

**FORMULATION OF VISUAL NARRATIVE
READING AND CODING APPROACH
THROUGH CULTURAL WATERFRONT
PORTRAITURE PHOTOGRAPHS
ANALYSIS**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

EDDY IZUWAN BIN MUSA

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FORMULASI KAEDAH PEMBACAAN NARATIF DAN PENGEKODAN MELALUI ANALISIS POTRET FOTOGRAF BUDAYA ‘WATERFRONT’

ABSTRAK

Bidang Naratologi Visual kini hampir secara eksklusif melingkungi imej yang mempunyai pergerakan atau imej secara berurutan walaupun beberapa kajian akademik telah memperdebatkan kemungkinan perluasan bidang tersebut kepada imej tunggal. Sebaliknya, Semiotika Visual kini yang melingkungi imej tunggal cenderung kepada kaedah interpretasi yang dimaklumkan oleh bidang Kebudayaan sahaja dan bukan melalui perspektif Narratologis. Berkenaan dengan di atas, kemampuan narasi imej tunggal juga sedang dipertikaikan dalam akademia. Untuk mengatasi pertikaian ini, tesis ini meliti kemungkinan memperoleh narativisasi dari pembacaan imej tunggal. Ini dilaksanakan melalui formulasi Kaedah Pembacaan Naratif Visual dan Pengekodan daripada peruntukan Naratologi Visual dengan Semiotika Visual dan dilancarkan melalui penyelidikan secara Kualitatif bersama Pengkodean Visual. Melalui kaedah ini, setiap naratif harus diseluruhi dan dimaklumkan secara etnografik berkenaan dunia Protagonis utamanya, dan seharusnya ‘berdasarkan’ bukti data diperoleh dari visual imej. Kaedah ini akan ditunjukkan penggunaanya melalui analisis imej-imej bertampilan masyarakat Waterfront. Tesis ini kemudian menjelaskan bahawa penggunaan kaedah tersebut untuk menganalisis imej telah menghasilkan naratif. Berdasarkan hasil-hasil ini, tesis ini dapat menegaskan bahawa imej tunggal mampu mencapai narativisasi, meskipun dibaca secara kesendiriannya, bebas daripada ditemani atau disertai media lain seperti teks, audio, atau temporaliti.

**FORMULATION OF VISUAL NARRATIVE READING AND CODING
APPROACH THROUGH CULTURAL WATERFRONT PORTRAITURE
PHOTOGRAPHS ANALYSIS**

ABSTRACT

Present Visual Narratology almost exclusively encompass images in motion or sequential images despite some dialectics arguing the possibility of extending to single, still frame images. Inversely, present Visual Semiotics encompassing singular, still frame images share a proclivity for culturally-informed interpretations but do not constitute a Narratological perspective. Alongside these issues, the narrative-ability of single still frame images are also being contested. To address these gaps and inconsistencies, the study examines the possibility of a systematic narrativization from the reading of single, still-frame images. It performs its premise by formulating a systematic Visual Narrative Reading and Coding Approach constituting a simultaneous theoretical appropriation of Visual Narratology and Visual Semiotics deployed through a Qualitative Method Design with Visual Coding. Through this systematic approach, any projected narrative rhetoric output would be comprehensive and ethnographically informed of its key Protagonist's World circumstances while simultaneously be grounded by evidential data deduced from the image's visual signifiers. The approach's deployment is demonstrated on selected photographs featuring Waterfront communities, resulting in systematic narrative rhetoric outputs. This led to its overall findings that assert a systematic narrativization of single still image is possible, despite being read independently from any accompanied mediums such as captions, audio or inferred temporality.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Can standalone still images narrate? This query premises this study's entirety. It examines the possibility of a systematic narrativization¹ of single, still-frame images that are standalone or autonomous from any accompanying medium such as textual inserts, audio or inferred temporality. To perform said examination, this study formulates a systematic approach that simultaneously appropriates, Visual Narratology and Visual Semiotics as a Theoretical Framework, integrated within a Methodology of Qualitative, Visual Coding Design. This systematic approach, devised as Visual Narrative Reading Approach, is deployed onto selected Case Study, sampled photographs depicting Waterfront communities. The systematic approach's deployment in procuring construable narratives thus, responds directly to the above query.

¹ This thesis primarily adheres to the format of 'ise' as oppose to 'ize'. However, there will be exemptions. Its decision to use "narrativization" instead of "narrativisation" is prompted by the overwhelming preference in literary studies for the former. During the years spent in writing this thesis and after numerous internet search, this study has failed to find notable usage of "narrativisation" or "narrativise". On a side note, there will be some words such as "strategize", "emphasize" and "criticize" that this study selects to retain the 'ize' version. This decision is informed by its most recent search in 2021, where the 'ise' counterparts of such words appear to be fading. Some sources have even begun to deem them as being colloquial. However, cited phrases that use either 'ise' or 'ize' will remain to preserve the source autonomy.

Narratology, or the study of narratives, primarily entails the structure and strategic configurations of narratives to project thoughts, ideas, and perceived reality. The discussions derived through Aristotelian perspectives for literature and performing arts were the field's pioneers. Following this, the discussions of Narratology presiding over dramas, journalism and cinematic movies – among the field's present reiterations – were derivative of those two precedent areas. Further specialization from these resulted in Visual Narratology, that is, its theoretical application for visual mediums. However, present Visual Narratology discourses predominantly focus on moving images such as the cinematic medium or sequences of images such as comics. At present, there have been little expansion of Visual Narratology for single, still frame images despite some scholars arguing upon its possibility. Inversely, while most critical analyses of still images at present rely on Visual Semiotic approaches, they do not constitute outputs that are narrative inclined. Admittedly, some Semiotic outputs do share narrative-like tendencies, as a byproduct. Regardless, as these are, in some cases, unintended, they are not informed or structured within Narratology-based purviews. In addition, this study's literature review also discovers the practicality of the still-image medium to function as an autonomous narrative medium being questioned. This notion is inconsistent, as several studies argue conversely, favoring the positive possibility of the medium's narrative autonomy.

As such, given the above limitations and inconsistencies, this study examines the possibility of still image's autonomy in narrativization. It accomplishes this by examining the simultaneous appropriation of Visual Semiotics with interrelationship factors of Narratology's Plot and Character. This appropriation revolves formulating a systematic approach that configures both aforementioned fields for the narrative reading of individual, still visual portraitures. This formulation, will be addressed

henceforth as the Visual Narrative Reading Approach. Once that is attained, the study designs a systematic approach through a Qualitative Method with Case Studies of portraiture photographs depicting Waterfront communities.

This Introduction Chapter explores Visual Narratology and Visual Semiotics pertaining to visual mediums and focus upon issues of still image's narrative-ability. Through these issues, the Chapter will highlight them as research gaps that this study intends to address. Moving forward, as presented earlier; this study requires a subject matter whereby narrative readings are performed through the formulated approach's deployment. In light of this necessity, the chapter segues into a background introduction for Waterfront and its communities. Here, this study presents the account of several discourses that testify the critical need for this culture's narratives to be documented. Therefore, this study contributes by presenting narrative outputs consequent of the formulated approach's deployment on selected waterfront portraitures. Subsequently, the chapter reiterates its problem statement and how they are negotiated through its research objectives, research questions, and scope. In addition, the chapter also argues the appropriate Theoretical Framework and Methodology selected for its discursive processes. Finally, this study defines various key terms, choice usage of certain terminologies over its other similes throughout this study, and provide a general outline of the thesis.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This section provides background on issues within Visual Narratology and Visual Semiotics to establish its foundational theories while locating this study within the trajectory of contemporary discourses. Following which, the background discussions

on Visual Narratology constitute the field's contemporary applications to probe upon the possibility of appropriating them for single, still images. Subsequently, the exploration of contemporary Visual Semiotics constitutes its process mannerisms while reflecting the possibility of narrative-led integration. In addition, the literature review here also points to studies that contest the autonomy of still images to function as a narrative medium. Overall, the discussions of this section cumulatively establish that till present, theories pertaining to the applicability of Visual Narratology and Visual Semiotics on still image narratives remain largely unexplored. This results into the first and second problem statements. Moving forward, this section's exploration of Waterfront Communities and its present documentation reflects the necessity for a narrative-driven reading of portraitures that is also culturally informed. This establishes the third problem.

1.2.1 VISUAL NARRATOLOGY

This subsection serves to familiarise briefly with the main premises of Visual Narratology while explicating its present inapplicability for single, still frame images. The literatures of Visual Narratology² preside dominantly for temporal-based mediums such as the cinema and moving images, or for mediums with inferred temporality such as interconnected images through a series or comic panels. The aforementioned "temporality" generally refers to the "transition from one situation to

² The term "Narratology" is derived from the word 'narrative' and 'logy'; therefore, Narratology simply means "The study of Narratives". More of the origin and usage of this term is explored under the Key Terms section in Chapter 1. Since the word Narratology in itself refers to a field of study; as per the likes of Psychology, Physiology, etc.; this study uses it in its capitalized manner throughout this research. This study will also capitalize words throughout when referring to it as a field, such as Semiotic, Ethnography, etc. In some cases, concepts within fields such as "Plot" and "Character" will be introduced hyphenated and capitalized henceforth.

another takes place” with a discernible passage of time (Verstaten, 2009, p. 13). When temporality confronts “spatiality” within an image, they together allude to the conditions “situated in time and undergoes a transformation caused by non-habitual physical events” and inherently function as “individuated existents” (Weber, 2020, p. 299). Both definitions correspond to narrative requiring “Sequentiality” for narrativization. Individual, still frame images however, do not share this attribute of Sequentiality. In other words, Visual Narratology to date does not sufficiently account for individual still frame images such as paintings or photographs.

The subsection regards to Film Narratology where many possible theories are revealed to be useful to inform this study’s premised query. Among them, Mckee’s (1997) statements regarding Narratology through Literature or Drama alone being insufficient for cinematic depictions, appears pertinent (p. 6). Based on its literature review, this study selects Peter Verstaten’s theories in *Film Narratology 2009* to be the most illuminating. Through this work, he appropriates existing Narratology into depicting visual. Verstaten (2009) asked, “Who or what is being shown and how are they being shown?” in which he answered the ‘how’ relates to cinematography while the “who or what” relates to the *Mise En Scène* (p. 56). Upon closer inspection of Verstaten’s (2009) work, the who or what often reflects the Character’s characterization, while the how refers to the Character’s placement in context to the overall narratives, hence Plot (pp. 14-15). The binary notion relating “Plot” and “Character”³ is an integral aspect of Narratology’s core theories as pioneered by Aristotelian discussions (Aristotle, 335 BCE, pp. 471-473). A more detailed

³ This study capitalizes these core themes: “Plot” and “Character” from its general instances when it regards the word as a notion instead of a regular noun. This is for reasons detailed in the 2nd footnote. However, this distinction does not apply on cited phrases, to maintain the autonomy of the source.

exploration of these two themes is discussed in this study's Chapter 2 Literature Review, as many Narratology theories prevalent throughout this study exist as their contemporary derivatives. Contemporary Cinematography for instance, and by extension, Narratological treatment onto temporal visual mediums appears to adhere to Verstaten's (2009) concepts stated above (p. 56). However, for singular, still frame images, understanding the how and what is still insufficient for narrative due to it being the end product of interpreting the relationship between each signifier presented (Overton, 2015, p. xiii). The interpretative processes of cinema as per Verstaten's body of work rely on the temporality of sequence of images. Singular, still frame images do not share this feature.

Furthermore, Visual Narratology in principle, revolves in understanding the process of critical visual reading and therefore attain configurative control to achieve desired narrative outcomes. Neil Cohn (2012) in *Visual Narrative Structure* performs comprehensive work into ascertaining the configurative aspects of signifier placement in relation to narrative construed (pp. 413-447). On a critical note, in the case of this study, "reading" is not comprehending written linguistic texts, but visual signifiers that formulate a "Graphic Morphology" which induces upon the generation of inferences (Cohn, 2012, pp. 413-417). In other words, while Verstaten's Cinematography theories constitutes the formalistic aspects of a visual aesthetic in narrativization, the reading process to comprehend the graphic morphology consequent of signifiers requires a different theoretical basis.

Given the above's requirement, this study selects Bryan Tillman's work in *Creative Character Design 2011* and K.M. Weiland in *Creative Character Arcs 2016* to be most illuminating. Tillman (2011) summarises, signifiers attributed and

surrounding a character determine viewer's perception and investment for effective narrative to take place (p. 9). In addition, these signifiers generate a graphic morphology that infers the narrative's backstory while any treatment upon the signifiers reflects the narrative's progression (Tillman, 2011, 5-12). Curiously, the premise of Tillman's (2011) work revolves on appropriating Analytical Psychology⁴ Archetypes, into visual, semiotic forms (pp. 4-11). The strategy of appropriating Archetypes into Narratology is a contemporary one, also reflected in a string of other scholars, more of which are elucidated in Chapter 2's Literature Review. As for Weiland (2016), she posits all Characters are bounded by psychological similarities of regular people that are defined by the microcosms of the conditions they live in (p. 41).

Weiland's notion above in particular resonates with two major recurring concepts in the context of this study. It echoes Roland Barthes's (1966) concept of "The World": in that it encompasses the conditions governing the rules within a narrative whereby the reading of such prompts for "Critical Verisimilitude" (pp. 6-7, 35). To simplify both concepts, the actions or reactions of all Characters within a narrative are predisposed to multiple aspects of their World circumstances such as political, ethnographical, economical, and others.

So far, the above summarises the key concepts of how Narratology theories are being constituted to apply through the reading of visual signifiers. However, to date, both the notion of Archetypes and the correlation to World's critical verisimilitude have not been appropriated to attain still image's narrative. Critical analysis

⁴ Analytical Psychology is also sometimes referred as Jungian psychology which forms the school of psychotherapy. This school originates from Carl Gustav Jung. Analytical psychology is not to be confused with psychoanalysis, despite having close resemblance of terminologies. The latter is distinctively a psychotherapeutic system, legacy of Sigmund Freud. While both notions shared certain base theories, they stand fundamentally apart in deeper interpretations.

surrounding photographs specifically, are still, as Walter Benjamin (1931) in *Little History of Photography* claimed: entangled in discourses predicated only in classifying its artistic nature (p. 508). This persisted despite his assertion of the medium's more valuable features as being a precise mechanism that may potentially lead to the discovery of an optical unconscious that rival psychoanalysis (Benjamin, 1931, pp. 508-512). Benjamin's assertions on the nature of photograph's classification entanglements retains till the present. This is evidenced in all 15 chapters in *Photograph and Philosophy: Essay on the Pencil of Nature* edited by Scott Walden (2008) where its authors discuss the nature of Photography as a medium (pp. 1-13). Only one chapter within, *Pictures of King Arthur: Photography and the Power of Narrative* by Gregory Currie (2008) who alluded to the narrative-ability of photographs (p. 281). However, this chapter emphasises on photograph's utility as an alternative medium for representation as oppose to its paintings, and only briefly associated the poignancy of narrativization (Currie, 2008, pp. 265-283). Furthermore, Carville and Lien (2021) reported that multiple, but notable studies of American Photography that intended to uncover the historiography of America altogether appear inadequate, as they focus on celebrity studio photography, evaluating photograph aesthetics, topographies, and classifying photographs by way of genealogy of merits (pp. 11-12). They criticise these works for not performing its stated mandate of America's historiography, and instead only accentuating photographers while striving to establish how they correlate aesthetically (Carville & Lien, 2021, p. 12).

Regardless, there are several scholars who align to Benjamin's claims. His assertion that a photograph exceeds a mere mechanical record does eventually resonate through Berger's and Barthes's writings, prompting both to expand critical analysis within this domain (Berger, 1972, p. 10; Barthes, 1977, pp. 52-60; 1980, p.30).

However, there is little by way of Narratology's spectrum of discussion that could be associated with either approach for this section. Berger (2015) for instance, predicate his reading of images along the cultural-emphasis trajectory of Iconology and Iconography (p. 12; Panofsky, 1939, p. 3). Barthes (1977), on the other hand, contributed to the above through a chapter titled *Structural Analysis of Narratives in Image, Music, Text* (pp. 79-124). However, his discussions there majorly revolve around his contestations and criticisms against Narratology of his time and his formulation of a description-based narrative analysis (Barthes, 1977, pp. 71-105). He did not account for his structure to be applicable on still images. Furthermore, earlier in the book, Barthes (1977) designed a semiotic-led analysis of photographs (1977, pp. 52-60). However, it is apparent that he did not integrate Narratology theories within those discussions. Thus, this study's literature review upon this Narratology trajectory for still images hits a dead end.

1.2.2 READING IMAGES

This subsection espouses literatures of Visual Narratology and Visual Semiotics that contain hints upon the possibility to perceive a Narratology outcome through Visual Semiotic applications. In particular, Barthes and Cohn argued that such simultaneous appropriation is possible, but to date, have yet perform a definitive study that sufficiently expands upon this premise (Barthes 1977, p. 79; Cohn, 2013, pp. 419-420). Weber (2020) even posits definitely, "a narrative is the semiotic product of narrating" (p. 297). However, his work focuses exclusively on data visualizations such as pie chart, network diagrams, figures, etc. (Weber, 2020, pp. 295-305). As such, Weber's

work applicability is very limited for the context of this study that predicates around Anthropos characters.

In general, Contemporary Semiotic reading of images have revolved around individual, still images for multiple fields. Yet, they tend to be cultural-induced interpretations. This could be attributed to the primary ethos of most of these Semiotic approaches. For instance, as espoused in the previous section, Barthes (1977) posits, signifiers connote historical or cultural signs, all in which contribute to critical verisimilitude (pp. 27-30). Even more primordial than Barthes and all contemporary Semiotic studies, including Cohn's, is the work of Erwin Panofsky, in *Studies in Iconology 1939*. Essentially, Panofsky (1939) requisites an understanding of customs and cultural traditions in relation to perform any act of Iconological reading on artworks (pp. 3-4). He presented a three-part framework to read paintings utilizing Iconology and Iconography (Panofsky, 1939, pp. 14-15). Barthes's (1977) own detailed framework for analyzing images mirrored Panofsky's in likeness; though his analysis was performed specifically on photographs; as was his case study (pp. 52-60). Barthes (1980) however improved this by introducing the concepts of *Studium*⁵ and *Punctum*⁶ later in 1980 (pp. 26-27). *Studium* addresses the critical verisimilitude present in a photograph while its lingering poignancy is addressed through *Punctum* (1980: 26-27). More of this in relation to narratives are discussed in later chapters. Likewise, Berger discovers a multitude of interpretations while analyzing paintings of portraits. An exemplary case being *Bathsheba's Reading of David's Letter* by

⁵ *Studium*, is similar to education; which consists of the signifiers present during the moment captured by the photographer; hence invariably contribute to critical verisimilitude. (Barthes, 1980, pp. 26-30)

⁶ *Punctum*, is similar to a shock, which pierces the *Studium*. (Barthes, 1980: 27) thus leads to the photograph's poignancy that establishes its presence in the viewer's mind, and lingered. (Barthes, 1980, pp. 49-55)

Rembrandt; where he ascertained culturally-induced⁷ readings from the placement and direction of character's gestures (Berger, 2015, p. 145). Another of Berger's work to be noted here would be his analysis of *The Fayum Portraits 1st-3rd Century*, where their depicted elements permit Berger (2015) to conjecture their existential narratives preserved by its creators (p. 7). The nature of these past outcomes is imperative within the next paragraph.

Following the above's discussion, it is therefore rational for contemporary scholars utilizing either Barthesian or Bergerian approaches to attain cultural focused interpretations when analyzing still images. This rationality extends even within the field of Social Sciences, when Peter Vannini in *Social Semiotics and Fieldwork – Method and Analytics 2007* conceptualises an Ethnographic approach to read images that adopts Sociosemiotic analysis. This field, known as "Sociosemiotic Ethnography" seeks to comprehend the relationships between signifiers and agency through sociological-based triangulation (Vannini, 2007, pp. 114-122). A similar approach was outlined in *What is a Picture Worth: A Primer for Coding and Interpreting Photographic Data*, where "Visual Coding" mode of analysis is applied onto Chinese migrant mothers to examine their cultural-based experiences in their respective host city (Chapman, Wu & Meihua, 2017, pp. 810-811). Incidentally, Sociosemiotic Ethnography and Visual Coding will become increasingly relevant as key concepts as this study progresses. Through another similar instance, Ryu Morimoto (2014) demonstrated his reading of photograph records recovered from Japan's natural

⁷ That study refers culturally to the portrayal of Bathsheba as a desirable woman as well as a powerful one to the other character in the painting, while also being best positioned for voyeuristic view of the painting. (Berger, 2015, p. 145) This observation alludes to a whole other discourse regarding Berger's male gaze and the portrayal of women in classical paintings. While this study acknowledges the presence of notions concerning Socio-political, Political bodies, etc; this study only addresses the aesthetics quality of inferring narrative of portrayed Characters.

disaster (pp. 289-300). He employed Semiotic approaches, particularly through Barthesian paradigm of tracing back the “Photographic Referent” to provide a theoretic outline of the portrayed subject’s narratives.

Essentially, in all instances of Chapman, Wu, Meihua, Berger and Barthes, narrative results merely appear as a byproduct of their cultural or Iconological and Iconography examinations instead of utilizing Narratology perspectives as an initial theoretical basis. Berger, for instance did not utilise a Narratology lens in his intellections, merely alluding that his reading appears to conclude in a narrative prose (Overton, 2015, p. xiii). Morimoto seems to allude most closely to a narrative-led approach though he did not present a distinctive enough argument that best explained his analytical and interpretative processes.

The above paragraphs enable this study to discern the first research gap. Studies of Visual Narratology merely focus on moving or sequential images (Mckee, 1997; Verstaten, 2009; Tillman, 2011; Weiland, 2016). On the other hand, most Visual Semiotics share a proclivity to base their approach solely on culturally-informed interpretations. The above notions are evidenced by the results of Semiotic-led studies (Berger, 2015, p.7; Barthes, 1977, pp. 52-60; Chapman, Wu & Meihua, pp. 810-811; Morimoto, 2014, pp. 289-300). There are many more studies with outcomes that supports both evidential notions that are detailed in the following chapters (Bronfen, 2010, pp. 11-18; Lidchi, 2013, pp. 166-179; Hall, 2013b, pp. 215-262; Borgo, Licata & Iorio, 2015, pp. 105-109; Pankhurst & Hawksley, 2013; Eddy & Sarena, 2017, pp. 150-156). Furthermore, they alongside Cohn’s (2013, pp. 419-420) and Barthes’s (1977, p. 79) assertions also prompt this study to argue that it is possible to perceive a Narratology outcome through Visual Semiotic applications. To date however, there is

yet a definitive study that sufficiently expands both fields upon this premise. Hence, this study addresses this as the first lacuna I), and thus, the first problem statement.

Furthermore, while semiotic reading could be performed on the very presence of a sign; the essence of a narrative, as per espoused by Chapter 2's literature review, requires at the very least, the presence of Plot and Character (Aristotle, 335 BCE, pp. 471-473). This study preemptively discusses this notion forward from Chapter 2 to establish a crucial statement. That is, this, only an image that contains at least a Character that interacts to a Plot may achieve narrative-ability. An image portraying any character is also known as – portraiture. Incidentally, Mckee and Barthes affirmed that there are no narratives without characters (Mckee, 1997, p. 33; Barthes, 1977, p. 105). Hence, the above circumstances when paired with notions of Plot and Character that Aristotle (335 BCE, pp. 471-473) presented, present an alternative statement that may be rephrased here: all stories are – portraitures.

1.2.3 VISUAL NARRATIVE-ABILITY

This subsection introduces the second II) lacuna that this study wishes to address. It stems from a dichotomy that this study discovers through its literature review. This dichotomy contains some contesting notions against the practicality of still-image medium to function as an autonomous narrative medium. This notion is inconsistent, as several studies argue conversely, favoring the positive possibility of the medium's narrative autonomy.

Firstly, it must be acknowledged that the Visual Narratology theories espoused so far may not be directly applicable to single-framed, static images such as photographs or paintings. This includes the works of Cohn, Mckee, Verstaten, Tillman and Weiland. That is because these studies revolve around visual mediums that utilise temporality or accompanied by other mediums such as textual inserts, audio, and others. Hence, they do not convincingly account for still image's narrative-ability, especially as a standalone. As to date there is yet an evidential Visual Narratology theory that accounts for still image's narrative-ability apart from some untested conjectures, this notion remains unresolved.

Secondly, there appear to be contestations against the possibility of still images attaining narrativization. For instance, while Berger may have claimed that his readings on paintings resulted in narratives; his observation was claimed to be rebutted by his own colleagues with the likes of Geoff Dyer and Susan Sontag; prompting upon that storytelling to be an oral based medium (Overton, 2015, p. xiii). Patrizia McBride (2016) in *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany* argued against the narrative-ability of photographs. She asserts that the photographic materials in illustrated press exposed its heteronomy; "(...) its inability to function in a self-sufficient, autonomous mode." (pp. 68-69) She as well made the affirmation that "(photographs) had to resort to captions or textual inserts that showed not only photography's dependency on another medium, writing, for its disambiguation and contextualization (...)" (McBride, 2016, p. 69).

Thirdly, despite being only conjectures and discourse rhetoric, there are scholars such as Verstaten, Cohn and Barthes that extrapolate the narrativization capabilities of still images. Both Verstaten and Cohn discuss briefly that the concept

of temporal development for narrativization can be read from still images, but did not examine further (Verstegen, 2009, p. 13; Cohn, 2013, pp. 419-420). Barthes (1982) in particular, through his famed proclamation in *Empire of Signs*: “The text does not ‘gloss’ the images, which do not ‘illustrate’ the text (p. xi), he affirms that the image constitutes a standalone medium. In a separate work, Barthes (1977) argue that the inclusion of text does not grant upon it that facility, instead it burdens upon it with culture, redundantly amplifying given connotations or even contradicts (pp. 26-27).

Through the above discussions, this study discerns this dichotomy amongst Narratology discourses as a second II) lacuna: the divergence upon the narrative-ability of still, single-framed images. Based upon the evidences construed through the literature review, this thesis argues in solidarity, for, the narrativization capabilities of this medium (Mckee, 1997; Verstegen, 2009; Tillman, 2011; Weiland, 2016; Berger, 2015, p. 7; Barthes, 1977, pp. 52-60; Chapman, Wu & Meihua, 2017, pp. 810-811; Morimoto, 2014, pp. 289-300; Bronfen, 2010, pp. 11-18; Lidchi, 2013, pp. 166-179; Hall, 2013b, pp. 215-262; Borgo, Licata & Iorio, 2015, pp. 105-109; Pankhurst & Hawksley, 2013; Eddy & Sarena, 2017, pp. 150-156; Cohn, 2013, pp. 419-420).

Hence, to address both lacunas so far, this study thus examines the possibility of narrativization of autonomous, single still frame images unaccompanied by other mediums. To perform said examination, this study selects to formulate a systematic Visual Narrative Reading Approach and design its deployment onto a series of case study portraiture photographs. This strategy is because the systematic approach formulation requires a case study to examine its deployment pragmatics. Due to this requirement, the study selects Waterfront portraitures to be its case study. This selection is predicated upon current research limitations within that field, which will

be addressed in the next consecutive subsections. They constitute this study's third III) lacuna.

1.2.4 WATERFRONT – SUBJECT MATTER

The objectives of this study necessitate the formulated approach's demonstrative deployment for narrative structuring of critical verisimilitude. Hence, this study selects to interpret Waterfront portraitures. The following subsections elucidates on definitions and substantiate the selection of this community in having their narratives interpreted and documented. This in turn, reflects the third lacuna this study wishes to address.

1.2.4(a) WATERFRONT DEFINITION

The "Waterfront" was defined: "(...) any developed area that is densely populated and is being used for, or has been used for, urban residential, recreational, commercial, shipping, or industrial purposes," (Coastal Zone Management Act, 1972, p. 11). However, while this study views the above definition to be applicable in regards to distinguishing the utility of Waterfront, it is insufficient to properly contextualise the empirical area scale for this study to focus on effectively. In compensation of this, this study abides by an alternative definition: "(...) the interface point where land and water met, approximately within 200 to 300 meters from the waterline and 1 to 2km to the land site and takes within 20minutes walking distance." (Yassin, Eves, & Mcdonagh, 2010, p. 3). This summarised definition is parked briefly here to provide imperative contextual ease that establishes the following subsections. A full overview of what

constitutes Waterfront and its communities that are relevant within the scope of this study are further examined in Chapter 2.

1.2.4(b) DOCUMENTATION ON WATERFRONT COMMUNITIES

This subsection details this study's examination of literature surrounding the Waterfront areas and its communities in Malaysia. In general, it discerns that disproportionate attention is relegated towards other sectors beyond the maritime industries.

To expand the above, existing policies directly affecting key Waterfront areas instead are largely implemented for re-developments into key touristic areas upon the dawn of the new millennium (Yassin, Eves & Mcdonagh, 2010, pp. 12-13). In contrast, America implemented policies as early as 1972 to ensure the continued preservation and restoration of their historic, cultural, and aesthetic coastal features amidst their Waterfront regions. Such are as examined in Section 303 in *Coastal Zone Management Act* (1972, p. 3). Among one of their exemplary case, *Port Towns and Urban Cultures – International Histories of the Waterfront* consists of scholarly works on documenting, preserving, as well as discoursing the aspects of Waterfront cultures across multiple regions (Beaven, Bell & James, 2015, p. 1). Its discourses address and account for America's culture of Waterfront areas that till then has been left wanting due to imminent higher focus upon the region's urban and commercial development (Beaven, Bell & James, 2015, pp. 2-3).

Literatures surrounding Malaysia evidenced the contrary. For instance, Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya (2001) in *A History of Malaysia* largely criticise the government's strategies for not contributing to the maritime industry and its Waterfront communities (p. 295). Multiple other literatures, including the Andayas's, account that this trajectory of governmental policies have further expanded the poverty range between Waterfront communities from their other nation counterparts (Andaya & Andaya, 2001, pp. 295-296, Yassin, Bond, & Mcdonagh 2011b, pp. 337; Yassin, Bond, & Mcdonagh, 2012, p. 211; Kelly & Zand, 2016; Jenkins, 2010, p. 148; Krzyzaniak & Malik, 1975, p. 3). This rampant poverty among Waterfront communities may have been regarded as largely overlooked in national policies as early as 1975, as per a document entitled *Poverty of Fishermen in Northwestern Malaysia: Market Power and Governmental Policies* (Krzyzaniak & Malik, 1975, p. 3). However, it appears that this rampant poverty surrounding the Waterfront communities retain, or has even been exacerbated in contemporary times. This report is evidenced by documentary journalisms such as *Asia's Toughest Jobs – The Fisherman of the Andaman Sea 2017*, *Doa Seorang Nelayan 2019*, and *Tawi-Tawi Life and Death on the Sea Border of Malaysia and the Philippines 2020* (Promchertchoo, 2017; Han & The, 2019; Teo, Tan & Johari, 2020). Furthermore, Gwynn Jenkins (2010) in *Interpreters of Space, Place and Cultural Practice Processes of Change through Tourism, Conservation and Development in George Town, Penang, Malaysia* argued that such rapid touristic developments as preferred by Malaysian policies significantly affect the maintaining or conservation of the Waterfront community's traditional cultural forms and way of life (p. 148).

To close the section, this study discerns that there is an apparent lack of literatures at the present that accounts for Waterfront narratives in Malaysia, that if persists, would further expand its community's marginalised and poverty circumstances. This constitutes the third 3) research gap. Present literature evidences of Waterfront including those presented predominantly focused on tourism, political policies and economic data (Yassin, Bond & Mcdonagh, 2011b, p. 336, 511; Yassin, Najib & Yasmin, 2013, p. 129; Yassin, Eves & Mcdonagh 2010, p. 1; Jenkins, 2010, p. 148; Krzyzaniak & Malik, 1975, p. 3). Whereas, the narratives of these Waterfront communities that could be expected to be located amongst the Social Sciences, Humanities, Arts or Anthropology appears insufficient. This study notes that there had been Anthropology and conservation attempts in Malaysia. In 2017 for instance, there were studies that photographed eroded walls of George Town, Penang as part of an art practice-based study to revitalise the populace's attention back to their own heritage grounds (Farhad & Rahman, 2017, p. 170). However, the choice to portray the walls of a Waterfront city instead of residents reflects their photographs to be characterless. These non-portraiture outcomes do not provide Character-driven narratives that can be discoursed further. Their photographs were not equivalent, in definition to the Fayum Portraits, as discoursed by Berger (2015, p. 7). While it is arguable that the walls themselves could represent a Character, for it is not necessary for a Character to be one of a Human: as evident in the genre of anthropomorphizing; but that notion has exceeded the scope of this study and therefore are not considered. Also, their works are insufficient to address Waterfront narratives for cultural communities or humanitarian efforts. In other words, they do not contribute sufficiently in enlightening the plight of their marginalised or poverty circumstances. This study intends to situate

itself with other scholarly efforts predicating upon interpreting portraiture photographs to locate critical intervention points (Chapman, Wu & Meihua, 2017, pp. 810-813).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In so far, there are three research gaps, or lacuna as termed in the previous texts, that this study has identified. Two from past scholarly studies of Visual Narratology and Visual Semiotics and their simultaneous applicability pertaining to still images and one other concerning cultural documentation of Waterfront Communities. All three are reiterated here for ease of reference before moving forward.

The first research gap alludes to the unexamined possibility of simultaneously appropriating Visual Narratology and Visual Semiotics to compensate the theoretical gap present within both fields. Visual Narratology has disproportionately focused on moving or sequential images while relegating aside the still image mediums images (Mckee, 1997; Verstaten, 2009; Tillman, 2011; Weiland, 2016). Some, such as Barthes and Cohn, argue the possibility of extending the concepts of Visual Narratology onto individual, still images, yet to date, have not address the matter directly (Barthes, 1977, p. 79; Cohn, 2013, pp. 419-420). Inversely, most Visual Semiotics share a proclivity to base their approach solely on culturally-informed interpretations (Berger, 2015, p. 7; Barthes, 1977, pp. 52-60; Chapman, Wu & Meihua, pp. 810-811; Morimoto, 2014, pp. 289-300) Hence, this simultaneous application of these two fields are significant additions for future studies that seek to structure narratives with cultural basis from still image data such as photographs.

The second research gap alludes to the dichotomy amongst Narratology discourses regarding the narrative-ability of standalone, still images. McBride (2016) claims still images are unable to “(...) function in a self-sufficient, autonomous mode” (pp. 68-69). She argued photographs “(...) had to resort to captions or textual inserts that showed not only Photography’s dependency on another medium, writing, for its disambiguation and contextualization (...)” (McBride, 2016, p. 69). McBride claimed to draw her arguments primarily on Benjamin’s work in *A Little History of Photography* (Benjamin, 1931, p. 527). Yet, this study criticizes her arguments as flawed. Through this study’s own reading of that Benjamin text, it has yet to find any claims that stated as such or even inferred it to be. This study confronts the narrative-ability of photographs that garnered a dichotomous observation from scholars such as McBride in contrast with those of Barthes, Berger, etc. (Barthes, 1970, p. xi; 1977, pp. 26-27, 39-40; Berger, 1972, pp. 7-34).

In essence, to authenticate the first and second gap addressed here; this study examines the possibility of narrativization of autonomous, single still frame images unaccompanied by other mediums. To do so, it formulates a deployable, pragmatic Visual Narrative Reading Approach to interpretate still, standalone autonomous visual portraitures. Furthermore, each case study unit is unaccompanied by captions, music or other mediums. This strategy addresses the critique of photographs being self-autonomous in generating inference, which alludes to the second research gap. The approach formulation is based upon the simultaneous appropriation of Visual Narratology and Visual Semiotics, hence alluding to the first research gap. However, in pursuit of both of the above, this study’s systematic approach formulation requires a case study to contextualize its theoretical and deployment intellections. Upon this requirement, the study selects Waterfront portraitures to be the most viable subject to

function as a case study. This study is aware that there exist many other possibilities of case studies that it could use to contextualize its systematic narrative reading approach. However, while inspecting the literatures surrounding Waterfront narratives, it discovers its third research gap there that justifies this selection to be the most suitable out of all other possibilities.

The third research gap alludes to the apparent lack of present literatures accounting for Waterfront narratives among its communities in Malaysia. The comprehensive local-based work of Yassin's and her colleagues reflects the imbalance coverage of cultural documentation in light of more mercantile and economical driven focus (Yassin, Bond & Mcdonagh, 2011a, p. 511; 2011b, p. 336; Yassin, Najib & Yasmin, 2013, p. 129; Yassin, Eves & Mcdonagh, 2010, p. 1; Jenkins, 2010, p. 148; Krzyzaniak & Malik, 1975, p. 3). Furthermore, present studies have warned that should this situation persist, the circumstances surrounding these communities' marginalization and poverty will further exacerbate (Krzyzaniak & Malik, 1975, p. 3; Promchertchoo, 2017; Han & The, 2019; Teo, Tan & Johari, 2020; Jenkins, 2010, p. 148). Only the work of Farhad and Rahman (2017) had contributed slightly, having a medium that reflects better critical verisimilitude (p. 182). However, as there are no Characters being depicted, they are insufficient as preservations of a moment, or existential evidence of thoughts and life that endures beyond death (Berger, 2015, p. 14). This study thus, mirroring Chapman, Wu, and Meihua's (2017, pp. 810-813), focuses its reading approach surrounding the narratives of the Waterfront community through portraitures to understand and locate acute factors of their contestations.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify factors and relationships of Plot and Character premised on Narratology discourses.
2. To examine the simultaneous appropriation of Visual Semiotics and Narratology for the narrative reading of individual, still visual portraiture as a formulation for a systematic Visual Narrative Reading Approach.
3. To design the deployment of the Visual Narrative Reading Approach through a systematic narrative reading of Case Study consisting of portraiture photographs depicting Waterfront communities.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions relate to issues that need to be addressed:

1. What factors and relationships of Plot and Character can be identified premised on Narratology discourses?
2. How to simultaneously appropriate, the factors and relationships of Plot and Character within Narratology with Visual Semiotics into existing Visual Coding Methodology to formulate a systematic Visual Narrative Reading Approach for the narrative reading of still visual portraiture?

3. How to design the deployment of the Visual Narrative Reading Approach through a systematic narrative reading of Case Study consisting of portraiture photographs depicting Waterfront communities?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

As presented in the background of study and problem statement sections, to date, there exist possibilities of extending the concepts of Visual Narratology onto individual, still images through Visual Semiotic applications. Hence, this simultaneous application of these two fields are significant additions for future studies that seek to structure narratives with cultural basis from still image data such as photographs.

In addition, the results from the achieved objectives of this study provides in depth possibility into Walter Benjamin's proposal. Specifically, that the awareness of Photography's potential may prompt the existence of optical unconscious, as how psychoanalysis contributed to the preliminary discoveries of the instinctual unconscious (Benjamin, 1931, pp. 508-512, 517). The objectives of this study which seek to continue the trajectory of exploring the viability of Photography as a medium that best documents, narrates, and induces thought upon any Characters it portrays (Barthes, 1966, pp. 3-14) in particular may assist Walter Benjamin's aspirations.

Furthermore, this study serves as the antithesis of sorts to the assessment of Patrizia McBride who argued against the narrative-ability of photographs as a self-sufficient, autonomous mode of medium. The consequences should McBride's assessment be true; is that it negates Berger's entire work in his book *Portraits*; (Berger,