

Dirk van den Berg

Urban scenes of contested human identity: 'capturing the glances of others, the vistas of the world'

Summary

This article provisionally concludes earlier research on picture formats in representations of urban environments, on the scenic tradition's typiconic features and on its affiliation with a worldview frame associated with parallelist philosophical conceptions. The argument ranges from the motif of a single eye, via its typiconic augmentation by pathos formulae of human actions and settings, to the field of visual narration by means of scenic description. In conclusion, examples of South African pictures are analysed in terms of key notions such as aposcopic vision in the scenic mode as a pathos formula or the theme of the social sublime.

Stadstonele van bestrede menslike identiteit: 'ontmoet die blikke van andere, die uitsigte van die wêreld'

Hierdie artikel voltooi navorsing oor pikturale formate in die uirbeelding van stedelike omgewings, oor verbande tussen die tipikoniek van die sceniese tradisie en die wêreldbeskouwlike raamwerk ten grondslag van parallelistiese filosofiese konsepsies. Die argument strek vanaf die visuele motief van 'n enkele oog, die tipikoniese uitbreiding daarvan deur patosformules van menslike handelinge en omgewings, tot die veld van visuele vertelling deur middel van sceniese beskrywing. Ten slotte word enkele Suid-Afrikaanse voorbeelde ontleed aan die hand van sleutelbegrippe soos aposkopiese visie in die sceniese modus as patosformule en die tema van die sosiaal-verhewene.

The power of prospecting and surveillance as images associated with the 'scenic' tradition¹ has been a topic of recent research in the rhetoric of visual power.² In savouring the affective presence of pictures from this tradition, the viewer senses a common 'scenic' identity — a family resemblance of typiconic features drawn into the imaginary cast of individual pictures, each also bearing traces of ideological conflict.³ A 'scenic' identity is one of several 'holding patterns' sustained in Western visual culture by established affiliations between typiconic formats and worldview frames. A rhetoric of 'scenic' display is remarkable for the way it engages spectators in certain 'thematic roles' — in particular those of the prospector and the sightseer as polar positions projected into various rhetorical configurations by a number of image formats in the historical array of 'scenic' picture types (cf Scheme 1).⁴

- 1 This third and provisionally final report on research in the 'scenic' tradition (cf Van den Berg 1997b & 1998b) is an expanded version of a paper first presented at the 14th annual conference of the South African Association of Art Historians on *Negotiating Identities*, UNISA, 15-17 July 1998. A special note of thanks is due to Johann Visagie, a colleague in the Department of Philosophy, for stimulating conversations on the systematics of image and ideology.
- 2 Cf Van den Berg 1996, especially the three tables summarising the traditions of visual power (Table 3) and the imaginary *personae* projected in the *imago* rhetoric of typiconic formats (Tables 4 & 5).
- 3 In my understanding ideological conflict concerns the 'datedness', 'partiality' or 'bias' of pictures. Like all human products, pictures are marked, on occasion even disfigured, by the cultural dynamics of contending ideological powers at any historical juncture. Yet pictures are not passive, merely suffering the effects of the prevailing 'style wars' — they also flaunt and actively advance ideological positions. This ideological dimension is not the topic of this paper but will be touched on from time to time.
- 4 Cf Van den Berg 1997b: 123-4 for a list of 'scenic' picture types as well as the appended examples of each. Only urban scenes (the topic of my research) are included among the picture types in Scheme 1. An exhaustive list of picture formats in the 'scenic' tradition should include various types of landscape pictures. In most cases, however, a 'scenic' format serves equally well in picturing either urban or natural scenery. Since identity is an issue in all traditions, the present paper will also use examples of 'non-scenic' urban pictures for comparative purposes.

Van den Berg/Urban scenes of contested human identity

Scheme 1: Summary of scenic images / picture types

1. Topography — description of place, overview, projective synopsis, city map, bird's eye view, perspectival survey
2. *Vedute* — urban landmarks on the horizon, perspectival city view, urban vista, anamorphic place, *genius loci*
3. Panorama/*panoptikon* — 'look-around', spatial environment, surrounding/enveloping city
4. Window — 'look-our' / 'out-look', frame, 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 reduction, urban patterning, network, *simultané*
7. Urban fragment — 'corner', city 'still-life', focus on urban detail, material traces of absent urban life
8. Urban landscape — urban site, built environment, industrial city-scape, technosphere
9. Architectural *capriccio* — fantasy combinations of emblematic & historical monuments
10. Rebus — *Zerrbild*, picture puzzle, *carceri*, disorientating & fragmented urban labyrinth / maze / trap
11. Visionary cities — mythic cities / ruins, prophetic revelation, apocalyptic / dystopian / utopian cities
12. Urban narratives — the city as narrative frame, urban chronotope, pilgrim's way, traveller's guide, tourist route, sequence of events moving through urban addresses, passage with exhibitions

1. 'Scenic' display

A painting by the South African artist Simon Jones offers a ready point of entry into the imaginary domain of the 'scenic' rhetoric of identity. The typiconic features of *The path of perception* (Fig 1) have been discussed elsewhere.⁵ Note the impassive humanoid figure, the radiant transparency which intimates an openness to possible worlds yet eschews any trace of otherworldly spirituality, and the impersonal, indeed almost cyborg-like character of the disembodied hand in the foreground, carefully positioned so that a stumpy wrist is paired with the left eye while a path of light connects the articulate yet inert digits with the right eye.

5 Cf Van den Berg 1997b: 92-6 where the Jones painting is paired with El Lissitzky's *The constructor (self-portrait)* of 1924 to illustrate prospection and surveillance as image powers of 'scenic' vision.



Fig 1: Simon Jones (1951-), *The path of perception* (1984), oil on panel.
Exhibited at RAU, 1985.

The simplified compositional layout displays its 'scenic' appeal — the elementary arrangement in clean-cut planes along horizontal and vertical axes and the almost machine-like precision in the meshing of facial and environmental features.⁶ Thus the eyes of the humanoid figure are aligned exactly with the horizon⁷ — at the

- 6 This reminds one of the "abstract machine of faciality and deterritorialization", the idea of a mutuality of *visagité* and *paysagité* advanced by Deleuze & Guatari (1987: 167-91).
- 7 The coincidence of eyes and horizon, indicating a fixed relation of point of view and vanishing point, is a standard feature of early modern perspectival design (cf Kubovy 1986). Rare in contemporary painting, its occurrence here is charged with significance. Kubovy interprets the image of an eye penetrated by an arrow — a small detail from a Mantegna fresco painting (Kubovy 1986: 1-1) — as a visual metaphor of perspective, adopting it as an emblem of his "psychology of perspective". With Kubovy's remarks on the "robustness of perspective" in mind, I would suggest that the Mantegna detail be taken rather as a rhetorical device.

division between an upper level consisting of a clear 'sky' along with the polished cranial sphere and a lower level comprising converging 'earth' and body features. The division along the vertical axis is probably intended as a means of contrasting 'nature' and 'culture' — on the right a marine scene with undulating parallels delineating the outdoor shapes of hand, shoulder, breaker, seashore, land and sky; on the left a scene of indoor illumination comprising orthogonal planes along with the constructed shapes of doors and geometrical window frames.

A reading which foregrounds such schematic divisions has to be undertaken circumspectly. Images readily feign conceptual features, allowing readers effortlessly to commute iconic force to didactic schematics or ontological models: in effect abbreviating the painting to an image, and the image to a diagram. Since this variety of synoptic scheme is often used in textbooks on the history of philosophy, one is tempted to look for correspondences between the compositional patterns of pictures and the ontological models proposed in certain traditions of philosophical thought.⁸ One should not, however, assume that this discursive level will necessarily provide a short-cut to underlying worldview frames.

Fortunately the Simon Jones painting offers alternative, promising avenues of exploration. One may, for instance, read the formal patterns of the composition as articulating a visual text — drawing nuances of visual meaning (like the connotations of 'nature' and 'culture') into allusive play with imaginary 'features'. Playing with nuances of *imago*, the painting presents its spectators — readers who become aware that a visual game is afoot and who are prepared to join the play — with the metaphorical schematics of an expressive movement concentrated in the humanoid facial features, specifically

8 Cf Van den Berg 1997b: 96-8 where a case was presented for typiconic connections between pictures in the 'scenic' tradition and parallelist conceptions or identity theories in philosophical thought. Rather than positing immediate similarities between conceptual patterns and pictorial compositions, the issue hinges on the historical effects of a common worldview framework which sustain the elaboration of parallelist conceptions in philosophical thought as well as 'scenic' typiconic features in the visual arts.

in the eyes as focal points of engagement in rhetorical encounters between spectators and the painted image.⁹ Thus a semi-circular transom window can be seen in the place of the right eye and a cloudlike sliver in the place of the left. Furthermore, these ocular positions in the composition are configured as open and closed respectively, or as a gazing eye and a downcast eye. The paired 'features' together might represent a looking gesture — perhaps the act of winking (a favourite motif of connivance in the 'picaresque' tradition) or, more likely in the 'scenic' tradition with its distancing and focusing variety of aposcopic vision, the act of taking aim (itself a venerable scholastic metaphor of intentionality).

An art historian's first impulse is to interpret these motifs as metaphors of scenic vision condensed into a single playful figure — a metonymical prospectus of the two main genres of 'scenic' picturing in the history of Western painting — the window-eye representing the urban scenery of cityscape pictures and the cloud-

- 9 The theory of 'human eccentricity' proposed in Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology offers valuable insights into interpersonal relations, particularly regarding the nature of pictorially mediated spectator engagement: "Body surface and voice, the primal sounding boards of expression, have for the power or 'faculty' of expressivity the character of organs of expression. That is, they appear as means and fields of expression, with and in which it becomes externally perceptible. In this process, that part of the body which is naturally outside the range of self-perception, i.e., the face, takes the lead and (with certain limits) becomes its representative. As the posture of the whole body mirrors in itself the mental state, so the face — and, again, in a concentrated way, the look — becomes the mirror, indeed the 'window' of the soul. As the area of sight and vocal utterance, a man's face is at once imperceptible and open. He looks out of and sounds forth from it, and by means of it captures *the glances of others, the vistas of the world*. Concealment and overtness make the face the front, the boundary and mediating surface of one's own against the other, the inner against the outer [my italics, DvdB]" (Plessner 1970: 44-5). The phrase "capturing the glances of others, the vistas of the world" describes in a nutshell a rhetoric of 'scenic' display, hence its use as my subtitle. The other important phrase ("the mediating surface of one's own against the other, the inner against the outer") formulates a fundamental aspect of Aby Warburg's notion of *Pathosformeln*, cf note 25 below.

eye standing for landscape pictures and natural scenery. A reading in this vein might match Jones's intent, yet its scope is restrictive in confining the work's metaphorical connotations to art history. Projected against the larger canvas of visual culture the ocular motifs seem to register additional and even more compelling connections. Consider for instance a syndicated mass media's image of a contact lens with a 'celebratory' football design (Fig 2), a fashionable prosthetic in the self-fashioning 'body image' culture of our era, promoting the 1998 World Cup soccer tournament as part of a global marketing campaign. Incidentally extending the window-eye's presence in mass culture, the mass media's reproduction, transmission, dissemination and circulation of such abbreviated images for purposes of advocacy and entertainment effectively embed them even deeper within ideological culture by renewing and reinforcing links with the steering powers of our time.¹⁰

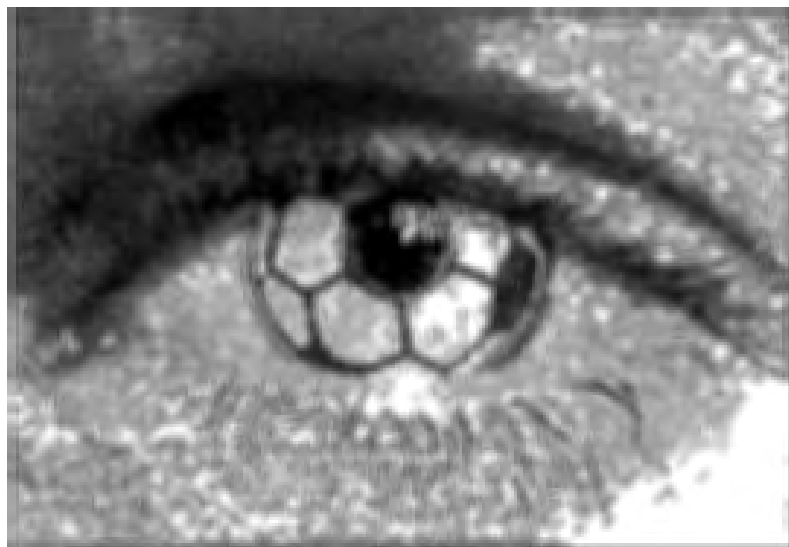


Fig 2: Syndicated mass media image of contact lenses with football design, modelled by Alegria Collantes for the 1998 Soccer World Cup tournament. *Die Volksblad*, 24 June 1998, front page.

10 Cf Tagg 1994 and the literature he provides on the discursive fields of steering powers as manifested in the visual régimes of the city and photography.

The cloud-in-the-eye,¹¹ on the other hand, resonates with *The false mirror*,¹² René Magritte's well-known painting depicting a single, staring eye with a black pupil and a blue sky and white clouds in the place of an iris — perhaps the most impressive ocularcentrist image of the eye as noetic *organon* or ocular apparatus of *panopticon* surveillance.¹³ Disembodied by the absence of eyelashes,¹⁴ this 'schematic' representation of a mysterious yet all-powerful and all-seeing eye has become an item in visual mass culture and public awareness since its adoption, in a variety of abbreviated formats, as the logo of the CBS network.¹⁵ It is seen daily by millions of American television viewers as a corporate image — presumably a reliable trademark for entertainment by presentations of 'truth' in soundbite packaging for mass consumption. The Magritte painting has also been used as illustration on dust-jackets — most appropriately for David Lyon's *The electronic eye: the rise of surveillance society* (1994). In this fine analysis it represents the "electronic panopticon" — an emblem for the way in which the computerised technologies of surveillance systems effectively reduce human personhood to a "data-image" of digital records in linked consumer data-banks.

The eye-cloud contraction also resonates with the famous opening sequence of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's disturbing film, *Un chien andalou* (1928). I am referring to the traumatic effect of this surrealist film's gruesome 'eye-opening' montage of two images — a sliver of cloud drifting across a full moon, and the eyeball of a woman being

- 11 In the past, as metaphors of revealing and concealing, clouds often represented divine glory and holiness. The traditional iconographical reference intensifies the ocular opposition between open and closed, gazing and downcast.
- 12 René Magritte, *Le faux miroir* or *De valse spiegel* (1928), oil on canvas, 53,1 by 79,7 cm. New York: Museum of Modern Art, illustrated in Van den Berg 1996: 16.
- 13 Cf Lyon (1994: 57-80) for an analysis of the dystopian turn in the fate of the Panopticon between Bentham and Foucault.
- 14 Eyelashes are indeed shown in another version of this image, Magritte's *Le faux miroir* (1935), a smaller painting (19 by 27 cm) in a private collection in Paris. The lashes have the effect of humanising and individualising the eye.
- 15 Cf Schmidt-Burkhardt 1992: 269 note 14.

cut by a razorblade.¹⁶ Motivated by resistance to bureaucratic and technocratic tendencies towards autonomy and instrumental domination, an imaginative act of ideology critique¹⁷ might (on the basis of the potency of images in revealing the ideological roots of distorted social formations) conceive of an alternative telecast, utilising this sequence as a network logo, but with the objective of provoking public awareness of a possible world in which the formation of public opinion would not be grounded in entertainment or diversion, and in which 'truth' would not be marketed as commodified items of *doxa*.

Remaining with media reproductions of eye images and summarising previous explorations, I would like to interpret a design by Hokoda and Mitchell, *The reconfigured eye* (Fig 3),¹⁸ as a visual statement of a philosophical position in the worldview frame which 'scenic' picturing holds in common with the philosophical tradition of parallellist thought the location also of identity philosophy since the time of the German idealist philosopher Schelling.¹⁹ I will read the design as a hypothetical 'eye fractal',²⁰ an ocular pattern representing in metaphorical mode the 'scenic' frame or parallellist position — in other words, resembling perspectivism's notion of a 'perspective of perspectives'. From the most minute of eyes to the largest one in the image — including the as yet invisible and merely virtual configuration of its infinite extension into cyberspace — all

16 Schmidt-Burckhardt 1992: 182 cites the pertinent section of the film script.

17 Cf Lyon 1994: 214-7 and Morbey & Robins 1995.

18 This is a computer-generated image of an eye made up of eyes, described on the cover of Mitchell (1992) as "produced by applying a special digital filter to a scanned image of an eye", apparently with the purpose of providing a print substitute for a self-symmetrical fractal graphic on a computer screen.

19 Cf Bril 1986: 139. The salient points of the case for linking 'scenic' picture formats to parallellist thought, presented in Van den Berg (1997b) are summarised in the following description of Fig 3.

20 Fig 3 is not a true fractal, in other words a graphic screen, self-symmetrical even down to the level of pixel values. Apart from the eyes, it also contains repetitions of a rectangular colour palette motif, one of which serves as a glint of reflected light in the pupil of the largest of the eyes.

the eyes are identical. Hence the issue at stake does not primarily concern relations between the one and the many, or between the parts and the whole, or perspectival proximity and distance — though these nuances are obviously also involved. Beyond these contested distinctions, however, at a fundamental level of patterning where the slant in a 'scenic' direction is established, the ocular pattern postulates a hermeneutics of identity and alterity. In other words, the fractal image suggests the presence in cyberspace of an assumed underlying congruence manifesting itself differentially in all its meshing multiples.

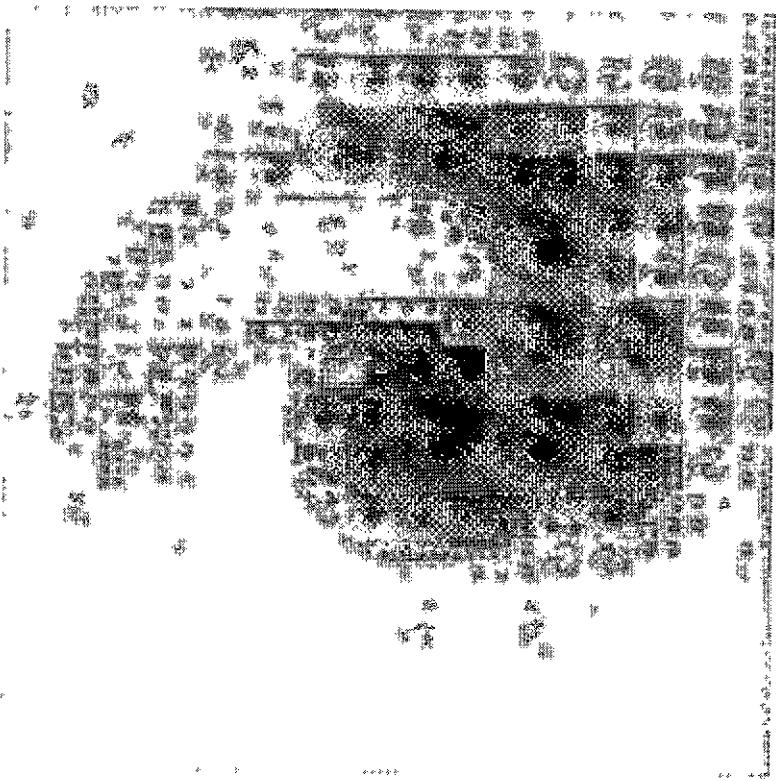


Fig 3: Wade Hokoda & William Mitchell, *The reconfigured eye* (1992),
(Mitchell 1992: 10.1 and dust-jacket illustration).

Translated into philosophical terms, the self-symmetrical ocular pattern or pictorial algorithm may thus be understood as signifying a spectrum of divergent yet complementary parallels at diverse functional levels — nature and culture, organic and mechanical, body and soul, brain and mind, unconscious and conscious, innate and environmental. In a 'scenic' worldview perspective, people, urban settlements and environments (both natural and social) are indeed comprehended as diverse yet parallel patterns of isomorphic integration in which a fundamental and as yet nameless identity comes to immediate expression.

Shusterman's (1996) contention that city dwellers typically experience urban identity by means of 'absences' and 'unseens' raises the question of how the worldview frame at the heart of this philosophical position is expressed in the imaginary cast of pictures? One possible avenue of exploration in answering the question is the conjecture that typiconic formats (viewed as typical or recurrent configurations of imaginary features) may also be envisioned as ocular motifs augmented by certain pathos formulae.²¹

21 This proposal was inspired by a metaphor teased out in a remark by William Rowe (1989: 159) on the fate of the worldview category, in particular the current pluralisation of the modern Western ideal of the world-picture: "Many of us suffer from an optical illusion when we consider the historical significance of the worldview question. We entertain the idea that ours is The Age of the Worldview [...] a period in which philosophy and the sciences are characterized by a cognizance of perspective and viewpoint [...] But the theme of cosmopsis (worldviewing) is not new; neither is the search for a scientific discipline of cosmoptics (the study of worldviewing), and neither is a philosophical cosmophthamology (treatment of disorders of the worldview)". The ophthalmic note has to be borne in mind in evaluating the legacy of typiconic traditions. Displaying a clear but partial vision of the world, the 'scenic' is at the same time a disorder of vision, a 'scenic' syndrome or symptomatic array of recurring 'blindspots', an ideological pattern of 'what goes without saying' in basic communication.

2. Typiconic features as pathos formulae

An awareness of the affective presence of images assumes spectator sensitivity towards the metaphorical scope of image power. The foregoing readings of images suggest, first, a focus on eye motifs or ocular patterns as reality-shaping metaphorical schematics in Ricoeur's imaginatively modelling sense of the term²² — distinct not only from diagrammatic abbreviation on a discursive level but also, one might argue, from Gombrich's notion of technical making and matching of schema and correction.²³ Secondly, the interpellation of affective images into the everyday flow of imagery in the visual media — a recognised critical procedure in cultural studies²⁴ — adopts the general direction of inquiry exemplified by Aby Warburg's *kulturwissenschaftliche* explorations in tracing the historical 'after-life' of certain images from Greek antiquity.

The proposal that one may describe the phenomenon of typiconic formats in Warburgian terms is advanced as a key in this regard — a key that may fit the 'orientation' category of the plan of display for the several forms of human expression collected in the Warburg

- 22 Cf several essays by Ricoeur in Valdés (1991) on the imaginative projection of meaning in metaphors and plot structures for semantic and narrative innovation.
- 23 A concise outline of Gombrich's arguments in *The story of art* (1950) and *Art and illusion* (1960) is applied to the eye as a motif in the section on "Response to meaning: the magic of eyes" in Gombrich (1996: 141-7). In this connection "magic" denotes a rhetorical effect created by the basically technical procedure of making and matching — a sense that is reinforced by the dust-jacket illustration of Gombrich's *The image and the eye* (1982), with its picture of the measuring eye and hand of an artist at work.
- 24 Cf Wolfgang Kemp's programmatic statement of 1970: "Man müsste darauf verzichten, die künstliche Aura des Kontemplativen um das Kunstwerk zu legen, man müsste es aber nicht nur aus seiner kunsthistorischen Immanenz herausführen [...] Bilder müssten konfrontiert werden mit Reklameplakaten, mit ihren Reproduktionen und Kopien oder mit Fotografien ihrer Sujets — solche Gegenüberstellungen würden eine kritische Schule des Umsehens im Bild begründen [...] In Konfrontationen müsste man weiterhin den numinösen Qualitätsbegriffen zu Leiben rücken" (Below 1986: 65). The challenges of this critical programme for typiconic research are reviewed by Morbey (1995).

Library. I am referring here to the fourfold division of *Orientierung / Bild / Wort / Dromenon*²⁵ proposed for the classification of material on the *Nachleben der Antike*. Such an appropriation of the concept of pathos formulae in a rhetoric of *imago*²⁶ is subject to the provision that the Warburgian meaning of 'orientation' be substantially deepened or replaced by a philosophical typology of worldview frames.

Since 'orientation' is a typical component of everyday acts of scenic attention as well, this general proposal seems especially

- 25 For Warburg, 'orientation' signifies the evolutionary sequence of 'religion-magic/natural science-philosophy', though implying also a critique of the Enlightenment meaning of this sequence (cf Setti 1997: 51-2): "Die Ausgangsfrage für die Arbeit von Warburg war die ästhetische Empfindung (oder die Erwidern) den Bildern gegenüber: ein universales und bedeutendes menschliches Gefühl, dessen Ursprung und dessen Grundwert er zu suchen vorhatte, unter Ausklammerung des Status 'Kunst' in der zeitgenössischen Gesellschaft, das heißt des 'Künstlerischen' als Wert. In der ästhetischen Antwort des modernen Menschen erkannte er einen intimen und weit zurückliegenden Kern, der in der menschlichen Natur angelegt und folglich mit dem identisch war, was die Reaktionen und Bilder (und auf die Welt) des primitiven Menschen kennzeichnet: einen glühenden Kern [einen Urkern von Pathos; das Detail, in dem der liebe Gott steckt, DvdB] der ursprünglich — auf den frühesten Stufen der Menschheitsgeschichte — aus den Bildern eines des Instrumente zur Orientierung des Menschen in der Welt machte für seine mühsame Suche nach *einem Gleichgewicht durch die Kontrolle des Von-ihm-Anderen* [my italics, DvdB], und was sich, sozusagen phylogenetisch, bis zu uns fortgesetzt hat, wobei es sich allerdings tiefgreifend gewandelt hat" (Setti 1997: 49-50). Note the italicised phrase's resonance with Plessner (note 9 above).
- 26 Cf Van den Berg 1996: 12-9. One is furthermore reminded of entomological terminology where *imago* denotes the fully developed stage of insects (the developmental process exploited in John Heartfield's well-known *Deutsche Naturgeschichte* photomontage of 1934). This offers the student of visual culture certain analogies regarding the metamorphosis of images and the transforming features of visual identities, for example, relating the *imago* effects of picture types in artworlds to evolving 'pupal' forms of imagery circulating in visual culture, or tracing the 'larval' forms of imagery to their metaphorical roots. Compare the strategy of identifying 'embryonic', 'anecdotal' or 'micro-scenic' images in Van den Berg 1998a & 1998b.

pertinent in the case of the 'scenic' tradition. The provisional array of 'scenic' images (listed in Scheme 1) may thus be considered as a set of 'orientational' pathos formulae for multiple rhetorical purposes. Their function in depicting the settings of human events is to orientate spectators in spatial as well as ideological terms. This is a familiar device in artistic representations as well as in popular imagery from visual culture. Conceived in this manner, 'scenographic formats' would supplement expressive body postures as a special focus of Warburg's *Pathosformeln* — the crucial actions and agony of participants in decisive events, rendered initially in representational motifs from Greek antiquity and subsequently resurging from social memory at times of crisis. In the typiconic sense advocated here, pathos formulae depict human beings and settings in the grip of powerful ideological forces.²⁷

Warburg's own emphasis may be illustrated by two self-portraits by the Mexican muralist David Siqueiros — two paintings which sustain the focus on ocular motifs. The most prominent feature of the first example is a single glaring eye with a dilated pupil expressing a mixture of anxiety and defiance (Fig 4). The body posture and gesture of the second example further articulate the basic agonistic tenor of the eye image. Here the pathos formula entails a dramatic foreshortening of the painter's posture while the traditional self-portraiture iconography of the painter's hand and brush has been replaced by the aggressive gesture of a defiant right arm and a huge fist with paint clinging to and flying from the nails (Fig 5). The painter's eye and hand have thus been forged into a political weapon to be wielded by a revolutionary artist. The confrontational posture and violent action create an orientational image of a social activist cast in the 'heroic' tradition's protagonist-antagonist mould. However, the extravagant and exaggerated depiction of a powerful

27 Cf Serti 1997: 39-49, in particular p 41: "Bildformel ist ein neutraler, deskriptiver Terminus, (dem griechischen *schema* entsprechend), Pathosformel ist im Gegensatz dazu stark mit kulturhistorischen Konnotationen besetzt. Pathosformel ist deswegen ein Wort mit inneren 'Sprengkraft'; es schließt in sich sowohl die Starrheit der Formel wie auch den Imperus des Pathos ein: in diesem inneren Spannungsfeld liegen sein Reichtum und seine Fruchtbarkeit."

Van den Berg/Urban scenes of contested human identity

body in action has since been incorporated into the stock of formulae used by illustrators to represent the violent actions of comic-book and cartoon heroes and villains. As a consequence, for spectators today, the second Siqueiros self-portrait teeters on the border between the tragic and the ludicrous.



Fig 4: David Siqueiros (1896-), *Siqueiros por Siqueiros* (1939).
Ducco on wood, 48 by 73 cm. Mexico City: Galeria Arvil



Fig 5: David Siqueiros (1896-), *Self-portrait*. Pyrovelin paint.
Mexico City: National Museum of Fine Art.

Artists in the 'scenic' tradition, on the other hand, proceeded along a different path. They took the lead in emancipating scenography's *parerga*, elevating the topic of environmental description, whether rudimentary or detailed, from the background to centre-stage. Their focus was the settings of human events rather than human bodies in action; in the terms of Alberti's pictorial rhetoric, *scena* rather than *istoria*. An elaborate array of 'scenic' picture formats evolved as early modern and modern artists began exploring each format's potential for a rhetoric of 'scenic' display.²⁸ The relative preponderance of either human bodies, actions and events or the non-

28 The inclusion of maps in Stoichita's (1997: 173-84) chapter on "The methodical eye" suggests that these 'scenic' formats may well be reckoned among the various 'meta-painting' devices which early modern painters exploited to register the 'self-aware' or artistic nature of painted images.

human environment (both natural and urban) is a secondary matter.²⁹ The critical issues involve three interrelated areas:

- The primary issue concerns the basic question of 'orientational' positions in an inclusive³⁰ or worldview sense of the term (embracing cosmic, human, societal and historical dimensions within ideological 'macromotives'³¹ rather than mere components of a worldview theory).
- Clusters of typiconic features come into play at a secondary level where the imaginary cast of such features can be read as divulging the 'holding pattern' of recurring worldview frames (the 'scenic' being merely one of a number of alternative framing models envisaged in pictures).
- In the 'scenic' frame, finally, a third issue concerns the array of 'scenic' picture formats, each of which has the rhetorical capacity to project the imaginary positions inherent in this specific orientation (namely, diverse compositional options for articulating the polar positions of prospector and sightseer).

29 A rhetoric of display assumes the mutuality of human bodies and the settings of human actions. In many cases either or both of these may be absent or not explicitly depicted. Presuming interactions between the exigencies of 'contexts' of situation and the constraints of 'texts', a rhetorical awareness is nonetheless sensitive to implicit relationships between imagined scenic settings (whether depicted or not) and the *in situ* setting in which pictures may be displayed, between imagined bodies and actions (again, whether depicted or not) and between the human identity of spectators and the effects of acts of spectating. I will return to the issue of a rhetoric of display (cf note 45 below), since Lehmann (1989) detects in its primacy an additional, specifically postmodern dimension of *Das Szenische*.

30 As Warburg was well aware, cf note 25 above.

31 In this regard, Visagie (1996: 130) conceives of 'nature', 'knowledge', 'power' and 'personhood' as awesome phenomena, possibly thematically related to the sublime discussed in section 6 below — "phenomena that are transcendently magnificent in what they are and in what they do; phenomena, also, that seem to exist at the limit, or rather, to *constitute* the limit, of what we ourselves are and what we can hope to do. Faced with manifestations of such grandeur, individuals and civilizations have always felt the urge to turn to these manifestations as the objects of their greatest concern, their highest tributes, their noblest efforts."

3. Aposcopic vision — pathos formula and narrative strategy

It seems that the power of prospecting or surveillance imagery probably derives from a 'scenic' variety of *aposkophein*³² — since time immemorial the posture and gesture of shielding the eyes or staring into the distance — itself the topic of a classic pathos formula akin to the kind of heroic action seen in the Siqueiros self-portraits.³³ Aposcopic vision is directed chiefly towards natural phenomena as depicted, for example, in Sir Joshua Reynolds's heroic *Self-portrait shading the eyes* (c 1747).³⁴ In the 'scenic' tradition, however, aposcopic vision may also take the form of instrument-assisted observation, for instance, the gesture of taking aim as suggested above in connection with the Simon Jones painting (Fig 1). This option may be attributed to this worldview frame's inherent complementarity of functions (perceptual and technical in this instance). An example of this manner of surveillance can be seen in Malcolm Morley's photorealistic *Sailor* (Fig 6) where the left eye is open but unseeing as the covered right eye is taking aim through the instrument of nautical navigation.

- 32 Cf Stoichita (1995: 32) on aposcopic gestures of 'bedazzlement' and 'concealment' as pathos formulae in the picturing of visionary or mystical experiences. Naturally the potential meaning of such gestures is context dependent, varying between inflections which one may typify as heroic ('glaring down the antagonist'), idyllic ('nostalgic yearning or melancholic desire'), hedonic ('craving arousal and relishing sensual pleasure'), scenic ('territorial prospection and surveillance') or picaresque ('comic winking and playing the fool').
- 33 Cf Jucker 1956. The aposcopic gesture, like all pathos formulae, is inherently ambiguous. Besides functioning as a typiconic feature in diverse worldview frames, it may also be harnessed in the service of opposing ideological positions within a single frame. The equestrian statue of *Physical energy* (1902-12) by the British Victorian artist, George Fredrick Watts (1817-1904), for instance, elaborates the aposcopic gesture in heroic vein by means of the combined postures of horse and rider. Despite sharing a 'heroic' frame, the British colonialist ideals represented by this statue for the Rhodes Memorial Temple, Table Mountain, Cape Town (cf Crump & Van Niekerk 1988: 54-5) differ sharply from the political message of Siqueiros's revolutionary murals in Mexico.
- 34 Oil on canvas, 62,5 by 73 cm. London: National Portrait Gallery, illustrated in Van den Berg 1998b.



Fig 6: Malcolm Morley (1931-), *Sailor* (1964).
Oil on canvas, 41,6 by 45 cm. Paris: private collection.

Of greater pertinence, however, is the fact that instrument-assisted observation may also be a distinctive manner of scrutinising pictures, as depicted for instance in the early portrait of his father by the Dutch print artist, M C Escher (Fig 7). The lithograph shows the elderly man's long-sightedness corrected by a magnifying glass, thus combining hyperopia and myopia in a touching image of scenic *apokopein* — an image format remarkable for its dynamic blending of distance and proximity, as well as for the graphic contraction of 'zoom-out' and 'zoom-in' vision often found in Escher prints. It is a conspicuous feature, for instance, of his 1937 woodcut *Still-life and street* (Fig 8). Here both the wall enclosing a private interior space and the intervening window frame opening on the open-air public space of the street scene are absent. The road surface of the street extends the table surface with still-life objects without any transition

towards the horizon; the books on the table rest against the nearest buildings. The effect of this 'scenic' pathos formula on the 'room with a view' theme is that buildings become bookrests, interior space becomes exterior territory, 'street-life' becomes 'still-life'.



Fig 7: M C Escher (1898-1972), Portrait of G.A. Escher, the artist's father (1935).
Lithograph, 23,6 by 20,8 cm.

Aposcopic contractions of this kind are a common feature of 'scenic' pictures and also a basis for visual narration by means of scenic description. The dilating focus of the argument which began with a single eye motif, augmented in the next stage by pathos formulae of the settings of human actions as typiconic features, at last opens on the field of visual narrative, in particular the topic of urban narrative as the final item in the list of 'scenic' images.³⁵ This

35 No 12 in Scheme 1.



Fig 8: M C Escher, *Still-life and street* (1937).
Woodcut, 48,7 by 49 cm.

composite 'scenic' format is found in certain urban pictures which combine the special features of other 'scenic' types into complex compositions of a narrative kind. Pictures in this class typically tell their stories by means of narrative interactions between imaginary points of view occupied by the prospector and the sightseer — the polar positions referred to in the first paragraph.

Prospecting viewers, as spectators of pictures, adopt a distanced observer's surveying orientation towards expansive space and schematic city maps. Such macro-scenic pictorial prospects guide spectators in locating and reading a visual story's narrative frame — the framing *topoi* of urban narratives, also activated (if only sectionally) by any of the formats in the 'scenic' array of picture

types.³⁶ Sightseeing spectators, on the other hand, are faced with ground level urban experience. They have to make local sense in orientating themselves in pictorial worlds by following cues supplied by depicted localities, routes, traffic movement, mobile perspectives and changing scenery. Sightseer roles typically involve 'zoom-in' vision for the deft deciphering and reading of details and pictorial cues and, in a special sense, the reader's projective imaginative tact in approaching and approximating the micro-scenic positions and narrative perspectives of minor characters. The concept of 'aposcopic vision in the scenic mode' is useful in explaining the temper of narrative interactions between macro-scenic prospecting and micro-scenic sightseeing.

4. The imaginative identities of spectator roles

Images with affective presence typically display an *imago* rhetoric, not merely engaging spectators in projected roles but indeed affecting their sense of identity in a persuasive shifting or endorsing of positions. We respond to pictures with vivid 'scenic' displays by acting out imaginary spectator roles — adopting the suggested perspectives of prospector and sightseer, being drawn into imaginary worlds with our feet on *terra firma* and our embodied imagination rooted in our own life-worlds. One may describe such imaginary viewing roles as rudimentary forms of human identity and thus also as traces of imagined communities or shared orientations — however damaged or diluted these may be in certain cases. Empathetic spectators initiate the visual role-play by negotiating imaginary identities, participating in pictorial worlds in steady dialogue with the performed roles in order to creatively uncover and to contest or yield to the implicit assumptions of attendant worldview frames. We

36 These features are discussed in greater detail in Van den Berg 1998a & 1998b. Significantly, Ernst Robert Curtius dedicated the founding text of *literarische Toposforschung* to the memory of Warburg — his *Europäische Literatur und lateinische Mittelalter* (1948). Reviving the rhetorical *topos* concept by seeing it as synonymous with Warburg's *Pathosformeln*, Curtius also illuminated the narrative function of complex metaphorical images, some of which hold special 'topographical' implications for visual narration by 'scenic' description.

Van den Berg/Urban scenes of contested human identity

negotiate the ensuing clashing and blending of identities — our appropriation of, our complicity in and our resistance to fictional identities and imagined communities — with varying degrees of solidarity and critique. At stake here are human openness, commitment and solicitude rather than identification and distinction in a merely formal or methodic sense of proximity and distance.

Consider, for instance, an image from 1982 by the Austrian photographer, Friedl Kubelka (nicknamed Bondy), with the title *Self-portrait* (Fig 9). I was unable to locate sufficient biographical information to resolve the gender ambiguities in this picture's *imago* projection. The unsettled gender identity is heightened even further when this image is paired with one of Cindy Sherman's untitled film stills, with a woman at a window (Fig 10) as one of the familiar 'scenic' motifs of distance and proximity — one of many in which this artist explored the power of mass media conventions in the visual construction of female gender roles.



Fig 9: Friedl (Bondy) Kubelka (1946-), *Self-portrait* (1982). Gelatine-silver print. Fine Photographs, Palais Dorotheum exhibition, Vienna, 11-21 October 1997. *Art News*, Oct 1997, 96(9): 21.



Fig 10: Cindy Sherman (1954-), Untitled film still #15 (1978).
Photograph from the series Black & white film stills (1975-1980).

Does the Bondy self-portrait of the title refer to the figure of the urban sightseer shown from behind, the *persona* of a woman in a leopard-skin costume looking at the skyscrapers on the horizon? Or do the *imago* effects instead stem from the male gaze of the camera eye's surveillance, a 'scenic' *persona* implicit in the joining of proximity and distance, configured in a vision at once 'zooming-in' on the female body and 'zooming-out' on an expansive cityscape? Questions like these are prompted by the 'scenic' worldview frame. The answers are determined, usually at unreflective levels of immediate response, by the spectator's participation in societal formations through social role-play and by personal commitments to a variety of imagined communities — differentiated manners of life-world habitation as well as ideologically inspired or entangled interests injected involuntarily into the virtual spectator roles (for instance the ambiguities of gender roles or the overdetermined medley of repressed roles which are censured and transgressive roles which are championed by feminist movements).

Van den Berg/Urban scenes of contested human identity

As a typiconic feature of 'scenic' picturing, composition based on parallels between prospecting and sightseeing forges universes of discourse of the kind persuasively visualised in Otto Umbehrt's photograph with the title *Perspective of the street* (Fig 11) — an example of the scenic *rebus* or *urban labyrinth*.³⁷ The superpositioned images should not be understood in a dualist sense, representing as separate domains the human and the inhuman, the personal and the impersonal, the spiritual and the material, but rather in a monist sense as simultaneous, parallel and involuntary materialisations of an impenetrable yet compelling identity.³⁸ In this imaginary world



Fig 11: Otto Umbehrt (1902-1980), *Perspective of the street* (1926).
Gelatine-silver print, 17,8 by 12,8 cm. London: Sothebys private collection.

37 Picture type no 10 in Scheme 1.

38 'Monists' struggle with structural diversiry in the light of a presumed divergence from a single origin; 'dualists', on the other hand, grapple with the co-ordination of ontic domains presumably structured separately as transcendent and non-transcendent realms. Cf Van den Berg (1997b: 92 note 9).

(possibly with the unconscious quality of imagery on a dream screen)³⁹ the human face in fact is the street's perspective; the collage of urban fragments indeed exists as human identity.

A relentlessly monist frame is similarly evident in a painting by Oskar Fischinger (Fig 12) — an instance of the *urban pattern*.⁴⁰ With the title *Blitzmaschine*, the clock-like image connotes a science fiction device like a 'time-travel machine'. The schematic pattern of this painting reduces the identity of the modern city-dweller to a dynamic co-ordination of inhuman, machine-tooled units meshing in a relentlessly urban tempo. The simplified and streamlined shadow figure of a man, the 'ghost in the machine' visible in the upper righthand section, represents but one cog in a utopian clockwork universe — perhaps a forebear of human identity reduced to a 'data-image' in contemporary information society (Lyon 1994).

Flowing from a power mustering covenant between some of modernity's most influential ideologies — steering powers like scientific knowledge, technological progress, organisational management, security and welfare planning — the entrenched optimism of this utopian position evidently has profound as well as potentially destructive ramifications for our ideas concerning human identity and the value it might have for individuals and communities. This is a vital issue in view of the sharp contrast between modern urban history's utopian dreams and the tragic reality of the inhumane living conditions prevailing in most major urban environments, in both the First and the Third Worlds and, in particular, their fusion in the divided cities of contemporary South Africa.

39 Representations of unconscious experience or dream sequences in the format of disorientating urban labyrinths are common in early German cinematography (eg Georg Wilhelm Pabst's film of 1926, *Geheimnisse einer Seele*). Such devices are often exploited in surrealist painting (eg Paul Delvaux's obsessive dream images) and thoroughly explored in 'scenic' films like Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961).

40 Picture type no 6 in Scheme 1.



Fig 12: Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967), *Blitzmaschine* (1922).
Oil on canvas, 80 by 66 cm. Private collection.

The nature of this contrast is unmistakable when we compare two 'scenic' pictures of the Cape, one from the dawn and one from the close of this century, offering urban scenes on both sides of Table Mountain. The first is the festive, naïve painting from the 1890s by James Ford, *Holiday in Cape Town in the twentieth century* (Fig 13). The rainbow ornamenting this late-Victorian outpost of the British empire was illusory when first painted at the time of the Anglo-Boer War. In the 'new' South Africa the imagined 'rainbow nation' community similarly proves to be no more than an Africanist mirage. The second is the desolate squatter area panorama of Andrew



Fig 13: James Ford (active in Cape Town 1883-1900),
Holiday in Cape Town in the twentieth century (1891-1899).
Oil on canvas, 138 by 183,5 cm. Cape Town: South African National Gallery.

Berman's exhibition transparency *Khayelitsha I* (Fig 14). It shows elevated floodlights rising above a low horizon. Erected by the apartheid security apparatus for surveillance purposes, these are today still the sole form of security in the shanty town environment of a teeming mass of the poor and unemployed.⁴¹

41 Space does not permit an exploration of urban 'scenic' pictures by black South African artists. Their works represent the finest examples of both extremes — the most naïvely utopian of urban visions as well as the bleakest of township scenes. Tito Zungo's coloured ballpoint or pen and ink designs on paper exemplify urban visions of the naïvely utopian variety, noteworthy for the way in which 'scenic' patterning is adopted in the transition from tribal decoration to urban art (cf Third Cape Town Triennial 1988: 85). A fine example of the opposite extreme of 'township art' is Alfred Thoba's *Apology to all African mothers* (1989), Fort Hare University Art Gallery, with its desolate urban scene of prostitution and ravaged family life (De Jager 1992: 194).



Fig 14: Andrew Berman (1953-), *Kbayelitsba exhibition transparency I* (March 1988). 39 by 121 cm. Third Cape Town Triennial 1988: 6.

5. The social sublime in narration by 'scenic' description

Urban narratives draw their thematic stories from human experiences which embody conflict situations arising from living together as communities in ideologically distorted societal formations. The 'scenic' tradition offers a particular emphasis in the descriptive narration of the living conditions and human settings of historical clashes between utopian visions, technocratic planning, social engineering and the social realities of settled communities. It has a predilection for human domicile in 'the best of possible worlds' with its inclusive and evolving continuities, both environmental and historical. Its subjects are adaptation, human acclimatisation to and even resignation in collective absorption. On occasion its subject is also human resistance (though of a distinctly non-revolutionary variety) against imperious forms of totalitarian solidarity, whether oppressive or benevolent in intent. In a 'scenic' perspective the 'Five Year Plan', the 'American dream', the 'European union', the 'African Renaissance' or the 'one rainbow nation' are but short-lived surface expressions of evolving identities. The spectator roles of 'scenic' pictures typically tender compelling social identities — involuntary participation in imagined communities as 'scenic' is an offer which one, as spectator, is simply not allowed to refuse. The ideological drive of a 'scenic' worldview is apparent in the hold exercised by its optimism in the face of all historical evidence to the contrary.

The altered key in which contemporary life-worlds and urban conditions are viewed may be assessed by considering tell-tale

adjustments to traditional picture formats — critical mutations in the array of 'scenic' images which highlight their rhetorical status as pathos formulae in new conditions. In this regard the advantage of reading typiconic features as pathos formulae becomes evident.⁴² One source of these mutations is the social sublime⁴³ — an off-shoot of the revolutionary shift in modern aesthetic experience from classical harmony and idealist beauty to aesthetic terror and the dangerous play of power and powerlessness. With uncanny⁴⁴ connotations of social upheaval, political violence and immolation of personal identity, the

- 42 Setti's (1997) otherwise incisive analysis of Warburg's methodology neglects the question of conceptual connections between *Pathosformeln* and the aesthetics of the sublime — an odd omission in view of the vital contribution of Friedrich Theodor Vischer's dark and irrational, quasi-natural and magical concept of symbolism (cf Vischer's text of 1837, *Über das Erhabene und Komische*) to Warburg's re-evaluation of antiquity's cultural legacy, surviving primarily by way of 'incommensurate' pathos formulae as 'primitive' repositories of the 'sublime' injected into and yet transcending classical forms: "In der Formel, naturgemäß 'kalt', steckt immer ein 'warmer' Pathoskern, fähig zur Schaffung von immer neuen Formen und Kunstwerken. Das enge Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Formel und Pathos löst sich so in ein mächtiges Bewußtseinsinstrument auf: gerade weil die Formel, fast *atomen comparationis*, einen Urkern von Pathos in sich trägt, bietet sie sich für den anthropologischen Vergleich an" (Setti 1997: 48).
- 43 Partly initiated in Lyotard (1984), the ramifications of this theme are surveyed in Pries (1989), De Bolla (1989) and the double issue of *Merkur* 487/486 devoted to *das Erhabene*. The contributions of Steinhauser (1989) and Lehmann (1989) warrant special attention.
- 44 Lehmann (1989: 757) describes the *Unheimliche* as central to the experience of the sublime: "Das ermöglichte systematische Ästhetik, inthronisierte jedoch zugleich einen Kunstbegriff, der die — im Erhabene doch am deutlichste sichtbare — zentrale Szene versammelt, was heutige Kunsttheorie bewegt: die Frage nach dem, was uns in Kunst widerfährt (die Rezeption); die Suspension der begrifflichen Orientierung; die Diskontinuität von Signifikant and Signifikat; die Themen des Unbegrenzten, Ungeformten, Abstrakten; die plötzliche 'Ereignis' eines Schocks". Cf Iversen (1998) for a reading of Edward Hopper's 'scenic' works in terms of the uncanny. In this regard she coins the concept of a 'blind field'.

social sublime has special relevance for the 'scenic' tradition.⁴⁵ We recognise its presence in the sited mode of subjectivity displayed in the works of leading South African proponents of 'scenic' picturing. Thus Clive van den Berg's pastel, *Holy Site No 15* (Fig 15) invokes a distanced observer only to mangle the intruding spectator's sightseeing eyes.⁴⁶ Holiness is not an open sight/site — indeed, I found it difficult to look at this image on exhibition display. A similarly sited subjectivity, in a contrasting 'picaresque' mode, informs William Kentridge's drawing *Reservoir* (Fig 16) with the compromised morality of modern urban existence as its theme. The billboard combination of cityscape and a swimming-pool close-up has a subversive purpose. It converts a sunny urban vista, a playground summary of Johannesburg landmarks, into a wasteland of everyday urban warfare. Zooming in on the poolside scene, it turns the goggled swimmer and sunbather with fishes into emblems of Folly in the tradition of Breugel and Hogarth.

In conclusion, mutations of the social sublime in the display rhetoric of picture formats may be demonstrated by two thematic comparisons of urban pictures drawn from outside the 'scenic' tradition.

45 Of special interest in this context is Lehmann's (1989: 759-766) proposal of *Das Szenische* as a special category of the sublime and thus a key notion in postmodern discourse. For Lehmann the 'scenic' denotes, among other things, a shift from the aesthetic object or artwork to an aesthetics of *Aufmerksamkeit* as well as the emergence of gestural and performance art from a progressive *Theatralisierung* of the arts (cf Lyotard 1977). Lehmann's (1989: 760) argument hinges on a new awareness of "das komplexe ganze von Kunst als einer Situation". As suggested above in note 29, a rhetoric of display is open to this situational dimension; it has the added advantage, however, of not being confined in its purview to current (epochal) practices, or to postmodern (theoretical) discourse.

46 One is reminded of the biblical description of holiness as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12: 29).



Fig 15: Clive van den Berg (1956-), Holy Site No 15 (1985).
Pastel on paper, 196 by 126 cm. Pietermaritzburg: Tatham Art Gallery.

6. Tortured topography

Consider first the case of *topography* as a 'scenic' type.⁴⁷ Playing with the ambiguous differences between topography's distanced 'overview' and cartographic mapping's scaled-down schematics, Jan Micker's *View of Amsterdam*⁴⁸ presents a commanding prospect of the seventeenth-century city from an imaginary bird's-eye point of view.

47 Picture type no 1 in Scheme 1.

48 Jan Christiaenz Micker, *Uitzicht op Amsterdam (s a)*, oil on panel. Amsterdam: Historisch Museum, illustrated in Van den Berg 1997b: 107.

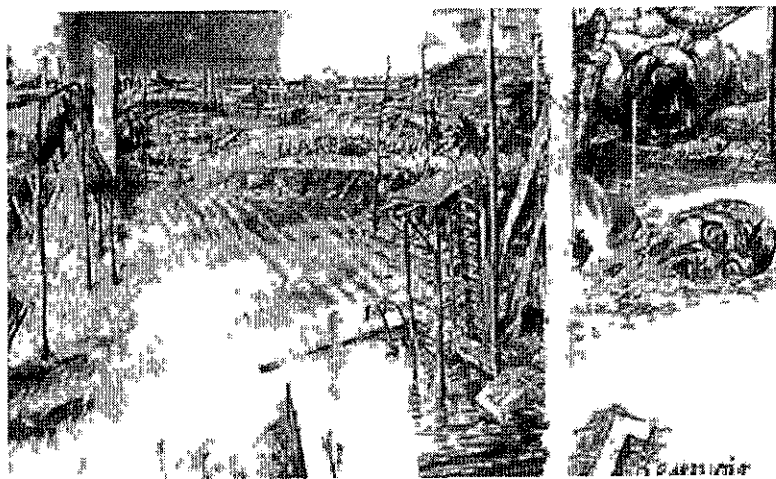


Fig 16: William Kentridge (1955-), *Reservoir* (1988).
Pastel, charcoal and gouache on paper, 123 by 190 cm. Third Cape Town Triennial 1988: 29.

The noble cloud shades sailing across a city at the centre of an expanding trade empire and a growing colonial power suggest a clear, simplified, open-spaced, synoptically patterned and non-transcendent universe. For the original spectators this 'scenic' view of a world-at-a-distance probably implied a notion of God as deistic creator of a global *harmonia praestabilita*. From a late twentieth-century perspective, on the other hand, this pictorial world might be read as demonstrating the resemblance calculus of Foucault's classical *épistème*. Thus a capitalist God who only helps those who help themselves might readily usurp the vacant position of transcendence.

Compare the cloud shades in Micker's picture with the peculiar topography presented by Anne Hyatt's drawing *This is life* (Fig 17) — with the added commentary that 'this is life' in South Africa, a former Dutch colony, three centuries later, experiencing the consequences of a Foucaultian reading come true. Anne Hyatt incorporates the stationary territorial data of aerial surveillance or reconnaissance photography into an image with a powerful 'scenic' presence which engages spectators at a level of reeling bodily sensation. It has an

aspect of violence and terror, perhaps matching the wild view of a free-falling parachutist plummeting to earth from a great height. The prospector-sightseer ratio is thus mutated into a pathological embodiment of dangerous 'scenic' play.⁴⁹

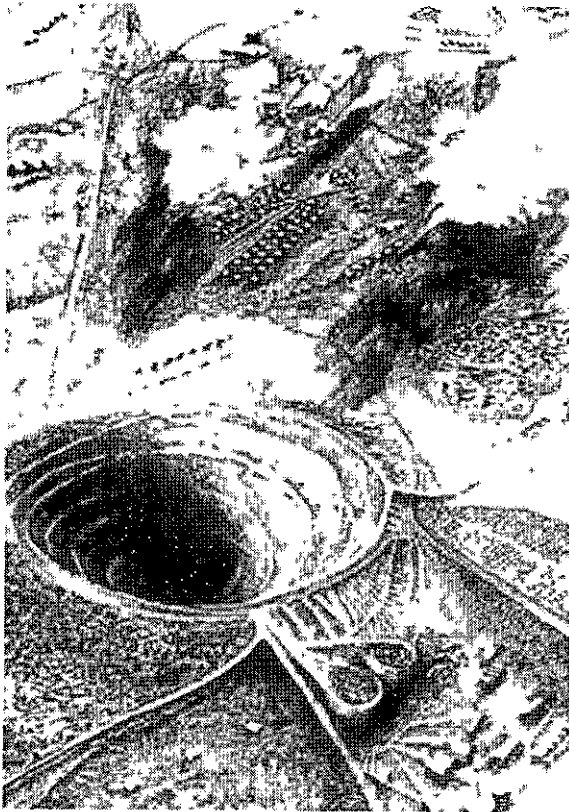


Fig 17: Anne Hyatt (1934-), *This is life* (1988).
Charcoal on paper, 155,5 by 105,5 cm. Third Cape Town Triennial 1988: 28.

49 Cf the choice of the falling figure of Icarus as a pivotal emblem in Buci-Gluckmann's (1997) analysis of the recent mutations of *l'oeil cartographique*, which she describes as "tautological", "entropic", "nomadic" and "ephemeral" gazes.

Ann Hyatt's drawing shows an industrial area in the foreground and, at some distance, a white suburb and a black township, each covered and threatened by localised cloud or smoke shadows. The looming open-cast mine in the lower foreground conveys a strong sense of foreboding. Its compelling attraction tells a story of communities inexorably being drawn into a maelstrom of social conflict or an impending revolutionary inferno (with the darker shapes of the mine and the clouds combining to suggest the emblematic facial features of the gaping jaws of Hell). Like a gigantic wound in the landscape — an index of the escalating scale of human technological control and the ravaging of nature — the open-cast mine replaces the deistic creator in Micker's topography with a gaping black hole of systemic collapse and chaos. Only an extremely naïve spectator (perhaps the bearer of an 'innocent eye', somebody without a hermeneutics of suspicion) would heave a sigh of relief in the patently false belief that this image represents merely one, bygone, revolutionary moment⁵⁰ in South Africa's troubled history — a former political hurdle that has apparently been safely negotiated.

7. Fatal window scene

Finally, consider the case of *window scenes*⁵¹ — perhaps the most prolific of the 'scenic' picture types but, as far as I can determine, one in which outdoor-living South African artists seem to lack adventurous experimentation.⁵² A utopian position of extreme urban optimism is represented by Umberto Boccioni's celebrated futurist painting *The street enters the house* (Fig 18) — a window scene in the 'heroic' mode. Its central female figure on the balcony is absorbed

50 The revolutionary moment of 1988, at the time of the controversial third Cape Triennial when this picture was first exhibited. Several of my South African examples have been selected from this exhibition. It represents a high point in the history of resistance art in apartheid South Africa and a substantial number of the works exhibited have 'scenic' connections.

51 Picture type no 4 in Scheme 1.

52 The best South African examples are by Fred Page (1908-1984), the isolated Port Elizabeth exponent of urban 'scenic' painting.

into the vibrant enveloping ambience of building site, urban noise, colour and rhythm of traffic movement. Like an imperious force-field the composition of simultaneous and mobile perspectives shatters conventional *finestra aperta* painting's perspectival closure, impetuously drawing spectators into its expansive movement and reshaping them in the image of technological utopianism.⁵³ Do we yield to the persuasion of this 'heroic' image, submitting to its promise of joy, conquered by the power of its environment? What degrees of solidarity and critique are involved in spectator resistance? Instead of offering resistance, spectators in the 'scenic' mould would easily adapt themselves to the work's 'heroic' utopianism and be whole-heartedly absorbed into this environment.



Fig 18: Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916), *The street enters the house* (1911). Oil on canvas, 100 by 100 cm. Hannover: Kunstmuseum Hannover.

53 Cf Grasskamp 1992.

Van den Berg/Urban scenes of contested human identity

Constrast this with another example, an equally dramatic but evidently fatal window scene — the German expressionist painter, Conrad Felixmüller's *The death of the poet Walter Rheiner* (Fig 19). The curtains and window plants are paltry domesticated remains of nature, once the bourgeois delight of an 'idyllic' worldview frame.⁵⁴ Through the window frame we see the self-immolation of a minor German poet, jumping from a window with his pen still clutched in his hand. Beyond this plummeting and spreadeagled body, the nocturnal scene of a deserted city with the baleful eyes of glowering streetlights is visible — the jumbled scene of the poet's life as well as his death.



Fig 19: Conrad Felixmüller (1900-1967), *Tod der Dichters Walter Rheiner* (1925).
Oil on canvas, 180 by 115 cm. Berlin: Private collection.

54 Cf Bättschmann 1989.

Like a life story supposedly flashing before the mind's eye in our last traumatic moments, the city's glowing red windows show the haunts where this man was made and unmade, the habitat where a human identity was imposed and rejected, the urban environment in which his resistance to an industrial life-world was finally crushed. This violent story's narrative frame should not be confined to Weimar Germany. It is an all-too-familiar tale of social anomie and frustrated identity in modern industrial societies, a subject that has been studied since Émile Durkheim's classic text of 1897, *Suicide*.⁵⁵

The painting's import, that modern cities are dangerous and destructive places, is perhaps wasted on spectators presently living amid urban crime, rural violence, collapsing services and deprivation in South Africa, considered by some to be one of the most dangerous localities on the globe. In such troubled circumstances a 'scenic' commitment to technological solutions for social problems does not offer a viable perspective or a sustainable alternative, though the lure of its non-revolutionary but utopian optimism is undeniable.

55 Cf Durkheim 1951.

Bibliography

ABRAHAM J H (ed)

1977. *The origins and growth of sociology*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.

BÄTSCHMANN O

1898. *Entfernung der Natur: Landschaftsmalerei, 1750-1920*. Köln: DuMont.

BELOW I

1986. The blind man: Nachlese zum Funkkolleg Kunst. *Kritische Berichte* 14(3): 56-69.

BENAMOU M & C CARAMELLO (eds)

1977. *Performance in postmodern culture*. Madison: Coda Press.

BRIL K A

1986. *Westerse denkstructuren. Een probleembistorisch onderzoek*. Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Uitgeverij.

BRYSON N, M A HOLLY &

K MOXEY (eds)

1994. *Visual culture. Images and interpretations*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.

BUCI-GLUCKMANN C

1997. *Der kartographische Blick der Kunst*. Berlin: Merve-Verlag. [*L'oeil cartographique de l'art*. Paris: Editions Galilée, 1996].

CRUMP A & R VAN NIEKERK

1988. *Public sculpture & reliefs: Cape Town*. Woodstock: Clifton Publications.

DE BOLLA P

1989. *The discourse of the sublime. Readings in history, aesthetics and the subject*. Oxford: Blackwell.

DE JAGER E J

1992. *Images of man: contemporary South African black art and artists: a pictorial guide to the collection of the University of Fort Hare housed in the De Beers Centenary Art Gallery*. Alice: Fort Hare University Press.

DELEUZE G & F GUATARRI

1987. *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Transl by B Massumi. London: Athlone Press.

DURKHEIM E

1951. Suicide. Abraham (ed) 1977: 161-81.

GOMBRICH E H

1996 (1973). Illusion and art. Woodfield (ed) 1996: 139-60.

GRASSKAMP M

1992. Die Malbarkeit der Stadt. Die Krise der Vedute im deutschen Expressionismus. Smuda (Hrsg) 1992: 265-84.

IVERSEN M

1998. In the blind field: Hopper and the uncanny. *Art History* 21(3): 409-29.

JUCKER I

1956. *Die Gestus des Apokopeion*. Zürich: Juris Verlag.

KUBOVY M

1986. *The psychology of perspective and Renaissance art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LEHMANN H-T

1989. Das Erhabene ist das Unheimliche. Zur Theorie einer Kunst des Ereignisses. *Merkur* 487/488 43(9/10): 751-64.

LYON D

1994. *The electronic eye. The rise of surveillance society*. Oxford: Polity Press.

LYOTARD J-F

1977. The unconscious as mise-en-scène. Benamou & Caramello (eds) 1977: 87-98.

1984. The sublime and the avant-garde. *Artforum* 22(8): 36-43.

MARSHALL P A, S GRIFFIOEN & R J MOUW (eds)

1989. *Stained glass: worldviews and social science*. Lanham, NY: University Press of America.

MICHEL K (Hrsg)

1997. *Vorträge aus dem Werburg-Haus*, Band 1. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

MITCHELL W J

1992. *The reconfigured eye: visual truth in the post-photographic era*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

MORBAY M L

1995. Sorties into cyberspace: art and electronic technologies. Zuidervaart & Luttikhuisen (eds) 1995: 56-77.

MORLEY D & K ROBINS

1995. *Spaces of identity: global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries*. London: Routledge.

PLESSNER H

1970. *Laughing and crying. A study of the limits of human behavior*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

PRIES C (Hrsg)

1989. *Das Erhabene. Zwischen Grenzerfahrung und Größenwahn*. Weinheim: VCH Acta Humaniora.

ROWE W V

1989. Society after the subject, philosophy after the worldview. Marshall *et al* (eds) 1989: 156-83.

SCHMIDT-BURKHARDT A

1992. *Sehende Bilder. Die Geschichte des Augenmotivs seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

SETTI S

1997. Pathos und Ethos, Morphologie und Funktion. Michels (Hrsg) 1997: 31-74.

SHUSTERMAN R

1996. Urban scenes and unseen. *Filozofski Vestnik* 17(2): 171-80 (issue theme: 'The seen --- Le vu').

SMUDA M (Hrsg)

1992. *Die Großstadt als 'Text'*. München: Fink.

STEINHAUSER M

1989. Im Bild des Erhabenen. *Merkur* 487/488 43(9/10): 815-32.

Van den Berg/Urban scenes of contested human identity

STOICHITA V I

1995. *Visionary experience in the golden age of Spanish painting*. London: Reaktion Books.

1997. *The self-aware image. An insight into early modern meta-painting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

TAGG J

1994. The discontinuous city: picturing and the discursive field. Bryson *et al* (eds) 1994: 83-103.

THIRD CAPE TOWN TRIENNIAL

1988. *Kaapstadse Triënnale 1988*. Kaapstad: Kunststiging Rembrandt van Rijn.

VALDÉS M J (ed)

1991. *A Ricoeur reader: reflection and imagination*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

VAN DEN BERG D J

1996. A rhetorical typology of traditions of visual power. *Acta Academica* 28(3): 1-28.

1997a. Picturing urban scenes. Bester R (ed) 1998. *Making art; making meaning. Proceedings of the thirteenth annual conference of the South African Association of Art Historians, 11-13 September 1997, University of Stellenbosch*. Melville: SAAAH: 115-9.

1997b. Picturing urban environments in the scenic tradition. *Acta Academica* 29(3): 86-128.

1998a. Narrative of urban space in scenic pictures. Von Maltzan C & Wilson R (eds). 1998. *A sense of space. SAVAL conference papers, University of the Witwatersrand, 2-5 June 1998*: 117-126.

1998b. Spectators in Jerusalem: urban narrative in the scenic tradition. *Acta Academica* 30(1): 27-62.

VISAGIE J

1996. A theory of macromotives. *Koers* 61(2): 129-151.

WOODFIELD R (ed)

1996. *The essential Gombrich. Selected writings on art and culture*. London: Phaidon.

ZUIDERVAART L & H LUTTIK-HUIZEN (eds)

1995. *Pledges of jubilee. Essays on the arts and culture, in honor of Calvin G. Seerveld*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.