

**INTIMATIONS OF INFINITY:  
exploring transcendence in landscape painting**

by

**GEORGIA SAAD**

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN FINE ARTS**

in the

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY OF ART AND FINE ARTS**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Supervisor:

**PROF K H DIETRICH**


Joint supervisor:

**MRS E PRETORIUS**

**NOVEMBER 1995**

## DECLARATION

I declare that *Intimations of infinity: exploring transcendence in landscape painting* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Signature

(Ms G Saad)

23/06/1996.....

Date

## SUMMARY

This dissertation investigates the question of transcendence and its relevance to my picture-making process. The term 'transcendence' refers to any experience which surpasses the finite. In relation to the art-making process it refers to an opening up of the frame. Transcendence is not regarded as a fixed and unalterable state but as such that it encompasses paradox. The fragmentary nature of experience and knowledge provides the point of departure for this investigation.

The possibility of transcendence is partly explored through the concept of symbolic orders. I am using the term 'symbolic orders' to refer to any frameworks which shape human experience in general and the creative process specifically.

Upon exploring the concept of transcendence as concerns the work of a number of artists and insofar as it has informed my own pictures it appears that there is a creative system pertaining to the artwork which is transcendent.

## KEY TERMS

Transcendence; fragmentation; paradox; symbolic orders; nature; landscape; picture surface; the grid; romanticism; symbol/fragment; spirituality; the feminine.

# CONTENTS

PREFACE	i
ABBREVIATIONS	viii
ABBREVIATIONS OF PAINTING TITLES	ix
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	x
INTRODUCTION	1
Symbolic Orders	2
Nature	4
Transcendence	6
The Convention of Landscape	8
CHAPTER 1	
NATURE AS LANDSCAPE	12
1.1 THE SYMBOLIC ORDER OF NATURALISM	13
1.1.1 The picture as a window frame	16
1.1.2 Discarding the window frame	18
1.1.3 The picture as a mirror of nature	20
1.1.4 Discarding the mirror of nature	25
1.1.5 The picture as a photograph	28
1.1.6 Naturalism as environment	33
1.2 THE PARADOXES OF NATURALISM	36
CHAPTER 2	
NATURE IN THE AFTERMATH OF MODERNISM	42
2.1 THE FRAGMENTS OF MODERNISM	43
2.1.1 The autonomy of the picture surface	44
2.1.2 The ambiguity of the grid	46

2.1.3	The fragmentariness of collage	52
2.1.4	The modernity of the photograph	56
2.1.5	The spiritual element in Modernism	59
2.2	THE AMBIGUITIES IN MODERNISM	64
CHAPTER 3		
NATURE AS A ROMANTIC LEGACY		65
3.1	NATURE AND ROMANTICISM	65
3.1.1	A transcendent awareness of nature	65
3.1.2	Nature as the representation of experience	69
3.1.3	The representation of the particular	71
3.1.4	The Romantic symbol	75
3.1.5	The Romantic fragment	79
3.1.6	Intimations of belonging and estrangement	81
3.1.7	The Romantic legacy	83
3.2	THE ROMANTIC PARADOX	86
CHAPTER 4		
NATURE AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE FEMININE		87
4.1	A MAGICAL PERCEPTION OF REALITY	89
4.2	NATURE AS A SYMBOLIC FORM OF THE FEMININE	95
4.2.1	The symbolism of water and rocks	98
4.3	NATURE AS PROCESS	102
4.3.1	The concepts of impermanence and flux	102
4.3.2	The cyclical rhythms of nature	105
4.4	ROMANTICISM AND THE FEMININE	106
4.5	THE AMBIGUITIES OF THE FEMININE	107

## CHAPTER 5

NATURE AS TRANSCENDENCE	108
5.1    TRANSCENDENCE IN NATURALISM	110
5.1.1    The metaphysical properties of 'naturalistic' light	110
5.2    TRANSCENDENCE IN ROMANTICISM	112
5.2.1    Indeterminacy as an evocation of transcendence	113
5.2.2    The concept of the sublime	117
5.3    TRANSCENDENCE IN MODERNISM	123
5.3.1    Abstraction as an evocation of transcendence	123
5.4    TRANSCENDENCE AND THE FEMININE	125
5.4.1    Transcendence and the magical/mythological perception	125
5.4.2    Transcendence and nature as process	130
5.5    BRIDGING THE GAP	130
CONCLUDING NOTE	132
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	138

## PREFACE

When I began my research, the proposed title of the dissertation was *Figurative modes of expression in times of social change*. This interest was reflected in the practical component of my research in which I was experimenting with the representation of the human figure in an urban environment (fig. 1, fig.2).<sup>1</sup>

In the early stages of my research I relocated to Knysna, to an environment which is in certain parts sublime in its physical appearance. It was my first intimate experience with nature and its impact was overwhelming. It changed me emotionally and intellectually and it mobilised my imagination and intuition.

This enquiry partly deals with two personal concerns: my relationship with nature and my relationship with my work. It is primarily an exploration of transcendence as pertaining to my encounter with nature and my own creative process. My involvement with nature aroused perceptions which I can only describe as religious or mystical. Consequently, I investigate concepts relating to transcendence, symbolic orders, the primacy of the imagination and the intuition, and the understanding of nature as a manifestation of the Divine.

My initial encounter with the vastness and grandeur of the natural environment stimulated me to investigate the genre of landscape in a visual and theoretical manner. Once the execution of the paintings began, however, the pictorial reality started taking on a life of its own and established complex links with my experience of nature. I became aware of the possibility of examining symbolic orders, as they related both to the natural world and the creation of pictures, which I had not been able to envisage in the fragmented experience of an urban existence.

---

<sup>1</sup>Georgia Saad, *Self Portrait with Cats* (1989). Oil on canvas, 171 x 100 cm.  
Georgia Saad, *Self Portrait* (1989-1990). Oil on canvas, 87 x 87 cm.



These concepts are relevant to a sensibility which may be seen as predominantly romantic and therefore the work of the Romantics, and of Caspar David Friedrich in particular, is pivotal. It is significant that I repeatedly refer to Friedrich's paintings as I feel a great affinity with his visual expression of the natural environment. Despite the fact that we belong to different times and world-views, I identify more strongly with his work and beliefs than with those of any of the contemporary romantic landscape painters. The yearning for an irretrievable past and the values associated with it, however, appears to be consistent with a romantic orientation.

It is also essential that the awareness of a transcendent reality is examined in terms of its embeddedness in a particular spatio-temporal context. My point of departure, therefore, will be the fragmentariness of vision which seems to characterise both my work and the world-view of a number of contemporary artists. My use of photographs as references for my paintings exemplifies a fragmented perspective. Moreover, my works are products of the late twentieth century, an age that has witnessed the deconstruction of familiar certainties, frames of commonality, and the abandonment of claims to an absolute reality.

The paintings which form part of my visual research are themselves fragments, partially expressive of relative experience and compartmentalized knowledge. Similarly, the theoretical components of the research are fragments taken from a much larger field of investigation. In examining the 'symbolic orders' which have shaped my work I have only chosen to discuss a few which are the most important to me, namely: naturalism, Romanticism, Modernism<sup>2</sup>, the experience of transcendence and the feminine orientation. 'Symbolic orders' as I further explain in the Introduction, is a term that I use to refer to structures which are flexible; I do not refer to monolithic or unalterable systems. Both the visual project and the written research are simultaneous attempts at expressing a reality that transcends their fragmentary form.

---

<sup>2</sup>Names such as 'modernism', 'romanticism' and 'naturalism' are capitalised when used in the context of art movements. Lower case is used when they refer to sensibilities.

In view of the deconstruction of fixed frames of reference, it would be meaningless to approach this investigation from an absolute perspective. I propose, therefore, to explore the concept of transcendence from a vantage point that allows for paradox. In examining some of the symbolic orders, such as naturalism, Romanticism, and Modernism, which have been instrumental in the creation of my body of work, I have been made aware of the paradoxical nature of each one of them. Their ostensibly definite structures have been subverted by the artists working within the various orders. In allowing for contradiction, rather than attempting to overcome it, these diverse expressions seem to evoke a more complex reality.

My approach to this enquiry will be from a predominantly Western perspective, as I consider myself to be mostly a product of the Western mind-set: in terms of birth, upbringing, and education. This is particularly relevant to the conventions relating to my art-making. I do, however, have affinities with non-Western paradigms, and will refer to Bushmen shamans, the beliefs of the Aborigines, and the Chinese approach to landscape painting. Moreover, my lived experience has been in Africa and it was my response to this natural environment that provided the inspiration for my work. In comparison to other landscapes that I have encountered, it is the vastness and untameability of Africa which has, for me, truly evoked the sublime.

In the written component of the research I have referred to religious or spiritual, philosophical, and art-historical sources. Considering that religion and the relationship of human beings to nature have been important concerns in humankind's attempts to make sense of an external reality, there are abundant literary references relating to this area of enquiry. I have found Immanuel Kant's *Critique of aesthetic judgement* (1952) and Plato's *Republic* (1956) significant in my enquiry.

The investigation of my picture-making in terms of an art-historical framework has enabled me to clarify a number of issues regarding the creative process. Leo Joseph Koerner's, *Caspar David Friedrich and the subject of landscape* (1990), has significantly illuminated my understanding of the Romantics. Other relevant sources have been Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of*

*the observer: on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century* (1990), Betty Jean Craige's *Relativism in the arts* (1983) and Jacques Derrida's *The truth in painting* (1978).

There seems to be a scarcity of information as concerns contemporary landscape painting. In the most recent issues of *Art in America* (January 1994 - June 1995) there has not been a single feature on contemporary landscape painting and there is a similar lack of information on the subject in the issues of *Art News* and *Artforum* of approximately the same period. Gregory Volk (in a recent issue of *Art News*) discusses the work of contemporary landscape painter Eric Wolf and he contends that landscape was 'once the most commonplace of painterly endeavours but now virtually an anomaly, especially among serious younger artists' (1995: 87). A similar viewpoint is referred to in Peter Frank's discussion of some contemporary American landscape painters. In attempting to establish the relevance of landscape painting to contemporary concerns, he asks 'aren't little glories in nature, the gently reassuring views of benign, homely, very familiar places anachronistic?' (1984:19).

I take issue with the above views on the representation of landscape, and I consider them indicative of our increasing separation from the natural environment. These views seem to be the result of the limited belief that only issues relating to contemporary urban preoccupations are 'relevant'. Insofar as we are still ultimately dependent on nature for our existence I consider the different expressions of the landscape to be extremely relevant. I also contend that landscape painting is more complex and far reaching than merely the 'little glories in nature' and 'the gently reassuring views of benign ... and familiar places'. In the sense that landscape representation can extend and renew our experience of the world it is as much an endeavour 'worthy' of the attention of 'serious' artists as it has ever been.

The veneration of nature, nevertheless, continues in the visual expression of contemporary artists who are working with natural forms and the environment. In this regard, these artists may be seen as extending the genre of landscape, albeit in new visual forms. There are a number of sources on this subject and *Art and design: art and the natural environment* (1994) highlights an important aspect of this discussion.

It is important to note that I am neither a philosopher nor an art-historian, but a painter. Consequently I will attempt as far as possible to ground any discussions in my paintings. Importantly, my main source and motivating influence has been nature, perceived through the perspective of my own experience, and manifested in my pictorial representations of the landscape.

In approaching this dissertation, it is important to bear in mind that my main intention has not been to create theoretical hypotheses and then test their validity, but has rather been to explore the creative act as directly informed by my picture-making process and my personal experience. In referring to universals, I do not wish to set up dogmas, but rather wish to communicate my private beliefs and my own quest to rediscover unity in a contemporary experience characterised by flux and relativity.

The practical component of this research consists of a body of paintings. I have used traditional materials such as oil paints, brushes and canvas, as I find them suitable to my method of working and I see them as belonging to the craft of painting which is of primary concern to me.

As regards terminology, the use of the term 'man' is sometimes unavoidable, but whenever it is used in the context of this investigation, it is meant as a generic term, encompassing both sexes. Similarly, the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine', or 'matriarchal' and 'patriarchal', denote certain qualities or principles which do not pertain exclusively to gender.

The terms 'picture' and 'picture-making' have been used to refer to my work. I have chosen the word 'picture' in order to emphasise the existence of a painting as a physical object and not as a reference to Kepler's definition of a picture or to any other concepts that one may associate with the term.

The titles of my landscape paintings are directly derived from lines written by the Romantic poets, particularly William Wordsworth.

I am grateful to the academic staff of the Department of History of Art and Fine Arts at the University of South Africa, and in particular, to Prof Karin M Skawran and my supervisors, Prof Keith Dietrich and Ms Elfriede Pretorius for their support and their invaluable criticism and advice.

I also acknowledge my appreciation to the University of South Africa for granting me the Robin Aldwinckle merit bursary. I am obligated to the librarians of the Unisa lending library, and especially Ms Marika Tucker, for their professional assistance.

I extend my thanks to Jan Tooley who made my relocation to Knysna possible and to Claude Jammet and Greg Roux, who exposed me to places that were far from the 'tourist trail.' I would also like to thank Craig Smith who is responsible for the photographic documentation.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AS *Art speak: a guide to contemporary ideas, movements, and buzzwords*
- DS *A dictionary of symbols*
- DPR *Dictionary of philosophy and religion: Eastern and Western thought.*
- EB *Encyclopedia Britannica*
- EM *Encyclopedia of morals*
- EU *Encyclopedia of the unexplained*
- EWA *Encyclopedia of world art*
- HID *The Heritage illustrated dictionary of the English language*
- NLEM *New Larousse encyclopedia of mythology*
- OCD *The Oxford combined dictionary of current English and modern usage*
- OCA *The Oxford companion to art*
- s.v. *sub verbo*

## ABBREVIATIONS OF PAINTING TITLES

*Round the Cape*

*Full Many Shapes*

*And Now this Spell was Snapped*

*But Now I only Hear*

*The Rocks that Muttered*

*Round Earth's Shore*

*Once Again/Do I Behold*

*Them the Morning Light Loves*

*Till All was Tranquil*

*Round the Cape of a Sudden Came the Sea*

*Full Many Shapes that Shadows Were*

*And Now this Spell was Snapped: Once More I viewed  
the Ocean Green*

*But Now I Only Hear/Its Melancholy, Long  
Withdrawing Roar*

*The Rocks that Muttered Close Upon our Ears*

*Round Earth's Shore/ Lay like the Folds of a Bright  
Girdle Furl'd*

*Once Again/ Do I Behold these Steep and Lofty Cliffs*

*Them the Morning Light Loves as it Glistens on the  
Silent Rocks*

*Till All was Tranquil as a Summer Sea*

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 Georgia Saad, *Self-Portrait with cats* (1989). Oil on canvas, 171 x 100 cm.
- 2 Georgia Saad, *Self-portrait* (1989-1990). Oil on canvas, 87 x 87 cm.
- 3 Georgia Saad, *Round the Cape of a Sudden Came the Sea* (1990). Oil on canvas, 58 x 88 cm.
- 4 Jane Freilicher, *Changing scene* (1981). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Henry 1985:79).
- 5 Jane Freilicher, *Bluish horizon* (1984). Medium unknown, 200 x 175 cm. Collection unknown. (Henry 1985:80).
- 6 Georgia Saad, *Round Earth's Shore/Lay like the Folds of a Bright Girdle Furl'd* (1993-1994). Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 101.5 cm.
- 7 Georgia Saad, *Pride of Purple Rocks I* (1991). Oil on canvas, 94 x 90 cm.
- 8 Hamish Fulton, *Barking dogs* (1978). Photographs, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Auping 1983:88-89).
- 9 Vija Celmins, *Untitled (Big sea #2)* (1969). Graphite on acrylic ground on paper, 85 x 112.5 cm. Collection: American Telephone & Telegraph Co., New York. (Armstrong 1981:105).
- 10 Georgia Saad, *Full Many Shapes that Shadows Were* (1990). Oil on canvas, 88 x 58 cm.
- 11 Georgia Saad, *And Now this Spell was Snapped: Once More I viewed the Ocean Green* (1991). Oil on canvas, 88 x 75 cm.
- 12 Georgia Saad, *Pride of Purple Rocks II* (1991). Oil on canvas, 94 x 90 cm.
- 13 Georgia Saad, *But Now I Only Hear/Its Melancholy, Long, Withdrawing Roar* (1992). Oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm.
- 14 Georgia Saad, *The Rocks that Muttered Close Upon our Ears* (1992). Oil on canvas, 100 x 171 cm.
- 15 Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield, Battery Park City - a confrontation* (1982). Two acres of wheat planted and harvested. Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan, New York. (Matilsky 1994:8).



- 16 Hans Haacke, *Grass grows* (1969). Earth, winter and annual rye grass. Installation at the Andrew Dickson White Museum, Cornell University, Ithica, New York. (Matilsky 1994:8).
- 17 James Pierce, *Earthwoman* (1976-77). Earth, 5 x 30 x 15 ft. Pratt farm. (Beardsley 1984:69).
- 18 Giuliano Mauri, *Tessitura del Bosco* (Weaving of the Woods) (1987). Vegetal elements, structural supports and woven surfaces. Environment of the River Adda, Lodi. (Fagone 1994:66).
- 19 Caspar David Friedrich, *Trees and bushes in the snow* (c.1828). Oil on canvas, 31 x 25.5 cm. Dresden, Gemäldergalerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen. (Koerner 1990:3).
- 20 Jorn Ronnau, *Unicorn* (1993). Tree in snow, TICKON project. Langeland, Denmark. (Ronnau 1994:55).
- 21 Georgia Saad, *Till All was Tranquil as a Summer Sea* (1990). Oil on canvas, 88 x 75 cm.
- 22 Georgia Saad, *Its Path was not Upon the Sea/in Ripple or in Shade* (1991). Oil on canvas, 88 x 75 cm.
- 23 Georgia Saad, *Once Again/Do I Behold these Steep and Lofty Cliffs* (1994). Oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm.
- 24 Georgia Saad, *Pride of Purple Rocks III* (1995). Oil on canvas, 140 x 101.5 cm.
- 25 Peter Schuyff, *Untitled* (1987). Acrylic on linen, 187.5 x 187.5 cm. Pat Hearn Gallery. (Schuyff 1987:125).
- 26 Dorothea Rockburne, *Guardian angel #2* (1982). Watercolour on vellum, 192.5 x 105 cm. Xavier Fourcade Gallery. (Herrera 1983:129).
- 27 Georgia Saad, *Them the Morning Light Loves as it Glistens on the Silent Rocks* (1993-4). Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 101.5 cm.
- 28 Jackson Pollock, *The white angel* (1946). Oil and enamel on canvas, 108.75 x 74.37 cm. Collection: Betty and Stanley K Sheinbaum, Los Angeles. (Welch 1987: 194).
- 29 Gary Hill, *Crux* (1983-1987). Video and sound installation. Hirshorn Museum. (Duncan 1995:71).

- 30 Caspar David Friedrich, *Cross in the mountains (The Tetschen Altar)* (1807-1808). Oil on canvas, 115 x 110 cm. Dresden, Gemäldergalerie. (Koerner 1990:35).
- 31 Rebecca Purdum, *Sneaking up on the ocean* (1987). Oil on canvas, 210 x 150 cm. Collection unknown. (Moorman 1988:105).
- 32 Wolfgang Laib, *Passage* (1992). Beeswax, wood construction; 790 x 522 cm. Installation at capc Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux. (Laib 1994:30).
- 33 Eric Wolf, *Blue mountain* (1994). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Volk 1995:87).
- 34 Georgia Saad, *A Sense Sublime/Of Something Far More Deeply Interfused* (1990). Oil on canvas, 87 x 187 cm.
- 35 April Gornik, *Untitled (lightning and water)* (1981). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Heartney 1989:123).
- 36 Keith Dietrich, *The first fruits, an altar for Cain and Abel* (1991). Egg tempera on canvas, 245 x 110 cm. Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria. (Exhibition invitation, The Goodman Gallery 1991).
- 37 April Gornik, *Thunder* (1985). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Heartney 1989:124).
- 38 Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the sea of fog* (c.1818). Oil on canvas, 94.8 x 74.8 cm. Hamburg, Kunsthalle. (Koerner 1990:155).
- 39 Anselm Kiefer, *Yggdrasil* (1985). Acrylic, emulsion, shellac, and lead on photograph, 103 x 83.5 cm. Collection of Stephen Frishberg, Philadelphia. (Gilmour 1990: Plate V).
- 40 Michael Ayrton, *Entrance to a wood* (1945). Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Yorke 1988:40)
- 41 Caspar David Friedrich, *Fir trees in the snow* (c.1828). Oil on canvas, 31 x 25.5 cm. Dresden, Gemäldergalerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen. (Koerner 1990:4).
- 42 Nils Udo, *The place of the rowanberries* (1993). Berries, natural habitat. (Udo 1994:58).
- 43 Othello Anderson, *Crystal clearing, winter solstice* (1986). Photograph, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Gablik 1991).

- 44 Artist unknown, *Hallucinatory figure with animal head*. Date unknown. Bushman painting. Drakensberg, Natal. (Lewis-Williams & Dowson:172).
- 45 Georgia O'Keefe, *Red hills and bones* (1941). Oil on canvas, 75 x 100 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Alfred Stieglitz collection. (O'Keefe 1976: Plate 97).
- 46 Nancy Holt, *Stone enclosure: rock rings* (1977-1978). Stone masonry, height: 300 x 600 cm. Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington. (Beardsley 1984:116).
- 47 James Turrell, *Roden Crater project* (1972 - present). Extinct volcano, Arizona. (Matilsky 1994:10).
- 48 Andy Goldsworthy, *Herd of arches* (1994). Red stone, dimensions unknown. Installation in an empty store on Bond Street, London. (Macritchie 1995:91).
- 49 Lars Vilks, *Textus* (1993). Wooden construction, three-storey high. Langeland, Denmark. (Vilks 1994:51).
- 50 Rembrandt van Rijn, *The stone bridge* (1630s). Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Stapen 1988:153).
- 51 Georgia Saad, *Ye Waves, that Out of the Great Deep Steal Forth* (1995). Oil on canvas, 147.5 x 108.5 cm.
- 52 Paul Klee, *Omphalo-centric lecture* (1939). Oil on canvas, 67.5 x 47.5 cm. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf. (Knott 1987:131).
- 53 Lydia Venieri, *Idolatry* (1994). Astrolabe, mirrors, steam, mixed mediums. Installation at Delphi. (Heartney 1995:62).

## INTRODUCTION

One of the predominant paradigms in contemporary Western society appears to be relativism. Relativism implies that our understanding of the world depends on numerous fragmented points of view and that, in a sense, we live in a centreless universe which is devoid of a fixed frame of reference. The relativist attitude has also deconstructed traditional notions of the 'self'<sup>1</sup> and by extension, long-held assumptions concerning the meaning of artworks and the role of the artist as in control of the meaning of his/her works.

Betty Jean Craige, in *What is relativism in the arts?* (1983), argues that as there is nothing which possesses transcendent value in the relativist paradigm; the art object cannot be said to have any transcendent meaning. Meaning according to the relativist perspective is contextual and 'includes the art world and the observer; and the artist becomes the "voice of no one"' (1983:9). Hierarchical orders concerning the making of artworks have been deconstructed and it appears that common symbolic frameworks, such as naturalism, which gave unity and coherence to artworks in the past, are no longer viable.

The main objective of this investigation is to examine the possibility of reconstructing a unified picture of reality out of the fragments of the deconstructed symbolic orders. I contend that there is a symbolic order within the art-making process which is transformative, and enables individuals to gain access to a transcendent reality. I propose to conduct this enquiry by investigating and deconstructing the symbolic structures which have informed my own creative process. Through an exploration of their fragmentary form, I will examine the possibility of the existence of a transcendent frame that would give coherence to the fragments.

---

<sup>1</sup>Craige, commenting on the disappearance of the self in contemporary society, says the following:

Now the 'I' confronts its own disappearance, which is to say that the 'I' ... acknowledges that it never actually had a self. The twentieth century relativist 'I' is self-deconstructing. So the humanist concept of man, dependent upon the spirit/matter opposition of a universe with a God, will disappear ... (1983:2).

Certain themes relating to the representation of nature, which I consider central to my creative process, will be examined. In Chapter 1 the representation of the landscape in terms of the conventions of naturalism will be explored. Chapter 2 focuses on the anti-mimetic and spiritual elements in Modernism and Chapter 3 deals with the influential legacy of the Romantics. In Chapter 4 I investigate 'the feminine' orientation in perceiving the world, and Chapter 5 deals with the issue of transcendence. I consider the above concepts to be expressive of different symbolic orders which inform my work. The paradoxical co-existence of fragmentation and transcendence appears to run like Ariadne's thread through all these symbolic orders. The objective/subjective nature of the relationship of the viewer to the world forms a sub-theme in this dissertation.

As an introduction to this investigation some relevant issues need to be defined and contextualised. Thus, concepts relating to symbolic orders, nature, transcendence, and the convention of landscape will be examined.

## SYMBOLIC ORDERS<sup>2</sup>

The term 'symbolic orders' is used in the context of this research to define any framework which gives coherence to human experience. In a sense, symbolic orders can be understood as an attempt to give structure and unity to what humans understand by reality.

A definition of the symbolic order which specifically relates to my picture-making would include: my personal set of meanings; visual conventions which I have used; beliefs; emotive, intellectual and intuitive insights; and ultimately my lived experience. The symbolic order which I understand to be that of my artwork, draws on other orders, but goes beyond them.

---

<sup>2</sup>I prefer to use the term 'symbolic' rather than 'allegorical'. Although both terms seem to have common elements insofar as in both of them one thing stands for another, I consider the symbol to be indeterminate whereas allegory appears to be more finite in the sense of expressing a one-to-one correspondence of literal and abstract meanings.

I believe, for example, that although my work is informed by naturalism, Romanticism and Modernism it cannot be adequately defined in terms of any one of these orders. This may be an indication that my paintings form a whole which extends beyond their respective frameworks.

Symbolic orders are accessible through the human capacity for comprehending symbols. In the past it was possible to speak of common symbolic orders insofar as symbols had a far wider application and could thus be 'universally' understood. In contemporary existence, however, symbols are no longer endowed with a constant signification. Umberto Eco, in discussing Lacan's substitution of the sun with a circle, comments 'but the sun, in so far as it is designated by a circle, is nothing if this circle is not inserted within a system of other formalizations that, in their entirety set up the symbolic order' (1984:135).

Thus in order to perceive the circle as signifying the sun one has to be aware of a specific symbolic order which then defines the symbol. By contrast, in previous cultural paradigms, when hierarchical orders were more fixed and finite, symbols would have had far more universal significance than do symbols in the contemporary world, open as they are to indefinite interpretations.

Similarly, I consider symbolic orders to be open to different interpretations. They may ultimately be extended to include patterns of similar experiences and reference systems. They may therefore be regarded as being in flux, rather than existing as fixed and unchangeable systems.

Symbolic orders also imply myth, metaphor and an alternative reality. Thus the importance of the imagination in grasping this symbolic universe is paramount. The Romantics,<sup>3</sup> who

---

<sup>3</sup>The term 'Romantics' is capitalised in order to distinguish the artists and poets who worked approximately within the period 1790-1835 from other artists who exhibit the romantic sensibility.

used symbols extensively, placed great emphasis on the power of the imagination, rather than the rational intellect, to translate the tangible into the intangible and to evoke another reality. The notion of symbolic orders is inherently ambiguous since it can be subjective and universal at the same time.

## NATURE

Nature has always provided a symbolic framework within which human experience can be evaluated. Even though the relationship of human beings to nature has undergone many changes, it is still possible, even in an age that is dominated by technology and a mind-set which has led to an almost complete subjugation of the natural environment, to find in nature a source for the revitalization of experience and the acquisition of important insights.

To quote Peter Fuller:

And, as for the absence of a shared symbolic order ... Even if we have ceased to believe in God, nature can provide it for us: the answer lies not in the reproduction of appearances, but in an *imaginative perception* of natural form, in which its particularities are not denied, but grasped and transfigured (Fuller 1990:16).

According to the *Dictionary of philosophy and religion*, the word 'nature' is derived from the Latin word *natura*, which is a translation of the Greek word *physis*. Both terms originate in ideas connected to processes of birth, growth and production. Thus the early meaning of the word referred to that part of reality which was subject to transformation (DPR 1980, s.v. "nature").

The term 'nature', however, is highly ambiguous. The difficulty in defining 'nature' arises partly from various interpretations attributed to the term throughout the different phases in Western thought. The *Dictionary of philosophy and religion* (1980 s.v. "nature") refers to

Plato's conception of nature as the realm of change, created according to an eternal pattern,<sup>4</sup> whereas the Stoic philosophers extended the concept of nature to include man, finite things and God as part of one system. Kant, on the other hand, confines nature to the phenomenal world and places man's life in a supersensible or noumenal realm.

In the context of this study there are two predominant issues which make a working definition of 'nature' problematic: the one relates to an 'objective' and the other to a subjective interpretation of nature. Objectivity implies a belief in a world which is empirically comprehensible and which can exist independently of our perception of it. Thus, nature, according to an objective interpretation would be something that is external to the human being. This external physical world appears to be presented initially through sensory perception. Another significant characteristic of the objective viewpoint is the implication that it is not linked to a specifically human perceptual viewpoint, and is thus non-anthropocentric. The question that arises from this approach, is whether it is possible to form a conception of the world that is independent of one's perception of it. Thomas Nagel in his *View from Nowhere* (1986:26), comments that 'reality is not just objective reality, and any objective conception of reality must include an acknowledgement of its own incompleteness'.

A subjective perception may be seen as anthropocentric as it rejects the possibility of a viewpoint that is distinct from the experiencing subject. The question that is formulated by the subjective approach is whether there is a world that exists outside our perception of it. According to this perspective, there appears to be no division between object and perception, concept and image, subject and external world. The subjective nature of perception was central to the philosophical systems of the German idealists, such as Johan Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling who greatly influenced the Romantics. My own perception

---

<sup>4</sup>Plato (1956:306-311) postulates his theory of forms or ideas in *The Republic* and other dialogues. Plato contends that the material objects that one perceives through the senses are exemplifications of perfect ideas or forms. Thus the empirical world appears less real than the perfect realm that brings it into being. To obtain knowledge of the forms would be to obtain knowledge of the true nature of reality.



of nature has been paradoxical in that it has vacillated between these two opposing views.<sup>5</sup>

When I initially began to paint the landscape my intention was to be an 'objective' viewer and record my observations as accurately as possible. I thus adopted the concept of *mimesis* as my point of departure.<sup>6</sup> I subsequently became aware of the impossibility of a completely objective reality and by extension of the impossibility of the concept of imitation. Considering that there is no such thing as a completely external reality, imitation of that reality becomes an illusion. Certain characteristics which started to appear in my paintings, such as the selection of some fragments as opposed to others, the arbitrary cropping of the natural images, different vantage points, indicated a subjectivity and a particular point of view. On the other hand, I do not agree with an entirely subjective viewpoint as I believe that there is a world that exists independently of my own perception of it.<sup>7</sup> My own definition of nature is one that allows for the simultaneous existence of both subjective and objective perspectives, or for a blurring of the boundaries between them.

## TRANSCENDENCE

The *Oxford combined dictionary of current English & modern English usage* gives a number of definitions relevant to transcendence. To 'transcend' means to 'be beyond range or domain or grasp of (human experience, reason, description, belief, etc.)...' and 'transcendent' is defined

---

<sup>5</sup>Stephen Priest (1991:65) in his *Theories of the mind* defines Idealism as the theory that only the mind exists. I believe that a more apt definition of Idealism would be one that proposes that all knowledge and experience are products of the mind and are thus subjective.

<sup>6</sup>The term 'mimesis' originates in the writings of Plato and Aristotle in which art is referred to as *mimesis*. The term was used in a discussion concerning the form of poetry, and it appears in Plato's Book X of *The Republic* (1956:401-406) and in Aristotle's *On the Art of Poetry* (1965:31-37). Plato argues in Book X that poetry and the arts are an illusion since implicit in his definition of *mimesis* is the concept of imitation of a higher Good or of an Ideal world which poetry and the visual arts are inadequate in representing.

<sup>7</sup>The rocks which have formed the subject of my painting, did not come into being because of my representations of them. Their physical existence is independent of my perception.

as 'of supreme merit or quality, (of God) existing apart from, or not subject to limitations of, material universe' (*OCD* 1982, s.v. "transcend"). Kant applies the term 'transcendental' to the *a priori* elements of experience which insofar as they are not obtained from it empirically, they transcend that experience. Kant states the following in his *Transcendental aesthetic* (1781): 'And accordingly we find existing in the mind *a priori*, the pure form of sensuous intuitions in general, in which all the manifold content of the phenomenal world is arranged and viewed under certain relations' (1952:23).

My own definition of transcendence refers to a greater reality which rises above the limitations of human experience and therefore relates to a suprasensible sphere. At the same time, however, I do not consider transcendence to be divorced from human experience, existing in some otherworldly realm of ideas.

I believe that transcendence may be part of the experience of the physical world and not dissociated from it. My experience of nature, for instance, made me aware of a larger reality which was nevertheless immanent in nature and could be perceived primarily through a sensory appreciation of the natural environment.

More specifically, I perceive nature to be a manifestation of an immanent and a transcendent God. In the context of this research I use transcendence as linked to notions of the Divine or the Absolute.<sup>9</sup>

There is an embedded paradox in attempting to define transcendence, in the sense that one

---

<sup>9</sup>I am fully aware of the paradoxical nature of a belief in God or a divine and Absolute Being (which is how I perceive God). In order to know God with any certainty or to be able to make definitive statements about His/Her existence would imply that I have myself reached a Godlike state which, given the limitations of my existence, is not the case. I do believe, however, that the lack of certainty or verifiable proof does not negate the existence of the Absolute. Moreover I consider doubt to be part of belief and not inimical to it.

has to rely on the limitations of human reason and experience to frame what extends beyond that experience. Considering human finitude it seems impossible to rationally discuss, define, or obtain knowledge of transcendent states. Attempting to make any definitive statements in this regard would be abrogating the concept of transcendence.

We can only bring within our conceptual grasp what is itself limited, an attempt to define transcendence essentially requires defining the undefinable. Moreover, as we are spatially and temporally limited beings and our powers of reasoning can only be effective within this finite framework, it would appear to be impossible to prove or disprove anything that transcends the framework. The problem is exacerbated by the restrictions of language, unless one allows for indefinite interpretations of words or a metaphorical use of language. AW Moore<sup>10</sup> in *The Infinite* (1990:11) argues that as a result of the paradox of our finitude prevailing in any enquiry into the infinite, we can more adequately understand the infinite through analogies and contrasts than by confronting it directly. Romantic poetry, for instance, exemplifies the use of metaphorical language to intimate infinity.<sup>11</sup>

I believe that transcendent states can be grasped more adequately through the use of imagination and intuition and through the human capacity for symbolic experiencing. I contend that even though it is not possible to precisely define the Absolute, it is still possible to perceive intimations of it through symbols which may reflect some of its facets. As concerns my own experience, nature has provided me with such a symbolic framework.

The above definitions of transcendence relate more to personal beliefs. Transcendence in the context of this research has a secondary meaning which pertains specifically to the art-making process. When the term is used in relation to my work it also refers to the opening

---

<sup>10</sup>There is no reference concerning the initials AW. No first names are given.

<sup>11</sup>As these lines by William Blake illustrate:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,  
And Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour (quoted in Raine 1970:50).

up of the frame. This frame may be seen as metaphorical (in the sense of being defined by symbolic orders/frames of reference) or literal (as in the sense of a pictorial frame).

The materiality of the artwork, a physical object bound by a frame, renders it relative. In this respect Derrida's notion of the *parergon* is significant. The *parergon* refers to associative constructs and imaginative interpretations and thus it is a means of opening up the frame. Derrida defines the *parergon* as that which 'comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done (*fait*), the fact (*le fait*), the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside (1978:54).

It appears therefore, that as a result of its metaphorical significations the work ceases to be a mere physical object and transcends its material existence.

## THE CONVENTION OF LANDSCAPE

The *Oxford combined dictionary of current English & modern usage* gives the origin of the word, 'landscape' as Dutch and defines it as a 'piece of inland scenery, picture of it, art of painting such pictures' and 'landscape gardening' as 'laying-out of grounds to imitate natural scenery'. As a verb, 'landscape' means to 'improve by, engage in, landscape gardening' (1982, s.v. "landscape").

Implicit in the above definitions is a mediated response to the natural environment. This mediation refers to a cultural context and it also entails a 'framing' of nature, or even an attempt to improve on it.<sup>12</sup> This transmutation of a direct experience of nature into a pictorial reality appears to be determined by cultural norms, social conditions, emotional and

---

<sup>12</sup>It is significant that the *Authorized Roget's Thesaurus of English words and phrases* gives the verb 'transform' as one of the meanings for the verb 'landscape' (1987, s.v. "landscape").

imaginative responses and the artist's personal viewpoint. All these determining factors suggest that landscape painting can never be about an 'innocent' or unmediated experience of nature. The painter Therese Oulton seems to express the view that landscape is determined by a cultural perspective when she argues the following:

Part of the problem for me was the concept of duality, which sets you in opposition to everything that is outside your own skin, which is particularly relevant if you are using shreds of landscape imagery. Landscape is treated as inanimate, which has had drastic results for the actual landscape. I am trying to change that approach to landscape - not to place it 'out there', taking on all your sins, and the meanings that you put onto it (Kent 1986:43).

In my initial representations of the landscape I believed that I was transposing my experience of nature directly onto the painted surface. I subsequently realised the inaccuracy of this belief. The painting of landscapes is a far more complex activity than simply recording the natural scene. As my visual research progressed it became increasingly obvious that all the factors which I mentioned above (such as the socio-temporal context, emotions, intuitions, and personal viewpoint) have shaped my vision of the landscape. The subjective nature of my expression has become even more evident in my most recent works, such as *Pride of Purple Rocks III* (fig. 24).<sup>13</sup>

In Chapters 3 and 4 I will be investigating approaches to the landscape as expressed in the work of the Romantics and of artists who exhibit a 'feminine' orientation.<sup>14</sup> Their response to the landscape seems to be one of identification and reconciliation with the natural environment, and this attitude underpins my own relationship to nature. The approach expressed

---

<sup>13</sup>Georgia Saad *Pride of Purple Rocks III* (1995). Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 101.5 cm.

<sup>14</sup>I have used the term 'feminine' to refer to certain common characteristics which I perceived in the artists' work, but it is not necessarily a term that they would employ to define their work.

by Anne Bancroft in her comparison of Chinese and Celtic landscapes is similar to my own, as concerns the painting of natural images:

The Chinese had a ... feeling for landscape ... and they actually had a word for it - for the heightened dimension of being which seems to reside in one particular site. Their word was *li*, which means the innermost reality of an object, place or occasion ... it was the work of the painter to identify himself with the *li* (or 'suchness') of what he painted in such a way that the painting revealed the full reality of the subject. Most people only see a surface reality; but if you were to express *li* it was necessary to drop the barrier of self and opinions and to enter completely into the rock or tree or waves that you were painting (1987:102).

My initial representations of the landscape were partly based on a similar kind of identification with the natural forms that became the subject of my painting. Paradoxically, this approach is essentially opposed to the subjectivist viewpoint which does not seem to allow for a reality that is external to the perceiving subject. Identifying with the 'spirit' of the rocks or the sea, for instance, suggests qualities which are intrinsic to these natural objects and which exist independently of the viewer. Moreover, the sense of empathy with the natural world, and becoming one with it through contemplation, may be seen as part of a magical perception of the world. The magical orientation is discussed more extensively in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

In investigating the above concepts I have attempted to outline some of the problems which I encountered in my research. An important realisation which I gained concerns the impossibility of arriving at any fixed and finite definitions. A sense of paradox underlies most of the concepts introduced above. At most I can only attempt to formulate my own definitions and define my own stance. I therefore begin this investigation from a position of extreme relativity. One of the ways of transcending this relative perspective would be to establish whether there are links between my work and ideas and those of others, which is what I propose to do during the process of this enquiry.

# CHAPTER 1

## NATURE AS LANDSCAPE

Finally, I must tell you that as a painter I am becoming more clear-sighted before nature, but with me the realisation of my sensations is always painful. I cannot attain the intensity that is unfolded before my senses. I have not the magnificent richness of colouring that animates nature (Morse 1981:279).<sup>1</sup>

I decided to use the natural environment around Knysna as my subject-matter because of the deep impact it had on me in my encounter with it. This impact was originally so overpowering as to temporarily prevent me from painting, as I felt that the contemplation of nature was as valid a creative act as the representation of it. More importantly, it seemed that attempting to represent it would interfere with my 'unmediated' perception of my surroundings.<sup>2</sup> The contemplation of nature made me aware of certain qualities which I perceived to be at variance with my experience of an urban environment: I became aware of a different perception of time and space; I developed a less anthropocentric perspective in terms of relating to the external world and a sense of much greater identification with the environment, as well as a more intuitive and imaginative awareness of nature.

Landscape painting, as already mentioned in the Introduction, refers to the transposition of a direct experience of nature into a pictorial reality which is partly determined by cultural norms, historical definitions, aesthetics, and the picture-maker's biography.<sup>3</sup> The main prob-

---

<sup>1</sup>Morse is quoting Cézanne whose letters constantly seem to express his preoccupation with rendering his sensations in paint.

<sup>2</sup>As a result of the powerful effect that nature had on my perceptions I originally believed that my response to that external reality was unmediated. It was only later that I became aware of its inherent subjectivity and the realization that the belief in an 'innocent eye' is an illusion.

<sup>3</sup>John Constable believed that culture had always obscured the rendering of nature. The disparity between the real landscape and its representations was that between nature and culture. The following quotation in A Bermingham's *Reading Constable* illustrates the artist's beliefs: 'The deterioration of art,' he maintains, 'has everywhere proceeded from similar causes, the imitation of preceding styles, with little reference to nature' (1990:104).

lem I was confronted with when I originally started exploring the genre of landscape was the limitation I experienced when attempting to transpose my insights concerning the infinity of nature. The limitations included: rendering an experience which transcended the purely visual, solely in visual terms; working with the restrictions of man-made materials and a palette incapable of matching the immense variety of sensations of light and colour as found in nature; and using an inherited vocabulary of representational possibilities, such as the conventions informing landscape painting.

In view of my initial belief in the 'objectivity' of the viewing subject, the conventions influencing the symbolic order of naturalism presented themselves as being the most appropriate in the representation of landscape.<sup>4</sup> The following comment by Ernst Hans Gombrich illuminates this point: 'The familiar will always remain the likely starting point for the representation of the unfamiliar; an existing representation will always exert its spell over the artist even when he strives to record the truth' (1977:72).

I firstly want to examine the symbolic order of naturalism which provided the point of departure for my initial representations of the landscape. I analyse this symbolic order so as to establish areas of convergence or deviation.

## 1.1 THE SYMBOLIC ORDER OF NATURALISM

Naturalism is mostly concerned with the exact observation and representation of natural appearances, underscored by an attitude of 'objectivity'. It is based on the premise that fidelity to one's sensory experience is the primary aesthetic imperative. John Constable, for instance, strove to be true to his perceptions of nature and he is known to have said that

---

<sup>4</sup>The *Oxford companion to art* (OCA 1970, s.v. "naturalism") employs the term 'naturalistic aesthetics' to refer to the philosophical theory arising out of nineteenth-century positivism. This theory attempted to apply scientific methods concerning an objective observation of reality to the arts. As a stylistic term 'naturalistic' is used to denote a type of art which endeavours to emulate the appearance of natural objects. The artwork may then be conceived as a mirror of nature.



'painting is a science' which '... should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature.

Why, then, may not landscape painting be considered as a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but the experiments?' (Gombrich 1977:29).

The concept of truth to nature which is central to the aesthetics of naturalism, may apparently be traced back to the Egyptian New Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> Naturalism may also be linked to the concept of mimesis. Plato's definition of mimesis is relevant in this context as it seems to imply that naturalism is not simply a matter of faithful duplication but rather a matter of symbolic frameworks created around the natural world. One of the definitions of mimesis in relation to representational art refers to the imitation of nature.

Imitation of nature can either mean faithful reproduction of sensuous reality (*natura naturata*) or a process of artistic creation analogous to natural processes (*natura naturans*) which does not necessarily have to reproduce the reality of nature.<sup>6</sup>

When I first started depicting the landscape (for example in *Round the Cape of a Sudden Came the Sea*) (fig.3), I was concerned with the concept of mimesis as an imitation of natural appearances.<sup>7</sup> Consequently I attempted to be as faithful to my observations of nature as possible. This fidelity to appearances caused major changes to my mode of expression. I began to show the natural forms in much greater detail than before, and the colour that I used was more tonal so as to reflect the colours which I perceived in nature.

---

<sup>5</sup>Gombrich argues that the earliest example of truth to nature can probably be dated back to the Egyptian New Kingdom. The pharaoh, Thutmose, is reported to have included representations of plants in his picture chronicle of the Syrian campaign. According to the inscription these pictures were reported to be 'the truth'. Owing to the stylized renderings, however, the species of plants cannot be accurately identified.

<sup>6</sup>According to the *Dictionary of philosophy and religion: Eastern and Western thought*, the terms *natura naturata* and *natura naturans* mean 'nature natured' and 'nature naturing' respectively. 'Nature naturing' applies to God as the creative principle of all things. 'Nature natured' applies to the created things which find their principle in God. The term has been used by the Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno to refer to transcendence and immanence in God, and by the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza to distinguish between eternal and infinite essence and finite beings (DPR 1980, s.v. "natura naturans" and "natura naturata").

<sup>7</sup>Georgia Saad, *Round the Cape of a Sudden Came the Sea* (1990). Oil on canvas, 58 x 88 cm.



Fig. 1

Georgia Saad, *Self-Portrait with cats* (1989).

Oil on canvas, 171 x 100 cm.



Fig.2

Georgia Saad, *Self-portrait* (1989-1990).

Oil on canvas, 87 x 87 cm.

Considering that it is beyond the purposes of this research to examine naturalism in its numerous manifestations, I shall confine my investigation to those aspects of it which are relevant to my visual expression. The naturalist conventions which I find pertinent are: the picture as a window frame, the picture as a mirror of nature, and the picture as a photograph.

These concepts will be examined in terms of their ambiguous structures. Although they aspire to a transcendent framework of vision, at the same time they seem embedded in the relativity of the world-view that brought them into being. They would, therefore, in this sense relate to a fragmentary reality.

Another aspect of naturalism which I intend to explore is that which is expressed in the work of artists who are using the natural environment itself as a medium.

### 1.1.1 The Picture as a window frame<sup>8</sup>

Alberti's definition of a picture as a framed window to the world designated a lasting model in the Western naturalist tradition. This model is primarily concerned with defining the 'real' as that which can occupy a position in space and the construct that determines this position is the science of perspective.<sup>9</sup> Linear or scientific perspective forms the rational basis of representational painting. Maurice Henri Pirenne in his *Optics, painting & photography* (1970) states:

---

<sup>8</sup>This concept refers to the ideas of Leon Battista Alberti. The interaction between Alberti, the architect Brunelleschi, and the sculptor Donatello, led to a systematization of a painter's perspective. Alberti's book, *Della Pittura* (On Painting) (1453) introduced the rules for transposing a three-dimensional scene onto a two-dimensional plane. This gave rise to the ordered space of Renaissance linear perspective (*EB* Vol. 1982, s.v. "Alberti, Leon Battista").

<sup>9</sup>In linear perspective the picture plane is considered as a transparent vertical screen which is placed between the artist and his subject. Outlines are traced on the picture plane as they appear from a single viewpoint. Linear perspective is a predominantly Western construct. The Chinese conception of space, which was mainly derived from landscape, acknowledged a 'travelling eye', thus Chinese artists adopted parallel perspective which induces the eye to glide from one scene to another (*OCA* 1970, s.v. "perspective").

Perspective provides a linear structure for the depiction on a surface of the apparent shape, size, and relative position of the objects constituting a scene in three dimensions: that is, for the representation of form, or for what is sometimes called the representation of space (1970:11).

There is an inherent ambiguity in the perspectival reconstruction of nature. Perspective claims to represent an objectively ordered reality which transcends the particularities of vision, yet this representation may only attain coherence and consistency from a restricted viewpoint.

The illusion of the 'real' space which perspective is meant to evoke can only be perceived from a fixed position in space. Pirenne argues that 'it is essential to remember always that a perspective projection is strictly valid only for one single eye placed at the right position with regard to the perspective or to the objects depicted in the perspective' (1970:76). Considering that linear perspective does not allow for the disparities that characterize binocular vision, which involves two different perspectives, it would seem that linear perspective is more expressive of an intellectual structure than 'truth to nature'.<sup>10</sup>

A contemporary artist who literally works within the convention of the picture as a window frame is Jane Freilicher. Gerrit Henry (1985:79), when discussing her work, mentions that Freilicher has been painting landscapes viewed through the windows of her summer home in Long Island since the 1950s. He comments that 'each is a celebration not only of nature but of the act of "taking on nature" - the struggle between what is perceived and how it should be painted' (1985:79).

In Freilicher's work entitled *Changing scene*<sup>11</sup> (fig.4), in addition to the view seen outside the window, the artist depicts herself in a corner of the painting. She is holding brushes in her

---

<sup>10</sup>Pirenne (1970:76) argues that systems of visual rays corresponding to the same objects are different for the two eyes. When looking out of a window, for instance, if one closes one eye and consecutively the other an apparent dislocation of space will result. The Leonardo window, which is an elaboration on Alberti's window, gives two different perspectives for the two eyes.

<sup>11</sup>Jane Freilicher, *Changing scene* (1981). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Henry 1985:79).

hand (a reference to the act of painting) and her expression seems to be one of disdain or frustration (a reference to the outside 'scene' which includes a bulldozer wreaking havoc in the landscape). It appears that while the artist is paying tribute to the landscape she is simultaneously frustrated by it. The extraneous elements (artist and bulldozer) which have been added to the representation of the landscape seem to imply an anthropocentric view that converges on the human being (whether that be artist or spectator).<sup>12</sup> The painting thus establishes not only visual but also conceptual links with the Albertian window.

### 1.1.2 Discarding the window frame

My representations of the landscape deviate from the concept of the picture as a window frame.<sup>13</sup> Even though any framing of nature acknowledges a dimension of subjectivity, the ordered demarcation of nature presupposed by perspectival construction is antithetical to my intentions. The kind of framing which is more in accordance with my approach to the landscape is one which allows for the representation of 'fragments' of the undifferentiated expanse of the natural world without greatly altering the vitality of its being.

In paintings such as *Round Earth's Shore/Lay like the Folds of a Bright Girdle Furl'd*<sup>14</sup> (fig.6), there are certain discontinuities in the use of perspective which seem to allow for the discrepancies of the visual experience. Instead of a logical recession into depth it appears as if two different perspectives are utilised in the painting. The background zone seems to tilt forward thus creating a strange tension between recession and flatness. Moreover, the high viewpoint is meant to destabilise the spectator's position and create the illusion of a less anthropocentric vantage point. At the same time, however, the subversion of traditional perspective indicates a position of extreme subjectivity. It is therefore an ambiguous construct.

---

<sup>12</sup>The inclusion of the artist and the bulldozer may also refer to the idea of 'improving on nature' which is implicit in the term 'landscape'.

<sup>13</sup>I am using the term to specifically refer to Alberti's window and the ordering of a 'given' scene from one fixed viewpoint.

<sup>14</sup>Georgia Saad, *Round Earth's Shore/Lay like the Folds of a Bright Girdle Furl'd* (1993-1994). Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 105.5cm.



Fig. 3

Georgia Saad, *Round the Cape of a Sudden Came the Sea* (1990).

Oil on canvas, 58 x 88 cm.

A similar ambiguity, however, may be detected in the Albertian picture. By utilising a perspective which converges on the central figure of the spectator it underscores a privileging of the human being and undermines the existence of nature which is independent of human perception. At the same time it aspires to a transcendent or universal vision as if nature can only be viewed from this particular vantage point. The urge for transcendence is counteracted by the specificity of the spectator's position and it thus also evokes a fragmented vision.<sup>15</sup>

A centrally projected perspective implies stability and stasis, whereas natural forms are continuously undergoing transformation. It has been more important to my mode of expression to evoke the unpredictable in terms of a discontinuous perspective rather than one which is stable and logical in structure.

The concept of the window frame has been further suppressed by my use of the fragment<sup>16</sup> as opposed to a panoramic view of nature.<sup>17</sup> In paintings like *Pride of Purple Rocks I*<sup>18</sup> (fig.7), the fragment evokes a continuation of the scene represented beyond the confines of the frame and there is also the implication that the universe is embedded in the fragment. It therefore creates an opening up of the frame. On the contrary, a panorama implies a sense of finality and completion much more than does the fragment and does not usually suggest an extension beyond the frame.

### 1.1.3 The picture as a mirror of nature<sup>19</sup>

The concept of a painting as being a mirror of nature has also shaped the vision of artists in

---

<sup>15</sup>It is specific in the sense that the illusion of depth can only be evoked from a fixed position in space.

<sup>16</sup>My use of the fragment as a visual device is discussed more extensively in Chapter 3.

<sup>17</sup>*The Oxford combined dictionary of current English and modern English usage* (1982, s.v. "panorama") defines panorama as 'picture or photograph containing wide view; continuous passing scene; unbroken view of surrounding region...'

<sup>18</sup>Georgia Saad, *Pride of Purple Rocks I* (1991). Oil on canvas, 94 x 90cm.

<sup>19</sup>The following excerpt from Leonardo's *Treatise on painting* is significant in this respect: 'the painter's mind should be like a mirror, which transforms itself into the color of the thing that it has as an object, and is filled with as many likenesses as there are things placed before it' (cited in Alpers 1983:47). Similarly, Pirenne argues:

a plane mirror ... sends to every eye the actual light flux which comes from the real scene ... The illusion produced by the mirror is thus of a very special kind. The mirror does not represent reality, it presents to us reality ... accordingly the phrase, 'an artist wishing to hold a mirror to Nature' can only mean an artist whose ideal is an objective, exact, complete representation of reality (Pirenne 1970:11).



Fig. 4

Jane Freilicher, *Changing scene* (1981).

Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown.

(Henry 1985:79).



Fig. 5

Jane Freilicher, *Bluish horizon* (1984).

Medium unknown, 200 x 175 cm. Collection unknown.

(Henry 1985:80).



search of naturalism within the Western tradition. It may be linked to the influence of the *camera obscura*<sup>20</sup> and theories of vision such as those of Johannes Kepler,<sup>21</sup> who wrote in 1604 that: 'Vision ... occurs when the image of the whole hemisphere of the external world in front of the eye - in fact a little more than a hemisphere - is projected onto the pink superficial layer of the concave retina' (cited in Pirenne 1970:1).

The implication of the discovery of the *camera obscura* for naturalistic painting was that it provided a more directly empirical model for the representation of natural appearances than the imitative model based on the concept of the picture as a window frame. This is partly because the *camera obscura* supplies direct visual impressions rather than serving as an access to a constructed image of the visible world. Svetlana Alpers, relating this mode of vision - which she calls 'picturing' - to Dutch descriptive painting of the seventeenth century, contends that,

- (i) it calls attention to the *making* of images rather than the finished product;
- (ii) it emphasizes the inseparability of maker, picture and what is pictured;
- and (iii) it allows us to broaden the scope of what we study since mirrors, maps, and eyes also can take their place alongside of art as forms of picturing so understood (1983:26).

---

<sup>20</sup>*Camera obscura* was the name given to a device which, by allowing light to pass through a hole into a box or darkened room, reflects an image of the world beyond onto a surface. This image, similarly to the image cast on the retina, is inverted, thus the *camera obscura* functions in a sense like the optical system of the human eye. In this respect it is also like the photographic camera. In the early 1600s, Kepler, who gave the *camera obscura* its name, used it to record astronomical phenomena and also had a portable apparatus which he used in the drawing of landscapes (OCA 1970, s.v. "camera obscura").

<sup>21</sup>Johannes Kepler (1571 - 1630) is the Renaissance astronomer and astrologer who founded modern optics. He postulated the earliest explanation of how human beings see. He presented his results in a book entitled *Ad Vittellionem Paralipomena, Quibus Astronomiae Pars Optica Traditur* (1604). Kepler's analysis of the process of vision provided the basis for all subsequent developments concerning an understanding of the structure and function of the human eye (EB 1982, s.v. "Kepler, Johannes").

This pictorial mode undermines the necessity of a prior frame as the initial definition of a picture and presents the spectator instead with an image spread out on the pictorial surface as if it were an undemarcated fragment of the world that continues beyond the limits of the canvas.

Jan Vermeer's *View of Delft* is an example of this method of representation.<sup>22</sup> Delft, as shown by Vermeer, creates the illusion of the world 'seen' imprinting itself on the surface in terms of colour and light, as if the discovery of the world and the depiction of it by the artist converge.<sup>23</sup> Jacob van Ruisdael's landscapes, such as *Bleaching fields near Haarlem*<sup>24</sup>, exemplify a similar pictorial approach.<sup>25</sup>

Freilicher's work *Bluish horizon* (fig.5) may be linked to the concept of the picture as a mirror of nature.<sup>26</sup> There is a suggestion that the represented landscape presented itself without the artist's mediation. The heightened colour and the painterly brushstrokes, however, imply a subjectivity that belies the 'objective' mirroring of the world.

Hamish Fulton in *Barking dogs* (fig.8) places three photographs consecutively to create a panoramic view of a large open field.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>Jan Vermeer, *View of Delft* (c.1658). Oil on canvas, 98.5 x 117.5cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague.

<sup>23</sup>My usage of the term 'seen' refers to the kind of representation that implies an 'unmediated' perception, as if the world presented itself, rather than representation which involves a selection and rearrangement of what is given.

<sup>24</sup>Jacob van Ruisdael, *Bleaching fields near Haarlem* (date unknown). Oil on canvas, 62.2 x 55.2cm. Kunsthau, Zurich.

<sup>25</sup>Eugene Fromentin describes Ruisdael as: 'That grand eye open to everything that lives ... without omitting anything, travels over the circular field of vision ... His eye has the property of a camera obscura: it reduces, diminishes the light and preserves in things the exact properties of their form and colouring' (1981:142). Kepler's definition of a picture expresses a similar concept of the eye as a maker of pictures. It is significant that Kepler's term '*Ut pictura, ita Visio*' refers to a definition of vision as the formation of a retinal image which he called a picture.

<sup>26</sup>Jane Freilicher, *Bluish horizon* (1984). Materials unknown, 200 x 175cm. (Henry 1985:80).

<sup>27</sup>Hamish Fulton, *Barking dogs* (1978). Photographs, dimensions unknown. (Auping 1983:88-89).



Fig. 6

Georgia Saad, *Round Earth's Shore/*

*Lay like the Folds of a Bright Girdle Furl'd* (1993-1994).

Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 101.5 cm.

This collage represents one of Fulton's walks in Kent in 1978. His photographs are the result of walks that he takes in the landscape. The texts that accompany the photographs mention the time, distance and sometimes the conditions of the walk. The text that accompanies *Barking dogs* reads:

Barking dogs  
A non-stop 82-mile Walk lasting a day a night and three quarters of a day  
Roads and Paths Fields and Woods Kent August Moon 1978.

The implication of this method of working is that the discovery of the world and the depiction of it by the artist converge. Michael Auping, referring to Fulton's work states that 'when Fulton takes his photographs, he is not separated from the "scenery" ... he is walking through it, incorporated into it' (1983:90).

This kind of creative process may be related to Alpers's (1983:26) definition of 'picturing' as emphasizing the 'inseparability of maker, picture and what is pictured', and suggests conceptual links with the idea of the picture as a mirror of nature. The use of collage, which is made up of fragments, nevertheless subverts the notion of a 'disembodied' eye recording the natural world as it 'presents' itself.

#### 1.1.4

#### Discarding the mirror of nature

In my earliest landscape paintings such as *Round the Cape* (1990) (fig.3) and *Full Many Shapes that Shadows Were*<sup>28</sup> (fig.10), I adopted a descriptive method of representation which shares a number of similarities with the convention of painting as earlier discussed. My intention was to transcribe as accurately as possible the world as it presented itself. By making the viewer's position indeterminate I attempted to imply the absence of such a viewer, as if the world came first. The notion of nature existing prior to the viewing subject was, however, undermined by my use of the fragment. There is an embedded paradox in the use of the fragment within a naturalist order. Focusing on the fragment and attempting to represent it as faithfully as possible implies a sense of 'objectivity', as if one could extract a section

---

<sup>28</sup>Georgia Saad, *Full Many Shapes that Shadows Were* (1990). Oil on canvas, 88 x 58cm.

from nature and present it as a 'given' reality. At the same time, however, the radical close-up views in paintings like *And Now this Spell was Snapped: Once More I viewed the Ocean Green*<sup>29</sup> (fig.11), subvert the 'objectivity' which I tried to communicate as they evoke a subjectivity which is alien to the 'disembodied' eye.<sup>30</sup>

Focusing on specific sections of nature, such as the fragments of the rocks, as opposed to a panoramic view of the natural environment, is an example of how I selected what I chose to represent, a process antithetical to the concept of art as a mirror of nature.<sup>31</sup>

A similar ambivalence underlies the work of the artist Vija Celmins. In her drawing *Untitled (Big sea #2)*<sup>32</sup> (fig.9), she represents an undifferentiated expanse of the sea as if she is unselectively reflecting the scene before her. The intensity with which she concentrates on this fragment of the sea, however, subverts the notion of a decorporeal vision.

Another possible reason for my rejection of the idea of the mirror of nature may stem from my essentially romantic approach to the landscape. An objective representation of the natural world does not seem to allow for the mystery of things. The occluded view of nature which I have chosen to depict in a painting such as *Pride of Purple Rocks II* (fig. 12) highlights some objects, but obscures others, thus suggesting that there is another world which lies behind visible appearances. This notion further undermines the concept of reflecting the world as it is.

---

<sup>29</sup>Georgia Saad, *And Now this Spell was Snapped: Once More I viewed the Ocean Green* (1991). Oil on canvas, 88 x 75 cm.

<sup>30</sup>The concept of the 'disembodied' eye relates to the kind of perception in which the eye passively records visual appearances. It implies that there is no subjectivity involved in the process of seeing, as if a given scene would be perceived in the same way by all the people who view it. It thus postulates a universal kind of vision.

<sup>31</sup>The notion of the picture as a mirror aims at producing the illusion that the picture-maker simply reflects the surrounding world in an unselective manner.

<sup>32</sup>Vija Celmins, *Untitled (Big sea #2)* (1969). Graphite on paper, 85 x 112.5cm. Collection: American Telephone & Telegraph Co., New York. (Armstrong 1981:105).

<sup>33</sup>Georgia Saad, *Pride of Purple Rocks II* (1991). Oil on canvas, 94 x 90 cm.



Fig. 7

Georgia Saad, *Pride of Purple Rocks I* (1993-1994).

Oil on canvas, 94 x 90 cm.

The photographic image, which may be seen as having its antecedents in the *camera obscura*, may also be regarded as pertaining to naturalistic conventions. Aaron Scharf (1968:77), in discussing landscape representation in the nineteenth century, claims that 'the photographic image became the yardstick with which pictorial representations of natural objects were gauged'. Similarly, Kirk Varnedoe in his article *The artifice of candor: Impressionism and photography reconsidered* (1980), argues that 'photography has come to respond so readily to modern ideas of truthful representation, and has reinforced them so authoritatively, that photography now claims exclusive parentage of the accompanying conventions' (1980:70).

The photographic image has been considered part of a continuous history of visual representation and an overarching naturalist convention. In this respect both photography and Renaissance perspective can be included in the quest for a progressively objective natural vision. Alpers (1983:43-44) considers photography as belonging to the northern descriptive mode which she calls 'Keplerian' rather than as the culmination of the Albertian mode of picture-making.

Jonathan Crary (1990:36), on the contrary, disputes this particular viewpoint by claiming that what separates photography from both perspective and the *camera obscura* is far more significant than what they have in common. Crary contends that the *camera obscura* was not simply an optical device but also a philosophical metaphor for explaining the relation of a perceiver to an external world. He states that 'for two centuries it stood as a model, in both rationalist and empiricist thought, of how observation leads to inferences about the world' (Crary 1990:29).

Photography, on the other hand, belongs to a period in which there had already been a profound break with the kind of perception presupposed by the *camera obscura*. Contrary to the transcendent model of vision propagated by the *camera obscura*, the kind of vision exemplified



Fig. 8

Hamish Fulton, *Barking dogs* (1978).

Photographs, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown.

(Auping 1983: 88-89).



Fig. 9

Vija Celmins, *Untitled (Big sea #2)* (1969).

Graphite on acrylic ground on paper, 85 x 112.5 cm.

Collection: American & Telegraph Co., New York.

(Armstrong 1981:105).





Fig. 10

Georgia Saad, *Full Many Shapes that Shadows were* (1990).

Oil on canvas, 88 x 58 cm.



Fig. 11

Georgia Saad, *And Now this Spell was Snapped:*

*Once More I viewed the Ocean Green* (1990).

Oil on canvas, 88 x 75 cm.

by photography was one in which the observer increasingly had to function within disjointed and alien urban spaces. Therefore they belong to two different categories as concerns the observer's relation to the visible.<sup>34</sup>

I believe that photography may be seen at the same time as part of a continuous visual tradition and as marking a departure from that tradition. As concerns the naturalist aesthetic, it appears to share similarities with both the Keplerian and the Albertian model. In some cases it recalls the *camera obscura* mode of vision, by creating the illusion of presenting the world as it is, and in others it can imitate the Albertian window with its centrally projected perspective.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, fragmentariness of vision is an important characteristic of the photographic image. Auping (1983:88) mentions that Fulton tends to distil his experience of a walk by representing it in a single photograph which is then framed. To frame one isolated view of a given scene as representative of an experience, however, seems like a completely arbitrary concept. Even if one was to take innumerable photographs of a certain place, these fragments would still not add up to a unified picture of the actual experience of the landscape. It appears that photographs of the natural environment can at best express the momentary and the transient.<sup>36</sup> They are essentially fragments and as such they seem to be more expressive of discontinuity and relativity rather than of the transcendent model of vision proposed by the *camera obscura*.

In all my representations of the landscape I have used photographic references. I felt that photographic documentation was a more pertinent kind of visual information than other

---

<sup>34</sup>Crary (1990:36) claims that his argument on the *camera obscura* is based on ideas of discontinuity and difference, as opposed to Alpers's notions of continuity concerning the origins of photography and the existence of an *a priori* observer who has constant access to 'tranhistorical' options of seeing.

<sup>35</sup>Hippolyte Bayard's *The roofs of Paris from Montmartre* of 1842, for example, shows such a perspectival view (Scharf, 1968:88).

<sup>36</sup>Objects in nature are continually changed by light (as well as by the slower transformative processes of growth and decay). Each photograph therefore can only capture a momentary view of any given object or scene.

media, such as drawing. I would 'document' a particular place or aspect of nature in numerous photographs and then I would proceed to work on a painting using either one or a number of photographs as references. In paintings like *But Now I Only Hear/Its Melancholy, Long, Withdrawing Roar*<sup>37</sup> (fig.13) and *The Rocks that Muttered Close Upon our Ears*<sup>38</sup> (fig.14), I used a number of photographs so that the final painting was a combination of multiple images within the same format. This rearrangement of the different views and their combination into a seemingly arbitrary scene undermined the 'objectivity' and naturalism that may be associated with the photographic image. Moreover, discrepancies resulting during the process of code-changing (from photographic to painterly form) were also deliberately incorporated. The painting *Pride of Purple Rocks II* (fig. 12) (1991) exemplifies this kind of distortion as it involves a transposition from a rectangular photographic format onto a square canvas.

#### 1.1.6 Naturalism as environment

Although I use traditional art materials, there are strong ideological links between my work and that of environmental artists. In view of the fact that it was my response to nature that provided the inspiration for my paintings, I share their attitude of reverence for natural forms and processes. The work of contemporary artists working with the natural environment may be seen as partly relating to the symbolic order of naturalism. As distinct from artists working within the pictorial conventions of naturalism and employing traditional materials, these artists are using nature itself as a medium. As discussed earlier, the imitation of nature may either imply a faithful reproduction of natural appearances (*natura naturata*) or a process of artistic creation analogous to natural processes (*natura naturans*). The artists working with the natural environment may be seen as fitting into the latter category.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>Georgia Saad, *But Now I Only Hear/Its Melancholy, Long, Withdrawing Roar* (1992). Oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm.

<sup>38</sup>Georgia Saad, *The Rocks that Muttered Close Upon our Ears* (1992). Oil on canvas, 100 x 171 cm.

<sup>39</sup>Andy Goldsworthy, Hans Haacke, Agnes Denes, Nancy Holt, James Turrel, Wolfgang Laib, Giuliano Mauri, Nils Udo and David Nash are some of the artists working within this mode of expression.



Fig. 12

Georgia Saad, *Pride of Purple Rocks II* (1991).

Oil on canvas, 94 x 90 cm.



Fig. 13

Georgia Saad, *But Now I Only Hear/*

*Its Melancholy, Long, Withdrawing Roar* (1992).

Oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm.

Barbara C Matilsky, in her discussion on environmental art, states that:

For the first time since prehistoric peoples created earth and rock mounds and petroglyphs, large numbers of Western artists began making art in and from, the landscape, reinterpreting elements and processes of nature ... art and life hence became entwined (1994:7).

Agnes Denes's *Wheatfield, Battery Park City - a confrontation*<sup>40</sup> (fig.15) brought the wonder of natural growth to an urban population. The artist temporarily transformed a debris-filled two-acre space in Manhattan into a wheatfield. The land was cleared, 225 truckloads of earth were brought in as topsoil and an irrigation system was created which maintained the field for four months.

Similarly, the artist Giuliano Mauro has been working with the natural habitat in the area of the river Adda. In his *Tessitura del Bosco (Weaving of the woods)*<sup>41</sup> (fig.18) he joins live plant elements, structural supports and woven surfaces into a single fabric which is fully integrated into the natural environment.

## 1.2 THE PARADOXES OF NATURALISM

Naturalism as a symbolic order seems to contain a number of ambivalences. The veridical theories of pictorial representation that one associates with naturalism exhibit non-veridical qualities which appear to contradict the concept of 'truth to nature'. Both the Keplerian and the Albertian pictures, for example, relate more to intellectual structures or to the phenomenology of perception than to a 'true' representation of nature.

---

<sup>40</sup>Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield, Battery Park City - a confrontation* (1982). Two acres of wheat planted and harvested. Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan, New York. (Matilsky 1994:8).

<sup>41</sup>Giuliano Mauri, *Tessitura del Bosco (Weaving of the woods)* (1987). Vegetal elements, structural supports and woven surfaces. Environment of the River Adda, Lodi. (Fagone 1994:66).



Fig. 14

Georgia Saad, *The Rocks that Muttered Close Upon our Ears* (1992).

Oil on canvas, 100 x 171 cm.





Fig. 15

Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield, Battery Park City - a confrontation* (1982).

Two acres of wheat planted and harvested.  
Battery Park Landfill,  
Downtown Manhattan, New York.  
(Matilsky 1994:8).

Fig. 16

Hans Haacke, *Grass grows* (1982).

Earth, winter and annual rye grass.

Installation at the Andrew Dickson  
White Museum, Cornell University,  
Ithaca, New York.

(Matilsky 1994:8).



Fig. 17

James Pierce, *Earthwoman* (1976-77).

Earth, 5 x 30 x 15 ft.

Pratt farm.

(Beardsley 1984:69).



Moreover, the transcendent frameworks of vision presupposed by these theories are expressive of relativist viewpoints as concerns the relation of the observer to the surrounding world. These viewpoints are not transhistorical but are the product of their particular world-view.<sup>42</sup>

Contradictions are also embedded in the use of the photograph. The change from a photographic to a painterly code implies that attempts at verisimilitude are undermined. As opposed to an 'unmediated' perception of nature one is using, as a point of departure, a number of distortions which are peculiar to the photographic image.

In a painting such as *Pride of Purple Rocks I* (1991), colour is distorted, space is compressed, and the arbitrary framing of the composition deviates from the notion of a 'natural' perception. The sharp value contrasts negate a deep penetration into depth and reorganize the pictorial surface into flat patterns. This creates a spatial ambiguity since the illusion of the third dimension is evoked and negated at the same time.

The different aspects of one scene that one is able to obtain by means of photography (close-up, panoramic or cropped-up views) all purport to recreate reality as it is. This fragmentation of a given scene, however, into all these various aspects is essentially anti-mimetic as it dislocates perception. It also implies that unclear, ambiguous or partial representations of things can be accepted as 'true' or 'natural'. Varnedoe, in discussing the world-view that evolved in the same historical frame that saw the spread of photography contends that it has '... encouraged us to accredit a whole vocabulary of spatial "deformations" and compositional "abberations" as appropriate symbolic conventions for realist representation' (1980:70).

Thus, in examining the mimetic conventions that have informed my own picture-making I became aware of the anti-mimetic qualities of my work. Despite the ostensible aim to be

---

<sup>42</sup>Cézanne, for example, in abandoning traditional linear perspective was also aiming to be 'true to nature'.

'objective' and as faithful to my perceptions of nature as possible, it became increasingly clear that the concept of the 'innocent eye' passively reflecting a nature that exists in complete independence to one's perceptions is a myth. Similarly, the conventions of naturalism which claim to accurately reproduce an external reality (and thus aspire to a universal framework) are in fact creating illusions which are accepted as reality within specific spatio-temporal contexts.

Contradictions also seem to be inherent in the naturalism of the environment artists. Even if an artist is working with natural materials there is still a certain interference with natural processes and the idea of 'improving' on nature seems to be implicit in some artists' method of working. The following comment by Nils Udo is relevant in this respect:

Even if I work alongside nature, preparing my intrusions as gently as possible, they always remain a basic contradiction within themselves. My whole work rests on this contradiction. It does not escape the inherent destiny of our existence. It injures what it touches: nature's virginity (1994:59).

Thus the symbolic order of naturalism seems riddled with ambiguities and illusions. Instead of providing a transcendent and all-encompassing framework, it appears to consist of so many fragmented points of view, rooted in the specific.

At the same time, however, naturalism has not ceased to provide a framework within which artists can express themselves with a renewed vitality and imbue this deconstructed order with new meanings.<sup>43</sup> In the Introduction I defined transcendence (in relation to the art-making process) as anything which opens up the frame. It appears that the artists who have been working within naturalism always have and are still extending the frame. In the varied

---

<sup>43</sup>Environment artists, for instance, have extended the meaning and visual vocabulary of naturalism.

expressions of these artists there seems to be a central and unified core which provides the impetus for the creation of their works: the symbolic order of naturalism. In its paradoxical evocation of a unified approach to reality (the imitation of nature) out of all its different fragments seems to lie its transcendent essence.

In the next chapter I will be investigating the anti-mimetic and spiritual elements of Modernism and the ambivalences that exist within this mode of expression.

## CHAPTER 2

### NATURE IN THE AFTERMATH OF MODERNISM

In the twentieth century ... the process of modernization expands to take in virtually the whole world, and the developing world culture of modernism achieves spectacular triumphs in art and thought. On the other hand, as the modern public expands, it shatters into a multitude of fragments, speaking incommensurable private languages; the idea of modernity, conceived in numerous fragmentary ways, loses much of its vividness, resonance and depth, and loses its capacity to organize and give meaning to people's lives (Berman 1988:37).

Modernism<sup>1</sup> has been another 'symbolic order'<sup>2</sup> which has informed my work. When I first started investigating Modernism I believed that the only influence it had on my work was the importance it places on the picture surface. Moreover, I found myself in opposition to many of its characteristics, one of which was its fragmentary nature. As Marshall Berman contends, however, in his *The experience of modernity* (1988):

... to be fully modern is to be anti-modern: from Marx and Dostoevsky's time to our own, it has been impossible to grasp and embrace the modern world's potentialities without loathing and fighting against some of its more palpable realities (1988:35).

---

<sup>1</sup>'Modern' or 'Modernist' are terms used to refer to the period roughly dating from the 1860s to the 1970s and it is specifically used to describe the style and ideology of art produced during this time. Robert Atkins (*AS* 1990, s.v. "modernism") defines 'Modern' and 'Modernism' as characterised by a radically new attitude towards the past and the present, which was partly the result of Western society's attempts to come to terms with the processes of urbanization, industrialization and secularism that began to emerge in the mid-nineteenth century. Modernism is supposed to have been superseded by post-Modernism in the mid-1970s, but both terms seem to be semantically unstable.

<sup>2</sup>In view of the ostensible fragmentariness of Modernism it seems paradoxical to call it a 'symbolic order'.

As this research progressed, however, I discovered links with other aspects of Modernism of which I was previously unaware. Despite the belief in the predominance of the surface (both literally and metaphorically) that one associates with Modernism<sup>3</sup> it is a highly ambivalent order and as such extends way beyond facile definitions.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.1 THE FRAGMENTS OF MODERNISM

Exploring Modernism seems to require a different procedure to that used when examining naturalism. It is more important to examine Modernism from its ostensible fragments in order to ascertain whether it evokes a transcendent vision, rather than using the same method of exploring naturalism where it seems more important to examine its transcendent structures.

In order to establish links between Modernism and my mode of expression I propose to investigate the following issues:

- (a) the autonomy of the picture surface
- (b) the ambiguous structure of the grid
- (c) the fragmentariness of collage
- (d) photography in Modernism and
- (e) the spiritual element in Modernism.

---

<sup>3</sup>'Flatness' was a concept predominantly associated with the critic Clement Greenberg. In discussing the Modernist picture Greenberg contends that,

if it deceives the eye at all, it is by optical rather than pictorial means ... Not only does the abstract picture seem to offer a narrower, more physical and less imaginative kind of experience than the illusionist picture, but it appears to do so without the nouns and transitive verbs, as it were, of the language of painting (1973:137).

As I discuss later on in this chapter, the 'abstract picture' is not necessarily less imaginative or narrower than the illusionist picture.

<sup>4</sup>Late Modernist critical theory as formulated by Greenberg made formalism a dogmatic ideology of art (see Greenberg, C. 'Modernist painting'. *Art and literature*, vol.4, Spring 1965:193-201). Greenbergian theory seems to have anticipated the paintings of late Modernism, as exemplified in the self-referential work of the Post-Painterly Abstractionists such as Kenneth Noland, Frank Stella, and Jules Olitski.

### 2.1.1 The autonomy of the picture surface

The emphasis on the picture surface is probably the predominant influence that Modernism has had on my work. The primacy accorded to the surface indicates a concern with formal elements as opposed to the concept of imitation. Despite my original aim to imitate natural appearances my concern with the 'autonomy' of the picture has also been instrumental in my creation of these paintings. I was aware of the manipulation of formal elements on a two-dimensional surface even in my earlier, more descriptive works, such as *Full Many Shapes* (1990) (fig.10).

The spatial ambiguity which appears in several of the paintings seems to be partly the result of the awareness of the essential flatness of the picture surface. In works such as *Round Earth's Shore* (1993-1994) (fig. 6) and *Till All was Tranquil as a Summer Sea*<sup>5</sup> (fig.21), some areas in the paintings appear to advance irrespective of their position in a seemingly recessive space. Spatial continuity is thus disrupted and the illusion of depth is negated at the same time as it is affirmed.

In other paintings, such as *Its Path was not Upon the Sea/In Ripple or in Shade*<sup>6</sup> (fig.22) and *The Rocks that Muttered* (1991) (fig. 14), the compression of space is far more evident. Depth is shallow and layered, and it is evoked through a superimposition of planes rather than through any deep spatial penetration. *Once Again/Do I behold these Steep and Lofty Cliffs*<sup>7</sup> (fig.23) shows an abrupt cropping of images and sharp contrasts of dark and light which further reinforce the flatness of the picture plane.

Similarly, Celmins's drawings of the ocean, *Untitled (Big sea #1)*<sup>8</sup> and *Untitled (Big sea #2)*

---

<sup>5</sup>Georgia Saad, *Till All was Tranquil as a Summer Sea* (1990). Oil on canvas, 88 x 75 cm.

<sup>6</sup>Georgia Saad, *Its Path was not Upon the Sea/in Ripple or in Shade* (1991). Oil on canvas, 88 x 75 cm.

<sup>7</sup>Georgia Saad, *Once Again / do I Behold these Steep and Lofty Cliffs* (1994). Oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm.

<sup>8</sup>Vija Celmins, *Untitled (Big sea #1)* (1969). Graphite on acrylic ground on paper, 85.32 x 125 cm. Collection: Chermayeff & Geismar Associates, N.Y.

(1969) (fig.9), even though representational, indicate a concern with an overall surface fabric that may be linked to the Modernist aesthetic. The magnification of the sea, which is the sole subject of the works, creates a visual ambiguity. Even though it is an accurate imitation of a natural element, at the same time it reads as surface pattern. Richard Armstrong's comment in relation to the above drawings appears to underline their spatial ambivalence. He states that: 'Abandoning specific incidents in favor of more neutral and ambiguous imagery, she arrived at a suggestive, contemplative space ... alternately impenetrable and infinitely deep - almost boundless - these drawings can be mesmerizing' (1981:104).

Another observation which was made, even during the execution of my more descriptive works like *Round the Cape* (1990) (fig.3), was that despite the use of mimetic conventions the paintings were essentially abstract. Even though they could be recognised as 'naturalistic' images I was more aware of them being made up of marks on a surface. The contemporary landscape painter April Gornick (Heartney 1989:125), seems to express similar feelings in relation to her work. She says that 'the more I paint the more I realize how unrealistic the painting process is'. Even though the importance of the painted marks characterises works of the past too, as Velasquez's paintings demonstrate, it is doubtful that we would have been as conscious of them as autonomous elements prior to Modernism.

My most recent works are becoming increasingly abstract. A painting like *Pride of Purple Rocks III*<sup>9</sup> (fig.24), which is a later version of *Pride of Purple Rocks I* (1991) (fig.7), shows a shift from earlier descriptive images to a much greater emphasis on the painted surface. Similarly, the naturalistic palette of my earlier painting has been replaced by heightened and more arbitrary colour.

---

<sup>9</sup>Georgia Saad, *Pride of Purple Rocks III* (1995). Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 101.5 cm.



The skills and material practices concerning the craft of painting (which are of great significance to me) may also be connected to the primacy of the surface. This link is paradoxical because Modernism is mainly associated with flat and impersonal surfaces. When I first started investigating Modernism I believed that my interest in the craft of painting was a reaction against the reductive surfaces of most Modernist pictures. I subsequently realised, however, that painterly qualities were a concern of a number of Modernist artists (and maybe even more so than in the past because of the importance accorded to the surface) as the works of Kandinsky or Rothko testify. This kind of surface appears to be highly expressive and confrontational, being closer to the viewer and not concerned as much with the frame of vision. In this sense my interest in the act of painting may be seen as linked to the Modernist aesthetic and not as a reaction against it.

### 2.1.2           The ambiguity of the grid

Rosalind Krauss in *The originality of the avant-garde and other modernist myths* (1985), contends that the grid became the central conceptual structure of Modernism. This structure made its appearance in the early part of the twentieth century in France, Holland and Russia, and has remained emblematic of Modernism ever since. Krauss argues that there are two ways in which the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art. One is spatial; the other is temporal. In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized and ordered, it is antinatural, anti-mimetic, unreal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature (1985:9).



Fig. 18

Giuliano Mauri, *Tessitura del Bosco*  
(Weaving of the Woods) (1987).

Vegetal elements, structural supports  
and woven surfaces. Environment of  
the River Adda, Lodi.

(Fagone 1994:66)

Fig. 19

Caspar David Friedrich,

*Trees and bushes in the snow* (c.1828).

Oil on canvas, 31 x 25.5 cm.

Dresden, Gemäldergalerie Neue Meister,

Staatliche Kunstsammlungen

(Koerner 1990:3)



Fig. 20

Jorn Ronnau, *Unicorn* (1993).

Tree in snow.

TICKON project.

Langeland, Denmark.

(Ronnau 1994:55).



Fig. 21

Georgia Saad, *Till All was Tranquil as a Summer Sea* (1990).

Oil on canvas, 88 x 75 cm.

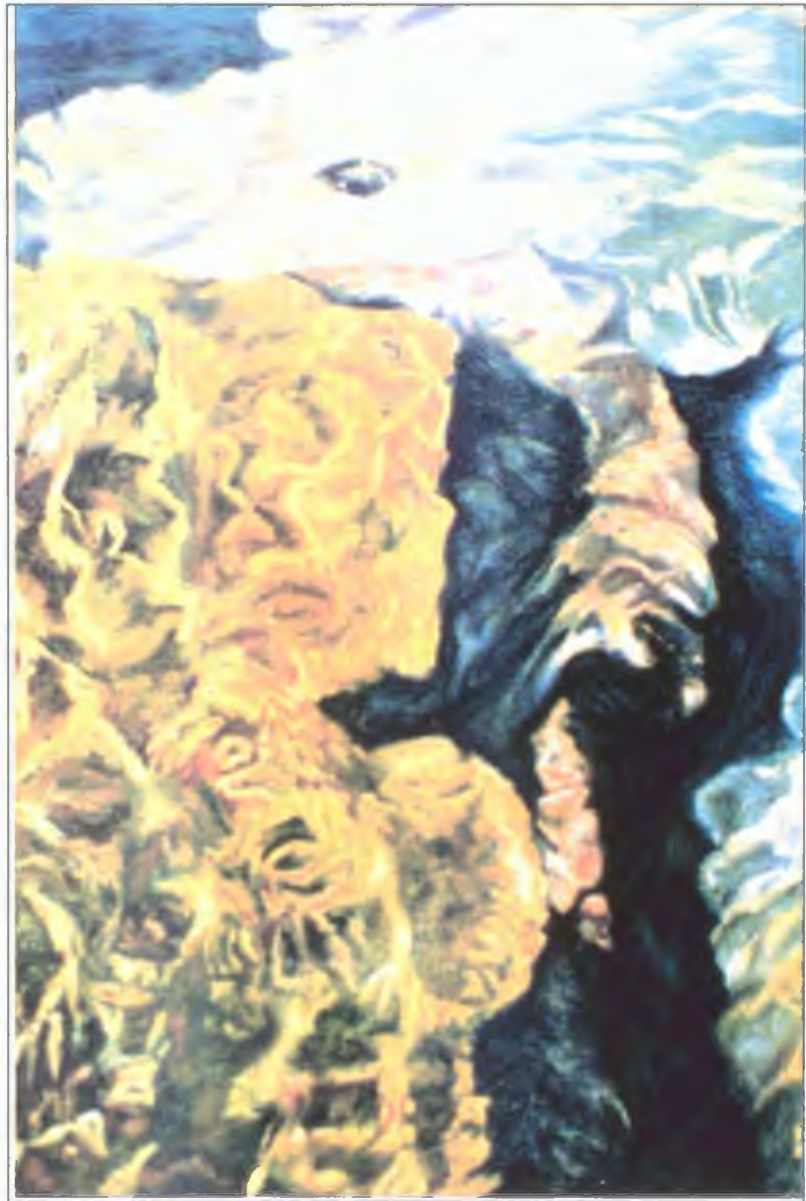


Fig. 22

Georgia Saad, *Its Path was not Upon the Sea/in Ripple or in Shade* (1991).

Oil on canvas, 88 x 75 cm.



Fig. 23

Georgia Saad, *Once Again/Do I Behold these Steep and Lofty Cliffs* (1994).

Oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm.

The grid exhibits conceptual links with pictorial conventions of the past such as the Albertian window and linear perspective, as well as with the gridded cartoons used in the Renaissance. There is an important difference, however, in that both of these conventions refer to the symbolic order of naturalism, whereas the modern grid is essentially anti-mimetic. Alberti's window and scientific perspective are based on the observation of nature and they represent attempts to map the natural world onto the two-dimensional surface of the picture. The grid, on the contrary, shows a withdrawal from nature, and its main concern is to map the surface itself. In this sense, although it has no precedent in previous pictorial traditions, it has extended those traditions.

The structure of the grid, however, is highly ambiguous. Krauss argues that the grid does not only declare the autonomy of the space of art, but also invokes infinity. By virtue of the grid (as perceived in Piet Mondrian's<sup>10</sup> abstractions) the work of art is presented as a fragment, thus implying a larger whole which extends beyond the frame. Krauss contends that:

In the cultist space of modern art, the grid serves not only as emblem but also as myth. For like all myths, it deals with paradox or contradiction not by dissolving the paradox or resolving the contradiction, but by covering them so that they seem ... to go away. The grid's mythic power is that it makes us able to think that we are dealing with materialism ... while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (1985:12).

Contemporary artists working within the mode of abstraction also seem to have a different understanding of the grid to simply perceiving it as mapping the surface. Abstract artist Peter Schuyff (1987:125), believes that 'grids and checkerboards are quite irreverent compositions'. He claims that since he was raised on abstract images and technologies, of which the grid is representative, he finds the structure as a 'natural and organic' part of his

---

<sup>10</sup>According to Robert P Welsh (1987:165), Dr. MJH Schoenmaekers (an influence on Mondrian through his interest in Theosophy) discusses vertical and horizontal lines in a manner which may explain their appearance in Mondrian's paintings.

'landscape'. As a result, he cannot see it in the same way as if it was originally perceived. Referring to grids he contends that, '...I consider them to be potentially poetic, not as something arid, pristine or theoretical' (1987:125). His painting *Untitled*<sup>11</sup>(fig.25) may be seen as expressing 'poetic' qualities as the grid is used to evoke a dematerialised, infinite expanse.

Even though there are no formal similarities between my work and the anti-mimetic structure of the grid, ideological links nevertheless exist . As mentioned earlier, the grid may be seen as a fragment that relates to a metaphysical reality. In the sense that it connotes that the universe is embedded in the fragment, it shares common elements with my use of the fragment.

### 2.1.3 The fragmentariness of collage

Collage as an accumulation of autonomous fragments deviates radically from the concept of imitation of nature. As a technique or a compositional principle, it seems to exemplify Modernism's fragmented vision and relativity. Moreover, it seems to exhibit conceptual links with the structure of the grid.

Donald B Kuspit (1983:126-147), in his essay 'Collage: the organizing principle of art in the age of the relativity of art' contends that since the advent of the Cubist collage, art and the experience of it could not be understood as anything but relative. Kuspit states that collage can be identified in terms of its synthesis of other elements, in connection to this he states:

Collage is a demonstration of this process of the many becoming the one, with the one never fully resolved because of the many that continue to impinge upon it. Every entity is potentially relevant to every other entity's existence, is potentially a fragment in every other entity's existence (1983:127).

---

<sup>11</sup>Peter Schuyff, *Untitled* (1987). Acrylic on linen, 187.5 x 187.5 cm. Collection: Pat Hearn Gallery. (Schuyff 1987:125).



Fig. 24

Georgia Saad, *Pride of the Purple Rocks III* (1990).

Oil on canvas, 140 x 101.5 cm.



The implication of this statement is that collage can never lay claim to an absolute reality because it is continually in a state of becoming. New Abstractionist, Philip Taaffe, who works with collage expresses a different approach to that of Kuspit. His method of working appears to correlate with the following comment that he makes in relation to pluralist culture. He claims: 'Pluralism is a word which is often used, but I think syncretism more accurately defines the situation; accretions of cultural artifacts brought together in ways that suggest unification rather than dissolution or disjunction' (1987:122).

Referring to his series of dinosaur vertebrae, for example, *Vertebrae*<sup>12</sup> he states that he works very hard at the planning stage and that he does not 'shape the thing as it goes along' (1987:122). This emphasis on the planning of the work seems antithetical to Kuspit's perception of collage as 'becoming' and indicates a desire to use collage as a means of creating a certain pictorial order.

I have used collage as a compositional device in some of my paintings, for example, *The Rocks that Muttered* (1992) (fig.14) and *But Now I Only Hear* (1992) (fig.13). In the creation of both of these paintings I combined different photographs into one scene which I then used as reference. My experimentation with collage did not prove very successful, largely because I used it as a means of creating order. To use collage as a compositional device in representing a supposedly unified scene seems to be contrary to the nature of collage. In this sense I find Kuspit's understanding of the concept useful.

Collage is also ambiguous. Although it does not purport to lay claim to an absolute reality it appears that it is precisely due to this failure to deal with absolutes that it can transcend relativity. In a sense it seems to exemplify Derrida's (1978:54) notion of the *parergon* as that which is 'neither simply outside nor simply inside'. It is fundamentally relative since ambigui-

---

<sup>12</sup>Philip Taaffe, *Vertebrae* (1987). Silkscreen collage, acrylic on canvas, 360 x 103.125 cm.



Fig. 25

Peter Schuyff, *Untitled* (1982).

Acrylic on linen, 187.5 x 187.5 cm.

Pat Hearn Gallery.

(Schuyff 1987:125).



Fig. 26

Dorothea Rockburne,

*Guardian angel #2* (1982).

Watercolour on vellum,

192.5 x 105 cm.

Xavier Fourcade Gallery

(Herrera 1983 :129).

ty lies in the fact that it is dislocated, but also linked in some way to the theme of the work. Because of its qualities of indeterminacy it can transcend what is fixed and therefore limited, and open up the frame.<sup>13</sup>

#### 2.1.4 The modernity of the photograph

In Chapter 1 the photograph was discussed in relation to the convention of naturalism. The status of the photograph is also ambivalent, however, as it is very much a part of the tradition of Modernism too. Photography informs our way of seeing by mediating our vision through mechanical devices. Thus, despite its mimetic properties it also establishes abstract relations between the observer and the observed while imposing those relations as real.

Photography also seems to suppress the tactile qualities of objects and elevates the sense of sight to a position of prominence. As Crary (1990:14) argues, this abstraction of vision was a precondition for Modernist painting in the nineteenth century. He describes how the sense of touch was an essential element in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theories of vision and how the ensuing severance of touch from sight was a consequence of a pervading separation of the senses in the nineteenth century. He contends that the loss of touch as 'a conceptual component of vision meant the unloosening of the eye from the referentiality incarnated in tactility and its subjective relation to perceived space' (1990:19).

In some of my paintings, such as *Them the Morning Light Loves as it Glistens on the Silent Rocks*<sup>14</sup> (fig.27), the spatial compression and flattening of forms may be directly linked to the photographic image which was used as a reference. When photographs are taken from a certain angle and under certain light conditions, solid forms can be reduced to two-dimensional

---

<sup>13</sup>In this respect collage may be seen to share similarities with the Romantic fragment which is discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup>Georgia Saad, *Them the Morning Light Loves as it Glistens on the Silent Rocks* (1993-1994). Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 101.5 cm.

shapes. This is particularly obvious when there are sharp contrasts of light and shade, as attention is drawn to the picture surface. Moreover, the interaction of light and chemicals in photographs also creates certain formal effects which heighten flatness. Therefore even photographs of the landscape seem to be as much about abstraction as naturalism.<sup>15</sup>

David Morse (1981:275-276) contends that because photography opened up a profusion of views it made it difficult for any view to be regarded as 'definitive'. Because photographs are taken at one particular instant and from innumerable vantage points, they seem to exemplify ephemerality. Painting, on the other hand, diffuses this exact sense of time and place and creates the illusion of a more absolute kind of vision. To quote Morse:

Since the act of painting may be spread over many days and worked up from initial sketches, its provisional and arbitrary character is progressively lost in the construction of a more comprehensively signifying image ... with photography ... every representation is evidently only a *partial* representation ... (1981:276):

As concerns my own method of working I agree with Morse in considering photography to be more suggestive of ephemerality than painting is. A painting is created over a period of time, which means that it involves an accumulation of different experiences, emotions, and visual impressions. The painted surface expresses this accretion of different elements. In depicting a particular landscape I chose one 'representative' photograph out of many that I had taken of the same scene.<sup>16</sup> I consider these photographs each to be a fragment of my experience of the landscape. In the paintings I attempt to bring all these fragments into a unified expression of the experience of a particular place.<sup>17</sup> The single photographic image that I choose is therefore not absolute, but serves as a point of departure.

---

<sup>15</sup>As I have already discussed in Chapter 1 there are a number of distortions associated with the photographic image that are essentially anti-mimetic.

<sup>16</sup>My considerations in choosing a particular photograph are usually related to formal issues and not because I regard the photograph to be more expressive of a place.

<sup>17</sup>This statement seems to involve a contradiction as the paintings themselves are in the form of fragments. I will be dealing with this issue in Chapter 3.

Hamish Fulton, who uses the medium of photography, accompanies his photographs such as *A hollow lane in the North Downs*<sup>18</sup> with texts which are derived from a journal that he keeps of all his walks. Auping makes the following comment in connection with the artist's use of texts: 'As distillations they are reminiscent of the haiku style of poetry, their rhythmic brevity bringing on a rush of sensations and mental images that seem to fill the photographs with a sense of experience the latter could not impart alone' (1983:92).

The above statement seems to imply that despite the artist's intention to distil his experience into a single image of a place, he also appears to be aware that a single, momentary view cannot be definitive, otherwise he would not have felt the need to supplement the photograph with a text.<sup>19</sup>

Thus it would seem that the illusion of immediacy that photography creates, suggests a temporal and fragmentary visual experience. This fragmentariness may be seen to relate to a model of vision in which the observer has to function within the discontinuous spaces of a modern or post-modern existence. This was probably a determining factor in my choice of photographic images as references, as opposed to a much slower kind of documentation such as detailed drawings of a particular scene. Despite my awareness of a transcendent reality and of a different concept of time and space, it appears that the simulated and fragmented reality of the photograph has also shaped my perception.

---

<sup>18</sup>Hamish Fulton, *A hollow lane in the North Downs* (1971). Photograph, dimensions: unknown.

The accompanying text reads: 'The pilgrims way 1971 ancient paths forming a route between Winchester and Canterbury 10 days in April a 165 mile walk' (Auping 1983:92).

<sup>19</sup>See Chapter 1.

Kuspit, in his *Signs of psyche in modern and post-modern art* (1993), argues that the essential ambiguity underlying modern art has less to do with the crisis concerning the making of the object than with the crisis of retaining a sense of wholeness in a modern world that denies any wholeness of being. In examining Modernism one becomes aware of a number of artists who retained a belief in a larger whole and expressed it in their work, despite the fragmented experience of modernity.

Non-figurative art, as exemplified in Mondrian's Neoplasticism and Kasimir Malevich's Suprematism, is not simply about mapping the picture surface but is also expressive of a yearning for the absolute and the eternal. Linda Dalrymple Henderson (1983:285), in her discussion of the fourth dimension in modern art, mentions that a world beyond sensory perception was an active concern of a number of artists working within a non-objective idiom.<sup>20</sup> In Malevich's Suprematism, for example, the illusion of the third dimension is transcended, and his nebulous white space may be seen as an evocation of infinity. Henderson quotes Malevich as saying in a letter which he wrote in 1916, that 'my new painting does not belong to the earth exclusively. The earth has been abandoned like a house eaten up with worms. And in fact in man, in his consciousness, there lies the aspiration toward space, the inclination to "reject the earthly globe"' (1983:285).

---

<sup>20</sup>Dalrymple Henderson (1983:1-25) states that the idea that space might possess a higher and invisible fourth dimension was the dominant influence in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This idea was propagated by Charles Howard Hinton (amongst others) whom Henderson describes as the 'first true hyperspace philosopher'. Hinton published his last major book entitled *The fourth dimension* in 1904. The fourth dimension was supposed to possess mysterious qualities that could not be entirely understood. It emerged out of a dissatisfaction with materialism and positivism and it resulted in idealist and mystical philosophical theories. The popularization of Einstein's theory of relativity which redefined the fourth dimension as time, rather than space, brought an end to this period in which artists, writers and musicians believed in expressing higher spiritual dimensions.

A number of artists such as Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Paul Klee were greatly influenced by the Theosophical movement, which emphasises spirituality.<sup>21</sup>

John F Moffitt in his discussion on Marc's use of colour quotes the following excerpt from Kandinsky's *The spiritual in art* (1977):

The strife of colors, the sense of balance we have lost, tottering principles, unexpected assaults, great questions, apparently useless strivings, storm and tempest, broken chains, antitheses and contradictions, these all make up our harmony. *The composition arising from this harmony is a mingling of color and form, each with its separate existence, but each blended into a common life which is called a picture by the force of the inner world.* (Quoted in Moffitt 1987:107).

Judging from the above quote, Kandinsky seems to be defining a 'picture' as a metaphor for 'cosmic' harmonies. Marc who appears to have held similar beliefs as Kandinsky, imbued his colours with a symbolic significance. According to Marc, blue symbolised the 'male' principle which was severe and spiritual; yellow symbolised the 'female' principle which was gentle and sensual; and red symbolised matter and was connected to the earth. This use of colour may be seen in paintings such as *Blue horses*<sup>22</sup> and *Fighting forms* by Marc.<sup>23</sup> In the latter painting there is no longer any reference to external nature only to forms of pure colour. A great bluish-black form occupies one side of the composition and a red mass the other.

---

<sup>21</sup>The Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and William Quan Judge. It appears that without the remarkable person of Madame Blavatsky the early Theosophical society would not have made a mark on the world. Theosophy was evidently welcomed into the more 'progressive' circles in Europe and America and it seems to have embodied the idealistic aspirations of a great section of the educated and semi-educated classes. These aspirations included, a desire for a better world; a need to find a substitute for God whom they felt materialist science was expelling from the physical world, and a yearning for magic and mystery which seemed to have been undermined by the advent of the machine (EU 1989, s.v. "Theosophical Society").

<sup>22</sup>Franz Marc, *Blue horses* (1911). Oil on canvas, 101.87 x 176.87 cm. Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis.

<sup>23</sup>Franz Marc, *Fighting forms* (1914). Oil on canvas, 89.37 x 129.37 cm. Bayerische Staatgemaldesammlungen, Munich.

Yellow appears at the top of the composition and green at the bottom. Moffitt quotes Marc as saying in respect to these colours:

... if you mix blue and yellow to obtain green you awaken red - Matter: the 'Earth' - to life; but here, as a painter, I always feel the difference: with green you never quite bring the brutality and materiality of red to rest ... . Green always requires the aid of blue (heaven) and yellow (the sun) in order to reduce matter to silence (1987:108).

It appears from the above descriptions that Marc attributes to colours a significance that corresponds to another level of existence, which transcends the purely physical.

A similar attitude seems to underlie the work of some contemporary artists working within the 'New Abstraction' mode.<sup>24</sup> Even though these artists are using abstract forms they are not simply concerned with formalist issues. The following statement by Philip Taaffe is pertinent in this regard:

I often think of the issues of modernism in theological terms. Theology extracts an exegesis or makes a story from a number of sacred, inspired or supernatural events ... perhaps we should see modernism as a field of inquiry in that sense; as a series of sacred and inspired moments ... (1987:122).

Peter Schuyff (1987:125), similarly comments that the 'light and spirituality' in abstraction have always been evident to him.

There are also artists within Modernism who seem to be interested in prescientific modes of thought, such as magical or mythological modes.

---

<sup>24</sup>There are contemporary artists who seem to reject spirituality in abstraction. Michael Bonesteel (December 1987:139) in *Medium cool: new Chicago abstraction*, discusses the exhibition 'The non-spiritual in art: abstract painting 1985 - ????' which was mounted in response to Maurice Tuchman's 'The spiritual in art: abstract painting 1895 - 1985'. The latter exhibition concentrates on materials and materiality as opposed to spiritual values.





Fig. 27

Georgia Saad, *Them the Morning Light Loves as it Glistens on the Silent Rocks* (1993-4). Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 101.5 cm.

Jackson Pollock's *The white angel*<sup>25</sup> (fig.28) exemplifies this approach.<sup>26</sup> The subject of this painting is probably based on a myth concerning the origins of alchemy. A male angel is represented on the left confronting a female angel on the right. The proximity of their genitalia suggests imminent copulation and can be understood to refer to the union of the male and female elements in the alchemical process. Similarly, in Pollock's *Alchemy*, the colours which are used (black, white, red and yellow) are symbolic of the four stages of transmutation in the alchemical process (Welch 1987:193-199). The artists Anselm Kiefer (Gilmour 1990:120) and Therese Oulton (Kent 1986:42), both compare the transformation of base matter in alchemy to the transformation of materials that occurs during the creative process.

Nancy Haynes, who works in an abstract mode, for example, *Untitled*<sup>27</sup> (1987), also expresses an interest in magical ways of thinking. She states that she is:

... very much attracted to prehistoric art, to petroglyphs, bone carvings, cave paintings. I am interested in primitivism as one aspect of modernism's lineage ... what fascinates me most is the combination of mysticism and physicality, the bond with their environment, manifested by primitive ritual objects (1987:118).

The above-mentioned artists have mostly chosen a non-mimetic approach in order to express spirituality. Although there are formal differences between their approach and mine (I have used mimetic conventions), I agree with their belief in the artwork as expressive of a spiritual reality. In this sense there are conceptual links between my work and this aspect of Modernism.

---

<sup>25</sup>Jackson Pollock, *The white angel* (1946). Oil and enamel on canvas, 108.75 x 74.37 cm. Collection of Betty and Stanley K. Sheinbaum, Los Angeles. (Welch 1987:194).

<sup>26</sup>Jonathan Welch (1987:196) in his 'Jackson Pollock's, *The white angel* and the origins of alchemy' mentions that alchemy seems to have been of great concern to avant-garde circles in New York in the 1940s. He refers to the Surrealist painter, Kurt Seligmann, who in his article entitled 'Magic Circles' discusses Jung's interpretation of the alchemical process as being psychic in nature. In this respect alchemy can be seen as analogous to the creative process.

<sup>27</sup>Nancy Haynes, *Untitled* (1987). Oil on slate, 58.75 x 58.75 cm.

## 2.2 THE AMBIGUITIES IN MODERNISM

In investigating the conventions of both naturalism and Modernism one is confronted with contradictions. In attempting to establish my connection with the mimetic qualities of naturalism I encountered its anti-mimetic properties, and in attempting to deviate from the materialism of modern art, I discovered a convergence with its longings for transcendence.<sup>28</sup>

It appears that despite the fragmentary nature of Modernism (exemplified in all its different visual modes) one may still detect overarching structures (such as those of spirituality or of the autonomy of the picture surface) which give meaning and coherence to dissimilar formal expressions.

Allusions to the infinite within Modernism also seem to indicate romantic links. Kuspit (1993:114-116) makes further connections to a romantic framework when he refers to the 'unintelligibility' of modern art. According to Kuspit, this quality may be found in paintings such as Claude Monet's *West facade of Rouen Cathedral, morning* (1894), Vincent Van Gogh's *Cypresses* (1889), Pablo Picasso's *The accordionist* (1911) and Pollock's *Full fathom five* (1947). This 'unintelligibility' Kuspit considers 'romantic' insofar as it implies a disbelief in traditional codes of meaning and emphasises the enigmatic attributes of the artwork.

Modernism still appears to provide contemporary artists with opportunities for extending its visual language. In this sense they are opening up the frame and are working with a Modernist idiom that transcends its ostensible finite and historical framework.

Thus, Modernism too, despite its apparent fragmentation, seems to lead to a paradoxical evocation of a transcendent framework. In the following chapter I will be enquiring into Romanticism and the paradoxes inherent in that particular symbolic order.

---

<sup>28</sup>In contradistinction to the Greenbergian disciples such as Stella and Olitski who reduced everything to the 'purity' of the surface, there were the Modernists who imbued that surface with multiple levels of meaning and metaphysical yearnings.

## CHAPTER 3

### NATURE AS A ROMANTIC LEGACY

But there's a Tree, of many, one,  
A single Field which I have looked upon,  
Both of them speak of something that is gone:  
The Pansy at my feet  
Doth the same tale repeat ...

(Wordsworth 1921:113)

My perception of nature has strong affinities with the romantic sensibility.<sup>1</sup> In investigating the Romantics, the following concepts are pertinent to my own work: a mystical or transcendent awareness of nature and the necessity of evoking the intuition and the imagination in developing that awareness; the representation of landscape as an expression of a personal experience; the importance of the representation of the particular as a means of intimating the universal; and the primacy of the symbol and the fragment in evoking a transcendent reality. What is probably my most important point of identification with the Romantics, however, is their paradoxical evocation of feelings of belonging and estrangement in relation to nature. This paradox is exemplified in the ambiguity which permeates the work of the Romantics and underlies most of the concepts mentioned above.

#### 3.1 NATURE AND ROMANTICISM

##### 3.1.1 A transcendent awareness of nature

The landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich mediate a religious experience, which is expressed

---

<sup>1</sup>Romanticism as a historical movement or phenomenon started approximately in the 1790s and lasted until 1835, even though the romantic sensibility may be found in different periods and cultural paradigms. Due to the complexity and contradictory nature of the movement, it is not possible to define it in terms of a single formula. Moreover, it would be beyond the purposes of this research to attempt to define Romanticism, so I would instead limit my investigation to those concepts of Romanticism (as they are exemplified in the work of Caspar David Friedrich in particular) with which I empathise, and which have relevance for my own investigation of nature.

within the very structure of represented nature. In *Cross in the mountains*<sup>2</sup> (fig.30), for instance, the Divine is evoked through the use of ambiguities, shifts between the visible and the invisible, and between the part and the whole.

A similar evocation of transcendence through shifts between the visible and the invisible is shown in the work of Gary Hill, albeit in a completely different medium of expression. His video and sound installation, entitled *Crux*<sup>3</sup> (fig.29), represents an updated version of the theme of the Crucifixion. For this piece, Hill walked across a deserted island<sup>4</sup> with five video cameras strategically strapped to his body, by means of which he recorded his journey.

The resultant installation comprised five monitors mounted on a wall in the shape of a crucifix. The monitors showed simultaneous views of the artist's hands, feet and face but not of the central part of his body. The monitors also featured glimpses of the same background landscape (which seem to refer to the landscapes that provide the setting in Renaissance Crucifixion scenes). The viewer is drawn into the work by undergoing the strange experience of watching five continuous close-ups at the same time and gradually as the video unfolds the viewer begins to conjure up Hill's missing torso. Michael Duncan says in relation to *Crux* that 'the discovery of the "absent presence" of Hill's body provides a weirdly effective parallel to Christian belief, a transcendence of the merely visual which can be seen as the work's existential "crux"' (1995:71).

In Friedrich's *Cross in the mountains* (1807-1808) (fig.30), the mountain appears as a silhouette, and variegated forms such as different types of firs, grasses and rocks, which call forth the diversity of nature are displayed on it. The flat silhouette of the mountain, which evokes

---

<sup>2</sup>Caspar David Friedrich, *Cross in the mountains (The Tetschen Altar)* (1807-1808). Oil on canvas, 115 x 110.5 cm. Dresden, Gemäldegalerie. (Koerner 1990:35).

<sup>3</sup>Gary Hill, *Crux* (1983-1987). Video and sound installation. Hirshhorn Museum. (Duncan 1995:71).

<sup>4</sup>Bannerman's Island on the Hudson River.

a sense of great distance, is juxtaposed with the detailed natural forms which it contains, and which implies a close-up view. This shift between proximity and distance, the microscopic and the colossal, results in a destabilisation of the viewer's position which may be conducive to the intuition of a transcendent order.

This visual disequilibrium is further reinforced by the fact that Friedrich provides the viewer neither with a firm ground on which to stand, nor with a stable horizon on which to focus. The artist represents the vertical mass of the mountain as if it is independent of any perceivable connection to the ground and places it before the spectator in such a way that it does not permit any point of access to its space. This indeterminacy constitutes an experience of transcendence. One of the ways of apprehending a transcendent reality is to disrupt a logical visual system, so as to mobilize the imagination and intuition rather than rationality.

In my own work, I have adopted a high viewpoint in some of my paintings, as in *Round the Cape* (1990) (fig.3) and *Pride of Purple Rocks I* (1991) (fig.7), in which I create a vertiginous effect. Such a viewpoint reinforces the destabilization of the spectator's position. This is different to what is established when a coherent visual structure which converges on the spectator at the centre of the composition, is employed. A high viewpoint leaves the spectator instead hovering precariously in mid-air. This kind of perspective also evokes a quality of sublimity which is characteristic of the sea and the rocks. The instability of the spectator's position implies a vision of nature as an untameable reality, beyond the control of human beings. In another painting, *And Now this Spell was Snapped* (1991) (fig.11), I have used a vantage point that is far below eye level, somewhere in the water looking up at the rocks. This creates a similar feeling of disequilibrium to that of a high viewpoint, as the spectator's placement can not be exactly pinpointed once again.

It appears that the use of these unstable perspectives results in a blurring of the boundaries between objective and subjective realities, and is more evocative of a transcendent experience than the centralised viewpoint which clearly defines the spectator's position and seems to conceive of him/her as the subject and nature as the separate object.



Fig. 28

Jackson Pollock, *The white angel* (1946).

Oil and enamel on canvas, 108.75 x 74.37 cm.

Collection: Betty and Stanley K Steinbaum .

Los Angeles.

(Welch 1987:194).

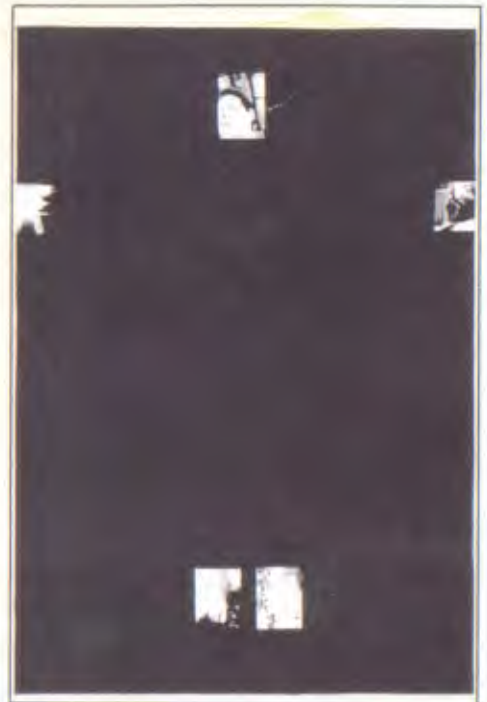
Fig. 29

Gary Hill, *Crux* (1983-1987).

Video and sound installation.

Hirshhorn Museum.

(Duncan 1995:71).



### 3.1.2 Nature as the representation of experience

A concept that is central to the Romantic evocation of a particular experience is that of *Erlebnis*.<sup>5</sup> The word seems to suggest the importance of one's particular experience in comprehending reality, as distinct from what one may know in theory, but which is not known experientially. Hans-Georg Gadamer in his *Truth and Method* observes:

... at the same time the form '*das Erlebte*' is used to mean the permanent content of what is experienced. This content is like a yield or result that achieves permanence, weight, and significance from out of the transience of experiencing. Both meanings obviously lie behind the coinage *Erlebnis*: both the immediacy, which precedes all interpretation, reworking, and communication, and merely offers a starting point for interpretation-material to be shaped and its discovered yield, its lasting result (1989:61).

Moreover, Gadamer (1989:63) argues that the concept of life which is intrinsic to the formation of the word *Erlebnis*<sup>6</sup> is a concept that 'in contrast to the abstractness of understanding and the particularity of perception or representation, ... implies a connection with totality, with infinity'. It appears that every act, being an element of life, reflects aspects of the infinity of life, and in this sense the finite may be seen as an expression of the infinite.

---

<sup>5</sup>The noun '*Erlebnis*' became common in the 1870s. According to Gadamer, (1989:60-61) the word was not found at all in the eighteenth century, and even Schiller and Goethe did not seem to be aware of it. It seems that it first appeared in one of Hegel's letters (Hoffmeister (ed.) *Briefe*, III:179) when Hegel uses the term 'my whole experience' (*Erlebnis*) concerning a journey. The word seems to appear more frequently in the 1870s. Apparently the word begins to be used in biographical writing simultaneously with entering general usage. Gadamer traces the origin of the word in the verb, '*erleben*' which means, primarily 'to be still alive when something happens'.

<sup>6</sup>*Erlebnis* also implies an experience that makes a special impression and has a lasting importance. W Dilthey in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (Experience and Poetry) (1905) includes an essay on Goethe in which the word appears. Considering that Goethe had described his poetry as being like a vast confession, it is important that the word was used in relation to him. In his essay, Dilthey compares Goethe with Rousseau, and in describing the new kind of writing that the latter had based on his inner experience he employs the term '*Das Erleben*'. The word *Erlebnis* may also be seen as a criticism of Enlightenment rationalism (1989:62).



In the representation of nature the concept of *Erlebniskunst* is of vital importance. According to Gadamer (1989:70) the term was initially suggestive of art that comes from experience and is an expression of experience. In a secondary sense, the term may be used for art that is intended to be aesthetically experienced. This involves an important ambiguity since it is only through an experience that we can grasp the meaning of a work that is supposed to be expressive of experience. In order for this experience to become collective it would need to be directed or mediated.

Friedrich's *Trees and bushes in the snow*<sup>7</sup> (fig.19) seems to embody the concept of *Erlebnis*. The placement of the common thicket within the pictorial structure creates the illusion that the spectator is placed as well. The thicket blocks off any wider view of the setting and one therefore does not stand before a 'landscape'. The bush's framed and centralized position in the picture undermines the concept of a nature that exists outside the viewer's perception and makes it appear as something viewed. Even though it stands devoid of life or human reference and all continuities of scale and size that would imply a human observer, the intensity with which the artist focuses on his image indicates the presence of such an observer. Joseph Leo Koerner in his *Caspar David Friedrich and the subject of landscape* contends:

You are placed before a thicket. You seek entrance to that which commands your attention. The scene becomes an extension of yourself, a buried meaning, an experience half-remembered or what you will. You believe that, because this is a painted scene, it is somehow for you, and that insignificant nature, represented, will have a bearing on your life. Frozen in your passage before the canvas, however, like a moth drawn towards a flame, you discover your kinship with the canvas: object among objects (1990:7).

By extracting the thicket from a larger whole (inanimate nature) the artist endows it with a specificity which implies an experience of it, and enables the viewer to empathise because of his/her own experience.

---

<sup>7</sup>Caspar David Friedrich, *Trees and bushes in the snow (From the Dresden Heath)* (c.1828). Oil on canvas, 31 x 25.5 cm. Gemäldeergalerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden. (Koerner 1990:3).

One of the ways in which one can communicate the singularity of a personal experience is by depicting the particularity of the represented object. This is especially applicable to representations of nature, as the diversity of its forms is one of its most striking characteristics. Nature defies facile generalisations despite the fact that human beings have habitually attempted to categorise, dissect, and explain natural forms so as to make them conform to the idea of an ordered universe.<sup>8</sup>

The humble shrubs in Friedrich's *Trees and bushes in the snow* (c.1828) (fig.19) are shown in their singularity, each specific twig has its own shape and thickness, and as such they are evocative of a personal experience. At the same time, however, Friedrich places the thicket against a potentially infinite background, thus not allowing it to be familiarised. The ground behind the delineated branches drops off unfathomably, and its subdued colour and hazy shape reinforces the sense of a vast and infinite expanse. This juxtaposition of the specific and the boundless creates a condition of visual disequilibrium which elicits the experience of transcendence.

The representation of the particularity of the object does not appear to be a concern of contemporary landscape painters April Gornik and Jane Wilson. Even though their work is representational, they do not appear to use the particular in nature as a point of departure. Wilson paints her cloud-swept landscapes from her imagination and from her childhood memories, as for example in *View from the empty house*,<sup>9</sup> while Gornik, who draws as much from her inner world as from the landscape, finds inspiration in books and the opera, and not only in the natural environment (Heartney 1989:121).

---

<sup>8</sup>To the Romantics, superficial appearances did not so much conceal order but depths of inexplicable mystery and, paradoxically, this mystery could be expressed not through vague abstractions but through the fidelity of one's perceptions to the particular in nature.

<sup>9</sup>Jane Wilson, *View from the empty house* (1963-1985). Materials and dimensions unknown.



Fig. 30

Caspar David Friedrich, *Cross in the mountains*  
(*The Tetschen Altar*) (1807-1808).

Oil on canvas, 115 x 110 cm.

Dresden, Gemäldegalerie. (Koerner 1990:35).



Fig. 31

Rebecca Purdum,

*Sneaking up on the ocean* (1987).

Oil on canvas, 210 x 150 cm.

Collection unknown.

(Moorman 1988:105).

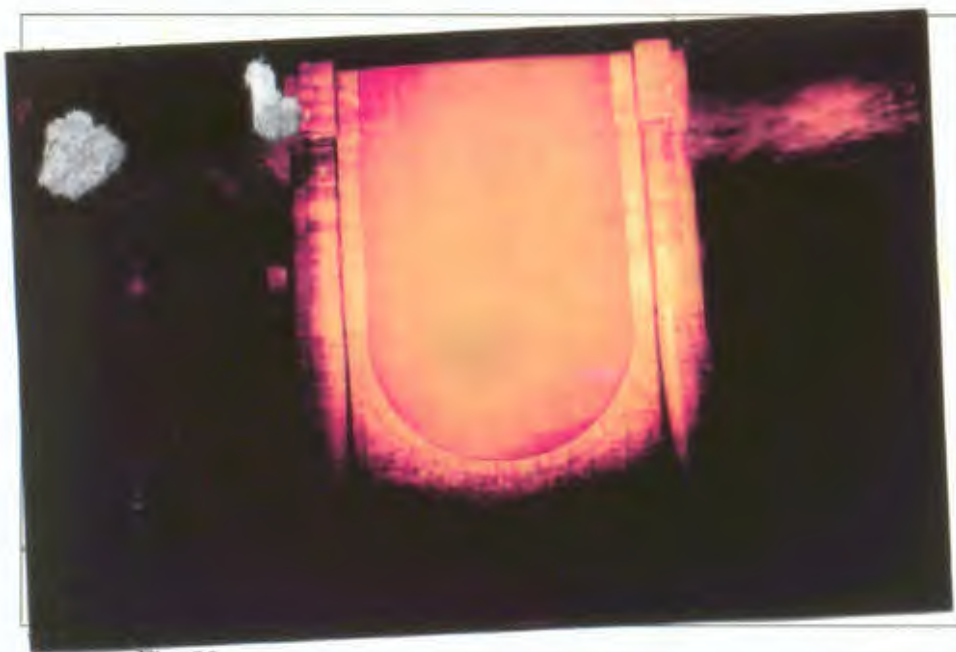


Fig. 32

Wolfgang Laib, *Passage* (1992).

Beeswax, wood construction, 790 x 522 cm. Installation at capc

Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux. (Laib 1994:30).



Fig. 33

Eric Wolf, *Blue mountain* (1994).

Materials and dimensions unknown.

Collection unknown.

(Volk 1995:87).

Other artists who work with landscape imagery depict nature in various degrees of abstraction. Eric Wolf whose works juxtapose abstraction and representation, reduces natural imagery to black and white rhythms. His initial experience of nature appears to dissolve when mediated through the painting process, as in *Blue mountain* (fig.33).<sup>10</sup> Thus the emphasis in contemporary paintings seems to lean more towards a generalised vision of landscape. In *A Sense Sublime/of Something Far More Deeply Interfused* (fig.34)<sup>11</sup> I attempted to communicate the kind of altered awareness I experienced contemplating nature by using a panoramic perspective. I subsequently discovered that this kind of depiction failed to impart anything about my experience of nature as it was too vague. I represented the sea and the rocks, for example, in a generalised manner which disregarded their individual characteristics. Thus, instead of the painting expressing a private experience, it seemed to exhibit a kind of superficial assessment of a place that one would associate with a postcard, that is, a view seemingly unrelated to a perceiving subject. It was only once I started depicting the sheer irregularity and uniqueness of each rock that the personal nature of my experience could be adequately communicated, as in *Round the Cape* (1990) (fig.3) and *Full Many Shapes That Shadows Were* (1990) (fig.10).

The concern with the particular in nature, however, creates its own ambivalences. The particularity which permits the object viewed to be singled out by the viewer (in this case the artist), may not only evoke transcendence, but also a sense of longing and of loss. The implication is that the 'moment in time' when the encounter between the object and the viewer occurred is now gone and can never be repeated, thus the representation of the singular acts as a poignant reminder of its absence.

In Friedrich's canvases, *From the Dresden Heath* (c.1828) (fig.19; fig.41), for example, the uniqueness of each object testifies to the embeddedness of its representation in the artist's

---

<sup>10</sup>Eric Wolf, *Blue mountain* (1994). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Volk 1995:87).

<sup>11</sup>Georgia Saad, *A Sense Sublime/of Something Far More Deeply Interfused* (1990). Oil on canvas, 87 x 187 cm.

lived experience and refers the work back to its original temporal moment. At the same time, however, this is a belated reference to a moment and a place that is no more, and this play between the original fullness of experience, which is unrepresentable, and its retrospective construction within the pictorial structure, evokes a powerful dimension of loss.<sup>12</sup>

As concerns my own work, my earlier landscape paintings *Till All was Tranquil* (1990) (fig. 21), *Round the Cape* (1990), and *Full Many Shapes* (1990), in which I concentrated on an accurate depiction of the specificity of each form (the subtlety of the tonal changes, the non-uniformity of each rock, the quality of light at that particular time of day) a similar sense of loss is stimulated, because of my emphasis on the specific. The sense of place which these paintings evoke is also accompanied by a feeling of absence and loss.

#### 3.1.4 The Romantic symbol

The Romantic concepts of the 'symbol' and the 'fragment' are essential in stimulating the imagination and the intuition in order to apprehend a transcendent reality. The Romantics sought to find an approximation for their intimations in the material world by emphasising association, hence the symbol became one of their master concepts.

According to one definition, (*OCD* 1982, s.v. "symbol") a symbol is, a 'thing generally regarded as typifying, representing, or recalling something'. The symbol is also defined as, 'something that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention; especially, a material object used to represent something invisible ...' (*HID* 1973, s.v. "symbol"). The symbol may thus be seen as something which suggests a deeper reality behind that which can be perceived.

---

<sup>12</sup>It is common knowledge that Friedrich did not execute the paintings in situ but in the cloistered space of his studio, thus his lived experience was 'recreated'.

Umberto Eco (1984:130), when discussing the etymology of the word 'symbol', mentions that it was initially an identification mark comprising two halves of a coin or of a medal. Either one of these two halves could stand for the other, but their full effect could only be achieved when they were joined again to make up the original whole. Thus, in the original concept of the symbol there is always a possibility of an ultimate recomposition. In more recent interpretations of the symbol, however, such a rejoining always seems to be deferred. Eco contends that: 'What is frequently appreciated in many so-called symbols is exactly their vagueness, their openness, their fruitful ineffectiveness to express a 'final' meaning, so that with symbols and by symbols one indicates what is always *beyond* one's reach' (1984:130).

Gornik uses symbolism in some of her landscapes in order to evoke the mystery underlying the natural world. In her painting *Untitled (lightning and water)*<sup>13</sup> (fig.35) she uses a single streak of lightning which becomes a focal point in the composition. The lightning is not painted naturalistically (because the entire scene would have then been illuminated). Framed as it is by the surrounding darkness it assumes symbolic significance and suggests an otherworldly reality.

Similarly, Keith Dietrich uses symbols in his 'landscape' paintings to suggest an undefinable reality. In works such as *Lot's wife dreams of Babel and wordstars*<sup>14</sup> and *The first fruits, an altar for Cain and Abel*<sup>15</sup> (fig.36), Dietrich uses cultural symbols, but also infuses the rock-forms themselves with symbolic significance. The dramatic lighting which bathes the rocks and also the abruptly cropped views isolate the rocks and transform them into potentially threatening presences. This mood of foreboding seems to be consistent with the romantic imagination.

---

<sup>13</sup>April Gornik, *Untitled (lightning and water)* (1981). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Heartney 1989:123).

<sup>14</sup>Keith Dietrich, *Lot's wife dreams of Babel and wordstars* (1991). Egg tempera on canvas, 245 x 110 cm.

<sup>15</sup>Keith Dietrich, *The first fruits, an altar for Cain and Abel* (1991). Egg tempera on canvas, 245 x 110 cm. Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria. (Exhibition invitation, The Goodman Gallery 1991).



Fig. 34

Georgia Saad, *A Sense Sublime/Of Something Far More Deeply Interfused* (1990).

Oil on canvas, 87 x 187 cm.



In Friedrich's *Cross in the mountains* (1808) (Fig.30), the artist renders the landscape both as being wholly natural and wholly infused with divinity, through his use of symbolism. The relation between man and God expressed traditionally by the crucifix and religious imagery is here expressed within the structure of represented nature. The concealed sun in the background for instance, may be seen as an allusion to God and also to a loss of faith, a concept which is further reinforced by the placement of the crucifix over an abyss. The crucifix itself may be viewed, not as a representation of a religious event, but almost as part of nature. Upon the rejection of traditional religious iconography the symbols of nature themselves seem to become the vehicles and images of transcendence (Rosenblum 1975:26). As Robert Rosenblum states:

... even without the presence of the crucifix that faces the concealed sunset ... the landscape itself, in its dramatic contrast of the closeness of firm rock and tree against the remoteness of a pervasive luminosity whose setting source is hidden from us, would suggest some uncommon event in nature, composed in terms of an emblematic polarity of dark and light, near and far, palpable and impalpable (1975:26).

Eco (1984:141) examines the aesthetics of Romanticism in view of a conjoining of symbolism and art. The work of art is thought of as a cohesive structure where expression and content are inseparable. In the sense that its meaning cannot be divorced from its form, the work of art is untranslatable, therefore it is properly a symbol.

Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner (1984:60-63) in *Romanticism and realism: the mythology of nineteenth-century art* remark that three main tactics can be distinguished in the attempts of the Romantics to free the symbol from convention in both figure and landscape painting:

- i. the elaboration of a totally personal symbolism, an idiosyncratic mythology that belongs wholly to the artist. William Blake is a good example of an artist who uses this tactic;
- ii. the use of symbols which are so familiar that they get taken for granted and appear to escape from convention such as the association of dark hues with sadness; and

- iii. the exploitation of latent possibilities of meaning in natural phenomena such as, for example, the coming of dawn as a new beginning. This mode of expression is so closely related to experience that the objects themselves appear to be communicating, the symbolism does not seem to be art, but the very language of nature itself.

In *Round the Earth's Shore* (1993) (fig.6) and *Them the Morning Light Loves* (1993-1994) (fig.27), I have used two natural images almost exclusively: the sea and the rocks. They are simultaneously themselves, that is, elements of nature, and also personal symbols, evocative of a private experience. These images also have traditional associations, the sea or water, for example, has been traditionally connected to the feminine element.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.1.5 The Romantic fragment

I have chosen the form of the fragment in paintings such as *Pride of Purple Rocks I* (1991) (fig.7) in order to suggest the infinity and boundlessness of nature. In this work the forms of the rocks are cut off by the picture frame, which points to a greater reality that extends beyond the confines of the frame. At the same time, however, as these fragments wrested from nature allude to a larger unity of which they form a part, they also exist independently of it, and each fragment becomes a centre of individual attention.

The Romantic search for a visual equivalent to symbolic experiencing finds its characteristic expression in the form of the fragment. The fragment, in a similar way as the symbol, points to a reality or a whole greater than itself. In order to express a transcendent reality, qualities of indeterminacy and infinity need to be invoked. One of the means of achieving this is by representing individual and specific fragments of the visible so as to intimate an invisible reality which transcends them.

---

<sup>16</sup>The symbolism of water as pertaining to the feminine is discussed more extensively in Chapter 4.



Fig. 36 Keith Dietrich, *The first fruits, an altar for Cain and Abel* (1991). Egg tempera on canvas, 245 x 110 cm. Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria. (Exhibition invitation, The Goodman Gallery 1991).



Fig. 35 April Gornik, *Untitled (lightning and water)* (1981). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Heartney 1989:123).



Fig. 37 April Gornik, *Thunder* (1985). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Heartney 1989:124).

In the *Wanderer above the sea of fog*<sup>17</sup> (fig.38) Friedrich conveys the interplay between the occluded space which would constitute the total view and the isolated fragments of the visible. Each summit stands both for itself, as well as for the whole landscape, from which it surfaces into view. This multiplicity of summits, however, does not add together to form a fixed whole, but instead replicates the whole within each fragmentary unit.<sup>18</sup> Again the finite is used to evoke the infinite.

In their veneration of nature, artists working with the natural environment also exhibit a romantic sensibility. The use of the fragment is particularly evident in the work of those who work with 'nature as process'. According to environment artist, Nils Udo (1994:59), '... the overwhelming mass of natural phenomena could mostly only be worked on in minute fragments taken out of their context'.

Hans Haacke, on the other hand, literally placed an organic fragment of nature in an art gallery. In his installation *Grass grows* (fig.16) he placed seeds on a small mound of earth and grew rye grass.<sup>19</sup> By bringing the growth process itself inside the enclosed space of the gallery, this particular fragment seems to be pointing to the larger reality of nature which exists outdoors. At the same time the mound of growing grass appears completely out of context in this unnatural environment, which in turn evokes a sense of rupture.

### 3.1.6 Intimations of belonging and estrangement

An experience of transcendence transposed onto a painted canvas in the form of the fragment is paradoxical, because it conveys a sense of limitation at the same time. A painted

---

<sup>17</sup>Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the sea of fog* (*Traveller looking over the sea of fog*) (c.1818). Oil on canvas, 94.8 x 74.8 cm. Kunsthalle, Hamburg. (Koerner 1990:155).

<sup>18</sup>As Friedrich Schlegel postulates in the *Athaenaeum fragment*: 206 'A fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and complete in itself like a hedgehog' (cited in Koerner 1990:185).

<sup>19</sup>Hans Haacke, *Grass grows* (1969). Earth, winter and annual rye grass. Installation at the Andrew Dickson White Museum, Cornell University, Ithica, New York. (Matilsky 1994:8).

fragment alluding to a greater reality also expresses signs of rupture and loss, as it stands detached from its original context as well as being isolated from the present.

In Friedrich's paintings, *Trees and bushes in the snow* (c.1828) (fig.19) and *Fir trees in the snow*<sup>20</sup> (fig.41) the alder thicket and fir grove are exhibited as if they were wholes, and the artist constructs the pictorial structure around them. On the other hand, they are fragments seized from a greater framework and they are also fragments from the past. Thus, the emphasis on the accidental and the specific, within the shape of each represented object denotes a singularity that not only intimates transcendence, but is also born of loss and fragmentation.

The Romantic fragments seem to express a sense of longing for infinity and a simultaneous realisation of its unattainability. They are reminders that experience and the representation of experience are not identical, for what the viewer perceives in the painted landscape is not the full presence of its vitality and life.

The representations are fragments of a temporal reality and as such cannot fully evoke the experience of transcendence. Thus, even though they appear to be erasing boundaries through intimations of eternity, they are at the same time establishing those boundaries by acknowledging the limitations of a transient existence. Friedrich's *Rückenfigur* expresses this ambivalence.<sup>21</sup> At the same time as we identify with the figure viewing the landscape we also experience the possibility of loss and exclusion from that landscape.

---

<sup>20</sup>Caspar David Friedrich, *Fir trees in the snow (From the Dresden Heath)* (c.1828). Oil on canvas, 31 x 25.5 cm. Gemäldergalerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden. (Koerner 1990:4).

<sup>21</sup>The *Rückenfigur* is the internal viewer in Friedrich's paintings. The turned figure who inhabits the foreground of so many of the artist's landscapes seems to infuse the works with a heightened subjectivity, and to imply that what we see is already the consequence of a prior experience.

The romantic tradition has re-emerged in the twentieth century in the work of a number of artists.<sup>22</sup> This 'New Romanticism', however, exhibits significant differences to that of the nineteenth century. Despite their expression of ambivalence, the nineteenth-century Romantics aspired to a universality the absence of which is much more obvious in the work of the latter-day romantics. The landscapes of Friedrich and Constable, for instance, were infused with spirituality and despite any feelings of alienation which the artists may have felt in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, they were ultimately conciliatory. Griffiths comments in this respect:

Imagination was an artist's privileged land where he could undertake the long quest for the great goal. Reconciliation with woman, the earth, nature, the home ... was a favourite theme. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit*, in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and in the paintings of Friedrich and his followers, the individual is in quest of a unity from which he or she has been severed... . The cultivation of the unique imagination, shown in terms of insertion into a sublimely extensive but eventually welcoming landscape, was a major Romantic theme (1988:32).

The landscapes of Friedrich and Constable not only expressed the longing for a restored harmony between man and nature but also the possibility of transcending man's fragmented experience. The work of the Neo-Romantics, on the other hand, appears to emphasise mostly the alienating aspects of nature and the inability of modern people to transcend the limits of a 'fallen' existence.

---

<sup>22</sup>These artists, similarly to their nineteenth-century forebears, have been working in different countries and over a period of time. Artists such as the English Neo-Romantics of the 1930s-1950s (Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash, Michael Ayrton, Keith Vaughan) and contemporary artists such as, Anselm Kiefer, Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Therese Oulton, Andy Goldsworthy, are ostensibly romantics. The term 'romantic', however, remains highly problematic. Although the above artists have been labelled 'romantic' (See Papadakis 1988b) there are numerous artists working within different conventions who exhibit a romantic sensibility.

In Michael Ayrton's *Entrance to a wood*<sup>23</sup> (fig.40), for instance, the viewer is denied access to the life-giving qualities of nature ostensibly symbolised by a tunnel leading to sunlight, by sharp, angular branches reminiscent of bayonets. This seems to imply that nature, instead of being symbolic of a greater reality becomes inaccessible and subordinate to the limited and destructive world of man. Paul Nash's image of the sunflower in *Eclipse of the sunflower*<sup>24</sup> negates all life-affirming qualities which the sunflowers in Runge's cosmogony symbolised.

Thus, the natural forms, which in Romantic paintings allowed glimpses of the Divine are now spiky and aggressive and appear to bear testimony to the belief that nature can no longer provide solace in a world devastated by two World Wars.

Anselm Kiefer's work may be seen as exhibiting a romantic sensibility in its use of symbolism and mythological, prescientific references. Far from aspiring to universality, however, Kiefer's work underscores the fragmentary nature of contemporary experience. In one version of *Yggdrasil*<sup>25</sup> (fig.39) he presents the image of a tree ignited by fire from the sky.<sup>26</sup> According to the myth, *Yggdrasil* or the World Ash, is under constant threat from the stags which nibble off all its young buds, a serpent which lurks under its third root and gnaws at it ceaselessly, and malevolent demons who continually scheme to destroy the tree (*LEM* 1990, s.v. "Teutonic Mythology"). It is significant that Kiefer does not portray the forces of nature as being supportive of the World Ash but chooses to emphasise their destructive associations by making *Yggdrasil* reach into a blackened cloud while a scorched lead blob descends from the sky. John Gilmour argues that:

---

<sup>23</sup>Michael Ayrton, *Entrance to a wood* (1945). Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Yorke 1988:40).

<sup>24</sup>Paul Nash, *Eclipse of the sunflower* (1945). Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Yorke 1988:41).

<sup>25</sup>Anselm Kiefer, *Yggdrasil* (1985-1986). Acrylic, emulsion, shellac, and lead on photograph, 103x83.5 cm. Collection: Stephen Frishberg, Philadelphia. (Gilmour 1990. Plate V).

<sup>26</sup>*Yggdrasil* is the name of the gigantic ash tree in Nordic mythology. The symbolism of fire appears in a number of Kiefer's works of the 1980s. The use of lead seems to suggest the dynamic opposition between ancient ideologies and the contemporary world view. Kiefer seems to associate the destructive forces of nature with the masters of fire (see Gilmour 1990:128-130).

This complex imagery has important reverberations in Kiefer's larger work, since if we regard the tree of life as a symbol of hope, as Kiefer himself would have us do, we must also recognize that he repeatedly portrays it as under threat, not only from the dragons, snakes and stags that undermine its life-supports, but also from humanity itself (Gilmour 1990:130).

In another version of *Yggdrasil*<sup>27</sup> there is an image of a tree in front of an industrial pylon to the left of which is a factory. Molten lead has been poured over the background, and the top half has been overpainted in black. This seems to allude to the relationship between the alchemical and the industrial transformation of nature, and the latter's attendant ecological threat. The disturbing implication is that even though people may have noble intentions, as was the case with the alchemists, the activity of tampering with nature can have dire repercussions.

Similarly, Oulton, whose work may also be viewed as part of the romantic heritage, subverts the notion of universality which characterises the Romantics. In her work, the emphasis is placed more on the materiality of the painting and on the language of painting, as in *Hermetic definition n.4*,<sup>28</sup> and *Dissonance quarter 1*,<sup>29</sup> rather than on a system of belief or a philosophical core. When one looks at her work it is not possible to determine whether she is representing rocks, water, or fire, even though these elements may be evoked, or whether the paintings may be read as landscapes. Instead of the sense of the 'otherness' of nature and its overpowering grandeur which characterises the landscapes of the Romantics, it appears that the sublime in Oulton's work has been relegated to the actual process of picture-making. In response to the Romantic sense of finite experience intimating infinity, she counters with her experience of things in a state of formation, flux, and disintegration. In her own words: 'If your experience is of a world that doesn't have a centre - religious or whatever - then you have to find another kind of spatial order' (cited in Kent 1986:42).

---

<sup>27</sup>Anselm Kiefer, *Yggdrasil* (1985). Melted lead mounted on acrylic, emulsion, and shellac on photograph, 220x190 cm. Private Collection.

<sup>28</sup>Therese Oulton, *Hermetic definition n.4* (1985). Oil on canvas, 71 x 61 cm.

<sup>29</sup>Therese Oulton, *Dissonance quarter 1* (1986). Oil on canvas, 173 x 147 cm. Gimpel Fils Gallery, London.



Thus, there seems to be a vast difference between some contemporary painters working within a romantic idiom and their nineteenth-century predecessors. Whereas the latter attempted to gain wholeness and a mystical union with the absolute, which was God or elemental nature, latter-day romantics work within an age that is predominantly secular, relativist and distrustful of absolutes.<sup>30</sup> The work of contemporary environment artists, however, appears to be more expressive of the yearning for a reconciliation with nature, and in that sense it seems to have a less ambiguous link with the work of the nineteenth-century Romantics.

### 3.2 THE ROMANTIC PARADOX

In concluding this chapter I refer to the paradoxes which seem to permeate all the different facets of romantic expression. A central ambiguity of the romantic aesthetic concerns the longing for transcendence. At the same time as artists reach out towards the infinite, they emphasise the extreme subjectivity of their personal vision which underscores the relativity of perception. Similarly, they attempt to express universality through the particularity of experience. These contradictions are reflected in their use of both the symbol and the fragment, which point to a larger reality while remaining embedded in the idiosyncratic. Thus, two seemingly irreconcilable concepts appear to be linked in the romantic idiom, relativity and the infinite, and the achievement of some artists in making these divergent realities re-converge in their artworks is probably the ultimate paradox associated with the romantic mode of expression.

---

<sup>30</sup>According to Robert Rosenblum, most of the painters working within the 'romantic' tradition are asynchronous with their own times. When questioned as to what would be the attitude of younger American artists toward Romanticism he stated:

Most of them would have shut the door on it and thrown away the keys. They are interested in the realities of art and life now and especially the idea of art as commodity which sends chills up so many spines because it seems like a blasphemy in terms of earlier pieties about art. I think that's a very sensible motif because that is the way things are now (1988b:16).

## CHAPTER 4

### NATURE AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE FEMININE

I am she that is the nature mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of the powers divine, queen of all that is in hell, the principal of them that dwell in heaven, manifested alone and under one form of all the gods and goddesses. At my will the planets of the sky, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the lamentable silences of hell are disposed; my name, my divinity is adored throughout all the world, in divers manners, in variable customs and by many names (Argüelles and Argüelles 1977:121).<sup>1</sup>

My encounter with nature prompted an inquiry into religious issues, particularly into those early matriarchal religions in which the earth mother was venerated as the one from which everything proceeds and to which everything returns. The earth itself, it appears, provided some of the earliest spiritual experiences of humankind.<sup>2</sup> Its sacred nature was not in doubt and it manifested a multitude of equally sacred forms such as rocks, trees, water and animals. Each form, however insignificant, revealed the totality of the whole. In *Origins of the sacred*, Anne Bancroft argues:

From the first Venus statuettes of 60,000 years ago to the agricultural peoples of 2000 BC the myths and religious rites of the Earth Mother were always to do with the mystery of life itself, the actual appearance of life being the greatest mystery of the universe; for, to early man, every object from stones and plants to birds and people had a sacred value, a meaning as a sign of the Great Reality. In this way the Mother represented not only the fecundity of life but also its mystery. We still pay unthinking honour to her today when we use the term 'Mother Nature' (1987:45).

---

<sup>1</sup>Address of the Goddess, in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*.

<sup>2</sup>According to *The new Encyclopedia Britannica*,

when ... people have displayed intensive attention to 'mother earth' (such as in the practice of laying down newborn babies on the earth ...), this partially reflects older cults that have remained relatively free from warrior and nation-building peoples with their emphasis on war (as in western Sudan, pre-Aryan India, and the Indian agrarian area of northern Mexico). The Andean earth-mother figure, Pacha-Mama, worshipped by the Peruvians stands in sharp contrast to the sun religion of the Inca ... . Earth deities are more actively venerated in areas in which people are closely bound to ancestors and the cultivation of grain (*NEB* 1988, s.v. "Religious and Spiritual Belief, Systems of").

It appears that the belief in the divinity of the feminine has re-emerged, not only as affecting a remote past, but as an integral part of contemporary religious attitudes, and this belief is closely connected to a veneration of nature and an awareness of its sacredness. To quote Lucy Lippard:

With the rise of the new feminism in the late 1960s, women's longing for a history and a mythology of our own found an outlet in a revisionist view of prehistoric matriarchies. Despite cursory or downright absent information about women in the dominant literature, we began to find out that woman had once been seen as the omnipotent deity, source of all things, perhaps even earlier than 25,000 BC - the date given the *Venus of Willendorf* (1983:41).

I see 'feminine' and 'masculine' as energies or principles which are inherent in each one of us. In the sense that I consider them as simultaneously existing, complementary energies, masculine is not to be simply equated with male, nor feminine with female. I agree with the viewpoint of Miriam & Jose Argüelles (1977:111) who accord an androgynistic meaning to the notions of masculine and feminine, and refer instead to the universal or psychological aspects of these terms than to gender.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, by discussing the 'feminine' aspects of nature, I by no means wish to imply that nature is to be identified with the feminine (considering that one could put forward an

---

<sup>3</sup>Androgyny is connected to the central symbol of alchemy which is the chemical or sacred marriage (*hieros gamos*). This refers to the union of feminine and masculine within oneself. In alchemy feminine and masculine are symbolized by mercury and sulphur, and according to the *Encyclopedia of the unexplained*, 'in the union of mercury and sulphur ... the sulphur behaves like the male seed and the mercury like the female seed in the conception and birth of a child' (EU 1989, s.v. "alchemy").

Argüelles & Argüelles (1977:113-114) further argue that in the androgynous world-view of the European alchemists the feminine was the *Anima Mundi*, the moving spirit of the universe. As such it was identified with the *prima materia*, the original chaotic condition of all the elements in the natural world used by the alchemists in their transformation of matter. In the eighteenth century alchemy came to be considered heretical by the new European orthodoxy which replaced God with Reason and led to the deposition of the feminine and its integral part in nature.

equally valid argument for its 'masculine' aspects) but to examine those elements of it which may be seen as manifesting qualities of the feminine.

I propose to examine the following qualities which may be seen as relating to a feminine orientation towards nature: a magical perception of reality, an appreciation of the earth as being a symbolic form of the feminine and an understanding of nature as process.

#### 4.1 A MAGICAL PERCEPTION OF REALITY

A magical perception also seems to accord with the feminine principle in the sense that it involves an identification with the natural environment and may thus be associated with Earth Mother religions. It appears to imply an intuitive apprehension of reality, in which there is no separation between the inner subjective world and the outer externalised world. This is different to a rational perception in which the self is distanced from nature, a magical level of awareness implies a merging of the self with nature and a participation in the physical universe, not a separation from it.<sup>4</sup>

My perception of nature has partly been of such a magical dimension that barriers between the self and external nature appear to dissolve. The feeling that is intrinsic to this level of consciousness is one of complete empathy with the natural environment. It also relates to the Chinese concept of '*ki*' or 'suchness' of a place which I referred to in the Introduction. My

---

<sup>4</sup>Edward C Whitmont (1987:41-690 in, *Return of the Goddess*, traces the development of consciousness from an early gynolatric, matriarchal and magical orientation to a later androlatric one and contends that this development has been marked by different stages: from Goddess to God, from pantheism to theism, and then to atheism and non-theism. Whitmont also divides the evolution of consciousness into different phases: (i) the magical phase, (ii) the mythological or imaginal phase and (iii) the mental phase. Even though these phases may be seen to correspond roughly to certain historical periods (viewed within a predominantly western framework) what is significant about them is that they refer to different modes of apprehending reality and nature in particular.

identification with the natural elements of water and rocks may be seen in paintings such as *And Now this Spell was Snapped* (1991) (fig.11) and *Pride of Purple Rocks II* (1991) (fig.12). The occluded perspective that is created in these paintings seems to express a more intimate relationship with nature than that suggested by a panoramic perspective.

A magical orientation appears to connect widely divergent visual expressions such as those of the Australian Aborigines and some contemporary artists. The Australian Aborigines, prior to contact with Europeans, appear to have perceived in the landscape a numinous quality which they called '*kurunba*' (Cowan 1989:24) or life-essence. The landscape was interconnected with myth, and a visual language was created out of the natural forms. These became iconic in essence, and were not only indicative of physical properties, but also of metaphysical meanings.<sup>5</sup>

The sacredness of the landscape was also translated into the visual language of the Aborigines. The rhythms of the landscape were expressed in their music, in the symbolic diagrams decorating their artifacts, and in their paintings on sand, caves, and even on their own bodies. These visual manifestations are, in a sense, expressive of a dialogue between human beings and the earth and suggest a fusion between internal and external reality.

It thus appears that nature provides the Aborigines with an aesthetic. The abstract designs, for example, used to suggest the presence of animals, human activity, and physical characteristics are all visually derived from their environment. Thus, a concentric circle may represent

---

<sup>5</sup>To quote James Cowan:

This numen figured largely in the philosophic and religious beliefs of the original inhabitants, particularly in relation to the earth itself. What they saw in their land was ... a profoundly metaphysical landscape capable of expressing their deepest spiritual yearnings ... the sacred precinct or *temenos* was not ... in keeping with the Eurocentric perception of a sacred place. Instead it was reflected in the totality of the landscape - that is, the earth, rock-forms, trees, mountains, insects, animals, etc. and finally in man himself (1989:24-25).



Fig. 38  
Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the sea of fog*  
(c.1818). Oil on canvas, 94.8 x 74.8 cm.  
Hamburg, Kunsthalle. (Koerner 1990:155).



Fig. 39  
Anselm Kiefer, *Yggdrasil* (1985).  
Acrylic, emulsion, shellac, and lead on  
photograph, 103 x 83.5 cm. Collection  
of Stephen Frishberg, Philadelphia.  
(Gilmour 1990: Plate V).



Fig. 40  
Michael Ayrton, *Entrance to a wood* (1945).  
Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.  
Collection unknown. (Yorke 1988:40).



Fig. 41  
Caspar David Friedrich, *Fir trees in the snow*  
(c.1828). Oil on canvas, 31 x 25.5 cm.  
Dresden, Gemäldergalerie Neue Meister, Staatliche  
Kunstsammlungen.  
(Koerner 1990:4)

a man with painted decorations on his body, or the breasts of women, while a triple line of parallel marks may mean the body scars on men or the tracks made by hunters. Similarly, the four main sacred colours: red, yellow, white, and black that are used in cave painting are derived from natural substances such as red and yellow ochre, pipe-clay, and charcoal (Cowan 1989:36).

Artists who use nature itself as a medium demonstrate a similar approach, in the sense that the natural environment determines the form of their work. Nils Udo makes ephemeral pieces which will eventually be reclaimed by nature.<sup>6</sup> In works like *The place of the rowanberries* (fig.42), he places red berries on the ground amongst moss and roots.<sup>7</sup> This unexpected juxtaposition suggests the irrational and draws attention to the exquisite detail that one may perceive in nature.

The artist (1994:59) says the following as concerns his approach to the natural environment: 'Nature is still complete ... in her most remote refuges, her magic still real ... Potential Utopias are under every stone, on every leaf and behind every tree ...' He further argues in relation to his work that:

A basic idea of the work was the attempt at absolute purity. Nature should ... present itself as on stage. Any unnatural element was excluded as impure ... only materials belonging to any given nature site were being used. It was their characteristics, the appropriate possibilities they offered and the character of the site itself that largely determined the shape of my work (1994:59).

Shamanism is also part of the magical dimension of consciousness and this is another issue which has become relevant to contemporary concerns and can be connected to the feminine.

Suzi Gablik contends:

One of the attractions of shamanism for modern individuals is that it

---

<sup>6</sup>These works are part of the TICKON project which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup>Nils Udo, *The place of the rowanberries* (1993). Berries, natural habitat. (Udo 1994:58).

appears to provide a possible basis for reharmonizing our out-of-balance relationship with nature, which is especially important just now. The shaman can hear the voice of the stones and trees that are speaking the voices of things unheard to us all. The shaman does not live in a mechanical, disenchanted world, but in an enchanted one, comprised of multiple, complex, living, interacting systems (1991:45).

Michele Jamal's *Shape shifters: shaman women in contemporary society* (1987) is a collection of biographies of women shamans from diverse cultural backgrounds. The common link amongst these shamans seems to be an awareness of the sacredness of the earth and of their own bodies, which reflect the transformative powers of nature. Jamal (1987:5) states that 'a woman's body is created for transformation: within a woman's womb a child takes form; from a woman's womb a child emerges into the world'.<sup>8</sup> She further argues that the shaman women of old Europe descended from a much older feminine sacred tradition originating in the Palaeolithic period, in which women used magical practices to secure nourishment from the vegetal world (1987:5).

David Lewis-Williams and Thomas Dowson (1989) in *Images of power: understanding Bushman rock art*, trace the connections of Bushman art to shamanism as it seems to blend real and visionary elements. The small white dots, for example, which are found in a number of the artworks, may be viewed as representing the tingling sensation that accompanies the

---

<sup>8</sup>The initiation of shamans in some traditions can be seen as a return to the chaotic waters of the womb. In *The feminine: spacious as the sky*, Argüelles & Argüelles (1977:101) refer to the shaman's death and rebirth experience among the Eskimo. It seems that the initiatory chaos starts when the shaman enters a state of trance, which may last for several days, within the womb-like igloo. This initiatory chaos may be induced by plunging into the waters beneath the ice and reemerging hours later from another hole in the ice, several miles away.



shaman's transformation from human to animal identity (fig.44).<sup>9</sup> This transformation is also expressed in the numerous depictions of human beings with animal features. Some figures have lines from the top of the head, and trailing streamers which probably represent either potency entering the shaman's body or out-of-body travel. Similarly, lines coming out from a figure's nose may signify the nosebleed suffered by the shaman as he/she enters a trance (1989:68-72).

Fern Schaffer is an artist who works with ritual. She works in collaboration with photographer Othello Anderson. For them the rituals signify the experience of being out in nature. Anderson's photograph, *Crystal clearing, winter solstice*<sup>10</sup> (fig.43), represents Schaffer during the enactment of an empowerment ritual which involved the cleansing of crystals in Lake Michigan. A magical dimension of consciousness suggests an interrelatedness with nature. Gablik in *The Reenchantment of art* (1991), argues that: 'There is a need for new forms emphasising our essential interconnectedness rather than our separateness, forms evoking the feeling of belonging to a larger whole rather than expressing the isolated, alienated self' (1991:5-6).

The work of American artist, Lynne Hull, illustrates this kind of participation in, and relatedness to, the physical world. Hull started in the 1980s to etch small, glyph-like symbols onto rock surfaces, found mostly in distant desert areas in Wyoming and Utah. These symbols were incised deeply enough so as to serve as pockets that could hold water, a precious commodity in the desert. As a result, these etchings functioned as a water supply to the creatures in the desert. Her works exist in the landscape in a way which is beneficial to the natural habitat, and are thus indicative of a position of relatedness to nature.

---

<sup>9</sup>Artist, unknown. *Hallucinatory figure with animal head*. Date unknown. Bushman painting. Drakensberg, Natal. (Lewis-Williams & Dowson:172).

<sup>10</sup>Othello Anderson, *Crystal clearing, winter solstice* (1986). Photograph, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Gablik 1991).

## 4.2 NATURE AS A SYMBOLIC FORM OF THE FEMININE

An appreciation of the earth as a symbolic form of the feminine seems to have been integral to early religious experiences. The very landscape was perceived as a manifestation of the earth goddess. Michael Dames (cited in Bancroft 1987:45) compares the earthwork of Silbury Hill to the 'Great Goddess pregnant' and referring to nearby Avebury comments that:<sup>11</sup>

The smooth undulating hills themselves resemble the Goddess ... for there people of the New Stone Age could walk on the torso of the divinity, explore her breasts, her armpits, the space between her thighs, or run the endless swell and ripple of her back for mile after mile, all the way from Dorset to East Anglia, or from Kent to the Yorkshire Wolds (Bancroft 1987:67).

In contemporary society too, the earth is often perceived as a woman's body. Lucy Lippard argues that women identify the forms of their bodies with the undulations of the earth, its mountains and hills. The menstrual cycles seem to be similar to the natural cycles of the earth; they are determined by phases of the moon and they relate to the earth's magnetic energies and the tides of the ocean. The female genitalia evoke the abyss as they are reminiscent of caves, cleft rocks or river beds. These evocations of the abyss are culturally associated with the maternal and the sexual, the regenerative or deathly aspects of the 'Earth Mother' (1983:42).

---

<sup>11</sup>According to Bancroft (1987:60-64), Silbury Hill is one of the most extraordinary of all the earthworks in Europe. It is a solid chalk hill, dating back to 2500 BC, and it is supposedly the largest manmade mound in Europe. When archaeologists first excavated the earthwork they surmised that it was the tomb of a great king. They subsequently discovered, however, a circular wall at its base and inside it a low mound of clay flints. Above this clay core there was a cone made up of earth and turf. This relationship of Silbury to its surroundings seems to confirm Dames's belief that 'Silbury is the Great Goddess pregnant', her body symbolised by the mound and her womb by the cone found inside it.

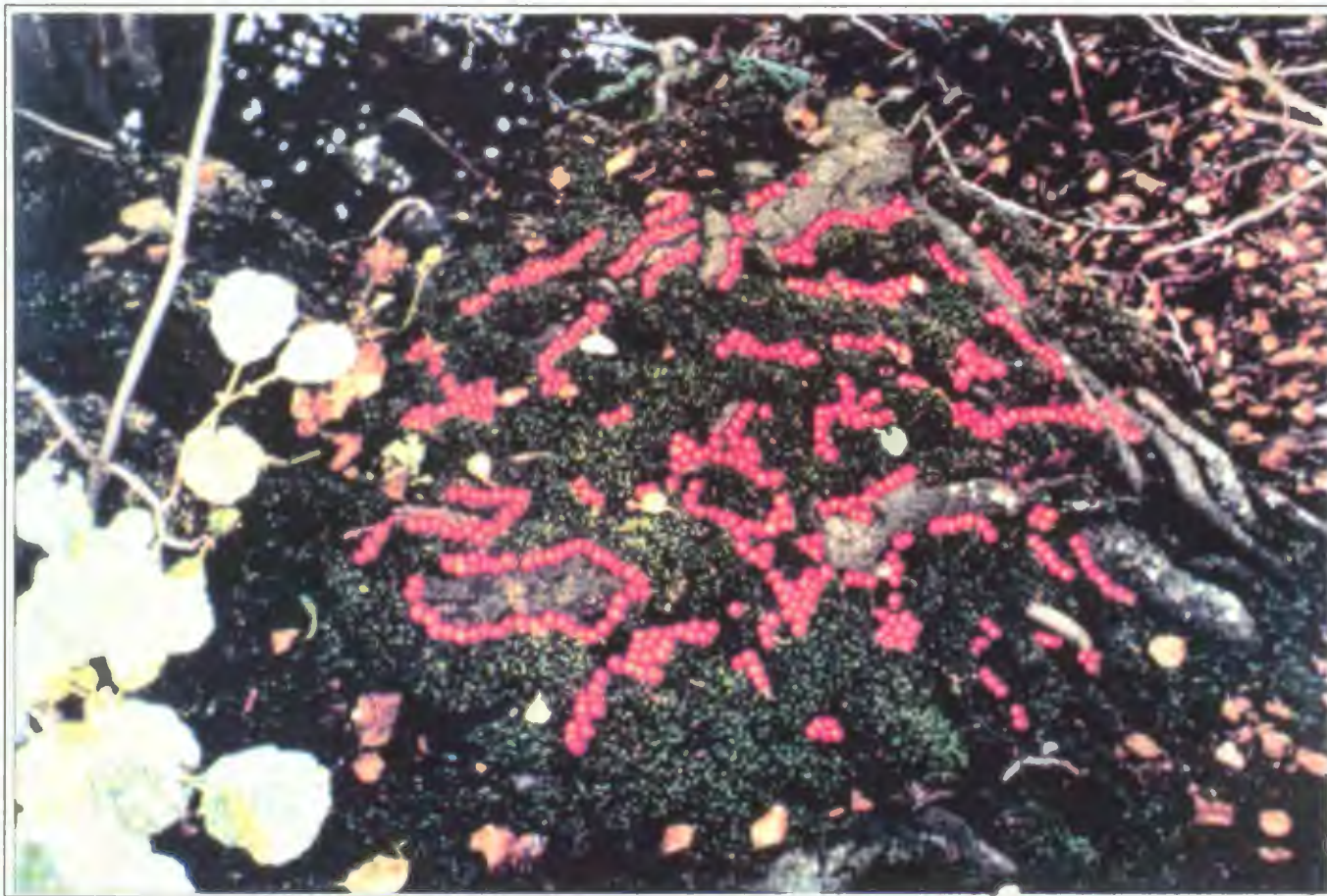


Fig. 42

Nils Udo, *The place of the rowanberries* (1993). Berries, natural habitat.

(Udo 1994:58).

In my later works such as, *Once Again /Do I Behold* (1994) (fig.23) and *Pride of Purple Rocks III*, (1995) (fig.24) which seem to be more expressive of an 'internalised' vision of the landscape the rocks suggest the female body. The natural forms appear to exhibit a greater sensuality which may be connected to the fluidity of the painted marks and to the way in which the abyss is evoked.

The interpretation of the landscape as symbolic of the feminine implies that natural forms may still be capable of affirming some basic connection to our remote past when the earth was revered as the Great Mother. Such an understanding of the landscape may be perceived in the work of Georgia O'Keefe whose paintings demonstrate a great affinity with nature. Even though she uses the traditional medium of oil paint, her images of the landscape have a strong sculptural quality which also appears peculiarly feminine. In paintings like *Red hills and bones*<sup>12</sup>(fig.45) and *Red and orange hills*,<sup>13</sup> the natural shapes have a voluptuousness which evokes the female figure in contour and surface, and even the colour seems like a mixture of earth colours and flesh. Referring to the painting entitled *Red hills and sky*<sup>14</sup> she says:

A little way out beyond my kitchen window at the Ranch is a V shape in the red hills. I passed the V many times - sometimes stopping to look as it spoke to me quietly. I one day carried my canvas out and made a drawing of it. The shapes of the drawing were so simple that it scarcely seemed worthwhile to bother with it any further. But I did a painting - just the arms of two red hills reaching out to the sky and holding it (O'Keefe 1976: colour-plate 85).

---

<sup>12</sup>Georgia O'Keefe, *Red hills and bones* (1941). Oil on canvas, 75 x 100 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art; The Alfred Stieglitz collection. (O'Keefe 1976: Plate 97).

<sup>13</sup>Georgia O'Keefe, *Red and orange hills* (1938). Oil on canvas, 47.5 x 90 cm. Collection of Judge and Mrs Oliver Seth.

<sup>14</sup>Georgia O'Keefe, *Red hills and sky* (1945). Oil on canvas, 75 x 100 cm. Private collection.

The artist, James Pierce, describes a similar sense of a landscape that relates to the female body, but his medium is the earth itself. In a work called *Earthwoman*<sup>15</sup> (fig.17) the recumbent figure, which echoes the *Venus of Willendorf* and Henry Moore's reclining figures, lies face down with arms and legs spread out. As she is oriented to the sunrise in the summer solstice, the sun rising through a hollow in her buttocks indicates a symbolic fertilisation (Beardsley 1984:67).

#### 4.2.1 The Symbolism of water and rocks

In my initial attempts at painting the landscape I was confronted with a choice between two sets of natural images: the sea and the rocks, and the trees in the forest. I chose the former as I felt a greater affinity with those particular natural elements, and I have since used them as my subject-matter almost exclusively, as for example in, *And Now this Spell was Snapped* (1991) (fig.11) and *Them the Morning Light Loves* (1993-1994) (fig.27).

What seems significant, is that despite the unconsciousness of my decision, both of these elements have been traditionally associated with the feminine. Erich Neumann comments that: 'Female powers dwell not only in ponds, springs, streams and swamps, but also in the earth, in mountains, hills, cliffs and along with the dead and the unborn - in the underworld. And above all, the mixture of the elements water and earth is primordially feminine; ...' (cited in Lippard 1983:52).<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>James Pierce, *Earthwoman* (1976-1977). Earth, 5 x 30 x 15 ft. Pratt farm. (Beardsley 1984:69).

<sup>16</sup>Neumann, E. 1972. *The great mother*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 260.



Fig. 43

Othello Anderson, *Crystal clearing, winter solstice* (1986).

Photograph, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown.

(Gablík 1991).



Fig. 44

Artist unknown, *Hallucinatory figure with animal head*. Date unknown.

Bushman painting. Drakensberg, Natal. (Lewis-Williams & Dowson:172).

Water is suggestive of the amniotic fluids, and the primeval void sustaining the creation and emergence of all life, as well as being symbolic of the unconscious, the emotions, the intuition, which are all related to a feminine mode of being.<sup>17</sup>

Juan Eduardo Cirlot in *A dictionary of symbols*, (1962:345) gives the following interpretations of water: the symbol for water in Egyptian hieroglyphs is associated with the primeval ocean or primal matter; similarly, the Chinese consider that all life originates in the waters; in the Vedas, water is referred to as the *matritâmah*, which means 'the most maternal', because in the beginning everything was like a sea without light; mercury in its first stages of transformation was apparently called 'water' by the alchemists; and in dream symbolism, birth is usually expressed through water-imagery. It appears from the above definitions that water is often linked to the processes of birth and procreation and therefore to the feminine.

Robert Smithson's *Spiral jetty*,<sup>18</sup> is an environmental project which uses the elements of water and earth. The interlocking pattern of rock and water seems to reflect Smithson's interest in the dual processes of growth and entropy. Growth appears in the form of salt crystals on the rocks and entropy, which according to Smithson's definition is used to refer to the gradual disintegration of systems, is symbolised by the counterclockwise spiral of the jetty (Matilsky 1994:11).

Rocks or stones have also been associated with the veneration of the earth ever since the earliest religious experiences. Earth and stone are made of the same material and thus they can

---

<sup>17</sup>Tom Chetwynd gives the following definition of water,

*... Without water there is no life: so water is not an image or simile, but a symbol of life.*

... the precondition of life, its origin. An even older form of existence that precedes and sustains life. The potential realm: the Primeval Waters in Egyptian myth contained the seeds of millions of beings ... . In the human psyche, contact with this mysterious essence is possible through Intuition, and is the source of wisdom, meaning insight into the course of life (1982:422-423).

<sup>18</sup>Robert Smithson, *Spiral jetty* (1970). Rocks, earth, salt crystals.

be seen as symbolising the same forces. They are also associated with creation, and minerals may be seen as embryos growing in the belly of the earth. To quote Neumann:

Numinous sites of a preorganic life, which were experienced in *participation mystique* with the Great Mother, are mountain, cave, stone-pillar and rock - including the childbearing rock - as throne, seat, dwelling place, and incarnation of the Great Mother ... It is no accident that 'stones' are among the oldest symbols of the Great Mother goddess.<sup>19</sup> (cited in Lippard:16).

Stones are associated with mythic qualities, as the circles at Stonehenge and the standing stones at Karnac in Brittany illustrate. There are a number of contemporary artists who have chosen stone as a medium, thus establishing a link with its mythical past.<sup>20</sup> Nancy Holt creates stone circles, as for example, in *Stone enclosure: rock rings* (fig.46).<sup>21</sup> This is constructed of schist (crystalline rock) and it comprises two concentric walls of stone perforated with archways and portholes. These openings provide views of the surrounding meadows thus causing the spectator to feel as if he/she were out in nature. At the same time the work evokes the feeling of a cloistered space or a secret garden as it enables one to look outside without being seen.

---

<sup>19</sup>Neumann, E. 1972. *The great mother*. Princeton: Princeton University Press:260

<sup>20</sup>According to the *Chinese mustard seed garden manual of painting*, (Sze 1959:191) rocks are described as the framework of the heavens and earth and as possessing *ch'i* (vital force or spirit). Painters are admonished to never paint rocks without *ch'i* and in order to portray *ch'i* the artist should seek beyond the material in the intangible. 'If the form of the rock is not clear in one's heart (-mind) and from there to the fingertips, the pictures can never be completely realised' (Sze 1959:191).

<sup>21</sup>Nancy Holt, *Stone enclosure: rock rings* (1977-78). Stone masonry, height: 300 x 1200 cm; 300 x 600 cm. Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington. (Beardsley 1984:116).



Andy Goldsworthy has been working with stone both on site in remote locations and in gallery installations.<sup>22</sup> The three shows of the 'Stone' exhibition that were held in London differed from each other even though they were thematically linked. *Hanging stone* was a window installation, which could only be viewed from the street, at the Michael Hue-Williams Fine Art gallery.<sup>23</sup> *Scaur water stone* was an installation at Grob Gallery comprising granite boulders laid on the gallery floor, and each cradling small pools of reddish water.<sup>24</sup> *Herd of arches* (fig.48) was a large rock installation at 27 Old Bond Street,<sup>25</sup> which consisted of freestanding structures of red stone. These stone frameworks extended Goldsworthy's dialogue with nature into a different realm, into the urban environment. Lynn Macritchie in discussing the work states that: 'Goldsworthy, whose self-professed ambition is to utilize nature's inherent energy, here succeeded in making that energy visible: the triumphant 'herd' shouldered through the cool trim of glass and steel to remind us of the substance of the earth itself' (1995:95, 125).

### 4.3 NATURE AS PROCESS

#### 4.3.1 The concepts of impermanence and flux

Another aspect which may be seen as part of a feminine consciousness is the sense of the impermanence and flux which characterises natural processes. All natural forms are subject to the cycle of birth and decay, and thus are expressive of unceasing movement and growth.

---

<sup>22</sup>The exhibition 'Stone' (April 20 - May 27, 1994) was held in London. The exhibition 'Breath of Earth' was on view at the San Jose Museum of Art in California (February 5 - April 23, 1995) and 'Black rocks - red pools' was on show at Galerie Lelong in New York at approximately the same time. The exhibition 'Andy Goldsworthy: stone works in America' was seen at the Scottsdale Center for the Arts in Arizona (August 9 - October 23, 1994) and the Gallery at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington (November 9 - December 9, 1994). The above shows followed the 1994 publication of *Stone*, an illustrated volume that records the works Goldsworthy made in Australia, Britain, France, Japan and the United States between 1990 - 1993 (Macritchie 1995:91).

<sup>23</sup>Andy Goldsworthy, *Hanging stone* (1994). Rocks, stones, dimensions unknown.

<sup>24</sup>Andy Goldsworthy, *Scaur water stone* (1994). Granite, boulders, water, dimensions unknown.

<sup>25</sup>Andy Goldsworthy, *Herd of arches* (1994). Red Stone, dimensions unknown. (Macritchie 1995:91).



Fig. 45

Georgia O'Keefe, *Red hills and bones* (1941). Oil on canvas, 75 x 100 cm.

Philadelphia Museum of Art;  
the Alfred Stieglitz collection.

(O'Keefe 1976: Plate 97).

Fig. 46

Nancy Holt, *Stone enclosure: rock rings*

(1977-1978). Stone masonry,

height: 300 x 600 cm.

Western Washington University,

Bellingham, Washington.

(Beardsley 1984:116).

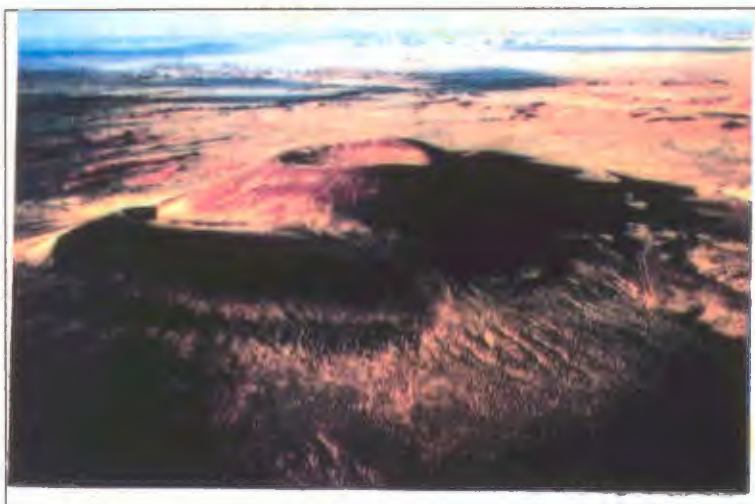


Fig. 47

James Turrell, *Roden Crater project* (1972 - present).

Extinct volcano, Arizona.

(Matilsky 1994:10).



According to Whitmont:

The Great Goddess represents being and becoming. The feminine is not concerned with achieving or ideating ... rather, it exists in the here and now and the endless flow. It values the vegetal dimension of growth-decay, the continuity and conservation of natural orders. It expresses the will of nature and of instinctual forces rather than the self-will of a particular person (1983:43).

The fluidity and impermanence of nature forms the subject of some of Goldsworthy's work. His approach is one of respect and effacement before nature. He uses materials that he finds on site and he establishes a dialogue with the environment through adaptation to different landscapes and seasons. He says the following, referring to his work:

It's not just the leaf or the stone ... [that] I'm trying to understand, not a single isolated object but nature as a whole - how the leaf has grown, how it has changed, how it has decayed, how the weather's affected by it. By working with a leaf in its place I begin to understand these processes (Gablik, 1991:91).

Ephemerality characterizes his works, which connects them to the transience of natural forms. He makes, for instance, lattices of leaves or dandelions stitched together with grass stalks which he then lays in a stream. Thus his objects can get blown away by the wind or the rain, and are ultimately reclaimed by nature. He claims that when he works with a leaf or a rock it is not only the object itself that he is concerned with but the fact that it also provides him with an insight into the processes of nature. When he leaves his material the processes continue. He further argues that the only way in which he can understand their transience is if his touch is also transient - only then is the cycle unbroken and the process complete (Gablik 1991:92).

One of the qualities which influenced my choice of subject-matter, that is, the sea and the rocks, was this element of flux. In the painting, *And Now this Spell was Snapped* (1991) (fig.11), I tried to capture the unceasing movement of the water. Implicit in the depiction of such a subject is a sense of the transient nature of things exemplified by the ebb and flow of the tide. This ebb and flow suggests a quality of untameability and lack of confinement. Elements of indeterminacy and fluidity, however, are not only characteristic of the sea, but of

the rocks too. Their boundaries merge into one another and it is impossible to isolate any one form as distinct from its surroundings. In *Them the Morning Light Loves* (1993 - 1994) (fig.27), water and rocks are treated in a similar manner and the rocks start assuming the characteristics of water in their fluidity of form and movement. The depiction of forms in this state of restlessness may evoke 'nature as process', rather than nature as a static and unchanging entity.

#### 4.3.2 The cyclical rhythms of nature

Connected to the concept of flux is an awareness of the cyclical rhythms of nature. As opposed to a linear perception of time, a natural environment marked by the changing of the seasons is cyclical and this kind of understanding is essentially feminine in orientation as it may be associated with the natural processes of growth and decay. Gablik (1991:90), referring to the work of Janz says he:

... paints flowers in all stages of the life cycle - tunes into the cyclical processes of nature - an awareness we have lost in our linear, Cartesian view of reality. For Janz the drawing must undergo a transformation in time similar to the transformation of a flower as it withers and dies.

The drawing gets transformed through a process of erasure and redrawing, as for example, in *Patricia's lily*.<sup>26</sup>

This drawing was drawn and erased daily for ten days, it was therefore no longer the static frame of an isolated moment in time, but became a process. This process is evident in the traces of former marks indicative of the development of the drawing over that period and thus the drawing may not be viewed in less than ten days. To quote Gablik (1991:90): 'This is time gathered into wholeness, the cyclical rhythm of life taught by the feminine principle, which connects us to the natural order of growth and decay'.

---

<sup>26</sup>Robert Janz, *Patricia's lily* (1988). Charcoal, dimensions unknown.

When I first started painting the landscape, and because I was living in a natural environment at that time, I became aware of the slower, cyclical rhythms of nature and this started to reflect in my method of working. I subsequently slowed down as I started building up the forms through successive layers of tones, as for example, in *Round the Cape* (1990) (fig.3) and *Full Many Shapes* (1990) (fig.10). That, combined with a focusing on the particular, resulted in my process of working extending over a much longer period of time than it had before. I came to the realisation that nature exacted a different creative approach to what I had used previously, and the method of working which I came to consider as most suited to my expression of nature was one which reflected its processes.

#### 4.4 ROMANTICISM AND THE FEMININE

The romantic aesthetic is also part of the feminine orientation in art-making. As I have already discussed in Chapter 3, the awareness of the mystery underlying natural phenomena and of the transience of earthly things which may be related to the romantic sensibility also seems to be the concern of artists working with the natural environment. Moreover, the kind of reverence that is expressed towards the natural world may be seen as romantic. Environment artists work with fragments of nature which, similarly to the Romantic fragment show signs of rupture while intimating a greater whole. Argüelles & Argüelles in their discussion on the feminine contend:

With the European lineages of wisdom broken and scattered, the Romantic vision became the illegitimate heir of the deposed realm of the mind ... . Within its primal home, the womb of night, the feminine gave birth to the modern traditions of aesthetic and cultural revolution ... . As the child of darkness, the dream was cultivated by the European Romantic poets and artists who found in it the inspiration to offset a life bereft of spiritual value (1977:113-114).

In the sense that artists working with feminine concepts emphasise aspects of fusion in their relation to nature rather than elements of separateness, they may also be seen as identifying with a romantic perspective.

#### 4.5 THE AMBIGUITIES OF THE FEMININE

Similar to the other symbolic orders discussed, the feminine also manifests inherent ambiguities. Artists who perceive nature as a symbolic form of the feminine may be seen as reconnecting with a mythical past when the earth was venerated as the Great Mother (and in this sense they would be transcending) or as remythologising the present (from a relative and contemporary viewpoint).

Artists working with the concept of 'nature as process' are wanting to dissolve the barriers between self and an external world and act as if they were 'nature'. This intention, however, involves a contradiction insofar as human interference would seem quite redundant to natural processes. To rearrange natural forms in an attempt to imitate nature's processes is paradoxical. There is an element of absurdity, for example, in a gallery attendant topping up pools of water on granite boulders as in Goldsworthy's installation, *Scaur water stone* (Macritchie 1995:93).

Macritchie (1995:93) also argues that the lumps of granite transported to the gallery from a river 'initially resonated not so much with echoes of the natural world from which they came, as with recollections of works of art'. The above observation seems to imply that in working with the natural environment one does not necessarily point to a greater reality but one assimilates nature in a culturally determined reality. This mode of expression also suggests a subjectivity that belies the ostensible aim of effacing oneself before nature.

Paradox and ambiguity, however, seem to be consistent with the notion of transcendence and this will be further discussed in the next and final chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### NATURE AS TRANSCENDENCE

When the sky above me teems with innumerable stars, the wind blows through the vastness of space, the wave breaks in the immense night; when above the forest the reddish morning light appears and the sun begins to illuminate the world, the mist rises in the valley and I throw myself in the grass sparkling with dew, every blade and stalk of grass teems with life, the earth awakens and stirs beneath me, and everything harmonizes in one great chord; then my soul rejoices and soars in the immeasurable space around me, there is no high or low, no time, no beginning and no end, I hear the living breath of God who holds and supports the world, in whom everything lives ...<sup>1</sup> (cited in Honour 1979:73).

This statement by Philip Otto Runge eloquently expresses the essence of transcendence. My own experience of the natural environment around Knysna stimulated similar stirrings of the suprasensible. My understanding of the natural environment was originally grounded in sensory perception which was subsequently transfigured into an expanded awareness that transcended the purely empirical.<sup>2</sup> This kind of consciousness resulted in an altered perception of time and space, a sense of identification with nature, an awareness of infinity and an

---

<sup>1</sup>It appears that an awareness of a transcendent reality has been a part of human experience ever since the origins of humankind. Most religions throughout the world are based on revelations of visions or dreams, all of which pertain to a reality that exists beyond the sensory, as this passage from Ezekiel illustrates,

I saw a storm coming from the north, a vast cloud with flashes of fire and brilliant light about it; and within was a radiance like brass, glowing in the heart of the flames (Ezekiel 4:8).

<sup>2</sup>This kind of perception was partly the result of spending long periods of time in virtually depopulated parts of nature. The sense of solitude which I experienced was conducive to becoming conscious of an alternative reality.

inability to comprehend the experience on a rational level.<sup>3</sup>

Although experiences of transcendence may not always be connected to religious revelation I perceived this kind of breakthrough in my ordinary levels of consciousness as an awareness of the numinous.<sup>4</sup> My encounter with nature influenced me to perceive the surrounding world as a manifestation of a God who is both immanent and transcendent.<sup>5</sup> William Barrett, in his argument on the existence of God makes the following comments:

Perhaps our feelings have a metaphysical depth beyond that of the rational intellect. Perhaps they lay hold, however dimly, of something in the cosmos inaccessible to reason ... Our experiences as moral agents, and as beings sensitive to the beauty of nature, point that way (1986:88).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>M Maxwell and V Tschudin (1990:10-44) argue that the following characteristics are common to transcendent experiences:

a quality of ineffability; a concept of time which is at variance with the generally accepted notion of linear time; a sense of union or a oneness with something outside the self and within; a loss of individual self; a state of knowledge which is different from knowledge obtained by means of the intellect and an intense and overwhelming feeling which is part of the experience and not a consequence of it.

According to the *New Encyclopedia Britannica* (NEB 1988, s.v. "religious experience") one of the aims of mysticism is to make possible the shift from the profane to the sacred. Before this transition or what is described as the 'great passage' is completed the individual undergoes an extension of awareness during which there is an experience of identification with nature, with other people and with things.

<sup>4</sup>*The Oxford combined dictionary of current English and modern usage* (1982, s.v. "numinous") defines 'numinous' as 'indicating presence of divinity; spiritual; awe-inspiring'. The word is derived from the Latin *numen* which means 'deity'.

<sup>5</sup>Although questions relating to the existence of God are beyond the scope and purposes of this dissertation they are relevant insofar as the issue of transcendence has informed my picture-making process.

<sup>6</sup>Maxwell & Tschudin (1990:4-9) contend that even though a religious feeling underlies a state of transcendence, such experiences are not always induced solely by means of religious beliefs. They refer to a research centre founded in Oxford in 1969 by Sir Alister Hardy (a Darwinian biologist) to investigate instances of transcendence. Apparently the centre has an archive of more than 5000 accounts of transcendence not all of which relate to religion. It seems that the majority of mystical experiences occur in nature or are associated with natural forms (1990:22).



In the Introduction I defined transcendence within the contexts of a greater reality (the Divine or spiritual) and of the art-making process. In this chapter I propose to investigate transcendence as manifested in the creative processes of artists working within the symbolic orders of naturalism, Romanticism, Modernism and the feminine. In addition, I will be examining concepts which I consider relevant to the representation of transcendence in a visual form, such as the various theories regarding the sublime, the concept of indeterminacy, the transformative aspects of light, and mythological or magical perception.

## 5.1 TRANSCENDENCE IN NATURALISM

A relationship between transcendence and naturalism appears to be a contradiction in terms. The ostensible aim of naturalism (which was defined in Chapter 1 as the imitation of nature) seems to relate more to the wish for an accurate reproduction of physical reality, rather than a yearning to represent the metaphysical. The theories that I have discussed in relation to naturalism, however, such as the Albertian and Keplerian pictures both seem to aspire to an absolute model of vision. In this sense they do express a longing for a transcendence of human limitations.

It is significant that even naturalistic works which seem to be concerned primarily with a physical reality, at the same time appear to express a vision which transcends the physical. The dematerialising properties of light appear to play an important role in expressing this supernatural reality.

### 5.1.1 The metaphysical properties of 'naturalistic' light

Although it is extremely difficult for me to ascertain whether there are transcendent elements in my work I have become aware of the importance of light in evoking such elements. In a

painting like *The Rocks that Muttered* (1992) (fig.14) in which the light is dull, there is a sense of imprisonment and of the rocks becoming enclosing walls. On the contrary, in paintings such as *Till All was Tranquil* (1990) (fig.21) and *Once Again/Do I Behold* (1994) (fig.23) the light has a luminosity which suggests a more expansive vision of another world.

Environmental artist, Wolfgang Laib, who works with natural materials such as beeswax and pollen also seems to add a transcendent dimension to 'naturalism'.<sup>7</sup> Referring to his exhibition entitled *Passage*, he describes how 'there was one arch which was really closed with beeswax. It was closed and it was called *Passage*. It was something that was closed but it was also something to enter into another world' (Farrow 1994:31).

His intention to evoke another world is exemplified in the installations *Pollen from hazelnut*<sup>8</sup> and *Passage*<sup>9</sup> (fig.32) where the light emanating from the natural materials has a metaphysical quality which suggests a larger reality.

Another environment artist whose work relates to the phenomenology of perception, and thus may be linked to Keplerian origins is James Turrel. Turrel's project at Roden Crater (fig.47), a 500,000-year-old extinct volcano in Arizona, involved grading and bulldozing the rim of the volcano into an even-sided dish.<sup>10</sup> From the bottom of the volcano, human vision is subjected to the following perceptual principle: the shape of the enclosure determines the perceived shape of the sky overhead (Failing 1985:73). Turrel thus focuses and magnifies the energies of light.

It appears, however, that Turrel is not simply interested in the scientific aspects of human

---

<sup>7</sup>In Chapter 1 it was discussed how artists working with the natural environment were associated with naturalism.

<sup>8</sup>Wolfgang Laib, *Pollen from hazelnut* (1986). Pollen, 320 x 360 cm. Installation at capc Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux.

<sup>9</sup>Wolfgang Laib, *Passage* (1992). Beeswax, wood construction, 790 x 522 cm. Installation at capc Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux. (Laib 1994:30).

<sup>10</sup>James Turrel, *Roden Crater project* (1972-present). Extinct volcano, Arizona. (Matilsky 1994:10).

perception. His project is sited in the desert, which is an environment which stimulates spiritual insights and communion with nature. By building rooms within and alongside the cone of the volcano and aligning them with the sun and certain stars he enables people to experience seasonal solstices and celestial phenomena as human beings were able to do in ancient times (Matilsky 1994:11). Turrel's interest in light also seems to point beyond the purely sensory. The artist's comments are significant in this regard. He argues that:

You can't form light with your hands, like clay. It is linked to thought more directly, in a less impure way, than traditional art materials. It's more like working in music than in painting or sculpture ... we are involved with light on so many levels ... think what happens to people when they spend time looking into a fire ... We can feel ourselves standing on the edge between a dream state and consciousness, and we seem to be able to pass back and forth. These are the kinds of experiences I wanted to deal with in my work (Failing 1985:74).

## 5.2 TRANSCENDENCE IN ROMANTICISM

As discussed in the Introduction there is a central paradox that is inherent in the concept of transcendence. This contradiction concerns the inability to define it without cancelling out that which transcends human finitude. Another related contradiction results from recognizing the infinite as that which is beyond definition.<sup>11</sup> This becomes particularly problematic when attempting to transpose such ambivalences on the painted surface.

Morse (1981:240-241) contends that the preoccupation with the infinite caused great problems for the Romantics. Considering that the infinite is that which lies beyond boundaries, there is an embedded contradiction in the attempt to represent it in pictorial form. This led to a derogation of painting in Romantic aesthetics since it was considered as the most complete and finished of the arts. Poetry and music were given a higher valuation as they were

---

<sup>11</sup>Kant argues in *The critique of aesthetic judgement* (1952):

But the infinite is absolutely ... great. In comparison with this all else ... is small. But the point of capital importance is that the mere ability even to think it as a *whole* indicates a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense ... the *mere ability even to think* the given infinite without contradiction, is something that requires the presence in the human mind of a faculty that is itself supersensible (Kant 1952:500).

regarded as less limited. Thus, painting, appearing as the art of limit and finitude had to aspire to qualities of music and poetry, that is, the unconfined.

It appears, however, that painting can transcend its limitations and express a numinous reality.<sup>12</sup> The Romantics in particular, succeeded in communicating a transcendent vision within the very structure of the picture surface. I propose to examine two concepts which seem to have been instrumental in the Romantic evocation of a metaphysical reality: the sublime and the sense of indeterminacy.

### 5.2.1 Indeterminacy as an evocation of transcendence

One of the ways in which one can express a transcendent experience through the creative process, appears to be by suggesting indeterminacy.<sup>13</sup> This indeterminacy may be suggested through a number of different means which may be visual or conceptual, such as the creation of visual disequilibrium, the use of the symbol and the fragment, the suggestion that a work is in the process of 'becoming'.

As already discussed, the evocation of transcendence through the indeterminacy caused by destabilizing the viewer's position is exemplified in the works of Friedrich. In a painting such as *Monk by the sea* (1809) the loss of a determinate position for the spectator and represented nature is achieved by the artist's disruption of traditional perspective. Friedrich violates a coherent visual structure by both deploying and rupturing the diagonals of linear per-

---

<sup>12</sup>According to Ouspensky the ability to discern the four-dimensional world of noumena required a sensitivity that could be most clearly perceived in art (in the term 'art' he included poetry, music and painting). He wrote in his *Tertium Organum* (1911): 'The phenomenal world is merely a means for the artist - just as colours are for the painter, and sounds for the musician - a means for the understanding of the noumenal world and for the expression of that understanding' (cited in Dalrymple Henderson 1983:251).

<sup>13</sup>Moore (1990:27) mentions that according to Plato *to apeiron* (the infinite) was indeterminate.

spective. He also eliminates from the landscape a connective midground and evokes an infinite expanse between the two.

This perspectival dislocation seems to emphasise the subjectivity of the viewer and it involves a paradox in the sense that the artist manages to evoke transcendence through a position of extreme subjectivity as opposed to the ostensible universality of the 'objective' viewpoint expressed by a rational perspective.<sup>14</sup>

In a painting such as *Round Earth's Shore* (1993-1994) (fig.6), I have used a similar indeterminacy by disrupting the coherence of my visual structure. Although they diminish in size, the natural forms in the background appear to come forward, creating a spatial shift which negates the illusion of a logical recession into depth.

Indeterminacy may also be evoked by artists who work with 'nature as process'. An example of this method of working is *Textus*<sup>15</sup> (fig.49) by Lars Vilks. *Textus* is a process work built around an old tree. The tree is still alive and will continue to grow into the structure. One can enter the work and move around in it. The work will also carry on growing into a bigger framework. Thus, the artist links several processes. Considering that it involves natural elements, which are forever undergoing transformation, the work cannot ever be complete and

---

<sup>14</sup>Friedrich's approach is also grounded in idealism which reinforces the subjective viewpoint. According to Stephen Priest (1991:65) a central claim of idealism is that it is 'what exists only within consciousness'.

<sup>15</sup>Lars Vilks, *Textus* (1993). Wooden construction, three storeys high. Langeland, Denmark. (Vilks 1994:51).

*Textus* is part of the TICKON project (Tranekaer Internationale Center for Kunst og Natur). This is the project of Alfio Bonnanno who, since the eighties had advocated the creation of an art centre in nature. In 1990 he was approached by the county council of Tranekaer and he was subsequently offered 60 acres for the free disposal of the centre. The concept underlying TICKON is that of a landscape with structures made of materials found on site. Some of the structures would be inaccessible (situated in marshes or lakes) whereas others would be accessible to human beings and animals. Human-made elements would become part of the cycles in nature and would undergo transformation through decomposition. A number of artists have been participating in the TICKON project since 1991. TICKON is in process on the island of Langeland in Denmark (Sutton 1994:33).

finite and thus transcends many kinds of boundaries.<sup>16</sup>

The symbol, evokes a transcendent reality because of its indeterminacy. In the sense that it is not possible to attribute any fixed meaning to symbols they are conducive to opening up the frame. The Surrealists, who may be seen as operating within the romantic framework used symbols in their work in order to evoke a more profound reality.<sup>17</sup> An example of this use of symbolism is Max Ernst's *Here everything is still floating*<sup>18</sup> (1920), where the upside-down anatomical drawing of a beetle becomes a steamboat floating at the bottom of the sea. By using symbols which are ambivalent and associative in nature, the Surrealists evaded rigid classifications and thus were able to transcend the finite.

April Gornik's work which has also been linked to the Romantic landscape tradition contains symbolic elements. In her painting, *Untitled (Two rocks)*<sup>19</sup>, the rocks seem to be infused with symbolic significance. Gornik emphasises the rocks by means of brilliant, dramatic light, thus imbuing them with a meaning which goes beyond their ostensible appearance. The scale of the rocks can also not be determined, which further reinforces their symbolic meaning. Eleanor Heartney in her discussion of the painting contends that:

The effect of the painting is both mysterious and unsettling. It's impossible to gauge the scale of the rocks - they may be modest boulders or towering islands ... The painting's overall mood of darkening gloom suggests the brooding visions of ... Casper David Friedrich, while its drama and imagery bring to mind that great monument of Symbolist landscape, Arnold Böcklin's *Isle of the dead* (1989:123).

---

<sup>16</sup>Kuspit's definition of collage as being a demonstration of the 'process of the many becoming the one, with the one never fully resolved because of the many that continue to impinge upon it' seems relevant in this respect (see Chapter 2).

<sup>17</sup>One of the major trends in Modernism was the exploration of the irrational and the fantastic mostly exemplified in the works of the Surrealists. Their concern with mystical or supernatural expression links them to nineteenth-century Romanticism and Symbolism.

<sup>18</sup>Max Ernst, *Here everything is still floating* (1920). Pastel photo-engraving and pencil, sheet, 10.32 x 12.2 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<sup>19</sup>April Gornik, *Untitled (Two rocks)* (1980). Materials and dimensions unknown.

As discussed earlier, in my own work I have used two natural elements almost exclusively, the sea and the rocks. These elements exist both as themselves, and as symbols which have associations that extend far beyond their physical appearance or denotative meaning.

The fragment functions in a similar way to the symbol in evoking a transcendent reality. Like the symbol, it too has a significance which points to a reality beyond itself. Considering that a fragment is wrested from a greater whole, it seems to hark back to an original unity. In Friedrich's *Trees and bushes in the snow* (c.1828) (fig.19), for instance, the natural forms are important in themselves, as shown by the particularity of Friedrich's treatment of them, but they are also pointers to a reality that transcends them.

I have used the fragment in all my works as it evokes a quality of incompleteness, suggesting, rather than clearly defining, the larger reality from which it was taken. In Chapter 3, however, I discussed the ambivalent nature of the fragment in the sense that it is also expressive of a fragmentary reality.

A further ambiguity is implied in the inability to circumvent the framed edges of a painting. In order to overcome the limitations of the 'frame' one has to consider that the meaning of the artwork does not wholly reside in its presence as physical object. Thus, it appears that the opening up of the frame needs to occur metaphorically as well as being suggested pictorially. In this respect, Jacques Derrida's<sup>20</sup> *parergon* is again pertinent.<sup>21</sup> When he refers to the *parergon* as 'neither simply inside nor simply outside' (1978:54) Derrida metaphorically opens up the frame of the work by allowing for infinite interpretations and thus allowing for tran-

---

<sup>20</sup>Jacques Derrida is one of the leading figures of the deconstructionist movement. Barrett (1986:127) discusses deconstruction as originally being a concept in literary criticism, but subsequently becoming a philosophy in itself, usually concerned with the destruction of philosophy. Literary criticism refers to a method of dissecting and disassembling a literary text.

<sup>21</sup>Elfriede Pretorius (1992:1) interprets *parerga* as the fragmented and 'unseen' elements in and around the artwork. These include symbolic meanings, feelings, interpretations, and contexts associated with a particular artwork.

scendence.<sup>22</sup> The *parergon*, in this sense is indeterminate, expressed in part by the use of the fragment and the symbol (since both exhibit open-ended qualities).

## 5.2.2 The concept of the sublime

The concept of the sublime is of particular importance to the Romantic evocation of a transcendent reality. The two predominant theories concerning the sublime, which influenced the Romantics, were those postulated by Immanuel Kant in his *The critique of aesthetic judgement* (1790) and Edmund Burke in *A philosophical inquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful* (1790). These points of view revolve around the objective/subjective or internal/external dialectic.

According to Burke<sup>23</sup> the sublime is to be found in an external reality (nature) which over-

---

<sup>22</sup>Although the metaphor of the frame implies a point of view which is subject to a specific time, place, and person, and therefore relative, it nevertheless seems to allow for transcendence because of its refusal to delimit the work to a fixed and stable meaning.

<sup>23</sup>Burke expands on a number of qualities which he considers as necessary to the evocation of the sublime. Some of these are: terror, obscurity, power, privation, vastness, infinity, succession and uniformity, difficulty, magnificence, light and colour.

Terror is referred to as that which gives rise to feelings of danger and the ocean is given as an example of such a terrifying object. Obscurity affects the imagination much more than clarity and is expressive of the infinite and the eternal because they too are unknowable and obscure. Power is a concept that relates to terror and may be encountered in the 'gloomy forest' and in the 'howling wilderness.' It also applies to the most powerful of 'beings' which is God. Privations such as vacuity, darkness, solitude and silence are all terrible and therefore sublime. Vastness which implies greatness of dimension is sublime, and Burke contends that vastness of height is less grand than depth. Looking down from a precipice, for example, is more awesome than looking up. Although there are scarcely any objects comprehensible to the senses which are in their nature infinite, if their boundaries cannot be perceived and the imagination is affected then infinity is evoked. A light which by its very excess obliterates all objects and thus is converted into a kind of darkness is sublime. This light is also associated with the Divine (Burke 1790:49-69).



powers human beings with a sense of their own finitude whereas Kant<sup>24</sup> places the sublime within human beings themselves, awakened when they are confronted by the sublimity of nature.

Both Burke's and Kant's theories seem to underscore the importance of the imagination in apprehending the sublime, these were given visual form by the Romantic painters in their quest to intimate infinity through pictorial representation:

- i. The dematerializing properties of light have been explored by artists like Joseph Mallord William Turner in paintings such as, *Light and colour (Goethe's theory: the morning after the deluge, Moses writing the Book of Genesis)*<sup>25</sup> and by Friedrich in a painting such as, *Cross in the mountains* (1808).
- ii. Feelings of solitude and silence are invoked by Friedrich in works like, *Monk by the*

---

<sup>24</sup>In his *critique of aesthetic judgement* Kant postulates that: '...true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging subject, and not in the object of nature that occasions this attitude by the estimate formed of it' (1952:501).

Kant, by relocating sublimity within the mind of the perceiving subject expresses a view opposed to Burke's who places the sublime in what is awe-inspiring in a nature that is external to the viewer. Kant further argues that the sublime is not contained in any sensuous form but rather relates to ideas of reason and the awakening of a supersensible faculty within us. He contends, '*the sublime is that, the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense*' (Kant 1952:498). The feeling of the sublime is described as a feeling of 'displeasure' which arises from the inadequacy of the imagination to arrive at an aesthetic estimation of magnitude through reason but at the same time this feeling of inadequacy gives rise to an awakened pleasure.

Another important point made by Kant is that human beings find their limitation in the face of the immensity of nature because of the inability of their faculties to achieve a standard that is commensurate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of nature's 'realm'. At the same time, however, as the 'might' of nature forces us to recognize our physical helplessness as natural beings, it also reveals a faculty whereby we estimate ourselves as independent of nature (1952:503).

<sup>25</sup>William Mallord Turner, *Light and colour (Goethe's theory: the morning after the deluge, Moses writing the Book of Genesis)* (1843). Oil on canvas, octagonal: 76.5 cm. Tate Gallery, London.

sea (1809), where the lonely figure of the monk seems to be contemplating the mysteries which lie beyond the physical world.

- iii. The vertiginous views deployed by Friedrich in paintings such as *Chalk cliffs on Rugen*<sup>26</sup> (c.1818), seem to echo Burke's (1937:61) admonition that 'we are more struck at looking down from a precipice, than looking up at an object of equal height'.

Furthermore, an extreme subjectivity underlies the pictorial expression of the Romantics, this is consistent with Kant's emphasis on the particularity of experience and his relocation of sublimity within the mind of the perceiving subject.

The above theories pertaining to the sublime form part of eighteenth-and nineteenth-century thinking which does not seem to apply any longer. There are, however, visual links between the work of some contemporary artists who deal with sublimity and the work of their Romantic predecessors.

The shimmering light in Rebecca Purdum's paintings such as, *Sneaking up on the ocean*<sup>27</sup> (fig.31), shows strong visual links with Turner's dematerialized surfaces. Despite the physicality of the canvases because of the manipulation of paint on the surface, the all-pervading luminosity infuses the painting with metaphysical qualities. Similarly the strong contrasts between light and darkness in a painting like *NYC 184*<sup>28</sup>, seem to exemplify Burke's (1937:67-68) theory concerning light, when he contends that the mere light which simply shows up objects is too common to evoke the sublime. On the other hand, a light which by

---

<sup>26</sup>Caspar David Friedrich, *Chalk cliffs on Rugen* (c.1818). Oil on canvas, 90.5 x 71 cm. Winterthur, Stiftung Oskar Reinhart.

<sup>27</sup>Rebecca Purdum, *Sneaking up on the ocean* (1987). Oil on canvas, 210 x 150 cm. Collection unknown. (Moorman 1988:105).

<sup>28</sup>Rebecca Purdum, *NYC 184* (1987). Oil on canvas, 195 x 140 cm.

its very excess obliterates all objects and thus is converted into a kind of darkness is sublime, he argues.

Gornik's painting entitled *Thunder*<sup>29</sup> (fig.37) evokes the sublime by means of dramatic lighting, vastness of scale, and the evocation of a sense of impending disaster. Heartney says the following in this respect:

For poets and painters of the Romantic era, Burke's essay provided a blueprint for the creation of grand and terrifying effects. Gornik's work, particularly in its more theatrical moments, borrows some of these effects - dramatic back-lighting, colossal clouds, fiery sunsets, wild weather ... (1989:124).

The sublime has also been investigated by Derrida (1978:127-128) who contends that the sublime is 'inappropriate to our faculty of representation'. He argues that:

If art gives form by limiting, or even by framing, there can be a *parergon* of the beautiful ... But there cannot, it seems to be a *parergon* for the sublime. The colossal excludes the *parergon*. First of all because it is not a work, an *ergon*, and then because the infinite is presented in it and the infinite cannot be bordered (1978:127-128).

For Derrida, infinity seems unrepresentable.<sup>30</sup> He also appears to agree with Kant in arguing that although the sublime is better presented by '(raw) nature' rather than by art, it is nevertheless not to be found in nature but in ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup>April Gornik, *Thunder* (1985). Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Heartney 1989:124).

<sup>30</sup>Derrida's assertion, however, that the sublime is unrepresentable appears to involve a contradiction. Considering that he seems to believe that one cannot know anything for certain, and that all one can talk about is presence or making things present then why should it be impossible to present the sublime?

<sup>31</sup>Derrida contends in this respect that,

presentation is inadequate to the idea of reason but it is presented in its very inadequation ... As inadequation, it does not belong to the natural sensible order, nor to nature in general, but to the mind, which contents itself with *using* nature to give us a feeling of finality independent of nature. Unlike that of the beautiful, the principle of the sublime must therefore be sought in ourselves who *project* ... the sublime into nature, ourselves as rational beings (1978:131-132).

Oulton's comments regarding sublimity also suggest a congruence with the Kantian and Derridian version of the sublime. She argues that 'the notion of the sublime to me was not in bowing to the grandeur of nature. ... in a Turner, what is most overwhelming for me is the power of Turner's own grandeur, rather than that of nature ...' (1986:44).

When Derrida (1978:131) claims that 'the sublime cannot inhabit any sensible form' he appears to be suggesting that insofar as paintings are expressions of the sensible, they can only evoke the infinite through their content, but not through their form or physical presence. The Romantic painters, however, in their understanding of the finite nature of a 'finished' work of art and their use of the fragment to evoke an incomplete and thus more complex reality, were able to communicate transcendence within the pictorial structure.

As concerns my own work there are a number of elements which seem to link it to all the above theories of the sublime. In paintings such as, *Pride of Purple Rocks I* (1991) where I have used a precipitous viewpoint, there appear to be connections with Burke's 'sublime'. I have attempted to evoke a feeling of silence and solitude in all the paintings (hence the absence of the human figure) and I have explored the transformative aspects of light. Even my use of the fragment may be linked to Burke's (1937:54) ideas when he argues that: 'hardly anything can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds ...'

In my later works, however, such as *Pride of Purple Rocks III* (1995) and *Ye Waves, that Out of the Great Deep Steal Forth*<sup>32</sup> (fig.51), there appears to be a more obvious shift from the idea

---

<sup>32</sup>Georgia Saad, *Ye Waves, that Out of the Great Deep Steal Forth* (1995). Oil on canvas, 147.5 x 108.5 cm. (This painting was still in process during the completion of this dissertation, therefore the included illustration is of the unfinished work.)



Fig. 48

Andy Goldsworthy, *Herd of arches* (1994).

Red stone, dimensions unknown.

Installation in an empty store on  
Bond Street, London.

(Macritchie 1995: 91).

Fig. 49

Lars Vilks, *Textus* (1993).

Wooden construction, three-storey  
high. Langeland, Denmark.

(Vilks 1994: 51).



Fig. 50

Rembrandt van Rijn, *The stone bridge* (1630s).

Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.

Collection unknown.

(Stapen 1988:153).



of the sublime being perceived in external nature to an awareness of the sublime within myself. This awareness is indicated by the increasing level of abstraction in my representation of natural forms.

Acknowledging the above-mentioned aspects of the sublime implies an attempt to bridge the gap between external reality and interiority. This is in accordance with my intention to blur the boundaries between an objective and a subjective reality, as discussed earlier. A further implication of this position seems to be the attempt to incorporate the totality of the world as absorbed within every aspect of experience, within the totality of the individual self. This then relates to the Romantic paradox of trying to assimilate infinity into the relativity of the individual experience.

### 5.3 TRANSCENDENCE IN MODERNISM

As discussed in Chapter 2, the yearning for transcendence appeared in the work of a number of Modernists, such as Mondrian, Kandinsky, Marc, Klee, Rothko. All these artists worked with concepts which have already been discussed as instrumental in transposing a transcendent reality onto the pictorial surface such as: the metaphysical properties of light, the symbolic nature of colours, and the use of the fragment as evocative of a universal reality.

#### 5.3.1 Abstraction as an evocation of transcendence

The most important contribution made by the Modernists in the search for transcendence seems to be their adoption of a completely abstract mode of expression. By removing the object from their paintings they appear to echo the feelings of the Romantics who considered painting to be more limited than poetry or music in its potential for expressing transcendent states.

John Moffitt (1987:123), in his essay on Marc's colour theory, discusses the belief shared by

artists like Marc, August Macke, and Kandinsky in a system of musical tones or colour values, that is, in a 'synaesthetic equation'. He quotes the following statement by Kandinsky: 'Color is the keyboard ... caus[ing] vibrations in the soul'.

Similarly Mark Rothko's paintings such as *Orange, red and red*,<sup>33</sup> demonstrate a lambent use of colour as light that evokes another world. John Griffiths says the following in relation to Rothko's work:

Mural painting and 'automatic' ... techniques derived from Surrealism give way eventually to a search for the means of portraying the most universal human and then pantheistic images: those which have to be purged of all finite representation in order to reveal the infinite ... . Simple transitions of tone make huge rectangular paintings throb gently and suggest a primal pulsation of organism and cosmos (1987:37).

Contemporary artists, who are working within an abstract idiom, such as Nancy Haynes, Philip Taaffe, Peter Schuyff, and Dorothea Rockburne seem to share a common viewpoint in considering their work to be about much more than formalist issues. They speak of their work in terms of poetry, myth, metaphor, and even theology.<sup>34</sup> In the sense that they want to imbue the surface with layers of meaning that transcends the purely formal, they also seem to be opening up the frame.

Rockburne's painted structures have been described (Gruen 1986:97) as 'metaphysical'. Even though their form is abstract they bear titles like, *Robe*, *Golden Section*, *Egyptian* and *Angel* series<sup>35</sup> as for example, *Guardian angel #2*<sup>36</sup> (fig.26). John Gruen comments on the artist's

---

<sup>33</sup>Mark Rothko, *Orange, red and red* (1962). Oil on canvas, 232.5 x 200 cm.

<sup>34</sup>See Chapter 2.

<sup>35</sup>The *Golden section* series refers to Rockburne's study of the Greek theory of proportions, the *Robe* series to the study of folds represented in medieval paintings, the *Egyptian* series to wall reliefs and the *Angel* series to the ranks within the angelic hierarchies (Gruen March 1986:101).

<sup>36</sup>Dorothea Rockburne, *Guardian angel* (1982). Watercolour on vellum, 192.5 x 105 cm. Xavier Fourcade Gallery. (Herrera 1983:129).

work: 'Shape, form, color, space and material combine to produce a mathematical energy that, in turn, emits a sense of transcendent equilibrium ... . It is work ... that in meaning leaves the door wide open to many interpretations' (Gruen 1986:101).

Rockburne (Gruen 1986:101) herself claims that she is interested 'in the abstract and in universal structures'.

Even though my paintings are representational there seem to be ideological links with the work of these artists. In addition, as already discussed, I have increased the level of abstraction in my more recent works and attempted to manifest my desire to imbue the surface itself with levels of meaning. Light, which in my earlier, more 'descriptive' paintings was used in order to approximate natural appearances has been replaced by light which emanates from the colours themselves, for example in, *Ye Waves, that Out of the Great Deep Steal Forth* (1995) (fig. 51).

#### 5.4 TRANSCENDENCE AND THE FEMININE

In Chapter 4 a number of concepts linked to the feminine such as: a magical or mythological perception of reality; nature as a symbolic form of the feminine; the concept of impermanence and flux; and the cyclical rhythms of nature were discussed. All the above concepts seem to be evocative of another reality. I propose to examine the following in relation to transcendence: mythological/magical perception and the creative process which echoes the processes of nature.

##### 5.4.1 Transcendence and the magical/mythological perception

Paul Klee's *Omphalo-centric lecture* (fig.52), may be connected to a magical or mythological



perception of the world.<sup>37</sup> The painting seems to be a physical manifestation of what he said at the Jena Lecture of 1924, 'it is the artist's mission to penetrate as far as may be toward that secret place where primal power nurtures all evolution ... . In the womb of nature in the primal ground of creation where the secret key to all things lies hidden' (quoted in Knott 1987:130).

The mysterious figure in the painting holds a glowing navel in its hand. Klee, in his early Bauhaus lectures (Knott 1987:130), associates the navel with the centre of creativity. The navel may be associated with the womb, creation, and the birth/death cycle. Likewise it is connected to the mystic centre from which all knowledge originates.<sup>38</sup> The visual source for the above painting appears to be the sixth-century BC *Berlin Kore (Aphrodite of the Pomegranate)*.<sup>39</sup> Apart from the visual similarities there seem to be associations with the fertility symbolism of the figure and its mythological origins.

Knott (1987:139) mentions that one definition of the *omphalos* connects it to the part that contains the seeds of the pomegranate. As used in the myth of Persephone, the pomegranate symbolises the return of spring and new life, and in Christian art it symbolised the resurrection. It is also a symbol of the womb (container of seeds) and fertility. *Omphalos* means 'navel' in Greek and the *omphalos* is also the round stone in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi which was supposed to mark the middle point of the earth. Knott makes the following statement concerning the *omphalos*:

The *Omphalos* is the very seat and symbol of the Earth Mother. Thus the *Omphalos* or navel as the center of the world goes beyond the sanctuary of Apollo to other important 'centers' corresponding with other sacred mountains, where heaven and earth come together forming the *axis mundi* ... (Knott 1987:133).

---

<sup>37</sup>Paul Klee, *Omphalo-centric lecture* (1939). Oil on canvas, 67.5 x 47.5 cm. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf. (Knott 1987:131).

<sup>38</sup>Knott quotes the following excerpt from Madame Blavatsky's *Collected writings (Isis unveiled)* (1887): 'The Ancients placed the astral soul of man, his self-consciousness, in the pit of the stomach. The Brahmans shared this belief with Plato and other philosophers ... . The navel was regarded as the "circle of the sun", the seat of internal divine light' (1987:133).

<sup>39</sup>*Aphrodite of the pomegranate* (570-550 BC). Staatliche Museen, Berlin.



Fig. 51

Georgia Saad, *Ye Waves, that Out of the Great Deep Steal Forth* (Unfinished) (1995).

Oil on canvas, 147.5 x 108.5 cm.

Thus, Klee's association of the mystic centre with the womb seems to suggest Klee's relation to the feminine. In the sense that the womb becomes a symbol for all creation and the primal ground from which everything (including knowledge) originates it also connects the feminine to a transcendent reality.

The concept of the *omphalos* reappears in the recently opened sculpture park in Delphi. This park is called 'The Meeting' and it features permanent works by eleven international artists.<sup>40</sup> The work of these artists explores the meaning of myth in today's world. Heartney argues that the works present a challenge to the following attitudes concerning myth:

According to Roland Barthes, myth is a form of ideology. By naturalizing the cultural, it persuades us to acquiesce to forms of political and social order which benefit the privileged few. Such a view suits the American art world's current distrust of tradition, transcendence and the very notion of the sacred (1995:61).

The Cypriot<sup>41</sup> artist, Theodoulos, explores the conflict between knowledge and the unknown in his installation entitled *Omphalos*.<sup>42</sup> The name of the installation refers to the belief that Delphi was the centre of the world (and it also relates to the Earth Mother). The installation comprises a deep shaft which is sunk into a hill overlooking the Gulf of Corinth. The interior of the shaft is painted in the intense blue colour, characteristic of Greek architecture. Inside the shaft, which is also like a well, there is a video screen displaying images of the ocean accompanied by appropriate sound effects. The work changes as the day progresses. In brilliant daylight the glass cap covering the shaft becomes a mirror that reflects the sky above, while at night the video of the sea can be viewed deep below the earth's surface. In this sense the work seems to refer to Plato's cave and his belief that the visual arts are an illusion (Heartney 1995:61).

---

<sup>40</sup>'The Meeting' opened in August 1994 at the European Cultural Center in Delphi, Greece.

<sup>41</sup>I am a Greek Cypriot by birth as well, so it is of great interest to me to encounter the work of Cypriot artists who are working in Cyprus or Greece. On a visit to the island earlier in 1995 I was amazed to discover that my colour range (especially the blue tonalities) showed a greater similarity to the palette of Cypriot artists who were painting the sea, than to the palette of South African artists painting the same subject.

<sup>42</sup>Theodoulos, *Omphalos* (1994). Installation.

Lydia Venieri's installation called *Idolatry*<sup>43</sup> (fig.53), shows a similar exploration of the irrational power of myth. This consists of a 'snake' undulating at the base of an astrolabe.<sup>44</sup>The astrolabe frames a 'magic mirror'. The mirror reflects the sun and the sky by day and periodically emits swirls of steam at night which obscures the surface. The mist-covered mirror which both hides and reveals is suggestive of the relationship between the rational and the irrational (Heartney 1995:61).

The work of the above artists may be seen as an attempt to create a continuity between the sacred realm and the present. My links with these artists are on a more personal level, as we share a common heritage. Greek mythology was part of my formative education and early experience of the world. Therefore, although I do not use ostensibly mythological symbols in my work, my perception of the natural elements, especially the sea, is partly infused with mythology.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup>Lydia Venieri, *Idolatry* (1994). Astrolabe, mirrors, steam, mixed mediums. Installation at Delphi. (Heartney 1995:62).

<sup>44</sup>An astrolabe is a navigation instrument used for measuring the altitudes of the stars.

<sup>45</sup>Homer sometimes uses the epithet 'Cyprian' to refer to Aphrodite. One of the main centres for the cult of Aphrodite was Paphos in Cyprus. According to myth, Aphrodite rose from the foam of the sea and was borne along the waves by Zephyr until she landed on the shores in Cyprus (*NLEM* 1990, s.v. "Aphrodite"). Cyprus subsequently became known as the birthplace of Aphrodite.

*Unicorn* (fig.20) by Jorn Ronnau combines legend with the processes of nature.<sup>46</sup> The artist's intention was to carve a unicorn's horn out of a tree which was still rooted in its natural environment and was not growing vertically. It was also important that the site evoked the cloistered secrecy of the legend.<sup>47</sup>

The horn was finally carved out of an oak tree which had been destabilised during a storm but had continued to grow. By removing the crown of the tree (which was too heavy and would have led to the eventual submergence of the tree into the surrounding marsh) and tapering it into the horn, Ronnau extended the tree's life. He transformed the tree into a work that suggested an otherworldly reality. According to the artist (Ronnau 1994:55), 'carving it was an immense physical and spiritual challenge'. *Unicorn* in the snow evokes a transcendent and mystical feeling that is similar to that evoked by Friedrich in, *Trees and bushes in the snow* (c.1828).

## 5.5 BRIDGING THE GAP

In investigating the work of the above artists the diversity of their expression becomes apparent. They all come from different time periods, geographical locations and world-views. It seems that their experience can only be fragmentary, rooted in the relativity of their existence, their personal history, their particular environment. Out of these various fragments, however, a unified picture begins to emerge. Although these artists have different experiences they seem to share a common yearning which inspires and determines the form of their particular expression: the yearning for transcendence.

---

<sup>46</sup>Jorn Ronnau, *Unicorn* (1993). Tree in snow. Langeland, Denmark. (Ronnau 1994:55).

<sup>47</sup>According to legend if a virgin goes out alone in the forest and falls asleep the unicorn will arrive and put his head in her lap. If she takes the horn in her hand the unicorn will be tamed and will follow her (Ronnau 1994:55).

Despite the difficulties in defining transcendence, the artists discussed above have allowed for its possibility. Most of them seem to have succeeded in evoking another reality through the physicality of their artworks. In this sense the 'confined' objects, the fragments, suggest the unconfined, in spite of the paradoxical nature of their quest.

It is significant that it is not only transcendence as a concept which links the work of these artists, but also its physical manifestation in their creative process. It seems that contemporary artists who can be linked to the deconstructed orders of naturalism, Romanticism, or Modernism are not simply appropriating fragments from the past. They are extending the visual vocabulary of these orders so that they become relevant to the present and through continual transformation they will probably have relevance in the future. In the sense that they are revitalizing these creative systems they seem to be conjuring up (apart from their belief in a greater reality) another transcendent order, that of the artworks themselves.

## CONCLUDING NOTE

This research has been part of a creative process in which I have attempted to explore the possibility of a transcendent reality both in relation to a greater whole and as concerns the art-making process.

My point of departure was the fragmentary nature of experience, knowledge, and conventions of the creative act.

In examining my own attempts at evoking a transcendent order in my picture-making process I have had to investigate a number of deconstructed symbolic orders, such as naturalism, Romanticism, Modernism, the feminine and transcendence itself.

A significant realisation which emerged during this enquiry concerned the relativity of all these creative systems. The transcendent vision proposed by the *camera obscura*, for example, was supplanted by the fragmentary vision offered by the photograph. My endeavour to establish a larger order exemplifying a fixed and unalterable Truth ultimately appeared to be dealing with illusions. It would therefore seem that the following words by Craige (1983:10) adequately define our reality: 'Our relativist minds made by a relativist world make a relativist world. And there is no Truth in us'.

In investigating the various fragments (visual conventions, deconstructed symbolic orders, conceptual structures, personal meanings) that have made up this research, however, there appears to be a 'truth' both in us and in the works that we create. Although it may not be 'the Truth' as unchangeable and fixed, it nevertheless seems to be a truth, albeit one that accommodates paradox and embraces ambivalence.

In view of our limited and disjunctive experience, it appears that a framework which accepts paradox is far more evocative of a transcendent reality than a purportedly fixed and stable

one. Even though I believe in an immanent and transcendent God, I cannot with any certainty define God. I believe that this applies to any transcendent concept. I contend, however, that although transcendence cannot be irrefutably determined, it may nevertheless be intimated in the interstices of our incomplete knowledge. Insofar as paradox allows for the gaps and the contradictory elements in our experience and perception, it seems to allow for transcendence. The following statement by Gregory Volk (1995:87) concerning Wolf's landscapes seems pertinent in this respect. He argues that 'because his method of working incorporates constant gaps between brushstrokes, his paintings seem simultaneously fragmentary and integrated'.

It is also significant that paradox seems to have close links with religious experience or mysticism, as this excerpt from the *Corpus Hermeticum* illustrates:

Make yourself higher than all heights, and lower than all depths; bring together in yourself all opposites of quality, heat and cold, dryness and fluidity ... think that you are not yet begotten, that you are in the womb ... that you have died, that you are in the world beyond the grave ... (quoted in Matthews & Matthews 1986:128).

The Surrealists seem to have deliberately employed ambivalence in order to evoke an alternative reality. Celia Rabinovitch (1987:144) in her essay entitled, 'Surrealism and modern religious consciousness' speaks about the Jungian 'archetypes' as being too literary in interpreting art because they imply that art illustrates rather than embodies meaning. She then makes the following comments as regards the Surrealist approach:

By contrast, the extreme degree of ambivalence found in Surrealist art eludes archetypal classifications because of its intentional ambiguity of meaning. The Surrealists deliberately employ contradiction and paradox to create a peculiar mental *frisson* ... an utterly non-rational response that resonates ... in the mind of the beholder (1987:144).

When Kandinsky (see page 71) says, '... antitheses and contradictions, these all make up our harmony' he seems to be expressing similar views.



In my exploration of the orders of naturalism, Romanticism, Modernism, the feminine, and transcendence, I encountered many ambiguities within these systems. Their ostensibly definite structures appear to have been subverted by the artists working within them. In allowing for paradox, rather than attempting to overcome it, these diverse expressions seem to have allowed for a greater reality.

When viewing works from different times and places it becomes apparent that the artists who created them were 'deconstructing' through their use of ambivalence (whether consciously or unconsciously), the symbolic orders which gave birth to their works, at the same time as they were allegedly affirming them. In this sense the deconstruction of symbolic systems does not seem to be a specifically contemporary preoccupation or trait.

It appears that artists have always been questioning a given order so as to uncover meaning and by so doing have been able to open up the frame and thereby achieve transcendence. When Friedrich, for example, uses the fragment as a pointer to a transcendent reality and at the same time as a sign of rupture and loss, he is engaged in a process of deconstruction and so is Rembrandt, when he infuses what should have been the 'objective' reality of seventeenth-century Dutch painting with the spiritual<sup>1</sup> (fig. 50).

Contemporary artists appear to be more accepting of ambiguity, even though they are not necessarily more successful at expressing it visually than artists in the past. The comments by the abstract artists: Sherrie Levine, Tishan Hsu, and Nancy Haynes below, reiterate this concern:

Since 1980, my work has been an exploration of the notion of originality. I continue to think about ambiguity and the improbability of certainty (Sherrie Levine 1987:114).

---

<sup>1</sup>Rembrandt van Rijn, *The stone bridge* (1630s). Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. (Stapen 1988:153).

The '80s are very much about splits and contradictions. As old paradigms cease to be sustaining or relevant, different ones will be needed ... I want my work to have some of the richness, complexity and contradiction which I see in life (Tishan Hsu 1987:117).

I am drawn to constructions, especially to those which have hidden places where the absent or non-visible plane is as important as the presence of the visible plane, so that the contradictions support one another (Nancy Haynes, 1987:118).

In examining my own picture-making process I have become aware of the fact that inasmuch as my work has been informed by the above-mentioned symbolic orders, it has also deconstructed the conventions and aims of these orders. While I used some aspects of these creative systems, others I ignored or discarded in my work. Naturalist conventions, for example, I subverted by imbuing my works with subjectivity; my interest in representation counteracted my links with the spirituality of the anti-mimetic aspects of Modernism. Thus, it seems that my pictures cannot be precisely defined within any given framework. In this sense it would appear that the paintings transcend the various fragments that gave them form.

As evidenced by the title of this dissertation, my intention was to explore transcendence in relation to landscape painting. During the process of this enquiry the concept of 'landscape' had to be extended in order to include the diverse expressions of artists who do not use the medium of painting, such as those who work with the natural environment. The work of these artists seems to subvert the symbolic order of landscape and to erase the traditional boundaries of this particular genre. Even artists working within an abstract idiom, such as Moira Dryer (Wei 1987:112) use the term 'landscape' to refer to their work. By extending the visual language of 'landscape' and exposing it to new interpretations these artists are injecting new life and vitality into the genre. In this regard they are also opening up the frame.

Most of the artists who have been discussed, refuse to confine themselves to narrow definitions and unequivocal positions. Through their acceptance of uncertainty and indeterminacy they have extended the fragmentary nature of their works and thereby have achieved transcendence.

There is, however, another aspect concerning their creative process which is expressive of transcendence: the evocation of an overarching framework. Despite the ambiguities and the fragmented perspectives that are inherent in their indeterminate structures there also seem to be common links between all the different symbolic orders. Spirituality, for example, has been expressed within the orders of naturalism, Romanticism, Modernism and the feminine. Contrary to the diversity of their visual manifestations, artists such as Laib, Friedrich, Klee, and O'Keefe succeed in evoking the spiritual in their work. Their works also evidence an interest in the feminine principle. There also appears to be another important ground of commonality underlying the creative expression of all the artists who have been discussed during the process of this enquiry: namely, the romantic sensibility. The works of artists as disparate as Rothko, Gornik, Goldsworthy, and Kiefer, exhibit romantic traits.

The paradox in the above argument, however, lies in the fact that I have chosen to focus on certain aspects of these orders, such as transcendence, in an attempt to create my own order. This may imply that my definitions concerning transcendence, nature, symbolic orders, visual conventions are rooted in the relativity of my existence and are determined by my particular context. The following comment by Craige seems important in this regard:

When we focus on our own discourse, no longer believing either in an objectively definable external reality or in our-selves [sic] as isolable entities capable of impartial observation or original thought, we gaze upon our own process of making order ... with eyes - with minds - constructed by that very process. We are relativists born of the relativist paradigm (1983:10).

I support Craige's assertion. In examining the various artists' creative output, however, I am also persuaded by the opposite of her assertion: a position that encompasses the universal. Discovering areas of commonality in works originating from such disparate spatio-temporal contexts would seem to suggest some kind of unity or a transcendent frame which integrates the fragments. In this sense these works are not simply random or meaningless objects confined to the specificity of their world. Imbued with levels of meaning (that are expressed in their visual structures) they appear to rise above geographical, temporal, or biographical boundaries.

The investigation of my own work has made me realise how numerous fragments (symbolic orders, visual conventions, private beliefs, my history) have converged on the surface of an inanimate object, called a painting, and have infused it with layers of meaning that transcend its purely physical and relative existence. Simon Morley, in his essay, 'A Différance' says the following in relation to artworks:

The changing fortunes of the visual arts ... reveal clearly what is essential to art as a whole, for it is precisely this *visual* quality that compromises the belief that it is possible to achieve a coincidence of the real and the transcendent ideal. Representation in art, far from being nothing more than a play of *différance*, combines the minute and absolutely random detail of the world together with a sense of unity and form (1988a:32).

In conclusion, I propose that this sense of unity and form, which seems to characterise the works discussed during the process of this research appears to endow the 'made' objects with universal significance. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the concept of transcendence, insofar as these artworks rise above barriers and communicate themes that evoke the universality underlying our fragmented experience, they transcend.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ADAMS, B. 1991. Facing the romantic void. *Art in America* April: 122-127.
- ALPERS, S. 1983. *The art of describing: Dutch art in the seventeenth century*. London: Penguin.
- APPLETON, J. 1975. *The experience of landscape*. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- ARGAN, GC. 1985-1986. History and antihistory. *Flash Art* 125, Dec/Jan: 54-55.
- ARGÜELLES, M. and ARGÜELLES, J. 1977. *The feminine: spacious as the sky*. Shambhala: Boulder & London.
- ARISTOTLE. 1974. *On the art of poetry*, translated by TS Dorsch. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.
- ARMSTRONG, R. 1981. Of earthly objects and stellar sights: Vija Celmins. *Art in America* 69 (5), May: 100-107.
- ATKINS, R. 1990. *Artspeak: a guide to contemporary ideas, movements, and buzzwords*. New York: Abbeville Press.
- AUPING, M. 1983. Hamish Fulton: moral landscapes. *Art in America* (2), February: 87-93.
- AUTY, G. 1988. Romantically inclined, in *The New Romantics*. *Art and Design* 4(11/12), editor AC Papadakis: 61-67.
- BALAKIAN, A. 1983. Relativism in the arts and the road to the absolute in *Relativism in the arts*. Editor BJ Craige, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.
- BANCROFT, A. 1987. *Origins of the sacred: the way of the sacred in western tradition*. London: Arkana Paperbacks.
- BARNES, TJ. & DUNCAN, JS. (eds.) 1992. *Writing worlds: discourse, text & metaphor in the representation of the landscape*. London: Routledge.
- BARRELL, J. 1990. The public prospect and the private view: the politics of taste in eighteenth century Britain, in *Reading landscape: country, city, capital*, edited by S Pugh, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- BARRETT, W. 1986. *Death of the soul: from Descartes to the computer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BASSON, E. 1992. *Man-altered landscapes: the work of John Clarke, in The stones revisited*. Pretoria: Pretoria Art Museum. (Catalogue for an exhibition held at the Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria.)
- BATESON, G. 1980. *Mind and nature: a necessary unity*. London: Fontana.

- BEARDSLEY, J. 1984. *Earthworks and beyond: contemporary art in the landscape*. New York: Alberville Press.
- BERMAN, M. 1988. The experience of modernity, in *Design after modernism: beyond the object*. Editor J Thackaray, Thames & Hudson.
- BERMINGHAM, A. 1990. Reading Constable, in *Reading landscape: country, city, capital* edited by S Pugh, Manchester: Manchester University Press: 97-120.
- BIBLE. 1970. *The new English Bible: with apocrypha*. Oxford: Oxford University Press & Cambridge University Press.
- BOHAN, RL. 1987. Catherine Dreier and the spiritual in art, in *The spiritual image in modern art*. Editor J Regier, Wheaton, Illinois: the Theosophical Publishing House.
- BURKE, E. 1937. *On taste: on the sublime and beautiful: reflections on the French revolution: a letter to a noble lord*. New York: Collier.
- CAVENDISH, R. (ed.) 1989. *Encyclopedia of the unexplained: magic, occultism, and parapsychology*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.
- CHETWYND, T. 1982. *A dictionary of symbols*. London: Paladin Books.
- CHRISTIANSEN, R. 1988. *Romantic affinities*. London: Bodley Head.
- CIRLOT, JE. 1962. *A dictionary of symbols*. Translated by J Sage. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- CLARK, K. 1976. *Landscape into art*. New edition. London: John Murray.
- CLARKE, J. 1992. The home art of Nukain Mabusa in *The stones revisited*. Pretoria: Pretoria Art Museum. (Catalogue for an exhibition held at the Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria.)
- COWAN, J. 1989. *Mysteries of the dream-time: the spiritual life of Australian aborigines*. Dorset: Prism Press.
- CRAIGE, BJ. 1983. What is relativism in the arts? in *Relativism in the arts* edited by BJ Craige, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press: 1-19.
- CRAIGE, BJ. (ed.) 1983. *Relativism in the arts*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.
- CRARY, J. 1990. *Techniques of the observer: on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- CROWTHER, P. 1988. Beyond art & philosophy: deconstruction & the post-modern sublime, in the new Modernism: deconstructionist tendencies in art. *Art and design* 4(3/4) Editor AC Papadakis: 47-52.

- CUMMING, H. 1988. Romanticism and retrospection: an interview with Robert Rosenblum, in *The new romantics*. *Art & design* 4(11/12). Editor AC Papadakis: 6-19.
- DERRIDA, J. 1978. *The truth in painting*. Translated by G Bennington & I McLeod. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- DERRIDA, J. 1988. Derrida on painting and The truth in painting, in *The New Modernism: deconstructionist tendencies in art*. *Art and Design* 4(3/4). Editor AC Papadakis: 19-25.
- DIETRICH, K. 1983. The ordinary and mysterious painted image. MAFA dissertation. University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- DIETRICH, K. 1992. Of salvation and civilisation: the image of indigenous southern Africans in European travel illustrations from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. D Litt et Phil thesis. University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- DRURY, N. 1987. *The shaman and the magician*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- DRYER, M. 1987. Moira Dryer, in *Talking abstract: part two*. *Art in America* (12), December: 126-127.
- DUNCAN, M. 1995. In Plato's electronic cave. *Art in America* 83 (6), June: 68-72.
- ECO, U. 1984. *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*. London: Macmillan.
- EITNER, L. 1955. The open window and the stormed tossed boat: an essay in the iconography of Romanticism. *Art Bulletin*. December: 279-290.
- ELDERFIELD, J. 1973. Painterliness redefined: Jules Olitski and recent abstract art. *Art International* XVII(4) April: 36-40.
- ELIADE, M. 1961. *Images and symbols: studies in religious symbolism*, translated by P Mairet. London: Harvill Press.
- ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA*. 1968. s.v. "transcendentalism". London: Benton.
- ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA*. 1982. s.v. "nature, philosophy of". s.v. "Alberti, Leon Battista". s.v. "Kepler, Johannes". 15th edition. London: Benton.
- ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA*. 1988. s.v. "religious and spiritual belief, systems of". s.v. "religious experience". 15th edition. London: Benton.
- ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE UNEXPLAINED*. 1989. s.v. "alchemy". London: Arkana.
- ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WORLD ART*. 1965. s.v. "mimesis". London: McGraw-Hill.
- FAGONE, V. 1994. Giuliano Mauri: art in nature 1981-1993, in *Art and the natural environment*. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges, (36): 63-67.

- FAILING, P. 1985. James Turrel's new light on the universe. *Art News* 85(4), April: 70-78.
- FINLAY, IH. 1994. Classicism, piety and nature, in Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design* Editor N Hodges, (36): 85-93.
- FER, B., BATCHELOR, D. & WOOD, P. 1993. *Realism, rationalism, surrealism: art between the wars*. New Haven: Yale University Press in association with The Open University.
- FERM, V. (ed.) 1957. *Encyclopedia of morals*. London: Peter Owen.
- FOSTER, R. 1962. *The new romantics: a reappraisal of the new criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- FOSTER, SC. 1975. The avant-garde and the privacy of mind. *Art International* XIX (9), November: 71-78.
- FRANK, P. 1984. Light: different angles on the landscape. *Arts Magazine* 58, June: 19.
- FREEDBERG, SJ. 1972. *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence, I*. New York: Harper & Row.
- FROMENTIN, E. 1981. *The masters of past time: Dutch and Flemish painting from Van Eyck to Rembrandt*. Editor H Gerson. 2nd edition. Oxford: Phaidon Press.
- FULLER, P. 1986. *The Australian scapegoat: towards an antipodean aesthetic*. University of Western Australia.
- FULLER, P. 1988. *Theoria: art and the absence of grace*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- FULLER, P. 1990. *Images of God: the consolations of lost illusions*. London: Hogarth Press.
- GABLIK, S. 1984. *Has modernism failed?* New York: Thames and Hudson.
- GABLIK, S. 1991. *The Reenchantment of art*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- GADAMER, H-G. 1989. *Truth and method*, translated by J Weinsheimer and DG Marshall. 2nd revised edition. London: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- GARDNER, P. 1985. Jane Wilson's weather eye. *Art News* 84(10), December: 56-60.
- GILMOUR, JC. 1990. *Fire on the earth: Anselm Kiefer and the postmodern world*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- GODFREY, T. 1986. *The new image: painting in the 1980s*. Oxford: Phaidon Press.
- GOMBRICH, EH. 1977. *Art and illusion: a study in the psychology of pictorial representation*. 5th edition. London: Phaidon Press.
- GOMBRICH, EH. 1982. *The image and the eye: further studies in the psychology of pictorial representation*. Oxford: Phaidon Press.



- GREEN, N. 1990. Rustic retreats: visions of the countryside in mid-nineteenth century France, in *Reading landscape: country, city, capital*. Edited by S Pugh, Manchester: Manchester University Press: 161-176.
- GREENBERG, C. 1973. *Art and culture*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- GREENHALGH, M. 1988. Romanticism: a definition, in *The new romantics*. *Art and Design* 4(11/12). Editor AC Papadakis: 20-27.
- GRIFFITHS, J. 1987. American art after 1945: abstraction to post-Modernism, in *British & American art: the uneasy dialectic*. *Art and Design* 39(10). Editor AC Papadakis: 37-44.
- GRIFFITHS, J. 1988a. Deconstruction deconstructed, in *The new Modernism: deconstructionist tendencies in art*. *Art and design* 4(3/4). Edited by AC Papadakis: 9-18.
- GRIFFITHS, J. 1988b. Deconstructionist tendencies in art, in *The new Modernism: deconstructionist tendencies in art*. *Art and design* 4(3/4). Edited by AC Papadakis: 53-60.
- GRIFFITHS, J. 1988c. Concepts of romanticism, in *The new romantics*. *Art and design* 4(11/12). Editor AC Papadakis: 28-35.
- GRIFFITHS, J. 1988d. New romantic artists, in *The new romantics*. *Art and design* 4(11/12). Editor AC Papadakis: 53-60.
- GRIGSON, G. (ed.). 1984. *Before the romantics*. Edinburgh: the Salamander Press.
- GRUEN, J. 1986. Dorothea Rockburne's unanswered questions. *Art News* 85(3), March: 97-101.
- GUATTARI, F. 1986. The Postmodern dead end. *Flash Art* (128), May/June: 40-41.
- HALLEY, P. 1987. Peter Halley, in *Talking abstract: part two*. *Art in America* (12), December: 120-121, 171.
- HAYNES, N. 1987. Nancy Haynes, in *Talking abstract: part two*. *Art in America* (12), December: 118-119.
- HEARTNEY, E. 1989. April Gornik's stormy weather. *Art in America* 88 (5), May: 120-125.
- HEARTNEY, E. 1995. Contemporary oracles. *Art in America*, (5), May: 61-63.
- HELLER, A FEHER & F.(eds.) 1986. *Reconstructing aesthetics: writings of the Budapest school*. Great Britain: Basil Blackwell.
- HENDERSON, DL. 1983. *The fourth dimension and non-Euclidean geometry in modern art*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- HENRY, G. 1985. Jane Freilicher and the real thing. *Art News* 84(1), January: 78-83.

- HENRY, G. 1994. The figurative field. *Art in America* 82(1), January: 82-87.
- HERRERA, H. 1983. Dorothea Rockburne at Fourcade, in Review of exhibitions. *Art in America*, (2), February: 129-130.
- HITCHING, F. 1977. *Earth Magic*. London: Pan Books.
- HODGES, N. (ed.) 1994. Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design*, (36).
- HONOUR, H. 1979. *Romanticism*. London: Allen Lane Penguin.
- HOWELLS, RJ. 1986. *Rousseau: la nouvelle Heloise*. London: Grant & Cutler.
- HOSBAUM, P. 1976. The Romantic dichotomy. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Winter: 32-45.
- HSU, T. 1987. Tishan Hsu, in Talking abstract: part two. *Art in America* (12), December: 116-117; 171.
- HUGHES, R. 1980. *Nothing if not critical: selected essays on art and artists*. Great Britain: Collins Harvill.
- HUTCHINS, RM. (ed.) 1952. Kant, in *Great books of the Western world*. Chicago: The University of Chicago.
- INGLIS, F. 1990. Landscape as popular culture, in *Reading landscape: country, city, capital*. Editor S Pugh, Manchester: Manchester University Press: 197-213.
- JEFFREY, I. 1984. *The British landscape: 1920-1950*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- JOACHIMIDES, CM. & ROSENTHAL, N. (eds.) 1982. *Zeitgeist*. New York: George Braziller.
- JUNG, CG. 1964. *Man and his symbols*. London: Aldus Books.
- KANT, I. 1952a. The Critique of Pure Reason, translated by JMD Meiklejohn, in *Great books of the Western world*. Editor RM Hutchins. Chicago: The University of Chicago: 1-250.
- KANT, I. 1952b. The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement, translated by JC Meredith, in *Great books of the Western world*. Editor RM Hutchins. Chicago: The University of Chicago: 461-549.
- KANT, I. 1960. *Observations on the feeling of the sublime and the beautiful*, translated by JT Goldthwait. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- KENT, S. 1986. Therese Oulton. *Flash art*, (127), April: 40-44.
- KIRKPATRICK, B. 1987. *Roget's thesaurus of English words and phrases*. London: Penguin Group.

- KNOTT, R. 1987. Paul Klee and the mystic centre, in *The spiritual image in modern art*. Editor J Regier. Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House.
- KOERNER, LJ. 1990. *Caspar David Friedrich and the subject of landscape*. London: Reaktion Books.
- KRAMER, H. 1985. *The revenge of the philistines: art and culture: 1972 - 1984*. New York.
- KRAUSS, RE. 1985. *The originality of the avant-garde and other modernist myths*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- KUSPIT, D. 1983. Collage: the organizing principle of art in the age of the relativity of art, in *Relativism in the arts*. Editor BJ Craige. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press: 123-147.
- KUSPIT, D. 1993. *Signs of psyche in modern and post-modern art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LAIB, W. 1994. Beyond the imagination, in Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges: 25-31.
- LEVINE, S. 1987. Sherrie Levine, in Talking abstract: part two. *Art in America*, (12), December: 114-115.
- LEWIS-WILLIAMS, D & DOWSON, T. 1989. *Images of power: understanding Bushman rock art*. Johannesburg: Southern Books.
- LIPPARD, LR. 1983. *Overlay: contemporary art and the art of prehistory*. New York: Pantheon.
- MACRITCHIE, L. 1995. Residency on earth. *Art in America* 83(4), April: 91-95; 125.
- MARKIDES, K. 1990. *Fire in the heart: healers, sages and mystics*. New York: Paragon House.
- MATHEWS, P. 1987. Aurier and Van Gogh: criticism and response, in *The spiritual image in modern art*. Editor J. Regier. Wheaton, Ill. USA: Theosophical Publishing House.
- MATILSKY, B.C. 1994. The survival of culture and nature: perspectives on the history of environmental art, in Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges: 7-15.
- MATTHEWS, C. & MATTHEWS, J. 1986a. *The Western way: a practical guide to the Western mystery tradition. Vol. I: the native tradition*. London : Arkana
- MATTHEWS, C. & MATTHEWS, J. 1986b. *The Western way: a practical guide to the Western mystery tradition. Vol.II: The hermetic tradition*. London: Arkana.
- MAXWELL, M. & TSCHUDIN, V. (eds.) 1990. *Seeing the invisible*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

- McCOY, K. 1994. Structures for discourse on light and shade, in *Art and the natural environment*. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges: 45-47.
- McDONALD, J. (ed.) 1993. *Peter Fuller's modern painters: reflections on British art*. London: Methuen.
- MILLAR, R. 1975. *Civilized magic: an interpretive guide to Australian painting*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- MOFFITT, JF. 1987. The Theosophical origins of Franz Marc's color theory, in *The spiritual image in modern art*. Editor J Regier. Wheaton, Ill. USA: Theosophical Publishing House: 102-129.
- MOORE, AW. 1990. *The infinite*. London: Routledge.
- MOORMAN, M. 1988. Rebecca Purdum: in a mysterious light. *Art News* 87(3), March: 105-106.
- MORLEY, S. 1988. A différance, in *The new Modernism: deconstructionist tendencies in art*. *Art and design* 4(3/4). Editor AC Papadakis: 27-32.
- MORRIS, W. (ed.) 1973. *The Heritage illustrated dictionary of the English language*. International edition. American Heritage.
- MORSE, D. 1981. *Perspectives on romanticism: a transformational analysis*. London: Macmillan.
- NAGEL, T. 1986. *The view from nowhere*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- NAIRNE, S. 1987. *State of the art: ideas and images in the 1980s*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- NEW LAROUSSE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MYTHOLOGY. 1990. s.v. "Indian mythology". s.v. "Teutonic mythology". 24th impression. London: Hamlyn.
- NOCHLIN, L. 1991. *The politics of vision: essays on nineteenth century art and society*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- NORRIS, C. 1983. *The deconstructive turn: essays in the rhetoric of philosophy*. London: Methuen.
- NORRIS, C. 1987. *Derrida*. London: Fontana.
- O'KEEFE, G. 1976. *Georgia O'Keefe*. New York: the Viking Press.
- OSBORNE, H. (ed.) 1970. *The Oxford companion to art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- OVENDEN, G. 1988. Ruralism and the new romantics, in *The new romantics*. *Art and Design*. 4(11/12). Editor AC Papadakis: 50-52.
- PAPADAKIS, AC. (ed.) 1987. British & American art: the uneasy dialectic. *Art and Design* 3(9/10).

- PAPADAKIS, AC. (ed.) 1988a. The New Modernism: deconstructionist tendencies in art. *Art and design* 4(3/4).
- PAPADAKIS, AC. (ed.) 1988b. The new romantics. *Art and Design* 4(1/12).
- PATRICK, K. 1988. Romanticism and the Modernist myth in The new romantics. *Art and Design*. 4(11/12). Editor AC Papadakis: 42-49.
- PIRENNE, MH. 1970. *Optics, painting & photography*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- PLATO. 1956. The Republic, in *Great dialogues of Plato*. Editor, EH Warmington & PG Rouse, London: the New English Library.
- PRETORIUS, E. 1992. A hermeneutic investigation of the parergon in artmaking, with special reference to Anselm Kiefer. MAFA dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- PRIEST, S. 1991. *Theories of the mind*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- PRINCENTHAL, N. 1994. Reinvented nature. *Art in America* 82(5), May: 90-95.
- PUGH, S. (ed.) 1990. *Reading landscape: country, city, capital*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- PUGH, S. (ed.) 1990. Introduction: Stepping out into the Open, in *Reading landscape: country, city, capital*. Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1-6.
- RABINOVITCH, C. 1987. Surrealism and modern religious consciousness, in *The spiritual image in modern art*. Editor J Regier. Wheaton, Illinois USA: Theosophical Publishing House: 141-162.
- RAINE, K. 1970. *William Blake*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- REASON, D. 1994. Birds, in Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges: 75-79.
- REESE, WL. 1980. *Dictionary of philosophy and religion: Eastern and Western thought*. s.v. "truth". s.v. "transcendent, the". s.v. "symbol". s.v. "natura naturans and natura naturata". s.v. "nature".
- REGIER, J. (ed.) 1987. *The spiritual image in modern art*. Wheaton, Ill. USA: Theosophical Publishing House.
- RONNAU, J. 1994. The unicorn, in Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges: 55.
- ROSEN, C. and ZERNER, H. 1984. *Romanticism and realism: the mythology of nineteenth century art*. New York: Viking Press.

- ROSENBERG, H. 1973. Myths and rituals of the avant-garde. *Art International* XVII/7, September: 67-68.
- ROSENBLUM, R. 1975. *Modern painting and the northern romantic tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- RUCKER, R. 1982. *Infinity & the mind: the science and philosophy of the infinite*. Sussex: the Harvester Press.
- RUSKIN, J. 1985. *Unto this last: and other writings*. Editor C Wilmer. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- SCHARF, A. 1974. *Art and photography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- SCHUYFF, P. 1987. Peter Schuyff, in Talking abstract: part two. *Art in America*, (12), December: 124-125.
- SKAWRAN, K. 1992. Introduction, in *The stones revisited*. Pretoria: Pretoria Art Museum. (Catalogue for an exhibition held at the Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria).
- SMITH, DN. (ed.) 1921. *Wordsworth: Poetry and prose*. Oxford: University Press.
- STAFFORD, BM. 1984. *Voyage into substance: art, science, nature and the illustrated travel account, 1760-1840*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- STAPEN, N. 1988. Country Fare. *Artnews*, 87(6), Summer: 150-153.
- SUTTON, GK. 1994a. Introduction to TICKON, in Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges: 33.
- SUTTON, GK. 1994b. David Nash: the language of wood, in Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges: 69-73.
- SYKES, JB. (ed.) 1982. *The Oxford combined dictionary of current English & modern usage*. 6th edition. London: Octopus Books.
- SZE, M-M. 1959. *The way of Chinese painting: its ideas and techniques: with selections from the seventeenth century Mustard Seed manual of painting*. New York: Random House.
- TAAFE, P. 1987. Philip Taafe, in Talking abstract: part two. *Art in America* (12), December: 122-123; 171.
- TALBOT, M. 1981. *Mysticism and the new physics*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- THACKARA, J. (ed.) 1988. *Design after modernism*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- UDO, N. 1994. Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges: 59.
- VARNEDOE, K. 1980. The Artifice of Candor: Impressionism and Photography Reconsidered. *Art in America*, January: 66-78.

- VAUGHAN, W. 1978. *Romantic art*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- VAUGHAN, W. 1980. *German Romantic painting*. Yale University Press.
- VERSLUIS, A. 1986. *The philosophy of magic*. London: Arkana.
- VILKS, L. 1994. Art and the natural environment. *Art and Design*. Editor N Hodges: 51.
- VOLK, G. 1995. Eric Wolf: recovered innocence. *Art News* 94(6), Summer: 87.
- WARMINGTON, EC & ROUSE, PG. 1956. *Great dialogues of Plato*, translated by W H Rouse. London: the New English Library.
- WEI, L. (ed.) 1987. Talking abstract: part two. *Art in America*, (12), December: 112-129.
- WELCH, J. 1987. Jackson Pollock's *The white angel* and the origins of alchemy, in *The spiritual image in modern art*. Editor J Regier. Wheaton, Ill. USA: Theosophical Publishing House: 193-201.
- WELSH, RP. 1987a. Introduction, in *The spiritual image in modern art*. Editor J Regier. Wheaton, Ill. USA: Theosophical Publishing House: 1-11.
- WELSH, RP. 1987b. Mondrian and Theosophy, in *The spiritual image in modern art*. Editor J Regier. Wheaton, Ill. USA: Theosophical Publishing House: 163-184.
- WHITE, H. 1983. The limits of relativism in the arts, in *Relativism in the arts*. Editor BJ Craige, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.
- WHITMONT, EC. 1983. *Return of the goddess*. London: Arkana.
- WILLEY, B. 1972. *The eighteenth century background: studies on the idea of nature in the thought of the period*. Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with Chatto & Windus.
- WILLIAMS, R. 1990. Between country and city, in *Reading landscape: country, city, capital*. Editor S Pugh, Manchester: Manchester University Press: 7-18.
- WOOD, P., FRANSCINA, F., HARRIS, J., HARRISON, C. 1993. *Modernism in dispute: art since the forties*. New Haven: Yale University Press in association with The Open University.
- WORDSWORTH, W. 1952. Selections from Wordsworth's poetry and prose, in *Wordsworth: poetry and prose*. Editor DN Smith. Oxford: University Press: 45-192.
- YORKE, M. 1988. English neo-romantics. The new romantics. *Art and design* 4(11/12). Editor AC Papadakis: 36-41.
- YOUNG, G. 1989. Bertha Everard and a sense of place. *De Arte* 40, September: 48-61.
- ZUKAV, G. 1979. *The dancing Wu Li masters: an overview of the new physics*, USA: William Morrow.

Fig. 52

Paul Klee, *Omphalo-centric lecture* (1939).

Oil on canvas, 67.5 x 47.5 cm.

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,

Düsseldorf.

(Knott 1987:131).



Fig. 53

Lydia Venieri, *Idolatry* (1994).

Astrolabe, mirrors, steam, mixed mediums.

Installation at Delphi.

(Heartney 1995:62).