



Three kinds of space

These pictures are about the very far and the very near, and about a third kind of space that combines aspects of both:

1. Distance

In certain of the postcards I have selected, the landscape is reduced to a horizon, a distant cut-out of a mountain. They are pieces of far places. The point of them, like all postcards, is to bring the far into contact with the near.

There are similar landscapes in some of the larger drawings: flattened mountain ranges and vertical planes of space. This space is meant to evoke detachment, or to suggest a kind of remote longing. This is a longing that is associated with imagined landscapes, or imperfectly perceived ones, such as those we view at night.

This is something like C.S. Lewis's "joy". Reading a saga, Lewis finds the verse. "I heard a voice that cried, / Balder the beautiful / is dead, is dead ----". He says, "I knew nothing about Balder, but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote) and then [...] found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it."

I had a similar experience reading a passage in W.G. Sebald's *Rings of Saturn*: a description of a doubled landscape - a landscape that echoed one of his dreams. Part of the emotional power of such descriptions is a sense of unbridgeable distance.

2. Nearness

The small drafting film books, on the other hand, concern intimate space. In the space between bodies only nearness matters. Distance shrinks to the gap between them, and the envelope of space in which they move.

3. The third kind of space

Finally, in the newspaper *Proposal for a new city, the same as the old one*, the world is both near and far. Many of the images are drawn in parallel projection, a system of translating three dimensional space into a two dimensional image without using perspective. Without a vanishing point, lines which are parallel in reality are also parallel on the picture plane, and objects do not reduce in size as they recede in space.

This lack of spatial hierarchy creates a sense of closeness, but it also creates distance. Since closeness is relative, if no object is far away, no object is particularly close.

So objects depicted in this way have the property of being close and far simultaneously. One might say that parallel projection makes the distant, intimate - but it's a strange kind of intimacy. We can't get any closer to the objects depicted in parallel projection - it's as if they're under glass.

Parallel projections are also associated with idealised or abstracted images of the real world: the exploded view of the workings of a machine, or the plans of buildings yet to be built. This third kind of space is constructed space. It's the space that our objects want to occupy, and that we imagine ourselves occupying when we build them.

Proposal for a new city, the same as the old one

This publication grew out of a series of drawings of the city of Cape Town. I was looking at buildings in Woodstock, Paarden Eiland and along Voortrekker Road. I would drive or walk around these areas, making mental images of the kinds of structures I saw, and then make drawings in studio. Later I began to use photographic references for the drawings, although the images weren't intended to represent particular places. Rather, they were an attempt to evoke a sense of Cape Town's unfinishedness.

The newspaper begins on page one with a perfect grid, echoing a street plan, which disintegrates into a scattered arrangement of individual

* C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, Fontana: London, 1959, page 20



Above: *Couple* (front and back covers) 2010 Artist's book (ink on drafting film) 210x148mm

Overleaf: *Mountain Journal* (detail) 2011 Hand-drawn plate lithograph Edition 16 705x762mm

panels. Inside each panel the city consists of isolated corners of buildings and streets, and sections of incomplete scaffolding.

Scaffolding is already a kind of drawing in three dimensions. It marks the landscape, and inhabits space with a strange presence. It crawls over buildings, or, built up into pylons, it goes striding along the road.

In later drawings, it metamorphoses into a series of improvised structures, like unstable trestles, that seem to teem across the landscape.

Grids and comics

Many of the drawings take the form of a grid of panels, like a page from a comic. They are comics - comics without stories. (Though some of them imply a narrative of disintegration or collapse.)

In a comic each panel is a fragment. Unlike a single image, it is apparent that each frame of a comic represents a partial view, a window of time or space. No single image is the definitive view of the scene. And the juxtaposition of those fragments suggest a document to be read over a certain period of time, rather than a picture to be taken in at a glance.

Horizontal and vertical

Walter Benjamin writes, "one may assume two sections that cut through the world's substance: firstly, the longitudinal cut done in painting, and secondly, the cross-section as found in certain graphics. The slicing seems to effect representation, to somehow contain the things, while the cross-section's quality is rather symbolic: it contains signs."

This horizontal cross-section is the domain of maps, diagrams, and certain kinds of drawings. It emphasises abstract relationships over surfaces, and symbols rather than pictures. This is obvious in the case of maps, which work via symbols as well as via a horizontal isomorphism with the land. But there's also a sense in which the act of drawing - quick, simplified, linear, symbolic - is more like the act of mapping than the act of painting.

Looking at a drawing, then, is like reading or decoding, rather than merely seeing.

Scored images

Many of the postcards and drawings have been scored with ruled ink lines, resembling rain or the beams of a searchlight. The lines form a veil over the images, or hide parts of them completely.

When I started making these lines I was thinking of Rembrandt's etchings, many of which feature similar scoring. In some, such as *The Three Crosses*, the later impressions become progressively darker and more obscured by dense thickets of line.

I first saw these etchings in the Johannesburg Art Gallery, and even as a child I was fascinated by their darkness. I remember noticing that one's eyes adjust to them in the same way as they adapt to a darkened room.

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† Quoted in Stefan Neuner, www.bettinacarl.de/yengl-StNeuner-Txt-katal-07.pdf, accessed on 16/09/2011. See also Emma Dexter's introductory essay in *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing*, Phaidon, 2005.