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Portraits of place: images of Southern Africa in landscape painting.

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PORTRAITS OF PLACE:

IMAGES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA IN LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Rebecca Caroline Lammas

Degree awarded with distinction on 8 Dec 1993.

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand for the degree of Master of Arts

Johannesburg, 1993

This dissertation is entirely my own work and has not been submitted previously as a dissertation for any degree at any other university.

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ABSTRACT

Place is an elusive but vibrant geographical entity. It comprises the human facet of the environment that is textured by subjective impulses and collective ideologies. The meaning of places is symbolically expressed in art: geographical myths are generated, perpetuated and anticipated in literary and visual creative images. In South Africa, the opportunities for using art to understand place have rarely been explored. Local geographers are more comfortable in the sterile landscapes born of theoretical and quantitative analysis than with their emotional and imaginative reconstitution as art. Yet, an abundance of indigenous qualitative material awaits sensitive investigation. Tracing the fingerprints of social and personal imagery in landscape painting illuminates the sense of place in southern Africa. The local environment has been interpreted variously through the lenses of colonialism, nationalism and a contemporary resistance movement as a foreign, alien, silent and violent landscape. Articulating the myths in visual terms, painters offer the geographer a bridge into southern Africa as it is confronted by the people who live here. Art is a celebration of the human environment; landscape paintings are portraits of place.

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PREFACE

Portraits of Place is the germination of a personal interest in the visual arts, whose seeds are to be found in the academic world of Art History, and particularly in the soils of inspiration tilled by Dr Michael Godby. Later, nourishment provided by geographical writings led me to an appreciation of landscape painting for its cultural and subjective meaning as a commentary on place, as well as for its formal and aesthetic content. The words of humanistic and cultural geographers, particularly from Canada and England, offered guidance and inspiration where South Africa's academic terrain is disappointingly and overwhelmingly bare. This dissertation is the first fruit from a deep enjoyment in the subject and a testimony to the rich reserve of local artistic resources. It embodies a firm belief in the value of an *art* of geography that is sensitive to perceptions and feelings that condense around place and that expresses these impulses in a poetic and sympathetic language.

A special difficulty confronted in compiling a dissertation including painted images relates to the reproduction of visual material. In the interests of quality, ease of execution and financial considerations, I opted to include colour photocopies made from reproductions of artworks found during a thorough study of publications on South African art. Photographs from books offer an accessible and wide range of visual imagery and their reproductions are usually of a superior quality than could be obtained by an amateur photographer and commercial printers. Permission was obtained from Gavin Younge, Skotaville Publishers, the Standard Bank Centre Art Gallery, A.A. Balkema, Struikhof and David Philip to copy their images for the purposes of private study and critical comment. Their cooperation is greatly appreciated. Fort Hare University Press was also contacted, but no response has as yet been received. If they contact me in the future, I shall willingly comply with any requirements that they may have regarding the reproduction of their images. It should be noted that portions of this dissertation have been published, in a different form, in *GeoJournal* and in a volume entitled *Geography in a Changing South Africa: Progress and Prospects*, edited by Chris Rogerson and Jeff McCarthy.

I owe a debt of gratitude to several people who have contributed, each in their own way, to the completion of this dissertation. First, the task of formulating and executing the research, as well as the writing process have been eased by continuous and generous encouragement from my supervisor, Dr Gordon Pirie. Gordon's enthusiasm and energetic interest in my work have always been an inspiration, but have been particularly important during the course of my Masters degree. Perhaps the least of his contributions involved proof-reading the dissertation, but I thank him for undertaking this somewhat tedious chore too. Second, particular mention must be made of the photographic work undertaken by the Central Graphics Unit under the careful supervision of helpful librarians from the University's Africana library, and by Phil Stickler in the Wits Cartographic Unit. On the personal front, I have benefited from other important forms of support: my father has always subtly, but persistently urged me to greater heights of achievement than I would otherwise have reached; my mother's enthusiasm is contagious; and in Mark, I have an understanding and sympathetic partner. Finally, grateful thanks go to the University of the Witwatersrand, the Centre for Science Development, and the Standard Bank Group whose financial assistance was imperative to my research. It should be noted that opinions expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to any of these institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Ringing out from our blue heavens,
From our deep seas breaking round;
Over everlasting mountains,
Where the echoing crags resound;
From our plains where creaking wagons
Cut their trails into the earth -
Calls the spirit of our country,
Of the land that gave us birth.

At thy call we shall not falter,
Firm and steadfast we shall stand;
At thy will to live or perish,
Oh, South Africa, dear land.

The landscape is fundamental to South African identity. Scripted in the country's national anthem is a love for and communion with the land, rather than with a monarchy or religious figure; a geographical description, as opposed to a dedication to the people, their history and traditions. For most of its inhabitants, it is as a centre of meaning and a basis for feeling - patriotism, exclusion, despair, elation, alienation - that the country exists. In their minds, it is home - place of refuge and prospect, or a hazardous maze of danger and threat. The human significance of the landscapes of the southern part of Africa is as distinct as their physical morphology; in the public mind, the sub-continent is a unique place, quite different from other places which have their own mythological and symbolic form. Typically, southern Africa is the land of wild animals, mud huts, bead-clad black indigenes, deserts, proteas and brilliant sunlight. Beyond these broad defining features, however, is a rich world textured by the human imagination, by fantasies, values, memories and other abstract and transient impulses. As such, southern Africa exists in a way that modern cartographic systems ignore: it is a vibrant and dynamic terrain of human meaning and significance. Its mantle is shaped by the tectonics of invention, decision and intention, and covered by a crust of emotion. The indigenous landscape is a *place*.

Place is one of the kernels of geographical research and fundamental to the autonomous identity of the discipline. Over the years, it has accumulated a complex residue of meaning. Since the early 1970s, in consequence of the gradual dismantling of the rigid objective-scientific dogma that blinkered the vision of many social scientists during the so-called quantitative

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revolution, the humanistic dimension of place has emerged hesitantly triumphant. The international community has begun to investigate and celebrate the intricacies of subjective experience, choreographed by social ideologies and primal geographical urges, and the myths and symbols of place that emerge from these. In absorbing the intangible dimensions of place into their discipline, geographers have had to relax their requirements for precise methodologies and accurate, testable conclusions. Indeed, truth itself has had to be redefined: now, it is aligned with art rather than with science. The former is compatible with imagination and emotion; these are the foundations of artistic expression and meaning which are often ambiguous and ill-defined. Poets and painters trust instinctive interpretations of subject-matter, including the landscape. Humanistic-cultural geographers too have adopted the artist's sensitivity, both in the content of their descriptions of place and, sometimes, in the style of their expression.

By comparison with initiatives in the discipline abroad, South African geographers provide meagre commentary on the local environment as place. Minor excursions into townships as experiential place using literary sources do little justice to the wealth of indigenous qualitative material and the symphony of myth and meaning that has been composed, over two centuries, around the landscapes of southern Africa. The natural environment is one of the primary genres of artistic endeavour locally, with landscape occupying at least a small niche in the oeuvre of most artists from the colonial era onward. The names Pierneef, Wenning, Baines, Jentsch, Volschenk, Bowler, Oerder and, more recently, Battiss, Sekoto, Kentridge, Arnold and Ngatane, are intimately connected to the local landscape. Many lesser-known artists have similarly explored the country's profiles and its moods. So far, the vast and heterogeneous world of images expressed in South African landscape painting have been traversed mainly by art historians who sort them according to historical transitions and interpret them on the basis of stylistic-formalist principles. Engaging the content of landscape painting on a purely aesthetic, descriptive level, and retelling familiar biographies and events without interpreting them, drowns the often subtle geographical messages of art. It is up to the geographer to carefully and sensitively coax out the voices and visions of place.

The landscape can be approached on several levels, in art as well as by geographers. The analogy with portraiture is highly suggestive. Ruskin (1856, cited in Beeton, 1970, p. 15) observes that depictions of nature, like portraits of people, can be undertaken on three levels:

> she has a body and a soul like man; ... It is possible to represent the body without the spirit; and this shall be like, to those whose senses are only cognizant of the body. It is possible to represent the spirit in its ordinary and inferior manifestations; and this shall be like, to those who have not watched for its moments of power. It is possible to represent the spirit in its secret and high operations; and this shall be like, only to those to whose watching they have been revealed. All these are truth; but according to the dignity of truths he can represent or feel, is the power of the painter.

Many local artists achieve only a superficial likeness of the landscape by accurately recording its surface features. The imperial eye, in particular, imposes a predetermined formula on the subject rather than empathising with its true character. Cold precision and lack of passion are signs of paucity in representation rather than accuracy; an impression that is interfused with the rich presence of hidden meanings and impulses is a truer portrait of place. Capturing the elusive, complex spirit of southern Africa demands an intimate understanding of the country and an authentic, indigenous language with which to communicate its identity. Increasing emphasis on the 'feeling' of the local environment - the pulse of its existence rather than the features on its face - has allowed South African artists to achieve superior portraits of the country. Evolving relationships with place in the visual arts are ripe with implications for the geographer pursuing the sense of place in southern Africa.

The current study is a preliminary effort to remove the mask on the brilliance and variety of southern Africa as place; to paint an impressionistic portrait of the local landscape. Art provides a fertile resource for achieving this end as the spirit of place emerges clearly here; *genius loci* permeates local literary and visual images. Of course, the brea(d)th of geographical potential in artistic resources cannot be adequately caught within a single volume of research; the meaning allocated to an expansive area by an enormous, varied and shifting society demands an extensive, multi-faceted and -disciplinary research effort. An introductory excursion is necessarily broad. The horizontal scope demands a single approach to the material. Geographical analysis of landscape painting must pay tribute to the nuances of imagined country, perceived environment, sense of place, for it is as a record of these that art

makes its unique contribution to the discipline. Conversely, by interpreting paintings in terms of place, geographers offer a novel understanding of art.

If the dissertation underplays the aesthetic value and socio-historical background to particular paintings and therefore frustrates the art critic, it offers a chart of the human contours of a country that may be more valuable to the geographer. Moreover, in that it harbours an implied 'geography of art', it may be useful to future researchers who will benefit from knowing the regional focus of particular artists as well as the degree of creative interest that a specific region has attracted. Perhaps the most important contribution of the dissertation will be its introduction of the 'art of geography' to a local geographical community that is still deeply entrenched in theoretical-quantitative studies. Not only are the sensitive and artistic initiatives of the international literature reviewed, but an effort is made to invest the dissertation with the poetic-imaginative sensibilities of the author, such that art is the medium, and not simply the object, of discussion.

Reconnaissance of the volatile terrain between geography and the arts, the canvas for specific empirical focus, forms the first part of this dissertation. In the opening chapter, a philosophical web is woven from threads extracted from pertinent literature. In particular, the concept of place is clarified, as elaborated by various humanistic geographers, art historians, linguists, architects, and philosophers. The broad intellectual stage erected, Chapter 2 scripts the existing interaction between geography and the humanities. Literary and painted landscapes have been wedded to geography - successfully, legitimately, and otherwise - by various match-makers in the discipline and non-geographers too. Three major courting grounds have been established: art as an 'objective' document of geographical features, particularly from the past; art as an impression of universal subjective impulses in relation to place; and art as a format for the generation and perpetuation of socio-cultural myths about the environment. A brief perambulation around the landscape as place in southern Africa (Chapter 3) reflects both the meagre academic commentary and, paradoxically, the wealth of artistic expression, on the human meaning of the local environment.

Chapters 4 through 6 knit a detailed picture of the local environment as place through various landscape paintings. The aim is to demonstrate the textures and nuances of meaning that have been woven around the unique landscapes of southern Africa. A dialogue is sought with the distinctive indigenous spirit of place. The approach to the landscape paintings themselves is thematic. Although paintings are arranged approximately in chronological order, this relates to the evolution of place perception and interpretation, rather than to strict historical considerations. The personality and intentions of individual artists and the socio-historical matrix surrounding their works are discussed where these facilitate a deeper appreciation of geographical messages. Likewise, the visual tapestry of colour, composition, line and brush stroke are considered where they are significant to the understanding of place. Even the selection of artworks is geographically contained: images are chosen according to their illustrative value in relation to the focus on the sense of place echoing through them. Most are representational images, with the landscape their primary subject, as these provide the most appropriate site for geographical investigation. Signs of 'geographicity' are embedded in titles, with those making direct reference to the outside world - rather than to the artists' own inventive powers - offering accessible routes into the creative reconstruction of place.

Art is not merely a transcription of a scene; it reads out and articulates the meaning of the landscape, portraying its symbolic-abstract associations as well as its external morphology. It commentates the shifting dialogue between people and place. Consequently, it offers the material for building a bridge from the arid terrain of scientific research, which embraces the environment in its clinical but superficial guise, to the colourful world vegetated by imagination and emotion with their blossoms of myth, symbol and meaning. Using art to span the rift between these markedly dissimilar regions of research in South Africa will hopefully alert local researchers to the beautiful land that they have previously neglected and to the strength of artistic imagery for supporting attempts to traverse the gap. More than this, it may inspire some to reinforce the bridge into this dynamic and ever-changing world so that it will be more accessible for geographers in the future.

CHAPTER 1

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS: PLACE, ART AND EXPERIENCE

False! False! Boring lines squiggle,
meaning empty roads, hedges and wet tyres,
of desolation of damp railway lines
where no-one encounters a red lamp danger.
But there's menace of a kind.
Why else do official cartographers
condemn the whole land behind
a strict cage emptied of noughts and crosses
Where no happy latitude is given?

And this, too, another lie:
this measurement of a lifetime's journey
in inches, these little, exact circles
for names of places where untamed people
privately hide and love and cry.

(from *Looking at a map*, Abse, 1970, cited in Canter, 1977, p. 105).

Place exploration and interpretation is the *raison d'etre* of geography. Yet, the discipline circumscribes this process with tight conventions and perspectives. For too long, geographers have imposed theoretical and mathematical systems upon the world as the sole basis for examining its variegated and dynamic character. Behavioural geographers, applied geographers, radical geographers, economic, transport, population and housing geographers, all are cast in different moulds, but they adopt similarly static and rigid formulae for addressing the world. Invariably, they fail to confront the environment as a realm of meaning, as a landscape of the heart. The mind has been granted supreme rights by place detective agencies; the appetite of reason has starved the soul and the imagination (see Brinkse, 1990). 'Description' - a mirror, rather than a translation of the world - was paraded to the guillotine years ago. Saint-Exupery's (1971, p. 65) Little Prince questions the very foundations of this condition:

"I also have a flower."
"We do not record flowers," said the geographer.
"Why is that? The flower is the most beautiful thing on my planet!"
"We do not record them," said the geographer, "because they are ephemeral."

The geographer cannot hope to fully appreciate place without giving primary concern to human priorities. In the equation of fact and relevance with measurability and objectivity, place is cropped into a superficial scientific entity.

Aggravating the ideological cramping in geography is a lethargy among practitioners who rarely walk beyond the confines of their offices to exercise and tone the tight, shrinking muscles of their limbs of the discipline. From their academic pigeonholes, geographers analyse the world as it is re-presented in weathered literature and on maps made by other people's hands. Worse, they rarely evolve new insights from these, as they reapply established approaches, borrowed or stolen during excursions over national or disciplinary boundaries. Porteous' (1986a, p. 250) biting comment is wonderfully descriptive:

> As geographers, we no longer confront the world. It's no longer *our* oyster; ... Indeed, we geographers have become oysters - immobile, thick-skinned, heads down, shut tight, difficult to prise open and, once inside, amorphous and flabby, playing with our bit of localised grit. Pearls are few, and of no great price.

Rejuvenation will demand the flushing of excess and dated material to lighten the burden of tradition that weighs on the discipline at present. Art offers potentially rich new insights and perspectives to fertilise the ground once it has been cleared. Buttimer (1990, p. 2) characterises the imminent paradigmatic reorientation towards the humanities as a phoenix in the development of contemporary geography, an emancipatory moment when "new life emerges from the ashes [of former dreams], with prospects for a fresh start". Certainly place, the epicentre of numerous waves of geographical research, demands and deserves to be unleashed from the heavy shackles of an arid academic discourse.

In the humanistic definition, place is a core of meaning, value and significance. Consequently, it can only be fully understood by releasing the humanity latent within it (see Tuan, 1974a; 1975; Relph, 1976). This requires both conducting studies *of* humanity in place, and reinstalling humanity *into* academic reflections on the world by exposing the subjective and emotive features of researchers (Cloke *et al.*, 1991). Ideally, scholars ought to abandon their articles, armchairs and apathy in a concerted effort to explore the world for themselves. More importantly, before they venture outside, they need to remove their blinkers, mufflers, and muzzles. They must begin to trust and give expression to their own responses to the environment, cast off their lenses of detachment, cultivate an empathy with subjects in their world, and learn to listen to the voices of place. In short, the meta-theories and generalising spectacles prescribed by science must be replaced by the kaleidoscope of vision pursued in the humanities. Place must be reconciled with art.

Place as the locus of spirit

A catholic definition of 'place' embraces - indeed it eulogises - the intangible qualitative character of sites as well as their concrete geographical features. Consequently, the term has enjoyed preferential treatment in the house of humanistic geography compared with its close relatives 'location', 'locality', 'environment' and 'space', which have found niches in alternative sub-disciplines. Location is, arguably, a mild and sallow version of place; 'site' or 'spot' are adequate synonyms. It implies mere positions in a system of abstract extensions, related in space and identified according to geometric and objective criteria. Walter (1988, p. 117) creates an evocative impression:

> When each dart strikes the map, it gives us simple location, deduced from the geometrical rationalization of the earth ... We identify where each dart lands by reading off its latitude and longitude, ... its relation to established places, and we say it is in the Sahara Desert, or in the middle of the Atlantic, or near Istanbul.

By contrast, place is an extension of location in the sense of pure position into a more complex entity tinted by the human palette. It implies more than is comprehensible using cerebral tools and categories.

Upon the observable external morphology of location are juxtaposed the residue of meaning, myth and intentionality that contribute to the experiential dimension of place. To continue with Walter's (1988, p. 117) examples:

> The Sahara makes us think of trackless wastes, sandstorms, nomads, camels. The Atlantic suggests Vikings and supertankers, voyages, storms, shipping lanes. Istanbul evokes a sense of teeming urban life and the slow movement of civilizations reaching back to Constantinople and Byzantium ... the quality of a place depends on human context shaped by memories and expectations, by stories of real and imagined events ...

The two entities, locality and place, can be approached using distinct ideological and descriptive tools. Walter (1988), following Ptolemy, distinguishes between geography and chorography. The former focuses on the world as a whole, adopts a perspective of unity and continuity, and uses mathematics to achieve generalised descriptions and explanations of nature's objective features. This is the domain of geometric rationalisation and precise determination. By contrast, chorography separates parts of the world and records minute details of the quality of place - including its subjective meaning - using artistic modes of representation. Imagery, myth, magic, religion, and artistic imagination are the indeterminate

expressive energies that shape and must be used to interpret this realm. It is chorographic exploration that reveals *place*. Walter calls for a separate field of inquiry - topistics - that will adopt appropriate conceptual categories to investigate place "without interfering with the work of geographers, sociologists, or any of the other specialized disciplines" (Walter, 1980, pp. 163-64). A more satisfactory solution to the malady of 'place neglect' is that geographers rewrite chorography into their job specifications.

Peeling back still more layers beyond the objective, rational, functional exterior of an environment, there is a character of place that can only be experienced, yet exists beyond the cosmos of human perception. In Walter's (1988, p. 142) words, every place has "an independent expressive energy which evokes feelings and representations". It is composed of and is confronted via a set of material phenomena, but can only be comprehended through the essence of their totality: "Each place has its *nomos*, its characteristic rule of action, or customary way of making itself felt, or specific way of being in the world" (Walter, 1988, p. 117). Following extensive travelling, D.H. Lawrence (1933, cited in Cook, 1981, p. 71) was moved to make a similar observation:

> Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different scars: call it what you like. But spirit of place is a great reality.

It is this *spirit of place* that has been seeded out of much geographical literature, finds no representation in its cartography, and has been disfigured after periodic torture in the mincer of academic debate. According to Tuan (1975, p. 153), contemporary society in general is guilty of ignoring place:

> Place may be said to have "spirit" or "personality", but only human beings can have a sense of place. People demonstrate their sense of place when they apply their moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations. Modern man, it is often claimed, has lost this sensitivity. He transgresses against the genius loci because he fails to recognise it; and he fails to recognise it because the blandness of much modern environment combined with the ethos of human dominance has stunted the cultivation of place awareness.

Only recently has the spirit of place begun to re-emerge hesitantly triumphant in some sensitive regional geographies.

Genius loci is a phrase that has started to enjoy currency among geographers, landscape architects, town planners, and other place-conscious academics. It has become a standard abbreviation for the dense conceptual cementing around the artistic and phenomenological appreciation of place. Architectural theorists, the most-cited of whom is Norberg-Schulz (see his 1979 *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*), are devoted fans. Motivated by the desire to situate design inspiration, justification and direction in building sites themselves and thereby to create meaningful man-made environments, they seek theoretical avenues for discovering and exploiting the genius of place. Norberg-Schulz's philosophical wanderings traverse some ground of relevance to the geographer: he too understands *genius loci* to be the essence of place. The sense of place refers to their identity or general comprehensive atmosphere; a home is 'protective', a restaurant or a ball-room is 'festive', a church 'solemn'. Natural environments too have a particular and distinctive character that is fundamental to place experience. An existentially relevant understanding of landscape must incorporate this 'spiritual' identity of place as it is communicated to the very soul of the individual.

Placelessness and nonplace in the modern era

Cities, dwellings, neighbourhoods, mountainscapes and countryside are inanimate, mere assemblages of brick, concrete, asphalt, foliage or rock. However they 'come alive' through direct confrontation. Their personality emerges from the community of noises and smells, drama, colour and surprise that are resident within them and at the base of human interaction with place. It is these qualities that geographers must tease out if they are to successfully examine place as a 'humanised' entity. The exercise will be an essential part of the project of human geography to understand humanity, for it is in people's intimate associations with various environments that broader geographical behaviours are conceived. As much as social and historical factors shape landscape, the meanings, senses, feelings and experiences that texture the subjective world are written externally, translated into crude symbols that combine to form distinctive places (Eliot-Hurst, 1975; Cosgrove, 1989a). People express themselves through landscape and place, albeit in thick brushstrokes. Emotion, culture, and identity stain the very foundations of place. Conversely, existential criteria are *drawn from* place; a sense of

belonging, community, even national identity, or alternatively, uprootedness and outsideness - in short, a sense of *place* - are extracted from the environment. Place is, therefore, simultaneously the repository of meaning, and the nourishment for meaningful existence; at once the root and the seedling of human identity.

It may invoke scepticism, but the significance of the genius of place should not be underestimated. Its importance rings clearly through the landscapes where it has been destroyed. In many cities, the 'spirit of place' is now more correctly interpreted as the phantom of a deceased entity, than as the positive energy and identity that it was coined to express. Indeed, the absence of place in the ghost-towns of the modern era is as unnerving as if the people were removed. In view of the magnitude of the effects of this condition on humanity (see Relph, 1976; 1989; Walter, 1980), there is a growing concern among planners to reinvest human environments with meaning, to re-create landscapes with soul. Homogenous suburban neighbourhoods, mass produced tourist-scapes and standardised industrial or commercial landscapes are woven in a tapestry of 'placelessness' (Relph, 1976) that is a remnant of an era in which place was subordinated to functionalism and modernism. Other-directed pseudo-places reflect the logic and requirements of capitalism, tourism, politics, and other tyrants of the contemporary world system, whilst squashing the identity of people and place. The complex strands of placelessness must now be unravelled and reassembled using a more human pattern. Natural materials must replace the synthetic fibres that modernism introduced to the cultivation of environments; place must be reinvested with human meaning.

South African history is interlaced with superb examples of the consequences of destroying meaningful rhythms between people and place. Time and again, African communities have been severed from their homes and dumped into distant, custom-built townships. The entire country has heard the intimidating thunder of apartheid's destructive march through freehold black suburbs. Annihilating place by bull-dozing residences amplifies the horrors of community eviction. Perhaps it also indirectly voices authorities' fears of the powers that are generated by intimate relationships with place. Matthews' *District Six* (*Cape Times*, 1 August

1979) locates the major tragedy of the government's removal scheme in the loss of the soul of a place:

> Mechanical monsters
> with rapacious lust have ravished
> the beauty of district six
> seven steps
> where gladiators provide circus
> and flowers flourished
> in fields of filth
> familiar landscapes effaced
> now grey ghosts
> in once hallowed places
> exiled pilgrims worship
> at desecrated shrines
> solitary seagull awheeling
> its melancholy mew
> last rites chanted
> at the death
> of a spirit
> that was district six

For residents, demolition forewarned the replacement of the hum of local life, the exuberance of people, a colourful ambience, and a vibrant community spirit with the screaming inadequacies of a uniform, sterile environment. Hart (1988) provides an excellent summation of the sense of place and its destruction in District Six.

Place is a bristling theme in the literary ouevre of residents of former townships. Mattera (1983, p. 5) records the emotional trauma and resignation associated with the destruction of place:

> We gave way
> there was nothing we could do
> although the bitterness stung in us
> in the place we knew to be a part of us

The flatscapes of townships into which the victims were relocated could only reinforce their feelings of uprootedness and despair. How apt is their colloquial label: LOCATION. They are certainly not PLACEs! "A location cannot *belong* to anyone", Huddleston (1956, p. 126) tells us, "except the people who control it, the European officials who live far away ...". And for those who must suffer it, nonplace is a serious and draining imposition on life:

> Meadowlands [a zone in Soweto] is soul-destroying, a depressing monotony. The houses look like thousands of mushrooms on a hillside. Small unit detached houses despatched without love or propriety, monolithic monsters from the architects boards of the National Building Research Institute (Modisane, 1963, p. 105).

The message for planners is blatant: place and humanity are tightly meshed. To live in an environment which has to be ignored or endured rather than enjoyed is to be diminished as a human being. Rationalised solutions simply serve to perpetuate the evil. Empathy and experience are important criteria for understanding and making place.

Here too is a lesson for geographers. Excluding the rhetoric of experience, emotion, and the passion of place from the process of representing the world is as problematic as overlooking it in the production and destruction of the physical landscape. The dominant (and defective) way of thinking about places through scientific rationalism is an 'epistemological stumbling block' on the way to creating and maintaining significant places (see Walter, 1980). Relph (1989, p. 149) ridicules preconditioned, systematised viewing of place:

> Trying to investigate places and landscapes by imposing standardised methods is like studying ballet by putting the dancers in straitjackets, or judging wines by measuring their alcohol content - the information may be accurate but it seriously misrepresents the subject matter.

The academy must adopt an alternative perspective in order to interpret place as a human entity. It must introduce artistic sensitivity into its observation, interpretation and recording of the world.

Recipe for the sensitive exploration of place

Submerged in extant literature on place is a fluid boundary between people and the *genius loci*. Various currents have washed researchers either toward humanity as the most important actor in the relationship, or into the dangerous waters of environmental determinism. Alternative ways of understanding the symbiotic interaction has precipitated different approaches to environmental appreciation and divergent interpretations of the term 'landscape' itself. The variety is represented in the triad of activities in academic research - observing, thinking, and recording (Relph, 1989) - that have been moulded in a number of forms. The sternest and most rigorous teacher, science dictates that its students observe precisely, preferably through experimentation using the latest equipment and techniques. The results are systematically categorised and churned through the rigid objective machinery of intellectual or computer-generated formulae to produce an explanatory theory that can be applied

generally and even facilitates prediction. Standing "far above their material, for a view from nowhere, ... [scientists] hope that they will thereby be able to plunge well below the surfaces of reality" (Tuan, 1989, p. 240). The robotics are impressive but they cannot even begin to capture the spirit of place, which resides between the appearance of surface phenomena and the viewer. To uncover this quality, a more sensitive process is required - one that *includes* humanity rather than circumventing or incinerating it.

Philosophy and art provide superior role models than science for landscape researchers. Ruskin, a nineteenth-century art critic and author of *Modern Painters*, must be the supreme example of these (see Cosgrove, 1979; Cosgrove and Thornes, 1981; Relph, 1989). First, in terms of a mode of observation, Ruskin advocates acute - even 'scientific' - vision, but as a method that precludes neither pleasure in experiencing the landscape nor the contemplation of deeper hidden truths and unities in nature. Indeed, Ruskin believed that accurate observation of its literal forms revealed a symbolic, moral and aesthetic order in the environment. It was here, he maintained, that the *truth*, the *essence* of a scene dwelled. In his notes about sketching a tree (Ruskin, 1885, cited in Cosgrove, 1979, p. 54) is to be found Ruskin's formula for observing nature:

> Languidly, but not idly, I began to draw it; and as I drew, the languor passed away: the beautiful lines insisted on being traced, - without weariness. More and more beautiful they became, as each rose out of the rest ... they "composed" themselves, by finer laws than any known of men. At last, the tree was there, and everything that I had thought before about trees, nowhere.

Ruskin allows the imaginative faculty to respond to and harmonise with nature; the empirical truth provided by the eye is supplemented by an appreciation for the spirit of the subject that exists beyond, as well as through the viewer. Sauer (1967) and other geographers (Cornish, 1928; 1943; Cosgrove, 1979) have associated this 'naive awareness' of a scene with aesthetic appreciation, with the 'morphologic eye': a spontaneous and critical attention to form and pattern (Sauer, 1967). Sensory awareness and imagination is the route into the soul of place. Within the quotation from Ruskin lies the crux of an art of geography. It is laden not only with lessons on observation, but extends into the area of thinking and recording too.

Ruskin's insistence that truth depends on observation without theoretical presupposition echoes the teachings of phenomenology. This philosophical tradition is characterised by its refusal to impose methodological systems in an attempt to explain the environment; instead, direct 'naive' response to subjects through experience is encouraged. Moreover, the unique is the fountainhead of landscape study. For geographers, it is in this style of contemplation that the autonomous spirit of place will be found, just as it allowed Ruskin to identify the essential character of a tree. Phenomenology also emphasises the importance of subtle questions regarding meaning and responsibility in the process of thinking about the landscape. It therefore offers a powerful tool for humanising geography. Finally, purging research methodologies of their scientific toxins will result in a visible change in associated literary products that comprise the last step in research - recording. Turning once again to Ruskin, it is clear that he was an avid believer in accurate description of direct sensory appreciation as a route to understanding the environment. Allowing the subject to reveal its own traits and expressing these as effectively as possible, he made no attempt to analyse and explain them in a framework of generalised visual and verbal indices. The picture is thorough, untheorised, and true to the dialogue between experience and nature, rather than to imposed intellectual, scientific 'realities'.

The humanities offer ample examples of the virtues of description (which is closely connected to interpretation), as opposed to explanation, as the offspring of the Academy. Art historians, anthropologists, linguists, and their like engage in descriptive studies as well as seeking underlying causes for observable phenomena. Oddly, contemporary geographers are inclined to apologise for 'mere description' which has been stigmatised as superficial, trivial and frivolous (see Jeans, 1979; Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987). Yet, the "technique of a cultural-humanist (descriptive) geographer is basically that of a storyteller", which implies that his or her description "is inexpungibly mixed with exegesis and interpretation, for ordinary language not only contains interpretative conjunctions that invite use, ... but is also very rich in words that reverberate - that hint at relationships - beyond their literal meanings" (Tuan, 1989, p. 240). The power of descriptive language yields an even more significant benefit for the exploration of place: it allows the researcher to transcend the barrier between observer and

subject to penetrate and express the existential qualities embraced in *genius loci*. Indeed, the storyteller figure is an appropriate guise for the geographer for it encourages adherence to the dense-textured facts of experience and does not attempt to "reduce and dominate the complex, unstable character of human reality - including feelings and emotions and the aesthetic impulse that are so much a part of that reality - to the degree that hypothesis-posing social science does" (Tuan, 1989, p. 240).

Studies of place should aim to unlock its silent qualities, to bear witness to the variety, significance, beauties and meaning embedded in it. It is these that characterise the complex and richly-textured relationship between humans and their environment, and that defy the cold chisel of intellectual craftsmanship that aims to level all surface undulations to 'expose' structures and processes beneath. The texture is important. Touching the grooves and knots adds the flavour of place and humanity to geographical research. Sensitive observation, meditative philosophical contemplation, and artistic description are the recipe for successfully combining these ingredients in academic research. They make room for a sensitivity to the depth and heterogeneity of directly apprehensible geographical phenomena and sensory impressions of these which are fundamental to the human condition and to the essence of place.

Experience, art and the truth of place

Geographers require a means of penetrating the complex people-place relationship without divorcing the partners in their interpretation. Experience is the key. It enshrines humanity as the medium for interpreting place, yet respects the individuality and power of place. Perhaps 'experience' is the name of Webb's (1961, cited in Paterson and Paterson, 1981, p. 219) 'third entity' which adds nuance to the place-person interaction:

> the personality of a man reacting upon the spirit of a place produces something which is neither the man nor the place, but fiercer and more beautiful than either. This third entity, born of the union, becomes a power and a haunting presence - non-human, non-material. For the mind that helped to create it once, it dominates the place of its birth forever.

Walter (1988) takes a more direct tack on the winds of experience. Among the musings contained within his gospel on place, *Placeways*, that provides so much inspiration and

direction, Walter suggests that experience finds coherence through a number of 'strands of unity'. Individuals, society, nature, and place, all are important, but the greatest of these is place:

> the first and greatest unity of experience is Place, the nature of which is grasped intuitively on the fringes of reason and perception ... The totality of what people do, think, and feel in a specific location gives identity to a place, and through its physique and morale it shapes a reality which is unique to places - different from the reality of an object or a person. Human experience makes place, but a place lives in its own way. Its form of experience occupies persons - the place locates experience in people (Walter, 1988, pp. 130-31).

People and place are engaged in an intimate dance through the obscure, intangible landscapes that emerge out of experience. The best way to understand the rhythms and steps of their spontaneous ballet is to take a partner from the many regions that await a sensitive companion and to slowly and meaningfully harmonise with it in movements that express both humanity and place. Yet, direct involvement in the absolute sense, is not a prerequisite. Art is master and choreographer of the movements between humanity and place, and therefore offers many windows on the spirit of place.

Emotion and experience - at the interstices of humanity and place - seep to the surface from the wells of subjectivity and achieve graphic expression in visual and verbal creative imagery. Perceptions of the environment rooted in sensory responses, moral and aesthetic judgements, passions and ideas are vividly portrayed in art. They evaporate under the scorching critical observation of science. They may also never be articulated in everyday discourse, for they lie deep within the inner being and are difficult to coax into conscious awareness and visible expression. "Languages differ in their capacity to articulate areas of experience", Tuan (1977, p. 148) observes. "Pictorial art and ritual supplement language by depicting areas of experience that words fail to frame; ... Art makes images of feeling so that feeling is accessible to contemplation and thought" (see also Lowenthal and Prince, 1975). This is appropriate, since in the domain of place:

> we talk about the condition of our inner energy and vitality, about intellectual energies and psychological effects, as well as religious energy, the energy of language, of ritual, the dance, works of art, and so forth. This notion of energy is swollen with ambiguity, unlike the scientific concept of physical energy, which is lean and precise. Ambiguity, the breath of poetry, leaves a stink in the nostrils of science ... [yet it] is not just a deficiency of language but is essential to its power of expression. It shows that the limits of language - like reality itself - are fluid ... human experience flows over the rims of words (Walter, 1988, p. 128).

The instinctive gestures and nameless processes that underlie poetic and graphic imagery make possible the crystallising of elusive experiences that words - let alone the insensitive language of academia - are inept at describing. The fundamental function of art is to gather the contradictions and complexities of the life-world. And it is through visualising the intricate lace of human experience that place emerges.

The elusive and faint spirit of place thrives under irrigation by subjectivity. Damming experience with the best artistic materials will produce an excellent appreciation of place. Poetry and other creative literature, painting, etching, even architecture, make manifest the 'transcendental' features of the environment that are the kernel of experiential place (Lowenthal and Prince, 1975). Nature is replete with scenes that reject alternative (rational, scientific) exploration. Ruskin (1858, cited in Beeton, 1970, p. 20) humbly acknowledged that the power and beauty of the environment out-weighed even the capabilities of art:

> The whole sky from zenith to the horizon becomes one molten mantling sea of colour and fire; every black bar turns into massy gold, every ripple and wave into unsullied shadowless crimson, and purple, and scarlet, and colours for which there are no words in language, and no ideas in the mind, - things which can only be conceived while they are visible.

Nonetheless, Ruskin remained confident that landscape painters could effectively communicate the essential character of place. Turner, a nineteenth-century English painter was, in Ruskin's view, the master of the truth of impression, able to capture not merely the facts of a scene, but to penetrate the soul of place with the truth of his own insight and the passion needed to record it (see Beeton, 1970; Rees, 1982a). Exactitude and impressionism are coupled in the harmonious rendering of the beauty and mystery that infuse the awareness of place; Turner's work embraces the signal marriage of intellectual insight and artistic grasp that Ruskin believed to be crucial to the sensitive interpretation and description of place. Certainly the inadequacies of art as a technique are minor in comparison to the violation of nature in representations made by geographers suffering the imprisonment of their imaginations during the reign of science.

Compounding the appropriateness of artistic vocabulary for evoking experiential qualities of place is its distinctive vantage point in the audience of the human-environment pantomime. As a communion between people and place, art is closer to place than is conventional

geography, yet it is simultaneously human response incarnate. Moreover, it has the capacity to communicate directly to the heart and soul of its viewers, to induce an awareness of place by holding up mirrors to memories and fantasies resident in its own audience (Tuan, 1990), thereby omitting the bastardisation of place experience through intellectualisation. Art is the spirit of place frozen rather than translated. It is therefore the path to a truth that dwells beyond the limits of scientific vision and analysis, a reality that speaks through the senses and the imagination. Evernden's (1983, p. 8) proclamation that the American prairie "is an experience, not an object - a sensation, not a view ... a way of being and not a thing at all" underscores the fundamental significance of the transcendental realm to the geographer. Indeed, reality itself has had to be redefined by geographers willing to listen to the voices of place in art.

The truth drifting through the landscapes of art is not only an alternative to the facts of traditional geography, it is arguably *more real*. Imagination and emotion texture the human environment as they colour the styles and language of painted and poetic images. Realism depends on a truth to these base features of experience, not on the objective rendering of nature. Picasso (cited in Tuan, 1990, p. 438), an artist renowned for his stylistic abstractions that distort the objective accuracy of his subjects is indignant at the suggestion that he does not paint reality:

> I always try to observe nature. As you can see, I've put in this still-life a box of leeks ... I wanted my canvas to smell of leeks. I insist on likeness, a more profound likeness, more real than the real.

Geography too should re-evaluate truth. According to Tuan (1990), the discipline is in danger of becoming 'hyperreal' and 'unreal' in striving to capture the environment by adhering to factual minutiae and producing a surfeit of place-names and statistical information. Its literature may be true as far as it goes, but is misleading in the omission of human experiential truths. It also becomes deceptive as the discipline disguises the inventive character of its observations as fact.

Optical fidelity is insufficient for truthfully capturing the identity of an object, for its qualitative character, "the warmth of a wool blanket, the light over a distant lake, the deadness

of a carcass - is also to be portrayed" (Tuan, 1990, p. 441). The comment could not be more significant than it is for place. Reality exists, paradoxically, in the fantasies and fiction of art. Thus:

> In the name of reality itself, geographers must pay close attention to the indubitable fact, powerfully revealed to us by literature and the arts, that humans are emotional as well as rational beings, that they have imagination which soars from time to time into self-deluding fantasy, and that these traits direct human energies which have transformed ... the face of the earth (Tuan, 1990, p. 444).

In the final analysis, philosophy offers a road for contemplating the messages of place, and art an appropriate language for recording them. Both cast off the unwieldy expectations of exact objective explanation and tight, precise, provable conclusions that expel the human spirit from science. Neither has been adequately absorbed by geography, but a tentative movement towards producing an 'art of geography' is a promising avenue towards embracing the spirit of place.

The art of geography

Porteous is probably the strongest advocate for geographers' direct sensory and artistic engagement with place. His pregnant term, 'intimate sensing' (Porteous, 1986a) captures the importance of landscape appraisal on a personal level, through its sounds, smells, taste and touch, as well as its visual features (see also Porteous, 1990). Tuan (1990) adds fantasy as a further variable in the relationship. In comparison with the 'remote sensing' of social science, which is clean, cold and detached, intimate sensing involves direct contact with the environment which encourages the purity of vision and experience that are quintessential to place. Intuitive readings evolve out of sensual immersion in the landscape; places emerge from the qualitative dimension where responses such as sheltering, togetherness, tranquillity, rhythm or openness mingle between geographical sites and experience. To be successful, intimate sensing or 'responsive seeing' (Relph, 1989) relies on the enthusiastic and concentrated involvement of the researcher. In addition, the researcher must be receptive to the subtle, gentle nuances of place that often suggest themselves, rather than imposing their presence arrogantly upon the viewer, and that are not amenable to testing. As with the interpretation

of painted or poetic landscapes, creativity and empathy with the landscape subject are more valuable routes to understanding than is logical descriptive analysis of its parts.

The connectivity between experience, place and art is manifest in the best regional descriptions. These provide a format for geographers to tap the deep roots of their literary and artistic imaginations in searching for the spirit of landscapes. From his seat in the planning profession, Grady Clay (1987, p. 3) advises:

> It's up to each of us to explore and possibly record our feelings within this place, our responses to it, as well as the emanations and currents from the place itself. Once we are open to the place, then we can recognize its promises, excitements, repose, inspiration, or even that indefinable something called "challenge" or magic that comes from some places ...

Following the formula, Clay creates a fragmented description (which he corners off decisively from 'prescription' that suffers the interference of a presumed course-of-action) of places in the real world that he has visited. A mosaic of geographical scenes - including Alleys, the Dangerous City, Holdout Zones, Kodachrome Town, Lassithi, Remembered Landscapes, Baltimore, the Scruburbs and Urban Fronts - is punctuated with 'theoretical' ruminations on objectivity, sense of place, territorial defence, place marketing, and more. Fact zigzags through the swarming subjective details of his travel experiences. The effect is intriguing, verging on fictional. As geography, the text swerves daringly between the modern but slow electric cars of contemporary geographers, the donkey carts of traditionalists, and the fantasy- and wind-powered vehicles borrowed from the humanities. The trip is unnerving, perhaps risky, but unusually exciting. Surely art is present here.

In a similarly emotive piece, Banham (1989) - another planner - dares to share an expressive geography fathered by first-hand experiences in the American desert. He makes no attempt to filter prejudice, value, and judgement; rather, he allows them unadulterated expression. In an unselfconscious manner, Banham describes views deflected through the lenses of elation and bewilderment, confusion and enthusiasm. Attempts at self-explanation are interwoven into the depiction of the splendours and delights of a specific territory. The result is a glimpse into the interpretative world stemming from direct experience and sensory perception. Banham not only describes a region; he also imparts meaning to the landscape, imbuing it with the glow lit in the dawn(ing) of experience. He breathes humanity into the

desert. This is surely an example of Jeans' (1979) 'humanistic description' which extends beyond a simple visual/verbal picture of the landscape to "an attempt to show forth its nature as deriving from absorption into mind" (Jeans, 1979, p. 209). Geographers are implored to immerse themselves in the atmosphere of place and to produce an evocative, painterly impression of landscape meaning. Both the content and the language of expression are important to this process.

In becoming aware of the poetics of places as these relate to their own beings, geographers may be content to engage in silent place appreciation. Beyond this, they will probably find it necessary to adopt non-traditional forms of expression and thereby to contribute to a more explicit art of geography. Opportunity seeps outside the somewhat limited framework of subjective regional portraiture into the realm of 'pure' artistry. Porteous (1984, p. 372) comments: "I have been unable to express what the world means to me in nearly twenty years of research, four books, and perhaps sixty articles. Poems make it easier, and a geoautobiography ... may be better still." Meinig (1983, p. 321) similarly unites art creation with geographical description through the medium of place experience, but warns:

> One does not become an artist by imitation, by learning a craft; one only becomes truly an artist by inner feeling, by conviction, by a compelling need to share those feelings and by developing the ability to translate them to others. The artist must draw upon his feelings and insights and literally *imagine* them into such forms as to make effective connection with the lives of others. He must find his own voice and make it understood; style must arise from purpose and personality.

Place *should* inspire artistic response if researchers are sufficiently open to the complexity and depth of its textures; certainly the dull prose of academia will be blunt and inadequate tools for etching the vibrations it inspires in the soul.

Reflecting perhaps their unfamiliarity with the vocabulary of the humanities - let alone the fine arts - geographers have been unforthcoming with bold statements emanating directly from individual confrontation with place. They are more comfortable raiding the landscapes of other people's imaginations to harvest the geographical orchards flourishing there. Only Porteous has really become involved in practising the art of geography, although there are numerous missionaries spreading word about the benefits of this path. Many are assembled under the banner of humanistic geography. Meinig (1983, p. 325), for example, distrusts the

capacity of conventional geographical regalia to capture the spirit of place, and tries to nudge geographers into become creators of literature:

> We shall not have a humanistic geography worthy of the claim until we have some of our most talented and sensitive scholars deeply engaged in the creation of the literature of the humanities. Geography will deserve to be called an art only when a substantial number of geographers have become artists.

Bunkse (1990, p. 98) similarly calls for the incorporation of literary-artistic humanism into geography, "not merely as an embellishment or source of data for scientific research, but *as a path of truth and wisdom in its own right*" (original emphasis). The vision of an earlier set of regional geographers is crystallised in this challenge. Younghusband (1920, p. 8) encouraged the geographer to develop the capacity "for expressing either in words or in a painting what he has seen, so that he can communicate it to us"; in order to do this, "he should have in him something of the poet and the painter".

Of course, not all geographers need to (or could) be artists in the strict sense. However, one of Porteous' (1984, p. 373) 'poems of place and time' illustrates the ripe potential in this form of expression:

> RANGOON, 1976
> Here men in trousers merit stares
> From movie queues, and Scotch, blackmarketed
> Will keep you for a whole week at The Strand
> If you can stand the broken windows, flies,
> The Peoples Beer, and the chits for tea and toast.
>
> Sewage jugs up from mains, still unmaintained
> Since liberation, while
> Eleven workmen gild a Buddha's toes,
> Risking the stupefaction of his smile.
>
> The Chindit bus is less safe than
> Your own feet, and the station's easily seen,
> Being built like a pagoda. Cross the wire,
> Make sure you take a cold box-lunch away,
> And board the riddled train to Mandalay.

Here is a superior portrait of the Burmese city than the dry schema of traditional regional geography offer. The description is written using the vocabulary of experience, and an impression of the spirit of place is moulded from morsels of the everyday life-world. Denying the superiority of latitude-longitude coordinates and population statistics or land-use patterns,

Porteous' poem teems instead with sensory and emotive details that relay the personality of place.

Non-traditional styles of writing are likely to be extremely valuable to the author attempting to capture the sense of place. They may, however, be problematic for the gatekeepers of academic publication; to scientists, they will be completely unacceptable. Unfortunately, geography in general is ill-prepared and -adjusted for reintroducing ephemeral and transcendental realities into its scope of research. The additional pressure of accepting an entirely new language - a poetry of place - may be unbearable. An intermediary stage that respects the status of data collection and analysis involves the use of artistic material produced by professional poets, novelists, painters and musicians to penetrate the personality of place via creations of the human agency. The approach has already attained a considerable following overseas. Although Porteous (1984) and Meinig (1983) shun the sieving of other people's artistic imagery in favour of the creation of art by geographers, the acknowledgement that art resonates with the spirit of place is janus-headed. By virtue of its high porosity to the sap of experience, art is a valuable means of drawing information about subjective environments, as well as a language for portraying them. After all, it is not only geographers who are capable of recording experiential environments in art. On the contrary, notwithstanding some valiant attempts to create an art of geography in the full sense of highly individual, explicitly emotional and inventive pieces, poets, novelists, painters and philosophers make more competent geographers than geographers do artists. In addition, sceptics may accord the researchers' own interpretations of place a lower value than the 'insider's view' presumed to inhabit a professional artist's observations.

CHAPTER 2

MUTUAL TERRITORY: LANDSCAPES OF ART AND GEOGRAPHY

Human geography is narrator of the tale about people in their environment. Necessarily versatile in character and familiar with the myriad of languages through which humanity expresses its relationship with the world, the discipline has adequately accomplished this enormous task. Keen academic sleuthing and enthusiastic ecclecticism have been woven into an impressive and expansive volume on the geographical dimension of human existence. Often, however, the story is barked in an acid, strident voice. External criticism and a floundering identity have inspired both pungent defences of the discipline from some of its members and an insipid humbleness in the work of others. Alternatively, the pompousness and drab monotony of pseudo-science and sterile empiricism smudge the pages. The lyrical and quietly contemplative qualities that constitute the humane side of the discipline's character are now rarely expressed. Almost everywhere, the *art* of human geography has been lost. Place, more than any other geographical concept, has borne the brunt of this loss, suffering waves of misrepresentation, quantification and out-right neglect. The roots of the tragedy are securely bedded in the mid-century fanaticism about science.

The 'quantitative revolution' swept over academia in the 1950s. Objectivism was exalted, mathematics was adopted as the mother-tongue of intellectual discourse, and positivism was promoted as the appropriate philosophical foundation for empirical research. The dominance of science over the artistic side of many disciplines was imminent. Overwhelmingly, there was minor resistance from a pacifist and fragile humanistic opponent. Geography surrendered willingly. Proponents of the scientific-mathematical creed easily ushered the discipline towards an overly-objective and deterministic view of the human-environment relationship. Theoretical generalisation, model-building, quantification, and law-seeking were the tools adopted internally to carve a niche for geography in the academic precinct of the social sciences (for an overview, see Cloke *et al.*, 1991; Johnston, 1991). Thus began the heyday of spatial science, and place as geometric pattern in Christaller's central place theory, Von Thunen's

land-use model, and their like. Science could beam proudly over the fete of digits and theories that it had organised. Predictably, art was evicted from the party.

The ebb of artistic and qualitative studies in geography marks a decline in the understanding of place and a serious loss for the discipline as a whole. The artistic sensibility inspires numerous significant and unique insights into the human-environment relationship that are ignored or distorted from other perspectives. Rees (1980) points out that important branches of geography - such as cartography - were actually nurtured in the same house as art. Not only were maps historically a form of decorative art, but the abstract impressions of reality in both cases reflect prevailing notions of space, environment, and cosmos (see Harley, 1988; 1992; Pickles, 1992). In a superficial sense, cartographers continue to apply aesthetic principles in order to communicate in a pleasing and effective manner. Yet, the modern map is a clearer manifestation of the rift between the two fields than their connectivity, and epitomises the silences that the geographical discipline has incurred by neglecting art. The history of maps tracks a path of progressive rationalisation, proceeding according to accepted laws of objectivity and subjective exclusion (see also Walter, 1988). Expressive features which served as cartographic records of the contribution of imagination and memory to place identity gradually retreated to the margins of maps. Today, they have been evicted completely. On official maps, there is little to distinguish one country from other blue line-rivered and green symbol-treed continents. Meaning, the crux of everyday reality as it is experienced by ordinary people, has no symbol in their keys.

A surrogate for the entire geographical discipline, the contemporary map fails to capture the intangible, emotive dimensions of experiential place and space. There is no indication of how it feels to be in a place, about the type of experience to expect there, or the perils of the soul on the journey between places. *Genius loci* is buried under the rubble of human sensitivity and imagination in ruin. These subtle human dimensions of geographical experience are sensitively evoked in art. The spirit of place is compatible with - indeed it demands - artistic expression. The elements which define and embroider human landscapes - unique experiences and perceptions of space, personalised senses of place, moral and symbolic associations, and

social and spiritual philosophies are crystallised on the canvas and in poetic writing. The created world of the artist *is* the landscape of the imagination (Lowenthal, 1961; Cosgrove, 1979), it is a concrete expression of what can be seen with 'the soul of the eye' (Relph, 1979). The artistic image is a metaphorical enlargement of the externalities of a scene that extends to the landscape imbued with mood (Agar, 1986), textured by memory (Lynch, 1976; Pocock, 1982), vibrating with subjective fantasy (Rees, 1977), contorted by collective ideology (Williams, 1973; Barrell, 1980; Bermingham, 1986; Cosgrove, 1985; 1989b), and harmonised with myth (Zaring, 1977; Cosgrove, 1982a; Fuller, 1989). It is thus a road into 'imagined country' (Short, 1991), a bridge to the 'insider's view' of the world that leads geographers to the essence of place.

Science could never hope to replicate the truths harboured along the exotic coasts of artistic islands in the geographical literature. Nor can it dispel them using its own idealistic fantasy of fact as testable hypothesis. There is clearly a reality beyond the objective, and its relative inaccessibility does not negate its academic and common validity.

> This Life's dim Window of the Soul
> Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
> And leads you to Believe a Lie
> When you see with, not thro' the Eye
> (from *The Everlasting Gospel*, Blake, c1818, cited in Lowenthal, 1961, p. 258).

It is unsurprising that a discipline that became obsessed with plotting general patterns of migration, transport, and information flows, or the location of vegetation, land-use, and housing types tended to overlook the specificity and uniqueness of people and place, and ignored the value of art. Human beings were caricatured as rational economic actors, with little attention given to their nuanced individual and emotional responses to the world. Tangentially, places were reduced to latitude-longitude coordinates and population-landform agglomerations that obliterated their human meaning, value, and significance. In effect, through their desperation to erect a sturdy tower of empirical-objective studies from which to trumpet their discipline's scientific status, geographers destroyed its identity as an art; they traded its soul for numerical precision and rational explanation (see Powell, 1980; Hart, 1982). The tragedy resounds in the present.

Echoes of humanity beyond quantitative geography

There have always been human geographers who find the quarters allocated to them in the scientific hostel uncomfortable, the intellectual and moral rent too high, and the house rules overly restrictive (Powell, 1980). Encouragingly, an interest in the subjective, cognitive side of place remained, even during the initial - and most crippling - assault of science. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a number of human geographers, in collaboration with other social scientists, consciously pursuing personal environmental images on the understanding that "man reacts to his environment as he perceives and interprets it through previous experience and knowledge" (Bunting and Guelke, 1979, p. 449). The attempt to uncover elements of the geography in people's minds was rooted in an anthropocentric appreciation of the environment that expelled the deterministic explanations of human-world relations that devil more objective, scientific studies. The emphasis fell on individual people as geographical subject. Notwithstanding its admirable stand in the human dimension of geography at a time when science was bombarding that world, this strain of the discipline was a willing prostitute for science. The humane voice echoing through behavioural and perception studies was muffled by a thick cloak of graphs, mathematics, and rigid survey techniques.

Illustratively, the mental map, minion of the new school and fathered by Lynch (1960), was a recognition that different people experience the same place in different ways, but it reduced the appraisive dimension to a mechanical precis written in scientific phraseology. Subjective environmental response was masked behind a veneer of objectivity. Respondents were required to summarise their images, sheep-like, according to a set of predetermined criteria and the results were herded into restrained theories of place imageability and overt human behaviouralism (see Downs and Stea, 1977). Human beings were narrowly conceived and usually homogenised by practitioners in the behavioural-cognitive branch of geography. Individual sensory awareness was, paradoxically, a route to generalised causative schemata that summarised interrelationships between socio-psychological criteria and the cognition of, and behaviour in space (see Pocock and Hudson, 1978). For example, geographical preference surfaces were statistically derived as composite images from subjects' ranking of places (eg. Gould, 1973), or normative models of cognitive distance were generated [illegible]

create 'universal' theories of perception (see Briggs, 1973). Cognition studies in this mould were clearly a parasite on the quantitative-theoretical side of geography. Subjectivity was suppressed and place was forced computer-ward.

Art has experienced a similar fate: at the hands of various insensitive scholars, it has been reduced to an 'objective' record of geographical externalities. The most superficial geographical content of landscape art is its description of the external features of place. It relates to a functional attribute of pictorial and literary representation: their capacity to record and present an immediate visual impression of the environment. Heathcote (1972) labels the factual content of creative imagery the 'explicit' information of art. Paintings and poems of geographical subjects that predate the photographic era or that portray scenes omitted in other records serve as valuable documents of past environments. In consequence, they are commonly incorporated into history text books (Osborne, 1992). Historical geographers use them to re-create the natural and human environments encountered by early settlers in different lands (Rees, Rees, 1977; 1982b; Arreola, 1982). Ironically, even physical geographers - who usually follow an orthodox scientism - have at times exploited paintings as a witness of environmental character and fluxes. Illustratively, Johannessen *et al.* (1971) used landscape art as a record of changing vegetation patterns to supplement evidence drawn from more conventional sources. Gellatly (1985) similarly used paintings to trace the historical fluctuations of a glacier in New Zealand. Unfortunately, these examples of the manipulation of art as 'scientific' record are suspect in their naivete and waste the resource in their superficial conclusions.

Studies using art as 'objective' evidence populate the human side of geography too, especially with reference to vernacular landscapes and shifting culture. In a mode of research spanning three decades, Price (1968), Lewis (1972), Ohman (1982) and Lawrence (1988) employed lithographs and other artworks to examine shifting architectural styles and land-use patterns in American history. These human geographers award pictorial imagery little more sympathetic interpretation than do their scientifically-bound physical counterparts. Ohman (1982, p. 185) states dryly: "Factual and visual evidence provides a comprehensive record o

nineteenth-century foursquare courthouses in Missouri. From the second decade of the century until the 1870s Missourians favored the foursquare design. Illustrations for thirty-five buildings exist ...". Raiding artworks for their factual content and decorative value is an insult to the enormous potential that they hold as a record of truths on a higher human plane that elude detached observation. Moreover, seeking objective references to place not only diminishes the importance of the source, it is also dangerous. It is based on the assumption that artists are able and intend to view place objectively and that they faithfully record it.

Norcliffe and Simpson-Housley (1992, pp. 2-3) highlight the hazards of using art to pinpoint factual phenomena in the landscape:

> Impressions of the landscape presented by artists, novelists, and poets are, of their nature ... evocative and idiosyncratic; they are designed to convey to the viewer or the reader the artist's or author's particular sense of a place. In some instances, they capture the essence of a place, but in other instances they may present a consciously distorted or even a contrived image.

The distortions may alleviate the documentary value of many images. The fact that "artists portray not what they see but the art in what they see" (Woods, 1978, p. 341) further aggravates the inadequacies of their work as accurate objective geographical evidence. Consequently, the assumption of imitation may lead geographers to incorrect conclusions (see Rees, 1973; Prince, 1984). The key to ascertaining the objective value of particular works lies in the 'patterns of intention' (Baxandall, 1985) surrounding their production. Where the artist's motive is located squarely in the realm of accurate representation rather than self-expression and fabrication, the created landscape may correspond closely to the real world (Bryson, 1983; Harmsen, 1985). The objective must be re-creative rather than creative. Rees (1976a) distinguishes topographers who re-create the external truth of the environment - such as surveyors, engineers, journalists, and artists producing sketches for scientific and military purposes - from landscape painters who create works of art. The former are engaged in what Pocock (1981a) calls 'word painting', an exhaustive description of place.

Ruskin was a strong advocate of a cultivated humbleness within artists confronted by a scene. They were encouraged to "go to Nature in all singleness of heart, ... having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning." Artists were to be faithful to her instruction, "rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and

good" (Ruskin, 1885, cited in Beeton, 1970, p. 16). Some modern art takes this instruction to the extreme: giant collages are produced using items picked up directly at sites in London. The 'slice-of-life' art simulates reality by recording the skin of place in minute detail. Richard Long's (1979) *A straight northward walk across Dartmoor* similarly records naked perceptions in a brief account of immediate sensory experience. The problem with this kind of art is that it cannot grasp the feelings and meanings that make a place, and therefore, arguably, does not properly represent them (see Walter, 1988). Lowenthal and Prince (1975, p. 126) put it succinctly: "art fails when it only imitates life. Aesthetic representations sift out and dispose of empty spaces and trivial events". And most art does transcend mere imitation:

> Generally speaking, what motivates and drives artistic endeavour is an imagination, bold at times to the point of waywardness, that strives to embody the 'felt power' in things rather than their accurate portrayal (Tuan, 1990, p. 439).

Art and geography, when they aim to provide accurate 'naked' views of reality rather meani[illegible] human interpretations overlook the power of place.

Regionalism: portraying the personality of place

Place and art have been more sensitively incorporated into geography at various points in the history of the discipline. Thematically, the results range from an over-emphasis on place in environmental determinism to its diluted inclusion in radical studies as the background to socio-political events. In the gallery of human geography, various attempts to explore place hang as colourful testimony to individuals who have blended their own shades and created unique geographical impressions of place in styles that reflect their era, different schools and personalities. The best examples are impressionist works that capture the flavour of the environment and contemporary life through direct observation of nature and, technically, through the juxtapositioning of small yet concentrated details to build an impression of the transitory landscape scene. Like impressionist painters, their minute descriptions of the myriad of local colours may be unintelligible at close range, but the character of places emerge when the eye fuses these at a distance. Expressing the importance of sensation in the process of apprehending the world, impressionist painters and geographers alike offer vivid accounts of unique places and times as human entities.

For regional geographers, the quest to uncover the features constituting the unique character of an area and to present these as a coherent and comprehensive regional description aligns their work with artistic impressions of place. Early scholars in the field were in fact encouraged to cultivate an 'artistic vision':

> a true eye for country ... an eye that can see into the very heart and, through all the thronging details, single out the one essential quality; an eye which can not only observe but can make discoveries (Younghusband, 1920, p. 8).

The mechanics of interpretation based on generalisation and simplification through the selection of typical elements, and the evocation of the character of a region through the synthesis of disparate elements are common to art and geography. In both cases, a visual shorthand is written using regional signatures to provide a recognisable image of the region (Rees, 1973). A treasure chest of vibrant, colourful depictions of place stands open; plucking a few pieces to enliven and embellish their often drab apparel will make regional geographers less conspicuous when they join the festivities held by the humanities in the name of place.

The realism of artworks that adopt an objective stance in relation to nature extends beyond surface naturalism to embrace a richer appreciation of landscape morphology; they encompass understanding, as well as imitative description. Layers of exploratory strokes amassed to embrace the essential character of a scene distinguish art from the hastily-taken snapshot. In attempting to adequately conjure the likeness of a scene, artists are in fact *compelled* to pursue knowledge about the relations between phenomena (see Rees, 1976a), to use Sauer's (1967) 'morphologic eye'. Photographic realism may distort landscapes beyond recognition by ignoring their rhythmic coherence that is sometimes 'felt' rather than observed. Art conveys the more abstract visual qualities of landscape - the assemblage and interactive poses of geographical elements that contribute to the 'personality' or 'atmosphere' of place.

In order to capture the total impression of a region, the peculiar arrangement of its parts that contributes to its distinctive flavour must be understood. Regional novels are a particularly rich resource in this respect (Pocock, 1981a). Meinig (1977, p. 4) asserts that "the skilful novelist often seems to come closest of all in capturing the full flavour of the environment". Hardy's Wessex (Barrell, 1982), Jane Austen's England (Herbert, 1991), Brett

Young's Black Country (Jay, 1975) and Larkin's Hull (Spooner, 1992) are testimony to the rich regional portraits in art. Though their images of place that may be thinly developed, they are certainly more inclusive than cartographic records. One of the deeper truths that the novel expresses is the aesthetic quality of place. Cornish (1928; 1943) was a firm believer in the geographical importance of beauty in the landscape. Bunkse (1981) too recommended an aesthetic tradition in geography. Once more, art is a valuable resource: "Art is something within an artist responding to the call of life and beauty. A love of one's environment is a requisite" (Lismer, 1932, cited in Rees, 1976b, p. 269). The visual tapestry of the environment, the textures, colours and composition of geographical elements, the aesthetic qualities in profile and in detail find unimpeded expression in art.

As a descriptive tool, art offers the geographer more than a mirror of physical features on the face of the country: it magnifies these to illuminate the finer grains and pores that comprise its skin. Focusing still closer, it is possible to detect the energy rushing beneath the surface of place - the subjective meaning and symbolic implications that are its lifeblood. Art is a route into the human realm vegetated by the shrubs of reason and intentionality, the finery of emotional blooms, and the sprawling trees of social networks. Inevitably, collective and individual world views - even when they are consciously denied in the artistic process - constantly infuse art to the extent that "the history of landscape painting [and writing] is the history of conceptions of nature" (Rees, 1982a, p. 253).

Humanistic geography: reconciling humanity with place

Humanistic geography represents one of the most conscious and organised attempts to release the clench of the scientific-mathematical tradition around the discipline (see especially Entrikin, 1976; also Cloke *et al.*, 1991). A disparate group of researchers adopted various perspectives and philosophies from the humanities that enabled them to embrace the subjective, emotive, and intangible dimensions of the environment that had been tabooed in the positivist canon. An important foundation of the movement is that people and their environment are inextricably linked and that they participate in one another's nature. "Places and people are

inseparable ..." says Violich (1985, p. 113), "Places exist only with reference to people, and the meaning of place can be revealed only in terms of human responses to the particular environment used as a framework for daily living". Thus, human beings were resurrected at the core of geography. A major ramification was the rethinking of place as a human entity. Though slow to infiltrate and heavily criticised, the humanist injection has sensitised mainstream international geography to the importance of human agency and the limitations of conventional scientific vision. It has yet to grasp the reins of the discipline and to determine its course in a meaningful way.

Humanistic geography does not have a single focus nor a clear identity. Contributors have scouted broadly over an array of sometimes incompatible intellectual positions, philosophical frameworks, methodologies, and materials. Indeed, some would reject the umbrella heading erected over their work. Moreover, the pastel shades of humanism have begun to wash the entire discipline; historical geographers, cultural geographers, transport geographers, and others, have at times adopted the sensitivities to place and human agency that are the trademark of the humanistic movement. Inasmuch as there is a distinguishable humanistic tradition in the discipline, it is a child of the 1960s. As emotion and humanitarianism were carried to the forefront of the social arena by the flower children, so too in academia, a few protestors against the positivist regime could be heard promoting the cause of subjective experience and private geographies as topics worthy of consideration. Leading the ruminations was Lowenthal (1961, p. 260):

> The surface of the earth is shaped for each person by refraction through cultural and personal lenses of custom and fancy. We are all artists and landscape architects, creating order and organizing space, time, and causality in accordance with our apperceptions and predilections.

It is geography's goal, he argued, to travel, document, and explain individual and consensual worlds that transcend objective reality, just as it traverses more easily-observable landscapes. Place was to be plotted as an inherently human phenomenon, not as "a collection of empirically observable objects and events, but rather [as] ... a repository of meaning" (Entrikin, 1976, p. 626).

Reconnaissance of the subjective, experiential facet of place has been enthusiastically undertaken by humanistic geographers. They engage the constellation of experiences that are typical to human interaction with place; the universal existential geographical impulses; "the prereflective, taken-for-granted dimensions of experience, the unquestioned meanings, and routinized determinants of [geographical] behaviour" (Buttimer, 1976, p. 281). Humanistic geographers have pioneered routes for geography in the world of experience (Lowenthal and Prince, 1975; Tuan, 1975; 1977; Buttimer and Seamon, 1980), in landscapes of affection (Tuan, 1974b; 1979; Relph, 1976), and symbolic environments of the imagination (Lowenthal and Bowden, 1975; Porteous, 1990). The results are imaginative and colourful. Territoriality, rootedness, security, outsideness, and refuge have been coagulated into theories of 'being-in-the-world' (Buttimer, 1976; Relph, 1985), topophobia and topophilia (Tuan, 1974b; Relph, 1976), and place ballets (Seamon, 1980). Whole volumes have been devoted to teasing out the intricacies of people's (positive and negative) emotional attachments to place and the texture of their experiences of space. Their excited rambling about deathscapes (Porteous, 1987), sick places (Walter, 1988), and landscapes of fear (Tuan, 1979) forms a riddle of paths fingering haphazardly around the human globe. Space too has been metamorphosed to harmonise with the geography of experience. Liberated from its (f)rigid shell of numerical precision and objective measurement, it emerges as a colourful, dynamic, and egocentric vision of nearness, farness, at-homeness, and back- and front-regions (Tuan, 1974b; Buttimer, 1980; Buttimer and Seamon, 1980).

Everywhere, the subjective landscape has inspired emotive and imaginative descriptions of place that speak to the soul and enliven the grey garb of traditional geography. Relph's (1976) *Place and Placelessness* is a supreme example of the humanistic current in geography. Place is conceptualised as a profound and complex aspect of the human experience of the world that encompasses both functional and existential features. Around this key concept, Relph weaves an interesting, if at times problematic, humanistic compendium using the threads of perceptual space and place, place identity, meaning, and image. Insideness and outsideness, selfconscious and unselfconscious sense of place and placelessness, individual and

mass images of the landscape are all counterpoised in a somewhat awkward dance around the phenomenological basis of human geography.

Tuan is another humanistic geographer who has long pursued the phantom of geographical experience, listening intently to its music and trying to organise it into chords of harmonious groups of feelings and existential/phenomenological concepts. A well-known attempt to systematise the complex range of human-environment interactions is his (1977) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience.* The common bases of geographical impulses are identified in biological-psychological and socio-cultural systems, as well as individual images of the world. Humanity is the core. Starting with the child's instinctive sensory responses to and modes of confronting the environment, and plowing randomly through the religions and perceptions of distant and primitive civilisations, Tuan develops a vague typology of broad human relationships with place and space. Spaciousness and crowding, mythical place and space, intimate experiences of homeland, and the juxtapositioning of time and space are explored as fundamental themes in the human environment: they are the preconscious, organic foundations which precede intellectual knowledge and constitute the taken-for-granted background to human relationships with place.

The cloak that the humanists draped tenderly over the wizen body of geography rivals Joseph's in its colourful splendour. Yet, the material of which it is woven is too ethereal to ward off the punishing effects of the seemingly endless summer of science and the criticism of sceptics (see Jackson, 1989; Pocock, 1983). The question of substance is a persistent fiend with which humanistic geography has had to contend. In particular, the lack of a comprehensive itinerary and the failure to produce a suitable map of the subjective world have exasperated many scholars (see Gregory, 1981; Silk, 1984). In their critique of the poverty of existing research, humanistic geographers sung out in harmony, yet their attempts to quell the onslaught of theories and numbers have never condensed into a formal academic endeavour with a coherent methodological and theoretical framework. On the contrary, their recarving of the cornerstones of geographical inquiry has been a carnival of intriguing proposals and intellectual ecclecticism. Like pioneers in other landscapes, Relph, Tuan, Buttimer, and their

colleagues pushed back existing frontiers and opened up new territories for exploration. The introduction of consciousness and experience, perception and interpretation has enlarged the objective world of geography into a field of places with human identities and meaning. Perhaps their most significant contribution was the digestion of artistic material as an appropriate and legitimate resource for geography.

Artistic commentary on the places of experience

'Sense of place' - a crucial notion in humanistic geography - is, fundamentally, a human construct. It relates to the manner in which people view their environment as subjective beings, according to universal human impulses and personal idiosyncratic and learned geographical responses. Experience, in a broad universal sense, and place as the location of that experience are the pinnacle of the research initiative. Of primary importance to humanistic geographers is the lustre of meaning and value that coat the coarse texture of geographical environs, transforming them into places of lived experience. Imagination is an important medium for this process: fantasy, memories and dreams help to polish the externalities of place into a human environment (Lowenthal and Bowden, 1975; Lowenthal and Prince, 1975; Tuan, 1990), as do emotion and mood. Creativity too is inherent to the process of transforming the geographical environment into a meaning-ful place. All find a home in the landscapes of art.

As it touches on subconscious, transient, indeterminate realms of existence, the humanistic dimension of place is extremely difficult to describe, let alone interpret and understand. Lowenthal and Prince (1975, p. 125) observe: "We have only the sketchiest notion of feelings and preoccupations about landscape and milieu, even for those we know best. Largely inarticulate about such matters, most people express reactions only in unusual circumstances." Lowenthal too recognised that because personal and even shared geographies are complex milieus making places "flexible, plastic, and somewhat amorphous" (1961, p. 250), they are difficult to penetrate and understand. Although he vaguely sketched its morphology,

Lowenthal offered no map to researchers hoping to find their way around - or even into - this world. Yet he was sure that:

> Because all knowledge is necessarily subjective as well as objective, delineations of the world that are purely matter-of-fact ordinarily seem too arid and lifeless to assimilate; only color and feeling convey verisimilitude. Besides unvarnished facts, we require fresh firsthand experience, individual opinions and prejudices (Lowenthal, 1961, p. 258).

In preparing for the journey through the world of feeling, meaning, and symbol, it was recommended that scholars reject the maps provided by the scientific community and instead pack their own subjective emotional and imaginative equipment. It was anticipated that these would be far more useful for expeditions on the potentially rugged and unexplored terrain of human places.

As "painting and literature overtly disclose a wealth of response; apprehensions of environment, tacit and acknowledged, suffuse the canvas and the page" (Lowenthal and Prince, 1975, p. 125), they too are valuable for the exploration of place. Indeed, humanistic geography's reconceptualisation of the landscape as a subjective imperative was coupled with the recognition that artistic material is an abundant geographical resource (Heathcote, 1972; Rees, 1973; 1978; Cosgrove, 1982b). Art is a sensitive medium for conveying the realities that result from the coincidence of external features of the landscape with the imaginative and emotional faculties that distort objective perception. It absorbs place as part of the energy flowing out of (and also into) experience and life-world. As the creative act is an intensely personal process, its fruits are charged with the opinions and idiosyncrasies of their producer as individual and social being. An artist necessarily mediates between the scene produced in paint or fiction and the real landscape from which it is extracted. Burgess and Gold (1982, p. 1) observe: "To *create* is to give of oneself and to endow the world which we inhabit with personal meaning". Depictions of geographical localities embrace unique perceptions and responses to the environment; they are tangible and accessible concretisations of *private* geographies of the mind and the heart.

Through the artistic medium, environment becomes place, imbued with the nuances of sensual experiences and moral judgements, the flavour of individual reflection that are inspired by, but elaborate upon the objective character of that environment. The acute senses,

unbridled subjectivity and expressive skills of artists allow them to capture the ambivalent, complex, sensual flavour of different environments (see Pocock, 1981a), the landscape of impression as well as tangible location or social mythology. Passion and idea are indelibly stamped on artworks such that they have been characterised as 'maps of states of mind'. Art critic, Knapp (1985, p. 1), notes:

> Any artist who takes in hand brush or pen, and uses it for creative purposes - to objectify and portray some private vision - thereby transforms what previously lay embedded in the subliminal sphere into a deliberate act. The painter or writer thus concretises the amorphous and endows with an independent life and order that which was heretofore inchoate, and, in so doing, the artist brings into existence a mirror image of his or her inward climate.

In images of the landscape, the artist therefore offers an 'insider's perspective' on geographical reality. Watson (1983, p. 392) is convinced that this allows the artist to penetrate "to the *real* issues, because he is *of* them. He voices them as prime experience." In art, place is interlaced with the delicate thread of emotion and imaginatively transformed into a realm of emphatically human meaning.

Art historians are aware of the geographical content of art, and are particularly concerned with its subjective manifestations. Handy's (1989) interpretation of Rankin's semi-abstract paintings is a lyrical declaration of the personal geography resident within art. The artist's richly textured works, based primarily on landscape motifs are examined as a record of "the play of light across the landscapes of the mind", involving "the delicate interlacing of paint and idea" (p. 51). Rankin's work is felt to have "everything to do with the specificity of place in the geographical sense, and with his own place in the world, a personal situation." (p. 51). His "determinedly specific evocations of Australian landscape", Handy explains, "are at once full of the emptiness, the slowness of the Australian terrain ... [while, at the same time] experiential reality saturates these abstractions" (p. 52). In a less impassioned and creative vein, Appleton (1975) catalogues the types of human response to place that are etched symbolically in art. His prospect and refuge theory compliments humanistic geography's concept of topophilia. Positive and negative environmental reactions are related directly to images in the painted landscape: roads offer the spectator a prospect, while cottages are a potential refuge or 'home'; an empty scene overhung by a stormy sky may be alienating and provoke feelings of rootlessness during confrontation with the artistic landscape, just as it does in the real world.

Art is the symbolic projection of primal phenomenological impulses, which are fundamental to human interaction with place.

Literature is an important route into individual perceptions of place. Porteous (1986b; 1987) uses Malcolm Lowry's novels to explore personal impressions of the city. The urban environment is transformed into a placeless arena for sensory overload, into a deathscape, a symbol of evil and a predator. The symbolic reconstruction of geographical reality is forcefully portrayed by the novelist. Pocock's (1981b) edited collection is a further tribute to the value of literature for exploring the experience of place. Contributors to his book celebrate the subjective content of art; portraits of landscape in literature are seen to extend beyond the realm of mere facts to the moral (Cosgrove and Thomes, 1981), existential (see especially Seamon, 1981; Middleton, 1981), symbolic (Paterson and Paterson, 1981) truth of place. Important trails continue to be followed in the landscapes of experience, particularly through the medium of creative literature. Such research leads circuitously to the spirit of place and provides an ideological skeleton for place-sensitive research. The centrality it gives to humanity is fundamentally important. So too is the acknowledgement that places have an identity rooted in the experiential, existential, human realm, as well as being points on a map with specific physical features and patterns of land use and population density. The research has implications for the study of real 'valued environments' too (Burgess and Gold, 1982).

Moods and memories of culture in place

Cultural geography offers a more sober analysis of place as an environment of perception and meaning that leads through (and to) socio-political, rather than abstract-universal geographical impulses. Its socio-historical approach has redefined landscape as 'a way of seeing' (Berger, 1972; see also Cosgrove, 1985) that extends to the moral meaning and social significance embedded in it. In this guise, landscape oozes social bias, class ideology and economic relations:

> the landscape concept is itself a sophisticated cultural construction: a particular way of composing, structuring and giving meaning to external world whose history has to be understood in relation to the material appropriation of land (Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987, p. 96).

Importantly, the perception of place involves the processing of sensory stimuli through the filter of a culturally-structured value system. The viewer is a 'tuned' organism, conditioned for seeing by rules for apprehension learned within a particular social milieu (see Baxandall, 1985). The myths, symbols and metaphors of space and place articulated within a particular context constitute a landscape ideology and to some degree dictate the individual's geographical sight (Short, 1991). Artistic vision is not exempt from the diversity of collective ideologies; artists have for long been entrenched within its structures and continue to adhere to its teachings.

Cultural geography points to a more meaningful framework for interpreting landscape paintings than humanistic geographers have developed. Not only is art examined for subjective perceptions of place, but these are explained as ideological constructs. Most artistic texts of place not only reveal the consciousness of individuals, the structures of feeling and imagination whereby the world is metamorphosed into intimate places, they simultaneously (though often only implicitly) record the broader ideological climates that precipitate the peculiarities of personal geographies. Art historians and literary critics, such as Williams (1973), Barrell (1972; 1980), Paulson (1982) and Bermingham (1986), provide important insights for geographers probing the cultural content of the landscape genre. Their critical investigations of the ideological significance underpinning certain formal and aesthetic movements within environmental representation constitute a detailed and stimulating map to scholars hoping to weave the political, social and economic into landscape studies. They underline the fact that the socially-constructed filters that artists use to survey the world are not transparent (see Prince, 1984 for an overview). Rather, these help to shape the formal and thematic elements that constitute the symbolic language of creative techniques. Art is therefore a manifestation of the preferences and prejudices of an entire society; the receiver and crier of cultural information. Social relationships, the fashions, trends and philosophies of a culture, are etched deeply in all its cultural products.

Artists may be unaware of the latent politics in their vision. However, according to the consensus of academic literature, they cannot escape writing culture into their work. The ideological allocation of meaning to the environment is harboured both in the content of art

and in its code of representation (see especially Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Barnes and Duncan, 1992). Cosgrove (1988; 1989b), for example, interprets the geometrical style adopted by Venetian landscape artists as an expression of iconography and constructs an account of power relations from their images. Unfortunately, the symptoms of socialised viewing need not surface in such obvious or direct terms. Bermingham (1986, p. 4) gives some indication of the scope and complexity of social commentary in art:

> The discrepancies, blindnesses and silences that the work of art maintains in the face of ideology are themselves ideological positions. Because art registers these positions, it is, instead of a one-dimensional "example" of ideology, as much a dynamic framer of ideology as politics itself. For this reason it is important not to overlook the work of art's contradictory character en route to larger social categories, for though art produces ideology and exists within it, it also registers inconsistencies within ideologies and pinpoints the places where their totalizing worldview threatens to unravel.

Martins (1981, p. 30) translates this observation on the messages hidden behind absences in landscape art for the South African geographer:

> for the artist to refrain from mentioning the freedom of the black press, dismemberment of the homeland into fragmented reserves, malnutrition, hunger and starvation that go hand in glove with forced removals of communities, is in itself a political act.

Clearly, it is important to scout beyond the obvious content of landscape images to penetrate their hidden agendas and meanings. Propaganda lurks in the shadows of many seemingly innocent artworks; racism crouches in the midst of buildings and fields depopulated of their black occupants; the scream of poverty neglected and ignored reverberates through the landscapes of wealth; and power and status bind the physical elements of many re-created environments in a declaration of social stratification (see also Barrell, 1972; 1980).

The very process of producing pure landscape painting is infused with socio-political implications. The ideological possession of land through taming in the painted image is a blatant statement of power (Paulson, 1982; Bermingham, 1986). Among a huge family of landscape myths and symbols (see Short, 1991), the pastoral is a particularly obvious declaration of ideology. It involves the denial, not only of industrialisation, but also of the exploitation of labour power under capitalism. Most landscape art perpetuates and proclaims bourgeois tastes and values. Painting and literature are not blind to social forces or ignorant of power differences. They are dynamic and complex socio-cultural discourse personified; the Frankenstein of deeply-bedded political, social, economic and spiritual forces.

Socio-cultural reflections in art

Art expresses a 'way of seeing' (Cosgrove, 1985) that characterises a particular society in a specific era. Cosgrove and Daniel's (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* and Barnes and Duncan's (1992) *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape* are manifestos on the socio-historical associations and implications of art. Rees (1976a) questions the reliability of the artist's vision as a surrogate for general attitudes, but the relationship is a premise to his investigation of various landscape paintings by Constable and Turner as representative of opposing yet contemporary views of nature in nineteenth-century England (Rees, 1982a). Harmsen (1985, p. 292) verbalises the basis for the assumption:

> No artist is an island. He is a member of a community with a tradition, customs and attitudes which affect him. His ideas ... are formed by his historical heritage and his present environment.

The reliability of art as social witness is magnified in that artists are not only an 'antenna' of a community and an era, they are also teachers within a given social milieu. It is widely acknowledged (Heathcote, 1972; Rees, 1973; 1978; Cosgrove, 1982a) that creative works play an important role in influencing public perception of the environment: they advocate a specific geographical perspective and so teach people to view nature in a particular way until "the public ends by seeing and feeling what artists have taught it to see" (Rees, 1973, p. 154). So, in their reciprocal relationship with society, artworks form an important part of the scaffolding for a general framework for approaching and interpreting reality.

Analysis of artistic re-creations of the world discloses the myths and symbols of place embedded in prevailing cultural value systems; they are an ideological seismograph. The pulses detected originate in the very heart of communal life and are accurately recorded, although it may take an expert to eliminate background noise in the form of subjective waves. Ley (1987) shows how architecture reflects the political, social and ideological complexities of a period; Daniels (1982) develops a related theme with reference to landscape gardening; Roche (1991) disentangles social commentary from comics; while Paterson (1991) dissects music to listen to its cultural rhythms. More popular among geographers are painted and literary representations

of place that cradle the offsprings of popular mood and thought specifically in relation to the landscape.

Mutations of geographical perception over time and across space are pursued by geographers in distinctive representations of the physical environment in poetry, novels and painting. Vacillating landscape tastes in the United States and England have been charted by Lowenthal and Prince (1965), Lowenthal (1968), Rees (1975), and Hugill (1986), among others. Analysis extends to the geographical origins and movements of thematic associations with landscape, such as the picturesque, romantic, pastoral, bucolic, antiquarianism, facadism, formlessness, refuge. The dominance of particular places in the profile of social activity and habit is a further ramification of the culture-tainted eye. Fluctuations in 'valued environments' are easily detected using the arts (see Brandon, 1984; Howard, 1985); they are denoted by the selection or neglect of potential landscape subjects. Arreola (1984) detects the fingerprints of ethnic consciousness in Mexican American mural paintings that have become a vehicle for expressing (and promoting) group identity, cultural pride and distinctiveness, as well as political positions. 'People's art' also serves to document regional landmarks and personality, and is thus a format for voicing growing and shifting place consciousness.

Historically, research has concentrated on pioneer societies. Rees (1976b; 1977; 1982b) has been particularly active in this area. He identifies shifts in environmental perception as these permeate early paintings of the Canadian prairie. Insight into colonist's thoughts and feelings illuminates the very processes of settlement. The fact that "the mind and spirit must also make their accommodation in the new land" (Rees, 1976b, p. 259) means that art is often an expression of the turmoil and conflicts, and finally the acceptance, that accompany immigrants in their move. Winsor (1987) scoured immigrant guidebooks to detail the stereotype of east central Illinois as a wet prairie. Using pictorial as well as cartographic and verbal imagery, he found that in assessing the landscape, nineteenth-century travellers "observed (and recorded) what they considered "typical", and stereotyped areas regardless of what actually was representative" (Winsor, 1987, p. 375). Arreola's (1982) discussion of

nineteenth-century townscapes of eastern Mexico and Zaring's (1977) exploration of the Romantic face of Wales lend geographical breadth to this assertion.

The primary role played by art in the articulation of a sense of place means that is also important in the search for a national identity (see Osborne, 1988; 1992; Short, 1991). Art is an important medium for exploring and locating meaning in place. By isolating the essential features of the environment and giving them comprehensible form, artists have been instrumental in the creation of a regional consciousness among infant nations. In this, they address a profound spiritual need. Paintings, poems, novels and folk tales are mirrors that reflect the world of the viewer, reader or listener. Without them, according to Rees (1982b, p. 7), a country has no means of knowing what it looks like:

> Maps and surveys orient and inform but, unless unusually expressive, they do not identify the fine character of a place, or elicit its spirit. If art and literature reflect other worlds, ... the result can be disquieting. People physically in one world remain spiritually in another.

Artists re-create the landscape, not only on the canvas or paper, but in the imaginations of an entire society. The myths they perpetuate are instructive not only for insiders, but for outsiders residing beyond the region too. The annals of a culture are illustrated by the art of its national artists; they help design, edit, and distribute the textbook of their society around the world. Geographers should read a copy from every region they hope to understand.

Artworks are in touch with the transient moods and variable temperament of society as these relate to place, they absorb transient emotional and imaginative landscapes, and they register the aesthetic colours of scenery. The softer fabric of a region's personality are just as important for describing and understanding its identity as are the great wheeling movements of its vital organs - the demographics of population, climate changes and political atmosphere. As a result, art commends itself as an invaluable medium for exploring the spirit of place.

CHAPTER 3

VOICES AND VISIONS OF PLACE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

> She took me to vantage points where I could see the city as it invaded the undulating country to all the horizons. I stared to the north, where the promontory-like buildings of Killarney, Rosebank, Sandton, Randburg jutted from the sea of trees. From the top end of Yeoville, looking south, the entire city centre ... was spread out, a forest of tall and rig'd structures with not a softening curve among them ... These sights did present an overview, ... but of a *purely geographic* nature. On a *deeper* level, however, our tour brought the city no closer to my grasp (from *Wasteland*, Robbins, 1987, p. 8, emphasis added).

Southern Africa's landscapes have largely been viewed from a distance, through the lens of objective, geometric or theoretical perspectives. Their subjective, emotive, qualitative detail has been granted disappointingly little commentary by academics, particularly those indoctrinated into the scientific vision, such as geographers. In 1947, Wright erected a signpost in the world of the imagination, declaring it *terrae incognitae* for geographers. Intended to lure curious researchers into an unexplored landscape where they might discover and colonise virgin territory, it has instead functioned as a caution to many geographers, who are more comfortable on well-traversed quantitative-theoretical terrain. The warning has perhaps sounded clearest in relation to the painted landscape which not only defies the comforting approach of measurement and mapping, but is described in a language with which the geographer has traditionally had little contact. Certainly, South African geographers have for long cowered from the challenge of exploring local art as a valuable resource for investigating place.

Unfamiliarity may be the biggest deterrent for indigenous geographers wishing to explore qualitative material. A history of overly scientific-empirical research has deprived them - possibly more than geographers in other countries - of a comprehensive methodological apparatus to assist their travels in the world of art. Traversing disciplinary boundaries is worthwhile here, as elsewhere: the humanities have engendered studies that are useful maps for unseasoned travellers in artistic landscapes (eg. Barrell, 1972; 1980; Williams, 1973; Paulson, 1982; Rosenthal, 1982; Bermingham, 1986; Tindall, 1991). Moreover, the international geographical community has developed an impressive range of conceptual equipment to assist journeys into the perceptual-artistic dimension of place. Humanistic and

cultural geographers in particular offer phenomenological interpretations of landscape and art according to topophobia-topophilia categories (Tuan, 1974b; 1979; Relph, 1976; Porteous, 1987) and a voluminous literature around consciousness and ideology as crucial components of the experience and representation of landscape (eg. Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Barnes and Duncan, 1992). Though the marriage between humanism and geography has been an awkward one, the relationship has bred numerous tantalising avenues for local research.

Established research agendas and perspectives provide beacons in the local landscape, marking features that are significant to a reading of place (both from reality and in art). They point the way for local researchers, but should not simply be imitated; it is not enough to borrow foreign ideas and to apply them in the South African context. Local circumstances breed unique challenges for a country's inhabitants, who express their relationship with the land in a geographically-specific idiom. These require independent consideration and analysis. South African geographers have made tentative steps towards interpreting the local landscape as place. Reconnaissance of the landscapes of experience has been a significant move towards diluting the dominance of sterile geographical explanations of the country; local humanistic scholars have begun to paint the colours of experience over the previously pallid image of the country. Against a backdrop of factual material relating to colonial exploitations of the country and the apartheid project of racial segregation and its geographical manifestations, the experiences of black people in particular add a human dimension to the geographical tale of South Africa. However, researchers have yet to introduce the level of sophistication - associated especially with socio-political contextualisation - that characterises international analyses of place. The focus is invariably upon the physical features of townships and the human activities located within them, and the emphasis usually falls upon the obvious face of black urban places rather than their deeper personalities. Moreover, visual material has been largely absent from the picture and has never been embraced as an essential actor in the theatre of South African landscape ideology.

Beyond the parched terrain of geography, there is some relief: local historians, linguists, art historians and other members of the humanities have considered the human textures of

place. Unfortunately, many of them are entrenched in a socio-historical mindframe. Place is surrendered to considerations of society and individuals: locality is reduced to context; geography is relegated to the title, rather than permeating the content of analysis. Despite their meagre commentary on place, certain studies are ripe with implications for the geographer. They provide an introductory cartography of southern Africa as a cultural and symbolic entity, rather than an economic or a scientific subject. The humanists' sensitive and evocative treatment of local artistic material is perhaps a more significant example for the geographer. Although critical analysis of the painted landscape is severely lacking in South Africa, even the occasional attempts at synchronising visual images with attitudes to nature predicated by social, political and religious ideologies, are an inspiration. The reservoir fed by the tributaries of geography and art is, however, depressingly empty. Excursions into South Africa as place rest necessarily on ecclecticism and the ingenuity of the researcher in squeezing droplets from diverse secondary material; waiting to drink from existing interpretative pools could lead to a thirsty death.

There is a rhapsody of symbol and meaning around the landscapes of southern Africa that is captured in an abundance of qualitative material. It awaits sensitive investigation for its geographical content. Place has been poignantly re-created in the lyrics of poets, musicians and novelists; the imagery of painters, travellers and film-makers offers profound insight into the dreams and motives that are fundamental to the authoring of the landscape; myths around the environment are continually updated in the mass media; while cartoons and graffiti provide satirical commentary on the human meaning and significance of geographical phenomena. The broad spectrum of qualitative expression embodies a sense of place. Art both reflects and influences interpretation of the environment, it records ideologies of the past, illuminates geographical meaning in the present, and feeds the ideals that will underlie places of the future. Consequently, it offers an invaluable resource for the geographer. If they take up the challenge of investigating place at this juncture, South African scholars will have to heed the criticisms of international scholarship (eg. Gregory, 1981; Silk, 1984). Notwithstanding the dangers involved, there is ample space for sensitive studies of southern Africa as place; a review of existing research highlights the breadth of the gap to be filled.

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South African geographers tour artistic landscapes

The heyday of the objective-scientific regime in geography has undoubtedly passed. Yet, symptoms of the epidemic it initiated remain strongly evident in the major centres of disciplinary research. Outposts of the discipline on the periphery - such as South Africa - are still heavily infected. Notwithstanding flickering potentials for a 'peopled' indigenous geography, an enormous rift divides the discipline locally from the sparsely-colonised, yet evocative terrain of an international humanistic initiative. Even more remote are the geographical insights offered directly by the humanities. To date, South African geographers have made only a minor contribution to the studies lying at the confluence of their discipline with the subjective world. Few scholars have ventured onto the terrain of experiential geography, and the approach to qualitative material has invariably been shallow and descriptive. At worst, research has remained securely tethered to the apron strings of the quantitative movement. Not only have artistic landscapes been forced into awkward co-habitation with positivist/empirical research, but they have been subjugated as passive decoration (see Christopher, 1979; Rogerson, 1986; Smith, 1992).

An unwillingness (or inability) to launch out from the s(t)olid positivist-empirical basis of conventional research has been the heaviest shackle on the humanistic limb of South African geography. Subjective analysis and artistic material have been marginalised to the periphery of established - and safer - research fields. Here, shadowed by alternative agendas, the humanistic pursuit has developed excruciatingly slowly. Invariably, literary and verbal landscapes are barely acknowledged if they appear at all. Forced into silent humility, they wait Cinderella-like for an opportunity to demonstrate their abundant beauty, insights and complexity. Yet, in the South African context, with its proliferation of 'hidden' landscapes, the value of qualitative resources could not be greater. Local art critic, Younge (1988, p. 17) points to the enormous and irreplaceable contribution made by cultural products to the investigation of black urban places:

> The closed book of township life is seldom penetrated by the casual visitor [or the academic geographer]. Terms such as 'squalor', 'hardship', or even 'housing', 'recreation' and 'schooling', tend to fragment our understanding of one of the modern world's most calculated attempts at social engineering. These terms may be able to give us endless statistics but they cannot measure subjective experience and a people's resolve to change.

It is in qualitative material that these experiential and cultural facets of the environment find expression. Art is a particularly useful resource in a country where participant observation has been curtailed both by early prohibitions and by the current dangers involved in entering the often violent township environs.

The importance of artistic material has been tentatively underlined by some South African geographers. Pickles (1978) advocated the use of creative literature, newspapers, etchings, and landscape paintings to aid an appreciation of personal and collective attitudes toward place. More particularly, he felt them appropriate tools for producing an 'artistic geography', "a more aesthetically literate geography" (Pickles, 1978, p 37). Western similarly (1978; 1981) supplemented time-honoured geographical resources such as questionnaires, censuses, maps and archival data with unorthodox material like poetry, photographs, newspaper advertisements and, importantly, his own experiences. Essaying the experiential world of Cape Town's 'coloured' population using these qualitative resources, Western nosed out the ubiquitous scent of fear, disadvantage, insecurity and tribulation that permeate the sense of place. Paying attention to the perceptions of people living in particular environments, and relying on subjective material, Pickles and Western made their way independently to the borders of humanistic research. Unfortunately, restrained subjectivity and continued reliance on 'hard' data, anchored their studies at the shore of the humanistic swell. Additionally, a limited appreciation of the subjective content of artistic material denied significant conclusions relating to the indigenous sense of place as it is articulated in landscape, via complex cultural and personal channels. South African art would have to wait for a more determined liberation movement to release geography from the jail of the scientific regime and to align it more closely with place.

Perception studies were another potential springboard to a fully-fledged local humanistic geography in the late 1970s. Despite a few inquisitive dabblers (Clark, 1978; Patricios, 1978), the movement failed to attract disciples in South Africa. Moreover, the nature of research into environmental cognition made it a minor irritation to the tyrannical hold that science retained on the discipline. Highly reminiscent of the mental map movement overseas (Gould, 1973;

Downs and Stea, 1977), local investigations of subjective environmental imagery had a strong behavioural flavour, were excessively decorated with numbers and scientific regalia, and were fundamentally grounded in a mechanical view of the individual that precluded humanistic insights. Art, where it featured, was manipulated as evidence for broad geographical patterns; its nuanced character was submerged under the weight of pre-established hypotheses (see Clark, 1978). The tendency persists to the present. Cultural geographers like Haswell (1982; 1986) include paintings to reconstruct historical vernacular landscapes and to compare geographical occurrences of, for example, architectural and town planning styles. Knitting the literary record with pictorial landscapes, Wedderburn (1991) weaves this kind of analysis through her historico-cultural geography of Pietermaritzburg. Perhaps the most sustained use of artistic material comes from humanistic geography.

In the South African milieu, humanistic geography has been neglected, misunderstood and abused, but it was not still-born. A handful of researchers have consciously repressed the garish, detached and clinical descriptions of place promoted by science in order to explore the softer hues that colour the humane face of the country. Place has begun to surface through the crusty veneer of locality, and art has quietly hummed the opening notes of its symphony on the environment. Tracking the footprints of experience in the literary landscape, various local researchers have begun to map subjective commentaries about the landscape as neglected geographical narratives. Black townships, which were for long *terra incognita* for South African geographers (Beavon, 1982), have attracted the most intense and consistent humanistic research effort. Butler-Adam (1981) uncloaks the simultaneous exuberance and violence of the hidden and avoided 'white' night-time city using poetic imagery, but the albinism of his study is rare. The humanists prefer to relay the story of black urban places which invite the use of the distinctive language of hardship, sorrow, rebellion, and conquest that textures black literature. At times research is in danger of being flooded by sentimentalism, exaggeration and romanticism, but local humanistic geography arguably offers the most legitimate description of the population evictions and removals, the bull-dozing of homes, community relocations, and territorial conflicts that are prominent features of life for many black South Africans: they are written in the words of the township inhabitants.

Distinct in detail relating to the uniqueness of individual places and different people in southern Africa, the experiences of the black victims of apartheid have become a familiar and repetitive story in the academic world and beyond. Pirie (1982) creates a collage of their lifestyle from the abundant indigenous literary record. Marabastad, Alexandra, Soweto, Sophiatown, Orlando, Prospect township, as well as the pockets of mixed-race areas in 'white' cities are described in the fine detail that characterises humanistic geography but escapes coarser research sieves. The exuberance of activities, the visual contrasts, the extraordinary publicness of life - all contribute to an impressionistic image of South African black townships. Pirie noses out and summarises the meaning and drama of place using passages from English literature, written by both insiders and outsiders to township existence. The literary record is approached as subjective commentary that reveals the colourful world of human existence hidden from conventional data - both its negative and positive dimensions. This task is taken to its climax in *The sight and soul of Sophiatown* (Hart and Pirie, 1984). The study is a pastiche of emotive townscapes written by the sensitive pens of poets and novelists.

In a provocative and unique endeavour, Pirie (1984) diverts the humanistic sleuthing for environmental meaning in the South African milieu to the histories of place names. The list of proposed labels for Soweto is read as an encyclopaedia of mental associations with the location; the naming process is excavated as subjective geographical interpretation made public. He has also (Pirie, 1992) humanised transport geography by spotlighting passengers' encounters with the mechanical instruments of apartheid in the words of local writers. The most vigorous effort to explore South Africa's townships from a humanistic perspective, however, has come from Hart (eg. 1984; 1986; 1988). She has energetically explored the imaginative worlds written by African poets and novelists, using them to tease out the spirit of place. She confronts the imagery born of personal interaction with the environment: the magic and symbolism of legendary Sophiatown and District Six are juxtaposed against the alienation and inconvenience of the blandscapes of Soweto and other dumping grounds of apartheid. The psychological distress, fear, bitterness, humiliation, anger and resentment that Hart untangles from the literary record demand subjective resources and are best presented in sensitive geographical commentaries. Likewise, the personal dynamics of the South African

informal sector may escape conventional research methods, but can be successfully investigated through the literary lens (see Hart, 1991). Casting the net of the experiential paradigm still further, Pirie and Hart (1989) have also distilled insiders' perspectives on the role of the state as maker, breaker and regulator of township life from local poetry and prose.

Alternative perspectives on place

Though they have woven a vibrancy into the otherwise dull tapestry of local geographical research, initial forays into the humanistic realm in South Africa are fraught with several problems. In particular, they mirror the shallow treatment of context that has plagued humanistic studies in general (Silk, 1984; Jackson, 1989). The international community will no longer tolerate:

> The casual ransacking of [artistic material] a ready means of uncovering the most obvious images of intentionality prised from the material structures which help give them their affectivity, and divorced from any serious recognition of ... the sociology of context ... [nor] the exasperating interrogation of the mundane and transparently trivial (Gregory, 1981, p. 2).

Simplistic, non-cumulative case studies, empiricism bound by the particular, and non-theoretical piece-meal discussions of someone else's imagination have been condemned to the academic dungeon. Sense of place, landscapes of experience, and personal geographies are now firmly cemented in socio-historical matrices. South African geographers have yet to contextualise experiences of place within a broader socio-political framework. Seduced by the immediate satisfactions of evoking place imagery through fertile humanistic material, they rarely provide more than a collage of borrowed visions and verses that are displayed in questionable combinations and presented with a minimum of intellectual glue. More insightful place commentaries come from beyond the geographical discipline.

Local art historians and literary critics are far more familiar and comfortable with creative imagery than are geographers, yet their interpretations are often place-blind. History rules their vision. Chronologies are profuse: artistic styles are arranged between transitions, artists' biographies become evolutionary calendars, thematic shifts are recorded in a socio-political framework. For the most part, landscape paintings are embedded, regardless of their content, within catalogues or 'dictionaries' arranged according to artists and dates (Gordon-Brown,

1952; Berman, 1983; Ogilvie, 1988). Preliminary introductions to themes of artistic endeavour are available (eg. Berman, 1975; Harmsen, 1985; Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke, 1989; Alexander and Cohen, 1990), but thematic considerations tend to be submerged within a descriptive-formalist approach to the artworks themselves. A book dealing exclusively with the landscape genre in South African art is severely lacking. Moreover, there is very little by way of critical analysis in the larger volumes of South African art. If they discuss the landscape at all, local art historians tend to address the paintings independently of their deeper human meaning. Here, it is necessary to scout more obscure sources such as conference papers and theses.

Direct contextualist and critical interpretation of paintings portraying southern Africa's landscapes is rare. Arnold (1979) documents and discusses Baines' romantic reconstructions of Victoria Falls, while Klopper (1989) compares the romantic with the colonial vision of Africa. Their studies make inroads into the historical ideologies of landscape that were imported to South Africa in its early years. Coetzee (1991) provides an evocative interpretation of Pierneef's landscape paintings as an expression of Afrikaner nationalism. The piece is ripe with suggestions for the possibility of applying the growing international demythicising of the silences of landscape representation (eg. Barrell, 1980; Bermingham, 1986) in the South African context. Discussion of the township as an environment for artistic endeavour has been more consistently located within an appreciation of the socio-political and economic overtones of place experience (see Younge, 1988; Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke, 1989; de Jager, 1992). Resistance art in particular (Williamson, 1989) cannot be divorced from its social context but it has yet to be conclusively tied to an appreciation of the experience of particular geographical locations. The emphasis tends to fall on the artists and their communities as social entities, rather than in terms of their relationships with place. Finally, Farber (1985) provides a useful commentary on popular art, in which the landscape is a single subject, as the manifestation of a commercialised and escapist modern attitude to place.

By far the most significant local contribution to an interpretation of South Africa as place comes from beyond art history, from Coetzee (1988). His *White Writing: On the Culture of*

Letters in South Africa is a provocative and insightful conversation with the broad interpretative schemes that society has imposed on the indigenous landscape. The picturesque, pastoral and romantic models and the myths of the wilderness and the silent landscape as these are manifest in Africa are an inspiring platform from which to begin a geographical examination of landscape painting. Although Coetzee refers primarily to literary reconstructions of place, his comments apply equally to visual images. Likewise, Chapman's (1981) introduction to his compendium of South African poetry points to significant changes in landscape perception in general. The importance of his work to the geographer extends to a critical interpretation of stylistic formulae for artistically representing place: realism, abstraction and expressionism are shown to be important mechanisms for expressing ideological stances to place as well as just a means of conveying the subject.

Historians from various disciplines have contributed to an understanding of colonial interpretations of the landscapes and inhabitants of southern Africa (see Crush, 1992 for an overview). Bratlinger (1985), Coombes, (1985), Comaroff and Comaroff (1988; 1991) and Pratt (1985; 1989) have woven a dense web of critical commentary on Victorian and subsequent attitudes to Africa. Colonial stereotypes of people and place provide ample material for 'turning region into narrative' (Hofmeyr, 1989). Although academic comments do not relate directly to painted images, the often clear biases evoked through imperial lenses are easy to translate into visual terms. The contemporary critical appreciation of historical representations of place as romantic reconstructions inspired by arrogance, nostalgia and alienation is an inspiration for the geographer seeking to penetrate a prevailing sense of place. Their application to the local environment are particularly useful for the interpretation of early landscape paintings of southern Africa.

Counter-balancing the failure of most academics to provide insight into the ideological and psychological significance of landscape paintings, there exists a large volume of material that relates artworks directly to place interpretation. Numerous biographies and autobiographies (eg. Daniell, 1805; Angas, 1849; Bradlow and Bradlow, 1955; Hendriks, 1960; Scott, 1964; Scholtz, 1970; Wallis, 1976; Nel, 1990) afford insights into personal perceptions of the

landscape, while simultaneously illuminating the cultural and ideological background within which works were produced. Although they often do not directly refer to place, the persistent researcher will be rewarded with a wealth of geographical description decorated by the unbridled expression of personal imagery. Poetry and other creative literature can similarly be used to enrich the appreciation of unique senses of place. In South Africa, there is a long tradition of expressing the landscape in word-paintings as well as visual images. Townships, the neglected places of local geographical experience, are particularly well represented here (see Abrahams, 1950; Mtshali, 1971; Dikobe, 1973). Ultimately, the researcher has to rely also on the messages of place that emerge from direct confrontation with the painted landscape, for it is here that the dialogue between people and their environment is articulated in a clear, often impassioned manner. The geographer must learn to listen independently for the voices and visions of place. An appreciation for the shifting dialects within which they have been expressed in South Africa will ease this task.

South African landscape painting: an overview

The evolution of South African landscape painting runs a parallel course to the development of the genre in other colonies, particularly Australia and North America (see Rees, 1976b; 1982b; Tyler, 1983; Bonyhady, 1985; Short, 1991). An imported colonial vision flourished in the nineteenth century among an early alienated and homesick settler society, to be replaced by attempts at creating a national language that was more closely attuned to the native environment. Ideally, a history of local art would begin before the arrival of white settlers, with representations produced by indigenous African groups (such as the San) in rock shelters of southern Africa's mountainous regions. Traditional art forms that persist in the present, like mural painting on houses and walls, and basketry and sculpture, have recently been acknowledged by local art historians (such as Younge, 1988; Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke, 1989). At last, they have begun to enjoy liberation from their inferior status as 'artefact' on the Eurocentric hierarchy that elevated 'art' above crafts. Yet, the literature on early African art continues to be sparse and is furnished with little interpretative commentary, particularly as to how the human-environment relationship pervades African - as any other - imagery.

Predominantly anthropological and ethnographic studies suggest that early African paintings and engravings were deeply embedded in social practice, playing a functional and often religious role, for example by invoking power over animal prey to ensure the survival of hunters or by facilitating communication with ancestral spirits (see Manaka, 1987; Alexander and Cohen, 1990). Although stylised, elongated animals and figures predominate in images that echo ancient myths and lifestyles, much African art is fundamentally related to the environment. As in Canada, the art produced by indigenous people may seem 'primitive' and 'archaic', but it is "a sophisticated statement of an integral relationship with their spiritual and material worlds", demonstrating "aesthetic as well as worldly and spiritual concerns" (Osborne, 1988, p. 163). The geographical exploration of these artworks may reveal significant insights into community responses to place, however they are not immediately accessible as environmental commentary. Only once the black artists of southern Africa had absorbed and manipulated western art practices, conventions and materials, and emulated the major European themes, did their art begin to capture experiences of place in direct geographical statements. Landscape is a feature of the twentieth century in their art, and African artists retain an individual perception of this subject: figurative and expressive naturalism are common to early urban township art, black consciousness art and later resistance imagery, in a modern allusion to traditional roots.

Despite their independent identity and vocabulary, even black artists have been susceptible to the broad tides of artistic convention, development and vogue that continue to flood the local creative scene. That said, a notable feature of South African art is the lack of co-ordinating movements that bind individual artists in Europe, America and other quarters of the western world into schools with a common purpose or mode of expression. Here, painting is "a medley of dissociated parts" (Berman, 1975, p. xii). The linking thread for the narrator of place is the degree of affinity to the spirit of the environment. The suppression or elevation of *genius loci* in relation to alternative frameworks of vision relating to socio-political, personal-emotional or formal-artistic criteria, distinguishes and melds various groups of landscape paintings for the geographer. The connections may conflict with those identified by the art historian, but often do not. Environmental ideologies shift over time, are therefore

approximately chronologically ordered, and are expressed both in the content and the style of landscape painting. Where society is generally confident of, or concerned with defining expressive formulae, ideology will find a louder voice in cultural products than will place; colonial impressions of southern Africa are prime examples of a landscape manipulated to conform with imported conventions for viewing. At the other extreme, artists may become so concerned with exploring and familiarising themselves and their audience with the local environment that they dwell on externalities and fail to evoke the deeper meaning of landscape; in the quest for a national identity, many artists of twentieth-century South Africa painted silent, empty places. Between the two is a continuum of greater and lesser emphasis on place. Implicit also is a geography of the art of southern Africa.

Tides of place: ebb ...

Landscape is the most consistent theme in South African art, both visual and verbal (Berman, 1974; 1975; Harmsen, 1985). In this genre are to be found images signed by all the prominent local artists, representing the major trends and shifts in expressive language, and exploring most regions in the country. The nineteenth century is witness to the earliest reconstructions of the country in the form of colonial romantic landscapes. Acquainted with the naturalistic styles of contemporary European painting, a community made up largely of British settlers focused their artistic activities on the Cape. Thomas Bowler (1813-1869) and Thomas Baines (1820-1875) are most noted among the early 'Africana' artists, recording historical subjects and the landscape. The moister climate of the coastal region submitted to the idealised picturesque vision that they had imported, whereas the interior offered only a barren and hostile wilderness. Francois Le Vaillant (1753-1824), William Burchell (1781-1863), Samuel Daniells (1775-1811), George French Angas (1822-1886) and William Cornwallis Harris (1807-1846), among other explorer-artists illustrated their travel accounts of the interior with images exaggerated to convey the exoticism of the native peoples and scenery of southern Africa. Early professional artists, such as Edward Roworth (1880-1964), Frederick I'ons (1802-1887) and Gwelo Goodman (1871-1939), many of whom were immigrants trained overseas, were similarly conditioned by conventions learned there and portrayed the local environment in naturalistic,

yet romantic images. The Dutch influence wove a variation into the emerging imported cultural fabric of southern Africa. Frans Oerder (1867-1944) and Pieter Wenning (1873-1921) applied the more sober realism and sombre, if warm, tonalities of the Dutch tradition to the Transvaal and Cape landscapes. The geographical shift to the Transvaal echoes the movement of Afrikaner farmers - with a direct Dutch heritage - from the Cape to the Boer Republics centred around Pretoria during the Great Trek which began in the 1830s.

Whatever their lineage, early painters of southern Africa relied upon imported artistic methods to deal with an environment that was very different from the landscapes for which the conventions had been developed. In consequence, there was little reference to the indigenous spirit of place. Even artists born and bred in the environment tended to comply with their market's conservative (Europeanised) tastes, and produced sentimental descriptions of the natural scenery. J.E.A. Volschenk (1853-1936) celebrated the mountains of Riversdale (an outlying district of the Cape). Usually washed with the golden glow of early morning or dusk, the images are romantic in spirit. Hugo Naude (1869-1941) received formal training in Europe and, as with many young products of international schools, he applied international techniques to the landscapes of southern Africa. Again the subject was the Cape, but this time the perimeter of the region bordering the semi-arid Karoo. Naude's mature work exhibits a greater affinity with the physical characteristics of the local environment, and as a result, he has been heralded as "the first local artist to adapt his style to the distinctive sunlit atmosphere of the South African landscape" (Berman, 1975, p. 14). The shift reflects a general release, in the 1920s and 1930s, of the country's artists from the early 'picture-postcard spell' (Berman, 1975). A growing concern to translate the distinctive qualities of light and space into paint led a younger generation of South African-born artists onto new territory - both artistic and geographical.

... And flow

An era of restrained experimentation initiated various unique interpretations of the external features of the landscapes of southern Africa in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Many artists studied in Europe and the development of local art continued to be generated and sustained by imported energy. Most landscapes were still approached in descriptive recordings of visual sensations which were sometimes synthesised to give an overall impression of the scene, but new approaches splintered the nature of artistic expression used to capture the appearance of the subject. Impressionism offered a doctrine - particularly suggestive for conveying the brilliant light of southern Africa - for representing the visual experience of landscape through fragments of pure colour that spoke of light and shadow rather than volumes with definite outlines (see Gardner, 1980 for a detailed explanation). Strat Caldecott (1886-1929) adjusted the typical Impressionist palette to better align his colours with the heat of the local environment, and applied their method to evoke its sun-scorched terrain. If Impressionism was a revolutionary departure for South African painting that shocked its conservative viewing public, the subjective images of Expressionist- and Fauvist-inspired landscapes were even more unorthodox and horrified the critics. Irma Stern (1894-1966), Maggie Laubser (1886-1973) and later the Everard group - including Bertha Everard (1873-1965), Ruth Everard Haden (1904-) and Rosamund Everard-Steenkamp (1907-1945) - who translated Transvaal landscapes into personalised symbolic statements compiled in bold planes of pure colour that lean toward abstraction, felt the full force of an unaccepting audience.

Equally original but far less contentious is the intellectual stylisation that J.H. Pierneef (1886-1957) applied to the landscape to convey his impression of a monumental, architectural order in nature. His geometrical compositions of the Highveld, South West Africa and the Orange Free State, akin to Cubism, are tinted with pale pastel hues that successfully convey the light and scale of the country's environment. The fact that the artist was the first to invent a style that was "entirely conditioned by the character of the indigenous environment" (Berman, 1975, p. 44) commended his images for use in the definition of a national identity. Nationalist art was promoted in public commissions, and W.H. Coetzer (1900-1983) joined

Pierneef in producing large murals of historical and landscape subjects in a simplified realism that communicated visual features of the environment in detached descriptive - if formally competitive - studies. The landscapes of southern Africa were perceived and portrayed as having distinctive characteristics: as long as the vast emptiness, mountain massifs, scrub vegetation and bright light were faithfully recorded and effectively communicated, it was felt that the art was 'African'. Uniqueness of topography was equated with truthfulness to landscape. Handling continued to be imported, however; the vision realised was "that of a Westerner looking in" (Berman, 1975, p. 125). Waves of immigration and pilgrimages to European art schools reinforced the trend through the 1930s and 1940s: Gregoire Boonzaier (1909-), Maud Sumner (1902-1985), Pranas Domsaitis (1880-1965) and Adolph Jentsch (1888-1977), to name a few, "introduced specific regional strands of Western artistic heritage into the local fabric" (Berman, 1975, p. 103).

Contemporary black African art was a further manifestation of the local preoccupation with the visual and the particular in the mid-twentieth century. It introduced the largely ignored urban scene and the rural African homelands to the repertoire of southern African landscape subjects: artists portrayed everyday activities in the townships using naturalistic images that amounted to a form of social realism. In spite of its African subject matter, early black urban art conformed with the general trend to paint the 'familiar' in the landscape and adhered to the dictates of a white market and a conventional western artistic training: environments wracked by poverty and bleak testimony to socio-political injustices were sentimentalised in much the same manner as the rest of the country had been. Gerard Sekoto (1913-) studied in Paris, John Mohl (1903-1985) in Germany, Gerard Bhengu (1910-) was influenced by British naturalism, and George Pemba (1912-) exploited a conservative style to produce aesthetically pleasing impressions of township life. The subject was different, the ideology was not. Township artists of the 1960s and 1970s, among whose ranks are found Ephraim Ngatane (1938-1971), Mslaba Dumile (1942-), Durant Sihlali (1935-) and James Salang (1941-) perpetuated the vogue for simplified and comfortable naturalism. Along with white artists painting Cape Dutch houses and cosmos as convenient symbols for the local environment, township artists developed a cliche for the indigenous landscape and provided

the basis for a popularised interpretation of place. Many artists to the present have copied their mannerisms to appeal to a persistently lazy audience.

Spring tide: modernism evokes the spirit of place

In the second half of the twentieth century, South African art has undergone substantial changes on the route to maturity. The most exciting developments are associated with the absorption and indigenous exploration and manipulation of the modern international art styles. "Relinquishing its long attachment to the past, local painting plunged into the maelstrom of the modern styles and piloted a passage through the trends of almost half a century in an energetic bid to swim abreast of the contemporary international tide" (Berman, 1975, p. 151). For the art historian, the most significant results relate to the formal character of the artworks (see Berman, 1975; Harmsen, 1985). One of the most conspicuous transitions involves the use of colour as a pure and independent element in painting, rather than as a means of describing the appearance of an object. Indeed, the subject of painting itself has shifted from the observable to intangibles such as actions, processes, emotions, concepts and other abstract conditions, these being more prevalent in the modern experience. In the spirit of abstraction, factual ties have gradually dissolved altogether at the hands of some members of a swelling local artistic community. Previous decades had laid the foundations for these innovations in artistic expression, particularly through the persistent pleas of the 1930s 'New Group' for modern alternatives to 'amateurism' and 'long-outmoded patterns of aesthetic thought' prevailing in South African art, and through the example of individualists such as Laubser, Stern and the Everard Group (Berman, 1975). Douglas Portway (1922-), Chris Coetzee (1929-), Andrew Verster (1937-), Lionel Abrams (1931-), Bill Ainslie (1934-1989), Nel Erasmus (1928-), and black artists David Kolane (1938-), Philip Malumise (1958-) and Dumisane Mabaso (1955-), among others, bring them to a climax in a truly modern vision, progressively turning away from the recognisable in the environment in search of a highly personal view.

Abstraction does not necessarily require that the subject matter be stripped entirely of concrete references and associations (Berman, 1975). On the contrary, it is a particularly strong vehicle for conveying deep, meaning-ful interpretations of subjects, such as the landscape, and it embodies a *modern* outlook on the world. Importantly for artists portraying southern African landscapes, it offers opportunities for conveying the chaos, uncertainty and fragmentation that are a distinct and pervasive feature of the local environment. Retaining obli ue references to the physical landscape - albeit that the direct association is sometimes evident only in the title - Gordon Vorster (1924-1988), Erik Laubscher (1927-), Larry Scully (1922-), Anna Vorster (1929-), Kevin Atkinson (1939-), and their peers explored new and more direct ways of capturing transient external features of the environment - uncluttered spaciousness, heat, the drama of shadows and rigid aggression of landshapes are the subjects, and they are eloquently conveyed using colour and line. In addition, through abstraction, the artists are able to penetrate the surface to expose the raw material of personal interaction with the country and external processes that structure that experience. At times, therefore, modernism has provided a route for exploring the spirit of place. Impressionism and its contemporary models, like the earlier descriptive naturalism had lead to a cul-de-sac: they were too objective, too ephemeral and too concerned with surfaces (Berman, 1975). Portraying a place involves more than capturing its physical likeness; more importantly, the personality needs to be expressed. In the modern era, personal encounters with southern Africa are fundamentally related to emotion - fear, anxiety, insecurity, paranoia, defiance, tension, protest - and deeply etched with the influence of politics.

Experiencing a 'crisis of identity' in the 1960s, local artists became aware of the paradox in trying to express the indigenous environment by adopting European idioms which, at the same time, were felt to be essential to ensuring the international status of South African art by declaring an awareness of the modern age. The questioning temper led to a new awareness of African traditions and artistic forms as a route into the intrinsic character of the land - a development that owed its impetus to the innovations of Walter Battiss (1906-1982) and Alexis Preller (1911-1975) who, as early as the 1940s, sought symbolic translations for the mystique of the country using African motifs. The incentive was perpetuated through the Amadlozi

Group which served as a forum for exhibiting artists who demonstrated a degree of 'Africa-ness' in their work. Among the regular contributors were Cecil Skotnes (1926-), Giuseppe Cattaneo (1929-) and Cecily Sash (1925-). Armando Baldinelli (1908-), Gunther van der Reis (1927-) and Marion Arnold (1947-) similarly create metaphors for place using motifs (some drawn from the landscape) that are perceived to bear the imprint of the specific South African experience. More significant in the context of the current climate of socio-political protest and conflict are attempts by artists allied (in temperament if not physically) with the modern resistance movement in the country. Not only the fiery incentive to create an indigenous art (an aspiration that far out-weighs the earlier complacent call for an independent 'national' art), but also the growing persistence of an indigenous reality, has spurred artists to deal with the landscape in more direct and innovative terms.

The Soweto riots of 1976 are a watershed in artistic representations of the local environment and, more generally, in the local ideology of landscape. Working largely from an urban base, and practising a heightened humanism, artists of the last two decades have commentated the realities of township violence, suffering and hardship that inspire either anger, bitterness, guilt or fear within their viewers. The subject is a new one, as artists previously shielded their market from the negative facets of their world, masking them with sentimentalism or removing the people from the landscape to alleviate socio-political implications. Contemporary artists, for example William Kentridge (1958-), Robert Hodgins (1932-), Sam Nhlengethwa (1955-), and Tommy Motswai (1963-), have begun to expose a mutant society and the myths infusing conventional landscape interpretation, and to to rewrite the country's history in terms of exploitation, subordination and conflict. Black artists in particular have situated the transition in the landscape: David Hlongwane (1963-) locates scenes of civilian and police battles on township stages, and Sydney Holo (1952-) and his brother Patrick (c.1955-) expose political corruption by recording the destruction of meaningful places and the consequent suffering inflicted on black communities. Others, like Sfiso Mkame (1963-) and Paul Sibisi (1948-) establish new motifs for the South African reality in burning cars, necklacing, and angry masses. The landscapes of southern Africa are now defined in terms of the tension and conflict that accompany social change. How different they

are from the colonial-romantic reconstructions of the environment or later descriptions of its external form - here is the spirit of place.

No longer is it only the subject of local art that is distinctly South African, the very fibres of the expressive forms have been imbued with the flavour of this country. The landscape is no longer defined by European standards and ideals. It has been re-written in a distinctive language, using the indigenous vocabulary of Africa: metaphors, symbols, words and visions are home-grown and finally refer to the spirit of place. Certainly, realities will change, both on the surface and in the minds of society; the spirit of place is fluid, fragile and always subtly defined. Indeed, only a handful of artists have managed to describe it, and each perceives and describes it differently. What is important, however, is that local artists have become aware of and cut through the cocoon of imported conventions and their market's conventionalism in a bid to escape its dark confinement. The future promises a colourful celebration of the truth of place as indigenous art opens its wings and takes flight across the landscapes of southern Africa.

CHAPTER 4

LITTLE WHITE LIES: COLONIAL VISIONS OF AFRICA

The history of art produced by white inhabitants of southern Africa is densely populated by paintings in the landscape genre. Until the twentieth century, many artistic representations of the country were either the work of travellers or romantic reconstructions from their stories, usually produced for a European market. Casual visitors, seamen, missionaries, explorers, and military and civil figures documented their experiences in the 'strange and wild land', focusing on the people, animals and plants that coloured their lives and journeys on the southern part of the African continent. Longer-term settlers continued the tradition. All came from western European countries, the majority from Britain. Curiosity and topographical interest were expressed in their academic recordings of the local environment.

Often, the first artists were amateurs who painted in their spare time, selecting subjects that had 'news value' or an alternative basis for public appeal. "They did not seek to interpret the country", Speed (1946, p. 6) notes, "but to indicate its more unusual features". To this end, many of the earliest impressions of the country were 'representational' in style (as opposed to abstract or expressionistic, for example), which implies fidelity to appearance. This did not automatically result in a truth to nature, however, for naturalism was often less important than historical and anthropological interests, and was usually submerged under broad European schemas for viewing and representing nature (see Coetzee, 1988).

Paradoxically, pioneer artists of southern Africa were expected and strove to be 'human cameras', slaves to science. In fact, the accuracy of their works did not often extend beneath the formal exterior of their compositions - their objectivity was purely superficial, a *trompe l'oeil*. Recognising the imaginative spokes holding together the wheels of artistic endeavour in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century South Africa, Battiss (1960, p. 5) made the following observation:

> Coming with the express purpose of accurately recording scenes and events, these early artists thought they were expressing the truth, but today we see much of it as romantic exaggeration. If they could not be on the spot, they were up to all the old tricks of making pictures of animals and scenes, especially battle scenes and incidents, from verbal descriptions, and for good measure, making pictures of a few purely fictitious birds, animals or landscapes to embellish

the process of creation. Their work has a piquant flavour which goes to show that artists are ever very bad cameras but very important recorders of how people feel about what they see.

Indeed, some early landscape paintings of southern Africa can boast little resemblance to physical reality. Comparing them with modern colour photographs reveals the extent of geographical distortions (see Arnold, 1979). Selection of details, exaggeration, alteration, and other manipulations of fact destroyed the relationship between the paintings and 'truth' in its scientific equation with objectivity. An imposition of foreign attitudes, values, ideologies and artistic conventions reinforced the rift in terms of faithfulness to place.

Early representations of southern Africa are lies - 'white' lies, about a place that inspired dread, enthusiasm, arrogance, hatred, sorrow, awe and homesickness among people who remained 'outsiders' to it, even once they had settled in the country. 'White', both because the untruths were created either unknowingly or without explicit intention to harm, and because their content was *white*-washed according to the prerequisites of a society that ignored and undermined the reality of black habitation in, and understanding of the land (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991). The sole loyalty of such art lies with the perceptions and emotions of the individuals and the community that nurtured it: Europe and Victorian traditions for seeing and recording nature. For historians, sociologists, art historians, and their geographical counterparts, the images harbour invaluable truths. The landscape art of pioneer societies is a sensitive record of early perceptions of the environment.

Rees is convinced of the validity of art providing 'maps of states of mind': "The chief source for construing past attitudes toward the environment are literature and pictorial art", he concludes (Rees, 1976b, p. 259). Indeed, evidence of shifting images of a country could not be richer. In the colonial context, art exposes the perspective of an eye that denies the harsh realities of a new land, and that ultimately aims to conquer by naming and dominating native people and places; an eye that sees through Imperial glasses. In the courthouse of Humanistic Geography and under the judgement of Place, however, the earliest images of South Africa and its immediate neighbours must be declared false. The vision crystallised and the techniques expressed are imported; the images do not uncover the essence of the local landscape - they

are not a document of *genius loci*. Deeply etched with the spirit of a culture and an era, the soul of place tends to be absent in works produced by the first artists on the sub-continent.

Pioneer travellers set the stage for colonial artists

The southern African landscape did not suffer alone the injustice of misrepresentation by its earliest artists; many outposts of European discovery and colonisation were similarly distorted in the first paintings undertaken on their shores (see Rees, 1970; Tyler, 1983; Bonyhady, 1985; Short, 1991). In fact, the story of local art in its pioneer phase is more than a parallel to the history of visual representation of other pre-colonial countries; it is a mirror. Not only did the same person often paint different places (for example, Daniell recorded and illustrated his travels around Africa in 1805 and around Ceylon in 1806, and Angas published *The Kafirs Illustrated* and *The New Zealanders Illustrated* following two of his many trips), but most travellers and artists originated from Europe, especially Britain, and hence from the same intellectual, philosophical and artistic womb. Mother England provided an ideological and psychological reinforcement to sustain her artists in foreign lands, as well as a market for their works. Certain anglicised tastes and expectations with regards perceptions of place were therefore perpetuated outside Europe. Consequently, attempts to portray various alien environments, and the artistic models employed, have so much in common that many of the earliest paintings of southern Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the Pacific islands and the United States are difficult to distinguish geographically.

That the umbilical cord binding early traveller artists to their home country was unbroken is abundantly evident in their landscape art which rarely captures the character of the indigenous landscape, but clearly reflects trends in European attitudes to nature. Early impressions of the local environment are laden with moral and aesthetic distortions. Indeed, the early artistic record of southern Africa is a far more sensitive barometer to shifts in the European social and intellectual climate than to the character of place. Pioneer art is true to a Victorian romantic view of nature and foreign people that culminated in an overt imperial propaganda. By contrast with the cynical expansionism that underlay the colonial approach

to landscape, pioneer perceptions elevated, admired and respected a gentle, accepting nature. Typical of the Enlightenment period, this attitude fostered idealised images of foreign lands as idyllic arcadias untouched by European settlement and occupied by noble savages and noble beasts (see also Short, 1991). Not for the first time, Geography shrank into the shadow of History. Place must have cringed at the prospect of having to attend yet another celebration of Time.

The first European explorer artists in southern Africa were 'cultural refugees' who imported and spread their own perspectives and representational conventions to many foreign environments. Certainly, characteristic land-scapes and -shapes bind the art produced during the pioneering era to different countries of origin. Yet, similarities in style and content migrated freely across the international boundaries that might be expected to have contained artistic activity. A romantic vision was blatantly expressed in art; this common convention for seeing the landscape infused imagery from all countries. Illustratively, Angas (1849, pp. 1-2), one of southern Africa's traveller-artists, sentimentalises landscapes from various geographical localities, undermining the differences that he recognises between them with a generally sugary g(l)aze:

> In the dewy silence of an autumn night I have looked upon the plains of old Troy ... I have roamed with delight amongst the blue mountains of South America, and been charmed with the loveliness of the humming-birds ... Each spot, each varied region, possesses an interest of its own, - an individual charm or terror ...

The word pictures, like painted images, are informed by the search for the picturesque, by "an ardent admiration of whatever is beautiful throughout nature" (Angas, 1849, p. 2). The result is a visual festival centred around nature, but not an exploration of the essence of place.

The emerging 'global culture' prescribed various approaches to landscape by early travellers, all circumscribed by the Victorian ideological doctrine with its romantic view of nature. In the empirical approach, an apparent disinterest in geographical features meant that physical terrain scarcely featured at all in travel illustrations. The landscape was often reduced to a stage on which to ground (rather than contextualise) figures and events. It was popular practice for the artists to fill the immediate foreground of compositions with human, plant or animal subjects (see Fig. 4.1), ostensibly to accurately record them, but possibly also to

alleviate problems of recording an alien landscape. The emphasis was scientific: images were made for the explicit purpose of recording novel zoological and botanical species. The 'naming game' spurred scientific artists (or were they artistic scientists) to 'discover' as many plants and animals as possible. Burchell, for example, was a veritable Noah, collecting innumerable fauna under the 'arc' of his name; the modern scientific record is flooded with Burchell's coucal, Burchell's zebra, Burchell's starling, and so on. Indigenous people were similarly recorded and labelled. Where the landscape appears at all, it locates the subjects somewhere, anywhere; in a *type* of place; in a spacious foreign environment, but not in a particular geographical location.

Illustrated travellogues were the most popular format for presenting the treasures of exploration (eg. Paterson, 1789; Le Vaillant, 1796; Barrow, 1806; Burchell, 1822). These manuscripts emerged concurrently with the vogue for adventurous expeditions (and big-game hunting) that led many travellers into the *terra incognita* of the African interior that had for centuries frustrated European cartographers and amused their critics:

> So geographers in Afric' maps,
> With savage pictures fill the gaps,
> And o'er uninhabitable downs,
> Place elephants for want of towns.
> (Swift, cited in Rees, 1980, p. 62).

The traveller-artists helped to fill the gaps in the European imagination. They populated Africa with masses of wildlife, plants and indigenous people. But their images were often fanciful manipulations of reality, throwing into question the artists' expressed interest in being useful to science. Distortions in animal subjects are often obvious to the point of rendering the images unbelievable, even comical (see Fig. 4.1). The focus is romantic; Harris's hippo is a dainty creature whose round body and pleasant face suggest a gentle temperament. The fountain emanating from a submerged companion belies the imposition of European aesthetics on the environment, as do the weeping willows adorning the river banks.

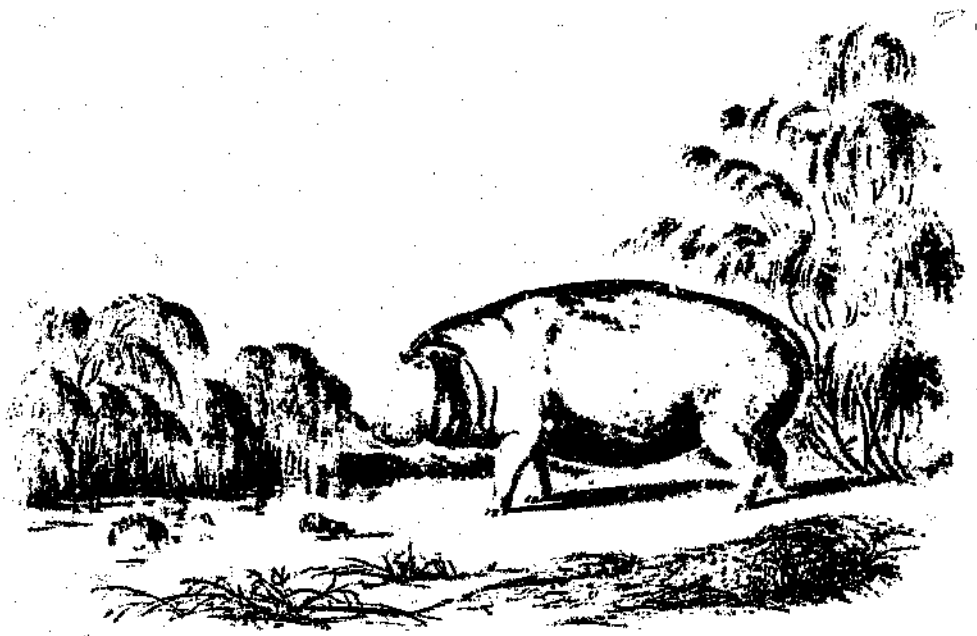


Figure 4.1 Harris: *The Hippopotamus*, 1840



Figure 4.2 Daniell: *The Pallah*, c.1804

Romantic reconstructions of place

Where early artists were more concerned with producing works of artistic value, the landscape was sometimes introduced as a formal background within which to locate animal or human subjects. Although there may be great attention to botanical detail, and despite the fact that the landscape may have been recorded in situ, Daniell's *Pallah* (Fig. 4.2), standing beside a bubbling brook, illuminates the pervasiveness of the romantic perception. The picture is a peaceful, quiet, picturesque scene, presenting gentle, timid creatures in a charming and fertile setting. Pringle (1789-1834) provides a poetic description of Africa's animals. Written in the same era, the poem underlines the sentimentality of the common European frame for viewing and representing foreign wildlife:

> Away - away from the dwellings of men,
> By the wild deer's haunt, by the buffalo's glen;
> By valleys remote where the oribi plays,
> Where the gnu, the gazelle, and the hartebeest graze,
> And the kudu and eland unhunted recline
> By the skirts of grey forests o'erhung with wild-vine;
> Where the elephant browses at peace in his wood,
> And the river-horse gambols unscared in the flood,
> And the mighty rhinoceros wallows at will
> In the fen where the wild-ass is drinking his fill.
> (from *Afar in the desert*, cited in Chapman, 1981, pp. 35-37).

Like the animals, the landscape is polished with romantic expectations into a warmly glowing place. Interestingly, the local environment is often shorn of its rugged vegetation and rocky terrain and smoothed into a green-lawned, moderately hilly, sunny and mystical place, tinted with the pastel shades that characterise a moister and softer climate than southern Africa's. Daniell's images are saturated with such romantic allusions. This mythical land, this Garden of Eden, is surely not Africa!

The idealism of early visions of southern Africa satisfied a dominant contemporary romantic impulse in Europe. The untamed wilderness was seen as a remnant from a golden age, and 'uncivilised', 'simple' communities represented a purer, spiritually richer and freer life that highlighted the paradoxical decline of western humanity through 'progress' and industrialisation (Short, 1991). In fact, the romantics used foreign countries and their inhabitants as a vehicle to criticise their own society; they became "a counterpoint to the industrial order, the tyranny of the clock and the age of consumption with its uncertainties of

continued choice and excesses of materialism" (Short, 1991, p. 23). Angas epitomises the romantic spirit:

> It is now seven years since I broke loose from the trammels that bound me to the artificial world: I was but one amongst the two millions of mighty London ... I longed for the natural world; and with a glad and thrilling heart, I shook off ... from my feet the dust of the city, and went forth alone to the uttermost ends of the earth.
>
> There is a charm, a freedom about such a [traveller's] life, which those who live and die surrounded by all the artificial refinements of an over-civilised country can never know ... I have had more real enjoyment of existence, more of nature, and less of care, during the many months I have passed amongst Kafirs and New Zealanders, than I have ever had amidst the anxieties and conventionalities of more refined life (Angas, 1849, p. 1 and p. 2 respectively).

If 'wild and sublime' Wales "provided all the ingredients of romantic landscape in abundance" (Zaring, 1977, p. 403), the potentials were amplified to enormous proportions in the lands that Europe touched only with the very fingertips of her empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Human beings were particularly amenable to romantic distortion. Daniell presented indigenous people in their traditional dress and in everyday settings as ethnography would have required, but transformed them in accordance with the romantic ideology that dictated that the subjects be in contented harmony with an abundant and mysterious nature (see Figs 4.3 and 4.4). Elfin figures roam freely over rolling fields and hills vegetated by short green grass and broad-leafed trees. Alternatively, they adopt curious classical poses, reminiscent of Greek statuettes. Daniell (1805, p. 39) marvels at the "tall elegant figures" of the African people that, "were it not for their colour, which is from black to bronze, even Europeans might pronounce ... a very handsome race of men". Although his attitude forewarns the racism of colonialism, the artist can still admire the indigenous population of southern Africa. The calm and peaceful character of its inhabitants echoes in the landscapes that surround them. Predictably, the agreeable and positive aspect of Africa and other colonies presented in the romantic vision was hungrily sapped and exploited for imperial purposes: both art and literature were used to promote immigration (Woolford, 1983).

In the final analysis, the message of art poured in the romantic mould is less a commentary on the reality of Africa, Australia, North America or the Pacific islands than about European ideologies. There can be little doubt that pioneer art denies the spirit of place. Yet, the

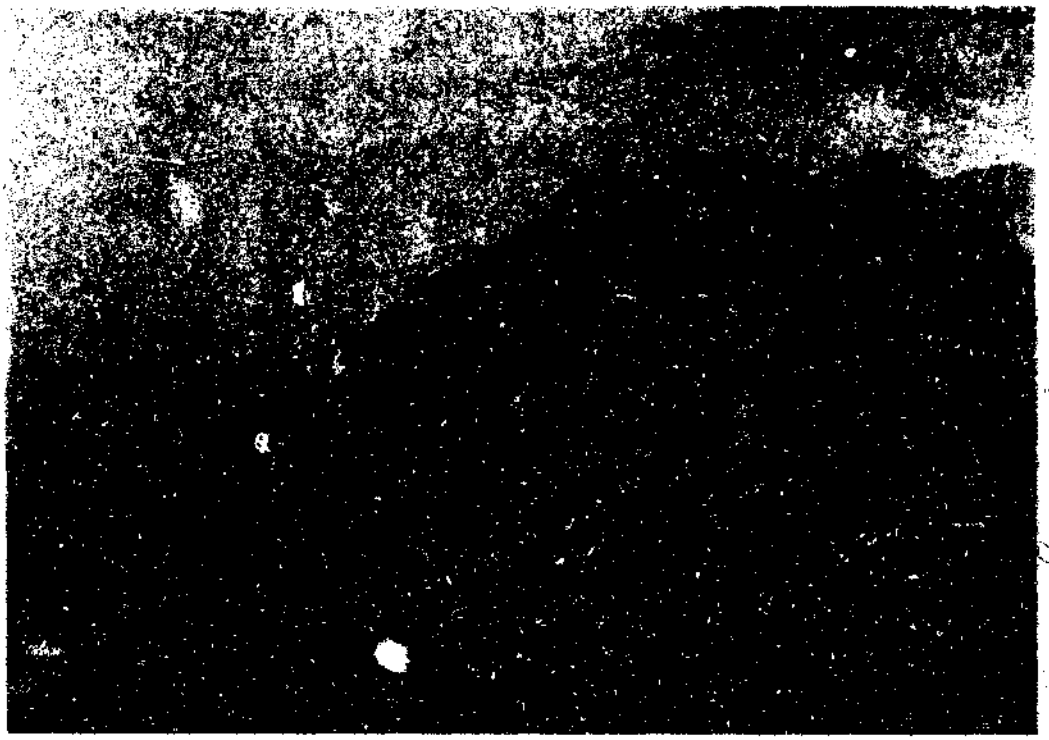


Figure 4.3 Daniell: *The Bosjesmen Hottentots*, c.1804

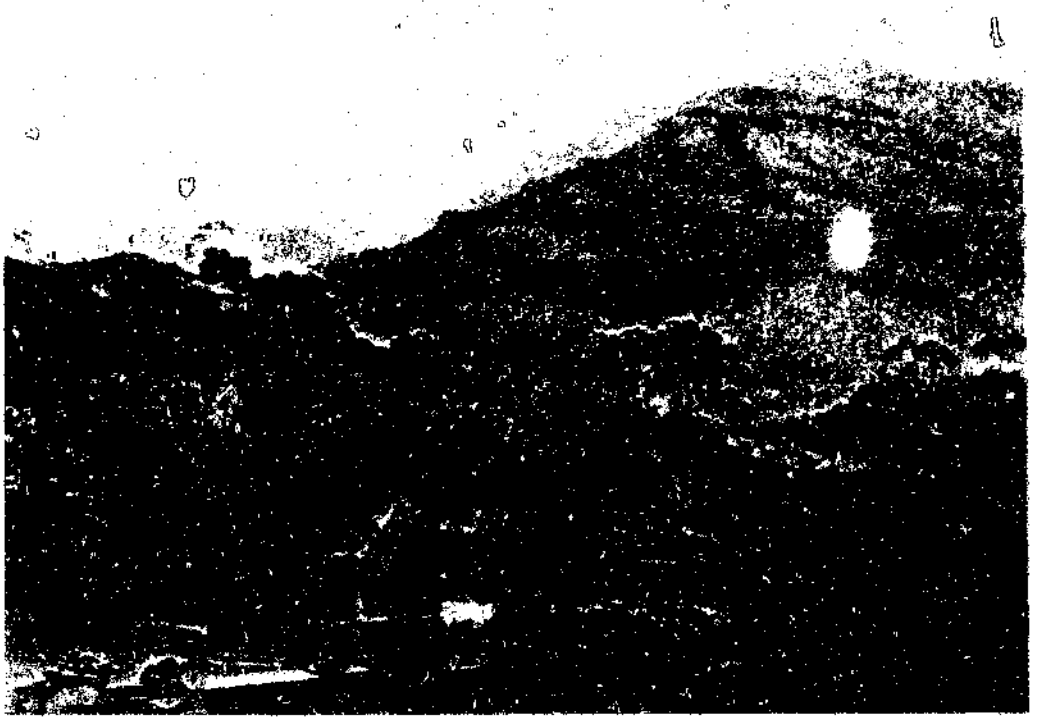


Figure 4.4 Daniell: *A Kaffer Village*, c.1804

romantic vision cannot rival the arrogant dismissal of anything foreign as inferior and requiring of European 'improvement' that motivated a future generation to subvert the landscape (both physically and in painting) entirely to its own interests and needs. The colonial ideology is a complex socio-political statement about the inherent superiority of the European and, conversely, the social, moral and physical immaturity and barbarism of anything non-European. The flourishing of an imperial attitude to southern Africa during the nineteenth century is forcefully expressed in particular conventions for representing subject people (Cowling, 1983). The landscape too is subjected to the colonial obsession with conquest and subjugation; it is symbolically domesticated and controlled in landscape painting even before it has been physically conquered.

Colonialism paints shades of conquest in the land

The myth of the garden appealed to the European public for as long as it did not need to justify its own imposing presence in southern Africa. By the nineteenth century, however, images of a gentle, mystical landscape and friendly black people conflicted with the need to legitimise the subjugation and exploitation that the Empire was inflicting on them both. Sympathy was inappropriate; it unsettled the intellectual and moral foundations of colonialism. The dominant ideology of landscape had to be altered. Landscape painting quickly swerved from its previous course to pursue this more pressing and modern task. In fact, colonial artists were concerned to dissociate themselves from their predecessors. Introducing Bowler's landscape paintings in a collection entitled *The Kafir Wars and the British Settlers in South Africa: A Series of Picturesque Views*, Thomson (1865, preface) claimed that the illustrated books of travel "never pretended to be anything more than rough sketches of more than ordinarily interesting or thrilling encounters with man or beast", and that they were "often drawn by artists who only betrayed their utter ignorance of the country and everything in it". The comment embodies a rejection of the previous romantic ideology of landscape that suffused illustrated travellogues.

Broadly, the essence of artistic endeavour shifted in the nineteenth century from a celebration of nature to embrace a political motive: art partook in the process of defining space within which the colonial project of conquest could be legitimised. Specifically, southern Africa's landscapes and its indigenous inhabitants were depicted as hostile, dangerous and primitive. The myth of an inhospitable, chaotic and barren country satisfied sceptics that the European presence there was not destroying a perfect state, as the romantics would have had it. Better yet, it promoted western influence as a positive and civilising force in Africa, thereby awarding colonialism a positive moral status. Contrasting images of the colony and its colonisers were presented to the overseas public thus:

> Africa ... [was] a land of darkness, the white man's burden, peopled with savages of an inherently inferior order (intellectually and morally) to the white coloniser. It was this coloniser's predominantly manly duty to disseminate light and civilisation and, incidentally, to exploit the natural resources of the colony since the Africans were incapable of realising this potential wealth for themselves (Coombes, 1985, p. 453).

The earthly paradise of the eighteenth century was transformed into the 'dark continent' of the nineteenth.

Dualism played a crucial role in colonial artistic impressions of southern Africa; contrast was a strong weapon of imperial propaganda. Indigenous people were compared with the European ideal and thereby predictably characterised as primitive, slothful or barbaric (see Said, 1978). Facial features in particular were adjusted, exaggerated or down-played to contribute to a stereotypical and deeply racist image of Africans as degenerate, brutal, lecherous and inferior savages (Cowling, 1983). In an apparent contradiction, they could also be portrayed as handsome, charming people, in the spirit of romanticism; some were 'Europeanised' in art. There was a condition, however. Only 'good natives' who conformed with European requirements and accepted the superiority of the colonists received the 'gifts' of progress, domesticity, gentility and Christianity (either in art or, by implication, in reality) - the marks of civilisation as Victorians defined it (Bell, 1982). In the process, they were stripped of their African identities:

> Rather than appearing as representatives of dynamic and autonomous cultures, they were represented as curiosities, 'things' upon which to hang 'dress' - that is, ideas and behaviour not of their own making (Bell, 1982, p. 84).

Positive images of Africans in colonial art relate to obedience, docility, passivity; conversely, opposition to subjugation (and implicitly also to acculturation) is implicit in portraits of ruthless, mindless, evil brutes (see Bell, 1982).

There is a strong parallel between many of the blatant distortions found in portraits of African people and those in the portraits of its landscape. In the latter, the European type was once again elevated as the ideal against - or rather, under - which all other types were ranked. Lowenthal and Prince (1965, p. 192) note that what was considered 'essentially English' at this time was "a calm and peaceful deer park, with slow-moving streams and wide expanses of meadowland studded with fine trees. The scene should include free-ranging domestic animals, ... arable land, hedgerows and small fields". The unfamiliar 'wilderness' of southern Africa was the antithesis of the green safety of Europe - the furthest possible deviation from a desirably domesticated state of nature.

A common formula for dealing with nature's deviant character in the colonies was to underline its difference from Europe. Therefore, whether positive or negative, caricatures of indigenous people were unified through their common function to highlight the 'otherness' of non-Europeans (see Said, 1978). Human subjects were usually semi-nude or clad in their traditional gear, and often portrayed alongside their 'primitive' huts or engaged in 'uncivilised' activities. Daniell's (1805, p. 27) comment about the Bushmen is an early declaration of the inherent difference perceived between black inhabitants of southern Africa and the European ideal:

> Bushmen Hottentots may be justly classed among the lowest and most miserable of human beings. They neither till the ground nor breed cattle, but live from day to day on the precarious spoils of the chace, the stolen cattle of the colonists, or on lizards, snakes, white ants ... So little notion have they of the value of property, that whenever they are so successful as to carry off a whole herd of cattle from the colonists, they kill them all at once, and without quitting the place of slaughter, feast together, till the whole is ... consumed.

Barker (1886, p. 76) makes a similar assertion:

> Certainly the Zulus are a strange race; I cannot say I saw anything to admire in them, physically or mentally; as servants, I was assured they were good, but the dreadful odour that clings to them, makes them to my mind too obnoxious to be admitted into the same room with one ... They are very idle, and make their women do all the work.

The theme is the 'exotic' and it betrays gross misunderstandings of the African subject. It relates to paintings of the landscape too.

Southern Africa as empty and chaotic wilderness

Through art, the African terrain was, in the colonial era, populated by strange creatures and odd plants, their difference accentuated through mutations in the European imagination. Art reflected exoticism, visually expressing the "self-defeating process of naming Africa by defining it as non-Europe - self-defeating because in each particular in which Africa is identified to be non-European, it remains Europe, not Africa, that is named" (Coetzee, 1988, p. 164). Yet, with hindsight, the process served a colonial purpose: it legitimised the European presence in Africa as a civilising influence. Portraits of southern Africa undertaken at the time contributed to the colonial theme of the 'wilderness', a particularly strong thread of imperial landscape perception. It embraces a strict rejection of natural foreign environments, and was common to Canada (see Rees, 1976b; 1977, 1982b), North America (Knox *et al.*, 1988), Australia (Short, 1991), southern Africa, and elsewhere. In each instance, it had stark negative connotations: the wilderness was "the alien and uncontrolled chaos of Nature" (Knox *et al.*, 1988, p. 54). Moreover, the emptiness of the landscape in wilderness paintings embraces a colonial assumption that Africa was an empty stage awaiting European 'discovery' and historical interpretation (see Crush, 1992). Pre-existing meaning written by indigenous people was effectively erased.

In the minds of Europeans - settlers as well as those who remained at home - wilderness was a negative and evil condition of native southern Africa. The Karoo landscape epitomised the barren, infinite, dangerous character of the untamed parts of the country for Scotland-born Pringle:

> Away - away - in the Wilderness vast,
> Where the White Man's foot hath never passed, ...
> A region of emptiness, howling and drear,
> Which Man hath abandoned from famine and fear;
> Which the snake and the lizard inhabit alone,
> With the twilight bat from the yawning stone;
> Where grass, nor herb, nor shrub takes root,
> Save poisonous thorns that pierce the foot; ...
> A region of drought, where no river glides,

> Nor rippling brook with oisered sides ...
> Appears, to refresh the aching eye:
> But the barren earth, and the burning sky,
> And the blank horizon, round and round,
> Spread - void of living sight or sound.
> (from *Afar in the desert*, cited in Chapman, 1981, pp. 36-37).

The emptiness of the landscape is broken only by the inescapable presence of danger. Africa in her natural guise was as hostile as its uncivilised indigenous people in early opinion. The country was seen to reject the 'White Man', when in fact the opposite was probably true: Europeans rejected the natural character of Africa in their minds and their hearts.

Locally, settlers feared that Africa might be the wilderness itself, "an anti-Garden, a garden ruled over by the serpent, where the wilderness takes root once again in men's hearts" (Coetzee, 1988, p. 3). Bowler's (Fig. 4.5) painting of *Macomo's den* captures the negative associations with wild lands and relates them directly to a "redoubtable old warrior" who constantly "defied the British and colonial forces" and caused the military and settlers trouble and annoyance (Thomson, 1865). On first impression, the landscape representation is not overtly negative, yet Thomson's interpretation gives significant insight into the contemporary reading of the painting and of the type of place it depicts:

> The picture requires few words of comment. Everyone will see for himself that it is the very spot likely to be chosen by a wily savage enemy from which to issue unawares, and into which to retreat again ... The artist ... has painted the wild chasm in the mountains, the gloom of which is increased by the dense forest which skirts the rugged cliffs, under the effect of one of those thunderstorms so prevalent in this part of the country ... a vulture sits solitary on the crag, where mayhap its mates had more than once gorged on the corpses of English soldiers.

Gone is the romantic admiration for nature; now the landscape is witness to and collaborator in a devious crime against civilised man. Daniell's pastoral-pastel environment is now transformed into a negative force that needs to be overcome.

The colonist's solution to the wilderness was to fight against it - for physical as well as spiritual survival. The remedy to counter southern Africa's 'insidious corruptions' involved labouring in the land (Coetzee, 1988) and carving civilised wedges into the landscape. Farm and city were the opponents of disorder. On Bowler's *Chumie* (Fig. 4.6), Thomson commented that it encompasses one of the 'finest landscapes on the frontiers':

> a scene of rich pastoral beauty and plenty, with sleek cattle grazing on the green slopes and cascades of water leaping from all the wood-fringed crags and peaks.



Figure 4.5 Bowler: *Macomo's Den, Waterkloof*, c.1846

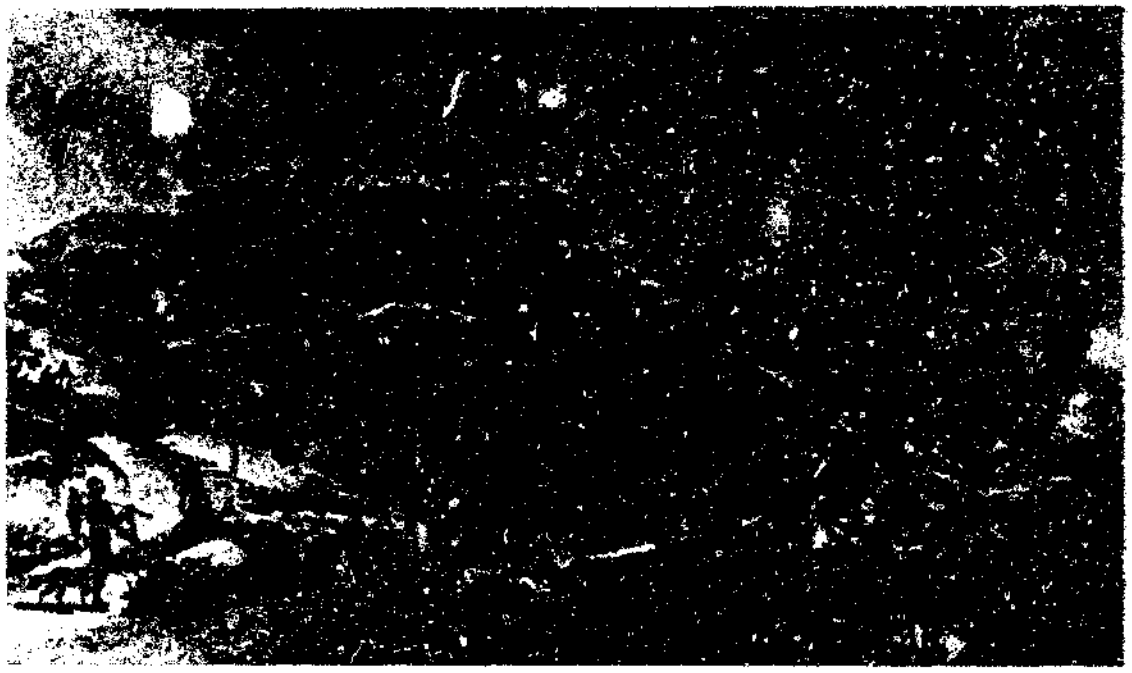


Figure 4.6 Bowler: *Chumie*, c.1864

Not only was the landscape tamed and obedient, harking back to the romantic ideal, but black Africans were similarly docile and quiet. Often, they were not only silent occupants of an equally hushed nature, they were excluded completely.

Townscapes: 'wedges of daring green' in the land

Motivated possibly as much by fear as by the colonial preoccupation with conquering the land, local settlers aimed to introduce European landscape features wherever they could be encouraged to grow: "If the garden did not pre-exist, then it would have to be forcibly shaped out of the wilderness which was its antithesis" (Knox *et al.*, 1988, p. 53). Like its black inhabitants, the country would be 'dressed' according to European standards, and the changes would be deemed indicative of the civilising impact of European presence and expansion into the interior. Mythogised, the frontier was viewed as a line of advancing white settlement where economic and social progress are deposited in the landscape (Osborne and Rogerson, 1978; Crush, 1992). The realities of confrontation - the defiance of African people and landscapes to subjugation - were ignored, and erased from art. Indigenous inhabitants of the land were rarely depicted "inhibiting the advance of the frontier" and never shown "inhabiting the landscapes of white settlement" (Crush, 1992, p. 12; see also Pratt, 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1988; 1991). Likewise, the wilderness could not be shown as a deterrent to European settlement.

Where colonial art admitted the existence of the wilderness at all, it used the 'veld' as a contrast to the domesticating impact that colonial farmsteads and towns were inscribing on the very landscape and as a justification for future conquests over the reigning chaos that needed to be overthrown. Angas' painting of Paarl, a town in the Cape Province (Fig. 4.7), interestingly juxtaposes the two landscape types. "In a charming and fertile valley, through which the Klein Berg Riviere, or "little river of the mountains", winds its meandering course, surrounded on all sides by grand and glorious mountains", he tells, "lies the picturesque village of the Paarl." The scene of a pastoral haven is framed by, and glorified against the wildness of nature in the foreground of the painting. Vultures, cacti and other indigenous flora are a



Figure 4.7 Angas: *The Paarl*, c.1849

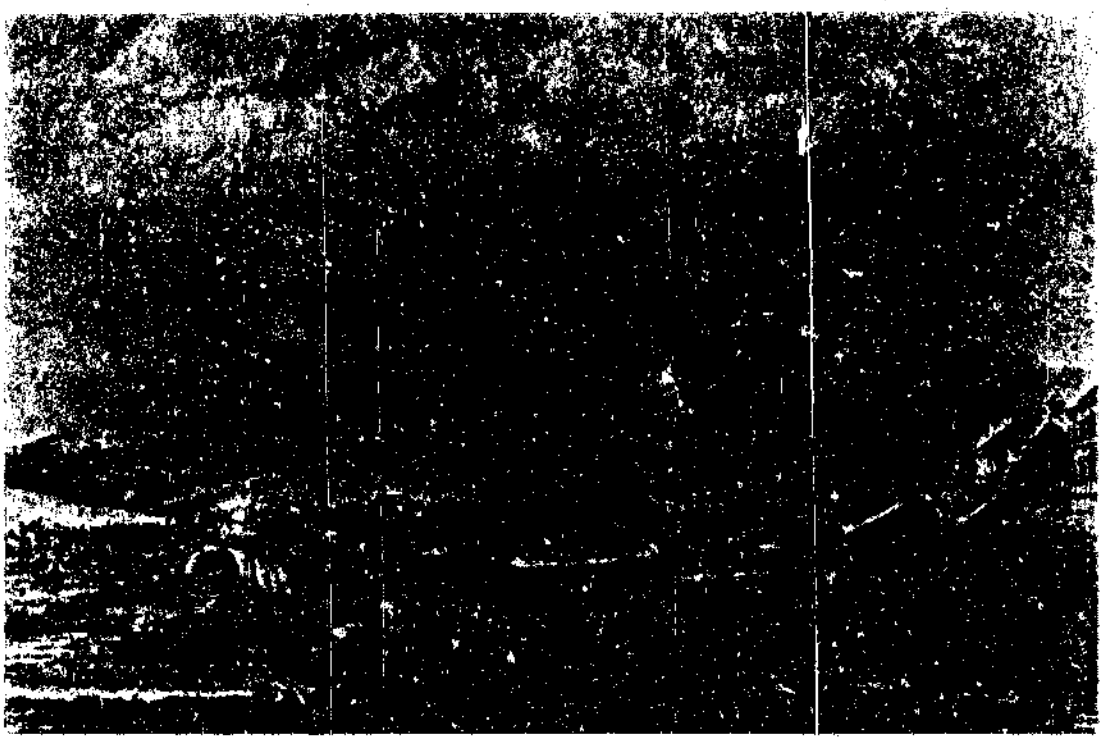


Figure 4.8 Bowler: *King William's Town*, c.1864

gnarled contrast to the pleasant scene that they look down upon; the wilderness intrudes only as a comparison for civilised existence in southern Africa. The interior of the sub-continent is denied its imposing and threatening hold over the settlers, and instead awaits like improvement under their hoe and habit. In the meantime, the vast mountainous terrain around Paarl and the unkempt girdles around other germinating urban centres were perceived as an empty, barren, 'dreary waste' that travellers to the frontiers were forced to traverse until they reached the 'more pleasing' environs of romantic gorges or the relief of a town (Thomson, 1865). Even 'civilised' African villages were viewed as an improvement on nature's indigenous complexion. Writing about a missionary station in Genadendal in the Cape, Angas (1849, p. 39) was impressed by the "peace and quietness, order and repose" that seemed to preside over the 'happy village'. The perceived reason behind the picturesque quality of the village lies in Angas' following comment: "the brethren, in attending to the spiritual wants of the people ... have, in the true spirit of wisdom and charity, made Christianity and *civilisation* go hand in hand" (original emphasis).

A core motif of the frontier myth in South Africa is the ox wagon. It is conspicuous in many scenes depicting hazardous journeys into the interior (see Coetzee, 1988; Klopper, 1989). Transporting the weapons of colonial progress, its presence implies that the travellers will - or have already - overcome various obstacles that the wilderness throws so mercilessly into their paths (and whereby nature indirectly legitimises the settler's need to conquer the landscape). Often, the vehicle is shown moving away from the viewer (and implicitly from civilisation), confronting the rebellious landscape, just as soldiers are depicted boldly facing their enemy in battle. The ox wagon indicates that virgin country has already been claimed for occupation. In Bowler's (Fig. 4.8) impression of King William's Town, the wagon is coupled with a townscape: the battle with nature has already been won. Significantly, the townscape in Africa was perceived by settlers as inherently 'unAfrican'; Fuller (n.d., p. 176) described Johannesburg in its early years as a "Little England beyond sea and plain". Pietermaritzburg was similarly likened to the Old World:

> All could see something of old England in the picturesque little town. Yorkshiremen could think of Thornton-le dale; Norfolk men of the streets of Long Stratton; southerners of the water channels of Salisbury. Inevitably, there were features which seemed exotic - the tall rank grass, the unkempt Australian gum, and above all the fierce intensity of the sub-tropical sun. But weeping willow and shady seringas softened and familiarized the aspect of the streets; among

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> the brilliant flowers growing in wild profusion were verbena and hybiscus, which emigrants knew as cultivated plants at home; the wild rose grew in every hedge (Hattersley, 1940, p. 56).

The town was home to European elegance, sophistication, modernity and progress; the spirit of improvement was rapidly changing the face of the dark continent. Little pieces of Europe were being transplanted into the African soil, and the European settlers admired in art their authorship of the towns being etched on the sub-continent.

In his *Myths* (cited in Chapman, 1981, p. 191), Butler pon[illegible] the colonial fingerprints left on place:

> multifarious shapes that breed
> About the homestead, below the dam, along the canal,
> Or any place where a European,
> Making the most of a fistful of water, splits
> The brown and grey with wedges of daring green -
> Known as invaders now, alien ...
> Leaving tentative footprints on the the sand between
> The aloe and the rock, uncertain if this
> Were part of their proper destiny.

Indeed, the colonists were compulsive tree planters, for besides their practical utility trees, clothed the naked landscape, making it more acceptable to British perceptions (see Lowenthal and Prince, 1965). Churches too were part of the stereotypical vision of the civilised landscape. As Butler implies, however, the colonial impact on the landscapes of southern Africa was hesitant and slow. It was also geographically restricted to the coastal margin. Paintings of the interior could not focus on enclaves of European improvement, for there were none. Instead, they had to deal with raw nature. A complementary vision to the frontier - that of the picturesque - provided a means for conquering the land *ideologically* where it had not been physically manicured. The process of Europeanising the landscape was symbolically - and more effectively - achieved in art through this idiom; the picturesque provided 'wedges of daring green' in the minds of the settlers, even where they did not tangibly exist.

Conventions of vision in place

Positive impressions of southern Africa were more common in colonial pictorial art than were visual affirmations of the dangers that threatened and challenged the settlers. The latter were more often present in literature (see Coetzee, 1988). Where paintings could not highlight the success of colonial endeavours to harness nature, pure landscape scenes were usually framed according to familiar artistic conventions; indigenous landscapes were subjugated under European culture where they had not suffered the impact of the settler's physical presence. In fact, the artists rarely saw southern Africa at all; they imposed their own visions onto the exterior of subject landscapes, just as they had 'Europeanised' subject people - with little consideration of the true identities that lay beneath the web of appearances they hastily spun. Importantly, the landscape could not be granted an autonomous personality beyond the needs of colonialism, so in art the true character of place was subdued. Here (Fig. 4.9) was Africa, if not tamed, passive and obedient, at least adorned with qualities of beauty that were familiar to Europeans and therefore made the country less threatening.

The picturesque entails a deep contemplation and unbridled admiration for a composed and aesthetically-defined quality of beauty in the landscape. The ideally picturesque view (both in nature and art) contains:

> distant mountains, a lake in the middle distance, and a foreground of rocks, woods, broken ground, cascades or ruins, this foreground to be characterised by "force and richness," by "roughness" of texture, in contrast to the "tenderness" of the middle and foreground (Coetzee, 1988, pp. 39-40).

In formal terms, it involves composing the landscape "in receding planes according to the Claudian scheme: a dark *coulisse* on one side shadowing the foreground; a middle plane of luminous distance; perhaps an intermediate plane too between middle and far distance" (Coetzee, 1988, p. 39). Angas' (Fig. 4.9) painting is a typical version of the theme. His description of *Baviaan's Kloof* reveals the extent of its picturesque conception. He sees in the gorge:

> scenery of the wildest and most romantic character: steep, broken cliffs, leading upwards to grey and jagged mountains, where the eagles are hovering ... and then, far beyond, pearly patches of snow, shining above the wreaths of vapour that linger over the glen. Darkly the foaming torrent rushes along its pebbled bed ... till it terminates in a black, still pool (Angas, 1849, p. 43).



Figure 4.9 Angas: *Baviaan's Kloof, Genadendal*, c.1849

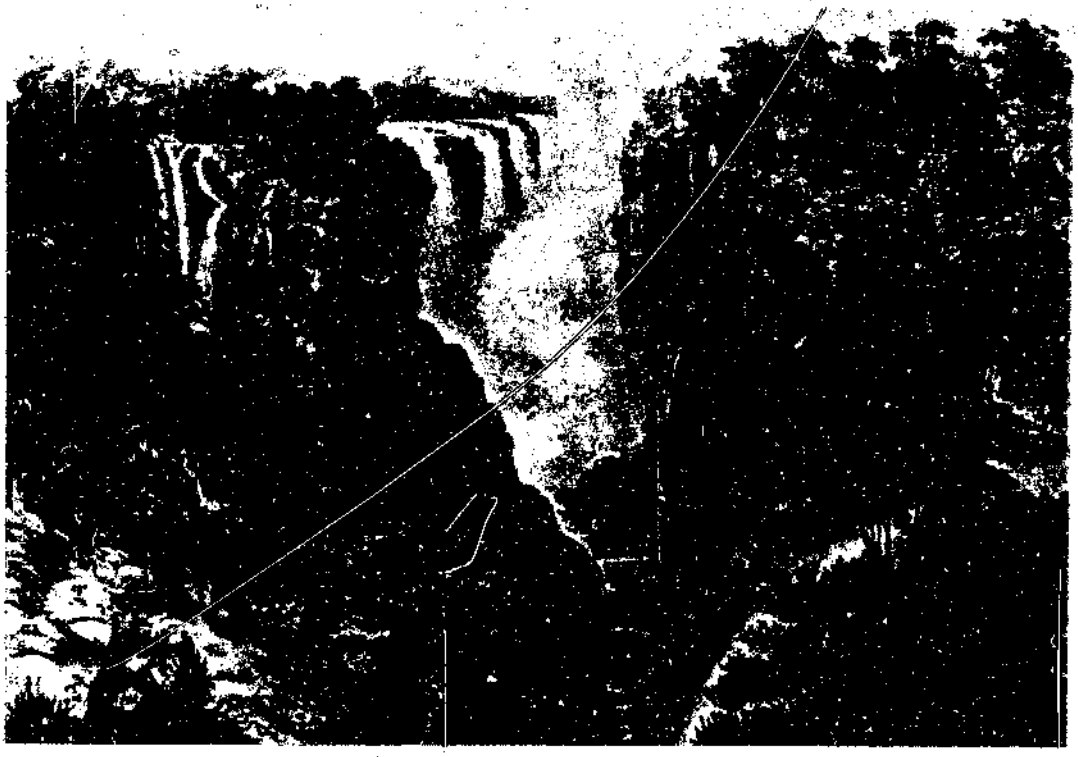


Figure 4.10 Baines: *Victoria Falls from the Western End*, c.1864

Here, the taming of the landscape relates not to a physical transformation, but to the domesticating impulse of the colonial eye. Although they sought scenes that would make comfortable companions both to their traditional artistic methods and to the ideas of their market, the metamorphosis of indigenous landscapes envisaged by early artists was frequently imagined rather than real. Underlying the imposition of the picturesque was the persistent (colonial) assumption that European reality was the only reality.

The settlers were not always consciously declaring their own superiority by assuming the universal applicability of their visions of nature. Indeed, for many, the conventions for seeing and representing the environment provided by the English landscape tradition were ingrained in their minds and hearts as reality. Furthermore, the scenes depicted by Gainsborough, Turner and Constable had been naturalised for the European public through repetition. The fact that the landscapes of southern Africa did not conform to the formulae developed for representing moist and misty England might have been problematic for many artists. Instead of creating new artistic tools, however, many opted to continue painting in their inherited traditions, and using anglicised colours, tints and tones on their palettes. The picturesque was a favourite device. It was not applicable to southern Africa, yet it was used time and again by colonial artists. The book on southern Africa compiled using Bowler's paintings (Thomson, 1865), aptly sub-titled "Picturesque views", is dedicated to the "many picturesque beauties of South African scenery", the artist's task being to "picture for others the beauties and grandeur of nature" such that "foreigners who have never visited the country will, upon looking at them [the paintings], confess that the natural beauties of the country, and the enterprise and courage of those who colonised it, are worthy of genuine admiration" (Thomson, 1865, preface). River valley, gorge, mountain pool and town are celebrated as rich testimony to the truth of this dedication.

The picturesque not only admires the calm moods of nature, it revels also in its powerful side; it embraces the 'sternly grand' as well as the 'exquisitely beautiful' (Thomson, 1865). Baines' impression of the Victoria Falls (Fig. 4.10) highlights the dramatic beauty of nature. The painting seems to defy Coetzee's (1988, p. 55) assertion that the sublime, "a certain way

of feeling about the landscape in which awe weighs heavily did not become the norm [in South Africa]". Baines' wonderment at the scene and his picturesque interpretation of it saturate both verbal and visual impressions. The following passage (Baines, 1862, cited in Arnold, 1979, p. 34) illuminates the emotion behind his representation of the Falls:

> A light easterly wind just swayed their soft vapoury tops; the sun, still low, shed its softened light over the sides exposed to it. The warm grey hills beyond faded gradually into the distance, and the deep valley ... showed every form of rough brown rock and every tint of green or autumnal foliage, presenting to the eye, long wearied of ... dry rocks and burnt grass, and desolated country, the most lovely and refreshing coup l'oeil the soul of the artist could imagine.

This admiration for nature is clearly voiced through the idiom of the picturesque. The scene is a celebration of the beauty of nature in its European conception. Once again, the scene is not Africa; indeed, typical African scenery is rejected as 'desolated country'. Baines' focus turns instead to an aspect of the country that invites the picturesque. Like most colonial artists, he disguises the true spirit of an indigenous landscape behind pleasantly acceptable scenery.

The picturesque landscape as nostalgia

Colonial art was not solely a slave to socio-political motives. At the same time, it expressed experiences of individuals in the landscape. Settlers often felt alienated, uncomfortable, abandoned and desperate, and art of the period is a testimony to their inability to directly confront place - it is a record of nostalgia and frustration. Simpler still, it speaks of the technical inadequacies of artists in a foreign land. The nineteenth-century settler was no more prepared to deal with foreign environments encountered through colonial expansion than was the explorer of the previous century. Guided by domineering motives and attitudes prescribed in the colonial handbook, the early settler nonetheless faced an awkward and inevitable duality in approaching the landscape:

> At one moment he is a European with Greek statues and Roman poets inhabiting the shades of his intellectual landscape; at another moment he is a white man, surrounded by forests of African witchcraft, girdled by unending savannas where roam elephants and giraffes. The inner classical world of his education is one of a familiar security - it is a world of civilised men with predictable situations, predictable ethics and predictable solutions ... But on the outside, hugging him like a rough uncomfortable goatskin, is Unusual Africa: insecure, illogical, black and red in colour; volcanoes, lakes, tropical diseases, locusts, droughts, floods, flames, man in conflict, violence. And so it happens that the modern man holding his Vergil is thrown from his European chariot on to the thorns of Africa (Battiss, 1960, p. 7).

The discontinuity between inner and outer worlds was the basis for a hopeless inability to come to terms with southern Africa's landscape; both emotionally and imaginatively, the settler floundered in the local environment. In art, the disjuncture was extended into a conflict between European aesthetics and an African subject. It was recorded in paintings with local content but an imported flavour. Stated simply, the artists often found the alien landscape unpaintable. With their European heritage and attendant concepts of art and nature, they were ill-equipped to tackle Africa and instead transformed it in the image of Europe.

Colonial artists in southern Africa experienced numerous technical difficulties in trying to represent an environment that was entirely different from those with which they were familiar. The typically immense and desolate landscapes of the country make a mockery of their European siblings. Their forms are more mature, the horizons much wider, even the sky seems higher: everywhere, space lies naked and imposing, overwhelming in its horizontality. The land is barren: Nature seems to have neglected Her toilet in southern Africa, allowing Her crustaceous interior to jut above the cosmetics of grass and forest that She usually wears. The extensive grasslands of the country's interior are sparsely populated by humans, trees and animals. These would at least offer features to lend depth and detail to the scene reproduced in paint. The unsympathetic light of Africa and its clear, dry atmosphere aggravate the severity of the local aspect of Nature's face still further:

> Eindloos wyd strek doods en kaal
> Verskroeide vlaktes waar die stofson straal
>
> (Endlessly wide, deathly and bare, stretch
> Scorched flatlands where the dust-sun glares)
> (from Mocke: *Die Vrystaat* (The Free State), cited and translated in Coetzee, 1988, p. 51).

The brilliance of the sun draws colour from the country, leaving it with a pallid hue broken only by the uncomplimentary wrinkles of sharply-defined shadows; the softly graded colours entertained by European artists are nowhere to be found. Burchell was prompted by the sterility of yellow and brown tones that suffuse the local terrain to comment: "In Africa we look in vain for those mellow beautiful tints with which the sun of autumn dyes the forests of England" (1822, vol. 2, p. 9). He was disappointed that even dawn failed to produce "those rosy and golden tints ... which decorate the morning sky of European countries" (1822, vol.

2, p. 231). Unfortunately, the European artist's palette was best prepared to reproduce the pretty, rich colours of home. Moreover, these were what the market wanted to see.

For a whole set of colonial artists, the alien landscapes of Africa were more than distasteful; they presented a major challenge to their artistic vocabulary and inherited conceptions of place - a challenge that the artists at times acknowledged and understood, but never overcame. Displaying an unusual sensitivity to the need to appreciate the aesthetic character of the indigenous landscape, Burchell (1822, vol. 2, p. 194) recognised a unique and admirable quality in southern African scenery which, he maintained, "if put to canvas, would ... prove to European painters that there exists ... a species of beauty with which, possibly, they may not yet be sufficiently acquainted". The majority chose, however, to find, or more often to imagine, a familiar species of beauty: the picturesque. Parallels with other colonies are evident once again (see Rees, 1976b; Short, 1991). Often, scenes were chosen according to their relative capacities to surrender to the imported artistic traditions that had been designed for use on British subjects. The results were usually more evocative of England or France than of local landscapes (see also Rees, 1976b; 1977). In South Africa, the Cape region surrendered willingly to the picturesque and soon became one of the painter's preferred places.

The picturesque was not only a trusted artistic tool, it was also familiar and comforting to colonial patrons of the arts. A major, if subtle undercurrent in the incentive for blatant untruths regarding the local landscape lay in the hearts of the settlers. Unprepared for the physical environment with its harsh, wild and dangerous nature, the settlers suffered the emotional trauma of an uprooted and alienated community. Arrogance and hope often shaded into disillusionment and homesickness. Bain (1797-1864), poetically described the despair of *The British settler* in South Africa:

> 'Tis four and twenty years, my friends, since
> first on Afric's shore we landed!
> And retrospections crowd my mind of that great
> day;
> Fear and doubt shut hope all out, for on a
> desert we seemed stranded,
> And dreary was our prospect then in Algoa Bay!
> (cited in Chapman, 1981, p. 49)

Similarly negative tones shade Dugmore's *A reminiscence of 1820* which reflects the emotional responses to southern Africa that he witnessed as one of the earliest settlers in the Cape:

> In the lone wilderness behold them stand,
> Gazing with new strange feelings on the scenes
> Now spread around them in a foreign clime,
> Far from the sea-girt home that gave them birth.
>
> They had been landed on a cheerless shore,
> Dreary and solitary; and the hope
> That erst had brighten'd all their visions, when,
> O'er the blue waters looming afar,
> They had seen Afric's mountains rise into view,
> Had nigh been quench'd again ...
> (cited in Chapman, 1981, p. 53)

Africa easily smashed the fragile hopes of the travel-weary group against her stark, pitiless, naked frame. At the same time, she inadvertently provided the impetus for a habit of vision to frame artworks: nostalgia.

The easiest solution for colonists facing a dreaded, hostile environment was to ignore its realities and to make it over in the image of 'home'; Rees (1976b, pp. 267-68) observes:

> One of the acknowledged properties of art, and one which has particular value in a pioneer society, is its capacity to serve as a soporific. In ignoring the open prairie, and in imposing a European style and sensibility upon their environment, the early resident painters provided a cultural link with the old country which softened the distress of homesick pioneer viewers. The anglicized versions of the landscape satisfied a pressing nostalgic need so that they were accepted as true statements about the new land. There was no demand for paintings depicting the often harsh realities of the new environment.

The reference could easily be to southern Africa. Far from attempting to come to terms with, accept and even harmonise with their new environment, southern Africa's settlers often wished to escape it; Pringle describes how they clung to the past:

> the eye is suffused with with regretful tears,
> From the fond recollections of former years;
> Bright visions of glory - that vanished too soon;
> Day-dreams - that departed ere manhood's noon; ...
> And my Native Land - whose magical name
> Thrills to the heart like electric flame;
> The home of my childhood; the haunts of my prime; ...
> All - all now forsaken - forgotten - foregone!
> (from *Afar in the desert*, cited in Chapman, 1981, pp. 35-37).

Rather than opening themselves to the spirit of the land, the settlers denied its existence, shut down their responses to the outside world and focused on their internal strife. Inasmuch as they approached the southern African landscape at all, it was so distorted through tears, fears and jeers to be almost unrecognisable. They were far more ready to accept the

illusions presented in art as truth than to deal with the truth of the environment itself (see also Watson, 1969). Their needs therefore served to perpetuate the picturesque illusions presented by colonial artists, and to discourage exploration of the true character of the landscapes of southern Africa.

A summary of untruths

In the early years of white habitation in southern Africa, the landscape was interpreted according to conventions that seemed natural, were politically viable and psychologically comforting to a colonial society. It is this underlying experiential and ideological framework, common to most settler societies, that explains the marked similarities between images produced in different colonies. Settler artworks are not simply dissimilar from European art due to their "disregard or unawareness of the seminal art movements occurring contemporaneously" there, as Berman (1974, p. 167) suggests. Rather, pioneer and colonial artists answered the tastes, ideas and values of their community to suit its needs (and to appeal to its market). In the process, the realities of place were denied.

The emotional matrix of uncertainty and nostalgia that surrounded settler art, coupled with the inevitable conquering spirit of colonialism divorced art from the landscape. Before local art could come to terms with the environment and thereby make an important contribution to the creation of a national consciousness, it would have to address the challenge of the land by imag(in)ing humanity into the reality of the indigenous landscape (Coetzee, 1988). The people of South Africa needed to feel they belonged in this place; they needed to know where they fitted in the landscape; they had to know what it meant to be living in southern Africa, to be South Africans. Ultimately, the country had to be confronted directly, by painters and poets who stood alone in quiet contemplation of the essences of place. In the early years, however, settler and land remained separate by mutual agreement.

The traditions of the romantic and the picturesque were inappropriate, the palette of greens and rich earthy shades heightened with white could not evoke the yellow-washed dryness of

the African veld, while the static, heatstruck plateau negated the European artist's goal of capturing the sparkling, transitory effects of sunlight on surfaces. Yet, the failure of the immigrant painters to reach into the soul of southern Africa related more importantly to the heart than to the eyes and mind of the settler society. The landscape remains "alien, impenetrable, until a language is found in which to win it, speak it, represent it" (Coetzee, 1988, p. 7), and it is only once people are 'at home in' or 'in harmony with' it that the landscape 'speaks to them' and is understood by them (Coetzee, 1988, p. 10). Undoubtedly, South Africa found the feet of its identity during these early years and the images used to portray it partially determined the course of its national character. Nonetheless, the true flavour of southern Africa would have to wait for a later generation to discover and reflect it. Whether they avoided the vastness of the landscape by ignoring it and selecting untypical scenes, or by manipulating it to conform with their own aesthetic conventions, the country's early artists did not capture the essence of its character.

CHAPTER 5

NATIONAL ART EXPLORES THE SURFACE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

In the spring-time of the twentieth century, the landscape genre blossomed in South African art. It not only grew into the primary subject-matter among professional painters in the country (Berman, 1974; 1975), but became more closely associated with the local environment and gradually attained an indigenous identity. New regions offering new geographical experiences - other than the Cape, haven of the picturesque - were plotted on the artistic map of the country. The singularity of the colonial vision was replaced with a diversity in landscape perception. Greater magnitude in geographical content and iconography was coupled with increased latitude in artistic approaches to the landscape. The fragmentation reflects a significant change in prevailing attitudes to the local environment: southern Africa was no longer rejected, tamed or stigmatised as exotic. Instead, it was approached energetically as a subject requiring honest representation in art; as the home - for better or for worse - of English-speaking settlers, their Afrikaner cousins and a growing black urban populace, that required the medium of human imagination to make it whole. It is no exaggeration to say that the first half of the twentieth century saw most local artists - both visual and verbal - engaged in a serious effort to understand the landscapes of southern Africa.

During the early years, in a climate of improving human interaction with the country, the entire youthful society on the African sub-continent was struggling to find its identity. Part of the battle was to forge a distinctive sense of place - distinct especially from Europe. This is the goal that tinges the hues and composes the brushstrokes of many landscape paintings produced in this context: artists were concerned to develop an indigenous landscape flavour, in art (by shedding the confining skin of received conventions) and, through it, in place. The tones are exploratory, yet familiar in their unsentimental expression; they reject the nostalgic tone and exotic tint of colonialism. Clarity was crucial to the landscape impression: to be incorporated into the national imagination, portraits of place needed not only to meet with the approval of the cognoscenti and the artistic community, but also to appeal to the country's citizens at large (Osborne, 1988). As elsewhere, therefore, the landscape found appropriate

expression in the ordinary, the commonplace, in scenes of daily routines in the land; the artists contributed to an iconography of southern Africa's 'veld and vlei', comparable to the Australian 'outback' (Short, 1991), the American 'West' (Tyler, 1983) or the Canadian 'North' (Osborne, 1988). Moreover, the landscape was usually voiced through a sober realism, a precise and clear artistic vocabulary that embodied a resonant, sometimes inventive, but always comprehensible use of natural imagery (Chapman, 1981).

The requisite of empathy with the natural environment and fidelity to nature lends a unity to the artistic exercise in the country's national phase, but it also led artists to a variety of conclusions. Consequently, the national voice is rich and varied: often southern Africa was represented in her charming and delicate aspect, but at times the lyricism gave way to a more severe expression of inevitability and harshness in the landscape (Harmsen, 1958). In addition, while many artists adopted a descriptive-romantic handling of their subject, others conjured abstract or expressionistic pieces from the local geography. Wenning, Naude, Goodman, Roworth, Pierneef, Volschenk, Jentsch, and black artists Mohl and Benghu, as well as impressionists like Boonzaaier and Caldecott, can be broadly grouped under the label of 'semi-realism'; Stern, Laubser, Preller, the Everard Group and township artists such as Ngatane, Sihlali and Pemba painted what they felt in a more individualistic comment on personal geographies (Battiss, 1960). There is a further diversity in the regional affinities of the work produced: the Transvaal landscape is best captured by Pierneef, while Jentsch evokes the empty vastness of Namibia, the Everard women explore the essence of the Eastern Transvaal, black artists focus on the urban scene country-wide, and Naude and Boonzaier lure the spirit of the Cape from behind its picturesque veneer. No single iconography can embrace the diversity of southern Africa.

Local landscape artists were necessarily divided in their unique responses to place, yet the majority were united in the spirit of nationalism. Using various techniques to evoke their personal impressions of their own 'bit' of the environment, each was attempting to 'strike root' in southern Africa's soil, to demythicise the landscape or, better yet, to re-mythicise it using authentic, African imagery. The patriotic goal conjured a myth relating to the absence of the

artist in the re-created landscape; an artwork was admired and absorbed into the nationalist enclave if it appeared to stand in a direct conversation with the truth of place. The 'best' artists were those who least imposed their own perspectives and artistic formulae on the landscape; style was to be subservient to nature. Thus, Pierneef's restrained abstractions were accepted only inasmuch as they were conceived to reach into the heart of the landscape; those who saw them as a technical device rejected the work as 'synthetic', 'imported', a 'cliched mannerism' (see Berman, 1975). A conservative public and critics sought transparency in the creative process. Apart from this, they looked to the artists to teach them about their country, to provide them with national symbols extracted from the land.

More than in other developing nations, perhaps, southern Africa was equated in the minds of its inhabitants with a pure, empty landscape. The primary task of artists was to alleviate the negative associations with wilderness that had been inscribed in the public memory in the nineteenth century, and to teach their audience to see beauty in the nakedness of nature. Love of indigenous scenery is the crux of the national landscape ethos. Through their own respect and admiration of the local blend of landscape features, artists hoped to teach their communities to feel at home in southern Africa. In order to achieve this successfully, they had to devise appropriate techniques for capturing the unique qualities of light and surface that even immigrants recognised as the essence of the distinctive flavour of the country. Greater exposure to a broader range of European artistic styles supplied local artists with superior modes and methods for doing so. The French Impressionists and German Expressionists were particularly useful role models. From them, South African artists borrowed the necessary conventions for translating the hard outlines of the local terrain, the draining light emitted by its vicious sun, and the limited colour range painted in its arid surface. All were gradually evoked with increasing competence, sincerity and honesty. Foreign aesthetic languages, stylistic traditions and ideological impulses persisted; indeed, they flourished. Even through imported lenses, however, the 'best' artists signed an African alliance, and their work is a spontaneous and honest depiction of the 'African truth', expressing the country's hardness, its relentlessness, its largeness, but also indicating the charm, the delicacy and - most importantly - the lovableness of the land (Harmsen, 1958).

Pastoralism denies the reality of place

The conservative mind conceives the pastoral as an ideal relationship between people and the land. Simplicity, peace, health, freedom and morality are considered the virtues of the country - the garden - that contrast with the vices of the city - the modern wilderness. The pastoral often embraces a retrospective gaze, in the spirit of nostalgia, that "holds up the time of the forefathers as an exemplary age when the garden of myth became actualized in history" (Coetzee, 1988, p. 4); it is a romantic conception of an era lost under industrialisation. The Wilson-Moore brothers, writing in the early twentieth century, lamented the *Changes* brought about in rural southern Africa by progress and capitalism:

> I passed the Rand; saw scarce a human face:
> Two years roll by, the old scene with it rolls;
> Where once the Boer's humble cottage stood,
> Stands now a town, with twice ten thousand souls ...
>
> I met a maid, once, in the days gone by;
> A quiet country lass, was little Liz;
> The timid glance is now a brazen'd eye,
> The once sweet voice, a constant croak, (for "Fiz").
> (cited in Chapman, 1981, p. 70).

Shunning negative effects of progress on people and landscape has implications for the representation of a present, as well as for the romantic view of the past. The farm is conceived as an ideal place in the modern world, where humanity and nature are engaged in a pleasant, harmonious interaction. Predictably, it was adopted in national art to suggest a clean, healthy relationship between a new nation and their land (see Rees, 1976b).

The pastoral sentiment and its artistic idiom will be recognised the world over, for the agrarian myth is an international one (Knox *et al.*, 1988; Zaring, 1977). It is a particularly strong component of the English landscape taste:

> there are few things in England for which a rural setting is not generally preferred. Windsor and Hampton Court are monuments to the notion that royalty belongs to the country. Whatever the reality, universities are imagined as green havens of peace. Cathedrals are found in many large cities, ... but the popular image of them conforms to the genre of painting th... shows Salisbury Cathedral behind lush meadows. The countryside is the proper frame for the profane as well as for the sacred (Lowenthal and Prince, 1965, p. 189).

The idealised rural landscape in art is "tamed and inhabited, warm, comfortable and humanised" (Lowenthal and Prince, 1965, p. 190), and it always harbours a pure and moral lifestyle. The pastoral myth ignores the possibility that the retreat from cities, industry and

society might be nothing more than an escape into sensual sloth and idleness. In South Africa, it must also deny the reality of the exploitation of black labour that is so deeply ingrained into the face of the rural landscape.

Laubser is South Africa's most prominent pastoral artist. True to her background in a conservative and deeply religious farming community, and her "overwhelming love of nature and a sincere affection for the Coloured peasants" (Berman, 1975, p. 59), she produced a dream topography of southern Africa as a folktale rural haven. Animals graze safely in a peaceful, colourful meadow (Fig. 5.1) overhung with marshmallow clouds and a turquoise sky. The picture is bright and happy; Africa is a land of sunshine and harmony. Indeed, Laubser's sun brushes the scene with an inviting warmth and gentle hue, rather than scalding its bare skin with the severe light that other artists have recorded. Every aspect of nature - the clay-moulded hills, the comfortable climate, the lush grass and peacefully grazing sheep - is quiet and gentle. Fairies might feel comfortable here, for innocence abounds in the fields; certainly peaceful rural folk are at home. Indeed, where people populate Laubser's landscapes, they too are simplified into poetic, sentimental figures of a humble and moral order. They are childlike symbols of an idyllic rural world. The harvesters in Figure 5.2, for instance, are in cheerful harmony with the landscape, anonymous witnesses to the virtues of a simple life of honest labour.

Beyond the superficial innocence of the pastoral scene in South Africa lie several very unromantic, even immoral realities: the exploitation of black labour and the appropriation of land for exclusively white occupation. These truths disrupt the myth of the rural arcadia of America and other corners of the western world where toil in the land equates agriculturists with 'the chosen people of God', denotes their private ownership of land, and implies 'individual freedom in an equalitarian society' (Knox *et al.*, 1988). In applying the pastoral idiom to South Africa, Laubser and others by necessity ignore socio-economic and political realities for if "the work of hands on a particular patch of earth ... is what inscribes it as the property of its occupiers *by right*, then the hands of black serfs doing the work had better not be seen" (Coetzee, 1988, p. 5). Alternatively, they can symbolise labour as an abstract condition, as a colourful and universal human enterprise.

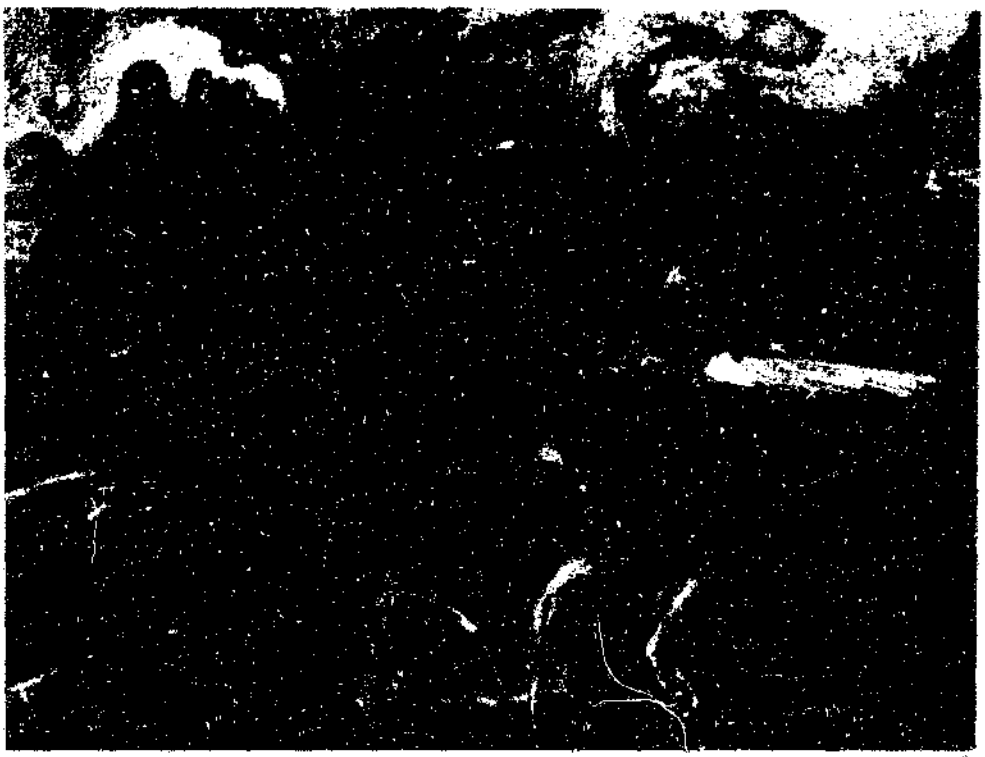


Figure 5.1 Laubser: *Landscape with Sheep*, c.1937



Figure 5.2 Laubser: *Oestyd*, c.1938

The anonymity of black figures in many local rural paintings is obliquely comforting to the conscience of a white employer. So too is their docile and cheerful appearance: they are often included merely as decorative detail in the fields of painted landscapes. More often, local pastoral art portrays white labour and occludes black. Coetzee (1988, p. 5) reasons that the black labourer's toil "threatens to deprive the white man of the labours that he, as Africa's new heir, must not only perform but, more important, be seen to perform". In a closer relationship with the truth, artists invariably erase work, and therefore humanity, from the landscape altogether. Indeed, the rural scene is a rare guise of the southern African environment in art (Coetzee, 1988). Reinforcing problems of representation associated with the blatantly exploitative and racial character of work, is the fact that the local environment itself is not typically submissive to human labours. Africa is "a land of rock and sun, not of soil and water" (Coetzee, 1988, p. 7). Capturing its essence can therefore be more effectively achieved by focusing on its natural and resistant personality than on the enclaves of human victory. The latter were, moreover, the subjects that early settlers had adopted. Scenes of rural bliss, civilised townscapes and picturesque retreats smacked of colonialism and were hardly conducive to cultivating an indigenous flavour in art. Laubser's painted rural Eden blurred the indigenous environment behind the myth of the garden - an obviously colonial construct. For artists shunning the imported attitude to place, southern Africa would have to be approached for what it was (or rather, what it was perceived to be): "a vast, empty, silent space, older than man, older than the dinosaurs ... and destined to be vast, empty, and unchanged long after man has passed from its face" (Coetzee, 1988, p. 7).

The silent artist contemplates Africa

The quest for an authentic language with which to portray the African landscape led to an overwhelming denial of the human medium in landscape painting in an effort to convey objectivity in its conception. Seeking authentic portrayals of place, many artists assumed a silent position in the landscapes they created. The foundation for the notion is understandable: the artists aimed to express the voices and visions of place, and did not want to drown them

out with personal conversations. Visual art was to be the maiden of place, not a slave to human agency. The poet was similarly captivated by the drive towards a truthfulness to place:

> In the words he throws out to the landscape, in the echoes he listens for, he is seeking a dialogue with Africa, a reciprocity with Africa, that will allow him an identity better than that of a visitor, stranger, transient (Coetzee, 1988, p. 8).

The goal of the transparent medium was, of course, idealistic: art necessarily embraces and expresses the idiosyncrasies of its maker as individual and social being, if only in its silences (see Williams, 1973). The very act of painting the landscape is itself an iconographic statement. More importantly, the effort to coax the spirit of place from a landscape emptied even of the artist was foredoomed, for its essence emerges through a country's inhabitants and their perceptions as much as through external geographical features. Coetzee's comment (1988, p. 9) is particularly insightful in this regard: "What response do rocks and stones make to the poet [or painter] who urges them to utter their true names? As we might expect, it is silence".

The apprehension and representation of the blank landscape is the dominant approach to southern Africa. Nature has been presented in all her (predominantly splendid) nakedness by a long tradition of local artists. Starting in the 1920s, the first South African-born artists of merit, Volschenk and Naude, portrayed Cape landscapes in their uninhabited glory (Figs. 5.3 and 5.4). Their early treatment of the subject, like their choice of scenery, is a direct extension of the colonial landscape ideology: place is a picturesque conception. Indeed, the effect is so sentimental that Berman (1975) labels this style of painting - common in the early part of the century - the 'picture postcard' approach. Like their modern counterparts in the mass media and their predecessors the traveller-artists, the first professional indigenous painters selected appealing compositions from the landscape and generated equally attractive images of them. Of Volschenk's painting, Berman (1975, p. 8) comments that "although the work does not in any way expand the viewer's vision, it provides a pleasant souvenir of the unspoiled beauty of the countryside". Nature was celebrated for its charming and vibrant features: Naude is famous for his numerous views of Namaqualand carpeted with the flowers of spring, whilst Volschenk's dawn-dappled mountains gained him renown. Cape Dutch homesteads, the Malay Quarter and District Six were popular artificial subjects - subjects that would degenerate into the cliches of popular art. Boonzaier's art, a dedication to the Cape Dutch cultural



Figure 5.3 Volschenk: *Clouds and Sunshine, Riversdale*, 1919



Figure 5.4 Naude: *Breederivier*, c.1924

landscape, was similarly celebrated for its sincere praise of beauty: "It catches the poetic atmosphere of our platteland. The very spirit of all the little dorps in our country is captured here" (Trumpelmann, 1959, p. 74). Documenting aesthetic qualities of the environment related to a contemporary, patriotic urge: artists were concerned to paint the beauties of the African environment so as to make it more acceptable to their public.

The external emphasis retained its grip on local art in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, despite its producers' growing confidence with artistic media and familiarity with the indigenous landscape. In fact, stark honesty about the subject became even more entrenched as the proper artistic method. Only the techniques adopted and the competence with which the landscape was conveyed edged forward in the footprints of time; the expressed motive behind the mainstream of landscape art circled endlessly around the fulcrum of naturalism. The voices of critics emphasised the importance of art as a format for recording the truth of the southern African landscape:

> How long shall we walk blindly
> In a land flooded with sunshine?
> How long shall we insult the vast veld
> With our mean thoughts?
> (from Slater, *Drought*, cited in Chapman, 1981, pp. 113-19).

Truthfulness to place was equated with an acceptance of the country's unique character. And the easiest route to acceptance was to portray the beauty - preferably the *indigenous* beauty of even the most desolate local landscape. In the Cape, attractiveness was automatically related to the picturesque. A more typically 'African' beauty related to the untamed, timeless, solitary landscape of the interior.

Aesthetic appreciation of the local landscape

Namibia epitomises the spaciousness of the local environment. Its beauty is inextricably bound to the "vastness and the silence of the desert landscape ... [to the] sublimity of space ... [that is] here a tangible reality (Berman, 1974, p. 150). The dry fringe of South Africa, and physically beyond the country's national boundary, it has nonetheless been absorbed into the national image as a distinctly African environment. Sister of the Karoo, Namibia provides

fertile ground, if not to human agricultural growth, at least to the seeds of its imaginative constructions. Expansive horizons, rocky topography, hard angular outlines and harsh light, the defining themes of national landscape art, are abundant. Moreover, the area has been successfully composed into an 'image region' through the efforts of one of the country's most celebrated artists. Jentsch has carved a position for Namibia in the public sense of place; he has "opened their eyes to the greatness of their country" (Hendriks, 1960 on Jentsch, p. 34). Jentsch's work (Fig. 5.5) provides abbreviated descriptions to suggest the minimal detail and gentle contours of the Namibian landscape; zones of delicate colour broken with subtle references to rock and scrub capture the brittle beauty of the desert. Even the medium - water colour - seems possessed of a kindred spirit to the land in its inherent tendency toward soft colour and loosely defined form. It aptly captures the endless distance of the African landscape.

Repeating the motif of the empty, barren landscape, Vorster expresses the *Winter veld* (Fig. 5.6) as a semi-abstract conglomerate of brown, ochre, and steely blue plates that summarise the dusty arid landscape of the South African interior. An offshoot of "his single overriding passion for the veld", the image is but one manifestation of Vorster's "perception of the poetry in the sun-bleached expanses of the land"; of his "sensitive appreciation of the innumerable subtle variations in the pink-grey-ochre colouring of earth and stone" (Berman, 1974, p. 318). Vorster personifies the country, seeks an intimate relationship with it, and aims to be faithful to the spirit of place (cited in Alexander and Cohen, 1990, p. 117):

> The dunes are the flesh and limestone rocks, the bones. These things combine to form a whole, with its own personality, mystique and eternity ... the personality of an environment I am pictorially trying to create.

As with Jentsch and so many other landscape painters, the artist was encouraged by his public to cultivate his "joyful understanding and loving treatment of the subject"; "that intense joy ... and the deep, positive acceptance of his country in its richness and exotic exuberance, as well as in the grandeur and starkness of its stony and arid desert parts" (Schroder, 1959, p. 34).

Exploring intimate associations with place and personal emotional and imaginative reactions to southern Africa invited subjective, individual statements that were, in an apparent contradiction, evicted from the national paradigm. Expressionism, post-impressionism,



Figure 5.5 Jentsch: *Landscape with Thorn Trees*, c.1940



Figure 5.6 Vorster: *Winter Veld*, 1958

fauvism, unrestrained abstraction and other overt references to the subjective vision were ignored or severely criticised. Laubser and Stern felt the full force of a conservative South African public and its inability to accept the landscape visions of the 'inner eye':

> To a public conditioned to believe that the sole aim of art was the faithful and attractive representation [of nature] ..., [their] vibrant colours, the distortions, the liberties taken in the rendering of natural objects ... all conflicted with the reigning scheme of things. Either the artists concerned were hopelessly incompetent and therefore had no right to show their works at all, or else they were engaged in perpetuating an elaborate joke, designed to make fools of the viewing public (Berman, 1975, p. 53).

The Everard Group - a family of female artists - similarly translated the local landscape into simplified forms, stark colours and undulating rhythms to create boldly abstracted references to their personal impressions of the Eastern Transvaal Highveld.

Many of the Everard landscapes are symbolically defined and decoratively conceived through flat planes of vibrant colour. They too were a nightmarish deviation from the naturalistic imitation that currently underlay much art in South Africa. Everard-Steenkamp's *Komati Pool* (Fig. 5.7), for example, is a violent contrast to the descriptive realism of a contemporary piece (Fig. 5.8) produced by Oerder of a dusty landscape in an equally dusty style. Everard-Steenkamp's image penetrates the details of surface, looks through sand and heat, to reach into the structure of terrain and into the human meaning of place. The painter has used the visual experience to inspire a mind-picture; colour and form are woven in an image that is derived from nature but that reaches beyond descriptive realism. Indeed, her work only moderately expresses the character of place; technique and composition are more outspokenly the basis of her pictorial arrangement of forms such that the image "is to be understood as a formal pattern *imposed upon* nature" (Stein-Lessing, 1961, p. 32). The final impression has more in common with post-Impressionist landscapes from Europe than with the unique identity of the Eastern Transvaal; the re-created environment has a higher status than the real one. In fact, Everard-Steenkamp's image may not be directly identifiable with the scene that inspired it; the view has been heavily clad with subjective garments and is wrapped in the cloak of formal considerations.

The subject of Everard-Steenkamp's painting revolves around the arrangement of line, shape and colour, and the composition relies upon the formal relationship of these elements

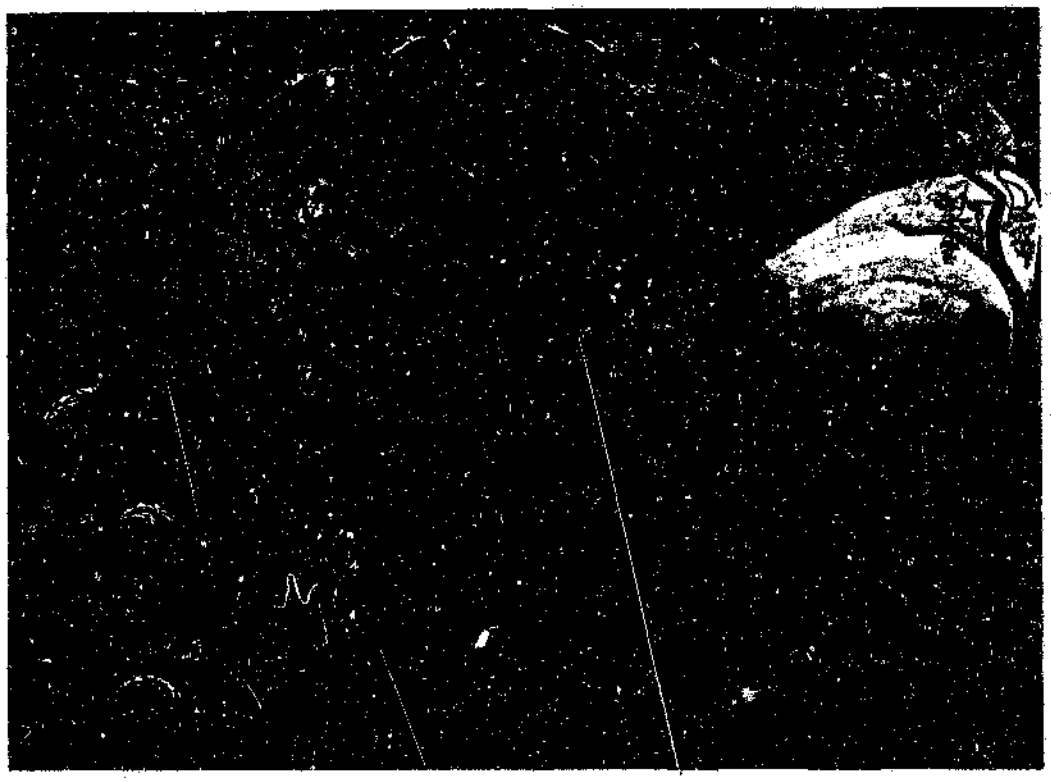


Figure 5.7 Everard-Steenkamp: *Komati Pool*, 1932



Figure 5.8 Oerder: *Landscape Near Pretoria*, c.1933

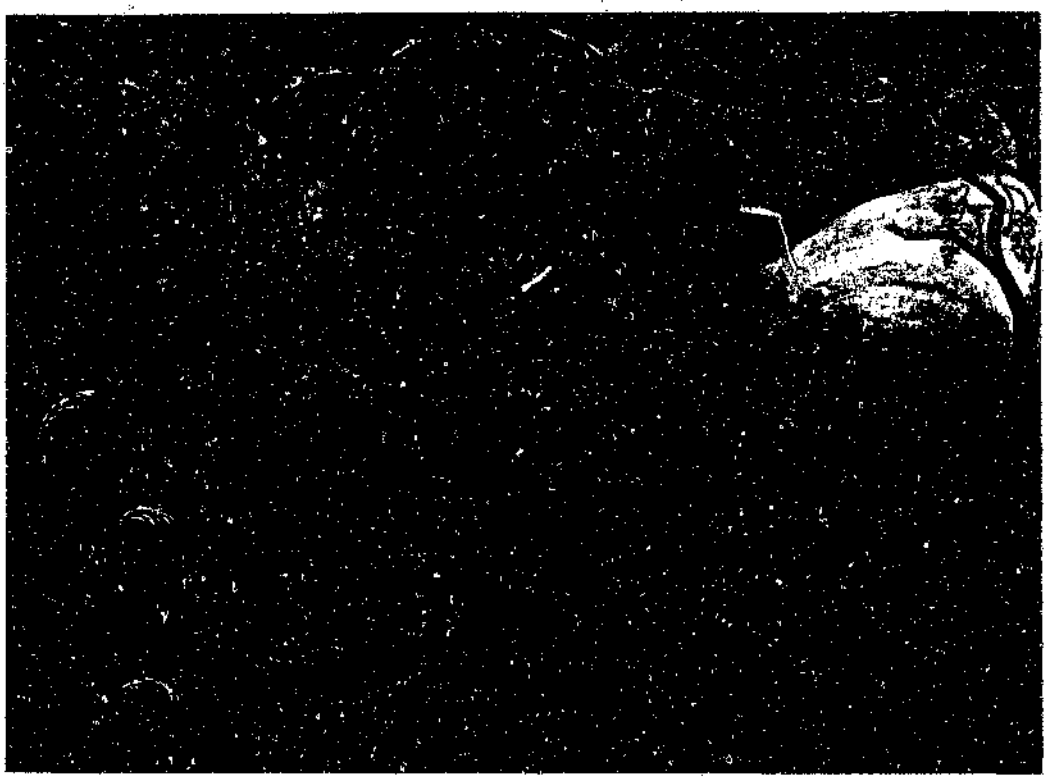


Figure 5.7 Everard-Steenkamp: *Komati Pool*, 1932



Figure 5.8 Oerder: *Landscape Near Pretoria*, c.1933

within the picture frame. The image therefore invites interpretation on a formal level. The vertical brown forms of rock and tree to the sides, and the pyramidal mountain above envelop the blue vibrating pool and sinuous vegetation. They serve as stable boundaries to the undulating forms spanning the distance between them. Form is cradled in a rhythmic dance inside the picture. Balance controls the movement: the blue sky echoes the colour of the pool and red-brown-ochre permeates throughout. Reinforcing the stable arrangement of colour, the shapes are logically composed. A major vertical axis bisects the painting into two equal halves through the tongue of a bar protruding into the water that marks the middle of the image. The apex of the mountain is the centre top, the tree trunk follows the axis down, and it extends through the centre of the shadow to the foliage at the base of the picture. In the horizontal, an axis is less defined, but follows the broad band of darker colour that runs from the rocks on the left, over the shadow in the pool, to the far bank. The painting may relate to nature, but is conceived more for its own, decorative possibilities. Strongly delineated shapes, and especially the intensely defined reflections in the pool, deny space and flatten the painting into a Post-Impressionist image. The painting in fact borders on 'art for art's sake', which overtakes future landscapes of subjective fantasy and technical abstraction. Everard-Steenkamp loved the medium as well as the subject that inspired her work. This is art in the face of enjoyment, in pursuit of attractive effects, under the guise of personal symbolism; it is not art in the name of place.

If expressionistic compositions of subjective birth deny the spirit of the environment by submerging it under the artist's personality and the temper of paint, objective perceptions may dilute it to such a degree as to make it even less recognisable. At least the fauvist colours and individualised designs of Laubser and the Everard Group offer some interpretative commentary on the landscape which, even if they are not universally shared, may be recognisable to some. Indeed, they may even teach people to more sensitive to the aesthetic-decorative qualities of the indigenous environment, as Stein-Lessing (1961) suggests. Alternatives to their deeply felt evocations of the local environment are a bland, insipid, and pitifully humble tribute to nature. Photographers might accomplish the same task in a superior manner. Perhaps the major achievement for place in the early twentieth century was that artists were becoming adept at

faithfully and convincingly evoking regional portraits. The dryness and brightness of the African summer - the troll under the British landscapist's bridge - was a particularly important conquest. In fact, art became the podium for announcing the victory of art over dry heat: reams of paintings captured the arid winter veld, and the Karoo and Namibian scenarios replaced the Cape as the painter's preferred scenes. They provided the correct overall impression: Africa as an empty, dry, inhuman place. Curiously, this not very positive impression of the country is the image that was encouraged and perpetuated by the South African state.

National art manipulates the spirit of place

Pierneef has been described (Harmsen, 1958, p. 118) as "a true South African painter". More than any other individual, he has been endlessly celebrated as a national artist. Hendriks (1959, p. 1) commends him as "a true propagandist of art and of his country, which he taught even his own countrymen to see and appreciate". The artist himself willingly carried the patriotic banner: "Art has to walk with the nation, and to grow with it" (cited in Grosskopf, 1947, p. 23); "You must travel with your own people on the ox-wagon"; "Truly national art has to be born of your own surroundings and your own soil" (cited in Berman, 1974, p. 223). Indeed, the artist is said to have "deliberately checked his personal leaning towards abstract expression" (Grosskopf, 1947, p. 23) so as not to ride too far ahead of his public's taste and capabilities in art. Instead, he limited his conceptions to "easily-appealing decorative form" (Berman, 1974, p. 224) that were capable of communicating the indigenous landscape flavour to a wide audience.

His empathy with the local environment and his love of nature are the basis for the laurels bestowed upon Pierneef:

> During the fifty years of his career as a painter he undertook an endless quest, always experimenting, in an effort to reach the authentic soul of the South African landscape and, especially, to understand the Transvaal veld from the inside and to express its own colours and lines with love and sincerity (Hendriks, 1959, p. 1).

As crusader of a growing national identity, Pierneef necessarily sung the praises of the African environment. His personal view of beauty was condensed into a rationalised and architectural



Figure 5.9 Pierneef: *Th[illegible]loof, Rustenburg*, c.1930

vision of an ordered system in the local environment (Fig. 5.9). The beauties he recorded reside below the distinctive colour and the shapes to which artists before him had alerted and sensitised indigenous eyes; Pierneef drew attention to the country's unique structural character: to the vast geometry of space. To communicate the impression in paint, Pierneef adopted a semi-abstract style.

Although they challenged the descriptive naturalism of the common vision of southern Africa's landscapes, Pierneef's images were not rejected. It was generally felt that the artist had not sacrificed the essential character of the landscape to his artistic impulses (Berman, 1975). Just the opposite: his stylistic deviation from naturalism was seen to be a culmination of his efforts to portray the essence of southern Africa whereby "he gives the most true, the most permanent representation of his land" (Harmsen, 1958, p. 122). Consequently:

> in the Forties and early Fifties, viewers found reassurance in the familiarity of his forms. Moreover, his subject-matter and his viewpoint were essentially South African, and his paintings were welcomed by many of his countrymen as evidence of the growing spirit of national independence which was freeing their culture from its long subservience to the influence of Europe (Berman, 1974, p. 226).

Indeed, Pierneef's landscapes came to dominate South African's images of their country; "For many, his formalized portrayals became the only truthful description of the landscape"; they could never again look at the regions the artist had portrayed "without seeing them subtly transformed into the stylized shapes of Pierneef's personal images" (Berman, 1974, p. 225).

Accepted by the majority as a true expression of the spirit of the country, Pierneef's art embodies the major facets of the iconography of South African landscape that permeated society at the time. As is to be expected, the visual stereotype is one of a hard, angular, even geometrical country reigned over by the relentless sun and equally persistent and severe highveld storms. More importantly, Pierneef's work embodies the inevitable myth of the empty landscape: "there is no sign of human activity in his detached perspectives", Berman (1974, p. 223) observes, "the symbols of life in his silent, ordered world of nature are established in the stylized, isolated forms of trees and other verdure". Coetzee (1991) provides an insightful reading of Pierneef's silent country that can be applied broadly to the output of many of his contemporaries: the empty landscape is interpreted according to its socio-political deceptions and distortions. Particularly under the nationalist government, the empty landscape was used to "establish the Afrikaners' claim to the land, on the basis of the strength of historical justification and divine ordination" (Coetzee, 1991, p. 4). While another local artist, Coetzer, provided the historical foundations for national identity in his epic scenes of the Great Trek and other events which were seen as "proof of the elect status and the pre-ordained exclusivity of the *Boerenasie*" (Coetzee, 1991, p. 5), Pierneef's painted images of the vacant spaciousness of the country sanitised the Afrikaner claim to the land.

Whether or not the political implications of the empty landscape were articulated at the time, Coetzee argues that the connection is "too direct and too persistent to deny" (p. 6). Empty, virgin territory is:

> an invitation, a reassurance and a promise: an invitation to take ownership because landscape is empty and therefore does not belong to anyone; reassuring because its aestheticizing distance means that it is frozen in time - eternally present as an Utopian ideal; a promise because, in its unexplored condition, it is the expectation of riches and potential - the sign of divine election (Coetzee, 1991, p. 6).

Pierneef gave Afrikaners a visual evocation of the illusion they wanted to believe of the land and themselves. The fact that he was commissioned by the state to produce large murals of the southern African landscape - of course, the empty landscape - reinforces the assertion. The empty landscape embraces a political, and essentially colonial need to conquer the land for exclusively white occupation: black habitation in and understanding of the land is ignored in art, and therefore also absent in the public mind (see Pratt, 1985; 1989; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1988). The deafening silence with regards to the reality of place for black people in South Africa speaks loudly in Pierneef's landscapes and those of his white peers. But it positively screams in the equally empty landscapes of black pioneer artists.

Black art mirrors the 'white' landscape

The struggle between humanity and nature that transformed the southern African landscape into the battleground of culture and ideology was not fought by all the country's inhabitants. Whereas the white settler society struggled to cultivate a native vision and a national consciousness on the unfamiliar soils and using the limited resources that the country offered them, black indigenous people had long since come to terms with their environment. Their 'traditional' art is an expression of their spiritual connection and cultural affinity with the landscape; a uniquely African art form that has evolved over decades of environmental interaction. Of course, African interpretations of place could not be promoted as the authentic 'language' for approaching the country by a white society; on the contrary, it had to claim its own impressions to be the legitimate vision of Africa (see Coetzee, 1988). Ironically, white artists - such as Battiss and Preller - adopted traditional motifs in order to achieve a genuinely African statement about place. Although some artists acknowledged black art as a truthful and important representation of the country's character, however, society at large could not (see Alexander and Cohen, 1990). It would accept the symbolic incorporation of African-inspired images into the work of white artists, but ignored black art; the latter was not - indeed it could not - be part of their heritage and their character as a nation. On the contrary, it threatened to expose and therefore to erode the foundations of the emerging national identity.

In accordance with South Africa's segregationist policies, black communities were completely excluded from the process of nation-building: they were and would remain a separate culture; an autonomous nation. Nationalist art which aimed at "giving shape to the myths by which worship of the nation-state is sustained in the minds of the citizens" (Woodcock, 1979, cited in Alexander and Cohen, 1990, p. 17), was designed for a white public and by a white art fraternity, recording the (exaggerated) history of the white people and their limited understanding of place. With citizenship and politics, art and the landscape were considered the exclusive domain of the settler community that had conquered or reconstituted them all. The limited output of landscape art from a growing black urban populace in the mid-twentieth century was in fact nothing more than a reinforcement of the power of white interpretations of place. Pure landscape painting itself is not a traditional theme in Africa; indeed, it relates to an ideological system of wealth through possession (Bermingham, 1986) to which tribal life has no links. Moreover, the leisurely contemplation of aesthetics and the recording of beauty in the picturesque image is an inherently colonial and elitest conception. It had no natural home in Africa until the white settlers imposed it on the landscape though their own art and taught black artists to do the same.

Initially, black artists were encouraged by their (white) patrons to make images of African traditional life and to steer away from the landscape (Alexander and Cohen, 1990). Some, such as Mohl who insisted that "when God made Africa, He also created beautiful landscapes for Africans to admire and paint" (cited in Alexander and Cohen, 1990, p. 15), disregarded the advice. His *Magaliesberg in mid winter* (Fig. 5.10) is comparable to the work of Oerder and Jentsch in its naturalistic handling of the landscape subject. If the detached rendering of an empty landscape is technically competent, in view of the iconographic links discussed above, it is an ideological enigma. Africa is presented as the parched, dusty, but pretty country that the white settlers wished to see - that they had to see - but the author of the vision is not a member of that society. Indeed, it would have better served black interests to expose the myth behind and overturn the colonial interpretation of landscape. Yet, Mohl's image is not an exception: all the early black artists adopted similarly mute and 'white' stances in relation to the southern African environment. Bhengu's (Fig. 5.11) rural idyll reinforces the image of



Figure 5.10 Mohl: *Magaliesberg in Mid Winter*, 1943



Figure 5.11 Benghu: *Homeward Bound*, 1941



Figure 5.12 Salang: *Township Scene*, 1972

contented and anonymous black labour in a pastoral haven. Salang's *Township scene* (Fig. 5.12) introduces a new urban subject and human occupants to the South African landscape genre (anticipating the township art movement), but the sunny colour and quiet, almost sleepy character of the scene washes this image with the same sentimental attractiveness and comfortable familiarity that are found in other paintings. The images are a proclamation of the ideological imperialism under which they were produced. Many artists were exposed to a Eurocentric art education - either at home or abroad - and they swayed to the tastes of a predominantly white audience and market.

The social background and current position of black artists was extremely influential to their landscape imagery. Many of the early practising landscape painters were a direct product of the colonial age - as much so as the white artists. Educated in missionary schools, they were taught to admire the romantic reconstructions of the British landscape school and to formulate images according to picturesque formulae. In much the same way, black literary artists conformed to, and later had to struggle to free themselves from the 'mission-school idiom',

"derived variously from the Bible and from a diet of English literary studies - particularly the Romantic poets" (Chapman, 1981, p. 17). In both instances, their artistic talents separated the black landscapists from their communities as an elite class of professionals. Their privileged position may have aligned them more closely with white society than with their struggling black communities. Of early attempts at writing place from the black perspective, Rive (1982, p. 12) comments that it was:

> imitative of writing by whites ... stilted and banal. The chief motive behind its creation seemed to have been to impress on a patronising White readership the measure of sophistication achieved by the Black author.

The observation applies equally to visual art. Although they addressed some of the absences in the white pictorial impression of southern Africa, black artists filled them with a similarly neutral interpretation of place.

Once the long-entrenched colour prejudice in South Africa was rigidified, codified and implemented by the Afrikaner nationalist government in 1948, a new generation of black artists started to expose the damage wrought in place by a discriminatory and oppressive political system under which they lived and worked. The slum and the inhuman township were documented using journalistic references to their poverty- and dirt-ridden exteriors. Art adopted the diluted political chore of exposing the mess that apartheid had swept under the carpet of 'objective' recordings of vegetation, geomorphology and culture in the landscape. A blemish was highlighted on the previously perfect face of southern Africa in paint; township art picked and squeezed at it until the nation could no longer ignore the eyesore in the middle of their beautiful, silent country. The move may have disrupted the aesthetic eye, but it did little to challenge socio-political reality at the root of the township boil.

Although the task of township art was ostensibly infused with political implications (Verstraete, 1989), few early contributions to the genre actively embraced a protest stance. Township art precede[illegible] is thematically related to resistance art, but it failed to reach the heights of emotional expression that transformed the landscape into a site of struggle for freedom and human dignity after 1976 (de Jager, 1992). Instead, the artists adopted a liberal orientation, compatible with a growing awareness in white society of the socio-economic

position of blacks (see Hart, 1984; Verstraete, 1989; de Jager, 1992). Exposing the effects of apartheid was the basis of a search for passive political changes, particularly by appealing to the conscience of the white community. For whites, however, liberal expression facilitated an apparent alignment with black victims of apartheid without threatening their own security and superiority. They could pass moral judgement on the condition of the townships, sympathise with their occupants, even feel shocked and disgusted by their situation without claiming responsibility for the history, present or future of the black situation in the local landscape. The attitude was sympathetic, but paternalistic.

Popular art and Afrokitsch commercialise the landscape

Township art emerged after the 1950s as the manifestation of an acute awareness of the disadvantaged position of black urban inhabitants in South Africa. Black urban existence was documented in accessible social commentaries. Often etched in hard lines and dark unyielding tones, broken windows, unkempt corrugated iron buildings, roofs held down with stones, the lack of sewerage, garbage, electricity and other facilities are a grim testimony to the hard work-a-day reality in black townships. The extraordinary publicness of life is also recorded: informal street trading, the cultural institution of the shebeen, music and dance, and all variety of urban activities are represented. Though it may fail on socio-political grounds, township art reveals a distinct experience of the environment by black inhabitants of South Africa. In fact, it may be celebrated as "one of the few genuinely original and indigenous art movements to have evolved from the South African soil" (de Jager, 1992, p. 46). Certainly, it exposes a previously hidden dimension of place in its distinctive South African guise.

The visual truth and external focus of national art in South Africa was extended in township art to incorporate individual and community responses to the environment; through its "consistent emphasis upon ... the human situation ... [it] broke ground which had previously been relatively barren in South African art" (Berman, 1975, p. 213; see also de Jager, 1992). Equally new were the negative hues underlying place perception. Resting stylistically on a figurative socio-realism characterised by expressionistic execution, township art evolved an

emphatic and often pessimistic 'art of place' - a clear and coordinated humanistic account of landscape. Dominant themes are the overburdened mother, the exhausted worker and the starving child abandoned in a desolate urban landscape (Verstraete, 1989). Experience is etched into each facet of the environment: faces are usually set in the mould of labour, often enduring rather than enjoying their surroundings; housing provides shelter, but not the safety and the aesthetic pleasures of 'home'. Sihlali's (Fig. 5.13) *Street scene*, for example, extends beyond the record of activities and surroundings to spotlight personal reaction to the environment: the impression is one of dismal monotony, of visual and emotional drudgery. The dull tones and smudged profiles of the painting encapsulate the dreariness of life, and the subdued resignation and weariness of its observer. Across the naturalistic impression of a dirty, everyday scene sweeps the despondent sigh of a spectator accustomed to, yet still mournful of the wretchedness of poverty and its familiarity to township dwellers. Within the very ordinariness of the image echoes the cruel inescapable reality of a lifestyle to which Sihlali's painting bears witness. As with Jentsch, the water colour medium is appropriate for recording the subdued tones of the African scene, but now the colours are drained not by nature, but by the burning reality of poverty and social deprivation.

Not all impressions of township life are shaded with negative tones. Indeed, de Jager (1992, p. 45) asserts that there "is no mood or aspect of township life not reflected". Some artists explored the joyful side of urban existence: the vibrancy and exuberance of thriving communities made up of colourful personalities in happy places. Pemba's portrait of a 'coloured' (categorically and literally) township in Port Elizabeth (Fig. 5.14) is a case in point. The meticulous record of individuals enjoying a summery, free existence are a stark contrast to Sihlali's township portrait. The disjuncture relates less to physical differences between the townscapes than to the way these were perceived by the artists. Pemba records his "irresistible urge to express visually his compassion for life and his fellow beings" (de Jager, 1992, p. 10); his images are a celebration of humanity and of life. Despite disparities in emphasis, each of the two artists in his own way shows a particular sensitivity for the township environment and provides an invaluable 'insider's view' of the townscape as place. Township art represents the perspective of an eye deeply acquainted with, and a spirit sharply responsive to the nuances



Figure 5.13 Sihlali: *Street Scene*, c.1977



Figure 5.14 Pemba: *New Brighton, Port Elizabeth*, 1977

behind the concrete facade of the urban scene. However, like those created by other township artists, Pemba and Sihlali's scenes remained characteristically narrative and descriptive. Moreover, the images do not confront the white conscience: poverty, like the figures in Pemba's image, is exposed but not as an ugly feature of place, and its eyes are diverted away from the viewer. The style too is conservative and compositions are often formal exercises that spiral into the abyss of commercial art that undermines the spirit of place.

Where the source for township images is the existential encounter between the inner and outer worlds and where they are conceived on the back streets of poverty, township art is a unique and valuable experiential resource for the humanistic geographer. Too often, however, the idiom lost its initial vitality and, through stylistic and thematic repetition, was degraded into decorative and stereotyped mannerism, empty of real meaning (Verstraete, 1989). Indeed, many late products of the township movement have been dismissed by local art historians as "mawkish figuration coupled with hasty and superficial execution ... [whose] aim was to make money by winning the sympathies of a white liberal audience and its patronage" (Stadler, 1990, p. 125). Manaka (1987, p. 15) labelled it 'self-pity art'. Insincere motives and poor execution have undoubtedly severely diminished the importance of township art; Verstraete (1989) goes so far as to say that the movement is dead, that it was a particular and impermanent historical moment in the development of South African art. Perhaps too, it was a transitory recognition of the reality of place - that ever-changing entity that reflects not only geography but society and time.

To be fair, township art was no more innocently attuned to place than were the silent landscapes of white art. The liberal spirit dictated the content, and western aesthetic values influenced the style of expression. Catering for their white buyer's preference for a naive vision which was equated with an authentic African perspective on place (Younge, 1988), black artists simply reinforced and further legitimised the power relations chiming constantly through white landscape art. Apart from the moral compromise and cultural infidelity involved in tailoring art for a white market, commercialism generated an insincerity to place. The aim was not to 'speak' place, but to *sell* it. And the most successful idiom for selling it was a non-critical,

non-analytical, immediate and 'popular' vision of the township that avoided, rather than challenged social realities. Farber (1985) aligns township art directly with popular art, that mode of representation (adopted by the mass media as well as the 'fine arts') that cultivates a familiar and accessible image of the environment which appeals to a lazy audience cowering from difficult realities such as those written in the landscape. In its evasion of confrontational issues, such art preserves the sense of false security of a bourgeois market, easing its conscience and its fears. Popular art is deceptive; as a vehicle of escapism and distraction, it reflects the self-deception of its audience.

'Kitsch' is a provocative label for imagery produced in pursuit of material gain and consumed for pleasure or escape. In the era between their country's colonial beginnings and resistance art of the late 1970s, various artists portraying southern Africa's landscapes layed the foundations for the modern industry of 'Afrokitsch'. The sentimental scenes of Cape Dutch houses, Jacaranda trees, cosmos and empty landscapes (Fig. 5.15), as well as busy township scenes (Fig. 5.16) are zombies of their predecessors, revived without souls, like so many traditional arts which are now curios for the tourist trade. Both black and white artists produce easy likenesses of place using predetermined themes and styles - 'easy' for the producer who merely imitates and for the consumer who can enjoy them without becoming involved in the landscape (either real or re-created). The dominance of realism in popular art itself speaks of the lethargy underlying the creation and appreciation of art: imagery that operates on a purely visual level invites unreflective enjoyment as it predigests the subject and spares both artist and patron the effort of interpretation. Place becomes a habit of viewing, reinforced through socio-cultural networks (Farber, 1985). In South Africa, the fact that the state has for long controlled the major mass communications media, the education systems and artistic creativity means that the ideology of landscape was tailored not only by real needs and desires to avoid the realities connected to place, but also in an active effort to hide them.

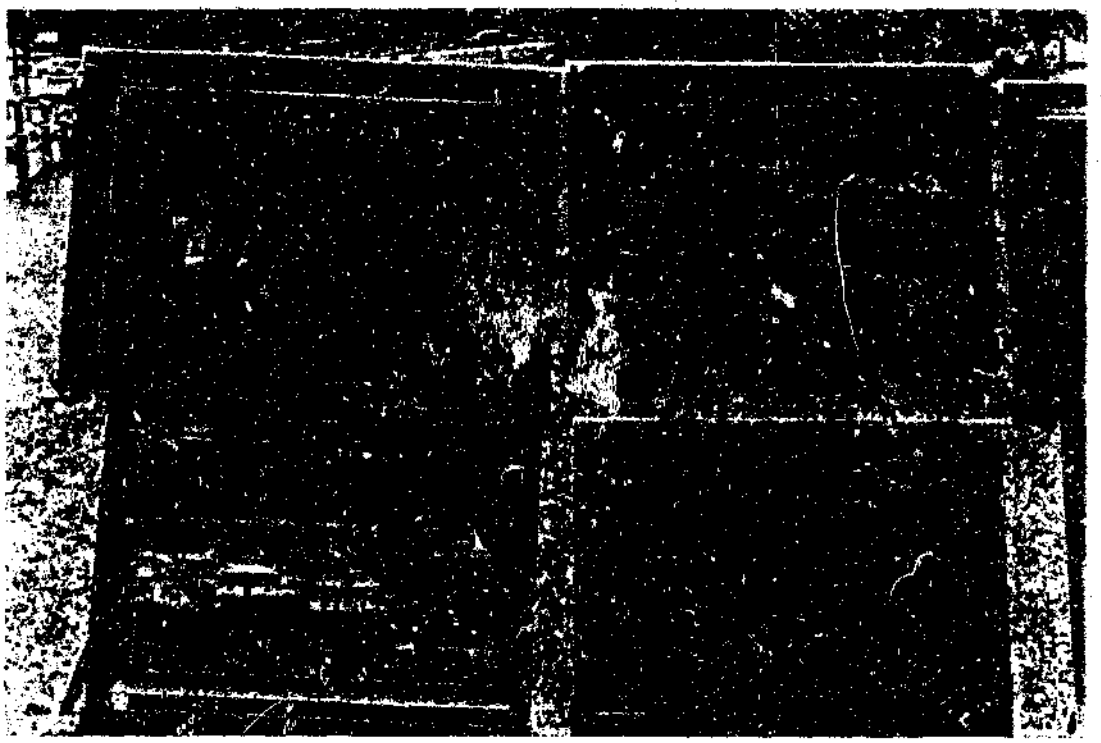


Figure 5.15 Local artist's market: popular landscape views, 1993

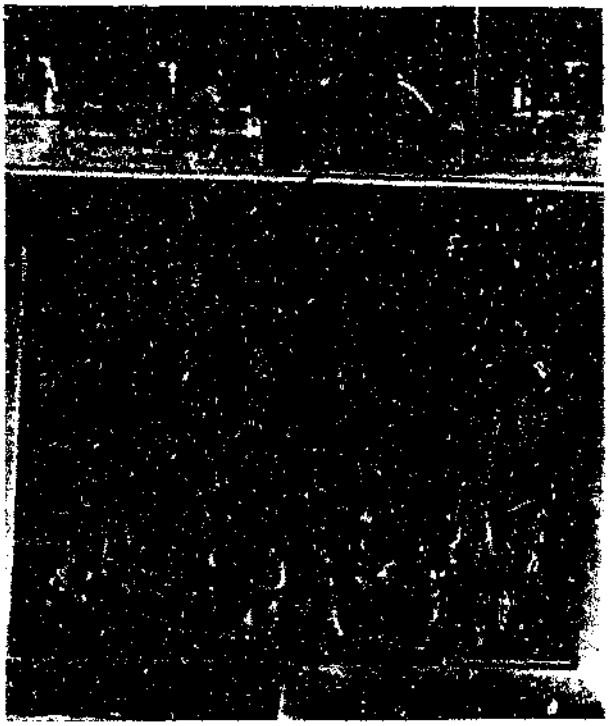


Figure 5.16 Local artist's market: typical township scene, 1993

Skirting the spirit of place

Importing artistic techniques, emptying the landscape to justify nationalism, or beautifying it to hide blemishes and to sell it to a lazy, fearful public all lead away from the spirit of place. Borrowing from Europe or catering to a market did not automatically exclude artists from the maturing and growing family that Africa held to her bosom. Yet, her children's hearts had to be involved in the land or they would remain estranged from the country. Wenning, for example "refused to surrender himself to Africa. He repeatedly protested that he was a Hollander and remained a painter of the Dutch School to the end" (Battiss, 1960, p. 8). Sekoto painted African life from Paris where, inevitably, his work "acquired an idealized quality ... influenced and modified ... by his Parisian environment, and a less than precise memory of Africa" (de Jager, 1992, p. 6). Modern popular artists are callous about their motives for painting place: "I used to do art", one of them pondered, "but it doesn't sell, you know". So, they take orders from patrons who decide which signs (as distinct from 'symbols') of Africa they want painted in which colours and arrangement. Now, the southern African landscape takes on the form which best fits in with the size of a dining room and the shade of upholstery. It is merely the subject matter that distinguishes art as South African. And the distinction is insufficient. Place is raped by those who appreciate only its superficial features without concern for what lies beneath, without consideration of the spirit of the land.

In the first half of the twentieth century, South African artists learned to etch a close likeness of the country's face. However, they failed to express the spirit of southern Africa that relates to more dynamic realities gushing beneath its surface. Indeed, one of the greatest recognised values of the early works lies with their artistic achievement: they "contributed significantly to the development of South African art" (Be[illegible], 1974, p. 4). In addition, they helped to define a relationship between a people and their land - not a marriage of equality and mutual inter-connectivity, but a courtship that bred understanding. Embedded deep within the nationalist tradition, however, are blatant untruths - lies about the nature of South African people, distortions of place. In the silences of the pictorial texts, there are realities that relate fundamentally to the distinctive character of southern Africa - the truth of labour exploitation, racial segregation, expropriation of land, environmental degradation, urban slums and

pollution, political violence. By ignoring the scars that such menacing socio-political realities have left on the face of the country, South African artists simultaneously overlook the rifts that they have torn into its soul. The spirit of place not only embraces the country of the imagination, the idealistic landscape that a nation would like to inhabit and feels safe to hang on its walls; it is also influenced by the ugly realities that the nation would rather forget and that it tries to mask in its art.

Art produced under and around the spirit of nationalism in South Africa embraces an important didactic task: it tries to teach the country's inhabitants to love their country. It builds a home for a people by identifying a unique and predominantly positive identity for southern Africa as place. To achieve this, however, the artists found it necessary to focus exclusively on the external features of the environment. The result has geographical value as a record of cultural and physical features and transitions, and it offers a colourful regionalism of southern Africa. But it does not embrace the full flavour of the place. Where is the wretched poverty that blocks the veins of the South African township like cholesterol, the uncomfortable cramps of overcrowding that contort its body, the filth that stains its face and crushes its soul; what of the the laughing exuberance of a child-like First World city tickled by the celebrations winding across its streets, the uncertainty of impending riots that stop its breath in a quiet hesitation, the panic that quickens to match the tempo of racing police vehicles and gathering crowds that threaten to tear open its very heart? These are the qualities that make southern Africa unique - they are probably its most significant traits, for they contribute to its personality. They are therefore fundamental to the spirit of this place.

CHAPTER 6

FROM SILENT TO VIOLENT LANDSCAPES

> What lies at the centre of this dazzling and tumultuous place? Piles of concrete, canyon streets, a never-ending charge of traffic, a sense of energy which too often turns out to be nothing more than a sour and feverish restlessness. And beneath these things? Perhaps only money and fear (from *Wasteland*, Robbins, 1987, p. 83).

In the course of his determined search for the essence of Johannesburg, Robbins becomes increasingly convinced that the spirit of the city lies beyond its physical exterior. The 'chaos of straight lines' in the city centre (p. 224), the 'grey-yellow mine dumps, beneath a fierce conglomeration of pylons and wires' (p. 3), 'hundreds of suburbs and satellite towns ... and intestinal-looking interchanges' (p. 3) are only the bare framework of the place. Stretched over and packed between the skeleton of physical features is a dense body of human impressions and experiences, illusions and dreams. It is the pulse of emotion, the muscle of intention, that give life to the city; without them, Johannesburg would be a corpse lying unattended on the African highveld. So it is with all landscapes, in southern Africa and elsewhere. Humanity cannot be ignored in evoking the spirit of place. People are fundamental to *genius loci*; place exists through them.

Qualitative material harbours humanistic insights into the world framed according to attitudes, circumstances and motives. Through direct confrontation with Johannesburg and some of its people, Robbins uncovered "the problem of mobility, the possibility of theft, and above all the potential danger of the Black townships" (p. 5) as primary feelings texturing the white resident's experience of the city. Western (1982) identified a similar fear at the human roots of another of South Africa's major urban centres, Cape Town. Like the geographer, the artist works from first-hand interaction with the environment and may record the distortions infusing personalised visions of place. Ngwenya's *Black, blue and broke* (Fig. 6.1), for example, provides a picture of the urban centre from the perspective of an African 'outsider' to the place. Physical signs of urbanism, such as telephone poles, smoke stacks, and an horizon that scrapes the sky with a thick brush of hard buildings, are interlaced with individualised symbols of experiential place. Alcohol, cigarettes, an emaciated hand, and an empty plate, speak of



Figure 6.1 Ngwenya: *Black, Blue and Broke*, 1980



Figure 6.2 Catherine: *Animal Instincts*, c.1985

emotional and social deprivation. The sombre tone and harsh line of the drawing echo the mood of solitude and melancholy etched in the heavy, drawn face of the subject. The topophobic vision of an alienating, depressing city extends beyond the objective world to document the thoughts and emotions that imbue personal geographies.

Emotions, symbols and personal interpretation dye the very fibres of place; they are its heart, the core of its being. Statistics, graphs and tables, and the detached monotonous drone of academic formality cannot hope to uncover and adequately communicate this human content of the landscape. Likewise, paintings that simply record surface appearances are more useful to the scientist than to the scholar of place; perhaps the physical geographer might still scan them for evidence of vegetation patterns or climatic change, if photographs did not offer superior evidence of these. Art (including the art of geography) should be "the expression of a deep personal commitment to one's own private vision, of a total sense of identification with the actual experience of one's own life", Verster (1979, cited in Alexander and Cohen, 1990, p. 22) concluded in his interesting questioning of whether there was a South African art or if this was still to happen. Denying subjective response inevitably negates truthfulness to the subject, as well as to the self; when applied to the landscape by both geographers and artists, objectivity and preconceived formulae for viewing overwhelm the personality of place.

By imposing intellectual purpose and detached perception in pursuit of a general impression of a subject that creates an easy, comfortable likeness, national art and popular art tends to overlook the internal and essential character of the environment. Landscape images are mug-shots if they are taken for the singular and narrow purpose of recording exterior detail; they cannot be sensitive portraits of place. Both geography and art have the potential for a more significant relationship with landscape: at their best, they illuminate the human-environment interface in an evocative, inspiring and direct manner. Catherine's impression of the city environs (Fig. 6.2) is a colourful declaration of the human encounter with place as it is experienced on a personal level. The visual onslaught of a mass of urban images - tin cans, wire fencing, faces, buildings - is very different in formal terms from Ngwenya's melancholic piece, yet both refer to the human meaning of place. Catherine

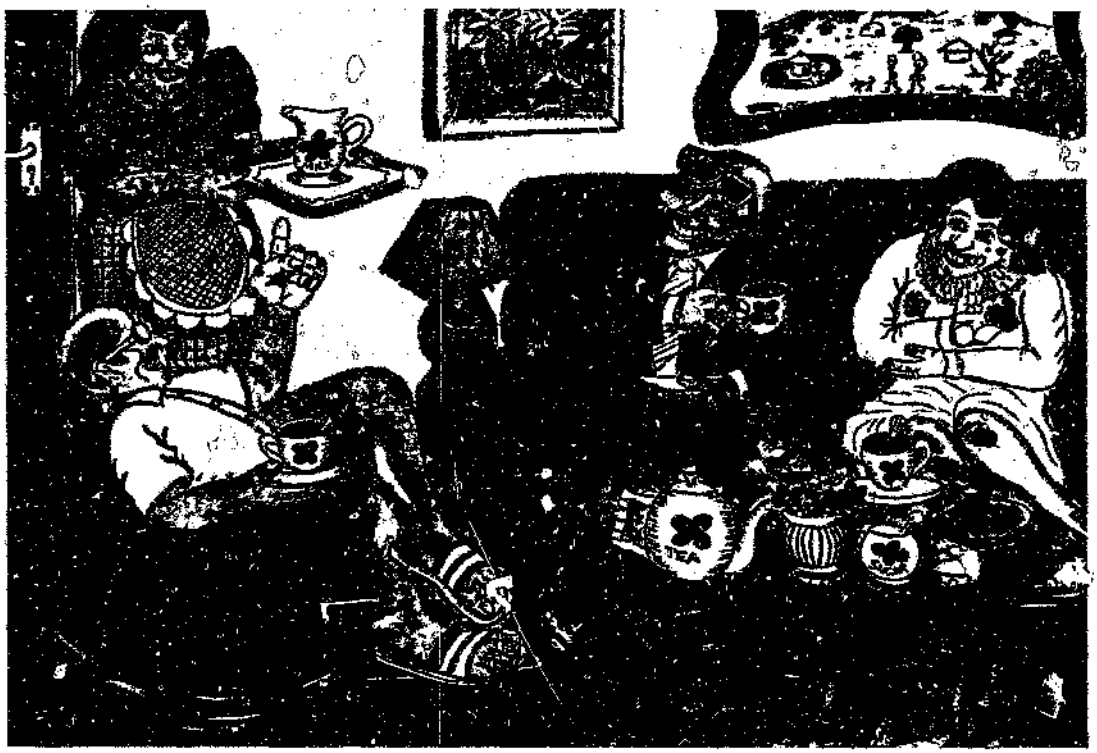


Figure 6.3 Motswai: *The Tea Party*, 1987

records a tightly-packed urban jungle; he uses "visual clutter to infuse raw energy into his composition, to amplify his ideas in a cacophony of visual noise" (Alexander and Cohen, 1990, p. 159). And the image screams its message directly at the spectator: there is no escaping the noisy, busy disorder of the city scene. Here is the metropolitan experience incarnate. This is the art of place.

The possibility for recording the human significance of place through art is particularly relevant for modern artists who no longer deny socio-political realities and their human consequences, but seek instead the most appropriate means of recording them. Moreover, spurred by an apprehension of new realities and new alternatives that has grown rapidly since the 1960s, artists have marked (and simultaneously helped bring about) the end of an era dominated by confident assumptions about the civilising role of English society and culture in southern Africa. A fundamental element in the transition has been the rewriting of the ideology of landscape. Place has been re-'thought' to coordinate it with the disjointed worldview and discontentment of the masses rather than with the summary equation of

landscape with possession and conquest proposed by an elite. The empty beautiful landscape is avoided as a bourgeois conception infused with warped bourgeois values and - especially in South Africa - blatant racist connotations. Motswai's inclusion of a conventional landscape painting in his satire on middle-class white existence (Fig. 6.3) blatantly ridicules the vogue for naturalistic images of the environment. The rejection makes way for a more politicised and evocative understanding of the spirit of place.

Beyond superficiality, towards a symbol of Afr' a

The middle of the twentieth century marks a swing in perception among many inhabitants and interpreters of southern Africa. Specifically, the post-colonial mood of the country led to a questioning of previously-accepted dominant white ideologies relating to the landscape - both real and artistic. The spirit of questioning prefigures the revolutionary rage that has emerged subsequently through the impetus of the black consciousness movement and a general resistance initiative. Chapman (1981, pp. 23-24) identifies a modern 'sense of new alternatives' which is connected to an 'altered apprehension of reality' and which asserts itself as 'a deeply felt awareness of beginnings and endings'. The tensions of re-adjustment texture local art in all its forms, infusing not only the content, but also the style of artistic impressions of place.

The need to re-imagine life and the landscape in southern Africa are symbolically manifest in a crisis of representation. Horn, a local poet, explores the inadequacies of an inherited artistic medium which is a servant to, rather than critic of society and its ideologies:

in purple shirt and orange tie
I the accredited clown
to this ailing society
am allowed to tell you a few truths
and similar nonsense

so listen you christened dung-heaps!
I will lie for you
everything: I can invent: everything ...

Don't tell me
'We live in
particularly bad times'
the poet always was a pimp
providing alibis for those
that seduce:
eyes persuaded to be blind.

(from *The poet as a clever invention*, cited in Chapman, 1981, pp. 281-82).

Not only his words, but the very style of Horn's poem implies a rejection of conventional formulae for approaching and depicting reality: Horn "deliberately denies the validity of imaginative richness and insists instead on a ... use of plain language as the only effective means of confronting social injustices. Metaphor and mask are felt to be bourgeois-inspired evasions of the true economic and political realities of South Africa" (Chapman, 1981, p. 25). Visual artists, similarly concerned to penetrate beneath superficial realities to explore southern Africa as a realm of meaning, have also adopted new modes of landscape representation.

A tepid version of the search for more legitimate visual expressions of southern Africa is found in the work of the 'symbolists'. Politically mute, the art produced by this innovative group of local artists (led by Battiss, Preller and Higgs) represents an early recognition that the true spirit of Africa lies beyond the continent's visual exterior and that it therefore cannot be pictorially captured using descriptive realism. Rather than dwelling on the poetic beauties (grandeur, sublimity, wilderness, emptiness) of the landscape and describing the southern African scene in descriptive, largely romantic scenes that satisfy the casual and sentimental eye, these artists sought a more universal, meaning-ful interpretation of landscape. They strove to capture 'African-ness' in summaries - or symbols - of the indigenous terrain and its people. In 1958, Harmsen (p. 178) was impressed by the inclusive nature of their work:

> They attempt to re-create the individuality of the entire problem which is South Africa. They attempt to incorporate both the landscape and the varied elements found in it into a symbol [or symbols] for their emotional attitude to Africa - an attitude which is reflected by such terms as colourful, harsh, flamboyant, enigmatic, haughty, primitive, savage ...

Motivated by the persistent desire to capture a distinct identity for southern Africa, the artists turned to pre-colonial African societies and appropriated traditional motifs into their own work; Battiss studied and raided San culture, for example, while Preller focused on the Ndebele. A more decorative and modern extension of their initiatives is found in Arnold's (Fig. 6.4) *Mountains*. The heat and harshness of the local environment are implicitly expressed through colour and line, instead of through direct evidence in the landscape. Moreover, the artist incorporates symbols of Africa to locate her landscape geographically, rather than external references to a specific place.



Figure 6.4 Arnold: *Mountains*, 1986

The white artist's adoption of elements of tribal design have been criticised as a means of establishing their own African identity and thereby denying their colonial origins (Ozynski, 1979, cited in Alexander and Cohen, 1990, p. 21). The argument is that such art serves to alleviate the burden of historical baggage and to quell a tide of white conscience by ignoring exploitation and repression and appealing instead to a common root for whites and blacks in the land. Nonetheless, primitivism was - and continues to be - a route to something uniquely African, both in art and in the subjects represented, and it has provided many people in southern Africa with a basis for a unified national identity. Whereas Pierneef and his contemporaries possibly provide the most typical *visual* experiences of southern Africa, the symbolists convey africaneity; they penetrate the surface to uncover the roots of the country's identity.

Whereas descriptive realism is bounded by locality and perhaps requires previous knowledge of the landscape presented before paintings can be adequately understood, symbolism is a universal language (Harmsen, 1958). Applied to portraits of place, it may be

able to communicate to a broader audience. Alternatively, as Alexander and Cohen (1990) suggest, the universality of what amounts to primitivism in many works may in fact negate the very African-ness of the images, aligning them with artistic traditions in Europe rather than with the reality of the local environment. As an intellectual solution to the problem of representing the country, furthermore, symbolism may be more expressive of personal and artistic interests than of the spirit of place. In the final analysis, Preller, Battiss, Arnold and other symbolists undoubtedly capture *an* essence of Africa, but they hardly convey what it feels like to be living here. Perhaps the greatest failure of symbolic representations of southern African landscapes for the researcher of place lies in their common inability to capture the socio-political climate that is so fundamental to the experience of the country, and therefore to its personality. Their images are caricatures, interesting summaries of place, but no more 'realistic' in terms of experience than are descriptive portraits in the national mode.

Abstracting externalities to view the spirit of place

If symbolism embraces a general view of Africa's personality implicitly in its content, modern stylistic idioms - particularly abstraction - present the fragmented and disrupted spirit of the country that is surely its most prominent trait at present. Aware of the socio-political content of the southern African environment, artists in the modern era have infused their landscapes with the potent and undeniable flavour of a precarious existence that haunts both its black and its white inhabitants. Reconceptualising place in this context, Kentridge portrays various man-made landscapes around Johannesburg as a disconcerting stage for an uncertain and unstable existence (eg. Fig. 6.5). The absence of people in a landscape that has obviously been constructed by and for them immediately unnerves the viewer; it recalls uncomfortable experiences of being locked in an empty shopping centre, working in an office after-hours or perhaps walking around a university at night. The response is psychological; the painting speaks directly to the preconscious geographical impulses that humanistic geography explores. Uneasiness tilts towards fear; the temptation is to look over one's shoulder although, unfortunately, in confronting the painted image, there is no hope of finding out what lies behind. The only hope is escape, but Kentridge has deserted the spectator in a seemingly

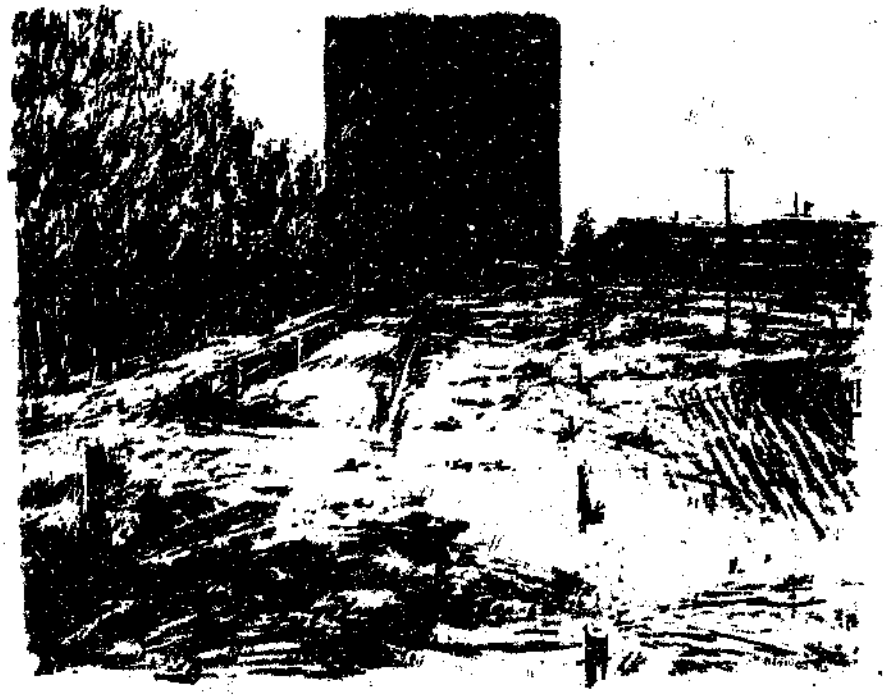


Figure 6.5 Kentridge: *Near Soccer City*, c.1990



Figure 6.6 Atkinson: *White African Landscpe*, 1982

endless space - perhaps he even enjoyed it. There is no refuge here, and certainly no comfort in the emptiness of landscape. The artist has inverted the ideology of the vacant Eden and presents instead an anti-garden. This is the urban wilderness.

By refusing spectators their usual comfortable relationship with the scene, Kentridge undermines the common foundations of place awareness. Many ordinary viewers of his work may simply refuse to acknowledge it, for the disorientation and sense of alienation, with regards both the re-created and the real landscape, destroy inherited tastes for the picturesque (in a general sense) scene. In fact, Kentridge denies the 'tranquilisation' of viewing that Pierneef, Volschenk, Jentsch and the township artists promoted - the removal of any need for interpretative, critical involvement with place as subject of art and, implicitly, as environment for existence. The same end is achieved, using different means, by abstract art. Here, it is the accessibility of descriptive realism that is overthrown. Atkinson's (Fig. 6.6) *White African landscape* exemplifies the work of this school in South Africa. Highly textured and brightly coloured, the canvas is energised into a dynamic scene of luminosity and contrast that play over a multitude of brush strokes. Instead of simply describing the physical features of landscape, such as trees, grass, flowers, path and sky, Atkinson suggests these as a vague backdrop to a picture about the meaning and the mood of place.

It may appear that Atkinson's work, as with any abstract image, is primarily a formal painterly exercise wherein the landscape is used merely as a foundation for exploring expression through the medium (see Alexander and Cohen, 1990). Yet, the very style of representation conveys a message about the landscape. Chapman (1981, p. 26) comments on the applicability of the modernist vocabulary of local artists to their situation. He refers specifically to contemporary literary artists who - like abstract painters - build ambiguity and indeterminacy into the very structure of their poetry or prose:

> This in itself says something about contemporary South African social reality: here we have a white man, caught in a landscape in transition, aware of the inevitable movement of change yet fearful of an uncertain future.

Atkinson is the epitome of the 'white man', and his painting is a testimony to his uneasy relationship with the land.

Intellectually, abstraction embodies the recognition by artists that the conventions favoured by a previous generation are inadequate to portray a seemingly indeterminate and fragmented world. Art has become a medium for questioning the legitimacy, and mocking the continued use of out-dated artistic traditions. More importantly, it is a forum for the expression of mounting social unease and a crisis of culture associated with this questioning of interpretative norms. Contextualising abstraction in the current socio-political environment exposes a deeper meaning in landscapes written in modernist vocabulary: abstraction is not merely adopted by artists as an aesthetic theory with particular formalist principles, rather it is "a necessary means of coping with their own disturbing perceptions of psychological and cultural crisis" (Chapman, 1981, p. 25). Chaos in the medium echoes a chaotic world; urgency of vision reflects an anxiety in the spirit. Returning to Atkinson's landscape (Fig. 6.6) in the light of South Africa's socio-political realities, the viewer must be struck immediately by the unsettled, and unsettl*ing* character of the image.

A turbulent sky presses down on a tormented field. The heat of Africa indicated in the vibrant yellows and reds now refers as much to the searing tension that burns its social terrain as it does to the country's physical climatic dimension. The imposing blue mass may suggest an impending doom, but the threat stems as much from humanity as from nature. The red pathway through the centre of Atkinson's world offers his audience a route into the painting, but does not suggest refuge in the landscape to comfort the traveller (see Appleton, 1975). Rather, the mangled bush might hide dangers, a promise that is reiterated by the sky that warns of a storm to come. There is a prospect, however, that might entice a traveller to traverse the landscape despite its ominous character. Is it hope that shimmers in a yellow mass on the horizon, or merely a mirage suspended above the heat of battle and racial tension? It is up to the white African to decide whether to persevere or to abandon the journey through a country with so much danger and so uncertain a future. Atkinson's landscape is born of an imagination in touch with the mood of southern Africa and the rising insecurity and paranoia of a white populace. The painting dramatises the growing anxiety experienced by an alienated individual trapped in a turbulent world. Indeed, it is a 'White African landscape'.

Alexander and Cohen's (1990, p. ^) assertion that abstract art tends to be "safely and ostensibly free of any historical or social issues beyond the artist's own seismic brush strokes" is clearly based on a superficial reading of the abstract image. In fact, the issue of legitimacy for abstract art within the specific local social context is not one of content, but rather of accessibility. It is not the artist's ignorance of socio-political realities in the landscape that incites criticism, but the fact that the popular viewer will probably be unable to understand the implications embedded in a complex and ambiguous artistic medium. At times, formal artistic considerations seem to surpass geographical implications, both in the manufacture and the interpretation of artworks. The result, in fact, is the opposite extreme of imagery that denies place by submerging it under imposed intellectual schemas to produce a superficial likeness of the landscape. Here, personal involvement is intense, yet the artist's personality and the external features of the art 'as artwork' tend to dwarf the character of place; the image is reduced (or elevated) to a personal and inaccessible fantasy.

In their retreat from appearances, abstract artists are in danger of simultaneously hiding the autonomous truth of the environment, masking *genius loci* with a veneer of illegibility that encourages audiences to interpret the landscape by - and also for - themselves. Although it invites intellectual involvement from the spectator, the fluidity of meaning inherent to abstraction often fails to challenge predetermined visions of place resident within its audience. Escapism is encouraged by the very ambiguity of the images: virtually any interpretation is valid. Moreover, in the interests of public understanding, recognisable subjects are arguably a more satisfactory means of communicating the truth of place even though abstract expressions may be a superior means of exploring them alone. Red blobs and swirls of blue and green may refer to an external situation, but for the masses, they hardly convey it in a coherent and persuasive manner. By contrast with the ambiguity of abstraction, both in terms of content and method, the immediacy of much contemporary black art directly confronts its audience with the shocking and blatant reality of a landscape tainted by poverty and suffering, and wracked with violence and protest. Realism has been adopted as an appropriate and authentic style of representation for recording the truth of the local situation for black people, both as subjects and, more recently, as viewers of art. It extends, in the context of mid-century

protest art and post-1976 black consciousness art, beyond exposing the socio-economic realities of apartheid that township art exposed, to the cultural purpose of conscientising and politicising a popular audience.

Socio-political fuel kindles an art of resistance

Contemporary southern Africa is alight with anticipation and hope. Yet, the fire of hatred, anger and conflict is stronger and has burnt for longer. Many South African cities have felt the searing heat of political unrest and police brutality, and the apathy of their inhabitants has melted in the blaze. The flames that left Soweto smouldering in 1976 must be seen especially as a turning point (Chapman, 1981; Williamson, 1989; Sole, 1991): running battles left hundreds dead or wounded and, more importantly, shocked a generation of black and white South Africans out of their lethargy. The bloody red glow in the background of Thoba's (Fig. 6.7) *1976 Riots* communicates this heat, and his figures recall the pain and suffering that was inflicted, mainly on students engaged in peaceful protest. This work, representative of a prominent theme of protest in township art and indicative of its escalating association with the black consciousness movement, implicitly marks a transition in all South African thinking: in their own way, every citizen responded to the reality of socio-political tensions that could no longer be ignored after the Soweto riots. The year 1976 is a watershed in artistic activity too. Williamson (1989, pp. 8-9) comments on the shift:

> Before 1976, a trip round South African art galleries would have given very little clue to the socio-political problems of the country. Strangely divorced from reality, landscapes, experiments in abstraction, figure studies and vignettes of township life hung on the walls ... In the years to come, there would be a growing realisation amongst anti-apartheid forces [and artists] that cultural resistance was a tool of immense power ... [a tool for] bringing about change.

From this time onward, the southern half of Africa would be home to an art of resistance.

Central to the modern phase of southern Africa's art history is its relationship with progressive organisations, trade unions and anti-apartheid forces in general (Younge, 1988; Williamson, 1989). The link underscores the pivotal role of art to protest and, conversely, of protest to contemporary local art. T-shirts, posters, murals, banners, plays, songs, and other forms of cultural expression are integral to the contemporary mass struggle against political

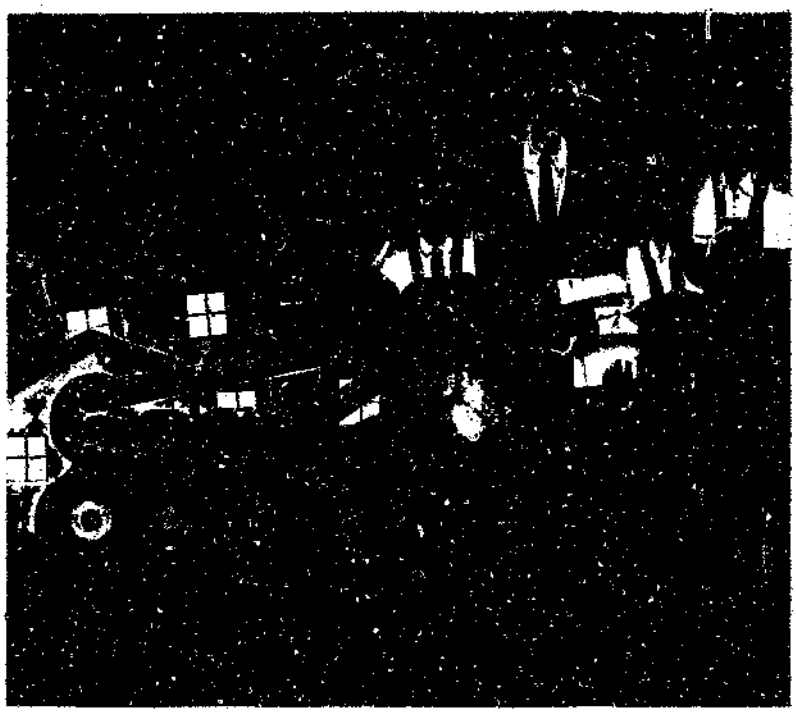


Figure 6.7 Thoba: *1976 Riots*, 1977

circumstances in the country. Painting, sculpture, prose and poetry have similarly raised the banner of resistance; the fine arts have united with popular culture. Indeed, conventional aesthetic aims have been submerged under the new indigenous incentive for producing art:

> the promise of art as a form of human communication which is visually, emotionally and, at the very least, intellectually satisfying, has been side-lined by the urgency of a social and political situation where children are detained, parents shot and collaborators burned (Younge, 1988, p. 10).

Formal compositional and aesthetic considerations are now less important to much artistic endeavour than are the expression of human experience and the declaration of a culture of resistance and violence. Mzamane (1978, p. 42), recognising the pervasiveness of politics in daily life and the need to convey this in art, commented that the local artist is "unimportant, irrelevant and probably alienated unless he is political. Art and politics in South Africa ... have become inseparable". Answering the demands of social relevance, artists have increasingly thrust evidence of socio-political forces to the forefront of painted and poetic landscapes, as awkward and conspicuous, but inevitable features of place, where before they lurked in the shadows - in the silences - of re-created geographical space.

Artistic representations of the prevailing atmosphere of insecurity, fear, disillusionment, and violence in southern Africa vary considerably, both in their technical style and in their approach to the subject. Some are realistic, others border on expressionism; while many simply expose a warped social structure, some attack it. Teale (1988) allies the latter distinction in South African art with race: she suggests that white artists are currently engaged in active social criticism, but that there is comparatively little by way of a potent and direct polemical black art in the country. Indeed, much black African art embraces the relatively unsophisticated task of documenting the impact of exploitation and suppression rather than criticising these in a parody of their makers. Limited and westernised art education that constituted a 'cultural vacuum' (Sole, 1991), coupled with an African tradition in naturalistic imagery may be at the roots of the absence. State censorship, which occasioned the banning of work and the imprisonment and exile of artists (see Gordimer, 1963), has probably been even more effective in destroying an artistic expression of protest:

> They don't like music in prison
> so they banned Dennis Brutus' poems
> and Wopko Jensma's poems
> and Breyten Breytenbach's poems
> and Wally Serote's poems
> and Sipho Sepamla's poems ...
> and my own poems
> They hate music and poems
> and pictures and statues
> they have cleaned out the country
> there is silence between its bare walls
> cleaned by the vultures
>
> (from Horn, *Silence in Jail*, cited in *Staffrider* , 1979, 2 (1), p. 5).

Yet, even realistic recordings of the deprivation, hardships and emotional burdens imposed on many Africans represent a form of protest. If protest is part of the spirit of place, it will find a home in the art produced by a country's inhabitants. To find the reference, it may be necessary to look beyond obvious symbols of resistance, however. Particularly for black artists, often the very style of expression is an act of defiance against traditional conceptions of art and landscape.

Intense and concentrated expressive artistic language in the form of realistic-descriptive imagery can be a route towards naturalising ideologically charged and warped interpretations of place. For black artists, however, the style is felt to be consistent with the message of protest they carry - a message that demands a 'language of urgency' to convey it: "we have got an

urgent message to deliver", Mtshali (1976, p. 127), tells his fellow artists, "We have not got the time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments ... and a lofty style". The 'message' revolves around black consciousness around "the need for black unity in the face of apartheid, the need for political and psychological liberation and self-reliance among black people, ... [and a] rediscovery of history and culture, so long denigrated by dominant white ideologies" (Sole, 1991, p. 179):

> We will have to *dor* r [smash] conventional literature, old fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to [illegible] spit and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have got to say. Because we are in search of our true selves - undergoing self-discovery as a people (Mutloatse, 1981, p. 5).

Realism does not preclude an art of resistance; on the contrary, it is the medium and the foundations for an effective expression of protest. Apart from conscientising a black audience, the blatant recording of injustices nourished by apartheid forces a white public to acknowledge and take (or place) responsibility for the harsh realities they expose so clearly as the result of socio-political factors. In southern Africa, contemporary black art is inherently an art of resistance, and realism is an appropriate medium for portraying a landscape of protest, an environment in turmoil, a place rapidly being inundated by the avalanche of a culture of violence.

Alternative histories and innovative readings of place

Adjustments to the local landscape brought about by a charged political atmosphere, itself inspired by the struggle for freedom, are taking place all over the visible environment: walled and electric-fenced white suburbs rub shoulders with burnt-out shacks of informal settlements and bullet-pitted hostels. The change is perhaps more marked in the public mind: perceptions of South Africa have shifted considerably, and local art matches the move. The painted landscape is no longer idealised to cater to conventional aesthetic demands for peaceful beauty. Instead, it is used as a means of questioning accepted understandings of place in a direct challenge to the conscience of a white society that for long submerged realities conflicting with its own needs. Indeed, an important component in revisualising the landscape involves subverting these previous interpretations; the 'politics of representation' - the politics of art itself - must be exposed, dominant white patriarchic accounts of history evicted, and



Figure 6.8 Grendon: *Ons Vir Jou, Suid Afrika*, 1985

alternatives proposed. History is a rich resource for the artist (and the geographer - see Crush, 1992) in southern Africa for past interpretations of the landscape are so obviously biased and eurocentric that they invite mockery and disbelief. Consequently, colonialism, nationalism and all their attendant myths and revered heroes and events have become a common subject for contemporary artists.

The violent upheaval of history in Grendon's twelve-metre long painting (Fig. 6.8) that questions the roots of South African identity, has assured his status as a resistance artist (see Williamson, 1989). The country's national anthem and flag offer a broad unifying theme, infusing the work with a cynical flavour as patriotism is clearly criticised for its blindness to exploitation. Grendon claims to document "the real effects of the arrival of the various colonising forces" (cited in Williamson, 1989, p. 12), and the picture is grim. A foreign ship

is laden with weapons of all description, including the chains of slavery. These all but submerge the influence of European culture and education, and ride high on the seas of traditional Africa - an ocean of shields. Skeletal figures are forced into servitude in the settlers' houses and gardens in the left of the composition, and in the mines to the right. Capitalism is the motor driving the exploitation of both the land and its mineral resources, as well as the people of South Africa, and military force is used to subjugate them both. Even religion is shown to be a weapon of oppression. The historic Great Trek is revisualised as a perverted imposition of Afrikaner symbols - Cape Dutch houses and monuments - on the landscape by a mechanical social system; the land is raped by a domineering white imposter. The figure in the centre, atop a phallic canon, is an imposing symbol of this situation.

Racial intolerance is conceived explicitly in Grendon's mammoth work. Like other innovative pictorial and poetic narratives of historical events, the artist has rewritten accounts of the colonial frontier, white conquests and subsequent exploitative activities in terms of the dispossession and exclusion of indigenous people. The result is a complete subversion of South African history as written in colonial and neo-colonial catalogues. It makes a mockery of white patriotism and a sham of the colonist's supposed civilising influence on the sub-continent. Criticism is not the only route towards a new understanding of southern Africa; unveiling the deified 'truths' of historical annals to expose their mythological faces is but a springboard to more meaningful place interpretation. Expanding the initiative, the artist and the geographer are able to explore the reality of local landscapes textured by human experience - legitimate and uncensored human landscapes. Indeed, there is a maze of 'hidden' places and spaces to be explored and documented. Many are geographies of black African existence, since these are the ones that were so forcefully repressed from the late eighteenth- to the mid-twentieth century. Where art previously served to perpetuate and justify white ignorance of black reality, its primary role is presently to explore the *terra incognita* (Beavon, 1992) of black landscapes. It is in literary and visual creations that Africans have finally been given an active position in the history of southern Africa, rather than being erased or suffocated under a blanket of white propaganda.

The re-laying of modern history according to black experience has become a potent remedy to the previous exclusivity of white historical accounts. The 21 March 1960, 16 June 1976 - these are the dates - Sharpeville, Soweto, Alexandra, Orlando and many other townships that have been scenes of violent confrontation are the geographical nodes in the new account of history. Funerals, imprisonments, the inadequacies of Bantu education, exiles, the state of emergency, Mandela's release and violent resistance are major ingredients in the modern understanding of place. The black community in general, and students in particular are the heroes of battles in the name of freedom. Mzamane (1984, pp. 158-59) emphasizes the significance and legitimacy of the African interpretation of history:

> I try to convey, in a way that several accounts by white reporters do not, what it felt like to be one of those involved, and to convey how life in the townships was transformed in its response to the call of the students ... My story therefore, is another effort to 'tell more of the truth than the historian's truth'.

Thoba (Fig. 6.7) achieves the same thing pictorially. His representation of the Soweto riots is infused with the despair suffered by families who lost children - youngsters who play games, but who also die at the mercy of army weapons. Perhaps the girl with her amputated leg represents the mutilation of the entire black community and not just one of its members.

Culture no longer provides South African communities with a shield from social injustice and attend protests against it, nor support the ideology that legitimises them; they are presented for all to see. An important ramification of the shift visible in artistic content is that southern Africa has been filled with figures - literally and symbolically. A bourgeois aesthetic that generated 'pure' landscape painting - the expression of an ideological possession and conquest of land (Bermingham, 1986) - has been replaced by an emergent tradition of 'peopled' landscapes that echo with the voices of its communities. Figures rush through contemporary scenes, screaming, jeering, crying. More importantly, subjects now confront the spectator where before - even in township art - they had humbly averted their eyes so as not to waken the conscience and cause discomfort. Landscape is no longer the exclusive realm of the lone artist seeking a communion with the environment, it is the domain of the masses - the often angry masses. It is charged with human emotion and intention, swollen with meaning, with pride, anger, hatred, irony, and with hope. The shift is appropriate, for now more than ever, it is in the actions of its people that the essence of southern Africa lies; through

them, the racial tensions, confrontations, fears and prejudices that give the indigenous landscape its distinctive flavour are exposed. The people embody - indeed, they are - the personality of this place.

Art points the way to achieving a new appreciation of the landscape that is not tailored to cater to bourgeois tastes and expectations, but that embraces the outwash plains of social injustice and landscapes fertilised by the manure of suffering and outrage. Publicising the often ugly character of existential environments in southern Africa locates the project of examining place securely in the present. The modern challenge is to confront socio-political realities in an effort to realise a more harmonious interaction between people and place. Moreover, the current spirit of the country is infused with suffering and violence. Portraits of the country display a meagre understanding of its personality if they paint silent landscapes. The country rarely has its mouth shut. Spectators would surely fail to recognise southern Africa if its face was not contorted with the scream of anger or the wail of mourning, and if its body was not poised to fight, in flight, or bent with grief. Moreover, a truthful likeness of the country would have to show its emaciated features: the soul of this place is wizen with drought, both that imposed by nature and the more permanent dearth of peace and harmony among its people.

Suffering landscapes

The most conspicuous and familiar aspect of the South African landscape relates to its government's policy of residential segregation according to racial classification. The racist political legacy not only lends a peculiar physical geography to the landscape that has out-lasted the legislation that created it, but it conditions every aspect of daily life for a large black urban populace and is therefore central to the human dimension of place as well. Local art has learned to be a sensitive scribe of the distinctive South African socio-political circumstance. White artists express their anger at the apathy and absurdly destructive nature of their own community in portraits of a mutant society. Unkempt, fat, deformed caricatures of ugliness symbolise a country courting disaster. Black artists, by comparison, record the consequences of apartheid. They document events in a country at war (Teale, 1988).

Although it was previously hi-jacked by the vogue for descriptive socio-realism, black art provides a particularly rich record of the wave of misery that apartheid has caused. Especially with reference to the township scene, experience is expressed in blatant and emotive terms; documenting life is the *raison d'etre* of much black urban art (Verstraete, 1989; de Jager, 1992). "In my painting", South African black artist Sekoto notes, "I was trying to give a picture of life" (cited in Verstraete, 1989, p. 154). To be realistic, the picture must extend beyond externalities, however. Sydney Holo affirms the centrality of experience: "I draw from the heart, I draw what I see happening", he says. "Drawing is not the same as taking a photograph: one can put feeling and expression into a work of art that cannot be shown in a photograph" (cited in Williamson, 1989, p. 134). And it is the reality of emotion that is a significant component in the spirit of place.

The human situation is usually presented in resistance art within the sociological context of enforced racial separation and its attendant deprivation. In an intimate conversation with socio-political realities, emotion interjects numerous loud remarks about the landscape through art. Discomfort and inconvenience are major consequences of the policy of racial segregation, but even they are dwarfed by the giant emotional ramifications of severing people from their homes and their families. The summary demolition of black homes by apartheid forces, particularly behind the shield of the dreaded bull-dozer, is understandably a prominent theme among black South African artists, many of whom have witnessed the destruction first-hand. Bitterness is often accompanied, even submerged, by despair. Patrick Holo's (Fig. 6.9) *Desperate* captures this emotion in the context of a scene portraying the demolitions of Modderdam and Unibell, where 'even the children were bulldozed'. It depicts a limp, forlorn figure standing beside the remnants of a corrugated iron shack that once was a home in a squatter camp. The thin body hangs with the burden of despair, and the face is wide-eyed and frowning in helpless resignation. There is no anger here, only sorrow and pain too severe to relieve with tears. Sometimes the anguish pours forth, however; it echoes mournfully, helplessly around Hlongwane's (Fig. 6.10) subject who, in the midst of destruction, lifts her arms to reinforce her desperate plea: *Where to go?*.



Figure 6.9 P. Holo: *Desperate*, c.1985



Figure 6.10 Hlongwane: *Where To Go?*, 1986

The harsh black and white lines of the linocut images portray the experience of suffering in poignant and powerful terms. The destruction of homes is a significant and inescapable element of the local landscape for its black inhabitants. Death too has become a forceful part of the experience of townships; it is:

> the mistress
> with whom we
> brazenly carry on
> an illicit love affair
> that ends only
> in the grave
>
> (from Mtshali, *Death - the tart*, cited in Mtshali, 1971, p. 80).

In Holo's (Fig. 6.9) image, the round eyes of dead children stare lifelessly at the viewer, echoing the circles that their lips trace around silenced screams. Distortions of bodies and the selection of detail contribute to the expressive power of this disturbing work. The artist shows little sympathy for an audience that art had always helped to shelter from the crueler side of life. Socio-realism charges forcefully at the audience. Hlongwane too presents the naked truth of destruction, the truth as experience knows it - the truth that society would rather deny.

Another emotional reality that permeates black lives in South Africa, but that hardly touches whites, is the persistent danger that plagues them, both from the police and from vigilante terrorists. Sydney Holo includes both (Fig. 6.11) as a combined force against the innocent township dweller who can only run from their assaults. Death scatters evidence of the attacks across the landscape. The presence of the police and their vehicles, in particular, has become as predictable a feature of the township scene as the trees and flowers in English landscapes. They are a premonition of the further fragmentation of township communities through detention of family members. This situation, typical in the state of emergency, angers Sydney Holo: "The government has got no feeling about the people, no feeling about our fathers and mothers. They just take them like dogs", he says (cited in Williamson, 1989, p. 134). For many, it is also a source of suffering, an emotion that is captured in Sydney Holo's *No life* (Fig. 6.12). The anguish of the young man in the foreground, who presumably is the recipient of 'no life' - the fate that awaits him in a prison cell - is a stark contrast to the smirking confidence of the policeman who is arresting him. He too shows 'no life', however, as a cold, detached instrument of the state. The intensity of the boy's emotion stretches his



Figure 6.11 S. Holo: *Crossroads*, 1986



Figure 6.12 S. Holo: *No Life*, c.1986

face into a skull-like form and clenches his hand into a desperate fist. Once again, the strong image produced using the linocut technique confronts the viewer with a harsh reality; a reality to which every mother and every son must surely be able to relate. The eyes of all the figures look outward, making the work even more disconcerting. Sorrow flushes the scene as the mother grips her child.

South Africa's black urban artists do not simply document the township scene, they highlight the meaning that deprivation and discrimination have inscribed into the very landscape. More importantly, they point to the socio-political parentage of their condition. In the spirit of resistance, they usually condemn this relationship and delineate the process of mobilisation and violent resistance that are a combative challenge to the dominant ideology. To return to Holo's image (Fig. 6.12), there is an anger that dilutes the despair on the mother's face, or perhaps it is the gel of determination that sets her lips in a firm crease on her face and her arms in a strong hold around the boy. Moreover, she dominates the composition; her largeness providing a protective shield for her son, but simultaneously contesting the superiority of the policeman. She cannot rival the armour that adorns him, but her clenched fist seems to award her with a greater physical strength. The fourth figure in the scene - an onlooker - similarly appears less shocked than disgruntled, unwilling to help, yet unimpressed by the situation. The roots of defiance are surely simmering here. They are often more directly expressed. Resistance is conveyed not only by exposing the realities of political oppression, but in fiery scenes of riots and battles that capture the frustration and anger of its victims and their resolve to change their fate.

Landscapes of violence

Adopting an active stance against the imposition of a life of fear and external control on South Africa's township residents usually means becoming involved in their ongoing battle with police. The culture of violence is nowhere more forcefully illustrated than in pictorial art. Hlongweni poetically records the political reality of police brutality that scars the social

memory and inspires the defiance to motivate the common resistance from black urban dwellers:

> Mama let me go
> to the battle
> on 21st March
> They've killed our heroes
> like animals
> in their land of Africa
> they have been killed by the boers
> Mama let me go
> to the battle
> on the 16th of June
> They have killed our students

Recent South African history is riddled with the wounds obtained in such battles. They leave their impact on the landscape. Moloto personifies Alexandra township as a hero of war, symbolising the endless suffering and struggle of its inhabitants:

> I remember your flesh, bullet-riddled.
> Reddish soaking clothes
> Dripping like a blanket on a line
> Drops shrinking soil below.
> (from *Alexandra (trudged on)*, cited in *Staffrider*, 1980, 5 (3), p. 20).

Art is an emotive testimony to the violence that has wounded the landscape, both physically and in terms of its character too.

Hlongwane's poem (above) is a companion piece to his (Fig. 6.13) pictorial representation of a township at war with the South African state. The familiar scene of families being torn apart is reiterated here. In the first image of the triptych, a mother tries to restrain her son within the safety of their home. Concern on the woman's face contrasts with the hostility, determination and aggression in the man's. His reason for leaving is obvious: a police van is visible through a window behind the figures. In the second image, uniformed policemen are poised behind the strong, rigid shield of their vehicle, brandishing weapons and cameras. Their opponent is not yet visible, but the unmistakable corrugated iron shacks set the stage as a township environment. The haphazard and fragile forms of these homes are a vivid contrast to the stable and menacing power of the state. Hlongwane finally depicts the imminent confrontation in a dynamic, almost confusing interaction of bodies, flames and weapons. Tyres burn, the immobile corpse of a victim lies discarded, a stone is hurled at the armoured police vehicle, and a crowd of protestors masses on the periphery of the composition, in

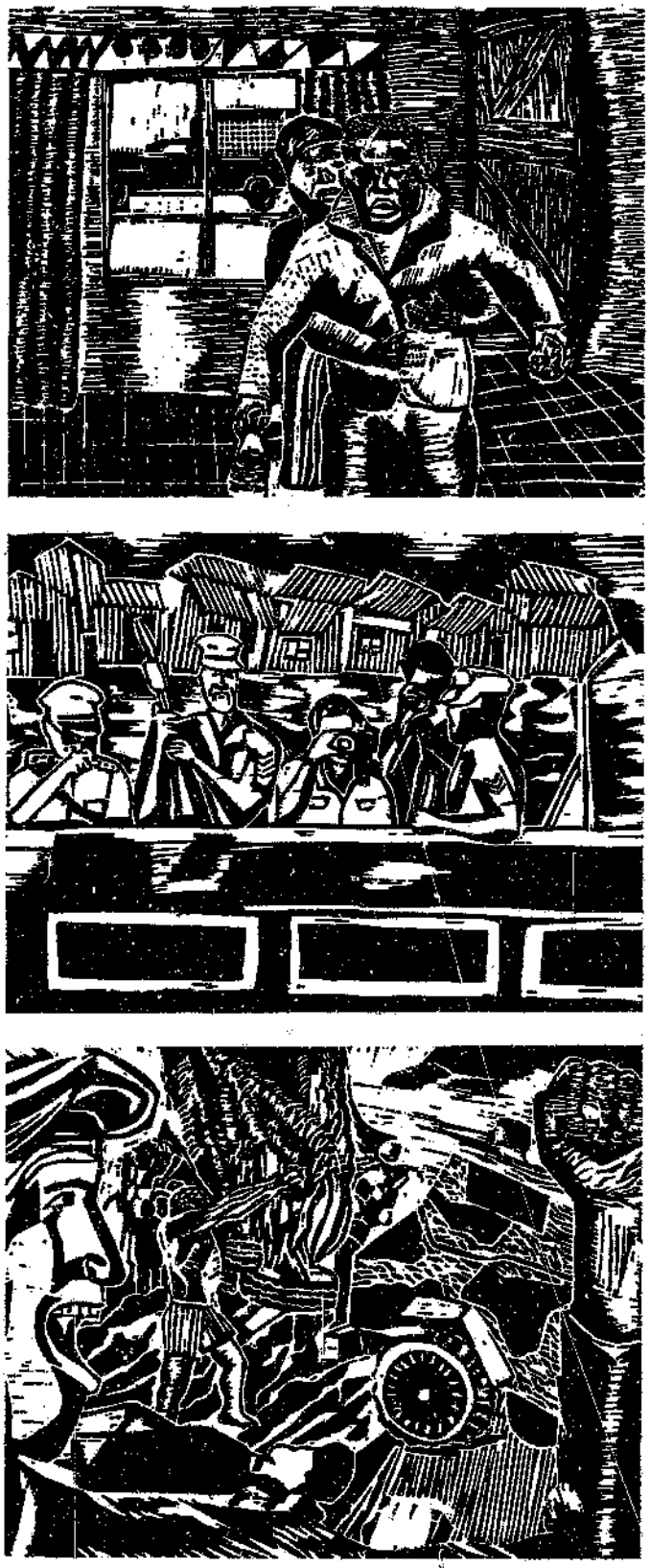


Figure 6.13 Hlongwane: *Mama Let Me Go*, c.1986

anticipation of further violence. The frame to this scene is a shouting face and an arm raised in a sign of defiance. The artwork is more than a document of a (common) event on the socio-political calendar, it is a powerful image of resistance. Photo-journalism is submerged under active political commentary; narration gives way to an expression of ideology.

Although images of resistance are often framed as individualised experiential impressions, they obtain their authenticity by exposing the plight of *all* black victims of oppression; the artists are expected to be the voice of the entire community (Sole, 1991). Consequently, they often produce generalised pictures of common suffering or collective uprising. Anonymous figures and undefined faces dance through stereotypical landscapes. Or they attend the funerals of victims of war. In Figure 6.14, the township is no longer simply a landscape of poverty, testimony to the apartheid order and its discriminatory interpretation and moulding of place, it is an environment of death. The coffins echo the rhythm of the dwellings and will probably remain a feature of the landscape in the minds of township inhabitants. Although Phambo mourns death as a waste, he portrays it as a road leading symbolically to the horizon, implicitly to the future - a brighter future. The candles flicker in hope as well as commemoration. In common with many artists - both visual and verbal - Phambo presents his interpretation of the environment as a general statement about the truth of place. Like white artists in the national phase, he may in fact be creating or simply perpetuating a new landscape myth for different, but equally political ends.

The violent landscape is not the only face of southern Africa. Moreover, it too harbours exclusions and generalisations: Sole (1991) points to the tendency among Soweto novelists to ignore social cleavages and contradictions within black society, and particularly to erase white individuals and working class blacks from the image. The result is a reversal of the colonial myth of the superiority, inevitability and correctness of the white interpretation of place in the picturesque landscape. It naturalises an understanding of southern Africa based on a sense of 'nonplace' - a negative, alienating environment that is the site of confrontation and suffering. Its limited perspective, as with other ideologies, cannot fully embrace the true spirit of the country. Yet, in exposing the negative facets of place, it provides an important

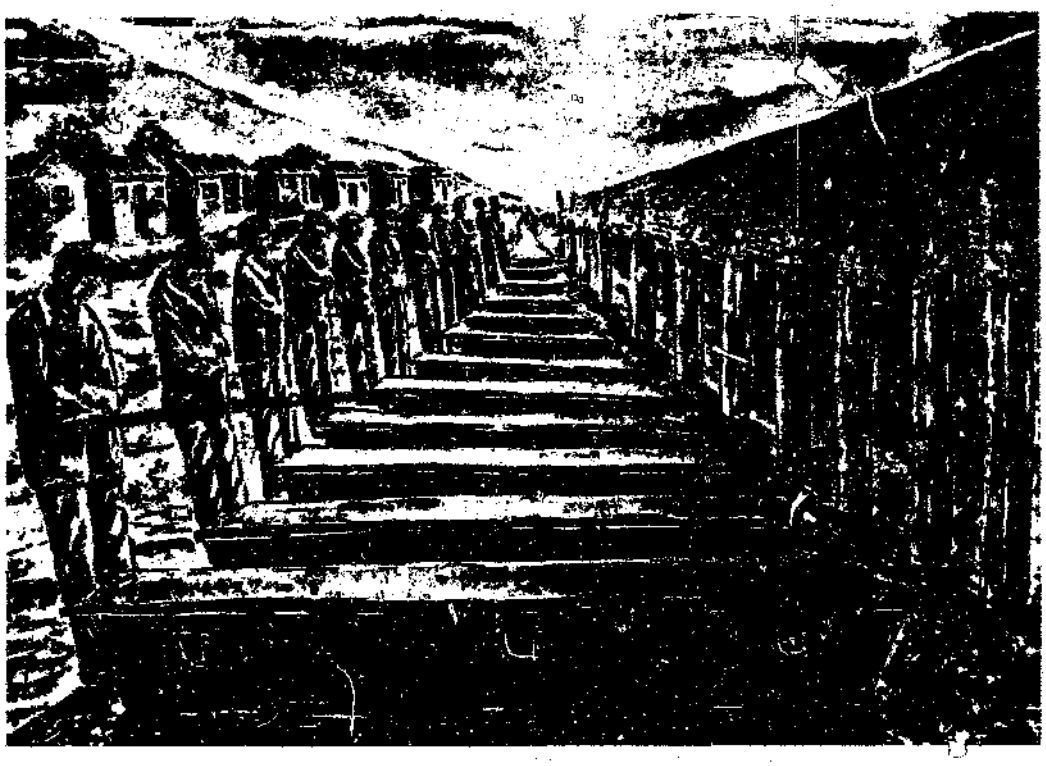


Figure 6.14 Phambo: *What a Waste*, 1987



Figure 6.15 Sibanda: *This is My Life*, 1988

counter-balance to the idealistic stance adopted in the silent landscape. Consequently, it offers a platform for exploring the contemporary personality of southern Africa to which the history of apartheid has lent the most distinctive feature. Sibanda's *This is my life* (Fig. 6.15), for instance, is a collection of symbols that are now intimately associated with South Africa and that found no place in earlier representations of the country.

The remnants of a 'necklacing' scar the foreground of Sibanda's landscape, just as they are situated in the forefront of the social memory of South Africa. Another typical image is that of a burning car, evidence of the violence that singes people and place alike, and a metaphor for the spirit of protest. Predictable too are the group of angry protestors. They march towards the spectator who is presented no means of escape through the painted landscape: to the left is the fiery wreck, to the right a fence. If the viewer wishes to join the approaching mass, safety may be assured, but the fate of an outsider trapped in the inevitable path of fury will certainly not be pleasant. Sibanda threatens the security of a white audience by over-riding its ignorance; he appeals to a black audience to take up a political ethic and fight for freedom. By referring implicitly to both sides of the socio-political experience, the artist presents an evocative impression of the meaning of the local landscape. In the current angered and politicised atmosphere that often precipitates violence, the voices of protest cannot be ignored in attempts to capture the essence of the country. The spirit of southern Africa rumbles with the feet of the toyi-toyi and reverberates with the viva!-cry of a nation in tumult, a nation seeking a new identity.

CONCLUSION

Places exist not only as environments for objective study and impassive interaction, they are also locations of intimate human experience and intangible response. They are approached and understood via the heart and imagination as well as via naked eyes and the rational mind. In the public sphere too, geographical realities are textured by values, intentions, myths and collective ideologies. The resultant humanistic identity of place as a centre of meaning is poorly recognised and explored by local geographers who continue to investigate the external character of southern Africa through a dense screen of theory and quantitative methodologies. There is meagre commentary on the spirit of the country. The eviction of art from the indigenous disciplinary literature aggravates the situation, for the echoes of place resound through painted and poetic landscapes more than they do in other geographical languages. The instruments of art are superbly tuned to the melodies of place. Local artists orchestrate the varied and shifting interpretations of southern Africa into a colourful and moving opera about the unique personality of the country. Geographers must attend the show in order to fully appreciate the indigenous voices and visions of place.

The paradox of *human* geography failing to capture the full repertoire of people's environmental interactions is compounded locally by the fact that the territory confronted as subject is heavily laden with human experience. From their hesitant yet arrogant colonial beginnings, to their wanderings as a nation seeking a legitimate place in the country, to their contemporary socio-political tensions which precipitate fear, paranoia, anger and hatred, South Africans have coated the face of their country with a thick layer of meaning. Apartheid in particular has scripted its tragic drama in the environment, and the opinions of various actors involved reverberates across the modern landscape. Contemporary maps of southern Africa fail to represent the wealth of myth and meaning that have condensed around the country in over two centuries of human interaction with place. Cartographers can no longer be ridiculed for including 'savage pictures' and 'elephants for want of towns', as Swift accused them of doing (see Chapter 4). Yet, modern cartography is arguably less realistic, for it overlooks the truth of experience. Swift's observations might be up-dated

So geographers in Afric' maps,
With boring symbols fill the gaps,
And o'er the country's empty face,
Etch objective truth, but leave place.

Art points the way toward reintroducing the personality of southern Africa to the geographical discipline: it expresses the aesthetic, humanistic, cultural, *humane* dimension of place that other approaches underplay. Appreciation for painted and other artistic landscapes may therefore allow academics to achieve portraits of place.

Southern Africa has endured a varied and often abusive relationship with the people who inhabit its landscapes. Initially, the true character of place was smothered under the domineering and impatient personality of a settler society. The youthful pioneer community at times appreciated the charm of nature's indigenous face, but was more involved with asserting its own authority and superiority, and with impressing its influence on the land. The imperial gaze sought a mirror of itself in place and scorned untamed wilderness as a rebellion against its domesticating efforts. Later, southern Africa found a humbler partner in a shy and unsettled community attempting to develop a more mature and meaningful interaction with place. National artists searched in vain for the spirit of a country that seemed to grow ever harder as efforts were made to engage it. Yet, the silent landscapes they painted also served to mask the human footprints that were scarring place. An adolescent society was struck by guilt, uncertainty and the need to legitimise its own presence in the landscape, all of which tainted its appreciation of place. Perhaps South African society may finally indulge in a sincere and mutually rewarding marriage with the country. Certainly, contemporary images of the landscape are more honest reflections of the local situation and are compiled using indigenous expressive fabrics. The country is no longer defined by European standards and ideals. The future promises a vibrant celebration of place, as indigenous art takes flight across the landscapes of southern Africa. Hopefully, South African geography may eventually experience a similar metamorphosis.

By virtue of the richness of local qualitative resources, this dissertation provides a broad impression of the spirit of southern Africa. Sensory awareness and imagination - both those of professional artists and those of the author - are adopted as appropriate tools for achieving

an intuitive reading of the meaning of place. The final picture is untheorised and cannot be proven; it is true to the dialogue between experience and nature rather than to intellectual-scientific schemas. Proof for the validity of interpretations of art and place lie with the reader: if the conclusions harmonise with experience, then they encapsulate the subjective truth of the landscape. In terms of the usefulness of the study, it is important to understand the broader implications of uncovering the spirit of a place. The exercise is not purely an artistic and therefore pleasurable excursion. In addition, research into place may teach geographers and their audiences to view the environment in a more sensitive way; investigating human meanings and aesthetic value may improve people-place relations that have for too long be scarred by rigidity, detachment and severity that characterise the modern (predominantly scientific) approach to the environment. By looking for the art in place, people may develop a more intimate and meaningful appreciation of their country. This has implications not only for environmental conservation, but for planning too.

An understanding of the meaning of place and placelessness better equips builders of new environments to stimulate positive human relations with place. In the dawning of a new South Africa, the implications of reuniting people in a comfortable and harmonious marriage with their land could not be greater. Architects of the new order must pursue the ideal of a place that satisfies the souls and the hearts of its inhabitants. Following the course plotted in the international literature from geography and beyond, local scholars may embark on this more courageous journey into the human landscape. At the same time, they must beware the trap of imitating established, foreign approaches to place - a danger that local artists have highlighted. There is ample material for exploring the spirit of southern Africa. If local scholars can continue to resist their humane instincts in light of the opportunity, they are academically frigid. They must caress their artistic tendencies into an ecstasy of meanings, passion and sensation to reach to the spirit of the southern African landscape.

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