The gesture of looking in classical history painting

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In this paper, possible functions of the gesture of indicating, either with hands or postures, or with looks or facial expressions, portrayed on the figures found in the history painting of the XVIIth century are studied. Two examples from the paintings of Le Brun and Poussin are analyzed in detail to show how these gestures are signifying elements of the story represented through the *dispositio* of its figures as well as operative parts of a representational apparatus historically and esthetically defined. The gesture of indicating, intended to articulate and regulate the viewer's reception of the painting, is supposed to constrain how he adheres to the religious, social or political values — that is the ideological background of the scene represented in the painting.

IN A STUDY devoted to the semiotics of the body and corporal gesture,[1] we noticed that the body was the place, prop, inscription surface and instrument used by many sign systems. Gesture and behavior are found among these signs which appear articulated in a manner culturally specific to social conditions, institutional rules, rituals of attitude and "etiquettes" expressing feelings themselves closely tied to roles, social functions and positions. Moreover, we wondered whether the act of imposing a process of making meaning on the body, its behaviors and gestures would not uncover the presence of discourses historically and culturally marked *on* the body.

In this light, gestures, poses and behaviors act out these discourses and present them in the form of figures. This word is to be understood in the sense given to it by rhetorics: "these forms of language, which render discourse more graceful and lively, forceful and energetic,"[2] are the procedures which provide a body of language with its movements and specific gestures for the expression of ideas and things in words. But even more so, it is very significant that it was in the name of *oratory action* that rhetorics elaborated a *language of the body*, that is to say, schemes of behavioral and gestural significance which, when added to, or even in certain extreme cases substituted for, discourse, its forms and tropes, intensify the force of its effects on the listener. Representations of meaning on the scene of the body

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in the form of gestures, mimicries and intonations, are as such actors strictly hierarchialized in a system of roles of propriety and decorum, which produce the theater of this meaning as an effect of belief, persuasion and conviction in the way the auditeur looks and hears, in his eyes and ears. One will see how in Quintilian[13] the orator's voice, mimicry and pantomime must be, along with the tropes of discourse the object of an exercise which puts them in harmonious correspondence with the content of the words and the nature of the thoughts.

An orator's first concern should be to feel these movements, to picture in his mind the facts and to be touched *as if* they were real. Thus the voice and the gestures animating the words of his language and the movements of his body will be the intermediaries, the signs (indices as well as icons according to Peirce)[4] which will insure passage into the listener's soul of the feelings being animated by the orator and the destinator will be that much more squarely and efficiently targeted since the orator imprints his voice and gestures with the effects suited to what he is speaking about. To use R. Jakobson's terms, the conative function (centered on the destinator of the discourse) will be that much more powerful since the expressive and emotional function — whether the emotion be true or faked — will be at its center.[5] But as much for one as for the other, it is the *oratio*, the content of the discourse that not only gives harmony and coherence to the corporal signs, voice intonations, body gestures and facial mimicries, but moreover will order them in a sequence according to the different parts of the discourse, the different types and causes that their staging involves.

The rhetorical model of oratory action is more than a useful instrument for the analysis of gesture language in classical painting. If the texts of the *Oratory Institution* and others of the same type have such a historical importance, it is because they found an area in art theory all prepared for their application to painting. In Alberti's *Della Pittura*,[6] one will discern this remarkable convergence brought about by the strictly visual nature of the substance of painting's expression as well as by the new concept of its aims and objectives. "Grandissimo opera del pittore non uno collosso ma istoria maggiore loda d'ingegnio rende l'istoria qualsia collosso," writes Alberti who adds: "bodies are part of the *istoria*; members are parts of the body; planes part of the members."[7] But bodies only really articulate the *istoria* in painting by harmonizing themselves in size and function to that which takes place in it. It is equally necessary to have a variety of bodies, a certain diversity of gestures and poses: "Be careful," says Alberti to the painter, "not to repeat the same gesture, pose. The *istoria* will move the soul of the beholder when each man painted in the *istoria* clearly shows the movement of his soul ... We weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, grieve with the grieving. These movements of the soul are made known by movements of the body."[8] This is the reason why it is necessary for the painter to carefully observe multiple movements, a gestural language quasi infinite which *animates* the body according to how the passions sway the soul.

And having said this, he adds: "I think that all the bodies ought to move

according to what is ordered in the *istoria*."[9] It is indeed the story, or those sequences chosen to be depicted by the painter, which provide him with the passions and actions of the figures he will represent through the animation of each figure with body and facial movements and gestures most suited to the passion and action that this figure manifests: gesture is thus defined, in its structure as a sign, at the point of intercrossing of the two "texts," one which is the recounted story "equipping" the story's actors with specific passions and actions, the other coming from observed nature which provides each movement of the soul (passion, internal affects) with the body movements specifically characterizing them. This interlacing of the story with nature implies, to simplify it, a double articulation of the gestural, one thought of as universal because it is natural, by which an exact correspondence between movements of the body (gestures) and movements of the soul (passions) is established; the other, specified in literature, Ancient mythology, Holy Testament and Christian hagiography, and providing painting with the *vraisemblable* (the plausible) particular to passions and actions suited to a particular moment or a particular place.

It is not just by chance that two and a half centuries after the appearance of *Della Pittura*, we will find in the *Logic of Port Royal*, in the chapter devoted to the idea of the sign where in the name of a classification of signs according to whether they are joined (in time and space) to the things they signify, or are separate from them, that the authors group in the first rubric, "the air of the face, sign of the soul's movements which is joined to those movements it signifies" and "the dove, figure of the Holy Ghost which was joined to the Holy Ghost."[10] In 1639, when Poussin sent his painting, the *Manne* to Chantelou, he found it necessary to first send a prefactory letter where he wrote the famous formula: "read the story and the painting, in order to know if each thing is appropriate to the subject." Therefore it is not in this case, just a question of looking but of reading, not only of looking attentively, but of deciphering, of perusing the painting as a large written page and of producing, during the perusal, the episode of the story staged by the painter. But if at first, the spectator is asked — indeed ordered — through the story to read the painting thus submitted to the test of propriety and decorum, then secondly, it is emphasized that the painting legitimately appropriates for itself the story's text in its rewriting of it with perfect accuracy, using its own "script" — its formal and expressive signs as figures accurately placed on the stage of the figurated scene and each one becomes a carrier of expression, that is to say, gestures, looks, movements and poses which are signs all that much more exact of the soul's affects since they are joined to the movements of these affects, since they are their indices (using Peirce's terms).

"In speaking about painting, (Poussin) says that just as the 24 letters of the alphabet serve to form our words and express our thoughts, the human body's lines express the diverse passions of the soul ..."[12] Formal signs, expressive indices, representations of gestures and mimicries, postures and poses,

movements and shiftings,[13] arranged on the figures just as the figures are arranged on specific places within the represented space, constitute the painting as a readable text according to the rules based on a *figurative* syntax. In any case, at least in theory, that is to say, in the normative discourse which regulates the exchange between narration (of history) and painting (of history) — the story's narrative effects are appropriated by the visual representation just as writing the story is rigorously constrained in its iconic effects by the picture. Although they are different, they are however substitutable for each other in their presupposed effects (by the discourse *on* the story and *on* painting).[14] To read the story and the picture would therefore amount to — at least in theory — recognizing an episode in a particular, known story by the immediate recognition of the pictured gestures which are sign-indices of the emotions which specifically and particularly characterize the actors of this story.

This is the reason that sometimes, there is uncertainty in the recognition of the story where the esthetic discourse, late in the classical century it is true, will recognize the mark of the Masters. What is the story that the painting "tells?" This is the question Leonardo asked Poussin in the realm of the dead according to Fénelon, in regard to one of the latter's pictures that they were contemplating *in absentia*, the *Paysage avec un homme tué par un serpent* (Landscape with a man killed by a snake): ". . . isn't it true (said Poussin) that these diverse degrees of fear and surprise (sign-indices, gestures and mimicries, accurately arranged on the figures in the diverse places on the representative scene) make up a sort of interplay (*un jeu*) which moves and pleases? I agree (answered Leonardo). But what is this design? Is it a story? I am not familiar with it. It is rather a "caprice." This type of work seems very pleasant to us, provided that "caprice" is regulated and does not digress in any way from real Nature . . ."[15] Carrying things a little bit further, we can ask ourselves what could become of history painting as a "caprice" (in Fénelon's terms)[16] in case the presupposed natural universality of gestures as sign-indices of the soul's movements would be questioned, even suspended, by the cultural, anthropological or historical diversity in the expressive gestures of emotions.

In the same chapter where oratory action is treated, Quintilian evokes the "play" of the hands as well as the universal language that hands seem to make up: "In order to designate places and persons, aren't they (hands) equal to adverbs and pronouns?" the pointing gesture is, it seems in fact, radically substitutable for a term, the demonstrative pronoun "this one," to the point that "this one" in its pure demonstrative function has no other significance than to designate the singular object indicated by the pointing gesture. In other words, *what* "this one" means is only comprehensible when accompanied by the *gesture which indicates the thing or person* that "this one" indicates to the point that inversely, the gesture of showing or indicating can perfectly obtain its effect without the verbal utterance of the words "this one." This is strongly emphasized by Benveniste, "it serves no purpose to define these terms and demonstratives in

general by deixis, as it is done, if one does not add that deixis is contemporary the discursive instance which carries the person indicator I — you."[17]

From now on, the demonstrative as well as the pointing gesture draw out the characteristics, unique and particular each time, from a double reference, n only to the object shown but also to the unit of the "discursive instance to which is referred." Writes Benveniste, "The essential is thus a relation between th indicator (of person, time, place, indicated object, etc. . . .) and the *prese* instance of discourse,"[18] a unique instance which shows it as such. Thus th pointing gesture is not, properly speaking, a sign but this movement of coexis ence of body with sensory space, a coexistence which unites in itself all th conditions of the sign's appearance in the form of a double negation, on one han the separating of a subject from an object, on the other hand, the one whic neutralizes the background on which the object is constituted as such by th pointing gesture which potentially extracts that object from it.

One understands the importance of these remarks on the pointing gesture f a study on the gestural in painting in general, and on classical history painting i particular. Certainly the pointing gesture is an essential element of denotative cognitive "discourse" on the narrative figures represented in the pictur alongside, or composed with, the "discourse" on the actions and passions evoke by the representation of the indices-gestures of the passions. But, in his reflexior on the presenting of the *istoria*, Alberti already underlined the essential value the specific gesture of pointing in establishing the communication of the *istoria* the beholder, in giving him its meaning and in causing the figures' passions to b produced in him. Undoubtedly, "I think," wrote Alberti, "in the first place th all the bodies ought to move according to what is ordered in the *istoria*. In a *istoria*, I like to see someone who admonishes and points out to us what happening there; beckons with his hand to see; or menaces with an angry fac and with flashing eyes, so that no one should come near; or shows some danger marvellous thing there; or invites us to weep or to laugh together with ther Therefore whatever the painted persons do among themselves or with th beholder, all is pointed towards ornamenting or teaching the *istoria*."[19]

This text is complex and nuanced but we can retain from it this pointir gesture towards the beholder off stage, the gesture of one of the figures who is i some way the delegate of the "présentative" function, the "ostensive" functio that all representation comprises as one of its fundamental dimensions. pointing gesture is in itself complex because, in the majority of the examples, it a combination of a hand gesture — indeed, the index finger which points out th episode — and a look in the direction of the beholder, the whole picture bein grasped through a dominant affect in which the diverse emotions expressed in th *istoria* are to be grasped: anger, fear, affliction, laughter. A pointing gesture towar the *istoria* and a look towards the beholder: in this gesture and look, the cogniti essence, speculative nature and theoretical notion of history painting appea that is to say, the representational apparatus elevated to its highest value, carrie

to the extremes of its power. The figure of the Albertian commentator is not only, as it has been written,[20] the means of establishing an emotive and affective tie to the beholder; he is, by his gesture-look, the figure — and here we come back to the rhetorical meaning of the word — where the optical and geometric schema of perspectival construction is represented, which constitutes an essential structure of the representative apparatus.

One will understand as well, on one hand, that the look of the commentator-figure can be dissociated from all pointing gestures towards the represented *istoria*, and on the other hand, that it can be abstracted from all emotive components expressed by the gestural and mimical sign-indices of the narrative figures, because *this* look of *this* figure in the picture has no other function that to indicate to its beholder that the painting has only to be contemplated. The look of the commentator-figure has become a gesture, or rather the contrary, the pointing gesture with its cognitive and denotative function,[21] the one which is indissociable from the double position referring to a subject and an object,[22] is metamorphosed in the fiction of a look by one of the figures where the presentational apparatus produces its *subject* with its three meanings: what is represented, the one who is its emittor and the one who is its destinator.

Thus a figure looks at the beholder outside the painting's stage and has no other role in the story than this look. In fact, it would be more exact to say that this figure's look "positions" the picture's beholder, not that it *defines* an optical and geometrical viewing point from which the picture must necessarily be seen. Rather, it produces, originating in the painting, a position for viewing and asks for a look in return for its fictive display. Inversely, a figure can be found in classical history painting who is entrusted with this gesture-look, not from the painting towards the beholder, but from its beholder towards the picture, a figure who will present, on stage of the history painting, the beholder in his role and function as a "looker."[22a] From now on, it is no longer the painting which, through one of its figures, designates the beholder's gaze in constituting it as such; it is the beholder who is "absorbed" into the painting by a figure who "represents" him:[23] the painting — the representation of a story — has thus attained total "autonomy" because it operates the inclusion into itself with this sort of "delegated" look, of its own beholder, in the form of a symbolized/figurative look. Here is an example.

Let us reread Poussin's letter to Chantelou concerning the *Manne*: "Besides, if you recall the first letter that I wrote you touching on the movements that I promised you I would make there, and that all together you would consider in the painting, I think that you will easily recognize the ones who languish, who admire, those who have pity, who are doing charity, who are in great need, who need to eat, who console and others, because the first seven figures on the left side will tell you the same that is here written and all the rest is of the same fabric: read the story and the picture, in order to see if each thing is appropriate to its subject." This text is central to the understanding, in this

particular case of the *Manne*, of what the reading of a picture according to Poussin is, and how the Academy and LeBrun will much later codify this reading. As we have already remarked with Alberti, the minimal unit of a picture's readability is a movement, the gesture of a figure. The picture's figures which cause the story represented in the painting to be seen, are first of all, aggregates of gestures. Between the gestures of the figure — the name of the passion which these gestures express — and the picture as figured presentation, there is only one and the same act of recognition. And as we have also noted, this act of recognition of the beholder's look presupposes a natural and universal language of the body whose gestures would be the signifiers and whose signifieds would be the soul's passions that characteristic names would designate. This act of recognition also presupposes that the sketch of the figures as aggregates of gestures be absolutely explicit and that it presents to the eye its clear and distinct representation, that is to say, immediately namable.

Such is the "theoretical" schema where one can recognize the Cartesian conception of the soul's passions as movements and gestures, body actions, a schema which would assure the conditions of making a reading of the history painting possible.[25] Two simultaneous actions insure it: one is the reading of a written text, be it only a potential one in the cultured memory of the beholder — the Israelites gathering manna in the desert; the other one is the attentive looking at a painting, looking which is as Poussin explained it, "the function of reason," the "prospect" that is the perspectival construction as the structural schema of the representational apparatus.[26]

However, an enumeration of the aggregates of gestures along with the enumeration of their corresponding names has never constituted a story. Poussin then adds this essential notion: "The first seven figures on the left side will tell you the same that is written here and the rest is of the same fabric." The seven figures on the left in the foreground provide a first unit of maximal readability because of the compositional rigor (they form a cluster, "ils groupent," Diderot will say of them) and because of the figural density which allows for the re-cognition of all the other figures in the picture. Each figure as a gestural complex expresses an emotion and represents a cluster of figures in the picture. Moreover, this group functions as a narrative matrix for the rest of the picture: it is its scenario whose development in the other figural groupings would *produce* the narrative depicted by the painting. In this way, one could say that it constitutes the nucleus of readability producing the total reading of the work.

Finally, if this analysis is exact, it follows that the painting's totality is represented by one of its parts, a group of seven figures and that, at the same time, one of the parts of the totality represents the totality and itself: *it represents itself while representing the totality*. In other words, and the remark is important, it produces itself, when starting out from the visual "readable" perusal of the painting (whose arrangement of the figures as gestural, emotive complexes spreads out, plane after plane, the linear aspect of its narration in the represented

space of the painting), a reflexive process which opens up a dimension in which a symbolic structure is inscribed whose meaning has to be deciphered, or at the least, whose intention is to be guessed. Therefore, at the moment when the painting's narrativity is articulated, in and by these figures, a readability ordered according to the narrating of the emotive-gestural series, at this very moment a tendency towards an interpretation is indicated in the narrating itself.

The seven figures arranged in the first plane to the left therefore articulate the first sequence of the story, the first narrative signification, the one of the misery of the Jewish people before the fall of the manna *and* the fundamental meaning of the whole story — its symbolic value. What does this group then show? At first a visual and figural composition rigorous in its complex unity: two couples of figures at once united and opposed by their gestures and movements surround three other figures who, in the center of the total group, construct a pyramid of bodies linked together by gesture and looks. These three central figures of the young woman giving her breast to the old woman, her mother, and refusing it to her infant while she looks at it with both love and sadness belong to a topical motif known as "Roman charity."[27]

Well, this group is being contemplated by a man who is standing; he is the *first* figure to the left of the whole painting and the *first* figure on the left of the group of seven figures to the left. This man, as will write Le Brun in his lecture on the *Manne,* represents fairly well 'a person amazed and surprised with admiration," the hand's gesture, the open palm, signifies it in particular; as does the slight backing away movement of the legs and feet.[28] He sees, contemplates and admires the marvels of an act of human charity which is only admirable in that it goes beyond the natural order of maternal love to the piety and love of a daughter for her mother. He sees, contemplates and admires this act of human charity shown on the first plane to the left of the painting, as will the beholder see, contemplate and admire the miracle of divine charity: the falling of the manna that is depicted by the whole painting. In other words, this figure to the left on the first plane represents both the admiration remarked by Le Brun and also the beholder of the whole picture, all the while showing him the emotive mode of the look that he will or should have for the painting. We must go further: just as the totality of the painting's figures are reflected in the group of the first seven figures on the left in order to assure the conditions of making a maximal reading of the picture possible, the symbolic plane of interpretation of the story related by the arrangement of the figures, the perspective apparatus (framing and positioning of the eye) as the condition making its optimal visibility possible is found reflected by the first figure of the painting, on the left in the group of the first seven figures: the beholder's delegate in the narrative scene which shows him that the affective, emotive mode of this gaze on the whole painting which is to be read is admiration.[29] The figure on the left has the beholder read what is the correct look — a look of admiration: it makes him read and see both who he is and who he should be, a look, a gesture at the limit of the body and soul, of passion

and action, at the limit also of the gesture-look of the painting which, in thi figure, in reflecting the functioning of the representational apparatus, present itself in representing the look-gesture of the beholder who, in the same figur sees himself in recognizing his model through "absorption" into and onto th narrative scene.

A second example, taken this time from a sketch of *l'Histoire du Roi* (History o the King) by Le Brun, would allow to simultaneously recognize, on one hand th beholder's positioning as such by the figure which, all the while being an integra part of the story's narration represented by the scene, all the while remaining on of the story's "actors" by his pose, makes the gesture of looking outside the fram and on the other hand, the beholder's absorption into the painting, into th representational apparatus by a figure who, coming onto the stage, is limited t indicating with his hand and by his behavior, the event in the process c happening on the stage of history and of the representation. In this tapestr representing the meeting of the two kings, of France and of Spain, in June 1660 o the Franco-Spanish border to conclude the treaty between the two countries, the two kings move towards the middle of the conference room which, as th Grande Mademoiselle tells us, "seemed very large to her," and "that there was window only at the spot which offered a view of the river, where two sentinel were placed when the king stayed there" . . . this window's small panes cut up th great mirror which reflected it, behind the two monarchs who were leanin towards each other, hats doffed, a hand held out for evoking the symbolic gestur of peace. They arrived in the middle of the room, from each side of the border — th edge of a Persian carpet with a background of gold and silver on the Spanish sid to the right, on the French side a large gold and silver braid of a carpet of crimso velvet. They form a double border which repeats on the scene's stage the tw thresholds of the room crossed by the delegations and kings, the double edge an the double banks of the isle of Faisants and of the Bidassoa river separating th two kingdoms — two geographic spaces and two political places. Two roya bodies stopped in the center, two faces lean towards each other and two hand will be clasped. European history and world history are suspended in thes suspended gestures: the wars have ended and the peace treaty has been signec here peace is being consecrated and in the following moment, whose imminenc can be felt through the unbalance of the masses and the asymmetry in th arrangement of the figures; the Infante of Spain, the conic volume of a satin dres with jet pearl embroideries, will slip from the Persian carpet to the velvet on from her father to her husband, from Spain to France. . . . In this center, th representational apparatus works at full speed to produce these historical an symbolic significations using this border whose signs mark out, while mult plying themselves in number, the whole representation.

Indeed, from one end of the border to the other, the stage of the historic scene i divided into two areas which are far from neutral: from the Spanish side, th curves and arabesques of the Persian carpet lend an impression of confusion t

the figures which are placed there, all the more so in that the Infante of Spain, and she alone, breaks up the layout of the group's movements because of her massive shape; on the French side, on the other hand, the golden braids from the velvet carpet strictly repeating the one which, in the center, limits it, constitutes as many secondary places, doubly regulated according to theatrical perspective and according to protocol where the members of the French delegation are hierarchically placed: the king advances alone in the first row, Monsieur his brother, the Queen Mother and the First Minister in the second row, the Duchess of Navailles, Turenne, the Maréchal of Grammont and a person seen from the back in the third, and finally five figures in the fourth where, on the extreme left edge of the scenic arrangement of this group, one recognizes the Prince of Conti. Therefore, it is *from the French side* that the group of lines and vectors can be projected. They articulate represented space while regulating the arrangement of the figures which spread out as they advance. It is on this side of the border that the moving force behind the historical figuration as well as the principle of its spectacular representation can be found. This double plan and double stakes, esthetical and artistic as well as political and ideological, should be closely examined. In fact, everything happens as if, on the stage decorated by the great organizers of the royal ceremony in the tapestry, the group of actors of this story (dynastic, political, military and diplomatic) is summarized or condensed in the figure of a single agent who is the finality and direction of their movement forwards as well as the force behind their progression: the king shows them the way, leading them, and he is the only one to take the big step forward, while being immobilized in the center; while on the contrary, the delegation he is leading is immobilized while marching towards the center. In any case, the underlying basis for this arrangement and its dynamic is defined by the rules of perspective: if the historical movement is developed in the represented space according to the plane parallel to the representation's plane while requiring a placement of the personalities in a frieze, and a strict presentation in profile of the great subject of history, the perspective apparatus aims, as for it, to open up illusionary depth in this plane, to hollow out scenic space to give a third dimension up to a point situated at an infinite distance but which the representational apparatus should place on the horizon of the represented space at the point where the orthogonals to the screen of representation are joined.[31] Seen only on the French side (the gold and silver braid of the carpet), and extended into the background, these orthogonals point to, if not a geometrical point, at least a visual zone situated approximately between the two heads of the sovereigns, and ideally in the reflection of the King of France's profile in the mirror, more precisely, in his eye. In other words, the representational apparatus which constructs the monument to the King's history and whose perspective apparatus is the architectonic structure, finds the principle of its strict construction in the King's portrait, and in this portrait in his eye, that is, in the reflection of a full figure reduced to its profile and condensed in this point. Thus the king's

body here is doubled in its very representation: the one who advances towards the center of the historical room while immobilized in suspended time between war and peace, the other who is its spectral reflection in the mirror — fictive body of the King and portrait of his portrait which is nothing more than the profile of a face, which is nothing more than the eye of this portrait at the "vanishing" point of the perspective construction of the representation that this eye figures: imaginary body whose eye would be its symbolic concentration.

From now on, one perceives how this "history-picture" whose double border limited the privileged place of composition, functions because of it, by the doubling of the representational apparatus which constructs this painting, that is to say, by multiplication of the internal edges in the frames and edges whose whole function will be to reproduce and amplify what the first "articulation" had allowed to be produced. And first of all, the mirror in the background which, in the middle and it seems, above a table covered with crimson velvet carpet, reproduces the entire composition of the painting, at once by its frame and the rectangular mirror panes which make it up, by the reflections it holds and the figures it frames. The mirror is therefore the vertical projection, to the back plane and at the painting's center of the pattern of the stage floor: it displays it, but in terms of regular geometry (ordered and regulated), it shows what the scene's construction presents to the eye as transformed by the perspective construction. It reflects the stage floor while correcting its network, in displaying its theoretic "truth" as the floor reflects the cutting up of the mirror while giving it its concrete reality. The fact remains that, even if it reflects its total construction, the mirror still is a *part of what* the painting represents; by position and function, not only does it present the two kings' profiles and the invisible window which illuminates the whole scene, but it is *a figure*, the one of representation itself, where the latter presents its functioning, that is to say where its two dimensions are shown, one transitive — the mirror represents beings and objects which are not otherwise visible — and the other reflexive — the mirror is an apparatus of reflexion which, here in particular, by the rectangular squares of which it is composed, shows itself its own reflecting surface. The two portraits in profile of the kings and, more precisely still, the one of the King of France, where the historic narrative is condensed into the image of its agent and the structure of the representation is condensed into the one of the beholder's eye, these portraits in the mirror are thus the symbolic concentration of its deictic and semiotic functions. The king is only King in his portrait.

The mirror, besides, frames four other persons: not only the two kings in its center (slightly moved towards the left, towards the French side) but also, at its edges, the two prime ministers, negotiators of the Treaty of the Pyrenees and the royal marriage, Mazarin for France on the left, Don Luis de Haro for Spain on the right, while the Queen Mother Anne of Austria on the French side and the Infante Maria Theresa on the Spanish side are pushed out of the mirror frame into the edges of the tapestry. Therefore the distinction is emphasized — the

border — between *the political*, literally, on one hand whose subjects and direct agents alone are allowed to occupy the central place in the "figure," and the *dynastic* on the other hand, whose dimensions of filiation and alliance are the means of the political but which, in return, are its consequences and effects.

The tapestry of the King's story is not only redoubled in its perspective construction and its narrative arrangement by the central mirror which presents the structural apparatus of the royal representation, but it is repeated within its own space by the two tapestries, presented on the right and left which provide a background for all the figures (with the exception of the political quartet), which actually close off two scenic places, the French and the Spanish ones, while opening them up in two imaginary spaces (and one can here see the difference in function, even in the *enunciative* level, between them and the mirror) and which, besides, offers an ideological and cultural connotation to the historical representation: not immaterial to all this is that Queen Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV and sister of Philippe IV, king of Spain and that the Infante Maria Theresa, the Queen's niece, Philippe's daughter and wife of Louis XIV, king of France, are the figures at the *edges* of these two tapestries (as Mazarin and don Luis de Haro were the figures at the frame's *edge* of the central mirror, just as Louis XIV and Philippe IV were the figures at the double median *border*).

A large brocaded curtain makes up, with three folds, the ultimate border in the upper part of the tapestry before its real frame; three folds, the first whose gathers hang in the left corner; the second, several unobtrusive pieces of material in the right corner; finally the third in the center, stretches out its even fold like a canopy above the mirror, above the two kings' heads. There again the double border, which we noted in the center of the representation is repeated; here it is no longer just a question of edges and borders which are area and division makers, but also of screens which occult and exhibit. Because the curtain — and one easily sees this — balances among the three spaces in which and through which all representation is constructed, presented and understood. This curtain is undoubtedly an element in the represented scene; it was supposed to be raised to let in the light through the only window providing light for the conference room. But it is also one of the elements of the represented space of the tapestry itself as its frame because through it, the historical scene receives its theatrical and spectacular dimension; finally it is an essential part of the representational surface and medium, notably above the mirror reflecting the window, but also, as for the tapestries where the royal tapestry is doubled, in the measure where curtain, texture, textile as canvas or tapestry, it is a "device" which "materially" conditions the viewing of the representation: raised in the center of the scene along its upper edge, *it literally shows that it allows sight.*

To finish up, it is necessary now to treat looks and eyes; therefore how does the tapestry narrating the encounter of two kings construct its beholder?

A group of figures — four of them — double and redouble the structure of the "constitution" of the king's portrait in his history, that is, the figure in profile and

in full of the king in his relation to the profile of his face (and to his eye) in the frontal mirror central to the background of the scene. It is remarkable, in fact, that in the group on the left, two figures are looking "out of the frame," off-stage: Monsieur, the king's brother, standing just behind him, and the Maréchal of Grammont behind him: the two heads are presented full face (on bodies in profile whose movement accompanies the one of Louis XIV), two faces with no particular emotion, whose total body of gestures it seems, is reduced to this look addressed to the beholder. Along the same protocol and perspective line that Grammont, Turenne and the Duchess of Navailles are placed, we see a person entirely from the back and he is clearly moved forward in relation to the others, from the edge of the stage to the point that, in the movement of his legs and feet, he seems to come and join the delegation from the exterior; he is an anonymous figure who points with the index of his right hand (but for whom?) to the central scene of the encounter between the two kings. However, at the extreme left, the border of the "tapestry" and the vertical edge of the stage setting cut up a profile so much that all we can say about it is that it seems to be reduced to an eye. The two looks, Monsieur's and Grammont's, come searching for the beholder's, not at the center of the presented space already occupied by the king who is looking at his tapestry, but on the left; the two looks of those who are the closest in blood and function to the monarch, come to stare at the beholder in *his place* and actually hold him there. But *imaginarily*, these two looks "couple" the beholder with the figure seen from the back, an anonymous courtier who is climbing onto the stage of the story where history is being made. In any case, different from Grammont, ambassador to Madrid or from Monsieur, the king's brother, his only function is to show to his double, the "real" beholder, the central event which is the encounter between the two kings, to show him what he would have seen had he been on the isle of Faisants in June 1660 and that as his delegate indicates this to him because he was not there. At the same time and with the same movement, this "imaginary" anonymous figure, on stage, makes the real beholder pass into the representation; it empties him of his reality in order to absorb him into the epideictic image of this courtier. Henceforth, all that is left of this beholder "mounting" onto the stage is this profile without gesture, body or sign, cut into by the representational screen as he is delegated to the wings of the historical theater, to the extreme left. He is as anonymous in his pure profile as is the courtier represented full body from the back but he differs from the courtier in that the beholder does not show, but looks at what is happening in the center, an eye sighting the royal event, reproducing — but from the edge of the scene — the king's profile being reflected at the scene's center: identification by transformation and substitution of the subject and the monarch, but with an absolute difference. In any case another identification takes place this time, hierarchically superior, which, through figuration, brings about the concurrence of the structures of political power and artistic representation, because in going from the king's profile in reflection to his subject's profile half hidden in the wings and

passing through the faces of the two actors and the back of the third, the process is shown by which the perspective device which constructs depth on a surface, and the figural arrangement in a frieze from which the king's narrative spreads out on a historic stage are articulated in the representation.

It is thus that these four figures carefully "coupled" between them and in the general apparatus of representation, by gesture and look, simultaneously introduce the beholder of the royal scene and "champion" it to him, showing him what he must see, with whom he must identify himself while situating him at an unbridgeable distance from the latter, while forbidding him to forget his position and rank in relation to him. By their gestures and looks, by their poses and behaviors, by their placement on the stage and their contrasted presentations, these four figures represent thus the operation itself of the apparatus of representation, because while being the actors on stage and characters in the narrative, they are entrusted with showing the processes by which the apparatus justifies by right and authorizes in truth the narration of a monarchical act.

Therefore these figures characteristic of a classical history painting, gesture and look, the pointing gesture and the look of contemplation, have the practical function, ambiguous but essential, of linking together, in the complicity of an esthetic, a theory and politics of representation.

Translated from the French by
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Notes and References

1. S.V. Corps (sémiotique du) in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Paris.
2. S.V. Figure in Littré. *Dictionnaire de la langue française.*
3. Quintilien, *Institution Oratoire*, Book XI, chap. III.
4. C.S. Peirce, *Ecrits sur le signe*, assembled, translated and commented by G. Deledalle, Seuil, Paris, 1978, p. 147–165.
5. R. Jakobson, *Essais de linguistique générale*, Fr. trans. by Nicolas Ruwet, Minuit, Paris, 1963, p. 216.
6. Leon Battista Alberti, *Della Pittura*, Eng. trans., introduction and notes by John R. Spencer, Yale U.P., New Haven, Conn. 1970.
7. *Id.*, p. 72 and n. 36, p. 123.
8. *Id.*, p. 77
9. *Id.*, p. 78.
10. *Logique de Port-Royal*, 5th ed. Despres, Paris, 1683, chap. IV, Ist part, p. 56.
11. N. Poussin, *Correspondance*, ed. Ch. Jouanny, Paris, Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français, vol. V, p. 21.
12. Félibien, *Memoires*, Actes du colloque Nicolas Poussin, Paris, 1960, vol. II, J. Thuillier, *Pour un Corpus Poussinianum*, p. 80 and following.
13. We know that in particular for Alberti that "we painters who wish to show the movements of the soul by movements of the body are concerned solely with the movement of change of place. Anything which moves its place can do it in seven ways: up, the first, down the second; to the right, the third; to the left, the fourth; in depth moving closer and then away and the seventh going around."
14. Cf. Louis Marin, *Détruire la peinture*, Galilée, Paris, 1977, p. 43–44.

15. Fénelon, *Dialogues des Morts, Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, 1823, vol. XIX, p. 342–343.
16. See also the meaning of the term in the dedicatory preface and exam in Corneille's *Illusion comique*: a strange monstre . . . a bizarre and extravagant invention . . . a mixture of a prologue, an imperfect comedy and a tragedy whose totality makes a comedy" which aims to question the limits between fiction and reality.
17. E. Benveniste, *Problemes de linguistique générale*, I, Gallimard, Paris, 1966, p. 253.
18. *Id.*, p. 253.
19. L.B. Alberti, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
20. Alberti English editor, John R. Spencer, p. 26.
21. R. Jakobson, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
22. E. Benveniste, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

22a. Cf. S. Alpers, "Interpretation without Representation" *Representations*, I, 1, U.C. Press, Feb. 1983, p. 37.

23. Cf. concerning this subject Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality, Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, University of California Press, 1980.
24. N. Poussin, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
25. Descartes., *Les passions de l'âme*, Paris 1649, art. 1 and 2, art. 27 and fol.
26. N. Poussin, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
27. This scene is frequently represented in the visual arts of antiquity and again from the beginning of the XVIth century. The most often however, is the young woman's father who, starving, is thus saved from death. The two versions of the anecdote are recounted by Valere Maxime in his collection of examples in the chapter devoted to filial piety, Valerii Maximi, *Dictorum factorumque memorabilium libri IX*, Anvers, 1614. Concerning the motif of the "Caritas Romana" see W. Deonna, "La légende de Pero et Micon et l'allaitement symbolique," *Latomus*, 13 (1954), p. 140–166 and 356–375; E. Knauer, "Caritas Roman," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 6 (1964), p. 9–23, A. Pigler, *Barockthemen*, vol. II, Budapest, 1974.
28. F. Thurleman, "La fonction de l'admiration dans l'esthétique du XVIIème," unpublished, Zurich.
29. Descartes, *Les passions de l'âme*, art. 53. L'admiration: "Lorsque la première rencontre de quelque objet nous surprend et que nous le jugeons être nouveau ou fort différent de ce que nous connaissions auparavant ou bien de ce que nous supposions qu'il devait être, cela fait que nous l'admirons . . . l'admiration est la première de toutes les passions et elle n'a point de contraire." Art. 70: De l'admiration, sa définition et sa cause et le art. 71 à 78 où l'on notera en particulier (art. 71) que "cette passion a cela de particulier qu'on ne remarque point qu'elle soit accompagnée d'aucun changement qui arrive dans le coeur et dans le sang ainsi que les autres passions," car n'ayant pour objet que la connaissance de la chose qu'on admire, elle n'a de rapport qu'avec le cerveau.
30. The encounter of the kings of France and Spain on the isle of Faisants on the border between France and Spain on the 6th of June, 1660. Cf. *L'Histoire du Roy*, by Daniel Meyer, Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1980, pp. 21–28.
31. Pascal, *Pensées*, n. 72 (ed. Brunschwicg).
32. Grammatically, this "I" is a simple point in the morphological system, and pragmatically a simple position of locution without any ontological quality. This remark is epistemologically and methodologically important in avoiding all confusion among the fields of grammar, discourse and philosophy. But it must not forbid access to other areas of research aiming in particular at uses historically and ideologically determined of the forms of language. Cf. E. Benveniste, *op. cit.*, pp. 251–257.
33. Cf. L. Marin, *Le portrait du Roi*, Minuit, Paris, 1981.
34. N. Poussin, *op. cit.*, p. 462.

FIGURE 1 The Israelites gathering the Manna, c. 1637, Louvre, Paris.

FIGURE 2 Philip IV and Louis XIV meet on the Ile des Faisans.