the intertextuality of a text, in establishing the totality of implicit codes and anonymous practices, does not result in a sense or a picture of unity, but rather a textual iridescence of infinite reflexes in what Roland Barthes has described as 'a mirage of citations'.[10]

A more fruitful way of proceeding, I believe, would be to take intertextuality as embodying what the very process of deconstruction seems to do to a text: particularly in its fragmentation of texts into components, codes, discursive practices and the way it exposes repetition as the productive mechanism of a text. Deconstruction confers a new kind of readability on contradictions, obscurities, ambiguities, ellipses, discontinuities and all play of the signifier. A deconstructive reading is an attempt to show how conspicuously foregrounded statements in a text are systematically related to discordant signifying elements that a text has thrown into its shadows or margins: it is an attempt to recover what is lost and to analyse what happens when a text is read solely in function of intentionality, meaningfulness and representativity. This would be to stress the relationship between viewing and painting, reading and writing, both at the moment of composition and at the moment of reception. The real value of this suggestion lies in the fact that deconstruction is not a technique applied to the text from the outside, nor is it a tool brought to bear on a confused or mystified text by an all-seeing critical subject. Texts are constituted by their own deconstruction which has, as Derrida would say, 'always already begun'.[11] Any given monological reading of a text is undermined within the text itself, and any reading which simply latches onto the overt content of the text's assertions, or else onto the rhetorical mode of those assertions, will be a partial reading, and will remain short of what is at work in the text. It is interesting then, despite reservations about the reduction of intertextuality to source-seeking, to see how the reading of allusions in any text will force a critic to underline the citational nature of that text and in so doing put emphasis on the textuality of the text and not its referentiality. As such it has the distinct advantage of being as close as possible to the reading that every text gives of itself, of unveiling the fact that every text is as Paul de Man said 'the allegory of its own reading'.[12]

The consequences of any critical reading as an allegory of reading, following de Man's deconstructive practices, point to the fundamental illegibility of the reading which each text gives of itself, as it unfolds through a sequence of interpretative moves which both strain towards a sense of ultimate understanding and, at the same time, confess the impossible nature of any such achievement. What the text says incessantly about itself is only the fundamental illegibility of its reading of itself which the critical text then takes as its origin. In this manner the textual scene, founded upon the referentiality of the text, the supposition of an author, of a narration and a reader, is demystified completely. In addition, by seeing interpretation itself as a fiction-making activity, deconstruction has displaced the authoritative metalinguistic status of textual interpretation and exemplified theory's own undecidable status *vis-a-vis* the text. The necessarily intertextual nature of any utterance reflects the difficulty of describing intertextuality since, as Barthes states: 'The *I* that approaches the text is already a plurality of other texts, of infinite or, more precisely, lost codes (whose origins are lost).'[13]

Now let us return to the traditions of art history to examine a painting based upon a painting with these comments on 'textual effects' in mind. The painting I have in mind is an early religious work by Colin McCahon, entitled *Entombment, after Titian* painted in 1947 and which may be found today in the National Art Gallery, Wellington. McCahon's painting, as its title indicates, consciously uses as its foundation the Venetian Renaissance painter Titian's *Entombment* of 1559, which is today found in the Prado, Madrid, and possibly a similar and later version of the same subject of c. 1566 also in the Prado. In biographical terms it reflects McCahon's personal response to his exposure about 1946 to various Quattro and Cinquecento Italian painters and paintings then available to him in reproduction for the first time.[14] It also relates directly to several versions, drawings, watercolours and oils of a similar subject McCahon completed at the same time, in particular a painting of the same title and the same year in a private collection in Christchurch described by McCahon in 1974 as 'the very first of them',[15] and more generically to works such as *Christ Taken from the Cross* and *The Marys at the Tomb*. But let us separate for the moment questions concerning the internal development of McCahon's oeuvre from a direct response to specific paintings, in order to concentrate on the textual effects of McCahon's allusion. There are three that may be significantly highlighted:

First of all, the underlying and the strong effect of the direct allusion to the work by Titian is the fact that this painting by McCahon proposes to its viewer the moment of painting as one of a game of difference and repetition. Through a definite allusion specified in the title, and made manifest in the textual machine,

13. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, translated by Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974; p. 10.
14. Both paintings by Titian are illustrated on facing pages in the 1936 German edition of H. Tietze's *Titian*, Phaidon Press, a copy of which McCahon possesssed, cf Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*, Wellington: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1984; p. 218, note 4.2.
15. Quoted in Luit Beiringa, *McCahon 'Religious' Works*, Palmerston North: Manawatu Art Gallery, 1975; p. 53.

overleaf
1. Entombment (after Titian), 1946
   oil on canvas
   5150 x 6350 mm

2. The entombment (after Titian) 1947
   oil on cardboard
   520 x 650 mm
   National Art Gallery, Wellington
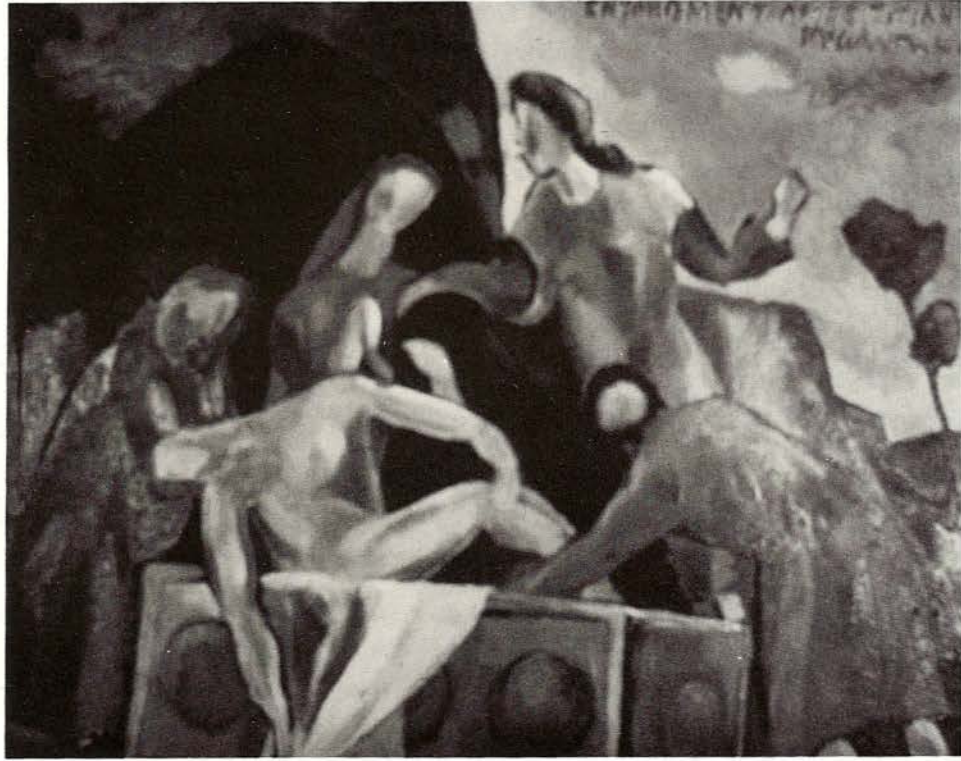
intertextuality is proposed as the ultimate subject matter of painting, not only this painting. The painting is not only a source of meaning, but is also an open re-source of meanings. This is also heightened extra-textually by the many versions of this painting around it, such that the reading of each individual painting is synecdochic and the total meaning must be larger than that which each separate painting conveys. McCahon's painting can be taken, then, as emblematic of a certain ontology of painting, and its play of textual difference and repetition may be mapped as follows:
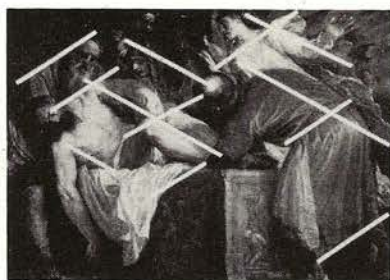
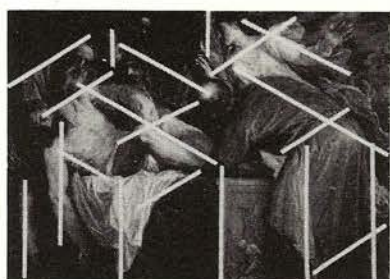| Entombment (Titian)	Entombment (Priv. Coll.)	Entombment (Nat. Gal.)
Central compositional unit of six figures, from left to right around the sarcophagus containing Christ: Joseph of Arimathaea, Virgin Mary, John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus.	Central compositional unit of six figures from left to right around the sarcophagus containing Christ: Joseph of Arimathaea, Mary of Bethany(?), Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus.	Compositional unit of five figures to the left of centre, from left to right: Mary of Bethany(?), Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus and Christ in open tomb.
Figures make up over two-thirds of the total compositional value.	Figures are less than half of the total compositional value.	Figures cover approximately one third of composition.
Joseph of Arimathaea: garments of yellow ochre and white, a distinguishing beard, supporting the body of Christ from behind. Purported to be a self-portrait of Titian.	Joseph of Arimathaea: red garment with a distinguishing beard and a similar gesture to the figure in Titian's painting.	Absent.
Virgin Mary: dressed in a dark blue garment, supports Christ's arm but also leans forward perhaps to kiss Christ.	Virgin Mary: dark blue-black garments, more deliberately bent down over Christ's arm.	Virgin Mary: dressed in blue with white cowl, not touching Christ's body.
John the Evangelist: an indistinct figure dressed in red in the background with only his face visible.	A female figure (Mary of Bethany?) in an analogous position with hands clasped in prayer, dressed in light-blue.	A female figure (Mary of Bethany?) dressed in red.
Mary Magdalene: Dressed in white with arms thrown up in a dramatic gesture of grief and placed behind the Virgin.	Mary Magdalene: Dressed in white and blue garments and hands repeat the gesture of Titian's figure. This figure dominates in composition.	Mary Magdalene: a dominant figure dressed in blue, placed behind the Virgin whose back her arms touch.
Nicodemus: dressed in red, leaning into sarcophagus to place Christ's feet. Bald patch is a distinguishing feature.	Nicodemus: Dressed in yellow ochre and leaning into the sarco-phagus.	Nicodemus: Kneeling at rear of sarcophagus on right with head bent down and bald patch recognisable.
Christ: the following features are noticeable: the unsupported head, the curve of the left arm	Christ: the curves of the arms are copied from Titian and accent-uated, the legs are not so visible,	Christ: the curve of the arms and the angularity of the legs is particularly pronounced.

16. Ibid, p. 1.

taken round through the top of the torso, the angularity of the legs bent at the knee.	the body is slighter.	
The gaze of all the figures except John the Evangelist in this composition is directed down towards Christ.	There is no delineation of eyes and facial features but a similar direction of gaze as in Titian results from the direction of the heads.	The direction of the gaze is down towards Christ except for the displaced figure of Nicodemus.
Gestures and interaction of hands an important compositional element.	Gestures significant for the overall composition.	Gestures and position of hands of relatively little importance.
The background of Titian's composition is clearly divided in two with the division further emphasised by being carried down through the edge of the sarcophagus. Features include the stone face of the burial cave on the left, clouds and distant hills on the right with a distinct tree and in the immediate foreground vegetation of grasses and small plants.	Here the landscape is divided almost evenly and the arch of the burial cave is more defined, as are the outlines of the hills that follow the outline of the figures, the solitary tree on the right is the only specific example of vegetation.	The natural background is much more extensive than in the other compositions although there is no apparent rock face or cave. The three crosses and the ladder recall the earlier moment of deposition. The forms of the hills are closely repeated in the human figures. There is no detail of vegetation.
The orientation of the sarcophagus is a dominant element. The angle of view is almost that of eye-level level with the open top. The scenes in the grisaille represent 'The Sacrifice of Isaac' and 'Cain Slaying Abel' and are examples of prefigurations of the death of Christ.	The sarcophagus is presented complete and from a similar angle and a circular pattern has been added to suggest the grisaille scenes of Titian.	The angle of view of the open sarcophagus is from above and to the left and the shape is a semicircle. There is no obvious decoration.
Signed on tablet in centre in gold letters: TITIANUS VECELLIUS AEQUES CAES.	Title, signature and date in upper right corner.	Inscription (partial title) date and signature.

Let us begin by considering some of the traditional readings and the longstanding acceptance of what constitutes McCahon's differential practice in these paintings. Previous discussions have emphasised the reductive, subtractive mode of composition on McCahon's part. Luit Beiringa, for example, who has commented in some detail on the early religious paintings, suggests that McCahon was 'less concerned with visual exactitude than with the meaning behind [the images]' and that his ultimate aim was 'to reconcile those religious symbols of an especially European derivation with his New Zealand setting'. To do this the borrowed images were 'reconstituted' by McCahon and 'simplified to regain direct impact and avoid obscurity'.[16] More recently, Gordon Brown has proposed that 'McCahon has

17. Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*, p. 37.
18. Ibid, p. 38.

stripped away the niceties of late Renaissance style so that the only strong connection to remain is the intense feeling for the common theme implicit in each painting' and that the depiction of 'human activity' is 'kept to a minimum'.[17] Brown, too, wishes to see historical and geographical reconciliation as the impetus for this: 'One of McCahon's deepest desires was to make the events of the divine drama real to New Zealanders and the contemporary situation in which they found themselves.'[18]

What I want to argue is that although this view may respond to some of the manifest features of the painting, it does so in terms that misapprehend the foregrounded play of textual similarity and difference. These assumptions do not recognise that the pictorial composition of McCahon's *Entombment* in the National Gallery (NG) is a great deal more complex than appeals to the notion of subtractive composition would have us believe. Observe, to begin with, the tangle of the figural qualities of these paintings. It is clear, with respect to the elements of figure in Titian's 1559 composition (T), that in the Christchurch *Entombment* (PC) and NG we have a visible reduction (a subtraction) in compositional value and in their number and also some misreadings of their identity (a point I wish to return to shortly). What is also clear, however, is how the spatial structure of each painting is constituted by the disposition of the figures included. The figures may be seen as comprising a vigorous network of lines, including a number of axes that have been arranged so as to reflect each other back and forth across the picture surface, building up a central triangular compositional unit.

Let us take T first, there are a clear number of parallel lines that bisect the composition diagonally: from left to right – Christ's body, left arm and leg; the forward tilt of Nicodemus' body; Mary Magdalene's outstretched arms; the line of the Virgin Mary's body and John the Evangelist's clasped hands; from right to left – Christ's knees; the winding sheet; Joseph of Arimithaea's back. One can immediately see, as well, an analogous but counterpointed series of vertical lines: Christ's right arm; Joseph of Arimathaea's leg; the projecting corner of the tomb; the line of the lighter-coloured fold of Nicodemus' garment. With PC the central triangular aspect of the composition is tightened and echoed in the arched cave in the background which could also be seen as a sort of displaced shadow of the central group. Again, the axes of contrast are clear: for the diagonals, from left to right, we have – Christ's right arm, the line of Mary Magdalene's body, Nicodemus' back, the leaning tree and the outline of the background hills; from right to left – the left side of the cave arch, the Virgin Mary's body, Nicodemus' left arm, the upper part of Joseph of Arimathaea's body. Strong vertical and horizontal lines are clearly discernible as well: for the verticals – the cliff line, the protruding corner and left edge of the tomb, the side of Christ's body and the folds of the winding sheet; for the horizontals – the line across the top of the sepulchre and that across the top of Christ's body. In NG there is clearly a reduction in the

significance of gesture as the figures have a static or semaphoric quality, but the function of these elements is taken over by the lines of the hills in the background: the verticals are strongly represented by the three crosses; the diagonals left to right by the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene as well as Christ and the hills on the viewer's right; the diagonals from right to left by Mary of Bethany, the ladder, winding sheet and the hills on the left. In many respects a tighter more complex integration of figures is achieved here. The triangular basis of composition, for example, is emphasised by the three crosses which provide encompassing lines of connection. With their reduction in number and the elimination of centripetal gestures to produce more static elements, the figures may be said to be reflected in and to some extent comprehended by the background. The composition of NG emerges from our discussion as closer to that of T than seemed possible, and if we go on to compare certain aspects of how the backgrounds in these three paintings are rendered, the connection is seen to be more proximate still.

One of the most striking features of Titian's *Entombment* is the syncope or break between the two halves of the composition: the left-hand side containing the dark indistinct cliff and carrying literally the greatest weight of the composition with the greatest number of mourners; the right-hand being a lighter, more open landscape vista, and appearing more volatile in its figural aspects. This sense of division is further emphasised by the dividing line of the protruding tomb edge. As well, both the hazy atmosphere of the background and the oblique angle of the tomb, with its dramatic disposition of surrounding figures rather like a stage set, serve to foreground the action. In PC the division of the background into two elements remains clear as do the stage set attributes as the angle of view has only slightly shifted. There is, however, more attempt to define the background and to relate it to the foregrounded figures: the outline of the hills on the right follows the line of the figures, the colour of Joseph of Arimathaea's garment is mirrored on the opposite side in the background hills, the outline of the burial cave is much more pronounced. In NG the angle of the spectator's point of view has changed significantly, now being directed down from above on a tomb whose interior is visible. The now rounded tomb neutralises the function of the foregrounding of the tomb corner in T and PC as does the more extensive background of this composition as a whole. It is still possible to observe the syncopation in two of the composition: the central vertical cross divides into complex left and a simple, clear right elements, and one could speak more accurately of the figures being comprehended by the landscape, in both senses of the word.

What is here briefly traced in the passage T/PC/NG, in other words, is a sort of constant flickering of presence and absence where meaning is scattered along the whole chain of signifiers as something suspended, having been or still to come. Such a complex process does little to support the traditional view that the stripped down effect of the minimal is to emphasise the simplicity and self-sufficiency as well

110

19. Stephen Bann, 'The Mythical
Conception is the Name:
Titles and Names in Modern
and Post-Modern Painting',
Word & Image, Vol. 1 no. 2,
April-June 1985; p. 182.

as the pictorial and ontological completeness of NG.

Secondly, the textual allusion has the status of an explicit mark of the intention of the painter. The painting as a text declares its own complete control of the textual scene in the selection of model spectator as captive of the authority of the painter as author. The explicit allusion of the title functions internally in the text to declare and convince that the author controls the process of intertextuality and dissemination — a process which in reality however at least partially escapes him. McCahon's simultaneous dependence on and disengagement from the Renaissance tradition are highlighted in those elements that seem clearly to respond to each other and therefore to play with allusion. The allusion proves the dependence of one painting upon the other and, at the same time, the desire of the alluding text to conceal, or at least make enigmatic, such dependence. With this gesture the text reads itself as if it were produced by the reading that it chooses, interprets and reinscribes. Thus it invites its viewer/reader to read in the traces of its omniscient and omnipresent painter/viewer. Titles, in fact, represent one of the most crucial intertextual mechanisms of painting and serve to undercut the values of closure and self-containment traditionally ascribed to individual paintings. McCahon's 'after Titian', with its connotations of 'consequent upon' and 'temporally subsequent', immediately implicates the work in an intertextual matrix that includes both pictorial genre and canonic subject. And such a theoretical self-consciousness can be seen historically as a feature of McCahon's modernism: 'the increased theoretical self-consciousness of modernist painters expressed itself in (among other things) an awareness of the utility of names.'[19]

From a postmodernist critical perspective the curious appending of a visible signature in each of the compositions is to be recognised as a further form of the taking of responsibility. Each signature shifts position — from lower centre to upper right to upper left — and while this shifting in itself may not be important, it does direct our attention to certain correspondences between the form of the signature and the form of the composition as we shall see.

Traditionally a signature attests to the presence to consciousness, and thus the control, of a signifying intention. In the realm of art history the signature has been used restrictively for authorisation and authentication. Similarly, in the realm of banking, which, after all, may not be so distant, for a signature to function it must have an iterable, repeatable form, it must conform to a model and be recognised as repetition to validate a cheque. But if we ask, following Derrida, what enables a signature to function in this way, we find that the real effect of signature is to disperse the subject in the text. By visible signing what is being signaled here is painting as a process of appropriation, a signing for a world, the painter making it his vision or thing, and this is emphasised in all our three cases by the very compositional integration of the proper name. What is at work in the signing of

these three paintings is what Karl Abraham in an early psychoanalytical essay called 'the determining force of names',[20] a notion which Geoffrey Hartman has recently taken up to suggest that every artist may be productively, if unconsciously, in conflict with his or her own name and each text is at once an acknowledging of this and an attempt at mastering it. The immodesty of Titian's reference to his Imperial Knighthood 'AEQUES CAES' ('may you equal Caesar') inscribed on the tablet in his *Entombment* is a clear indication of such a struggle, as is the monumental M of McCahon's later I AM paintings. Compositionally, as we have also seen, all three paintings in question may be considered as a series of interactions between the diagonal and the vertical, perhaps then it is no coincidence that the graphic essence of both painters' signatures (TV for Titian and M for McCahon) express that interaction. It is possible to note a more precise M in the position of the dead Christ's legs in NG? Can we also detect an inscribed C for Colin in the unusual shape of McCahon's tomb, as well as in the curve of Mary of Bethany's arm? If all this seems too far fetched to be taken seriously, I would simply point again to McCahon's signing practice throughout his whole oeuvre, where each visible signature has a definite corporeality of its own and is never merely a simple verbal signifier of authorisation.

There is more. The traces of the proper name in the reproduced signature in the text produce a disappropriation while they appropriate. As Derrida has shown in his reading of the contemporary French poet Francis Ponge, the proper name becomes improper:

> A proper name as mark ought to have no meaning, ought to be a pure reference; but since it is a word caught up in the network of a language, it always begins to signify. Sense contaminates this non-sense that is supposed to be kept aside; the name is not supposed to signify anything, yet it does begin to signify.[21]

The work of proper names in producing a text is always caught up in a play of signs whose signifying ramifications it never masters. Derrida's meditation on signatures points to what lies outside the work, to the distinction between what is intrinsic (text) and extrinsic (intertext), and to the structure of its border. In theory signatures lie outside the work, they frame it, present it, authorise it, but it also seems that to truly frame, mark or sign a work the signature must be within at its very heart, it must be incorporated. So the problematical relation of the inside and the outside of the text is played out in its inscription of proper names. As Derrida notes:

> In the form of the whole name, the inscription of the signature plays strangely with frame, with the border of the text, sometimes inside, sometimes outside, sometimes included, sometimes thrown overboard . . .[22]

And so we arrive at the third effect of direct citation, the first as we have seen is the revelation of the intertextual process as a process of the moment and condition of painting, the second is the contrary effect, the text seems to hide the process of

20. Abraham's essay of 1911, entitled 'On the Determining Force of Names', is mentioned by Geoffrey H. Hartman in his *Saving the Text. Literature/Derrida/Philosophy*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press;1981: pp. 96-117. On signatures in general cf. Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, 'Esquisse d'une typologie', *Revue de l'Art*, 26;1974: pp. 46-56. In another context Tony Green also speaks of McCahon 'finding his signature' in the 1940s, cf. his 'McCahon's Visit to the United States', *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, 3, 1975; p. 20.

21. Jacques Derrida, quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983; p. 192.

22. Jacques Derrida, Signéponge/Signsponge, translated by Richard Rand, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984; p. 120.

23. On colour in Titian cf.
Theodor Hetzer, *Tizian,
Geschichte seiner Farbe,*
Frankfurt, 1935; 1948.

intertextuality and aims to persuade its viewer that it controls every aspect of its own composition. Seeming at once to deny and to explicitly declare its own processes, it desires to show off that it is in complete control of its textual determinations.

The third effect of explicit allusion is that as a gesture it does not proceed in any unitary interpretative line. In fact it both affirms and negates simultaneously the other text, on the one hand the allusive intention declares the domination of the originary text on the other it reflects a deep despair that in its extreme becomes a parody or in its paradoxical form may appear primitive and thus place itself at the beginning of the tradition rather than at its culmination, thus antedating its original and constituting its own model.

These considerations find support in McCahon's handling of the elements of scene and time. With the visible elements of the crucifixion (crosses) and deposition (ladder), and in spite of the 'after Titian', the temporal indications of NG point to a moment *before* that depicted by Titian in his *Entombment*. Another feature that deserves emphasis in this connection is the confusion over or misreading of the identity of the figures in T on McCahon's part. The exchange of Mary of Bethany for John the Evangelist in PC and NG and the absence of Joseph of Arimathaea in NG indicate not only an overall shifting of the balance of gender and the inscription of yet another M by McCahon into his text, but also the temporal dimensions of the event depicted. The presence of three Marys at the tomb points both to a later event and a subsequent composition by McCahon. What is being represented here, then, is not so much a precise historical event but the (hi)story of the very process of representation itself and all the mobile circuit of substitutions, displacements, condensations and recombinations involved. If we wish to find another instance of the complexity of compositional interplay, we may detect this in McCahon's reading of Titian's elaborate and radical use of colour. Since the critical reaction of Vasari, Titian's particular use of colour (*colorito*), as opposed to the accepted graphic values of line and form (*disegno*), have remained a focal centre for discussions of his work which have emphasised his avoidance of well-defined linear contours, as well as the softness and blending of his colours. These practices, it is believed, derive from Titian's working method of blocking in masses of colour at the early working stages of his composition.[23] McCahon in NG has shifted the balance and the figural associations of colour from Titian, emphasising both red and blue which are also repeated as blocks in the landscape background. As well, in contrast to the delicacy and suffusion in Titian, McCahon's linear outlines and contours in NG are strongly defined in black and contribute considerably to the primitive appearance of his work. There is a further instance where the displacing movement of the sign in the dynamics of these paintings postulates a return to the same and in so doing a return to the origin. As has already been noted, the compositional weight of Titian's *Entombment* is given over to the figure, as well as to

drapery and the clothing of the figures in general. Upon close observation of NG, it is clear that this weighting is echoed and recuperated in its very antithesis: McCahon's background hills contain all the multifaceted infolding, creasing and composed disarrangement of the garments of Titian's figures. This apparent landscape is more than landscape and manifests a connection with the original staging of the figure in T. Upon further observation, it could also be speculated that these background hills are suggestive of some kind of painted (canvas) backdrop draped over an uneven set support, thus providing an illusory scene of the text of painting and (inter)texuality itself: 'etymologically the text is a cloth; *textus*, from which text derives means "woven"'.[24] That such possibly different signifying mechanisms are exhibited by these two texts under the aegis of the same or analogous signifiers implies a complex strategy of concealment and exposure, continuity and disruption, loyalty and betrayal. Through such a simultaneous movement of retrieval and obliteration intertextuality 'fabricates' a text, and in this very process the notion of the integrity and self-containedness of the text finds itself disestablished.

At one extreme, McCahon's reading of Titian may be a disrespectful reading, ironical of a venerable and venerated text and its religious and artistic conventions, through the emptying out of historicity and specificity and in allowing the meaning of representation to take precedence. At the other, it may exhibit a kind of 'textual paranoia' − a mortal fear of abandoning the tradition recalled. Or, on the other hand, it may appear 'primitive' and originary both in style and theme and thus place itself at the beginning of a tradition rather than at its culmination. In the specular reading which each painting gives of the other, one painting would repaint the other, but it would be simultaneously painted by the other, hiding the possible repainting beneath the sameness of the repeated signifier. The irony of deconstructive reading consists in the ambivalence that prevents any elimination of one of these extremes, even if the desire of the reader is for a unitary rationalistic reading. The relation between text and intertext involves the repetitive set up and collapse of their difference, and one could say in fact that this indecision of reading is one of the main intertextual resources of the text.

What is interesting to note at this point is that as the painter's reading is dissolved, so, too, the phantasm of the textual scene dissolves. The textual scene is played out according to its own needs. Criticism assumes the same power that the author/painter appropriates by making an allusion, that is by choosing, fixing, establishing the movement of intertextuality. The power, and one might add the despair, of the critic repeats the gesture of the author: in fact by activating and operating the pretext of allusion the critic assumes the role of the implied reader inscribed in the text.

Let me now rapidly try to theorise the principal strands of the argument. The

24. Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text' in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, edited with an introduction by Josué V. Harari, London: Methuen, 1980; p. 76.

114

25. Susan Gubar, 'The 'Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity' in *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, edited by Elaine Showalter, London: Virago Press, 1985; p. 294.

26. Barbara Johnson, 'Les fleurs du mal armé: Some Reflections on Intertextuality' in *Lyric Poetry. Beyond New Criticism*, edited by Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985; pp. 264-280.

27. Paul de Man, 'The Resistance to Theory', in *Yale French Studies, 63*, 1982; pp. 3-20.

author/painter holds together the text, but the text continues to demonstrate its frustrating force, since the presence or absence of the author derives from it at one and the same time. The integrity and intentional self-identity of the individual text are put into question in ways that have nothing to do with concepts of 'originality', 'foundation' and derivateness, since the very notion of self-contained artistic 'property' is shown to be an illusion. When read in terms of its dynamic intertextuality, of intertextuality as deconstruction, the text becomes differently energised, traversed by forces and desires that are invisible or unreadable to those who would see it as homogeneous, a totalisable collection of signifieds. Through this indecision of reading the control and precision of the reading of the author is reduced to illusion and the text can only show through its mechanisms that the reading of itself proposed is in fact the reading of the illegibility of reading.

So it is, too, that the ongoingness of art history is acted out by this text despite an apparent attempt to arrest it. Not in terms of the traditional concerns with the transfer of artistic property, but in terms of misreading or infiltration, that is, violations of property. Not in terms of a comfortable Oedipal reading between father and son in which there is a reciprocal reinforcing relationship, even if it be based upon antagonism, but mining the solidity of the textual scene through a diasporic, disseminating, intertextualising reading. It is also worth noting at this point the similarities between this deconstructive gesture and the ways in which gender and feminist criticism might similarly subvert the underlying traditional paradigms of intertextual theory. Intertextuality has long been viewed as a struggle between fathers and sons, and it would not be exaggerated to say that both art and literary history have viewed it as an exclusively male affair. The presumption of both these histories in the past has been to take issue with gender only when it has become an issue if the author or painter was a woman, and to maintain the ultimate conception of beauty as a female body: naked, immobile and mute. As Susan Gubar remarks in a recent article entitled 'The "Blank Page" and the Issues of Female Creativity': 'When the metaphors of literary [and we could easily extend that to artistic] creativity are filtered through a sexual lens, female sexuality is often identified with textuality'.[25] Intertextuality may radically de-psychologise and deconstruct such male-dominated reifications and we are only beginning to touch here on a new and exciting area that Barbara Johnson has labelled 'the intertextualities of intersexuality'.[26]

What further complicates the issue is that any deconstructive strategy comes to find itself in a position of paradoxical relativity between its own discourse and its own theories as Paul de Man, in an essay entitled 'The Resistance to Theory', has convincingly shown.[27] At the end of his essay de Man observes how deconstructive literary theory is a non-theory or 'the universal theory of the impossibility of theory' to conclude ironically that: 'To the extent however that they are theory, rhetorical readings, like the other kinds, still avoid and resist the reading they

advocate. Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory *is* itself this resistance.' This means, of course, that intertextuality or deconstructive discourse does not support its own control, it declares itself at one and the same time the master and the servant of discourse. But in the sense that its critical practice is capable of undoing and exposing the links in and of a text, exhibiting in such a way its own virtuosity and strength, deconstructive discourse comes to occupy, at least momentarily, all the positions of power (coherence, authority, truth) that it makes vacillate in other texts. In particular it acquires an extreme power of seduction by measuring itself through the force of other texts and by coming out as victor in the confrontation. I say momentarily, for any deconstructive gesture may only wait and want in turn for its moment as victim, for the moment of its deconstruction.