Nicolas Poussin, *The Arcadian Shepherds* (Louvre, Paris)

Nicolas Poussin, *The Israelites Gathering the Manna* (Louvre, Paris)
TO DESTROY PAINTING
LOUIS MARIN

... he has come into the world to destroy painting.
—remark attributed to Poussin concerning Caravaggio

READINGS

Another word from the Master found in the letter which he addresses to Chante-lou in 1639 as he sends him The Israelites Gathering the Manna: "Read the story (histoire) and the tableau, in order to see whether each thing is appropriate to the subject" (Poussin, in A Documentary History of Art, ed. E. Holt (New York: Doubleday, 1958), vol. II, p. 147).* A word from the Master. He gives a reading order, an injunction first of all, 'read...'. It is not a question only of seeing, nor even of looking attentively, but of reading, of deciphering, or more simply of moving across the tableau as if across a large written page and of continually producing some of the meaning in this movement, of recapturing what the painter wished to say. What does the expression 'read the tableau' signify, when the tableau is a representation of a story? How can the tableau represent a story?

Next, the injunction carries a hierarchy: 'read the story first of all, then the tableau.' Go from the story which you already know before even looking at the tableau, because I have given you its title, its proper name, its resume: the Israelites gathering up the Manna in the desert, go from the story to the tableau, to the story in painting. Read the second through the first. I am putting myself to the test of suitability and of propriety; the tableau represents the story of the Manna, in its totality and in each of its parts: one part, one sequence of the story. The representation is appropriate to

* This and other quotations from translations modified. References provided by the translator. (Trans. note)
the story: as completely, as exactly, as judicially as if the story had constrained its representation: neither excess nor default, neither supplement nor lack. To and fro without any residue from the tableau to the story and from the story to the tableau: exact analogy, rigorous proportion, perfect identification. Read the story, that is to say, the tableau or the inverse: the order—first the story, then the tableau—has no other value than of a test or of a challenge, a putting to the test of a right, the putting of a challenge to find an illegality.

One could express this again in a more scholarly way, but it is the same thing: the tableau is—that is to say, must legitimately be—the text of a story whose 'characters,' whose writing, are at once formal and expressive signs: formal signs or disposition—the distribution of the figures in the space of the representational scene; expressive signs, meaning 'expressions,' gestures, looks, movements, attitudes, which are the exact signs of affects, of the passions of the soul. I am inventing nothing: reread Félibien: "in speaking of painting, it is said that the twenty four letters of the alphabet serve to form our speech and to express our thoughts, just as the lineaments of the human body serve to express the different passions of the soul" (in Nicolas Poussin, ed. A. Chastel (Paris: CNRS, 1960), vol. II, p. 80). If the formal signs and expressive signs thus distributed in the space of the tableau constitute a readable text, this signifies that they obey syntactic rules which are not those of the narrative syntax of the narrative (récit) represented by the tableau, but which are properly figurative ones. We must therefore try to elucidate the rules of this syntax but, as we already know, however different, their final product will be identical: the representation appropriates its story to itself; the story constrains rigorously its representation. Read the tableau as the text of the story in representation but also as the representation of the text of the story, different and substitutable at the same time: the mastery of the most skillful of painters.

One could express this again in a briefer way, but it is still the same thing: the tableau of the story is a large sentence, a large judgement 'spread everywhere on the surface.' What is its verb? The central kernel through which everything holds together, through which theoretical desire constitutes the subject of representation in its center, through which the story comes to the visible for it, through which the events (narrative statements, énoncés) seem to narrate themselves ... seem ... a secret fissure, infinitesimal scission, (de)negation.

Hence the suspicion: "read the story and the tableau." Why did the Master feel the need to give a reading order, to Chantelou, to you, to me? Because this is not a matter of course. Why must I read? And not at all simply look, take pleasure in the forms and in the colors on the canvas in a certain arranged order ... A masochistic suspicion. I call for a constraint, a supplementary contract. So let us read.
Reading I.

Before me there is a tableau, The Arcadian Shepherds, I see it, I look at it attentively; nothing in the tableau—except its de facto existence and that I am looking at it—marks, or unmarks the painter or spectator, the theoretical subject. An old device pointed out by Alberti in On Painting: no figure looks within the tableau, no figure looks at me, this would only ‘position’ me in the place of the painter as a seeing eye, as a theoretical subject, in order to designate and establish the contemplative locus, the magic circuit between the tableau-look and the spectator-eye.

The painter effaces himself and he effaces me in the same way. A purifying asceticism: I do not enter into the appearances. These do not come to me to capture me, to seduce me. The singular event represented on the tableau is only a scene detached at its proper distance and subsisting by itself, in the field of a pure contemplation: the spectability of the historical tableau, of all the hauteur of its self-sufficiency. Hence the order from the painter to his spectator: “Read,” I am giving you the order to place yourself in a reading position, freely, in order to recognize, in order to know by seeing it... (if each thing is appropriate to the subject).

“Read the story and the tableau.” But what is the story? Are you familiar with it? This is the question which the ghost of Leonardo da Vinci addresses to the ghost of Poussin in the Kingdom of the Dead concerning another tableau of the Master which the two painters contemplate in absentia: Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake. Poussin: “...is it not true that these different degrees of fear and surprise [the formal and expressive signs, the characters of a representational alphabet distributed exactly and everywhere in the space of the tableau] form a kind of touching and pleasing game?” Leonardo: “I agree with that. But what is this sketch? Is it a story? I do not recognize it. This is more of a caprice.” Poussin: “It is a caprice. This genre of work suits me well provided that the caprice is controlled and that it in no way deviates from true nature...” (Fénélon, Dialogues of the Dead, in Oeuvres complètes (Paris, 1823), vol. XIX, pp. 342-343).

The Arcadian Shepherds: a caprice of Poussin’s? ‘Read the tableau and tell yourself a story,’ in your own way, according to your caprice. It is the same thing with Marmontel and the pastoral tale Palémon in the Mercure de France (June, 1791).... Perhaps it is the same with this text which I am writing, and my story of the theory of the representational tableau. The Arcadian Shepherds, the theoretical caprice of Poussin and my story of theory, the caprice which the representation of the representation of the story is.

Theoretical Digression II: On the constitution of the space of representation.

Poussin’s letter to Chantelou reveals a precondition to the possibility of reading the tableau: “When you receive yours, I beg you, if you like it, to provide it with a small frame; it needs one so that, in considering it in all its parts, the eye shall remain concentrated, and not dispersed beyond the limits of the tableau by receiving im-
pressions of objects which, seen pell-mell with the painted objects, are confounded with them" (Holt, p. 146). Beneath its technical appearance, this text is defining a complex theoretical operation of the constitution of the tableau as an object of vision and of reading. In fact, in order to be considered in all its parts, it is necessary that the canvas receive a frame whose function is to separate the pictorial space from the ambient space. A fragment of space, the frame has an essential function: dependent neither on the spectator’s space, nor on the tableau’s space, it neutralizes the ambient world; thanks to it, the eye is enclosed in the space of the tableau, focalized by it. From then on, there is nothing but the tableau in the optical pyramid. One then understands why in his Memorandum to Sublet des Noyers, about three years later, at the end of his stay in Paris, Poussin will oppose the attentive consideration of objects to simple viewing of them; the search, in the very act of vision, of the means to truly know the object viewed, to the natural reception of resemblance and form of this object in the eye; the prospect, perspective, the formal structure of representation-enunciation, to the aspect (Félibien, Entretiens sur la vie et les ouvrages de Nicolas Poussin (1685; rpt. Geneva: P. Cailler, 1947), p. 65).

The frame thus marks a rupture in the perceptual continuum, by which a new space is constituted for the attentive look, whose unique function is to show forms and colors: a space of representation in which the object as figure, and space as a figurative locus can be recognized and read. The frame therefore marks the possibility of accession to the look, the possibility of the object as a readable object.

We could find two confirmations of this function of the tableau’s limit. The first is in the analysis of the decoration project for the Long Gallery of the Louvre in which the role of the limit in its relation with the geometrical-optical structure of the look is quite evident: "From the same spot and from the same distance, one must look with a single glance at half of the soffit of the arch beneath the panelled ceiling, and one must recognize that all that I disposed inside this arch must be considered as being attached there and veneered to it, so that it cannot be claimed that there is any body which breaks the arch’s surface, or which is beyond and sunken below the surface, but in order that instead the whole thing equally forms its soffit and its figure" (Félibien, p. 67). The second confirmation lies in Poussin’s willingness, as his contemporaries observed, to paint canvases of moderate dimensions. Félibien writes: "He found in tableaux of moderate size a vast enough field to reveal his knowledge" (p. 158), and wrote of The Plague at Ashod: "This gave him occasion to confine his brush inside of rather narrow limits, but which however gave him enough room to reveal his noble conceptions and to display, in small spaces, large and skillful dispositions" (pp. 37-38). Whether it is a question of a tableau or of a decor, the space of representation must not invest the look, as the perceived world does. And if the construction of the space of representation rests entirely on the prospect, the formal
structure of the representation-enunciation articulating the relations between three fundamental terms, "of the eye, of the line of sight, and of the distance from the eye to the object," then what is manifested with the frame is the strange play of the enunciative denegation: through it, as we said, the eye is enclosed in the space of the tableau and at the same stroke the look is disinvested from the perceived world, but by confining "his brush inside of rather narrow limits," the limit of the frame carries out the release of the look from the represented space.

'Look attentively at the tableau, look only at it: this is the condition itself for reading of the tableau and of the story: prospect, the office of reason. But this is only a tableau, a representation: this is not a trompe l'oeil; on the contrary, the eye is released in order to truly know: Theory, I contemplate the Arcadian scene.'

Reading 2.

Now it happens that the neutralized relation of the eye and of the look, from the painter to the tableau and from the tableau to the spectator is—since I am not familiar with the story which the tableau represents—'in all evidence' the story conveyed by the representational scene and the frieze of its figures: three figures, a 'shepherdess' to the right, two 'shepherds' to the left, exchanging looks and gestures concerning a fourth figure, one knee to the ground. Silent dialogue, mute poetry, painting. No speech flies from mouths to ears: one gesture of indication and three looks, visible things, the minimal alphabet of the language of painting. Before expressing the passions of the soul by the 'lineaments' of the body in order to reveal what is in the mind, pointing and looking are the movements-towards-the-other, passions of the other, affect of exteriority. "Indexes of ostension which refer themselves to the structure of enunciation while denouncing the superfluity of the words accompanying them: 'This,' 'Look.' " An instantaneous present presence of the exchange of a message before speech, a minimal primitive discourse. The message concerns the kneeling figure: a referent. And in this interlacing of gestures and of looks, I note that the shepherd leaning against the tomb to the left has no other link with the two personages to the right than the shepherd at whom he is looking. His look exhibits the kneeling shepherd, renders him visible just as his comrade to the right is indicating the kneeling shepherd, is proposing him to the 'shepherdess's' look by pointing to him. She takes him in her own vision, receives him by contemplating him. By combining the indication and the look, the indication of the kneeling figure and the look towards the woman standing at his two sides, this third figure conveys, between the pointing and looking, a question, a question generated by the double play of the destination of the gesture and the look: I point him out to you since I look at you while pointing to him and since I do not look at him. 'Do you know, yourself, what he is doing (look), the one whom I am pointing out to you (gesture)
and whom you see in the same way as the other one sees him from the other side of the scene?' The interrogation appears in this divergence, by way of what one could call the negative of a look, which is a quite strange characteristic of it and which only manifests itself on the basis of the gesture of designation. In other words, the interrogation is only 'visible' between a position and a negation-for-the-other: by showing you the kneeling shepherd, I posit him for you as an object-to-see. But by looking at you, by making him disappear for me as an object viewed, by denying him for my look, I open for you my anticipation of speech from you. The question is the space of this anticipation of a position by the other. All this in an instant without speech. But you are not looking at me. Do you hear my mute question? You look without my seeing the one whom I am pointing out to you. Is it indeed the kneeling man who I am pointing out to you? In the instant itself of this play of looks and gestures with plural destination, something like an originary time is deployed. The kneeling man, because he is now pointed out, is to be seen by the woman to whom the shepherd points him out: the future. While looking at the woman at his side, the shepherd ceases to see the kneeling one, but he has already seen him since he is now pointing him out: the past. The future, the past in the present, the presence, the present instant of the gesture of indication which thus only appears on the borders of a lapse of the seeing: I do not look at him any longer. You do not look at me yet. You look at him. I point him out to you.

The same description could be recast apropos of the shepherd leaning against the tomb on the left, who—as I just remarked—looks at the kneeling man in the same way as the woman on the right does. Both of them look only at him. They do not see the other who is pointing: not yet, already no longer. A suspense of time, an instant which is at the same time between and around, in which time, the duration is seized in its appearance, an instant of a communication, of an exchange at the instant of being formed.

I am saying this: the represented story is articulated in the space of the scene of representation according to the main functions of enunciation: addressing—message—reception—reference—code. The 'shepherd' on the left gives something to be seen; the 'shepherdess' receives this gift; the 'shepherd' on the right refers by his gesture of indication and interrogates by his look. The kneeling 'shepherd' is the message. The represented narrative, thus reduced to its schema, narrates the primitive 'story' of exchange, the origin of communication.

This schema is none other than the old model proposed by Jakobson, the fundamental structure of enunciation and of its conditions of possibility ('Linguistics and Poetics,' in Style in Language, ed. T. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 350-77). Consider these two diagrams:
Theoretical remarks:
1. Everything takes place as if Poussin was enunciating the enunciative model, was representing the model of representation, thus occupying, in painting, the 'metalinguistic' and theoretical position of the linguist constructing and communicating the model of communication.
2. The schema of the communicational flow is oriented from A, the addressee, towards D, the receiver, for properly pictorial reasons (the equilibrium, the composition of the tableau, to which I shall return) and non-pictorial ones (the orientation of reading of a written text which causes the point of departure of the reading to be on the left side, not at the right, and which is precisely emphasized by the phrase inscribed on the tomb).
3. However, D's look which returns back to B can be interpreted simultaneously as the operation of closure of the theoretical model (which is atemporal, achronic, with logical or metalinguistic value) and also as a response in the 'dialogue' in which the different figures are engaged, where time is a process of change, a form of exchange, a duration punctuated by enunciative positionings.
4. A last remark: a single represented figure, as in the case of 'C,' may carry several semantic functions, here those of reference and code. Certain figures semantically effect condensations of functions: they are overdetermined. Hence the question already posed about 'C' and about the divergence between the gesture and the look: open as it is in the represented scene as in the space of anticipation of a question, isn't it also open in order to be occupied by my discourse, the spectator's discourse, the painter's discourse? Isn't it, surreptitiously, in the story, the empty locus of the enunciation, of the representation?
Reading 3:

A reading of the figure which I have called the message, the kneeling man of whom the others 'speak,' at whom they look or to whom they point. This concerns a man who looks at a written line, who designates it with a finger, who reads it or tries to read it—to tell the truth, he rather gives the impression of spelling out its signs. Even better, to the degree that "Et in Arcadia," the first three words of the inscription are read in the representation emerging from his opened mouth, a—silent—voice is proffered by him, the voice which says "Et in Arcadia/Ego." He sees, he points to, he reads a written fragment, 'it says' a message through him, of which all the gesturality, all of the outspread body exhibited by the tableau, lets be seen that he is its attentive receiver. He cumulates, by a sort of interior duplication of the representation, all the functions of communication: he points out, reference; he reads or deciphers, code; he sees, reception; what? A message for which he is the speaking-tube (porte-voix), the silent repetition inscribed in his figure at the center of the canvas. It is written, it says something through him, in his opened mouth, in profile.

Who writes? Who speaks, here-and-now in the reactivation of these signs on the wall of marble? Ego, myself? Who is there? Me. You, who? We cannot go further. My reading stops. I who repeat, like the kneeling shepherd, 'I.' And yet he and I, we and you, know well that this is not me, you, us who have inscribed 'I' at this center on the wall of the tomb. Neither me, nor you, nor us: Ego, no one. Ego, if not these traces on the opaque and smooth surface of the sepulcher, hollowed out by the chisel of a writer-sculptor. It is written, it has spoken: the tomb speaks silently.

Reminder:

"In speaking of painting, it is said that the twenty four letters of the alphabet serve to form our speech and to express our thoughts, just as the lineaments of the human body serve to express the different passions of the soul in order to reveal on the outside what is within the mind . . . " just as the fourteen letters of the inscription, the four words serve in order to reveal on the outside—on the surface—that which is in the 'sene.'

Reading 4:

A rereading of the preceding readings. I now establish—I who contemplate—the two absent things at the start and at the end of my theory, the two defaults there where there should have been an eye or a voice: an eye in the tableau in order to signify, designate, and assign the locus of a creative-contemplative look: the painter effaces himself. The painter effaces me, me just as himself, himself just as me; a speaking out of the stone, at its center, in order to name the writer-author of the signs inscribed in the marble with his proper name, a name which everyone and no
one can appropriate to themselves. A double default or double absence which, however, links—because they are not there—the look and the name, the subject of enunciation at the point of view and its other, the signifier at the vanishing point, at its center. In the statement of the story which the tableau represents, which it declares with the harmonious frieze of its four figures on one side and on the other of its four written words, the representation represents an absence at its beginning, the absence of the subject of the representation, and at its end, the other of this absence, a statement errant and divagating at the same time, which is for everyone because it is for no one and is never fixed, inscribed in the marble, a statement without enunciator: an enigma of auto-biography, of its inscription of a living self, a 'zoographos'—the painter as the Greeks called him—who is perhaps only the relation, through absence, of the auto-biographical subject and of the auto-thanato-graphic subject: unless one be the other, unless the first can only give itself to be seen in the representation under the—un-signifying (deprived of meaning and insistent on provoking it)—form of a dead sign, of a seme, a sign, four signs, the beginning of a narrative, of a little story which no one and everyone narrates, of which it is necessary that Myself, I take hold, in order to constitute myself as 'I' inside of this violence.

And here this feat of strength is accomplished: since the positing itself of the question of an absence at the beginning and at the end of the tableau, and I who posit this theoretical question, I find myself finally inside the tableau, I find my double and my representative there in the figure of the kneeling shepherd who already accomplishes, in the represented scene, what I am accomplishing since I have been writing and since I have been contemplating. He sees as I see, reads as I read, points as I point; for him, the inscription on the wall of the tomb; for me, the tableau where he is inscribed and the inscription which is written there. The shepherd of Arcadia on his knee repeats me as I repeat him in an endless coil: he represents me in the canvas as I mimic him on the outside of the canvas, included-excluded around the double absence, between the two absent terms. And what the tableau is for me, the tomb is for him: the tomb is his tableau. His tomb is my tableau. It is indeed possible that theory-pleasure is this violence.

What does 'represent' signify? How is the process of representation of painting articulated and constructed in and by its product, named 'tableau'? This smooth, geometrically defined, limited and framed wall on which all the depth of an other world is given to be seen, on which is given to be read an indecipherable secret of the other world?
Theoretical digression III: On the reading look or on theory.

Let us reread Le Brun’s lecture of 1667 on The Manna: it is a reading of the tableau, but it has great theoretical interest not only in proposing a detailed description of the representation but also in effecting its staging. Le Brun studies Poussin’s tableau in two psychologically linked stages; first of all, a global course of the look by which the contemplator sees the tableau as a whole, and then an attentive examination of its parts: stages carefully marked to the letter, “this tableau having been exposed to the Academy not only in order to be viewed by all the Assembly, but in order to be examined in all its parts” (Félibien, pp. 161-62). But these two stages of reading cover over two logically articulated moments of the creative process, invention and disposition: the invention or choice of the subject and the general putting into place of the composition, and the disposition or distribution of forms and of light, the organization of the locus and of the figures.

The steps of the global course of the look in Le Brun are first of all the landscape, the scenic space or background, then the forestage, the foreground, with the group at left, then the group at right, and between the two, an empty space. Then the middle ground, with Moses and Aaron in the center “accompanied by the Ancients of the People set in several different attitudes,” and finally the look returns to the space, to the landscape and to the morning sky.

Within this general organization the analysis of the tableau in its parts or the disposition of the figurative locus is carried out. The problem to be resolved is that of the articulation of the figures and of the locus, or again that of the constitution of the representation of space. Whence a remarkable theoretical notation by Le Brun: it is in fact necessary that the look be free, “the eye must be able to move about in all the expanse of this desert,” but it is not necessary that it be “errant.” The look must be arrested, without being fixed; it must link or articulate the unitary space of the representation, into a representation of space according to the plurality of figures. This articulation is the transformation of a perceptual continuum, the locus of errantry of the look, into a figurative discontinuity, a locus of reading. There we see a fundamental condition of the possibility of meaning: “However, in order that the eyes may not always be errant and carried off into such a large space of the landscape, they are arrested by the groups of figures which do not at all divide the principal subject, but serve to link it and to make it better understood.” A totality of oppositions and of differences, the tableau in its beautiful harmony is the order of a diversity in the ensemble of courses of the look.

Le Brun does indeed perceive that in this tableau the principle of articulation which presides over the disposition of figures is the central empty space of the fore-
ground, liberating the look from the peripeteia and from its two phases of the left and the right, and which orients the look towards the two central figures of the middle distance on which the subject is constructed in its spatial architecture and is comprehended in its meaning: "the two parts of this tableau at the left and at the right form two groups of figures which leave the middle open and free to view in order to better discover Moses and Aaron who are most distant." One can find in Félibien a sort of definition of the term peripeteia: "One sees that these groups of different persons performing diverse actions are so many episodes serving as what is called peripeteia, or means to make known the change which has happened upon the Israelites who are coming out of extreme misery and returning to a more happy state" (pp. 186-87). For his part, the abbé of Aubignac defines the word in Chapter V of his The Whole Art of the Stage as "the conversion and reversal of affairs in the scene, when the Hero passes from prosperity to adversity or the contrary." A still more precise analysis, which would aim at taking into account the interpretive displacement to which any 'reading' makes vision itself of the tableau submit, ought then to reveal the distortion to which Le Brun subjects the disposition of Poussin's tableau. Everything happens in fact as if, for Le Brun, the groups of figures are symmetrically distributed to the left and to the right, around the empty central space in the foreground and around Moses and Aaron in the middle ground. Now the figures are organized according to a subtle play of slightly oblique lines from left to right in the foreground, and from right to left in the middle distance. Through this is outlined the kind of zigzag movement so characteristic of the landscapes of the last years of the decade (starting from the 1643-44 studies in the National Gallery of London, for example). But with a fundamental difference: in The Manna, it is the figures which, by their disposition, articulate the space into its Z movement, whereas subsequently the representation of space will not have need of them in order to be constituted, except at a few essential points.

One could repeat the same analysis apropos of the distribution of light, of expressions, or of proportions. Thus 'seeing' and 'reading' are articulated in the tableau since 1/ the disposition of the figures in the figurative locus creates the space of look's course; 2/ but, at the same time, this disposition is the formal condition of possibility of an interpretation of a meaning, the space of the look's 'discourse.' The operative principle of this articulation is the creation of oppositions which are closed not only by the limit of the frame, but also by this law of organization which is the story concentrating itself into its subject. But the story is not a law of exterior reference, it is the internal law of organization of differences. How so?
DE(NEGATION)

Hypothesis I: Prospective-perspective is the formal structure of the representation-enunciation.

Hypothesis II: The 'iconic' narrative, in order to be accomplished, inscribes itself in the representational enunciative apparatus and neutralizes it by transformation: (de)negation.

Problem I: To find the procedures of transformation of the representational-enunciative apparatus in an example of a narrative tableau.

Problem II: To show that the tableau: The Arcadian Shepherds is a singularity to the degree that 1/ it is governed by these procedures of transformation; 2/ it exposes narratively-iconically the principle of transformation.

The optical box of Brunellesco or the paradigm of hypothesis I:

As for perspective, the first work in which he showed it was a small panel about half a braccio square (38 square centimeters) on which he made a picture of the church of St. Giovanni of Florence. He painted the outside of the church and as much as can be seen at one glance. It seems that to draw this picture he went some three braccia (2.3 meters) inside the central door of St. Maria del Fiore. The panel was made with much care and delicacy and so precisely, in the colors of the black and white marble, that there is no a miniaturist who could have done better... For the distance, and the part representing the sky, where the boundaries of the tableau merge into the air, Filippo burnished silver so that the actual air and the sky might be reflected in it, and so the clouds, that one sees reflected in the silver, are moved by the wind when it blows.

The painter of such a tableau assumes that it has to be seen from a single point, which is fixed in reference to the height and the width of the picture, and that it has to be seen from the right distance. Seen from any other point, the effect of the perspective would be distorted. Thus, to prevent the spectator from falling into error in choosing his point of view, Filippo made a hole in the picture at that point in the view of the church of St. Giovanni which is directly opposite to the eye of the spectator, who might be standing in the central portal of St. Maria del Fiore in order to paint the scene. This hole was small as a lentil on the painted side, and on the back of the panel it opened out in a conical form to the size of a ducat or a little more, like the crown of a woman’s straw hat. Filippo had the spectator put his eye against the reverse side where the hole was large, and while he shaded his eye with his one hand, with the other he was told to hold a flat mirror on the far side in such a way that the painting was reflected in it. The distance from the mirror to the hand near the eye had to be in a given proportion to the distance between the point where Filippo stood in painting his picture and the church of St. Giovanni. When one looked at it thus, the burnished silver already mentioned, the perspective of the piazza, and the fixing of the point of vision made the scene absolutely real. I have had the painting in my hand and have seen it many times in those days, so I can testify to it. (Antonio Manetti, The Life of Filippo di ser Brunellesco, in Holt, vol. I, pp. 171-72)

Propositions:

The optical box of Brunellesco establishes the structural equivalence, in the system, between the point of view and the vanishing point for the pro-duction (Vorstellung) of the painted appearances and/or their reception by the contemplative
To Destroy Painting

eye (Darstellung). It establishes the equivalence of the look and of the eye in the sense that it submits the look to the eye, to its geometric and optical law. However, this equivalence or this subjection of the look to the eye, through which the eye-subject constitutes itself, is only demonstrated through the effect of a mirror placed before the tableau; the spectator looks at the tableau in the mirror across (per-spectiva) the support and receives from the mirror the projection of the objects represented on the surface of the tableau into his eye (pro-spectiva): the reflection of the 'represented.'

Spectacularity-specularity: the window is a mirror. Through a realized abstraction, Brunellesco's experimental apparatus gives to be understood what the tableau-representation conjoins in its realization, in its real production.

The exact visibility of the referent through specularity is combined with its absence: the world is indeed there, on the tableau, precisely and scientifically, in its perceptual appearances. Thanks to the 'new painting' and its laws, there is no longer only one sole and the same world given in its immanence. But what the tableau brings to its surface is only an image, the reflection of this world. The representational screen is a window through which spectator-man contemplates the scene represented on the tableau just as if he was seeing the real scene of the world. But this screen, because it is a plane and a surface and, materially, a support, is also a reflexive-reflective apparatus, on which and thanks to which the objects of reality are outlined and painted.

1/ The tableau as a surface-support does not exist: the human look is not filtered by any grill or interpretive sieve in order to seize upon the natural world.

2/ In order to be able to represent the natural world, the tableau as surface-support does exist: on and through it the exact splitting of reality into two is accomplished. The human eye receives only the double of the world.

Hence the necessary position and the necessary neutralization of the material 'canvas' and of the 'real' surface in the technical, theoretical, and ideological assumption of its transparence: it is the invisibility of the surface-support which is the condition of possibility for the visibility of the represented world. Diaphaneity is the technical-theoretical definition of the plastic screen of the representation.

Return to hypothesis I:

Prospective-perspective and, to speak the Master's language, the submission and the subjection of the aspect to the prospect, of vision to theory, of the perceptual look to the rational eye, is indeed the formal structure of the representation-enunciation, but it is only so by (de)negation of its reflexive-reflective apparatus: the tableau. Even before the historical tableau carries out the (de)negation of the subject of representation-enunciation, this denegation is already carried out on the level of the representational apparatus itself.
Remark: The optical cube of Brunellesco has no ceiling in the same way that the scenographic cube which the representational tableau proposes to the theoretical eye has only three walls. The natural light of the sun and its varied play through the clouds illuminates the reflection in the mirror of the representation of the church of St. Giovanni of Florence and of the Place of the Seigneurie. The fourth (absent) wall of the scenographic cube is lit by this same light, but there is in it another light illuminating the represented scene: a problem of the representation of the light, a problem of a look-light, of an eye-source of light which is not at the point of view, in another place. So, where is it? This question must not be forgotten apropos of Caravaggio. Thus this remark found in the manuscript of Giulio Mancini, Considerazioni sulla Pittura (Considerations on Painting), 1619-21 (rpt. and ed. A. Marucchi (Rome: Academia Nazionale del Lincei, 1956), vol. 1, p. 108):

The particularity of the school of Caravaggio is the employment of a constant luminous source, lighting from above without reflections; since this can be produced in a room which would only have a single window and whose walls would be painted in black in such a way that the lighting would be very brilliant and the shadows very dark, they give depth to the tableau... All these devices do not seem to me appropriate to the composition of the story and to the expression of emotions... because it is impossible to dispose inside a room lighted by a single window a large number of figures acting out a story, who laugh, lament, move about and who at the same time are immobilized in order to let themselves be painted.

Theoretical digression IV: On the mirror-window as representation in the mirror of the window in the representational scene or the representation of the reflexive-reflecting apparatus.

Take as an example the tapestry of Le Brun (from the series History of the King) narrating the meeting of Louis XIV and Philip IV of Spain at the Isle des Faisants in 1660. If we construct the perspective network of the ‘tableau’—and this is easy thanks to the marks of construction left on the ‘floor’ of the represented scene—we establish that the vanishing point of the perspective framework is situated in the lower left corner of what could, at first view, seem to be an open window in the background of the room but is ‘in reality’ a mirror reflecting a window. The latter, consequently, can only be outside of the ‘tableau’ and the scenography, in the space where the spectator is placed, at the place of the point of view. Through the invisible window, light enters into the ‘tableau’ and illuminates it: the eye is the source of light but also its receptacle, through the mirror which does not light anything.

The mirror represented at the rear which reflects a transparent window situated facing it, but outside the tableau, invisible except for its reflection, placed at the place of the point of view, indicates that this point of view—absent from the tableau—is present there in its reflection as a ‘vanishing point.’ The missing origin of the painted objects is at the same time their present represented end: a structural equivalence of the two points, but a represented equivalence. And the represented reflection of this reflection which is the tableau, far from re-establishing the world in
its natural and historical accomplishment by a symmetrical operation inverse to the first one, multiples the mimesis of the tableau while representing the operation which constitutes it, within the representation itself which is its product. In it, the reflection of the reflection, this mimeme to the second degree, only posits the structure of the representation in order to efface it, only in order to represent its effacement: a supreme denegation of which the mirror, a visible reflection of the window absent from the tableau because the tableau is, in itself, a window-mirror which renders visible the absence of real things, bears the mark by absence. In fact, if the point of view is situated in the lower left corner of the window reflected by the mirror, if thus the spectator's eye is necessarily placed there, it is not indicated there, it is not at all reflected there in its virtual image, unless the mirror reflecting the window is itself
the look by which the tableau relays to the spectator the image of his own eye.

The perspective syntax of our historical tableau defines the structure of representation-enunciation, but in order to deny it, in that, through it the locus of the point of view is geometrically and optically determined—thus the tableau is viewed, produced, or addressed by way of a point, which is an 'I—here—now'—but the vanishing point where it is indicated, in the equivalence of the reflection in the mirror, points to this absence. It posits the subject of representation-enunciation as absent: an iconic transposition of the grammatical third person 'he' characteristic of the historical narrative in its text.

One confirmation, among others, of this analysis lies in the sumptuous raised and draped curtain, in the upper part of the tableau. Like the two tapestries at the left and right, this curtain is a part of the represented scene. It suffices to refer to the Memoirs of Mlle. de Montpensier to know that curtains constituted an element of the real decor of the meeting. Their lowering or lifting permitted the transforming of the scene of the ceremony, to partition it or enlarge it according to the precise rules of diplomatic etiquette, namely, according to certain political exigencies in the appearance of the historical event. As concerns the scene of the meeting, one can suppose that the curtain extended the length of the wall containing the window which is the single source of the light illuminating the room, and that this curtain had been raised for the occasion. Only the wall and window have disappeared from the tableau so that the representation can be effected; more precisely, the wall has become the transparent window of the tableau through which we contemplate, spectators-painters, the spectacle of the meeting.

Hence a first ambiguity, of which many other examples can be found in classical historical painting: the raised curtain is a part of the represented scene referring to a referent object, a part of the historical event whose narrative the tableau assumes; but it is also, and no less necessarily, an element of the representation of the scene which it gives to be seen as a theatrical scene, as a spectacle: an instrument of the scenography no longer of the event, but of the tableau itself; in short, it is an instrument of the frame which encloses it and posits it as a representation. It is thus at the same time an element of the statement and a feature of the enunciation. But another ambiguity is grafted onto this first one which participates in the same operation of denegation of the enunciation that was previously evidenced; one will note that, in fact, the curtain deploys its most ample and most solemn folds at the center of the tableau, above the two kings: at the center of the tableau, in this capacity, it is a plastic and decorative element of the tableau's composition; above the two kings, in this capacity, it is the coded sign of their importance relative to the other figures, a symbol of supreme political and religious power, an ultimate avatar of the triumphal arch or imperial canopy. Thus here a part of the tableau which we name a 'raised
curtain' is found to be: 1/ a represented curtain referring to a real element of the event and of its topographical environment; 2/ a theatrical stage curtain, an instrument of the representation of the event and as such, a 'marker' of the process of enunciation; 3/ a represented curtain whose particular draping and pleating is an accent of the 'esthetic' composition of the tableau: it reinforces the symmetry of the scene around a centrality already underlined by the mirror window and by the balanced movements which animate the two groups of figures culminating in the encounter of the two royal personages; 4/ a curtain-canopy, a symbolic sign of the royal and religious power invested in these personages. The enumeration of these significations, in the examination of the characteristic polysemy of an element of the tableau, obeys the reciprocal process of semantization and of grammaticalization whose function is to operate unceasingly the position and negation, by indecidable oscillation between these different characteristics, of the enunciative-representational operation: the spectator only occupies the plane of the enunciation in order to leave it immediately and rejoin the plane of the statement, and vice versa. Thus the denegation of the representation, thanks to which the tableau accedes to its historical-narrative dimension, is represented in the tableau. The enunciation is only posited and indicated in order to be dissimulated and negated.

Return to the Arcadian Shepherds

And if the mirror of the background of Le Brun's tapestry reflecting the invisible transparent window by which the eye contemplates the historic royal scene (and illuminates it in its glory) was, on the Arcadian scene,—the scene of Utopia—the opaque and visible wall of the tomb (sub)porting on its surface four written signs, readable-read, the epitaph of a story and the shadow of the one—me, you, us—looking and attempting to read?

Citations


Shall we follow the examples of painters whose sole aim is to be able to copy pictures by using the ruler and the measuring rod? It is a positive disgrace to be content to owe all our achievement to imitation. For what, I ask again, would have been the result if no one had done more than his predecessor's model? We would have nothing... in history beyond the annals of the Pontifices... and the art of painting would be restricted to tracing a line around a shadow thrown in the sunlight.

Who discovered painting? The Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Greeks...
But it is my opinion that design, which is the foundation of both arts, and the very soul which conceives and nourishes in itself every part of the intelligence, came into full existence at the time of the origin of all things, when the Most High, after creating the world and adorning the heavens with shining lights, descended through the limpid air to the solid earth, and by shaping man, disclosed the first form of sculpture and painting in the charming invention of things. Who will deny that from this man, as from a living example, the ideas of statues and sculpture, and the questions of pose and outline, first took form ...? ( . . . ) According to Pliny, the art of painting was introduced in Egypt by Gyges the Lydian who, seeing his own shadow projected by the fire, suddenly sketched his own contour on the wall with a bit of charcoal . . . (Giorgio Vasari, The Lives of Painters, Sculptors & Architects, trans. A. Hinds (New York: Dutton, 1927), pp. 1-3)

From the reflection in the mirror to the shadow on the wall:

There is no more noble art than painting. Moreover, painting was given the highest honor by our ancestors. For, although almost all other artists were called craftsmen, the painter alone was not considered in that category. For this reason, I say among my friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower, according to the poets, was the inventor of painting. Since painting is already the flower of every art, the story of Narcissus is most to the point. What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain? Quintilian said that the ancient painters used to circumscribe shadows cast by the sun, and from this our art has grown. (Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting, trans. J. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 64)

The disposition of the body-figures or the paradigm of hypothesis II.

Pymandrus says to me: is it possible that, in so great a company, there was no one who found something to take up for criticism in so large a work?

You make me recall, I replied, that one of the Academy, after having elogized to captivate the listeners, said that it seemed to him that Poussin, having been so exact so as to want to omit nothing of the necessary circumstances in the composition of a story, nonetheless had not made an image resembling enough what happened in the desert when God caused the Manna to fall there, since he had represented it as some snow falling during the day, and in view of the Israelites; which goes against the text of Scripture (Exodus 16) which states that they found the manna as well as dew spread out near their camp in the morning when they went out to gather it up. Moreover, this great need, and this extreme misery which he has recorded are not appropriate to the moment of action which he figures: since when the people received the manna, they had already been succored by the quail, which had been sufficient to allay the worst of the famine; thus it was not necessary to paint the people in such a great languishment, and still less to have this miraculous food falling in the way snow falls.

To this someone replied that it is not the same with Painting as it is with History: that a Historian makes himself understood through an arrangement of spoken words and a series of discourses which form an image of things, and represent successively an action such as he pleases; but the Painter having only an instant in which he must seize the thing which he wishes to figure on a canvas, it is sometimes necessary that he join together many incidents having preceded it, in order to make understood the subject which he is displaying, without which those who see his work would not be better instructed about the action which he is representing than if a Historian, instead of reporting the whole subject of his story, contented himself with telling only its ending.

It is for this reason that Poussin, wishing to show how the Manna was sent to the Israelites,
believed that it did not suffice to spread it about on the ground, and to represent men and women gathering it up; but that to mark the greatness of this miracle it was necessary to have seen at the same time the state in which the Israelites were at that time. For this reason he has represented them in the desert; some in languor, others eager to gather up this nourishment, and still others eager to thank God for his blessings: these different states and diverse actions taking place of discourse and speech for him in order that his thought be understood. And since the Painter has no other language nor other characters than these sorts of impressions, this is what obliged him to make the Manna seen falling from Heaven, because he could not otherwise make understood from where it came. Since if one did not see it fall from above, and that these men and women are taking it up from the ground, one might just as easily believe that this was a grain or some kind of fruit. It is true that the the people had already received some nourishment from the quail which had come into the camp; but since this had only happened the night before, one could say that these could not have been able to so promptly give back vigor to the most debilitated people. And still again, on the preceding day, God had promised the people through his prophet to give them meat that very night, and to give them bread each morning; since nevertheless the people were of great number, and spread out over an ample stretch of ground, it is not unlikely that there were many who still did not know of the promise that had been made to them, or even knew it but did not give faith to the words of Moses, since they were naturally disbelieving. Some other person added to all these reasons that, if by the rules of theater it is permitted to Poets to join together several events which have occurred at different times in order to form a single action of them, provided there is nothing which clashes with itself, and that verisimilitude is exactly observed in it, it is still more just that Painters take this license, since without it their works would remain deprived of what renders their composition more admirable, and makes the beauty of their Author’s genius better known. In this occurrence one could not accuse Poussin of having put anything into his tableau which hinders the unity of action, and which lacks verisimilitude, having nothing there which does not concur in a single subject. While he has not entirely followed the text of Holy Scripture, one cannot say that he has deviated from the truth of the story. (Félibien, pp. 181-85)

Propositions:

The iconic narrative is the representation of a narrative moment-instant disposed in the form of a model of a-chronic intelligibility. The disposition of the body-figures in a plane schematically parallel to the plan of the plastic screen is the fundamental means of construction of the narrative model, of the non-temporal present of the instant of representation, the only one which is left to the classic painter to represent, and of its topographical circumstances, a potential narrative converting the description of spatial and logical relations in the tableau into a before-and-after succession of reading in its active reception. Hence a new way of approaching the (de)negation of the representation-enunciation through the disposition of the body-figures, i.e., of the narrative statements as they are received. The ‘iconic’ narrative inscribes itself into the representational-enunciative apparatus.
But—as we have seen—this apparatus is not static: the structural equivalence of the point of view and the vanishing point signifies the reversibility of the movement from one to the other with respect to the represented. The network subtending the tableau is vectorial, with oriented lines of force, but this orientation is reversible: a logicization of the 'temporal' process of enunciation-reception. This 'modelization' necessarily affects the 'representeds' disposed on this network with double orientation, in this sense that it is spatializing their relations. In this, we pass—without our noticing it—from the addressing 'hic et nunc' of the iconic 'message,' from the temporal and spatial situation of its production, to the structure of this address, to the model of its production, from the statement apprehended in its process of enunciation to its grammar, the sole object of study and analysis. Without us noticing it—why? Because the discourse through which this grammar is enounced, through which this syntax is produced, is itself a verbal message, is itself a process of enunciation and of production which re-temporalizes the model according to semantic and lexical exigencies of the propositional contents which the tableau gives to be seen and to be understood, through reference to the referential temporality of the actions of the story which the tableau assumes into its narrative. For the spectator's eye coursing among the representeds of the tableau, there will indeed be a narrative, an assumption of the past and future moments which are posited, in terms of a before and after, in relation to the central instant of the representation, but in doing this the spectator's eye will only enounce, in the temporal forms of narrative, the grammatical and syntactic articulations of the model which the narrative tableau is.

Hence the problem of the link between the disposition of the body-figures and the structure of the represented space and its solution: everything happens as if Poussin's tableau was operating a transformation, in the geometric sense of the term, consisting in lateralizing the structure in depth of the represented space—a deep structure which the perspective (and its different geometric, aerial, etc. modalities) governs and organizes—by situating the figures of the narrative, of the istoria according to a frieze disposition parallel to the plane of the tableau, of the tavola. This point is capital and has been emphasized several times, notably by the comparison between the Louvre version of The Arcadian Shepherds and the Chatsworth version (1629-1633). But perhaps the stake and the operations of this have not been sufficiently laid out. These are double: first of all, the displacing of the vanishing point, at the same time, from the deep visible structure of perspective and from the horizon of the represented space to the central point of the lateral structure and of the readable surface of the narrated iconic narrative. Then, the operating of a type of 90° rotation of the bundle of optical rays, whose summits are the point of view and the vanishing point, in order to situate these points in a plane parallel to the tableau plane, a plane marked out by the disposition of the figures into a frieze, into
facing groups where the equivalence, but a reversed equivalence, of the point-of-view/vanishing-point network shows through.

From that moment on, in the first operation of transformation (T1) the point of view/vanishing point (whose structural equivalence has been established) has become the central event, the focal moment of the narrated story in which the latter is condensed and summed up, the 'locus of the subject of the statement' (10). The event seems to narrate itself by itself as it is produced, not at the horizon of the tableau, but at the horizon of the story. No one speaks here: there is no longer any narrator.

In the second operation of transformation (T2), the point of view of the perspective apparatus (Pv), a formal structure of representation-enunciation, has become the point of origin (O) and the vanishing point (vp), the final point of the narrative represented in the tableau (F). The look of the 'shepherd' on the left (A) towards the kneeling figure (B) comes back to this figure through the look of the 'shepherdess' on the right (D), a look at which is the end of the silent dialogue with her companion (C), her last mute 'word' in the exchange of gestures and of looks.

From then on the point of view/vanishing point where the painted appearances are born and are reabsorbed in the deep—and illusory—space of the representation, a point massively occulted by the central tomb, is quite exactly displaced onto its wall at its middle, which is the locus and moment of the narrative, between the two indexes of the hands of the two shepherds facing one another, a locus and moment of the event: that of the inscription, of its deciphering and of its indication, quite precisely the place of a letter in its epitaph and that of a fissure in the surface of its wall.

The stake in the transformation and in its two operations is—as can be seen—essential: it is a matter of having the representation escape its own process of constitution which it nevertheless requires, and of positing the representation in its 'objective' autonomy, which however it withholds only from the theoretical desire it accomplishes when a subject is constituted and is effaced in the representation's own constitution.

The following diagrams can schematize the two procedures of transformation:
Everything happens, basically, as if a second eye was situated in the coulisses on the left of the scene, quite close to the plane of the tableau, and from this hidden place was perceiving, as a width, the dimension of depth opened in this plane by the relation between the point of view and the vanishing point which the eye of the spectator-painter can never see, since it is his own vision. Everything happens as if the iconic narrative deployed by the frieze of bodies in the plane of the scene, parallel to the plane of the tableau, permitted the theoretical eye to see itself. But what it sees is not itself, it is a story at the center of which it has collapsed, traced itself in the marble wall of the tomb. It thus sees itself in its visible and readable substitutes, the bodies, the gestures, the looks, and the fingers pointed towards the four signs of which the last, the ultimate one, separated from the three others, is Ego.

But this enigmatic and hidden second eye, this anamorphic eye has left a trace spread everywhere throughout the tableau; it inscribes itself through the trace in the figures, since it is the eye-light, the sun, which illuminates the scene by way of the left coulisse, and which projects the shadow of the deciphering and reading shepherd, our representative in the scene, onto the wall of the tomb at the point of the central narrated event, this point being the most remarkable of all since it is the point of contact between the represented finger, its shadow, and a written sign of the epitaph, a point on the surface of the tomb, and which is neither the tip of the finger, nor the point of its shadow, nor the trace of the sign and which is all of these at once: a blind spot, neuter, neutralizing and neutralized, the tip of the groping blindman’s cane by which Descartes, in the Dioptics (Philosophical Writings, ed. E. Anscombe and P. Geach (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), pp. 239-56), justly simulated the instantaneity of the ray of light.

The work of painting is "an imitation made with lines and colors of everything to be seen under the sun."

Then ask if every iconic narrative, by which I understand this narrative that the spectator-reader narrates to himself in looking at the serene and immobile representation enclosed in the optical pyramid of his own eye, presents an Apollonian presence where time, succession, change wait to be generated in the inexhaustible murmur of discourses, ask if every narrative ineluctably produced by way of this atemporal matrix, which the work of painting is, does not result from the hidden presence of this second eye in the coulisse, an eye-fiction which models, through the solar light which emanates from it, the body-figures beyond the smooth and invisible surface of the mirror-window of the tableau. The dimension of depth, which is in the perceptual space as well as in its illusion realized on the canvas the invisible dimension, because it is the dimension of the look and the perceiving body projected—in an imaginary scheme—as far as the horizon depth, as far as the hole of the vanishing point where it is summed up and is annulled, is the dimension seen by the eye-fiction, by the eye-light hidden almost on the plane of the specular screen, and yet this dimension makes a return to the eye of the spectator-reader with the rhythm of the figures and of the bodies, a story which narrates itself.
Citations.

The representational operation, the operations in particular through which the narrative iconic representation is constituted, consist precisely in denying the existential character of depth in order to lateralize it, reflect it, or represent it as width.

Traditional ideas of perception are at one in denying that depth is visible. Berkeley shows that it could not be given to sight in the absence of any means of recording it, since our retinas receive only a manifestly flat projection of the spectacle. If one retorted that after the criticism of the ‘constancy hypothesis’ we cannot judge what we see by what is pictured on our retinas, Berkeley would probably reply that, whatever may be true of the retinal image, depth cannot be seen because it is not spread out before our eyes, but appears to them only in foreshortened form. In analytical reflection, it is for theoretical reasons that depth is to be judged invisible; even if it could be registered by our eyes, the sensory impression would present only a multiplicity in itself, which would have to be ranged over, so that distance, like all other spatial relations, exists only for a subject who synthesizes it and embraces it in thought. Though diametrically opposed to each other, the two doctrines presuppose the same repression of our affective experience. In both cases depth is tacitly equated with width seen in profile, and this is what makes it invisible. Berkeley’s argument, made quite explicit, runs roughly like this. What I call depth is in reality a juxtaposition of points, making it comparable to width. I am simply badly placed to see it. I should see it if I were in the position of a spectator looking on from the side, who can take in at a glance the series of objects spread out in front of me, whereas for me they conceal each other—or see the distance from my body to the first object, whereas for me this distance is compressed into a point. What makes depth invisible for me is precisely what makes it visible for the spectator as width: the juxtaposition of simultaneous points in one direction which is that of my look. The depth which is declared invisible is, therefore, a depth already identified with width and, this being the case, the argument would lack even a semblance of consistency. In the same way, intellectualism can bring to light, in the experience of depth, a thinking subject who synthesizes that experience, only because it reflects on the basis of a depth already in existence, on a juxtaposition of simultaneous points which is not depth as it is presented to me, but as it is presented to a spectator standing at the side, in short as width. By assimilating one to the other from the very outset, the two philosophies take for granted the result of a constitutive process the stages of which we must, in fact, trace back. In order to treat depth as width viewed in profile, in order to arrive at a uniform space, the subject must leave his place, abandon his point of view on the world, and think himself into a sort of ubiquity. For God, who is everywhere, width is immediately equivalent to depth. Intellectualism and empiricism do not give us any account of the human experience of the world; they tell us what God might think about it. And indeed it is the world itself which suggests to us that we substitute one dimension for another and conceive it from no point of view. All men accept without any speculation the equivalence of depth and width; this equivalence is part and parcel of the self-evidence of an intersubjective world, which is what makes philosophers as forgetful as anyone else of the originality of depth. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. C. Smith (New York: Humanities, 1962), pp. 254-56)

The subject thus becomes God, a theoretical eye. He ceases to be a perceiving body, closed up and opened flesh of the world, a look seen and seeing. This body-subject is neutralized as such, disinvested from its worldly situation, a spectator of the tableau.
More directly than the other dimensions of space, depth forces us to reject the preconceived notion of the world and rediscover the primordial experience from which it springs: it is, in fact to speak, the most ‘existential’ of all dimensions, because (and here Berkeley’s argument is right) it is not impressed upon the subject itself, it quite clearly belongs to the perspective and not to things. Therefore it cannot either be extracted from, or even put into that perspective by consciousness. It announces a certain indissoluble link between things and myself by which I am placed in front of them, whereas width can, at first sight, be taken as a relationship between things themselves, in which the perceiving subject is not implied. (Merleau-Ponty, p. 256)

Merleau-Ponty can then conclude his phenomenological description of depth by the double and reciprocal implication of time and of space, a deep structure which the narrative iconic representation will at the same time disimplicate and neutralize in order to better permit its surreptitious reproduction in the imaginary.

One cannot, therefore, speak of a synthesis of depth, since a synthesis presupposes, or at least, like the Kantian synthesis, posits discrete terms, and since depth does not posit the multiplicity of perspective appearances to be made explicit by analysis, but sees that multiplicity only against the background of the stable thing. This quasi-synthesis is elucidated if we understand it as temporal. When I say that I see an object at a distance, I mean that I already hold it, or that I still hold it, it is in the future or in the past as well as being in space. It will perhaps be said that it is there only for me: in itself the lamp which I perceive exists at the same time as I do, that distance is between simultaneous objects, and that this simultaneity is contained in the very meaning of perception. No doubt. But co-existence, which in fact defines space, is not alien to time, but it is the fact of two phenomena belonging to the same temporal wave. As for the relationship of the perceived object to my perception, it does not unite them in space and outside time: they are contemporary. The ‘order of co-existents’ is inseparable from the ‘order of sequences,’ or rather time is not only the consciousness of a sequence. Perception provides me with a ‘field of presence’ in the broad sense, extending in two dimensions: the here-there dimension and the past-present-future dimension. The second elucidates the first. I ‘hold,’ I ‘have’ the distant object without any explicit positing of the spatial perspective (apparent size and shape) as I still ‘have in hand’ the immediate past without any distortion and without any interposed ‘recollection.’ If we want to talk about synthesis, it will be, as Husserl says, a ‘transitional synthesis,’ which does not link disparate perspectives, but brings about the ‘passage’ from one to the other. Psychology has involved itself in endless difficulties trying to base memory on the possession of certain contents or recollections, the present traces (in the body or the unconscious) of the abolished past, for from these traces we can never come to understand the recognition of the past as past. In the same way we shall never come to understand the perception of distance if we start from contents presented, so to speak, all equidistant, a flat projection of the world, as recollections are a projection of the past in the present. And just as memory can be understood only as a direct possession of the past with no interposed contents, so the perception of distance can be understood only as a being in the distance which links up with being where it appears. Memory is built out of the progressive and continuous passing of one instant into another, and the interlocking of each one, with its whole horizon, in the thickness of its successor. The same continuous transition implies the object as it is out there, with, in short, its ‘real’ size as I should see it if I were beside it, in the perception that I have of it from here. Just as there is no possibility of engaging in any discussion of the ‘conservation of recollections,’ but only of a certain way of seeing time which brings out the past as an inalienable dimension of consciousness, there is no problem of distance, distance being immediately visible provided that we can find the living present in which it is constituted. (Merleau-Ponty, pp. 365-66)
That in *The Arcadian Shepherds*, the spatio-temporal quasi-synthesis is operated *between* two pointed index fingers, between two *carnal* hands and a *shadow*, between figures and signs, over the very sign of death, can only lead to a questioning of the *Living Present* of the phenomenological monad in which the Present only manifests itself in being open from a distance and by a divergence. Remember Aristotle: “for in that in which the ‘now’ is, the distance (*apostasis*) from the ‘now’ will also be” (*Physics* 223a: 8-9, in *Basic Works*, New York: Random House, 1941).

**Problem II**—Reminder:

*The Arcadian Shepherds*, a tableau, this tableau, a singularity within these generalities: because there is, in its center, a seme, a tomb and at the center of this center, four written signs, and amidst these signs, the last sign, an empty signifier, in waiting to be filled by a live speech and because this place *there*—the central place—is the one pointed to by an index finger which is also the point of a shadow projected onto the wall by the solar light, this tableau represents the representation and its scene and its surface, and its support and its body-figures: it gives to be seen what every representation is, the (de)negation of representation-enunciation; it stages it: it offers to the theoretical eye its auto-representation, its auto-reference in looking at it from this blind center (blinding-blinded) where the body is no longer anything more than a shadow, where the tableau is no longer anything more than an opaque surface, a support of marble where a silent speech is spoken: a writing.

**LANDSCAPE: ARCADIA**

Forget for a moment the body-figures and the tomb in order to describe the landscape (*paysage*) of the scene, Arcadia. At the passage, in this passage, ask why I name it Arcadia: my forgetting in order to read and to see is still a memory, that of a title outside the tableau and its painted appearances, the name given by history, knowledge, texts and narratives, in which the successive contemplations are summed up; a memory itself preceded, at the ‘origin’ of the History of knowledge, of texts and of narratives, by a memory more ancient than it since it is already inscribed in the tableau at its center, on the wall of the tomb: Et in *Arcadia*, ego.

An impossible forgetting since I see, I read only this name and the four body-figures surrounding it. A rhetorical forgetting in order to express what I see to the left, to the right and in front, and below the body-figures arranged around the tomb.

A rustic and wild landscape, a nature, a ‘desert’ as was said in the seventeenth century, and I think of the discussion of the ‘desert’ of Sinai at the Royal Academy of Painting when *The Manna* was exhibited “not only to be viewed by the whole Assembly but to be examined in all of its parts. One will first of all consider the disposition of the place which represents perfectly a sterile desert and an uncultivated land . . . . Although the landscape is composed in a knowledgeable and agreeable manner,
there however are only large rocks serving as a base for the figures. The trees have no freshness: the land bears neither plants nor grass; and one can notice neither the roads nor paths which would make one judge this to be a frequented country” (Féli-bien, pp. 161-62).

Desert, Arcadia, Sinai... I name it Arcadia because of this memorative sign at its center: the tomb, "Et in Arcadia"...

"Poussin has painted a Shepherd who has one knee on the ground and is pointing with a finger to these words engraved on a tomb, Et in Arcadia ego. Arcadia is a region of which the poets have spoken as a delightful country: but through this inscription it is intended to be shown that the one who is in the tomb has lived in Arcadia and that death is met with amidst the greatest felicities” (Féli-bien, pp. 118-19). The written name and its memory diverts the landscape of the desert into one of the delights of nature at its origin.

For the moment, just say: the landscape is deployed in a very open curvature towards the horizon, a natural jewel case of the sign who massive geometry, whose quasi-abstract masonry annuls the scientific art of topographical and aerial transitions from foreground to background.

A ‘divergent’ presentation, as has been said, of the figuration of space, a movement of spatial rotation. The ground retracts to the left and to the right and is projected into the foreground: a sort of animated circular scene. The ground advances to the right and coils back to the left, a dynamic whose stages around a strict central vertical, the fissure running through the wall of the tomb, are marked by the axes of the shepherds’ differently inclined staffs: a dynamic itself figured, in the median locus of the canvas’s surface, at the central axis of deep space, by the divergence between the two hands and the curvature of the shadow thrown by the arm.

Consider this dynamic schema:
Divergence and convergence, contrary movements of the space and of the figures: a rhythm repeated at the center of the canvas and at the focus of the ‘narrative,’ in the spacing of the figures. The theater of the scene, its ground and the figures in this scene offer a music to view: return to Arcadia, in the landscape.

Citation: Polybius, The Histories, Book IV or “The Character of the Arcadians.” A digression on music.

Now, seeing that the Arcadians as a whole have a reputation for virtue throughout Greece, not only in respect of their hospitality and humanity, but especially for their scrupulous piety, it seems worthwhile to investigate briefly the barbarous character of the Cynæans: and inquire how it came about that, though indisputably Arcadians in race, they at that time so far surpassed the rest of Greece in cruelty and contempt of law.

They seem then to me to be the first, and indeed the only, Arcadians who have abandoned institutions nobly conceived by their ancestors and admirably adapted to the characters of all the inhabitants of Arcadia. For music, and I mean by that true music, which is advantageous to every one to practice, is obligatory with the Arcadians.

Everyone is familiarly acquainted with the fact that the Arcadians are the only people among whom boys are by the laws trained from infancy to sing hymns and paens, in which they celebrate in the traditional fashion the heroes and gods of their particular towns. They next learn the airs of Philoxenus and Timotheus, and dance with great spirit to the pipers at the yearly Dionysia in the theatres, the boys at the boys’ festival, and the young men at what is called the men’s festival. Similarly it is their universal custom, at all festal gatherings and banquets, not to have strangers to make the music, but to produce it themselves, calling on each other in turn for a song. They do not look upon it as a disgrace to disclaim knowledge of any other skill: but no one can disclaim the knowledge of how to sing, because all are forced to learn; nor can they confess the knowledge, and yet excuse themselves from practising it, because that too among them is looked upon as disgraceful. Their young men again practise a military step to the music of the pipe and in regular order of battle, producing elaborate dances, which they display to their fellow-citizens every year in the theatres, at the public charge and expense.

Now the object of the ancient Arcadians in introducing these customs was not, as I think, the gratification of luxury and extravagance. They saw that Arcadia was a nation of workers; that the life of the people was laborious and hard; and that, as a natural consequence of the coldness and gloom which were the prevailing features of a great part of the country, the general character of the people was austere. For we mortals have an irresistible tendency to yield to climatic influences. . . . And it was with a view of softening and tempering this natural ruggedness and rusticity, that they not only introduced the things which I have mentioned, but also the custom of holding assemblies and frequently offering sacrifices, in both of which women took part equally with men; and having mixed dances of girls and boys: and in fact did everything they could to humanise their souls by the civilising and softening influence of such culture. The people of Cynæa entirely neglected these things, although they needed them more than any one else, because their climate and country is by far the most unfavourable in all Arcadia; and on the contrary gave their whole minds to mutual animosities andcontents. They in consequence became finally so brutalised, that no Greek city has ever witnessed a longer series of the most atrocious crimes. (trans. E. Shuckbaugh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), vol. I, pp. 296-97)

The nature which The Arcadian Shepherds lets us read is a wild nature: the accidents of the represented horizon, the mountains at center and on the right, the dis-
creet highlights of the tomb at its center, trees, rocks, and bushes surrounding the sepulcher and even the uneven ground of the scene scarcely relate to the Sicilian charms of *Landscape with Polyphemus* at the Hermitage, for instance. Now, as will be noticed, Polybius takes care to oppose the humanity, the austerity, the hospitality, the simplicity of life of the Arcadians in a harsh, sad, and cold country to this Arcadian tribe of Cynaethans who had fallen back into bestiality and savagery. Why? Because the latter had forgotten the wisdom of their compatriots who had overcome nature's harshness through the collective practice of music, and precisely of singing, through the art of musical voice.

It is there, in the Arcadia of Polybius the Arcadian, at 'the natural origin' of man, that the formal articulation of the space of the scene, founded on the radical and dynamic opposition between the disposition of the open desert scene and the volume of the closed tomb in its mass, finds a meaning in my own theoretical reverie: the moment, historically unassignable, of the rupture, of the dissonance in the natural-cultural harmony of savagery mastered by song; the song of the origin suddenly silent. What the shepherd encounters, me, you, us, these are written signs, indissoluble on the wall of the tomb, these signs recognized as signs and which he nevertheless cannot read, traces of the past written on the scene. What *The Arcadian Shepherds* narrates to us is, musically-plastically, the instant of the rupture, of the interruption of the song of the origin, the silent moment of the intrusion of history. The tableau would sing the encounter with signs, the marks of the historical civilization in the story, that is, the encounter with death. And if I read the three figures of the shepherds from left to right as ignorance ('the Arcadians do not look upon it as a disgrace to disclaim knowledge'), effort and work, the suffering of knowledge (the deciphering of the signs), and rational interrogation of the meaning hidden in the traces, it is quite possible that the grand and noble figure of the woman on the right is the response of Wisdom, a response which is at the same time a warning and a resignation to the inevitable: 'Do not concern yourself with signs, do not concern yourself with writing, turn yourself away from knowledge-power, from the power-knowledge of signs' and also 'You can no longer escape from signs now that you have encountered them; you have encountered death, you are condemned to memory, to history.'

Poussin's *Shepherds* or the writing lesson of the Arcadians: the intrusion of history seized at the instant of the rupture which is time in the present, the discovery of the capitalization of duration in the traces of the letters; it has already taken place here-and-now in the utopia of present immediacy, of direct communication of meaning as something sensible, the utopia, the non-place of the voice, of the song, always present, constructing the architectures of rhythm and of melody without ever being at any of their points.

Here is the tree, now is night; here is the plain, now is day... my 'having in view' (*le viser mien, Meinen*) of the sensible certitude which a negation breaks and frag-
ments and finally preserves from the beginning, and as "a truth loses nothing in being written," let us write 'now is day' and already twilight falls and the coming night invades and effaces the light of the first certitude: Arcadia according to Poussin or the certitude of sensible meaning according to Hegel in The Phenomenology of Mind (Ch. 1).

A Virgilian echo at this point in my theoretical reverie: if the tomb—to believe Panofsky ("Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegaic Tradition," in Meaning and the Visual Arts (New York: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 295-320)—makes its first appearance in Arcadia with the fifth Eclogue of Virgil, deep in my memory I think—and doubtless I am not the first to have noticed it—that this tomb of Daphnis and his written epitaph suggests the fragility of the art of the voice and song. In fact, although Daphnis loves singing and is worthy of being sung, he is not himself a singer and the sole verses of which he has been the author are the written verses of his epitaph inscribed in the poem itself at its center on a tomb, between the song of Mopsus who describes how, at the death of this leader Daphnis, the cultivated countryside returned to primitive savagery, and the song of Menalceas which evokes, with Daphnis's apotheosis, a universe mysteriously reconciled with itself beyond death.

In the foreground, the half-circle of the ground of the scene with its fractures; at the rear the convex space of the rocks, mountains, and bushes: in the center, at the middle the tomb which, imperceptibly, turns on its axis in order to place itself a little aslant in relation to the plane of the representational screen and in order to divide the locus of the scene.

The figures of the tomb.

This slight, this imperceptible movement of rotation from the front to the right, from the rear to the left permits the placing of the two standing and immobile figures at its front corners, the shepherd on the left at the rear, the woman on the right at the front, but both of them, corner figures, are sufficiently tranquil, in repose in order to dissociate them—at the rear, in the front—from the couples of which they else form a part: the guardians of the tomb, its virtues.

With these two extreme figures, the narrative, as we have said, is born and comes to an end by returning to its center through their double look. There the action finds its beginning and its end in two attitudes of repose while underlining its culminating moment, its central instant. Now this situation of the corner statues of the tomb, linked to their beginning and ending position in the narrative which the scene is conveying, detaches them not only from the group of figures, but makes them in some way exceed the narrative of which they form a part: characters and symbols, if not allegories, which put us in delectation: the delectation which the philosophical beauty of allegory produces: the assumption of allegory into symbol.

These examples suffice only too well to make understood with what intelligence, what clarity of mind and what nobility of expression our illustrious Painter knew how to treat any sort of
matter, without embarrassment, without obscurity, and without making use of vacuous thoughts or of these insipid, vile and disagreeable circumstances with which many painters seeking to employ allegories have filled their works, for want of knowledge and doctrine.

(Félibien, pp. 119-20)

The allegory is transmuted into symbol by its indiscernible integration into the narrative, so well that my contemplation, my reading, my theory, my discourse can itself only, in being formed, open the space of pleasure, between narrative and allegory, an inexpressibly happy delectation, unable to either show itself (se montre) or demonstrate itself (se démontre). "... the beautiful gives me pleasure and claims the agreement of everyone; at the same time the mind is conscious of being in a certain way ennobled and of being elevated above simple sensibility to pleasure through sensible impressions. This is the intelligible which taste perceives and with which our higher cognitive faculties are in harmony. Without it there would be only contradictions between their nature and the claims of taste. ... In fact, in taste the faculty of judgment is not submitted to the heteronomy of the laws of experience as it is in empirical judgment: in relation to the objects of such a pure satisfaction, it gives itself its law just as reason does in relation to the faculty of desiring; consequently, because of this internal possibility within the subject and of the external possibility of a nature in agreement with it, it is seen to be related to something inside the subject and outside of him which is neither nature or freedom, but which is still connected with the foundation of the latter (the suprasensible), in which the theoretical and the practical are brought back into unity in a manner which is common but unknown." One will recognize this as the fifty-ninth section of Kant’s Critique of Judgment, on the Beautiful as symbol of Morality. Delectation, pleasure, in the utopia of ‘theoretical’ happiness; in the philosophical beauty of allegory, indiscernibly the freedom of the imagination is just as in agreement with the Law of understanding, as it is united with it, and the law united with freedom: a harmony which the symbol at the same time gives to and withdraws from the look and language.

Let us dream freely: the rapprochement which I will make between the laureled head of the shepherd on the left and Apollo in The Inspiration of the Epic Poet (1630-31) incites me to glimpse in this character, a guardian of the tomb, the ‘origin’ of the iconic narrative, a contemplator of the deciphering shepherd, a figure symbolic of the story, the epic in prose, but whereas in The Inspiration, the poet prepares himself to write following Apollo’s dictation, the one whom he contemplates here is limited to reading something which is already written.

For her part, the woman on the right, an interlocutor with the shepherd whom she brushes with her hand but whose mute question she seems to ignore, who contemplates the decipherer with a peaceful detachment, makes me dream of a figure of Mnemosyne, Memory in its relation to a forgetting more originary than it. Her monumental stature, her presentation in profile, the pose of her right hand, her eye without any ‘statuified’ look, are so many traits which evoke in me this passion of admiration which Descartes analyzes in his Treatise on the Passions: an originary
passion of knowledge, without bodily effects, a passion of difference and of alterity, of attention and of the trace of the forgotten, an admiration which is the Memory of forgetting. Isn’t this the meaning of the question her companion addresses to her: ‘What is the name of the one who wrote this trace which the reader is trying to read?’ and of her response: ‘You are, you who reads, condemned to decipher and yet you will know nothing; you only remember a single thing, which is that you have always already forgotten.’

But no anxiety: the deciphering, the destiny of interpretation is on the contrary in its interminability, in its indecibility, the very fashion living beings have neutralizing the anxiety of loss. It is then necessary to come from this to the narrative scene (of which the two extreme figures form, and do not form a part) and to its two places which the two facing figures on the left and on the right occupy, the two who, truly, ‘act’: two characters symmetrically disposed in an inverted complementarity by relation to a central axis, one on the ground of the scene, the other with foot upon a block of stone, one spelling the inscription with look and gesture, the other pointing to the tomb and/or his companion busy reading and interrogating the woman, Memory, his Memory, with a look. A mirror structure whose plane would be perpendicular to the tableau plane; it would pass—invisible—between the two index fingers. It is the plane of the tableau turned round—or that of the tomb—whose only trace of turning is the fissure.

Contrapuntal music, a play of differences and of spacings, of echoes, of repetitions displaced between the two groups of too perfectly symmetrical figures. The ‘shepherds’ on the left, the ‘shepherd’ and ‘shepherdess’ on the right are put into opposition by a sort of chiasmus, but over this figural ‘architectonics’ runs another dominant movement from left to right—a reading of the tableau, a reading of the epitaph of the tomb, a flux of light—a movement underlined by the feature of the retroprospective look from the shepherd to the Arcadian. And below, the scherzo of a line, a broken diagonal (from the left foot of the reading shepherd to the profiled head of the noble woman through the vigorous accents of the arms and hands facing each other) whose syncope is indicated at the exact center of the canvas, in the middle of the figures, at the focus of the story, at the node of the chiasmus between the right and left hands, in the turning movement of the two index fingers.

But with strokes of the crossed staffs, through the groupings of the figures the letter M of death (la mort) (of which the tomb is the seme) is written here, in the same way as in Apollo and Daphne, Poussin’s last tableau, Anthony Blunt read a Heraclitean harmonic tension of contraries in the lyre and bow, the lyre held by Apollo, the bow drawn by the little Cupid.

Finally, a last remark: in a certain way, through their grouping, the facing shepherds are the emanations of the corner figures of the tomb, as if their products, but with an inversion from rear to front which, despite the narrowness of the scene, permits a spatial and ‘semantic’ depth to open up there. From the inspiring-contemplat-
ing Apollo is pro-duced (placed in front) the figure of the reader-locutor of the
inscription. As for the questioning shepherd who is demanding of Memory at the
same time what 'deciphering' signifies and the name of the dead one, he refers to the
one who is withholding the response-forgetting; the iconographic argument being,
on this point, the badly squared block, a plastic metonymy of the tomb, on which
the group rest themselves and which is, from Raphael to Ripa, one of the signs of
Memory and of History, of the Memory of History. Hence this movement from rear
to front, but whose poles are inverted on the level of the inscription. From History
to deciphering and from the question of meaning to Memory, the space of the scene
is deployed through the figures as they are twisted round in the central zone and, at
the same time, the narrative—or rather the discourse through which it is enounced—is produced.

The fundamental articulation of the ensemble of the scene and its figures is indeed
this central place, this spacing between the two groups of figures, the empty center
already marked out in The Manna as the locus-instant of narrative change, and
which is occupied here by an inscription.

Poussinian music encore: apropos of The Manna.

The tableau constitutes a properly pictorial text representing the 'symbolic' register
in the story it narrates: a problem of writing, a problem of syntax. Let us reread
Félibien: the painter's language or more precisely "the characters" which he utilizes
are "these sorts of impressions which give to the spectator the different states and
the diverse actions" for which he has represented and distributed movements on his
canvas in the groups of figures, "since for him they take the place of discourse and
of speech in order to make understood his thought" (p. 183). They represent the text
of the story.

The letters of the pictorial writing are thus the bodily signs left as traces of emos-
tions by the movements of the soul. The theory of affects is perhaps Cartesian for
Poussin or for Le Brun, but its practice, the practice of expressive representation, is
already that of Giotto.

The pictorial narrative will move the soul of the beholder when each figure painted there
clearly shows the movement of their own soul. . . These movements of the soul are made
known by movements of the body. . . Thus all the movements of the body should be closely
observed by the painter. These he may well learn from nature, even though it is difficult to imi-
titate the many movements of the soul. (Alberti, On Painting, p. 77)

How can this writing constitute the discourse of the painter in the tableau? In
order to approximate the expressible unit, the foundation of, to speak Kant's lan-
guage, the theoretical and practical, the space of delectation and of pleasure in the
work of painting, we are encountering two rival models: the one of the theatrical scene and of dramatic representation, whose technical value for Poussin is well known through Sandrart's *Journal* and Le Blond de la Tour's *Letter*, since as a prelude to creation Poussin produced genuine theatrical models and figurines which he would position on scene in the model. This is the model which Le Brun and Félibien wish to exploit on the theoretical plane. The orderly poetic license by which unity of action is achieved in theater justifies the painter's license to construct the spatial unity of a succession of narrative events.

The other model is musical, that of the theory of modes which Poussin expounded in his letter to Chantelou of November 24, 1647 (in Blunt, pp. 367-70; Holt, vol. II, pp. 154-56). The difficulties of analysis posed by this letter, which resumes Gioseffo Zarlino's *The Harmonic Institutions* and gives it contradictory applications, are well known. But beyond these difficulties may be kept the idea of the mode defined as *ratio*, or as a manner, or determined order of organization; Poussin writes "the mode is the composition of several things put together in a proportioned fashion." An internal law of organization, mode reveals "a difference of mode whereby one could understand that each of them retained in itself a subtle distinction, particularly when all the things that pertain to the composition were put together proportionally." Mode as a specific scale is defined at the same time by the initial chord and by the system of intervals between the notes: it reveals a type of causality of the pictorial object which is a system of differences among parts, inducing an overall effect, particularly in the spectator, as Poussin strongly emphasizes in the same text.

Le Brun and Félibien ask: how can narrative change in painting be recognized? By induction of the modal difference which consists in the *spacing* no longer of notes, no longer of letters, but of expressive signs, of affects in the figures and in the figurative locus. The mode is a certain type of intervals in which the articulation between the parts of the tableau, this spacing, is obtained by the play of its oppositions, by "their judicious contrast," as Le Brun says. The interval of expressions, of figures, of groups of figures is at once temporal and spatial to the degree that it is this interval which generates the space of the representation by the ordered, 'modalized' representation of the figures.

If mode is defined by a system of intervals and the characteristic chord of the tonic, the dominant and median third of the tonic, could not one attempt to rediscover evidence of both, in *The Manna*, along with Poussin himself, despite the gap of eight years? Could not one reconstitute, thanks to the musical model, the constitution of the pictorial text insofar as it represents the literary text, to retrace the process of generation of the space of representation? One can do so, either in the contents as does Le Brun for example, or in a more formal fashion, as we are going to attempt to do.
The foreground of the tableau is the plane of change; it opposes a before, the group on the left, and an after, the group on the right, an opposition which marks the central empty place.

The middle distance is the plane of the instant of representation about which Le Brun speaks, and it is centered by the double figure of Moses-Aaron who mark the link between the two groups of figures with opposed attitudes, the ones on the left standing, with arms raised, the ones on the right kneeling, with their arms lowered towards the vessels.

The background is the plane of the landscape-space. It opposes the rock-arch with the light, on the left, to the group of dark trees at right, an opposition marked by the central empty place in the sky.

This is the pure syntax of the tableau which carries out the transformation of the Story as change, into Space as landscape through the mediation of the instant of representation. One can then invest this abstract schema with meanings and we will read, with the letter to Jacques Stella (in Blunt, p. 223), misery and famine, before, the hunger to nourish oneself after, in the foreground plane which is the plane of the story: a Story whose change, not itself figurable, is represented by the empty place whose sole function is to space the two groups of figures. But this non-figurable element of the story is figured in the middle ground which, in the ‘instant’ of representation, disengages the moral and religious lesson of the story: it is the double figure of the prophets, a mediating instrument of the miraculous change, inasmuch as the group of Ancients of the people thanking God is opposed to those who, contravening divine order, have begun to store up the manna; the greedy people in the middle ground correspond to the hungry ones in the foreground, just as those who are offering thanks correspond to those suffering. Finally, this vertical ‘semantic’ organization permits one to give a meaning to the landscape-space: the rock-arch repeated so often in seventeenth century landscapes, for example in Claude Lorrain, beginning back with the ancient fresco of the Barberini Palace, marking the glory of God by opposition to the dark forest. Space thus has symbolic value in this tableau, but through its integration into a totality, a symbolic value which is quite different from the allegorical meaning for which Le Brun searches in Poussin’s The Ecstasy of St. Paul, for instance. If we overlap these two constitutions of the space of representation of the tableau, we then obtain, in a sort of perception in depth, the syntax of the course and the order of discourse of the look in the system of spacing of the figures.

But mode is defined not only by the system of intervals, but also by its characteristic chord. Poussin himself gives us this determinant chord of the tableau in his letter to Chantelou. It is the group on the left which is the point of departure for the double discourse-course across the figures: "Furthermore, if you can remember the
first letter I wrote to you concerning the movements of the figures which I promised to depict, and if you consider the tableau at the same time, I think you will be able to recognize with ease which figures languish, which ones are astonished, which are filled with pity, perform deeds of charity, are in great need, seek consolation, since the first seven figures on the left side will tell everything that is written there, and all the rest is much to the same effect: read the story and the tableau. . ." (Holt, pp. 146-47).

Poussin gives us a list of seven affects, but in the plural: these seven emotions are each signified by a plurality of figures. But these are also expressed by the first seven figures from the left; why would these be first if not because, the first seven figures read and viewed, they give the modal tone of the tableau. These seven figures on the left represent, at the same stroke, all the figures of the tableau, not in the sense that all the others would be reproducing them, but in the sense that the ensemble of expressive signs on the left gives the modal difference of all the figures of the tableau.

Translated by Larry Crawford