

## CHAPTER 5

### PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE CODE

#### 5.1 PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

For the practical applications of the code, the medium and format (Section 4.4) used in the study paintings (Section 4.5) (i.e. ground charcoal in wax medium and a square format) are retained to show a continuity of mindset. For this final stage, however, a size larger than that employed in the study paintings was deemed appropriate as a progressive increase of scale for each stage. Such progression was conceived to be in keeping with a viewer's progression from intimate scrutiny of the small etchings to expansive negotiation of meanings encoded in the final paintings.

In the following discussion, analysis of the practical applications of the code focuses on the transposition of relevant visual devices and their function from Table 4.6.1 to a single painting representing each cycle. Given that the visual devices are designed to express but one energy, practical application of the code to convey each energy cycle centres on energy experienced as an overall feeling for each cycle. Hence, visual devices are utilised in varying degrees. Only those devices that are pivotal to the expression of a particular energy are addressed, however, in the account of each painting (Sections 5.2-5.6).

Initial experimentation into expressing energy cycles by slavishly applying relevant visual devices of the code as outlined in Table 4.6.1 was enlightening but not entirely successful. In the artist's view, these first attempt paintings were so formulaic that they were soulless and mechanical—the remains of which now lie hidden beneath

subsequent paintings. From these informing excursions into applying codes, the approach taken for the final stage paintings is less prescriptive. With a fresh and more liberal approach to applying the code, creative invention is a key component. This adaptive, rather than formulaic, use of the code will become clear in the following discussions.

## **5.2 TOWNSVILLE COMMON: GROWTH CYCLE**

*Townsville Common: Growth Cycle* [Plate 5.2.1] features a section of bush from The Common in which the tops of pandanus can be seen protruding from the lower-canopy scrub. During execution of this painting, the “desired outcome” (Section 4.2) was foremost in mind: portraying the four individual feelings as energies of the growth cycle—“fecundity”, “exuberance”, “gently unfolding”, and “rejuvenation”—with accent on “upward rhythm”, “central core”, “helical growth patterns” and “strong upward movement” (Table 4.6.1) to connote the overall feeling of joyous activity.

In the painting, expression of growth cycle energies centres on a strong spiralling “upward rhythm” rising from the bottom foreground and moving to the right. The outer edge of this movement is in light tone while its central core is in dark tone. Attention is drawn to this “central core” by “helical growth patterns” of a pandanus. By intention, this pattern projects “fecundity” while the “strong upward movement” of the composition projects “rejuvenation”. Radiating arrangements of shapes within the background pandanus at top centre and tonal simplification of negative space add a note of “exuberance” to the expression of growth.

Subtle tonal gradation within the light-tone foliage in the foremost curve of the spiral creates the impression that this foliage is “gently unfolding” by portraying it as rolling over the dark-tone foliage beneath. The softly rendered left side of the painting



*Townsville Common; Growth Cycle, 2003*  
charcoal and wax on canvas, 104 x 103 cm

**Plate 5.2.1**

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE CODE TO EXPRESS ENERGIES  
OF GROWTH**

has a different purpose. Here, reflections connote water. By association, they also allude to it as the “fluid nutrient” necessary for growth.

In essence, the feelings captured by the visual devices carry the singular energies from the study paintings to a more encompassing view of the energy of the growth cycle: an energy of joyous activity experienced in 2002-2003 on *The Common*.

### **5.3 TOWNSVILLE COMMON: DIURNAL CHANGE**

*Townsville Common: Diurnal Change* [Plate 5.3.1] features transition of light from intense to subdued. This transition is captured in the portrayal of a foreground stand of five tree trunks and the scrubland seen beyond. During the execution of this painting, the “desired outcome” (Section 4.2) was foremost in mind: portraying the four individual feelings as energies of diurnal change—“tranquillity”, “struggling to survive”, “mysteriousness” and “anticipation” (Table 4.6.1)—with accent on “stillness”, “awkward angles”, “vague forms” and “spatial conundrums” to connote the overall notion of gentle transition.

In the painting, expression of diurnal change energies centres on different rhythms: repetition of foreground trees and rhythms of marks within the background. The constancy of repetition of the trees connotes, to the artist’s mind, stillness associated with “tranquillity”. However, marks in the background enhance captured “tranquillity” by a languid circular arrangement of tonal accents. The foreground trunks have a further purpose. With their disposition as vertical bars, they lend the suggestion of barriers. Seen in this way, the trees protect what lies beyond and, to the artist’s eye, their repetition and formal arrangement make the circular rhythm in what lies beyond appear to be “struggling to survive”.



*Townsville Common: Diurnal Change, 2003*  
charcoal and wax on canvas, 104 x 103 cm

**Plate 5.3.1**

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE CODE TO EXPRESS ENERGIES  
OF DIURNAL CHANGE**

Further articulating the struggle is a broad zig-zag of “awkward angles” in the background. This linking of shapes from tree canopy to ground creates an uneasy effect like a lightning strike. The zig-zag also carries with it the feeling of “mysteriousness” in the crepuscular gloom projected by “vague forms” rendered in the darkness of the tree canopy. Use of texture plays a role in this feeling of mystery by the “spatial conundrum” arising from strong textures occurring in the negative spaces between the trees. In this conundrum, the textures make the negative spaces appear to advance rather than the normal action of receding. For the author, this conundrum of optical push-and-pull evokes the feeling of “anticipation” which, in this case, is the desire to resolve visual uncertainty.

In essence, the foregoing discussion demonstrates the transposition of the notion of singular energies from the study paintings to the expression of the energy of diurnal change: an energy of gentle transitions experienced in 2002-2003 on The Common.

#### **5.4 TOWNSVILLE COMMON: SEASONS**

*Townsville Common: Seasons* [Plate 5.4.1] has an attribute not applicable to the depiction of energies in the other paintings: a strong differentiation between two dissimilar energies (the *Wet* and the *Dry*). Hence, a contrast of treatment is seen in the features portrayed. Nevertheless, expression of the energies of the seasons centres on connection despite this dissimilarity.

In the painting, energy of the *Wet* is portrayed by luxuriant, plumped out foliage of background bush expressed as a backdrop to the *Dry* portrayed by austere trees and skeletal shrub shown in the foreground. In depicting this duality during execution of the painting, the “desired outcome” (Section 4.2) was foremost in mind:



*Townsville Common: Seasons, 2003*  
charcoal and wax on canvas, 104 x 103 cm

**Plate 5.4.1**

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE CODE TO EXPRESS ENERGIES  
OF SEASONAL CHANGE**

portraying the four individual feelings of energy of seasonal change—“abundance”, “contentment”, “barrenness” and “brittleness”—with accent on “layers of omnidirectional lines”, “depth”, “knife edges” and “potential for fracturing” (Table 4.6.1) as the key devices. These devices are critical to highlighting dissimilarity rather than connoting an overall congruent feeling.

In this regard, delicately rendered “layers of omnidirectional lines” portraying the luxuriant background vegetation in the upper left, express “abundance” of the *Wet* by alluding to unfettered energy captured by the scattering of “omnidirectional lines”. By contrast in the treatment of line, this scattering draws attention to the curved shapes within the background foliage. These shapes have a two-fold task: they express “contentment” by creating pathways of “depth” (Section 4.5.4) within the foliage; and, they create strong contrast of luxuriant plumped shapes to foreground austerity.

Expression of the energy of the *Dry* is concentrated in the right foreground of the painting. Here, use of “knife edges”, created by the juxtaposition of strongly contrasting tones, expresses the energy of “barrenness” (Section 4.5.4). These “knife edges”, shown in rocks strewn on the ground, highlight the “lack of obvious nurtured vegetation”. By their sharpness, attention is drawn to, and association with, deadness is extended to adjacent trees and shrub. In these lifeless plant forms, rough texture, is applied as a series of “fragile protrusions” on trunks, to express “surface fragility” and “brittleness” of bark. Going further, “internal fragility”, associated with “brittleness”, is expressed by intermittent use of texture revealing the deadness of the shrub. To the artist, this treatment of texture signifies “weaknesses” and, by association, the “potential for fracturing”.



A forked track shown lying between different treatments of the *Wet* and *Dry* seasons, in one sense, isolates the two energy groups by creating an area of demarcation. In another sense, the tract also acts as a line of connection by visually uniting the two dissimilar energies. With this latter reading, treatment of the track's surface marries both energies by using physical features from the *Dry* (rocks) but rendering them in the softness of the *Wet*.

In essence, the feelings captured by the visual devices carry the singular energies from the study paintings to a more encompassing view of the energy of the seasonal change experienced in 2002-2003 on The Common.

## **5.5 TOWNSVILLE COMMON: MIGRATION**

*Townsville Common: Migration* [Plate 5.5.1] features schematic representation of migration expressed by diametrically opposed tones. Shown in the upper-right corner of the painting, a large, white, amorphous shape of negative space with many pathways leading into it connotes the unknown: an area waiting to be experienced (in the sense of a migratory destiny). The remaining dark area of the painting connotes the known: a region through which migratory travel is necessary. Within this dark region, light tone shapes connote both the migratory creatures and their “busyness”.

During execution of this painting, the “desired outcome” (Section 4.2) was foremost in mind: portraying the four individual feelings of the energy of migration—“busyness”, “pathways”, “uneasiness” and “agitation”—with accent on “fragmented”, “silhouettes”, “deep void” and “net-like” (Table 4.6.1) to connote the overall feeling of bustling movement. This overall feeling is personally viewed as an outcome of creatures’ reasons (arguably instinctive) for migrating: procreation and sustenance.



*Townsville Common: Migration 2003*  
charcoal and wax on canvas, 104 x 103 cm

**Plate 5.4.1**

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE CODE TO EXPRESS ENERGIES  
OF MIGRATION**

In the painting, the expression of the energy of migration centres on the arrangement of tone to create a “deep void” over which all activity is expressed. “Fragmented” lines of dots drawn across the central core of this void express “busyness” by being seen as analogues of “vibrating sounds of heightened activity” (Section 4.5.5). And, as an extension of this activity, fine lines, shown as radiating projections, from forms in this central core and in the upper left of the painting, add another dimension to the “busyness” of migration, by expressing “aerial vibrations of birds’ chatter”.

Rhythms of white dots against the black void create “pathways” of “silhouettes” from the bottom and top-left of the painting. Towards the centre of the void, “silhouette” shapes become blossom-like forms. Arrangement of dots to these shapes expresses the “flow of natural forces” and movement of “air currents” (Section 4.5.5) lending the suggestion that more than one “pathway” may be followed.

Contrast in tone between the “silhouettes” of white shapes and the “deep void” underneath is instrumental in expressing a “lurking malevolence” (in the sense of encroachment of a dark mass into pristine whiteness to “disturb the viewer”). Adding to this projected malevolence is a tongue-like dark shape that extends from the void into the area of white negative space. Tonal variance surrounding the tongue of darkness lends a suggestion of “uneasiness”, in the sense that the treatment of this variance projects the dark energy of the tongue into the unknown of the negative space. Further enhancing this projected “uneasiness”, are aligned marks rendering the tone of the outer void. From the author’s viewpoint, this alignment not only directs the viewer’s eye across the void, but it also carries uneasy association of a surface scratched: an analogy for “strident calls” of birds voicing their “uneasiness”.

This way of looking at the marks is given more substance by the marks being so thickly laid that they are lines of texture creating strong “thrust” towards the central

void. Thus, “restricted” movement is expressed, and, by association “agitation”, in the sense that by limiting free movement against the force of such thrust an agitated state is created in migratory creatures. Highlighting “restricted movement” and “agitation” is gossamer texture of a “net-like” web capturing a group of marks shown centre front. Contrast between texture of thrust and texture of web lends force to the part each texture plays in expressing “agitation” caused by “restricted movement”.

In essence, the feelings captured by the visual devices carry the singular energies from the study paintings to a more encompassing view of the energy of migration experienced in 2002-2003 on *The Common*.

## **5.1 TOWNSVILLE COMMON: TIDES**

*Townsville Common: Tides* [Plate 5.6.1] focuses on changes of surface quality of mud flats and saltpans. With this interest in mind, the support for this painting is treated differently to those portraying the other four energies. Unlike the coarse surface of the support used in the previously discussed paintings, here a smooth surface, reminiscent of the glisten of damp ground is employed. To achieve this quality of surface, the canvas support was applied with five coats of gesso and sanded with fine grade abrasive paper between after each coat to create a smooth surface with sheen.

During execution of this painting, the “desired outcome” (Section 4.2) was foremost in mind: portraying the four individual feelings as energies of tidal motion—“ooziness”, “openness”, “viscous movement” and “crustiness”—with accent on “waves”, “spatial depth”, “forward creeping” and “variations of edge” (Table 4.6.1) to connote the overall feeling of expansiveness.



*Townsville Common: Tides, 2003*  
charcoal and wax on canvas, 104 x 103 cm

**Plate 5.6.1**

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE CODE TO EXPRESS ENERGIES  
OF THE MOTION OF TIDES**

Expression of tidal energy centres on subtle changes of surface quality shown as trails from foreground to background in the painting. In the right-foreground, “waves” of fine lines, detailing tracteries of water movement in the wake of receding tide, explicitly portray saturated “ooziness” and, by association communicate, the idea of “squelching mud when it is subjected to a load”.

Receding from foreground into background negative space, shapes of native succulents growing along ridges left by tidal movement express the energy of “openness” (Section 4.5.6) by accenting “spatial depth”. This accent is created by the shapes’ “diminishing size” and definition from foreground to almost negligible registration as a horizontal band in the background.

Treatment of tonal change from a dark foreground to light infinity captures the “languid energy” of “forward creeping” “viscous movement”. In this treatment, the portrayal of edges of the ripples creates contrast between subtle texture on the left side and heavier texture on the right side (where plant growth is supported and tracteries of past water movement are registered). Treatment of the foreground ripples also expresses “crustiness”, wherein less distinct edges shown in the texture on the left, suggests that this area has a “brittle surface skin with the potential to crack”.

In essence, the feelings captured by the visual devices carry the singular energies from the study paintings to a more encompassing view of the energy of tides experienced in 2002-2003 on The Common.

## 5.7 EVALUATING THE CODE

Prior to commencing this study, *The Townsville Common*, 2002 [Plate 5.7.1] was executed to serve as a control painting for future comparison. Moreover, like a control in a scientific experiment, this painting allows the author to gauge whether the application of the research in terms of a visual code created by balancing intuitive and analytical processes (Sections 4.3-4.6), does express energies of cyclical change.

Similar in aspect to *Townsville Common: Seasons* [Plate 5.3.1], the control painting features a stand of trees through which the bush is glimpsed beyond. This similarity of aspect is not coincidental. At the time of applying the codes, a deliberate decision was made to include a painting portraying a similar aspect to the control painting with the view of a later comparison.

In comparing the two paintings, there is one key difference setting them poles apart: the conceptual depth of meanings encoded. From the author's perception, the control painting denies input of *gut reaction* in the vision expressed. For example, the use of colour and the pictorially representative way the paint is applied highlight features, rather than an authentic response to the subject. Going further, the approach to the subject was more about painterly concerns: an attitude similar to Brown's treatment of *The Common*, wherein the focus is "on the painter's enjoyment of the physical act of painting" (Section 4.4). Arguably, *The Townsville Common* is about the "art of colour" (Wright, 1923)<sup>27</sup> and as its projected meaning leans more to a celebration of colour for sensual gratification than to articulating a genuine response to the landscape. Or, to express this difference with regard to energy, *The Townsville Common* reveals energies of artist in connection to place (Section 4.4) rather than the energies of the place connecting with the artist.

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Wright (1923) reasons in favour of two equally expressive and legitimate art forms within the notion of painting since 1800: the "art of colour" and the "art of painting".



*The Townsville Common, 2002*  
oil and wax on canvas, 145 x 144 cm

## CONTROL PAINTING

### Plate 5.7.1



An even playing field for comparison between the pre- and post-research paintings is achieved when *The Townsville Common* is viewed in its reduction to grey scale [Plate 5.7.2]. This removal of colour facilitates comparison with the equally colour-neutral post-research paintings. Comparison between the grey-scale control painting and *Townsville Common: Seasons* demonstrates clearly that line, shape, tone and texture are handled differently in each painting approach. For example, in the control painting, line and shape are employed to portray the bush as a celebration of colour, whereas, in *Townsville Common: Seasons* these elements help differentiate and create a visual dialogue between foreground and background.

Another notable difference is revealed in the use of tone and texture in portraying the tree on the left of each painting.. For example, in *The Townsville Common* tonal gradation is employed to represent the form of the tree, while texture is used to represent its rough bark in *Townsville Common: Seasons*. In the latter painting, however, the texture does more than replicate surface: it expresses “surface fragility” and “brittleness” (Section 5.4).

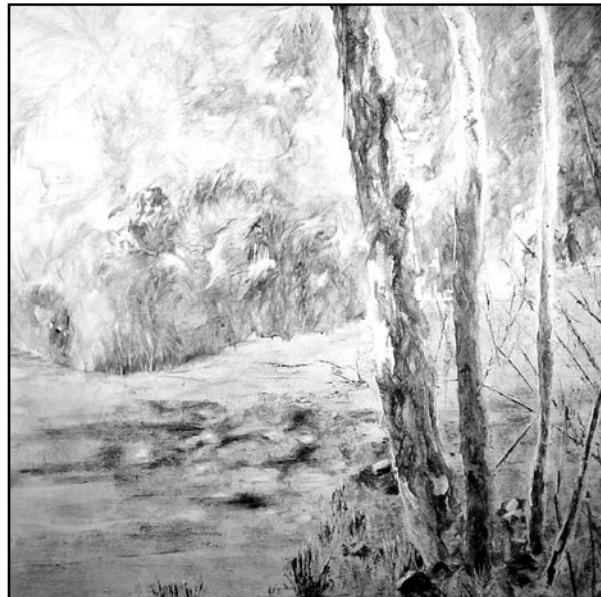
Comparison of the colour-play shown in the control painting with the complex visual dialogue between devices driven by the code in *Townsville Common: Seasons* highlights the conceptual depth of the latter painting. In *Townsville Common: Seasons* the viewer is invited to contemplate contrasting devices portraying the austere foreground and plumped out background as revealing “lack of obvious nurtured vegetation” and “abundance” (Section 5.3). The author anticipates that a reading of other subtle contrasts driven by the code will allow an understanding of the four individual feelings of energy outlined in Section 5.4. Hence, it is envisaged that a viewer will experience the essence of seasonal change energies on The Common rather than a moment in an artist’s experiences as captured in the control painting. Nevertheless, the



*The Townsville Common, 2002*  
oil and wax on canvas, 145 x 144 cm

# **GREY SCALE OF CONTROL PAINTING (PRE-RESEARCH)**

**Plate 5.7.2**



*Townsville Common: Seasons, 2003*  
oil and wax on canvas, 104 x 103 cm

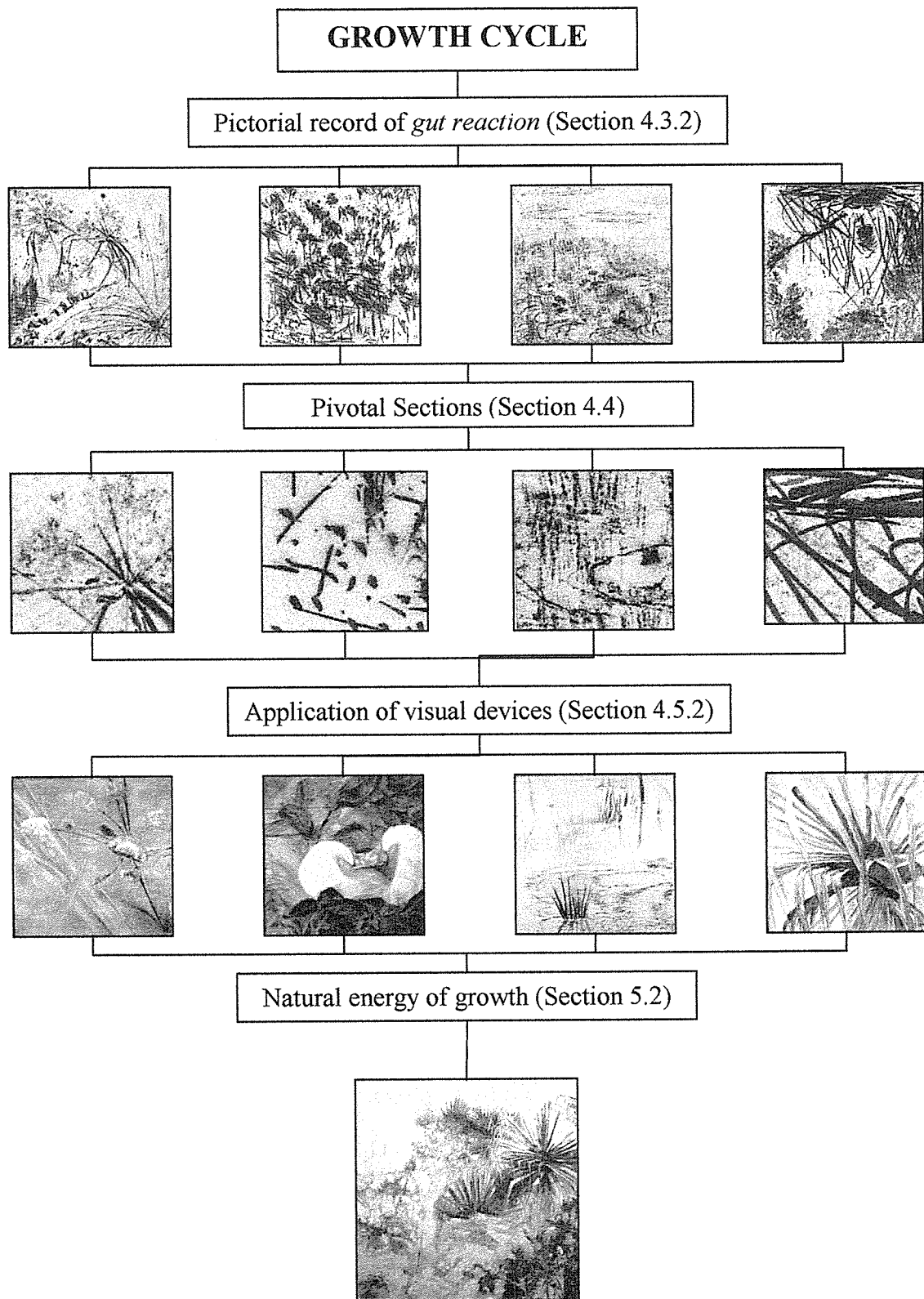
# **APPLIED CODE (POST RESEARCH)**

**Plate 5.7.3**

projected reading outlined above is conjecture and other viewers may have different readings based on variables outlined in Section 2.7.

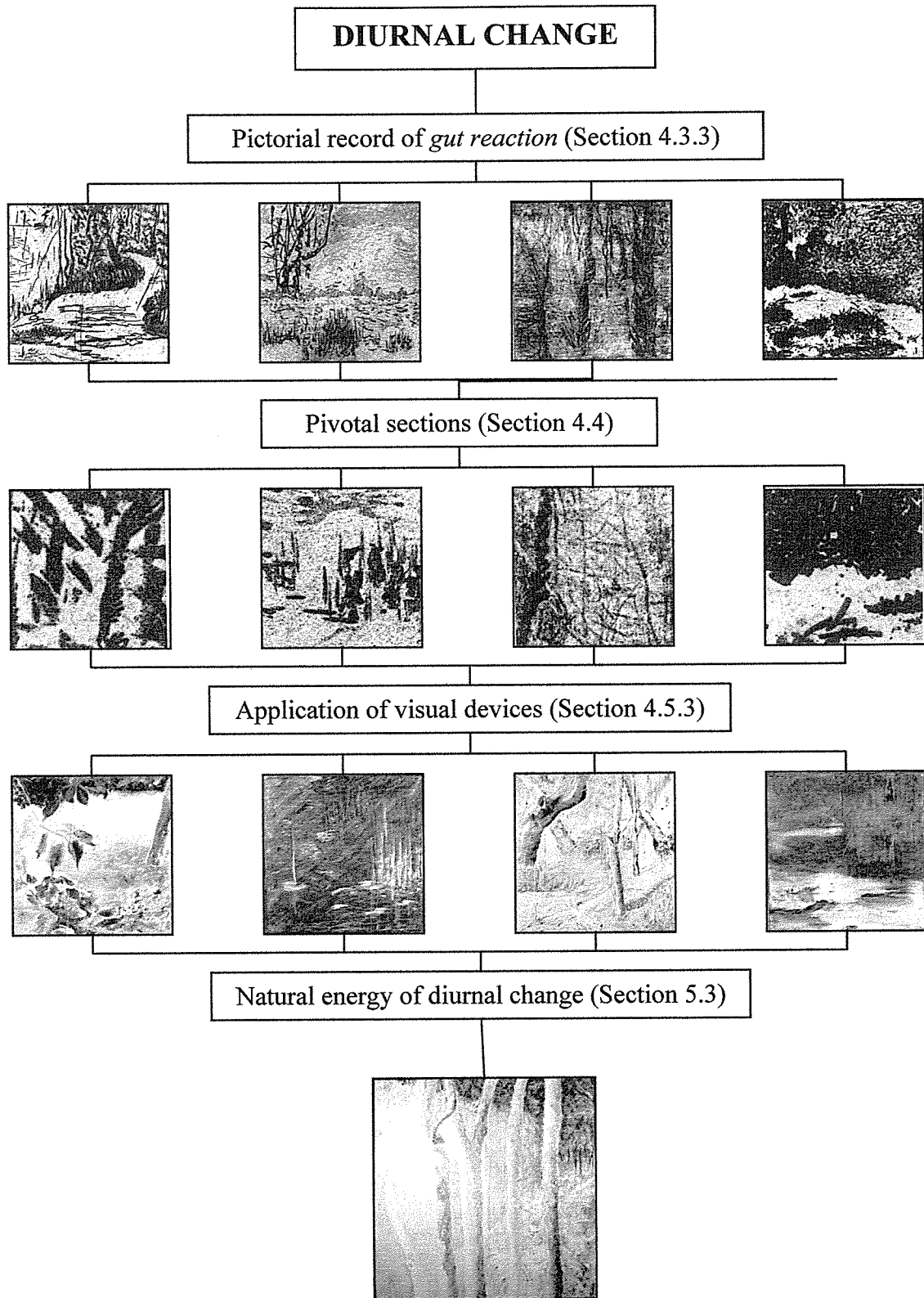
Control paintings do not exist for each cyclical change. *The Townsville Common* was the artist's response before the development of a code and, as such, it was conceived and executed with the intention of capturing a general impression. Having a single control, however, is not a problem. Similar deductions regarding each of the other paintings in which a code has been applied still apply, and, for the author, application of the code enables readings of cyclical changes.

In essence, the application of visual codes demonstrates that inner *gut reactions* can be articulated. One is experienced and the other interpreted through devices used. Pictorial development from *gut reaction* to application of code is demonstrated in flow charts (Figures 5.7.1 to 5.7.5).



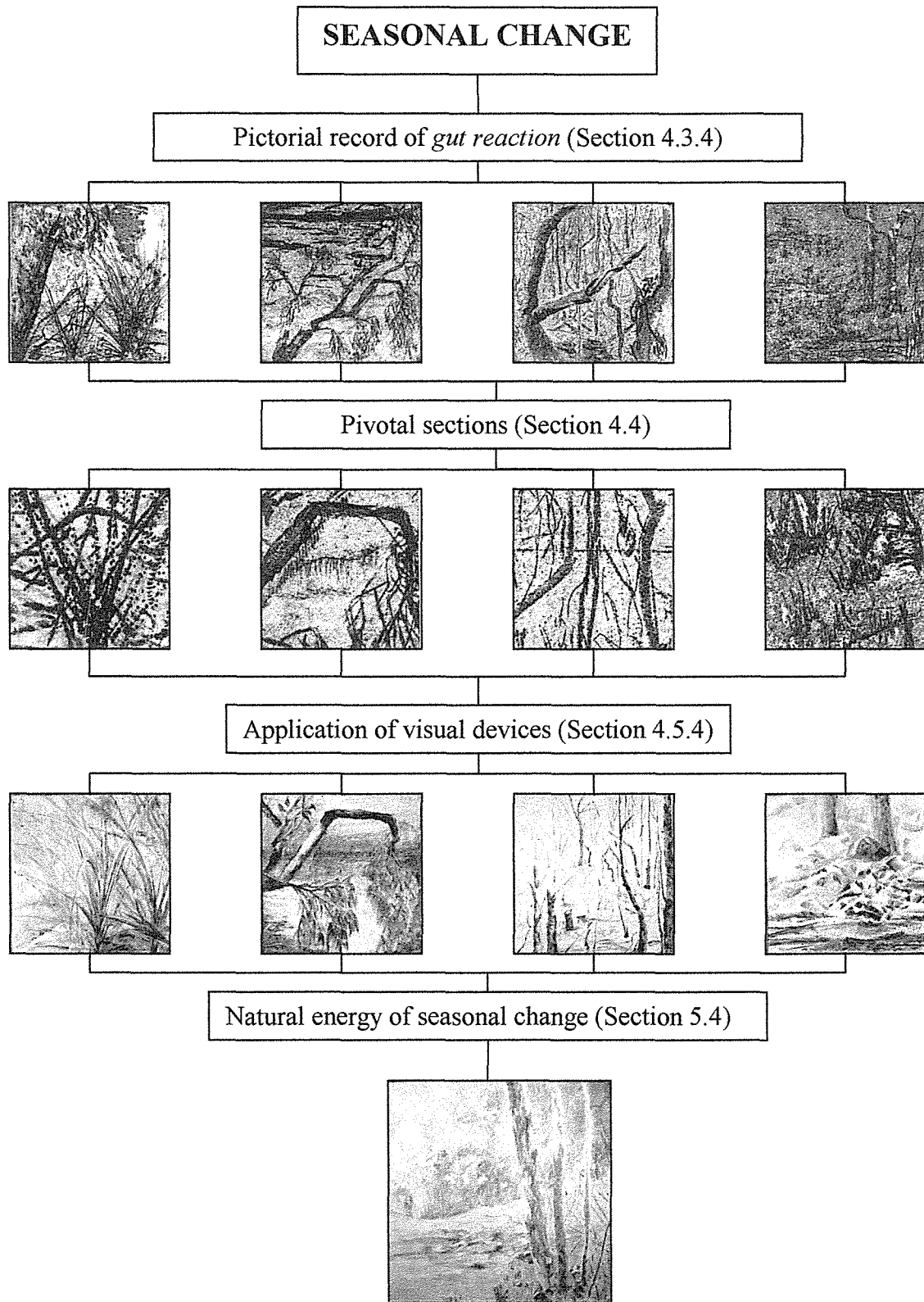
**PICTORIAL DEVELOPMENT FROM *GUT REACTION* TO  
APPLICATION OF CODE**

**Figure 5.7.1**



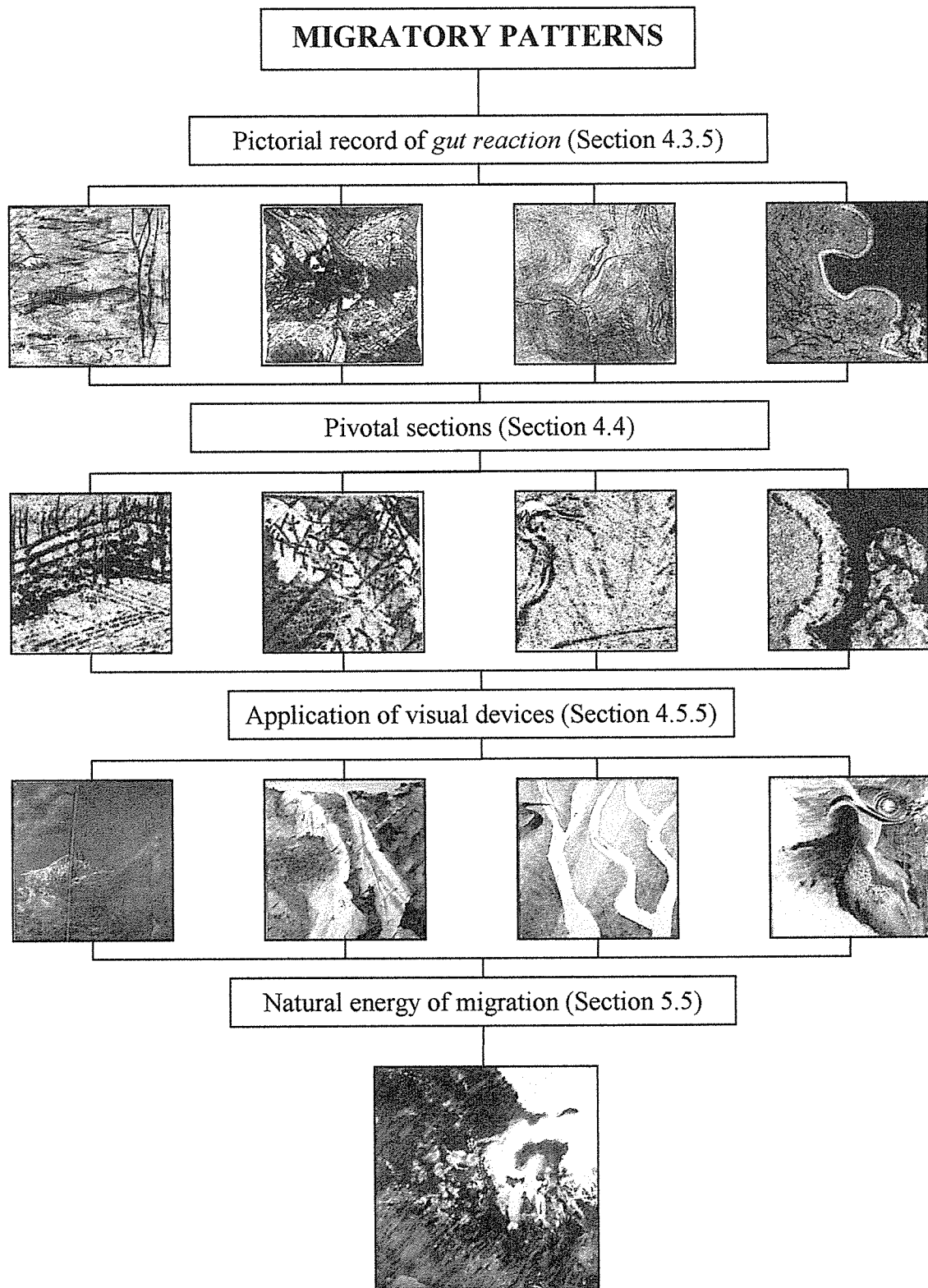
**PICTORIAL DEVELOPMENT FROM *GUT REACTION* TO  
APPLICATION OF CODE**

**Figure 5.7.2**



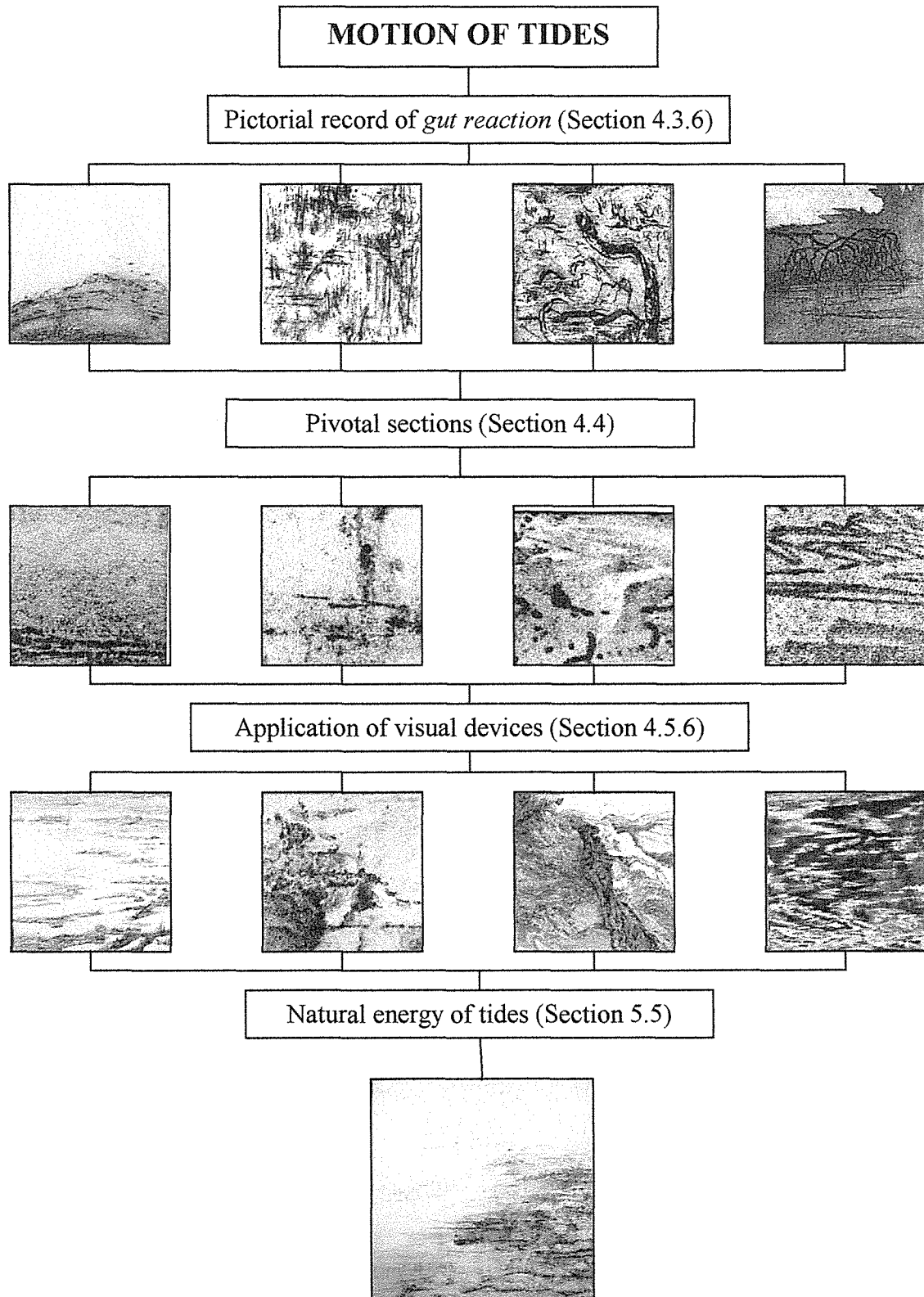
**PICTORIAL DEVELOPMENT FROM *GUT REACTION* TO  
APPLICATION OF CODE**

**Figure 5.7.3**



**PICTORIAL DEVELOPMENT FROM *GUT REACTION* TO  
APPLICATION OF CODE**

**Figure 5.7.4**



**PICTORIAL DEVELOPMENT FROM *GUT REACTION* TO APPLICATION  
OF CODE**

**Figure 5.7.5**