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Spectators in Jerusalem: urban narrative in the scenic tradition

Summary

This investigation of the narrative prospects of urban pictures in the scenic tradition is devoted to Hans Memling's painting depicting a sequence of Passion scenes set in a topographical view of Jerusalem. In refuting Goodman's view that the painting offers 'not only no direction but no order of telling at all', attention is drawn to the telling rhetoric of certain 'micro-scenic' core motifs, whose mature typiconic features emerged only with the formation of the scenic tradition's full array of picture types. It is conjectured that aposcopic vision may well be a source of scenic parallels between distance and proximity, and hence also of narrative parallels between prospector and sightseer roles implicit in various scenic picture types.

Toeskouers in Jerusalem: stedelike narratief in die sceniese tradisie

Die narratiewe potensiaal van stadsbeelde in die sceniese tradisie word ondersoek aan die hand van Hans Memling se skildery wat 'n reeks van tonele uit die lydensgeskiedenis in 'n topografiese uitsig van Jerusalem voorstel. Om Goodman se siening te weerlê dat hier 'nie slegs geen rigting nie maar ook geen orde van vertelling sou wees nie', word die verhalende retoriek van sekere 'mikro-sceniese' motiewe uitgelig en in verband gebring met tipikoniese eienskappe wat mettertyd, met die vestiging van die sceniese tradisie se omvattende versameling van prenttipes, uit hierdie kernmotiewe sou ontwikkel. Aposkopiese visie word voorgestel as moontlike bron vir sceniese parallelle tussen afstand en nabyheid, en dus ook vir narratiewe parallele tussen implisiete betragtersrolle van die prospektor en die toeskouer by sceniese prenttipes.

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Figure 1: Hans Memling, *The passion of Christ* (c 1470). Panel, 54,6 by 87,3 cm. Turino: Galleria Sabauda.

The legendary Jerusalem is represented as urban scenery in *The passion of Christ* (Fig 1), a remarkable work by the fifteenth-century Flemish painter Hans Memling.[1] In contrast to the concerns of the connoisseurs of Memling scholarship, my conjectures on how the painting is to be read are prompted primarily by questions in narrative theory. Yet I hope to demonstrate that, besides being a useful tool for narrative analysis, the notion of typiconic frames may also offer an account of this painting's extraordinary historical position in the formation of a scenic tradition in Western painting.

A special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, bearing the title "On Narrative", had its genesis in a symposium held in 1979 at the University of Chicago on "Narrative: the illusion of sequence". In his contribution, Nelson Goodman[2] examines the often tenuous relations between stories and their telling. He uses a number of pictorial examples to demonstrate the many differences between the order in which story events occur and the possible sequential order in which they may be recounted. The Memling painting is one of these examples. It narrates the New Testament story of the Passion of Christ by picturing the events as a series of scenes in an imaginary topography of the walled city of Jerusalem and the landscape setting of the surrounding countryside. Goodman even supplied a plan of the sequence, with the scenes numbered in the order of their occurrence (cf Scheme 1).[3] Goodman's plot plan omits certain scenes[4] but with

1   This is an expanded version of a paper first presented at *A Sense of Space*, the biennial congress of the South African Society for General Literary Studies (SAVAL), hosted by the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2-5 June 1998.

2   A revised version (Goodman 1980) appears with other contributions under the editorship of Mitchell (1980/81).

3   Cf Goodman 1980: Fig 6.

4   Certain events in the Passion story which occur as scenes in Memling's painting are omitted, for instance, Peter's denial of Christ, complete with crowing cock (to the left of the central city square scene), Christ before Herod (immediately to the right of the Ecce Homo scene), and the division of Christ's garments (immediately below the Crucifixion scene).

5   Goodman (1980: 105) refers to the telling of the Passion events in this painting

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its aid we can, from a synoptic or mapping point of view, readily follow the convoluted sequence of events criss-crossing the city and the countryside.[5]
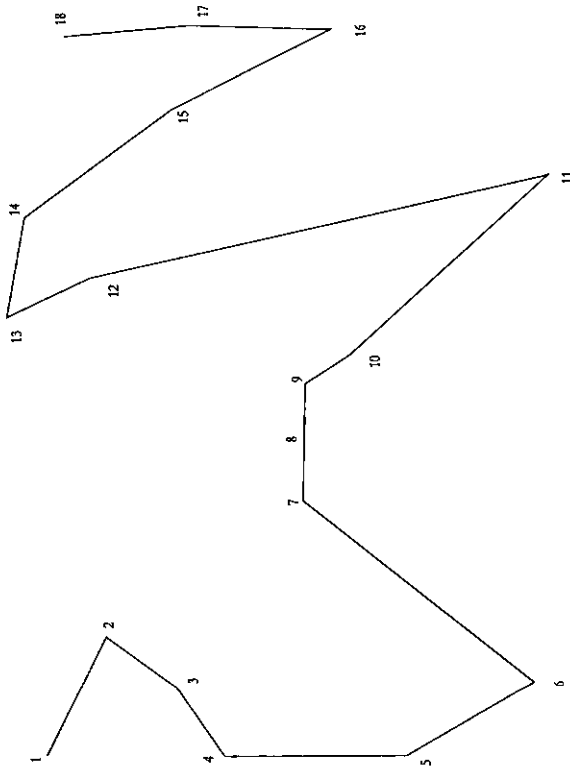
Scheme 1: The plan of scenes in Goodman (1980: Fig 6)

as a "tortuous course" of events. The difficulty which spectators initially experience in tracing the labyrinthine course mapped by the events in the layout of the city resonates with recurrent features of an urban *rebus* listed as no 10 in Scheme 2. The emphasis in such picture puzzles is on the visual impenetrability of urban environments — in this case a visitor's initial disorientation and anxiety on a first visit to a foreign city.

6   Goodman 1980: 106.

Goodman describes the pictorial organisation of Memling's painting as "spatial, atemporal, motivated perhaps both by considerations of design and by regarding these events as eternal and emblematic rather than episodic or transient".[6] I have a double objective in reviewing his rather hasty conclusion that "there is not only no direction but no order of telling at all". The first is to examine the painting as an early modern instance of visual narrative, specifically with respect to its use of the urban form as a unified narrative frame. Memling's picture engages the spectator primarily with a vivid scenic presence. The panel is of modest dimensions with the unobtrusive frame of a cabinet picture yet the painting opens on a vast imaginary expanse.[7] One may describe the purpose of its visual rhetoric as scenic display of the story's narrative frame.

A second objective is to remark on the narrative prospects of certain image formats which came to be closely associated with the picturing of urban scenes. Apart from topography, Memling's painting offers mere glimpses in this regard, yet I would like to draw attention to certain 'micro-scenes' scattered across the composition and to comment on their contribution as *ancillae narrationis*[8] or supplements to the main scenes in Goodman's plot plan. The mature typiconic features of core motifs in these 'micro-scenes' emerged progressively during the scenic tradition's subsequent history which saw the development of an elaborate array of urban scene picture types.[9] Among these, topography is the first and urban narrative the last listed in the accompanying summary (Table 1). The main focus of this inquiry will be on the latter composite picture type.

7   Cf Duro 1996, and especially Gillies 1996.
8   Cf Wolfgang Kemp (1996: 33 ff and 75 ff) for a discussion of his concept of *ancillae narrationis*.
9   A common feature of these picture types is their worldview scope in giving expression to the scenic tradition's ideological bias towards non-reductive parallellism or layered simultaneity in the modern urban experience. Cf the discussion of the scenic tradition's typiconic features in Van den Berg (1997), in particular their alliance with a line of philosophical inquiry commonly described in the historiography of philosophy as parallellist conceptions or identity theories.

Table 1: Array of scenic images / picture types

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1.	Typography	description of place, city map, survey, synopsis, overview, bird's eye view
2.	Vedute	city on the horison, urban vista, *stadsgesig*, perspectival view, landmarks
3.	Panorama/ panoptikon	'look-around', *omsig*, environment, surrounding/ enveloping city
4.	Window	'outlook', interior / exterior view, public / private, *finestra aperta / finestra chiusa*
5.	Record	time sequence at one place, street scene with traffic, parade, pageant, march, special events, spectacle
6.	Urban pattern	schematic reductions, urban patterning, *simultané*
7.	Urban fragment	'corner', city 'still-life', focus on urban detail
8.	Urban landscape	urban site, built environment, industrial city-scape
9.	Architectural *capriccio*	fantasy combinations of historical buildings
10.	Rebus	*Zerrbild*, picture puzzle, *carceri*, urban labyrinth/ maze
11.	Visionary cities	prophetic revelation, apocalyptic / utopian cities
12.	Urban narratives	the city as narrative frame, traveller's guide, sequence of events moving through urban addresses, passage with exhibitions
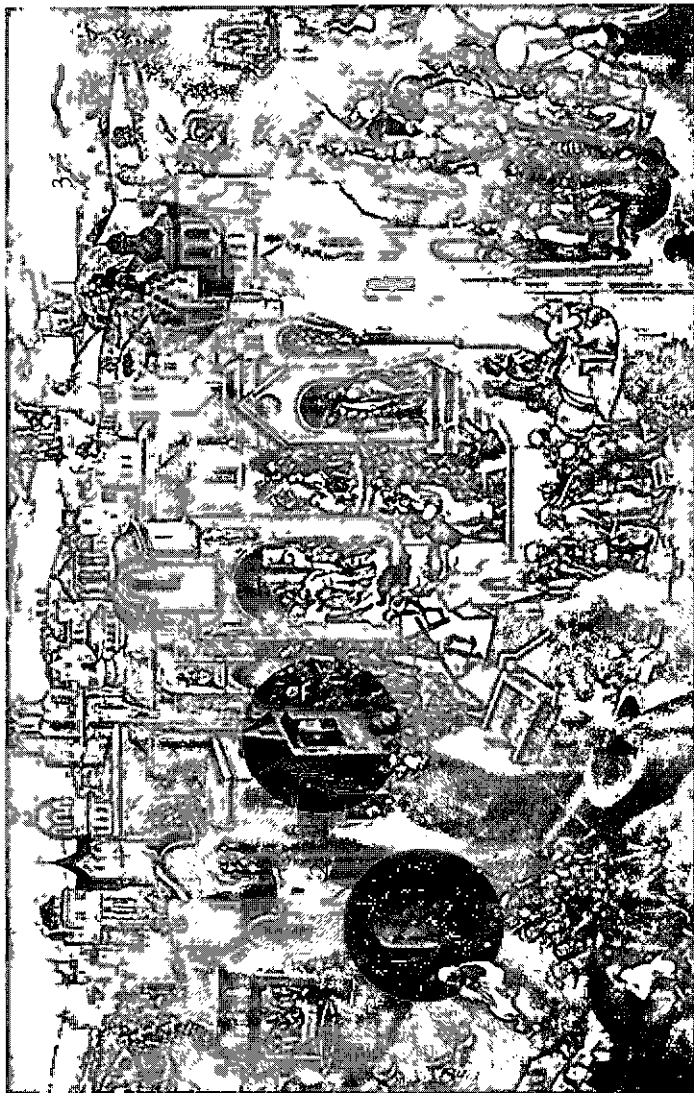
Figure 1a: Three micro-scenic core motifs.

1. Scenic picture types

Let me demonstrate what I mean by designating certain core motifs as kernel scenes or 'micro-scenes'.[10] Consider for instance the diminutive motif (immediately to the left of the picture's geometric centre) of a window with a couple witnessing the scenes of Christ's trial (No 1 in Fig 1a). I deem this a core motif since it lacks the detailed elaboration and enormous depth of vividly descriptive views which were common in the window scenes of precursors to Memling such as Jan van Eyck or the Master of Flémalle. In addition, this motif exhibits hardly any of the features later to be associated with the window scene as a picture format — its vital interplay between interior and exterior, between open and closed spaces, between public and private spheres, between confinement and depth of vision, between figures from the front and the back. Yet window scenes[11] were destined to become one of the scenic tradition's most fertile and varied picture types with inexhaustible narrative potential. One of the manifold versions, Umberto Boccioni's futurist painting of 1911, *The street enters the house* (Fig 2), represents the enveloping ambience of building sites, urban noise, traffic movement and mobile perspectives in a modern industrial city as a veritable force-field which shatters the perspectival closure of *finestra aperta* painting.[12]

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10 The founding role of anecdotes in biographical narratives offers an instructive parallel to the position of kernel scenic images in the development of scenic picture types (cf Soussloff 1997: 145-158). As with the status of biographical anecdotes as commutable textual fragments, the full potential of 'micro-scenic' motifs may of course be elaborated in widely different picture types — scenic as well as non-scenic. Cf note 21 below on the variable adaptation of aposcopic vision.

11 Picture type no 4 in Table 1.

12 For a discussion of this painting in the light of futurist notions concerning Bergsonian *durée* and the 'cinematic' representation of modern urban perception, cf Grasskamp (1992: 147-157). Conceding possible negative effects of anti-narrative impulses in diverse modern arts (cf Elkins 1991 *a propos* painting), Grasskamp nevertheless disputes Goodman's views regarding visual narrative (to wit, "Das Bild ist eine zeitlose Geschichte, ohne Abfolge des Geschehens und auch ohne Abfolge des Erzählens"). Grasskamp lays bare

Figure 2: Umberto Boccioni, *The street enters the house* (1911).
Oil on canvas, 100 by 100 cm. Hannover: Kunstmuseum Hannover.

Or consider another 'micro-scene' (No 2 in Fig 1a) — that of a porter figure lighting the gate torch in the foreground on the left, a familiar dramatic device in early modern theatre (the porter scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for instance). Its pictorial function in Memling's composition is to indicate a certain time and place in the city, and thus also in the reader's imaginative appropriation of a single link in the narrative sequence (in other words, following the exit, in procession, of the night-party sent to arrest Christ and prior to the return of this train in reverse order). This motif displays embryonic features of the urban record[13] — a richly varied scenic

various correspondences between futurist painting and a number of anti-narrative devices (for instance, discourse without beginning, middle or end, such as James Joyce deploys in his 1922 novel *Ulysses*.

13 Picture type no 5 in Table 1. For a discussion of the urban record's typically descriptive forms of narration, cf Rodini's (1998) article on Gentile Bellini's painting *Procession in Piazza San Marco*.

type evolved in representations of urban traffic, processions, parades, carnivals, and urban crowds. This image format returns in the foreground on the right where the procession heading for Golgotha exits through a city gate. A recent version of this picture type is *Trafalgar Square*, a painting from the 1960s by the British Pop artist Richard Hamilton (Fig 3). It conveys a sense of metropolitan London by reducing the snarled urban traffic and random groupings of urban crowds at a tourist site to contingent and fragmentary blobs on a printing screen, thus drawing parallels between circulation in traffic systems and the industrial production and dissemination of images.

Figure 3: Richard Hamilton, *Trafalgar Square* (1965-7).
Oil on canvas, 80 by 120 cm. Köln: Museum Ludwig.

Finally, consider in the upper right quadrant of the city, the solitary motif of a house with a stepped gable (No 3 in Fig 1a). It strikes a somewhat incongruous note of Flemish 'reality' amid the fantastic constructions in the urban texture of Memling's Jerusalem. Here again, we encounter the kernel of a full-blown picture type in the scenic tradition — the urban fragment[14] which came into its own

14   Picture type no 7 in Table 1.

as late as the eighteenth century with paintings like Thomas Jones's stark *Walls in Naples* (Fig 4). This picture type specialises in close-up images of ordinary urban settings exhibiting still-life qualities due to the absence of human beings. The narrative potential of its familiar yet strange, prosaic yet poetic qualities is only realised by detecting and unravelling minute details bearing traces of human existence in an archeology of urban debris.

Figure 4: Thomas Jones, *Walls in Naples* (1782).
Oil on canvas. Private collection.

By incorporating these 'micro-scenes', Memling's painting comprises an extraordinarily rich mixture of image types later associated with the scenic tradition. Their evolution as distinct picture types did not begin with Memling, though the Renaissance evidently saw the burgeoning of several special genres of painting, including several varieties of scenic picturing. Memling's scenic mixture seems indicative, rather, of the composite and configurative nature of urban narrative as a distinct picture type. I will examine Memling's use of the city as a narrative frame in the light of the narrative potential of the various scenic image formats which developed from core motifs such as those mentioned above.

2. Narrative painting and reading spectators

The sequence of Passion scenes distributed across Memling's painting derives from a well-known and central narrative series in the iconographic tradition of the medieval church. A representative case is the stained glass windows of Chartres Cathedral's western portal (Fig 5). Here the fourteen scenes of the Passion window on the left are combined with the Root of Jesse on the right and the Youth of Christ in the centre window. In this case the telling or reading follows a vertical order from below, beginning at the bottom of the righthand window and concluding at the top of the lefthand window. Together this set of lancet windows narrates but one of many sequences in a Gothic cathedral's full iconographic programme which covers sacred history in the encyclopedic manner of a scholastic *summa*. In medieval pictorial systems[15] stories are, as a rule, narrated visually by means of their placing within various architectural co-ordinates (for instance, the frames of portals, windows or altar wings) ultimately grounded in allegorical interpretations of the church edifice as a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem.[16]

Memling's painting, however, exemplifies a new class of pictorial narrative as well as involving a new breed of spectators. Regarding the former, the events of the Passion story have been transposed from the typically medieval, allegorical *cum* architectural, frame into a historical topography of the city of Jerusalem. Memling narrativises the urban form in a novel way by plotting the sequence of events as a continuous series of scenic settings in the general spatial layout of the city[17] — with the main actors, the figure of Christ in particular, making repeated appearances. In summary, while retaining certain elements of medieval "polifocality",[18] the painting's rhetoric of scenic

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15 Cf Kemp 1993.

16 Cf Kemp 1987, 1996a & 1996b.

17 As an example of visual narrative Memling's painting belongs to the class of 'continuous narrative' — a type of pictorial narrative whose rebirth during the Italian Renaissance is examined in Andrews 1996.

description converts the placing of the story (formerly the architectural frames of sacred edifices) into the story's places (the sequence of scenic settings) and, finally, into the story of a place (the scenic narrative frame of the city of Jerusalem depicted in a "unifocal" painting).

Figure 5: Chartres Cathedral, western portal stained glass windows:
Jesse's Dream, the Youth of Christ and the Passion of Christ (c 1145-1155).

18 Werner Hofmann (1998: 31-50) recently introduced this term to designate "mutual embeddedness" or heterogeneity — along with the differentiating contrast between "coherence" and "fragmentation", a defining attribute common to art products preceding as well as following the "age of fine art".

As far as the new kind of spectator[19] is concerned, the 'choric spectator'[20] consonant with the medieval church's liturgical spaces is replaced in this instance by a scenic variety of *aposkopein*[21] — since time immemorial the posture and gesture of staring into the distance. Aposcopic vision is the subject of a time-honoured *Pathosformel* which is, for example, depicted as an environmental action in Sir Joshua Reynolds's heroic *Self-portrait shading the eyes* of 1748 (Fig 6). Of greater significance is the fact that this action may also be adopted for a distinctive manner of scrutinising pictures, as can be seen in the early portrait of his father by the Dutch print artist, M C Escher (Fig 7). Combining hyperopia and myopia[22] (the elderly gentleman's long-sightedness corrected by a view through a magnifying glass), this print conveys a touching image of scenic *aposkopein* — an image format remarkable for its dynamic blending of distance and proximity. This pictorial parallel is often projected in the composition of Escher prints and recurs in general as a special feature

19 In addition to courtiers, the new breed of spectator which this painting addresses generally came from a mercantile class of merchants and bankers or an intellectual class of humanist scholars who commissioned and collected paintings and prints for secular purposes. The new kind of spectator I have in mind denotes an item of visual attention present in the cultural habits of this social grouping.

20 This is Nicholas Bryson's term for the medieval mode of reading visual narratives in architectural frames (cf Bryson 1981).

21 Cf Stoichita (1995: 32) on aposcopic gestures of 'bedazzlement' and 'concealment' in the picturing of visionary or mystical experiences in seventeenth-century Spanish painting. Naturally the potential meaning of such gestures is context-dependent, thus varying between inflections one may well typify, for instance, as heroic ('staring down the antagonist'), picaresque ('comic winking'), hedonistic ('voyeurist desire'), idyllic ('nostalgic yearning') or scenic ('territorial surveillance').

22 Cf Elkins 1996 on abnormalities of vision and varieties of blindness as metaphors for the biased nature of human vision, in particular visual partialities of an ideological nature. Hyperopia and myopia, or distance and proximity of vision, thus represent ideologically charged notions of perspectivity inherent in the typiconic features of pictures in the scenic tradition, notwithstanding the prominent conceptual role of *Fernbild* and *Nahbild* in the rise of formalist methodologies of art historiography.

of pictures in the scenic tradition. I should like to subject Memling's use of aposcopic vision in a scenic narrative to further consideration.

Figure 6: Joshua Reynolds, *Self-portrait shading the eyes* (c 1748). Oil on canvas, 62,5 by 73 cm. London: National Portrait Gallery.

Figure 7: M C Escher, *Portrait of G.A.Escher, the artist's father* (1935). Lithograph, 23,6 by 20,8 cm.

3. Scenic prospector and sightseer

Memling's painting tells its story by means of mediating narrative interactions between two imaginary points of view. In reading the picture a spectator is prompted to appropriate and to alternate between two distinct narrative perspectives. My labels for the spectator's two scenic roles are prospector and sightseer. Prospecting[23] viewers adopt an observer stance towards the expanse and the horizon along with a surveying orientation towards the schematic layout of the city map. Sightseeing spectators, on the other hand, are faced with the ground-level urban experience. They have to make local sense of the city in orientating themselves by means of a mobile array of routes, addresses, traffic in motion and changing scenery.[24] With this ability in common — the city-dweller's 'habitat tact' in effortlessly linking orientation at the micro- and macro-scenic levels — each of the image formats in the scenic tradition's array of picture types may project distinct configurations of prospecting and sightseeing roles.

From the prospector's central and elevated point of view the topography of Memling's city furnishes the reading spectator with a synoptic key to the Passion story. It effects this in part by recalling the city's eschatonic topography in medieval iconography. Such a medieval model of the heavenly Jerusalem can be seen in a famous wood-cut illustration of 1493 by Michael Wolgemut and Hans Pleydenwurff for Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik* (Fig 8) — the 'holy city' with the temple in its centre and surrounded by walls with twelve towers. This centralised view of an ideal city not built by human hands, depicted from an elevated if not divine point of view, will become a recurrent image format in many subsequent representations of visionary or mythical cities.[25] The same image format persists even in cases of secular urban visions of modern utopias.[26]

23 Iser 1989 takes prospecting as one of the key metaphors for processes of reading.
24 Cf Lynch 1960.
25 Picture type no 11 in Table 1.
26 One may even argue that it remains present as 'zero degree' in the dystopic reversals of apocalyptic visions.

One need only mention instances like Wassily Luckhart's *An die Freude* of 1919 (Fig 9) or a 1926 film poster for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (Fig 10).
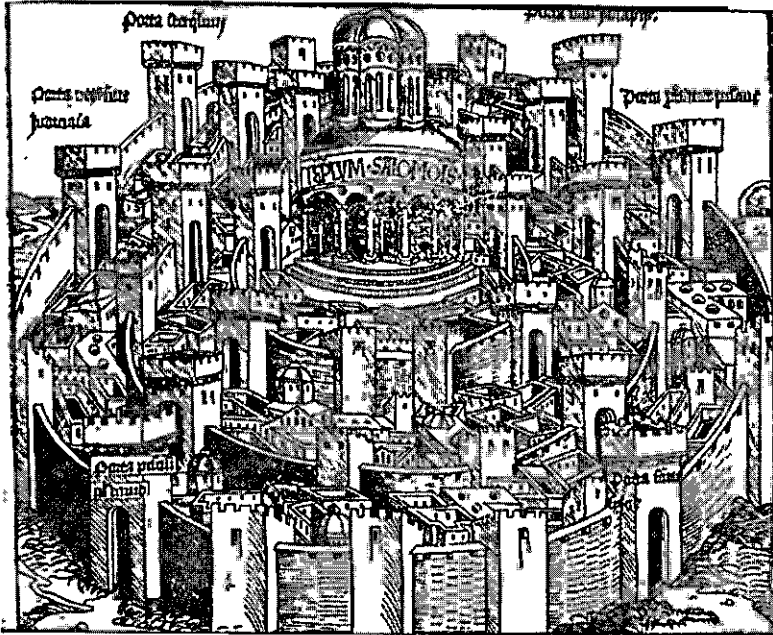

Figure 8: Michael Wolgemut & Hans Pleydenwurff, 'Jerusalem', woodcut print in Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik* or *Liber chronicarum* (Nürnberg: Anton Koberger, 1493).
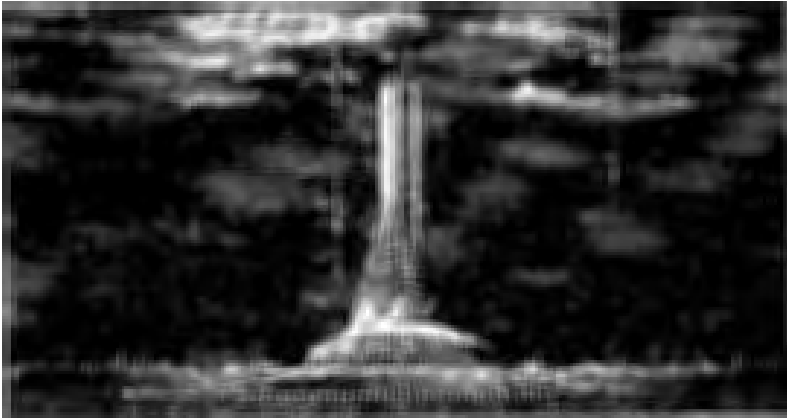
Figure 9: Wassily Luckhart, *An die Freude* (1919). Utopian design.

4. Narrative temporality

In Memling's topography, however, the city has the irregular layout
of a changing settlement — the human site of historical events in a
pre-modern urban constellation of walls, gates, temple, palace, public
square, towers and roofs. Memling's Jerusalem is still a notional city;
not the historical destination which a crusader might experience.
Crucial to visual narration, however, is the fact that this fifteenth-
century rendition of a New Testament version of the old royal city of
David describes a corrupt capital (according to post-exilic re-
interpretations of Old Testament prophecies), a city ready for the
sacking — the historical fate of Jerusalem foretold in the prophecy of
destruction which Christ uttered immediately prior to the first of the
Passion scenes depicted in the painting. As a narrative frame this
urban prospect thus fixes the story's past and future parameters. By
means of the incorporation of references to prefigurative typology,
the urban constellation is charged with the before-and-after dynamic
of unfolding events, those Passion events to be recounted from
beginning to end between the first and the last of the scenes,
respectively depicted in the top left- and righthand corners.[27]

27 Christ's entry into Jerusalem and the risen Christ appearing to Mary, or
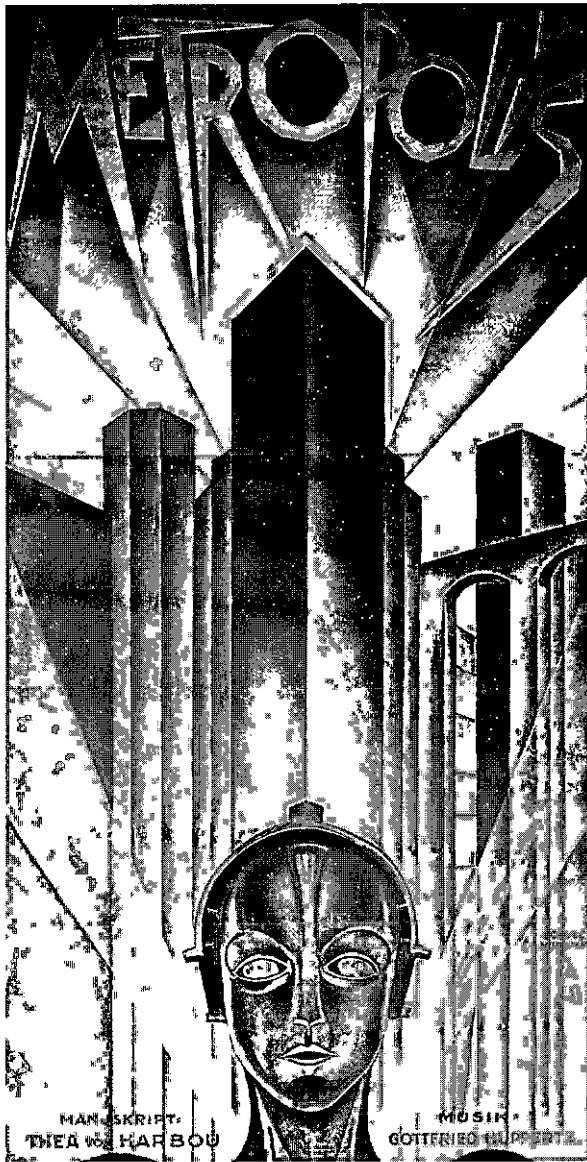   Goodman's scenes 1 and 18.

Figure 10: Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (1926), film poster.

The temporal directionality of Memling's narrative, its inherent before-and-after dynamic, contrasts with the centralised spatial format common in picturing the mythic time frame of visionary cities. Due to such cities' eschatonic or apocalyptic, utopic or dystopic nature, particularly in terms of their spatial paradoxes,[28] this contrast involves more than a mere opposition of time and space — the "atemporal spatialisation" conceived in Goodman's illusion of narrative sequence. The fact that Memling's painting manages to project a unified narrative perspective in the form of a scenic synopsis emancipates it from the medieval triptych conventions which still held for the narrative structure of altarpieces in the fifteenth century.[29] Visual narration by means of a scenic division of story events nevertheless retained its currency in popular visual culture — as can be seen, for example, in applications of the convention of episodic sequence in a seventeenth-century *View of London from Southwark, before, during and after the Great Fire* (Fig 11) or the 'comic strip' convention of sequential stages in an engraving of *The great London plague of 1665* (Fig 12).

Memling's prospector-narrator's topographical synopsis sets the temporal frame for the telling of the story — a narrative *parcours* embracing the passage of several days, with the Sabbath and all but one of the nights elided from the sequence. This is achieved by depicting the city like a gigantic sundial, with darkness reigning in the lower lefthand quarter — the setting for the nocturnal scenes that tell the events of Thursday evening: the scene of the Last Supper with Judas withdrawing to meet with the Jewish council, the scenes in the garden of Gethsemane with Christ praying and then being arrested, and finally Peter's denial at the border between day and night sections. Note also the hint of narrative ties across the diagonal axis, between the lower nocturnal quarter of the city and the darkness enveloping the Crucifixion scene at the top. The disciples' sleeping figures in the garden of Gethsemane thus double as the dead rising from their graves at Friday noon. Such scenic clues about local time sequences within the city are telling devices of visual narration.

28 Cf Marin 1984.
29 Cf Pilz 1970 on the triptych as a narrative form of pictorial composition.
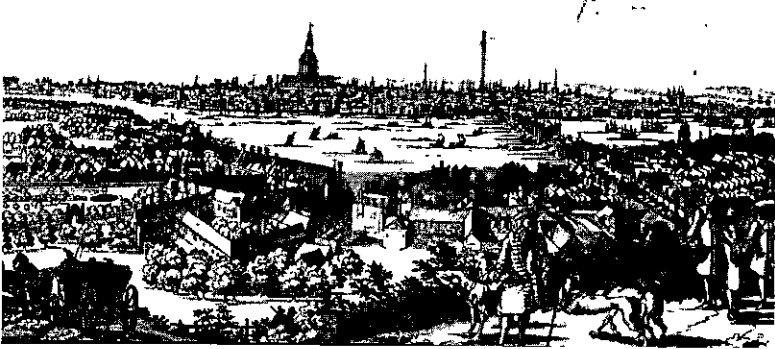
Figure 11: Anonymous, *View of London from Southwark before,
during and after the Great Fire*. Engraving.

Figure 12: Anonymous, *The great London plague of 1665*. Woodcut print.

One may compare temporal indices in scenic settings with their symbolic use in emblematic prints on the 'times of day' theme which became popular in the seventeenth century, as a rule depicting seasonal activities against scenic backgrounds in which accessories from nature or from urban settings serve to establish a time of day or night. The latter elements, initially subsidiary or parergonal, are special features in scenic pictures and will gradually attain dominance in the work of artists in the scenic tradition. Appreciated in this light, the scenic day-night combinations in Memling's painting take on the cast of a rudimentary urban landscape[30] —pictures in which the built environment is rendered like a scene from nature — another image format typical of the scenic tradition. Thus the Italian futurist artist, Giacomo Balla, uses a modern variation on the triptych format in a painting of 1904, *The labourer's day* (Fig 13), to visually narrate the incessant cycle of day and night, the numbing alternation of labour and sleep in a construction worker's cheerless existence. As in the Memling painting, one section depicts a nocturnal scene while the presence of the complete cycle serves to suggest the universality of events or conditions.

Another comparable instance of an urban landscape is *The city from Greenwich Village* (Fig 14), a painting by John Sloan, the most distinguished member of the New York group called the Ash Can school.[31] The contrast between the gloomy foreground and the glowing city rising in the background again represents a particular time of day — a nightfall scene. However, the combination of the visionary qualities of the glowing city rising on the horizon to the left and the converging elevated railway and traffic lanes in the foreground also suggest the powerful attraction of the modern city as an enduriug conditiou. The painting thus tells the fateful story of urbanisation as a social force that affected the life history of the masses and resonates with a tradition of American novels from Theodore Dreiser to John Dos Passos.

30 Picture type no 8 in Table 1.
31 Cf Zurier, Snyder & Mecklenburg 1995 and Conrad 1984: 86-113.

Figure 13: Giacomo Balla, *The labourer's day* (1904).
Oil on paper, 100 by 135 cm. Private collection.

Figure 14: John Sloan, *The city from Greenwich Village* (1922).
Oil on canvas, 66 by 85,7 cm. Boston: National Gallery of Art.

5. Pilgrimage

I return to Memling's painting, now gradually shifting attention towards topography's second spectator role — that of a sightseeing spectator negotiating the site of historical events at the ground level of urban experience or, in the case of a painting, that of a close reader who responds to telling pictorial detail, for instance, a spectator like Escher's father (Fig 7). In this connection one should bear in mind that Memling's painting was a devotional picture, in fact an altarpiece for private use. Hence the requisite sightseer attitude is prefigured by the donor portraits of the Italian merchant couple, Tommaso Portinari and his wife, shown kneeling in the painting's lower left- and righthand corners. The narrative plot has to be read in this meditative key — not just any sightseeing traveller consulting a city map, on the move as it were, but a devout pilgrim visiting and revisiting, lingering and delaying, offering prayers at a series of shrines along a meandering *via sacra*. The spectator is meant to bond with the scenic *via dolorosa* in the manner of a worshipper fingering the beads of a rosary or poring over a daily sequence of prayers in a well-thumbed Book of Hours — both, incidently, celebrated metaphors of narrative succession.[32]

Adopting the imaginary role of a traveller-pilgrim, spectators reading the Passion scenes join a Bakhtinian chronotope — the chronotope of the Way.[33] Their itinerary follows the historical route of a saintly hero's trial by ordeal from the point of departure to the arrival at a final destination, from the entry scene's royal advent to the triumph of the resurrection scene.[34] The scenes along the *Kreuzweg* thus has to be read as stations in the founding legend of a spiritual way of salvation and as the narrative source of various ways of living — the most significant in this case being, among others, the

32 Cf Botvinick 1992.
33 Cf Bahktin 1981 and also Kemp (1996: 159-185) on early modern visual interpretations of the *Kreuzweg* as examples of the chronotope of the Way.
34 In Memling's painting the eschatonic triumph of Christ is prefigured by the statue of an enthroned king situated above the palace of Pilate as a sign of the divine origin of earthly justice.

pilgrimage image of the Christian sojourner's ascetic identity. A further item from Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik*, an illustration of Rome with its ancient ruins and sanctuaries (Fig 15), demonstrates the notion of urban topography as *mirabilia Romae* — the scenic itinerary of a pilgrim's journey as well as the ritual setting of Holy Week in Roman Catholic station liturgy.[35] In the secular culture of the modern era the idea of pilgrimage to 'holy cities' or 'holy sites' and remaining traces of the sojourner mentality are exploited commercially by the mass tourism industry.[36]
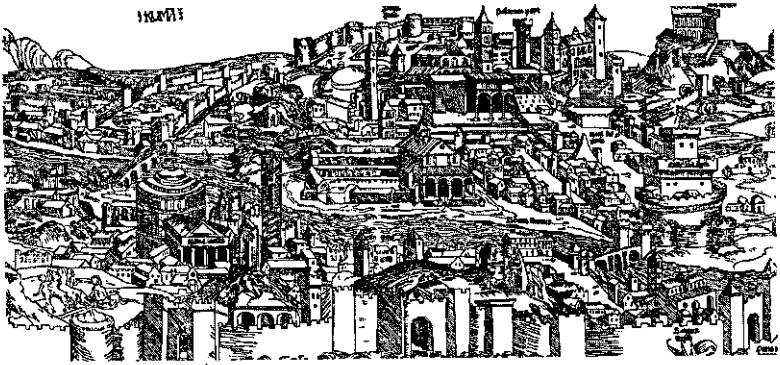

Figure 15: Michael Wolgemut & Hans Pleydenwurff, 'Rome',
woodcut print in Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik* or *Liber chronicum*
(Nürnberg: Anton Koberger, 1499).

35 Station liturgy or the cycle of services at various altars or stations evolved in part from the custom of papal visits to Roman churches on the processional route between the Lateran Palace and St Peter's.

36 Cf the Roman Catholic Church's website <http://christusrex.org/> for a sample of available tourist offerings.

6. Tourism

A postwar *Guide for visitors to the Ise Shrine* (Fig 16) illustrates the pilgrim's way of entering into a narrative chronotope. This intriguing hybrid combines two distinct scenic image formats — a schematic map with a section of Japan's national railway network on the extreme right, and a landscape scene depicted in a pictorial style traditionally reserved for sacred scenery. The geometrically reduced figures in the network map become flowing lines extending iuto the panorama of the landscape. Pilgrims join tourists on this excursion, yet they look with different eyes or an unlike set of visual habits. With the guide open on their laps, tourists read the schematic map in the conventional Western manner — plotting their position on the route from a perpendicular point of view while distegarding the ethnic elaboration of the picture's decorative landscape background.

Pilgrims, on the other hand, have a special chronotopic orientation and experience another form of transport during the excursion. Peering out through the train window at passing scenery, they adopt a horizontal point of view towards the panoramic image of the landscape with its sacred sites. Meditated in the stillness of this imaginary frame, the picture is in fact an exegesis of what is visible outside. In this altered state of consciousness it is uo longer the landscape rhat is moving past the travelling train; instead it is now the pilgrim who is advancing and who uses the picture to gauge his or her progress in an exercise of spirituality. In other words, in reading this hybrid image's narrative, the scenic parallel of distance and proximity registers elements of an anthropological contrast between insider and outsider perspectives. As natives of a secularised culture with ideologically informed scenic habits, we have to negotiate barriers of similar scope in aspiring to read the visual narrative presented by Memling's late medieval or early modern painting.

In Western cultures scenic picture formats associated with travelling and with modern travel literature evolved in conjunction with the development of the industrial metropolis and the emergence of modern tourism, during an era when mechanised systems of transport began to afford travellers ever-accelerating velocity and increasing comfort of movement — the origin of the traveller's
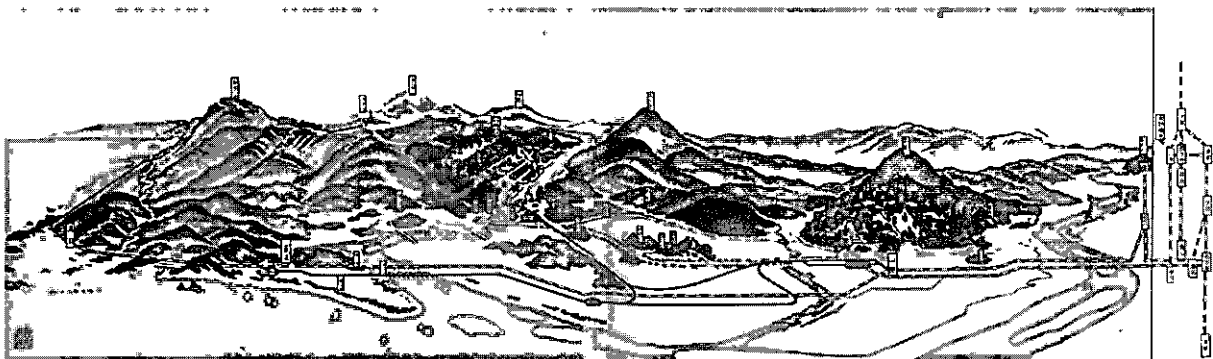
53

Figure 16: *Guide for visitors to Ise Shrine*, Japan (1948-54).

Figure 17: Robert Havel (jr), *Costa scena, or Cruise along the southern coast of Kent* (1823).
Hand painted engraving for a 5,48 meter long panorama roll. London: Gestetner Collection..

roving perspective and the tourist's scenic gaze.[37] The velocity of human movement through scenery and the concomitant experience of disembodiment and environmental detachment became fully topical only with twentieth-century scenic pictures and tourist posters. During the nineteenth century, wandering and travelling were valued as notable expressions of human freedom, and the slow progress of pilgrimage (formerly a model for Grand Tour itineraries) was converted into the leisure and luxury of secular tourism.

The latter development is visible in an early precursor of the cinema, a fascinating example from 1823, Robert Havel's *Costa scena, or Cruise along the southern coast of Kent* (Fig 17). This hand-coloured engraving for a 5,48 meter panoramic roll records a continuous sequence of scenery viewed in roving perspective from the fixed point of view of a ship travelling parallel to the coast. For greater freedom of movement we have to turn to examples of a later date, like the urban scene from *Excursion dans Paris sans voitures* (Fig 18), an anonymous guide published around 1867 with the telling subtitle: "New guide for sauntering: a simplified plan indispensible to foreigners making their own way in Paris". Needless to say, the spectator is here projected into the commodified metropolitan world of the *flâneur*,[38] a well-known subject in nineteenth- and twentieth-century storytelling, sociological writings and urban novels.

7. Scenography

I return to the pilgrim's circumspect progress along the *via dolorosa* in Memling's painting by observing that ritual recitation of prayers from a Book of Hours in the comfort of one's home has little in common with the perilous experience of actual pilgrimage in the Middle Ages. For the original spectators this gap was bridged somewhat by the liturgical scenography of mystery plays. I am referring to a common aspect of the late-medieval city dweller's experience, possibly even the immediate source for Memling's

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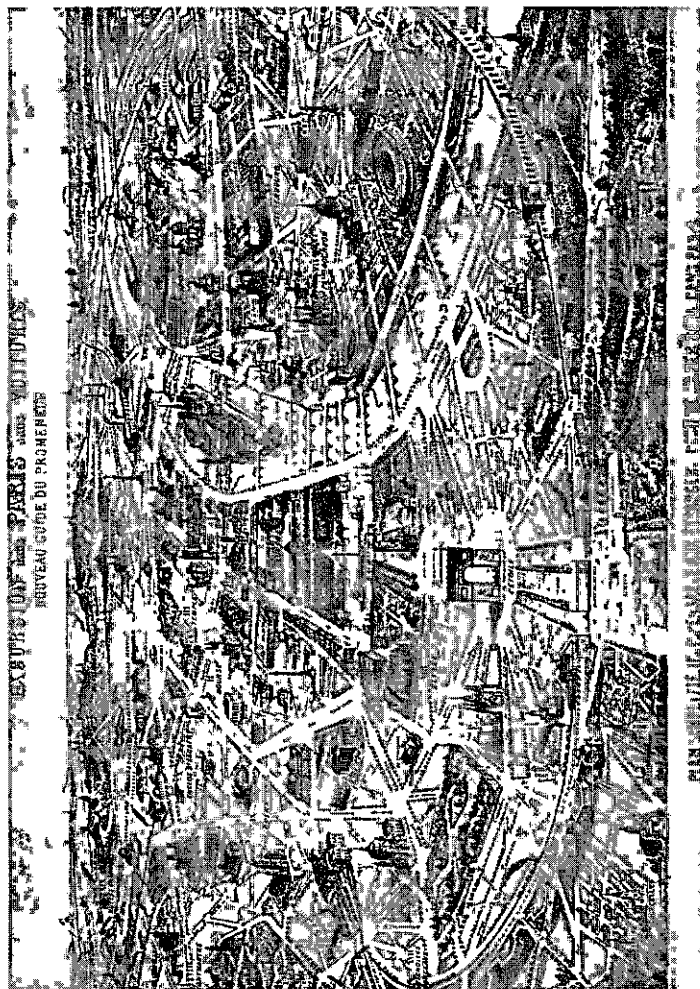37   Cf Urry 1990 & 1992.
38   Cf Tester 1994.

Figure 18: Anonymous, *Excursion dans Paris sans voiture. Nouveau guide du promeneur: plan simplifié, indispensable aux étrangers pour se guider seul dans Paris* (c 1867).

painting[39] — seeing wagons with the stage decor of various plays dispersed among various urban addresses, parked before the residences of guild members participating in a city's Passion Plays. In other words, the sequential order of the Passion story is read by stringing the scenes together like remembered episodes in the urban experience of perambulating from address to address in a city. Such scenic episodes are gathered together (the original sense of 'reading') in an audience's memory of performances of the scenes of a Passion Play.

Rather than an urban mixture of weathered and recent edifices in a 'real' city, Memling's Jerusalem resembles a fantastic collection of stage decors for a Passion Play.[40] This is particularly evident in the transparent fourth wall scenography of private domestic spaces in the nocturnal scenes.[41] In Western art history, the scenic tradition in fact grew from stage decor, and in this painting *skenographia* is expanded from scenic *parerga* to the narrative frame of an all-inclusive urban scene. Theatrical scenography is, once again, a figurative component that will become a recurrent strategy in the history of the scenic tradition. This becomes evident when Memling's city is contrasted with modern versions of this scenography. Despite obvious differences between the urban forms of pre-modern and modern cities, a family resemblance is evident in the disjunct but pulsating, jazzy rhythms and urban *simultané* of the metropolitan ambience created in Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Photographic collage of Berlin* (Fig 19). This fragmented image was projected as a scenic backdrop for stage activity in a 1929 performance of Walter Mehring's play *Der Kaufmann von Berlin*. It represents one of the many *mise-en-scène* strategies adopted by the director, Piscator, to break down the illusory fourth wall dividing audience from stage space.

39 Cf Pochat 1990: 46-51.
40 As a fantasy collection of historical buildings the painting could also be read as an early example of an architectural *capriccio* — picture type no 9 in Table 1.
41 For example, the room of the Last Supper or Caiphas's house; Goodman's scenes 3 and 4.
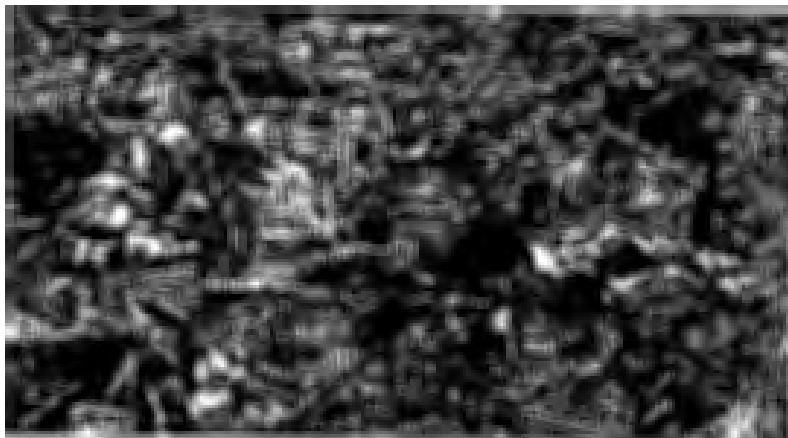
Figure 19: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Photographic collage of Berlin*,
projected as stage decor for Walter Mehring's play, *Der Kaufmann von Berlin*,
directed by Piscator, première on 6 September 1929.

8. Narrative prospectivity

In conclusion it should be noted that Memling replaces the city's
inhabitants — the urban crowds of 'real' Jerusalemites — with an
engaging collection of characters, witting and unwitting participants
in the Passion events, who thus come to resemble the *turba* of an
oratorio performance. Apart from the principal actors and the *turba*,
however, the *dramatis personae* include a small number of onlookers
who, with varying degrees of awareness, play a special role in visually
telling the story. As they are associated with the 'micro-scenes', they
may well be described as 'micro-narrative' actors. They include
figures like the impassively and silently witnessing couple in the
window near the centre of the composition (the window scene); the
gesticulating and conversing pair of sightseers on the bulwarks
behind the solitary stepped gable (the Flemish urban fragment); the
porter as an innocent bystander at the gate (the urban record) and,
finally, the triplet of a father with a boy and a dog, shown from the
back as 'Everyman' figures, seemingly unaware of the fact that they
are heading the procession on the road to Calvary.

Since they represent us — as spectators of the Passion events in various sightseeing roles — these unobtrusive yet key figures are crucial operators in recounting and reading the visual narrative.[42] The reader detects them only after subjecting the city as narrative frame to intensive scrutiny. Once they have been descried, however, the story comes alive for the reader. The telling presence of these narrative figures corroborates Wolfgang Kemp's view that fifteenth-century painting's most significant innovation was the narrativisation of pictorial depth perception.[43] They each embody narrative prospectivity at a specific station in the city, linking the deictic here and now of their situations with the there and then of the passage of events visible from their points of view along the *Kreuzweg*. Transcending mere *ancillae narrationis*, the joint function of these figures is to articulate narrative links between scenic distance and proximity, acting as relays between spectators inhabiting the painting's imaginary story world and ourselves late-twentieth-century spectators occupying the gallery space in front of the painting.[44]

Note in particular, at the extreme boundary of visibility, the minuscule female figure near the horizon in the top righthand corner — a lonely traveller approaching the city or perhaps a worker returning from the field. This character may be taken as the figure withing the painting's imaginary world which is the most representative of scenic aposcopic vision. Her zoom-out remoteness in expansive space corresponds with the perspective of spectators who adopt an imaginary prospector's elevated point of view for scenic surveillance at a distance. On the other hand, she adds a concurrent challenge to spectators by stretching a sightseer's imaginative zoom-

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42 Goodman (1980: 106) overlooks their crucial narrative function when he reaches the conclusion that "there is not only no direction but no order of telling at all" in this painting.

43 Cf Kemp 1996: 88-90.

44 Cf Acres 1998, especially the section "City: distance and proximity", devoted to the narrative structuring of time by means of the cityscape in the central panel of Rogier van der Weyden's *Columba altarpiece*, a seminal precursor of Memling's painting.

in or empathy capabilities to the limit as we endeavour to imagine her part in the story from her remote position.

She thus embodies an ultimate focal point for scenic reader responses — the point of our imaginative access to a narrative picture containing a scenic version of historical Jerusalem as a world-at-a-distance which presents a story from redemption history in a non-transcendant setting. In a literal sense her remoteness represents our imaginative approach in the effort of drawing closer to the story events and the difficulties involved in our committed and personal approximation and appropriation of a Passion narrative in the scenic mode.

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