

The World of the Landscape

Bart Verschaffel
Ghent University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

Verschaffel, Bart. "The World of the Landscape." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 14.3 (2012): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2036>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 1143 times as of 11/07/19.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 14 Issue 3 (September 2012) Article 2

Bart Verschaffel,

"The World of the Landscape"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/2>>

Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 14.3 (2012)

Thematic Issue ***New Work on Landscape and Its Narration***

Ed. Sofie Verraest, Bart Keunen, and Katrien Bollen

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/>>

Abstract: In his article "The World of the Landscape" Bart Verschaffel analyzes the visual logic of the landscape genre in painting as it was developed from the sixteenth century onward. He argues that the structure of a minimal foreground, a middle ground cut off from the foreground, and a background that gives way to the distant, corresponds to a meditative attitude, proper to the nature of the image as such. The landscape is essentially a calm image. Second, Verschaffel puts forward that the middle ground in landscape images is not, as in history painting, a waiting room adjacent to the action in the foreground, but is rather oriented towards the horizon and beyond: a landscape always represents the world. Further, in the tradition of landscape for the Romantics the vagueness resting on the horizon comes to the fore and creates an "atmosphere" that touches a lonely soul and transforms an image of the world into an intimate encounter.

Bart VERSCHAFFEL

The World of the Landscape

Translated from the Dutch by Gregory Ball

Alois Riegl opens his 1899 essay "Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst" by evoking the mechanisms of landscape. Riegl describes a landscape experience and immediately summons up an image of the landscape setting for the reader: "I sat down on a lonely Alpine peak. The earth falls away steeply at my feet, so that nothing is near or within reach, and nothing stirs my sense of touch. Looking is everything here" (28; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by Gregory Ball). With nothing within reach, nothing to plan or do, one can only look: the landscape comes about as the viewpoint is uncoupled and isolated from the field of vision. The range of potential action is reduced to the viewpoint, where there is hardly any space for action, or none at all. This transforms the spectator into a beholder. And the landscape, an independent world that is no longer an environment, appears in front of the beholder — not here, but there. To quote Alain Corbin: "When we look at a landscape, we feel we are placed both facing and outside a space. To the beholder this space becomes a painting" (20-21). A landscape has the structure and the detachment of an image.

Further on Riegl describes how things appear in detached contemplation: uniform, counter-posed, and therefore as if coated with "a unifying stillness" (28). From the point of view of action, things do not all appear equivalent; after all, not everything is equally usable or dangerous and therefore pragmatically important. Our attention is focused on what may or will happen, and it seeks out actors and intrigues. Our body anticipates movement, and our perception is selective. If, by contrast, we were to sit on Riegl's rocky outcrop and thus find ourselves in a place where there is nothing to do, we would naturally become restful and calmly observing. According to Riegl, this equivalence "unites": it summons up an aesthetic and moral experience of peace and harmony. This sense of harmony and happiness, Riegl writes, offers the beholder the intuition that "across all the contrasts that our imperfect senses notice in our vicinity, something intangible, a 'World Soul,' permeates all things and unites in perfect harmony" (29). What viewing format — or, to use one of Corbin's terms, what *esthétique imperative* (20) — leads Riegl to rest and look, there, on that rocky outcrop? What effect does the detachment of Riegl's *point de vue*, which Corbin writes about, have on its meaning? We structure the image of the landscape by halting and transforming the perspective of action and allowing the world to appear, and, secondly, by structuring this world as a distance. Riegl writes that the two basic factors determining the landscape format are "Stillness and the view in the distance" [*Ruhe und Fernsicht*] ("Die Stimmung" 28).

We live our lives spontaneously on the basis of a perspective of action and with an interest in action that, with the body as the central point, structures it and lets it expand. What is nearby, what most concerns us, seems the most real and important. We know that reality is larger than our field of action, and we know that all environments and all lives are set in the same world. But this world itself never actually appears. The world, defined as the receptacle of all the environments in which people act, is at the same time presupposed and hidden by this interest in action: people live in their environments, the world starts beyond what concerns them and does not make any appearance as such. It only looms up behind everything that bothers and concerns us. That is why Immanuel Kant writes that the World is not an empirical fact, but a regulative idea — a basic principle that we use to structure our experiences. A landscape painting, therefore, shows a world that can only be seen in images, and usually does not resemble what can be seen "in reality." Put differently, the image of the landscape makes something visible or represents a meaning that is not visible in itself. Those landscapes that "really exist" — they have been photographed or can be visited — clearly derive from this image of the landscape: they are the result of very strongly coded ways of looking that are regulated entirely by the landscape code and that enable us to look at a "real" environment as an *image* of the world. There are several ways of visualizing or symbolizing this idea of the world, for instance by means of the globe, the map, the satellite photograph, etc. These types of representation are connected to and sometimes combined with the landscape, for example through the framing of a map with a strip of small landscapes, as was done in Dutch seventeenth-century paintings or by making a panoramic landscape in the foreground merge into a town plan in the background. But the

landscape is a specific type of visualization and its image halts and limits the field of the action and allows the world that we sense behind the environments to appear — separate, independent, and distant.

Resting means not acting, and, therefore, as the interest in action is always primordial, it means the suspension and deactivation of the attitudes and automatisms that accompany action. Therefore, looking at an image transforms our perception: all the senses that structure space as an environment, that scan and check the immediate range of action on every side (smell, hearing, range of touch) are halted. The eye, which normally flashes and turns back and forth, is kept within a frame and is thus fixed. Therefore, every image — that is to say, every two-dimensional depiction — induces rest, regardless of what the image represents. All images automatically open up a space one cannot enter and in which one is unable to act. Nevertheless, every type of narrative image tries to elicit an imaginary involvement or participation that undoes this detachment. Every image excludes the viewer and turns him into a beholder, but in the image of the landscape, he is actually invited to take his place there as a distant beholder. The stillness that is the underlying principle of every image is made explicit in the landscape image. As such, the image of the landscape follows along the current of the basic structure of the image. The first decision in the construction of a landscape image concerns the foreground. What is at stake here can best be clarified by comparing a landscape painting to a history painting. The latter is theatrical and narrative: the action, which in reality, of course, comprises many moments and aspects, is concentrated, and is turned exclusively towards one side and thus towards the spectator. It takes place in the foreground and, usually, in the center, and its place more or less fills the picture. When the action is divided into episodes, the separate moments are represented by the arrangement of characters and props, and the different moments are positioned in the image according to their importance and on the basis of fixed codes related to, for instance, our inclination to "read" a painting from left to right. In this context, it should be noted that a painting's middle ground links up narratively and visually with the foreground. Throughout history, painting the action has always been played towards the spectator, and the distance between the beholder and the action is therefore minimized. The image is intended to turn the spectator into a witness, and therefore always puts him "within hearing distance." After all, the witness has to be able to hear what is said, read the faces, sympathize, identify, and approve or disapprove of (re)actions.

The image of the landscape reverses the setting of the history painting. First of all, the spectator's (imaginary) range of action is restricted. One radical option is to set the viewpoint high up and thereby leave out the foreground altogether, so that the imaginary position of the viewer does not link up with the picture space at all, and the latter becomes inaccessible. However, this spectator's position is often an imaginary extension of the foreground of the picture space, and thereby becomes an imaginary part of the world that appears in the image, although the possibility of stepping further into the picture space is immediately blocked, as in Riegl's case on the Alpine rock. The beholder's realm is reduced to the size of an outlook post: anyone who is invited to enter the picture is immediately confined to a place where he cannot do much more than look. When, by contrast, this foreground is occupied by an action (characters, a situation, props) that spontaneously captures the beholder's narrative attention and curiosity, the urge to interpret and guess a story is minimized. This effect can be achieved by keeping the figures small so that they remain beyond the range of hearing, by shifting the scene away from the centre, by looking over it from an elevated viewpoint, and, more generally, by making the action space in the foreground as narrow as possible, or cutting it off at an angle to form a corner. What is essential is that the position of the viewer or the foreground is cut off from the middle ground.

The second decision that defines the image of the landscape and provides a basis to divide it into subgenres is the way in which the space is articulated beyond the foreground, and thus out of earshot. The zones under consideration include the middle ground, distance, horizon, and sky. Beyond the foreground, one can no longer distinguish voices and faces, or have more than an inkling of a story that might elicit empathy and invite one to enter into the action. As from the middle ground, one can no longer dramatize, as the characters and situations that are generally able to arouse curiosity and empathy are in a place where, as the Chinese say, the trees have no branches and the people no eyes. In the image of the landscape, everything becomes homogenous, which in turn induces a degree of indifference. Seen from the distance, from the hill, for Lucretius the great battle and the screams of

the warriors are no more than a silent squirming or a small cloud of dust. In each landscape image, the respective proportions of and the relations between middle ground, distance, horizon, and sky have to be defined. The middle ground and background or distance, world, and sky can merge smoothly into one another, or they can relate to each other with drama and contrast in accordance with various formulae. The composition is complicated even more by the qualitative attributes that indicate the degree of habitability or livability and, for example, turn the background and even the middle ground into "wilds." When there are no more towers, cities, or ships to be seen, but only forest or even ground where nothing can grow — sea, ice, rock — the semantic contrasts between the action or story and the world can be increased until the elements perform a geological "drama" that takes us to the boundary of the classical landscape genre. And then, on the horizon, beyond the middle ground, receding even further, begins the world and a space — the sky or the sea — that human activity cannot fill or appropriate at all. What returns in various guises in these variants on the image of the landscape is the essential subject of the image of the landscape: the world. Contrary to popular belief, the proper subject of the landscape image is not nature, or even its relation to man; instead, nature is only one of the possible forms the world can take. A town or a city can also qualify as a landscape and be depicted as such (Lemaire 60). The landscape does not show culture in contrast with nature, but man's range of action as smaller or subordinate to the world. In one of the earliest definitions of the genre, Thomas Blount (1656) stated that "all that which in a picture is not body or argument is Landscape" (Blount qtd. in Andrews 30). In the image of the landscape, the world appears, devoid of action, bigger than all stories and lives, and it cannot be filled by all these overlapping fields of action. In the landscape, the world is not unlike time: it passes and forgets human history.

Therefore, the paintings that exemplify the semantic structure of the landscape image picture explicitly in the composition the contrast between human actions — and their context in the foreground — and an empty world without people. Two early examples are worth discussing in greater detail. The first is a book miniature by Jean Colombe from the Duke of Berry's *Très Riches Heures* (ca. 1485) that shows King David's victory. The lower half of the picture is taken up by a foreground without depth full of the commotion of battle, which ends in a mass of helmets and a forest of lances, above which an empty, receding landscape appears. The action is not situated in the world but is set in front of and in contrast to the world. Albrecht Altdorfer's *Battle of Alexander* (1529) has the same structure: its perspective shifts several times. The lower third of the picture is a broad battlefield with many warriors; above this zone, in two steps, is a dark middle ground with mountains and a city in which only buildings — no figures — can be distinguished; in the final third, there is no horizon, but distant bluish seas and mountain ranges with a cloudy sky and a sunset, seen from a very high viewpoint beyond the middle ground. The two examples described here, which synecdochically represent a wide range of early landscape images, are probably less skillfully painted or less correct in terms of perspective than later pictures. As they depict the semantic structure of the landscape in a basic, almost schematic way, they are more clear and therefore more powerful than pictures which include figures in the landscape. After all, the sort of painting that represents human history as part of the landscape is also structured by the semantic contrast between the setting of the action or the story, and the world that cannot be filled or used up by this action.

The next step after structuring the picture area and visualizing the World is adding *staffage*: putting figures in the landscape. The options here all follow the same logic of reducing and neutralizing the narrative content and interest, and of referring to the world. There are three categories of *staffage*. The first comprises the figures involved in a biblical, mythological, or historical story that is worth telling, but who are isolated in the foreground of the image, or who, together with their story, are lost somewhere in the middle ground. Second, there are the figures whose actions only amount to an anecdote or an illustration of a typical situation. They make their appearance in genre scenes and pastoral landscapes, or as extras in heroic and romantic landscapes. These figures perform self-evident and even tautological actions: the farmer ploughs, the traveler walks, the shepherd guards, and so on. Whether they populate the foreground or the middle ground, these characters remain a non-emphatic presence. They belong more to the land than to a story. Their most important effect on the meaning of a painting is that, depending on their position and occupation, and in interaction with the nature of the terrain, they demonstrate the degree of inhabitability of their world. The shepherds and travelers in the landscapes in the style of Salvator Rosa, for example, indicate the desolate and

sublime nature, while Poussin's shepherds and Brueghel's farmers belong to a world that is inhabited as far as the horizon. The third important category of *staffage* comprises the figures who, while in the picture, look at the landscape. For this reason, they are often figures at rest: travelers, shepherds, walkers and anglers, figures at a window, or open-air painters. These figures share the awareness of the landscape with the beholder and mirror his position in front of the picture. The best-known landscape painter with a penchant for these characters is Caspar David Friedrich and Karl Gustav Carus, who often portray them from the back. The possibilities and the significance of all three types of figures are well-illustrated in Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus*, a landscape that is also exemplary in its composition: a short, truncated foreground with a farmer ploughing, a shepherd who, leaning on his staff, contemplates the world in general across the foreground, where a human drama (the death of Icarus) takes place as a barely visible incident on a broad sea in an endless landscape.

The second basic element of landscape images is distance. Unlike globes, maps of the world, and history paintings, the image of the landscape shows a world that is oriented towards the distance. The foreground is separated from the middle ground, which recedes or drawn into the depths of the picture. In the simplest variant, an *arrière-pays* appears there, attached to a horizon instead of a structuring point of view, but there are other ways of evoking the endless receding in outdoor views and even in indoor spaces. One way is by repetition, entirely filling the picture from foreground to distance with the same thing, which suggests endlessness. This is the case in Altdorfer's forest views, Piranesi's *Carceri*, and the bird's-eye views of photographers such as Cartier-Bresson. Traditional techniques to create depth or distance in a picture include the view through a window, the use of scenic frames (including hillsides and views through masses of rocks or trees), mathematical perspective, the diminution of easily-measurable elements, the use of hodological motifs, such as waterways and roads, that guide the eye into the picture, and, finally, color and atmospheric perspective. In the latter case, the division into foreground, middle ground, and background is reinforced by the use of color: the foreground and/or the "frame" behind the scene on the proscenium are/is kept in brown or a dark color, the middle ground is green, and the background bluish-white; the result is one of both receding and blurring.

The early development of the image of the landscape not only shows how painters experimented with various landscape formulas by combining all the aforementioned elements, testing them for their potential and power, sometimes in variations that demonstrate virtuosity. The history of the image of the landscape also involves the positioning of and giving significance to distance. The landscape tradition has developed types of pictures and oeuvres that make the distance itself the actual subject of the landscape image – from figuring as a discrete reference in Patenir's work to its appearance in Friedrich's and Carus's work and the sublime landscape in general. So what is distance and what does it signify? According to Paul Claudel, distance is to the soul what gravity is to the body (137). Is it the case that, similar to the way in which gravity structures the sense of the body (including the sense of weight, upward and downward direction, and the difference between standing and lying down), distance structures our self-awareness and memory? Is it so that the image of the landscape appeals to us, even before it evokes an *état d'âme*, because it visualizes one of the basic metaphors that structure our inner being? What is it about distance? Is not everything that triggers a mental effort, such as imagination or representation, both near and far, both here and out of my reach? And do not all objects of desire feel structurally distant?

A significant trend in Western thinking, influenced by Heidegger, has made representation suspect. It understands representation as focused on presence and thus as a concentration on the self and the familiar, as homogenization, appropriation, dominance, violence, and destruction. It states or at least suggests that ethical respect, the radicality of critique, or the necessary nimbleness of thinking are ensured by the failure, deliberate rejection, or disruption of representation. Today, all thinking or writing — especially when obliged by this awareness — has to relate to "absence," the "Other," and the structurally unrepresentable. Thinking has to offer itself up for deconstruction in order to exist. In the meantime, the place or the role of the "Other" is claimed by a whole series of candidates: the basic strategies for breaking open the homogenizing representation and for thematizing the ruptures, gaps, cracks, and edges of meaning are well known; the connection between historical trauma, "theory," and art has been made, and offers many opportunities to think with and exaggerated political correctness and to make the creation of art seem heroic. This line of

thinking, which lives off the tried-and-tested logic of negative theology, has undoubtedly resulted in some interesting work, but also appears to have given way to an orthodoxy that yields stereotypical arguments and dogmatic art. It is mainly at fault in its initial presupposition: a quick review of the actual conditions and the tradition of accursed "representation" teaches us that the latter does not simply imply homogenization, domination, or identification, uniformly and in its structure itself. Important gradations and differences are disregarded. This is also apparent in, for instance, the landscape tradition in which the distance appears within the constructed and represented space. What is distant is always out of reach and "absent," but begins in front of the horizon and therefore in the world. Distance is represented and not "radically different": it is similar to here, but it is there, far away, and receding. It reveals possibilities. In the distance, objects, the horizon, and the sky dissolve; the distance can only be seen in a blur and is therefore endless.

The landscape image does not show a field of human action beyond which other places are hidden and that makes room for similar stories and lives, but instead establishes a view in which the world, in which human action is barely noticeable, is tied to "distance." Thus, only the representation of the world in the landscape image is capable of bringing the distance to the fore and connecting it with the beholder. The image of the landscape (and therefore also an actual walk, or the view through the window, or a viewpoint in the Alps informed by the landscape image) can connect to the distance.

What is it that makes the landscape an intimate image, no matter how vastly it opens out? What in the image makes the connection between the distance and the soul, what is it that brings the distance closer? Riegl points to "Peace" and "Distance," but, in an essay on Jakob Van Ruysdael (1902), he returns to the former essay's main question to add a third element that is essential to the determination of *Stimmung*: the air or *Luftraum*. After all, it is the air that softens the outlines, sharpness, and tangibility of objects, and suggests the unity of everything. It is the "phenomena of the air," in interaction with the special light of the morning, evening, or night, that subjectify the objective appearance of things under the normal noontime daylight, which softens the outlines of things and makes them merge into one another, which draws the colors towards one another and towards a basic tone. The air "connects all the separate things brought together in an image of the landscape, on and above the earth, into a single united whole" (Riegl, "Jakob" 133). The medium for *Stimmung* is the air. In the image of the landscape, the air or the sky is not all around or high above us, but in front of us, far away, resting on the horizon. Midday light is not mood-affecting. It is only when the sun is low — at sunrise or sunset — that the light streams from the distance, across the world, towards us. And this proximity, whereby the isolated, immobile, resting beholder is left alone with the distance, creates *Stimmung* and induces reverie. In French, the combination or congeniality of soul and distance is appropriately called *avoir du vague à l'âme*.

A vital step in the evolution of landscape painting was the development of atmospheric perspective. Before, distance had offered a sharply focused view of a miniaturized world, for example in the work of the Van Eycks; now, it became "subjectified" and presented as it is actually seen: increasingly blurred. In the distance, objects lose their outlines and definition; they dissolve into the air and the light on the horizon. Even the horizon itself can dissolve to become a *floeu artistique*, an artistic blur. Patenir's bluish-white distance does not depict reality as it is, but rather projects a subjective "truth." On the horizon, things lose their corporality, solidity, and objectivity, and they become joined together. It is there, as a hinterland on the horizon of early Flemish landscape paintings, that this vagueness makes its first appearance in art. The "discovery" of vagueness as a horizon was followed by an interest in the zones of the landscape image and the phenomena that relate to vagueness. The proportion of sky in the picture was increased as the horizon was lowered. By means of a low viewpoint and a rising middle ground, the sky in the picture was brought forward. In addition, there was a growing interest in "atmospheric" phenomena and conditions (including twilight, mist, and clouds) as well as light effects (depending on the season, the time of day, and the weather).

Vague is what has no clear outline, and therefore neither a clear boundary nor a definition or "place." Since it has no boundaries, the vague neither takes possession of its "place" nor shuts anything out; it is permeable, porous, not solid, and tends to mix. Initially, vagueness was considered an epistemological rather than ontological category: impressions, insights, or concepts can be either well-defined or vague, but reality, by contrast, is in principle incomprehensible and therefore *clair et distinct*. We sometimes see or understand things vaguely or indistinctly, but does that mean that they

are vague? Vagueness is the effect of "linguistic indecision" and indicates a lack of knowledge, poor vision, or careless thinking, which requires correction and completion. Yet, at the same time, the vague appears to be an ontological category as well: some things seem to exist "vaguely." Events, for instance, appear to have no clear outline or form, and therefore no clear structure or place. Also, and crucially, there are such atmospheric phenomena as haze, smoke, mist, vapor, and clouds, which one can feel but not touch. There is also the soul, that odd inner space each person carries inside, and what one encounters there. Feelings, memories, hunger, jealousy, and desire are certainly somewhere, but where exactly? Thoughts, feelings, and memories exist without a clear form or outline, in and alongside one another, with no clear place or relations. Reality, in other words, is not everywhere, uniform, definite, and in sharp focus: it is comprehensible. The vagueness of the distance is unfamiliarly familiar.

Initially, vagueness was just an element of the image of the landscape, but it became an important ingredient and a topic of the genre. By means of the *contre-jour* effect of the morning and evening twilight, and by means of vapor, mist, rain, and smoke, the loss of outline and the vagueness of the horizon are brought forward, together with the distance. This is what provides the romantic landscape with its basic structure. A double movement takes place: on the one hand, the world, and the beholder's eye are drawn towards the depth of the image, as in all landscape images, but, at the same time, this distance, dissolved into and transformed into vagueness, comes to the fore. This movement is reminiscent of how someone who is standing with his feet in the surf simultaneously feels the pull of the ebb and sees the waves rolling towards him from the distance. Distance and middle ground merge, perhaps in mist or as an area of water. In other instances, the middle ground is omitted, so that the distance almost touches the beholder of the landscape, who is in or in front of the picture. This is illustrated by Friedrich's pictures, most of which are composed so that mist or vapor hides the middle ground and brings the horizon or distance, turned into something vague, close to the viewer. The "atmosphere" connects the earth and the sky, and the solitary beholder is left alone with a nebulous, impalpable world. This immediacy, this quasi-contact between the beholder and the distance, charges the picture with *Stimmung*.

In the German tradition of romantic landscapes, vagueness is a truth. The German term *Stimmung* cannot be translated into English or French appropriately, but it could be described as a combination of "atmosphere" and "mood." In the French tradition of classical landscapes — which continued to assume the primacy of history painting and the example of classical antiquity — the landscape essentially represents the world, which is understood as the setting for history (see, for instance, Déculot). The artist may well have painted in the open air and stayed true to nature, but his/her work shows the *campagna* and not nature seen as a great autonomous organism. The artist painted the light and the atmosphere that surrounds and situates human lives and stories. In the German romantic tradition, which, for familiar historical reasons, rejected the primacy of French culture and history painting, the actual subject of the landscape was not the world, but nature. And nature was understood as a primary reality or an organism that lies "beneath" history. In "Letters on the Landscape," which anticipates the romantic-idealist philosophy of landscape, the painter, physicist, and theorist Carl Carus calls landscape art Earth Life Picturing Art *Erdlebenbildkunst*. Nature becomes independent and is understood as a self-sufficient and self-contained reality that makes man insignificant: "you lose yourself in infinite space ... You are nothing, God is everything" (Friedrich and Carus 64). This nature does not merely exist as an outside: each human carries it within himself as a pre-reflective and pre-narrative "natural" substrate of self-feeling. The *Gemüt* is not the residue of a personal history, nor an accumulated memory. It emanates from the depths of the soul similar to how the mist rises from the meadows. Owing to his/her lonely heart, his/her knowledge of the "correspondences" between personal moods and "natural states" such as autumn, decay, and melancholy, and his/her understanding of what landscape elements such as rocks and water evoke, the artist — unlike ordinary people — is capable of painting a "subjective" image or a synthesis that allows the (divine) oneness of everything to appear in and as Nature. As a result, the landscape painter who paints sublime nature is at the same time a *Seelenmaler*: a portrait painter of the soul.

The "intimacy" of images of the landscape appears to be based on a structural similarity between the mechanism of landscape and "inwardness." The soul that is "in the mood" and nature come together in vagueness and in music — in fact, the latter is fundamental to the romantic interpretation

of the landscape and aesthetics. In a landscape image, things exist and come in the same way as sounds are not separate entities and have no clear boundaries, but begin and end vaguely, exist both alongside and within each other, penetrate each other, and resound together in a chord or harmony. Unlike looking at a portrait or a history scene, looking at a landscape is almost like listening. The romantic landscape does not present itself as an object or a spectacle in front of a beholder, but is something that penetrates the "inner world" — like music. The landscape fills the soul and connects with the first, pre-rational, musical layer of feeling in the heart. The landscape is an intimate image. Is this because our inner world is (like) a landscape?

When we do not react spontaneously, but act, this is accompanied by mental activity – an awareness, attention, the beginning of memories, thoughts and words. This mental activity is structured and directed by the body which clusters all *mémoire* or mental activity and pushes it into the present as "activity" (see Bergson). When the body and the world do not focus the attention, when this organizing force is absent or weakens, or sometimes as a result of a special perception, one looks away from the world. And then one becomes aware of the "interior" and "the hidden extensiveness of the mental realm ... there is such an empire hidden in each and everyone" (Valéry 8) With this "turning away" from the world, an awareness of the inner world of the mental space opens up, which is "seen" with its "content" of feelings, thoughts, memories, phantasms, words, and word pictures, a space in which mental activity can take place. Thus, people are outside with an "inside." And this mental life takes place: it is situated somewhere in the torso and the head, where all the organs are, too, in a place that is actually filled by the body machine. However, the mental space hollows out the body and then fills it with an "inside," an empty space that is surrounded by the skin, but which inside seems boundless and thus infinite. All languages and societies develop topologies and diagrams of this inner space, without ever being able to map it: the "inside" never becomes as clear as the things seen in the world. Paul Valéry calls this inner space a "mental wood" (Valéry 984), but also a "space made of crossings, a network and superposition of porous layers" and a "landscape": in this space, the inner life means moving and interacting: "thinking: something draws a path, a road in a virgin territory, between cities or known places. Bridges build themselves, neighbors unacquainted with each other meet" (Valéry 915). But sometimes, the inner life also means looking inward without a plan or a thought, just like Riegl looks at the outside world on his Alpine rock. In this situation, the attention is not focused and evenly distributed; the "inner eye" is at rest and forms a global view. This inner space, which appears to lack boundaries as well as base or bottom, seems more like a *Luftraum* in which light and hazy things appear — mental clouds, wisps of mist, fluff, kites, and dust. Fleeting "stuff" that by the mental activity can be composed into more or less clear emotions, thoughts, argumentation, words, and decisions, which in themselves are never solid and have no clear place or beginning. The inner experience is also situated in time and space, yet this spatialization does not seem entirely successful. The time experienced or the *durée* cannot be divided into separate parts. The basic material of the inner experience is essentially vague: feelings and thoughts do not begin and end sharply; they can be in the same place and interpenetrate each other, and stick to each other like clouds. And when one does not start thinking but sits quiet in this inner world, without moving, one starts to feel the breadth and "distance" of this space, and one can observe how things interpenetrate each other and form an unarticulated whole. Somewhat in tune with Bergson's arguments, Georg Simmel considers the spatialization of the inner experience as a form of violence towards the "oneness" that characterizes both the inner world and living Nature. In his essay on Böcklin, Simmel writes that it is precisely in the romantic image of the landscape that this "oneness-prior-to-spatialization" is captured. For Simmel, the "*Stimmung* effect" is achieved in painting by dissolving the outlines of things in such atmospheric elements as mist and diffused light, but also by means of brushwork and by dissolving the outlines in patches or in the paint. Painting becomes "modern" not when vagueness characterizes the landscape elements, and not when it becomes the subject of the picture, but when the picture itself becomes "vague," as is the case for Turner's adaptations of Claude Lorrain. When the work of art itself becomes an instance of the vagueness that one can see and confront as an object – in Rothko's case, for instance – the picture loses its connection with the world and becomes a meditation object. When artists realize that it is not only distance that makes things vague, but also, conversely, that vagueness makes things "distant," and when, at the same time as photographers, they discover the possibility of adding a lack of sharpness to the picture, they find

both a formula and a technique for powerful images. Gerhard Richter has demonstrated how this works in his paintings and, in particular, in his landscapes, and has unmasked its claim to truth (see, e.g., Elger). The classical artistic strategy which intends to make an impression and convince by creating "full images," saturated with color and meaning and competing with reality itself, is countered by the strategy that makes images or installations of a world of things that are absorbed into one another or into the mist. More recently, the image itself became meager, soft and almost empty (the anorexic almost-paintings of the 1990s) — the aesthetics of the almost-vanishing or the non-or-hardly-existent. In this case, the picture that is traditionally considered to make something visible, and the sketch that traditionally prefigures a full picture, seem outdated and on the point of becoming obsolete. Is it possible today to make pictures of the world that are not landscapes, and that do not make use of vagueness and the *non-finito* as a prefabricated aura?

Works Cited

- Andrews, Malcolm. *Landscape and Western Art*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Bergson, Henri. *Matière et mémoire*. Paris: PU de France, 1970.
- Claudel, Paul. *L'Oeil écoute*. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.
- Corbin, Alain. *L'Homme dans le paysage. Entretien avec Jean Lebrun*. Paris: Textuel, 2001.
- Décultot, Elisabeth. *Peindre le paysage. Discours théorique et renouveau pictural dans le romantisme allemande*. Tusson: Le Lérot, 1996.
- Elger, Dietmar. *Gerhard Richter: Landscapes*. Trans. Fiona Elliott. Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 1998.
- Friedrich, Caspar David, and Carl Gustav Carus. *De la peinture de paysage dans l'Allemagne romantique. Choix de textes*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1983.
- Lemaire, Ton. *Filosofie van het landschap*. Baarn: Ambo, 1970.
- Lucretius. *De rerum natura: The Latin Text of Lucretius*. Ed. William Ellery Leonard and Stanley Barney Smith. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2008.
- Riegl, Alois. "Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst." *Gesammelte Aufsätze*. By Alois Riegl. Augsburg: Benno Filser, 1929. 28-39.
- Riegl, Alois. "Jakob Van Ruysdael." *Gesammelte Aufsätze*. By Alois Riegl. Augsburg: Benno Filser, 1929. 133-43.
- Simmel, Georg. "Böcklins Landschaften." *Die Zukunft* 12.47 (1885): 272-77.
- Valéry, Paul. *Cahiers*. Paris: Gallimard, 1980. Ed. and trans. Paul Gifford, Brian Stimpson, and Robert Pickering. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000.

Author's profile: Bart Verschaffel <<http://www.architectuur.ugent.be/en/departement/staff/bart-verschaffel>> teaches architectural theory, architectural criticism, and philosophy at Ghent University. He has published numerous articles on artists such as Piranesi, Wiertz, Magritte, de Chirico, Balthus, and Kawara. His recent book publications include *Essais sur les genres en peinture. Nature morte, portrait, paysage* (2007), *Van Hermes en Hestia. Over architectuur* (2006, 2010), and *De zaak van de kunst. Over kennis, kritiek, en schoonheid* (2011). E-mail: <bart.verschaffel@ugent.be>

Translator's profile: Gregory Ball <<http://www.gregoryball.be/index.html>> is a translator of texts in the fields of arts and culture including architecture, dance, literature, music, theater, and related fields. E-mail: <gb.translation@telenet.be>