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#### LIGHT AND ITS PREY

[La Lumière et la proie: Anatomies d'une figure religieuse, Le Corrège 1526.]

"Light and Its Prey" is a complete translation of a 1980 book which was originally conceived and commissioned in 1979 as the commentary for a film by Thierry Kunzel's workshop. The film was to have been directed by Philippe Grandrieux, but the was in fact never made. However Schefer's commentary on one of Correggio's paintings, The Mystical Union (1526), remains a powerful instance of his mode of analysis or of reading. The painting, which hangs in the Louvre in Paris. consists of central grouping in which the Virgin and the infant Jesus are visually joined along with Saint Sebastian and Saint Catherine; in the background are indistinct renderings of the martyrdoms of these latter two figures.

"Light and Its Prey" begins with a usefully overt discussion of Schefer's particular mode of approaching and writing about painting. In a sense the problem Schefer sets out to solve is exactly around the title of the painting. That is, Schefer's work will question both the putative <u>unity</u> not only of the picture's topic and structure, but also of any analysis. In that sense this text enacts in writing Schefer's understanding of the process of spectatorship which in his view always registers a certain tension between spectator and painting. Here the tension is not only topical (to do with the painting's proposition of a unity in its meaning and figuration), nor simply structural (to do with the painting's organization and representation), but also procedural (to do with the painting's interpretation or the process of its being viewed and read). The analysis therefore proceeds, not according to any of its supposed or desired unities, but by "anatomizing" the picture to the time of what Schefer calls a "diastolic rhythm which provokes the arrival of wisps of words, scraps of reasoning or memories." These "arrivals" are in a sense the experience which the picture's union or unity cannot control.

So Schefer sets himself the task, as spectator, of as it were entering the picture and of finding the gaps in the overarching proposition of unity that the picture would proffer. The gambit is to pay attention first of all to the picture's periphery—the somewhat indistinct bodies and objects in the background which constitute what Schefer calls a first approach to the visible. These will constitute in Schefer's reading points of entry into the picture for the spectator. More specifically and as the text progresses these "openings" come to be understood as the unstable figuration of the obscene (etymologically, that which is "off-scene"); that is, these are the registration of the animal and paradoxical body that cannot quite accede to the shining and sacred scene occupied by the central grouping. The painting is construed for Schefer, then, around such tensions as those between the obscene and the sublime, pagan and Christian mysticism, the primitive body and the divine body, the scene and its borders.

A central question in all this concerns the place of the spectator in the picture and the spectator's experience in and of the picture. The proposition whose truth the book tries to demonstrate is that the painting opens up onto a world which depends upon it but which it cannot control. That world is the world of the spectator's experience as subject of both memory and of the painting's ideological solicitation, and the paradoxical experience of it is what this book attempts to render by reading the picture's multifarious "anatomies."

Such a brief summary of how Schefer approaches this picture can, of course, neither do justice to the complexity and texture of his writing of that experience, nor take stock of the often surprising conclusions he comes to. Suffice it to say that "Light and Its Prey" has been chosen to be translated in its entirety because it provides a powerful instance of what it might mean for the reader to experience the experience that Schefer is pointing to.

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#### introduction

A painting in a museum is reduced to a few minutes of writing. In that way it's described, commented upon, or indifferently looked at against the grain.

Yet a text isn't the master of its object--nor can any object in the world constitute a pretext; a text is organized primarily by imaginary durations (that is, by an invention of time) from which the signification of objects consequently arises.

The text is ultimately constituted only by inventing the duration of a world that we call imaginary because it can act as the model and the sounding board for every universe still possible.

So the present text doesn't exactly describe a picture. This picture (Correggio's <u>Mystical Union</u>), isn't my text's pretext, and it won't be able to either guarantee or annul my text in the long run--the only possibility is that the picture might be able to invent the text.

A text isn't a system of lines and points. Although it's materially composed of figures, it can't be essentially reduced to geometric forms: so it's in its nature or in its destiny to be heard but not seen.

So the text's vocation (or its nature? its function?) is to make heard what's not seen: or else, because it's a hidden thing or a thing constructed in such a way that it remains constantly invisible.

But if it makes heard something that cannot be seen, it replaces that invisible body by ephemeral constructions that constitute our imagination (they're

ephemeral because nothing, no surface, holds them down, and no geometry allows them all to survive together).

Or else it's because the text is indefeasibly attached to making invisible what it designates, and to contaminating it with an entirely other space (I'd even say, contaminating the whole world with the results of a theoretical physics which hasn't as yet been formulated).

This text isn't written in fragments but rather it's written to the time of openings—the openings of an eye, of a camera, or more accurately of a ring that has no apparatus, a sort of isolated ring beating alone, dilating and closing upon the parts of a picture, as if this were an organ without lids and living without a body, an eye that effects writing and upon which writing presses with an unseen hand.

So each of these openings, each passage of light onto figures, marks a tiny experimental night, and in their turn such nocturnal fictions take on different durations only by dint of writing.

I know only this, however: this organ, this eye, is subject to a diastolic rhythm which provokes the arrival of wisps of words, scraps of reasoning or memories. It's constituted in that alone, and it regularly closes up as if to expel something that it would fatal to be filled with, and as if it were constantly necessary to regurgitate something that makes every vista impossible. All I know, then, is this succession and this accelerated alternation of nights in between these movements of the eye--so I know that the creatures in the painting are just asleep, they're cohabiting there, stretching out to their fullest extent, unconstrained, like a maiden spending the night in her chambers.

## golden legend

Correggio's painting represents the mystical union of Saint Catherine with Christ, who is represented as an infant, under the gaze of Saint Sebastian and celebrated by the Virgin Mary.

In Saint Catherine we recognize Catherine of Alexandria, whose life is reported by Jacobus de Voragine in <u>The Golden Legend</u>. Her exemplary life--which is inimitable because its every event, miraculously, constitutes an encounter between the poor girl and the sacred or something that's already bigger than she is. This legendary life is divided into tableaux.

Saint Sebastian, the Roman archer who lived elsewhere and at another time, doesn't appear in this particular story.

#### Catherine:

Catherine comes from <u>catha</u>, total, and <u>ruina</u>, ruin; for the edifice of the Devil was wholly destroyed in her. The edifice of pride was destroyed by her humility, the edifice of carnal lust by her virginity, and the edifice of worldly greed by her contempt of worldly goods. Or Catherine is the same as <u>catenula</u>, a chain; for of her good works she fashioned a chain, whereby she ascended to Heaven....

# sterling examples

'I am Catherine, the only daughter of King Costus. But, albeit born to the purple and not ill instructed in the liberal learning, I have spurned all these things, and taken refuge in Our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the gods whom you adore can aid neither you nor others....'

'I see,' said the king, 'that thou disposest to ensnare us with thy pestilential cunning....'

Then, seeing that he was no match for her wisdom, the Caesar secretly sent letters.....Hence fifty orators gathered together from the various provinces; and these surpassed all mortal men in every earthly wisdom.... [Caesar said to them]: 'There is among us a maiden of incomparable sense and prudence, who refutes all our wise men, and affirms that all our gods are demons. If you master her arguments, you will return to your lands laden with honours!....'

When therefore she stood in the presence of the orators, she said to the emperor: 'By what justice didst thou set fifty orators against one maiden, promising them rewards, while thou compellest me to fight without hope of guerdon? But my reward shall be my Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the hope and the crown of those who fight for Him!' Then, when the orators asserted that it was impossible that God should become man or should suffer, the virgin showed that this had been predicted even by the Gentiles. For Plato had spoken of a god who is a circle but wounded, and the Sibyl had said: 'Happy that God Who will hang from a high tree!....'

Then the king was called to another part of the province to deal with certain impending cases, and the queen, inflamed with love, hastened at midnight to the virgin's prison, with

Porphyrius the captain of the soldiers. When she entered, she saw the cell filled with indescribable brightness, and the angels salving the virgin's wounds.....'

[Later, Catherine speaks to the Emperor]: 'Whatever torments thou canst devise,' she said, 'delay them not, for I desire to offer my flesh and blood to Christ, as He also offered Himself for me. He in sooth is my God, my Lover, my Shepherd, and my only Spouse.'

Thereupon a certain prefect commended the following plan to the furious king: in three days four wheels, studded with iron saws and sharp nails, should be made ready, and by this horrible device the virgin should be cut to pieces, that the sight of so dreadful a death might deter the other Christians. It was further ordered that two of the wheels should revolve in one direction, and two be driven in the opposite direction, so that grinding and drawing her at once, they might crush and devour her. But when the engine was completed, the virgin prayed the Lord that for the praise of His name and for the conversion of the people who stood by, the machine might fall to pieces. And instantly an angel of the Lord struck the monstrous mill, and broke it apart with such violence that four thousand pagans were killed by its collapse.....

She was therefore sentenced to be beheaded. And when she was led out to the place of execution, she raised her eyes to Heaven, and prayed, saying: 'O hope and salvation of them that believe,

O honour and glory of virgins! Jesus, good King, I implore Thee...'

And a voice answered her: 'Come, My beloved, My spouse, behold the door of Heaven is opened to thee.....' And when her head was cut off, milk gushed forth from her body instead of blood..... And from her bones an oil issues continually, which strengthens the limbs of the weak. Catherine suffered under the tyrant Maxentius, or Maximinus, who began to reign in the year of the Lord, 310.

It is said that a certain monk of Rouen betook himself to Mount Sinai, and there abode for seven years, devoting himself to the service of Saint Catherine. When this monk prayed earnestly that he might be made worthy to possess a relic of her body, suddenly one of the fingers broke off from her hand.....

She had the mathematical in her contempt of earthly things; for, according to Boethius, this science speculates upon abstract forms without matter. This Saint Catherine had...<sup>1</sup>

Now, if 'Plato had spoken of a god who is a circle but wounded,' is that a matter of geometry or of melancholy?

At any rate, that's what one tradition tells us, the testimony of an unknown witness. We can suppose the witness to be imaginary or to have been, by some trick, Saint Sebastian himself: the torments of this maiden on the wheel would have compensated him for his own long torture or for the infection of his body by innumerable arrows, or for his being hit by the miraculous shrapnel from the angel's breaking the wheel in the course of the first failed and bloody attempt at executing

Catherine: 4000 shards of iron and wood. According to Sebastian's testimony, Catherine of Alexandria would have lost her head after such goings on....

prologue

Someone other than the one who looks is doing the writing, or is describing this picture to him, ceaselessly and inexactly. So this is the scene: someone is looking and someone else is speaking in his ear or using his back as a support for writing.

It's not a matter of knowing what the picture is, but what the duration of looking implies. For example, passing into mobile points which are not precisely figured in the picture; passing, therefore, into an imagination of those points. And it's a question again of knowing, if he turns away after every page, what colour the spectator's back is.

Perhaps he can see something else here, without doubt, insofar as he's writing this entertainment in capricious moods. And yet, insofar as it exists, I don't like this painting.

All I retain from it is the part that points towards another world, its hardened milk, or its quantities of dust.

Its huge bent figures and this curdled milk, that ignoble pink child.

And this scribe on my back is maybe not the <u>most</u> improbable denizen of the picture: the one who's speaking has perhaps not even seen the picture, nor imagined it--perhaps he drew it himself, quickly, in a quarter of an hour, in a single night.

So it's rather--and because of this double spectator--the animation of a generalized anatomy or its scenario: how long, for example, does a visit to the museum last?

We always speak to someone as we look at paintings; meaning what?-that we simply make someone a witness to our safeguarded look. But between the
spectator and the scribe the fiction of a blind dictation is maintained; so we're not so sure
of keeping our look safe from sleep. So then, what does the pedagogue do with all that?

I didn't choose this picture (this piece of writing was commissioned); besides, it's sublime. There is--I don't know how to say it--a whole internal periphery of objects floating around in it, bringing about indistinct, enigmatic, and misshapen edges almost everywhere in the picture: a sort of proof of the view or of the distance at which, alongside the painted characters, the visible subsists for us in its quantity and in the latent or expended force of the figures. The larger figures in the picture--those that play like the light--are bordered by unfinished or indistinct bodies. Bordered by a primitive blurring of (the first effort at) the whole species of the visible which, if the space were turned around, would replace the world with monsters, or with the hell that the sublime hides.

Sublime or decidedly obscene. Those sketches placed in the picture, like a world turning itself inside out, like thoughts in the back of the painter's mind, are like animals trying to participate in the same figurative space, intent on contradiction or upon removing the ridiculous from the shadows (a shadow is an inimitable body) and depositing it in the sacred.

So there's this continual assault on the larger forms, on the miracle of their light, on their world that's illuminated by two stars, two moons, two suns simultaneously--an assault that's all the more consistent if in the shadow a demon appears attached to each figure; and the result of this assault is the constant whispering

of all the remains of the visible that the picture gazes at in us. And incites us to regard the monster there where it improbably resides. Meaning where?--the place that we ourselves would occupy in the painting. As if the return of our abhorrence at what we love were imperiously leading us here.

The obscene--in the instance of our gaze that's realized here--is added to the sublime by way of our presence. The sublime of this painting, or of this scene which abducts the painting, like the rape of Ganymede, suppresses the entire object that a desire encumbers, and is thus infinitely aggravated by the weight of invisible things or of the not altogether painted things that we add to it.

So we add our probable enigma here; that's to say, the invisible quantity, in all its irony, that attaches to us and that always interrupts the ascent or arrests the very flight of an arrow that might carry us somewhere else. Exactly there where in our constancy and impertinent laughter we can't reach, there where death doesn't exist (there where, because of death's absence, the lineaments of faces are stellar orbs).

The shuddering of the painting leads us, on the contrary, to where the genius of Correggio contrives both to figure and to weigh those inverted faces that will come to disfigure the saintliness of every scene in its suspended light, in its duration, in its desire for limpidity.

Those unfinished figures fill in all the gaps of this mystical scene. They immediately signal the place where we live, the species that we can't leave: the very certain mud of all light. So it is that all our active life passes by in the application of this darkness, in these holes, alongside the most sublime desires, that's to say, alongside a sanctification of death.

Now such a face, or its light, such a vanquished hand: something in me turns me away therefore from what I can't always be.

Alluding to this gravity and to this unhappiness without which we would be already shooting stars or extinguished spheres in eternity, out of fear.

The effect of the picture is to produce something that our gaze or our normally active sight could never give birth to within us. Casting our eyes around us, it's not invisible objects that we encounter (this is the mysterious default of transparent bodies--that is, of bodies beneath bodies and which impart continuity to the world--that classical optics corrected with its theoretical hypotheses). So the picture dries up the possibility of a visible that is finally, "after all," empirical. These flat universes of colour, of figures, zones without movement in which the autonomy of the world is primarily the simultaneity of all its parts, are thus not quite laid out for a human gaze.

This is still a new experience, that of seeing in our ways of looking a slow growth in the quantity of objects or indistinct zones that constitute the edges of every figure. This growth of indiscernible things doesn't bring back the idea of a moving flow, I don't know what it figures, yet it unleashes an inopportune consciousness of death. So it is, too, that the picture is a paradoxical mirror, that it organizes for us the consumption of a visible that it nonetheless doesn't reflect. So it is that, turned towards it, we're already the whole, momentary consciousness of a universe mutilated by the inexactitude of visible proportions...

Those proportions aren't measurable by compass, nor indeed by our gaze (as if a world reduced to flat figures presupposed optical operations alone, and more elementary ones than in our universe); in these masses of light and darkness that don't reflect any sun, and of which we have no experiential memory except the memory of an impermeably invisible world inside us, these are new emotions surveying these

unmeasured faces: a laugh, the lightest anxiety, the sentiment of the sublime, the despair of such an impossible reflection of time; these take the new measure, so to speak, of the emotional distances and of the sentiments not destined for our world, but which touch off a second picture within us.

This upside down head and this gaze don't move us with their truth, that is, through our memory of having seen them reach daylight, but they do sink down within us as inimitable gestures and immediately lock up this sublime in a world that's determined to remain invisible within us.

And because at the center of ourselves, by way of spot that cannot be demonstrated, this world is not of the world, and because the inimitable gesture, the virgin's tears, the grimaces of a Bacchus, are all proof that we ourselves have been made secret: another time in this closed up pocket within us--and which only confuses their mass--composes an uninhabited world; it's in this world, in crossing the heaven or hell of a memory without experience, that the desire for the sublime, for the obscene, or for the ridiculous, already locates the memory of the inimitable world.

# the world of hair

On a horizon or a blue crepe sky, or a sky of feathers. With Correggio the wind has thus forged this division in the open sky and this invention of mixing fibres in the wind but making them push the limits and release a wad of cotton as if from a tree, or from a head. That's to say, taking hold of the sky, that's thicker here and already engages this fringed material, and pulling it apart with both hands like the edges of a wound.

This is how the wind causes the beginning of the universe: upon the quantity amassed here, which is ever more transparent, and by pulling apart these fibres that are porous to the light.

So, as if through a reflection thrown into the sky and this obscure image and this hair, from a head turned upside down in the trees and, leaves trembling and head and clouds made of skin, almost there in these trees, planted root and branch in reverse on the head of the Virgin, her own head in reverse in Saint Sebastian's forest-through these first nebulous remains of the smoke of the world, and the breeze, and the sky in the place of the water that cuts these stretched fibres in two, it's through all this that Correggio finally casts his eye upon the skin touched by the wind, upon the hair, the trees, the water and mother-of-pearl and the milk of the women's skin. And those mad desires caught like birds, like little branches, like bits of straw in the hair.

Then from the hill an equal mass of leaves becomes thickly detached, the head of the Virgin gets turned around. Thus the sky marks the distance between these two images and further divides these two similar forms, and the red hair in the branches and on the tree trunks strings out the body of Sebastian, catching his arrows.

A quantity of trees and leaves separates the whole incipient universe here by pulling away the caulking of hell, this wool, this powder.

It's a strangely back-to-front image, the image of equal quantities without a site, the oldest form or the lowest form of those colloids, dusts, and fibres that the painter's eye releases. The world of Correggio begins in this way, it begins then by opening up exactly the wrong way round.

Yet these primitive states don't exist anywhere, their place here is unpredictable, their strange transfer of the sky--as if it were just being branded onto the reflection of this tree, this hair. It's here that the painting begins, with this indistinct distancing. It's the pursuit of this paradoxical body--look at it--that finishes painting this whole picture on its skin.

# affirmations

Correggio: "If we consider the wind and the clouds as a world, this world already simulates or manifests the forgetfulness of bodies, and yet it is in this world that all bodies must move."<sup>2</sup>

Heraclitus: "A person in <the> night kindles a light for himself, since his vision has been extinguished. In his sleep he touches that which is dead, though <himself> alive, <and> when awake touches that which sleeps."<sup>3</sup>

This weight on the eyelids is a world of women. In the incipient landscape, or in these first remains of landscape, made of trees, hair and prayers, there's a dream that hasn't yet been worked through, persisting on the retina and turning its back on the initial puzzle of a childhood dream.

A blind child disseminates the stuff of his contradictory dreams. This sibylline monster, this hermaphrodite is then a god who immediately comes to reign over the confusion of his dreams where women's bodies become enlarged. Sebastian, standing up, is distracted by the dream: it's the gaze of a real (its irony) on the accident that the figures guess at, or they grope their closed eyes.

But we cleave to this painted world of figures and colours by way of a single point that subsists in us in this spectacle--not with our whole body, but by way of a single point that beats, that crosses over, that's entirely turned towards this other world.

Two objects and two points

A preliminary sacrilegious hypothesis might propose the infant Jesus as an object of exchange, a homosexual transitional object, a sort of currency between these two women.

But could Saint Sebastian, as delegate for a perforated body, take the place of some other body detached from the real (from the mystical body)?

And why, as with metaphor or crime, assassination, in ancient texts, is nothing perpetrated on these seeming bodies except displaced parts, simulacra not of whole objects but of living parts? And so a character in a mystical scene could ask that question of this object in transition, or more exactly in crime, quite innocently....

So Sebastian is there like an actor backstage watching the union being performed and witnessing the ever so tiny murder in the course of which, unlike in any act of love, the body and the figure (the figure that follows the disappearance of the body by proximity or distancing) nonetheless subsist together (both the lost body and its new face in one figure); but they subsist neither in a gesture, nor in an object, nor (even when it's this to begin with) in a figure ideally reducible to the point where three dimensions meet and cancel themselves out in one figure.

So do we have to find a point that engenders, equally ideally, the entire space of the picture's figures, since one point could annihilate them?

It's a question of the extreme irreducible point where the gesture is a body, a space, a figure. The extreme irreducibility of such a point is its obscenity: it's a point that is neither physical nor geometric; it's the memory of what constitutes movement in any body. But bodies are just as much effected by the reverse memory: the body is a limit to movement. This reversal is infinite.

If the observer steps back far enough, the picture will be reduced to a single point containing all other possible points, etc...This point is immediately the one by which we disappear from the painting.

## disproportions

Linked to the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian and with their backs toward him, the people in the picture here are giants; these characters thus compose a kind of Olympus, they are gods; yet approximately in the middle of all their stomachs they're hiding or holding a god who is smaller than they are.

This god is singularly badly drawn; amongst their thighs that he's still touching he has even smaller thighs: he's carried away by a revelation and by a desire (or curiosity) that's even smaller than he is; the god-child is haunted by the future of a still smaller god, still more of a child, by this hint of a god, or of an adult woman still more miniscule than the child-god, than this dwarf.

This desire has no object to fit it; or no object can measure or contain the very body of the desirer. It closes up this troubled object not as a measure of its power but as a failure of imagination.

So is there a scale here that would invariably have to be gone down? The biggest body holds a smaller object, one that it can make enter itself, this bit of a world that it consumes in its desire, but on condition that the smaller body can look, that is, can pull into itself a lower body, that is, an even more naked and blind bit of the world.

The squalid doll, caught in the gaze of the little god, no longer sees anything. This is a vanquished desire--the final state of a coveted body. The skin of the universe spilt onto a hand.

Thus the Virgin, Catherine, the infant Jesus, the ageless doll: where, then, in this chain and this scale does endless desire reside? where is it extinguished, that

is, where is its ecstasy and its fulfillment? what is Saint Sebastian doing here unless he's obliquely enjoying all the innocence of such a crime?

The last child in the picture, appearing as such only because he is the ultimate object of a disproportionate appetite, of an appetite that is nonetheless only that of an object finally residing in a look; this infant without a face is no god, and moreover he's forever vanishing.

But isn't it the case that, beneath this ultimate figure, by way of this body beyond all bodies and yet more naked than any other, a figure begins within the picture?

And isn't that the case because the hand of a painter (in Correggio's time) approaches a mirror like this one and deposits upon its simple image a pose, a gesture, a hint of a resemblance, because some other body will have to emerge from the captive desire of this figure, monstrous only because it's beginning and thus taking shape in body and face, will have to emerge and surround its first reflection and its image of the very gods who annihilate it, hold it, desire it, and then in their turn lose themselves in it?

Is the picture divided as a scene of the different actions that it figures? Alongside the very slow movement of the mystical union (very slow or else constituted by halts at the different stages of movement which deliver or invent bodies), there's this lively and piercing gaze, and also the whole pointed figure of Saint Sebastian. In a single moment he precipitates--like some kind of witness to an endless, tension-free orgasm-this slowed down action that constitutes the center of the picture. But even more, caught up in those clouds of branches, leaves, and hair, its speed forever slowed, the martyrdom of Sebastian delivers a lightning bolt, a glow of sulphur, to the back of the picture.

So beneath the Virgin's lowered gaze, at exactly that moment, is the martyrdom of Catherine solidifying something like a cone and this pyramid, and the sheaf of arrows, thrown in the wink of an eye?

Beyond this division of time, what is it that's initially divided in the picture? Is it figures, forms more primitive than figures, colours? What, then, is the most fundamental body here (the one from which the whole picture could be engendered)?

The existence or the hypothesis of such a body (primary, elemental) is almost confirmed by the presence in the middle of the picture (and at the center of the the manipulation of the visible, of all the tokens of the visible, by the different characters) the presence of a figure that seems to attain a final state, an almost vanquished state of figuration—or if you prefer, a paradoxical state of resemblance construed upon these forms.

The hand, indeed, the hand onto which alien fingers are grafted, responds to two different scales: as soon as it's broken down, in the sum of its parts this

hand is bigger than a single hand; a body is hidden within it--at rest or abandoned; this body is therefore smaller than the figure of the hand that contains it; but if, in addition to its stomach, its thighs, its swinging legs, this body had a head and some hands, those hands would in turn be the smallest detail of the picture. So as soon as one sees this body, it has to be able to grow bigger than the hand upon which it rests; for the child looking at it, then, it must immediately be the most complete body, or the most naked, decapitated, and amputated body, or a body simply sketched out in a look; and nonetheless, this unfinished figure must be a finished animal and a complete monster.

So an uncertain body of this kind recalls all the other bodies; thus an unfinished or monstrous figure recalls the definition of all the other figures. But if this little image, if this doll of an image holds all the figures, then in some strange way is it still the biggest?--or maybe the most absolute: this strange doll and obscene simulacrum is, then, the most naked body; it's the only object floating in the characters' view, and this constant anamorphosis (located at the point where three bodies join, where the space also construes this knot of fleshes and skins) is the whole object and is wholly disproportionate to these desires, to these looks. Desires that are unified in one form, that trouble it, while at the same time detaching any verifiable form from it. So something moves, awakens, dies, rolls over and ceaselessly inflates and lifts itself up-within this form that's disengaged and sketched onto another form, like the momentary truth of what a gaze and the weight of a gaze attaches to an object.

But how can the smallest of bodies be the biggest, if it's still only a shred of skin?

Berkeley: "I say you never saw one Body touch. or rather I say I never saw one Body that I could say touch'd this or that other," or this figure alone is immediately a touching; a small violence. And is it not equally a way of painting, within

the painting, so that what's painted can in turn paint what will emerge from the shadows of the picture, and do so indefinitely?

"If you want to know what depth of shadow is best for flesh, project above it the shadow of your finger, and according to whether you want it lighter or darker, bring your finger closer or further away from the painting, then copy this shadow."

But that's still not it: this body, however small it may be, still isn't the size of a dot. So nothing can come of it.

And is the picture divided because something--less than a figure and not yet a form--continues to be divided within it?

## fascination

Let's start again: what fascinates us in the picture is nothing other than the enigma that it puts on scene. What fascinates us in the picture, fascinates its characters. Our gaze is therefore led, and all the looks in the picture finish, stop, and are annulled in the same enigma. This enigma ("why does one indistinct body give account of all the other bodies?") turns us into characters in the picture. So if we're to see this body, do we have to become other characters in the picture? And is that what we call a mise en abyme?

Or rather, why is it that we can only look at the picture like one of its characters? But a character who's supplementary to the scene in the way that Sebastian is.

Or again, why is it that we can open up this space (interrogate it, live in it) only by complementing it, that is, by closing it up behind us and thence participating

in the secret (in the illusion of the secret) that it organizes, the secret that would thus be everything that figuration hides? The painting doesn't exactly explain that; it makes us watch our own enigma. This is the enigma: the visible is what we don't understand, or what constantly agitates a blind spot within us, this blind ray that instantly mortifies all perception. This picture finally paints us, then; it makes us live on the edge of its scene, precariously balanced, our backs entirely up against a shadow that still hasn't been painted. We won't be able to grasp the whole picture unless we lose it entirely.

The characters (and we ourselves) thus look at the picture in different ways: they're not doing anything else (in fact they're looking at Correggio's ultimate trick, the smallest of skins, situated amongst them). The picture is made in such a way that as soon as we discover such a secret we can no longer be anything but one of its characters (the one, precisely, whose turned back hides the painting). One of the characters-does that mean, strictly speaking, another body?

Or that one more hand joins these already crossed hands? Berkeley: "Qu: wt do men mean when they talk of one Body's touching another. I say you never saw one Body touch. or rather I say I never saw one Body that I could say touch'd this or that other. for that if my optiques were improv'd I should see intervalls & other bodies betwixt those wch now seem to touch."<sup>5</sup>

How to have done with all these extra bodies, these intervals between movements, these bodies among themselves, the monster and the weak god who has collapsed on the scene? And how to leave the body through which all the bodies touch each other?

the wrinkles

Let's pretend that this picture is a face: immediately it offers (the horses at the top and their world, that is, the imagination of the states and bodies that they recall) smoother and better illuminated surfaces, declivities, shadow, a multitude of looks (internally, but imposed upon it as well).

It also presents some wrinkles, zones that are more indistinct, very fine grains (or as if such a face had just been constructed from several different ages whose combination endowed it with an expression—as if again the whole picture were a blemish on the skin…). For example, if the painter fills in or illuminates those lines, they become objects or figures. But does this make the picture unstable? Is there something in it then that remains unfinished, not quite fixed, and is the picture then internally drawn towards one particular colour that would efface all other colours? And how, if it's a face (a huge animated face), can it contain so much <u>body</u>? Are the picture's folds thus the only insignificant detail that had to be introduced?

Imagine immediately that one could make an inventory of these folds, these spots, these fibres or these hybrid figures that gravitate in the picture. Or else try to suppress them. What would remain?--perhaps exactly the same picture, that's to say, the same effects. So must the picture remain intact after the subtraction of such a quantity of painting?

Is it again made so as not to move if another painter (if, for example, I myself who already belongs to the division of these visible masses) then started to organize the painted matter in another way?

But in order to see all that, in the shadow of this scene, in the limit of the red and bordering on these folds of red fabric, you have to touch what you guess is there, look, that is, at what wasn't made to be seen, look at what's not in the light and that retains not the slightest particle of whiteness. A black surface, embossed at the Virgin's elbow, is wrinkled or loaded with all the folds of the matter of the picture. Black is nothing but the colour of the most invisible body.

And why is it that, alongside these slick faces, these faces stretched with light, the picture's ageing, its grimace, its usury, its hell, are all collected together into one corner of the picture? There's no expression here and this isn't the effect of a fold in the breeze; it's a wrinkle that's dried out, so it's a sinuosity and a relief that reflects nothing. Like the silent work, rotting in the shade, of bodies that have no colour, that are, strictly speaking, invisible.

A crust of painting that nothing pushes or lifts from the inside? a corner of the portrait of Dorian Gray, abandoned to time? or of the unmanageable model who wouldn't stop moving, or of someone who just had to be <u>the first to look</u>?

Is it possible to imagine lighting this shadow so as to make an object emerge from it? You have to cross immediately to the other edge of the picture--passing across bodies, dresses, knees--to where a hand is resting upon a broken and indistinct wheel that seems to be made of breadcrumbs.

What animates this whole scene, the pearly or transparent flesh, if not the transfer onto those angles of the invisible weight, of what subsists as a pure quantity of painting, entirely impregnated or loaded with the invisible body's colour?

Yet if you make those uncertain traits disappear, the two women in the picture continue to play; they send light to each other, from one face to another, and one of them collapses.

Correggio's two tricks

Vasari: Correggio's trick is in his way of painting hair (that is, painting the very matter of painting, and painting a body without the support of a body).

Berenson: Correggio's trick is his lack of depth. He discovered how to paint surfaces; and, painting the surface of the picture's characters, he obviously painted their skin, giving it life, that's to say, colour, and iridescence--breath. The sensuality of the women in Correggio's religious paintings allows for a Jesuit marriage: "I then understood why his sacred subjects could not please, for he had no interest in the male figures, and as to the female figures, the charm of femininity, mixing with the expression imposed by the religious motive, resulted in that insincerity which closely anticipates, if it be not already an embodiment of what in painting we call Jesuitism--and quite rightly, for the jesuits always traded upon human weakness, and ended by marrying sensuality to Faith."

That hand is still the ultimate character in this painted world (the index of an additional charm, thus: hair, skin, hands and clouds--these are what apparently constitute the whole anatomy for Correggio. But this hand is equally the first character in the picture.

A hand could touch all those "signs" in Correggio (it's also his only imaginative trick): lift up, wave the hair, brush the skin: so the picture is the unification and the ideal animation of the elements of a body that touches itself through those parts.

So the hand isn't yet a figure, but it's already a character; it's a covering; it's a fetish for the painter. But if a hybrid figure like this were seen in isolation, wouldn't it appear completely monstrous?

It's first of all detached from any body to which it could have been related. We've seen that a figure is founded here on these fingers (and this new form is the result of the contact of several bodies-- Berkeley: "I say you never saw one Body

touch. or rather I say I never saw one Body that I could say touch'd this or that other," unless you can see, perceiving the spaces in this contact, the body that emerges from amongst bodies that seem to be touching). Or that forms pass into one another according to the cinematographic technique of the dissolve.

But if this hand were in some way independent and took on a life of its own, crawling, moving, grabbing at other prehensile and tactile members which stop it from getting away quickly or directly, wouldn't it look like a spider, a hairless one, or perhaps some sort of crab without a shell?

We've been imagining a union between Saint Catherine and the infant-god. But what's this crab doing there in between them?

### omens of death

Bit by bit, a second picture begins to appear, almost imperceptibly, like a star, within the first (and looks at it from the inside), and it's made by punctuating the space or the scene with signs of death.

That, for example, is what seems to survive from the mystical spectacle of Saint Sebastian, or it's the consequence of his contemplating those fingers, his burning gaze (and his mutilation is offered as a discreet sign of his renunciation)--and perhaps it's what's present too where the picture produces this enormous efflorescence, where this flattened body is wounded by displacing itself: distractedly playing with his arrows and anesthetized by what he's looking at over Catherine's shoulder--at the same time as his tunic places the figure of a lion on the Virgin's neck, he pricks his finger and bleeds, and his bloodied finger, this blood that flows, intensifies the picture's unsteadiness from his tight angle. And those signs intensify his expiatory destiny, over which the Virgin rules.

The flesh tones also mark a passage towards a dead body: the child-god 's pink flesh (framed by the red of his mother's dress); Catherine's yellow waxiness (in her cloak and her dress, the approximate result of these two colors), as if she were anemic, and imperceptibly approaching the green of her cloak; the celluloid pinkish-yellow of the doll (the other fingers sticking to this figure are almost a bloody pink); a balance amongst the flesh colour on the Virgin (frozen flesh), the red in the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, and the white (albumen) in the martyrdom of Catherine (treated thus in glair or egg-white). And then Sebastian's pinched ear, his whole face inflamed.

The Virgin's profile, on her hair, is drawn by a crest or a light garland, leaves or weeds, a crest, very pale. Almost invisible.

The fleshes or the skin tones are captured in that way, as soon as some whiteness is added to them or the light falls upon them, as soon as a <u>lustre</u> appears in the skin's humidity, in the tension with which a body, otherwise controlled by its muscles, can endow them, the extreme tautness to which it can continue to stretch them; in a force of extenuation. At the end of a finger, then, the skin changes from the milkiness at the edges of the corpse and the bleeding meat to the greasy yellow of the hem. Rome used to imagine likewise that in palour there was a god and a plague that brought only whiteness and killed the last living being--that is, the inimitable body-with darkness. The body that the desire for light continually extenuates here--the body that, as Saint Catherine dies, is astounded by the consistency of her paleness and by her cries beneath the blows of the living and the dead ("because his unhappy memory causes memory to kill him"); because the machine's annihilation, when a wheel crushes her flesh against iron teeth, persists in her as the annihilation of the price put upon her torment, and because this broken wheel formidably produces in her the desire for this cruelly extinguished passion; so she endlessly succumbs only to the remnant of a life devoted to the memory of dying, only to this broken wheel that bends her over backwards; and, falling beneath the redoubled blows of the continuing massacre, she collapses into this deeper or more yellowish whiteness, and consequently her hand can no longer point to anyone.

The machine or the disk that, as it turns, pales or discolors faces, for example, is driving the mill, grain by grain, that bites into the saint's back and throws her into a perpetual swoon.

eyes closed

So the upper parts of the picture represent the Virgin's double consciousness: the martyrdom of Sebastian is attached to her hair, the martyrdom of Catherine to her closed eyelids.

Her hands join other hands, or close up the distance between bodies, annul that distance by way of an added sign, a sign that all the characters inhabit, desire, and through which they are all extenuated in their turn (the mystical union). The Virgin transforms the whole countryside into a destiny of sacrifices.

She is, then, the principal character, not because her face is the smoothest but mainly because all the other bodies pass through her for their annihilation. So is this Sibyl, this Circe, a torturer? She's seated and manipulates, changes, helps the dying Catherine on to her death, helps the androgynous baby on to becoming a dwarf. She doesn't put a stop to their suffering.

The meditation on time that doesn't affect her face allows this blind manipulation to shine in her: time as suffering is the imagination that she endows to all the bodies. (What we have here, just the same, is a confrontation of the two virgins around a dwarf, uniting them in a double portrait). And in the empty invocation of this stella suppliciorum the original meaning of supplicium is genuflection. Sebastian's finger is bloodied by his arrow.

The only scientific explanation to be offered for this physiognomy and of this comportment is indeed that the model who sat for the Virgin was a woman afflicted by deafness; thus, deaf before being virginal?

Sebastian, for his double torment (his place as witness, his pricked finger, his martyrdom), and Catherine, for her annihilation, return to that silent meditation or to that deaf graft of a history of the bodies of characters united by the

Virgin. The Church used to say of the Virgin (by the invocation of the <u>virgo crudelis</u>) that through her virginity she had placed in herself, like a fruit of stone, a limit and a kind of milestone, like the fulcrum in the Roman circus, the stone which, stopping generations, simply stops succession in death. So this figure who has placed in herself the stone of sleep for her centuries of dormition is basically deaf to the most elementary supplication. The supplication, releasing the hand of a character who is destined and marked by this abandon, that she should put an end to their torment.

But this death, stopped in the connected effect of generation, is simply radiant: in this figure made up of ecstasy, transport, wounds, and miniaturized massacres--and, doubtless, like a nimbus around man's halting or decelerated disappearance, the disappearance of the race of giants, under the ecstatic gaze of the androgynous dwarf.

time

The background upon which the characters turn their backs can only be imagined as the past rather than the future (the destination) of two of them.

The centre of the picture, the equidistance between the figures or the whole bodily zone framed by this multiple hand, is the point or the pivot around which figures or scenic functions are exchanged and equalized; beneath the gaze of the fingers they become, strictly speaking, indifferent, equidistant from the figure that seals their future.

So this presumes only one action, that is, a sort of perpetual present. The hand that's suspended amongst all the stomachs, casting a shadow on the picture, is less than the sketch of a figure, then. It's a rose of breezes, a rose of action; in this hand made from several different hands--none of which point to anything--a star (of wax, of

flesh or nacre) revolves indefinitely in the same suspension of time for all the characters (who are thus condemned to be able to swap places). As soon as it falls, assuming that it does, it enters the sketch of a child's backside, or slaps it.

The light of the scene corresponds to this circular or null eternity; this light simply revolves, focussing on a ring.

Suppose your fingers are dangling, and are lifted up by other fingers from beneath, and another hand immobilizes this greasy flower, if stumpy fingers are then attached to your palm, you'll not be pointing to any object, any place, any point, any name even. You'll just have to decipher this enigma: how much time did it take to make this composition of nails and skin? All you'll see then will be time, and if it could move, this new hand would show only the time from which all the bodies are equidistant.

### attribution

Who is the infant-god's mother?

"God has made me with child,"

From that point onwards movement begins to decompose: "thus I give my child to god."

A calculation: if Catherine dies or remains hanging near death, then some part of her probably becomes the child of god-Jesus.

This connected reproduction reaches the limit of its possibilities in miniaturized bodies.

We've shown that, in a play of lenses, the body of the infant Jesus could diminish--and, equally, paradoxically grow--to the size of a doll. Proposition: an androgynous being thus has no fixed size, it receives one only by contiguity, by annexation, and in proportion to the object it desires. Thus, this object defines the androgyne as both human and monster, that is, in any case, endows it with some sort of proportion, from which...

### So all this lands up in miniature!

### metamorphoses

Ovid crosses the picture, that is, the sequence of the states of painting in these successive determinations of forms:

The hill, the hair, the trees (the grove and the archers), the suppression of the trees and the hair; the dwarf and the doll: single beardless body.

Metamorphosis enters and works both background and foreground, the depth, as a story (that is, as a sequence of avatars) about the figuration of bodies. A few signs taken from the mystical scene organize a history of figuration in this picture; it's also just a whirlwind of details, like a wind, pilgrims trapped in sand, a light fog or dust in their eyes alongside these Olympian giants, inordinately busy, inordinately seated, majestically perpetrating the extenuation of the smallest one among them. Yet, from that first vibration of heat in a body located amongst a hair, a tree, and its shattering on a star of skin and transfixing those gods, it's like a diagonal ray that finally transpierces the whole picture and, like a trunk or an arrow, even crosses the flesh of the seated bodies.

That hand is only a body (I mean that hand as it's supported beneath the eyes by an invisible stalk), and a body that's simply lost in all these differences of size (so every character is painted according to a scale and with the size proper to it). So is this body taken out of limbo?

In Plutarch, following Ovid, the bodies of the dead are submitted to the work of cutting and weaving for metempsychosis: every anatomy has to be remade for its destiny in eternity, beyond its punishment.

According to its strict scale, the foreground (where this hand, moving in opposite ways--it clenches, moves away from itself, escapes, holds itself back--this hand finally bringing a shadow, and immediately dominating that shadow with its small mass, becoming a unified figure by way of this simple projection), the foreground ought to be the very background of the picture--if such an encumbered character is indeed the furthest away. If it's not over there, then it's the miniature of the picture.

And what if the head of which it's deprived had, for example, already been transferred in effigy to the medallion pinned to Catherine's corsage, in the sketch (ivory or bone coloured) of a death's head, or a moth, a hawkmoth?

So the picture has been composed of geometric relations between paired terms: the virgin and the child, the child and the dwarf, Saint Sebastian and the dwarf, Saint Sebastian and Saint Catherine, and so on...

The picture has further been composed of mathematical points and of chromatic points, colloid or powdery. So we've seen how a body is engendered in two ways starting from a single point, and how in turn such a point is reversible within a body, or in fragments of undrawn material which, as they're added, can become anatomical parts. It's played, then, amongst a point, a body, and bits of dust (smoke, clouds or the imagination of a Brownian motion, of a swarm of coloured grains in the canvas--where we've acted as the hint of <u>one fly too many</u> surveying some of the detail of the figures); it's played, then, as a double hypothesis, both geometric and plastic, somewhere between Ovid and Berkeley.

All these relations, between points or between opposed pairs of characters, come to be figured at an angle to the painted world's centre of gravity: in the middle of the universe, in the middle of the assembly which presides over the ruling of this universe (not over its fate, but over its imminence and over the suspension of its annihilation in the light), the transitional object of all the relations composes a flower of flesh, a blistering, a single smooth finger fixed in fifteen successive positions. This multiple index of time, the hand of supplication, the ignoble body that alone can reside as a complement to the whole apparatus of torment, that is, the way the same SACRED figure, passing constantly from crime to innocence, returns to the eyes of all the larger figures, the return of the only figure that's on bended knee.

But that figure, as you see, has managed to relax the tension (of lust, abandon, hardness, softness, and obscenity --but again, of colour, or light, or shadow), relax the tension that brought all these characters together. So these characters have assembled to produce amongst themselves the very object that unites them, and to see that object deformed and pulled in all directions, pulled towards all sorts of forms by their individual desires (so each of them might be coupled to this image that's drawn according to each of their points of view, that is, drawn at an angle). So this body, in a unified way and on all sides, derives from the broken wheel (the wheel that's always cut off from the quarter of our desire because of the imprescriptible condition that such desire can only be wholly conducted upon this sight), and exists only by virtue of those angles. Fleshing itself out beyond limbo, it can only suppress all those who join with it.

So it's the mystery of a second incarnation that's being played out here, alongside this transfixed infant-god: so the incomplete body incarnates the finality of every figure, that is, its look (or to put it another way, its obverse). So, are all the characters looking at their own naked backs?—they're all contemplating in deep despair the only body that suppresses all of <u>their</u> bodies, the only object that's needed for them to be annihilated: and if that object turns away, and if it turns away without showing anything, then everything has finally to disappear.

But have we forgotten something? some other point among the points? another body, that is, another relation?--every relation, Correggio tells us, is a new body, and that's why the picture, written down in both Berkeley and Ovid, is multiplied in several ways, that is, according to proportions that are <u>extreme opposites</u>.

Have we forgotten to unite this saint to God? have we actually forgotten to talk about the picture's subject?--almost, although this union passes through all the characters, except through the union of the saint and the infant-god. It can't get beyond the Virgin's mediation. Nonetheless, it also can't avoid contact (that is, the body

in the extreme interval of a movement). This contact is Saint Catherine's coma. This contact and this body suppress the object of all the bodies. But this figure suppresses all the figures except the one that becomes scenery: so it effaces the whole picture.

So the question is just a rhetorical one.

If there's no body to resist the duration of the luminous emission of the anamorphosis that prolongs it, that is, no body to resist its contact with the visible, if the picture undoes the picture, if a single one of the figures (and the least clear, the only one that has no iconography) effaces it and eats all the figures because they are in their turn unfinished forms or shams (for example, dressed up), the saint and the god unite only because of this recourse to a form that destroys all forms. In short, because a star or a monster, an incomplete metamorphosis (Ovid corrected by Berkeley or Descartes), is corrupting all the light.

Your question about knowing how to unite a virgin with God has no answer. It gets its response here, rather, in the dormition of the Virgin and in the stone of sleep that the saint in her turn tries to push into her body. It gets the reply that she must die even as she stays awake; she must die because what he loves in her is the very surrender of her death. So, close to indecency, her sin and her banner must survive her as the abandoned body; in this perpetual swoon what must survive is her unrecognized desire to be the absolute other loved only by god. So she keeps on swaying into this future of albumen, ivory, mashed bread, white linen, yellow, moth, hawkmoth, swinging by a finger that has come unlaced from her body.

Your question has no answer, your question effaces the whole picture. It's a rhetorical question that ought to be phrased as follows....

#### measurements

Why unite a virgin with God? and in this god, unite her to which even smaller god that could be figured? To the one that's precisely the smallest, the little finger? to the point, to the dust? or perhaps to the one that's not figured, even if the mystic union might take place once more somewhere behind the picture, on its reverse side? But what if one figure represents within itself the turned and naked back of all the characters? You still can't make anything out on so concentrated a surface, it hides in turn the only--and smallest--picture of a world that you'll ever see, placed at the tip of an inverted cone, an indiscernible point whose perspective is still obstructed by this very confused, concentrated, welded union of naked backs bent over the orifice of that world...

So ask me only this--and the reply is written in books: why and when, perhaps, was it possible to imagine--and for the sake of what addition of an otherwise unavailable blessedness--this union of a virgin with God? And the word "mystic" here: does it mean "mythic," from the word <u>muthos</u> (a fable), or mystery (from <u>musterion</u>: silent history), or is it explained by the offices of the <u>mystes</u>, priests of the perpetual initiation into the hidden things?

Let's try to add more, all the same, one last time, just for the pleasure of the experience.

Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical schemas of the human body are hypothetical combinations: there, anatomically unknown human organs are replaced by animal parts, and thence the physiological world is crawling with grafts, permutations, hypotheses, pigs' snouts grafted onto men, and so in this torture of our species the universe gives off an endless din of bleating and baying. Similarly, the entire organism is

a puzzle made of a woman's body, a human foetus in the uterus of a cow, a dog's larynx...But what has this to do with our picture?

It's that here in the same way the unknown (that is, the unexperienced) anatomy of this coupling is <u>dealt with by guesswork</u> across variations of size. What, for example, is the result--not the act itself, but the result--of this mystical union? If you mathematically express the relation between two anatomical parts as that between two distinct bodies--for example between Catherine's body and her hand turned into a dwarf (and immobilized to that effect)--then a simple proportion results from the difference; so mathematically the infant-god is the androgynous issue possible from such a union.

And what a frightful secret has thus been unleashed, step by step, upon the world of babies.

Another hypothesis still remains.

The coupling of saint Catherine and her hand--or her kind of proportional subtraction--might produce a little woman's body (a term anatomically absent from the picture) facing the infant-Jesus and having the same size: a prepubescent girl, or a female dwarf indeed.

But this anatomical conversion is quite obviously a physiological impossibility; consequently, we can expect nothing from the world of babies.

And so your question has led to completely absurd answers!

spiral
(rapid movement)

Like a dog that won't give suck, the Virgin inflames desires in some unknown (that is, unexperienced) bodies for the pleasure of a spectator. That spectator wounds his finger-like the two cupids of Danae who tease arrows.

The most unexperienced body is both beardless and blind: so it's not offered any kind of spectacle; it's tried out, manipulated, and made to mate with itself.

In the middle of the unfinished circle, this copulation is done by this kind of snail whose spiral shell uncoils in such a way as to describe as it turns the place of each character.

This is how Saint Sebastian gets his revenge.

Correggio dies in 1534, having been born in 1489; his whole life is written on a scroll. He dies of a sudden illness. He would have painted this picture around 1526, and that year he was blessed with a daughter, Caterina Lucrezia: so he would have given the name of the picture to his daughter, the name of his daughter to the picture, and put his daughter in the picture. His daughter was born blind, dumb, and tiny, and she died; that's all written on a scroll.

(transition)

Consequently the subject of the picture doesn't exist. So if that's the case, how can the picture come into existence through the destruction of its subject and its own internal exhaustion? The painted figures look--that's the whole fiction of painting, their definitional visibility. Like bars of soap in Dutch paintings, they can only look indefinitely--if every gaze recentres the imagination of an active visibility surrounding it--or they can sustain the consciousness of a visible residue left by the sudden retreat of their bodies from the field (and the visible grows around you only in an undefined moment of the latency of your whole body); the painted characters would

evaluate the extent of this catchment of images, allowing only premature ghosts to run to its surface. That's to say, a new cohabitation of time in the corruption of images.

## miracle

This is no majesty ruling over this scene, but a sovereign deafness.

The mother of God doesn't hear the cries that accompany the metamorphosis--the suffering of fishes tortured in aquariums.

A hook silently lodging in their flesh, no cry, trapped in the water, impossible to breathe, a cloud of blood in which this tormented body lands up suspended, that is, giving a few spasms.

Thus the silent reign, in this light that's so exactly placed, no dazzle.

Yet the Virgin's closed eye, or her eyelid lowered over the eyeball, the mirage that it locks and holds in, allows another picture to escape or collapse in the grass--a miniscule picture at an angle beneath the moon, seen by closed eyes:

he had executed admirable paintings that one would almost not call mythological so particular were they to him, painted in fidelity to a universe that he carried inside, or that he perhaps saw before him where we would see something quite different whose consciousness had diminished to the point of making it something quite as passive as nature...clouds bleeding in a foretelling of death, mysteriously dark valleys smilingly consecrated and which knew the mystery that they locked away, the sea happy to transport the Argo...a promontory dedicated as a marble temple and finished as a temple, a bird that realizes that it stands for death or inspiration, the serpent/monster conscious of the struggle it engages with the hero, a Muse looking like a traveller, a courtesan as serious as a saint carrying her sin like a badge almost separate from her and as serious as a saint, the hero calm and as extremely gentle as a young girl, his head bare, his body calm, his limpid eyes directing a sword into the flesh of a monster that seems conscious of the struggle in which it engaged against those eyes, his steed a horse with eyes half-closed like a courtesan lazily training her eyeballs beneath her eyelids to admire his trappings, furious horses grinding their teeth and rolling their eyes.

Why his inspiration always made him cultivate, as if he were filled with something more precious than the rest of the world, a certain look, that of a serious woman, with the purity of antique features and with an almost childish expression..."

(As if this page from Proust, down to the last detail, had been destined for Correggio).

#### Ovid's Ovidiana

Descending from his whistling forest, Sebastian--a hedgehog of arrows, or an aged cupid--surveys the massacre from which he has escaped:

With Correggio the wind has thus forged this division in the open sky and this invention of mixing fibres in the wind but making them push the limits and release a wad of cotton as if from a tree, or from a head. That's to say, taking hold of the sky, that's thicker here and already engages this fringed material, and pulling it apart with both hands like the edges of a wound. Leaves trembling and head and clouds made of skin, almost there in these trees, planted root and branch in reverse on the head of the Virgin, like birds, like little branches, like bits of straw in the hair.

And the god Apollo said, "arbor eris:"

'My bride,' he said, 'since you can never be,

At least, sweet laurel, you shall be my tree.'

....On the trunk

He placed his hand and felt beneath the bark

Her heart still beating, held in his embrace

Her branches, pressed his kisses on the wood;
Yet from his kisses still the wood recoiled.
'My lyre, my locks, my quiver you shall wreathe...
So keep your leaves' proud glory ever green.'
Thus spoke the god; the laurel in assent
Inclined her new-made branches and bent down,
Or seemed to bend, her head, her leafy crown.<sup>8</sup>

The stag lay down upon the grass to rest.... There, unaware, with his sharp javelin, Young Cyparissus pierced him in the heart. And as he saw him dying of the wound, So cruel, he resolved to die himself. What words of comfort did not Phoebus give! What warnings not to yield to grief so sore, So ill-proportioned! Still he groaned and begged A last boon from the gods, that he might mourn For evermore. And now, with endless sobs, With lifeblood drained away, his limbs began To take a greenish hue; his hair that curled Down from his snowy brow rose in a crest, A crest of bristles, and as stiffness spread A graceful spire gazed at the starry sky. Apollo groaned and said in sorrow, 'I Shall mourn for you, for others you shall mourn; You shall attend when men with grief are torn.'

Such was the grove the bard assembled. There He sat amid a company of beasts,

A flock of birds....<sup>9</sup>

Thus the sky marks the distance between these two images and further divides these two similar forms. A quantity of trees and leaves separates the whole incipient universe here by pulling away the caulking of hell, this wool. The world of Correggio begins in this way, it begins then to open up exactly the wrong way round.

film

The Virgin, the child's perpetual guardian, is also the guardian of his world, his imagination, or his dreams. She holds sway over time, that is, over proportions (over the little film--the martyrdom of Catherine; and the little theatre--the martyrdom of Sebastian).

So she immobilises in this child a world of covetousness or unassuaged--unfinished--desires.

Are we already justified in imagining a dark intelligence here from which would emerge, under the pressure or the sporadic bursts of lightning, some series of pictures made from the fading of this darkness, or that in flashes of sulphur and magnesium would allow the escape of agile or somber silhouettes, but silhouettes that are younger, more pale, and more untamed than the chaos of images rolling aimlessly around in the middle and the very centre of this spirit that's inhabited by the desire to annul the images awakening within it? Or in imagining here a vampire passion satisfying itself only on those silhouettes that are still black? and that the light consumes grain by grain.

So, is it an interior being, one that has arrived in this fiction, from some sort of wheel of existence that represents a species, a fiction simply anticipating the effects of the cinematograph? a being that is filmed by the Virgin's eye in Correggio's picture.

Illuminated from the inside, the image can no longer be reached except through this impalpable film whose figures are hardly discernible from the vegetation and dust in the background trembling in time with the figures—even though this whole world, moving at the speed of a grain of light, excludes from movement no part of the fattened and clenched objects scanned by these emulsions of photons.

This movement--whose beam is projected in a cone by this eye, enigmatically lowered onto what it contemplates, onto the implacable muteness of its imagination--allows these attenuated bodies that are loaded down by a thick whiteness that absorbs the light for them, allows them to sink or to be worn down for the sake of this miniscule picture.

Emerging haltingly in a parade of images, the scene or the narrow strip of the martyrdom of Catherine assembles, on pale figures and silhouettes of colloid illuminated from one side, in the thickness or the counterweight of a lowered eyelid, assembles only this amorphous and liquid time, this powdery time upon which, beneath the gaze of a lonely eye, these figures seem to run around, and with their hands of dust they touch the shadow or the very time in which every form is extenuated. So the Virgin's eye--even before the light can turn the silhouettes of the martyrdom around--overtakes them in a zone of evaporation. Rolling in a chaos of images and escaping even from the pressure of this jutting forehead, like a star with no memory of colours except the increasing palour of this suddenly returning thought or the soiled spectacle of the martyred saint, the crumbling of a slaughter is perpetrated in front of this face.

And still remaining, like bits of dust dancing in a ray of light, the body of the saint, and the horse, and the rider (who melts over her like a block of gelatine or the forepart emanating from a substance that no sunlight can reach) are transported beyond themselves; they finally function in a place they cannot reach: they encounter a sphere of evaporation, and they enter it. But they all lean away from the eye, and they glutinate, with no light, without any time.

Caught in an incessant exchange, porous, supremely uninhabited, this body is effected only by way of this putrefaction of moments in which a rapid glance can find nothing but an immediately diminished memory, the horror that grows around two bodies frozen at the moment before an ancient crime.

So, by way of an originary extinguishing of colours, the wide angle beneath the eye of the Virgin films the memory of a sacrifice; but if this memory is halted in the perpetual instant before the repetition of the murder, if this moment itself is infinitely repeated, then every figure begins to rot, or is atomized by the return of the unfinished memory, and by this other crumbling where memory no longer consumes anything but the unfinished figure of time.

Or this rough cut film remains, and the incomplete capture of bodies in this corruption of points, corruption of matter without any exception into atoms of light. The apparition of forms from the dimmest of light resembles the sun's primitive writing on a sensitive surface, and in a moment of universal decomposition it also freezes a whole world of light, of shadow, of bodies in an infinity of powdery points. The painter immediately demonstrates that the whole picture rests beneath another light, he rounds off a world that's has no sun.

So the dust walks across a silhouette that's simultaneously black and white.

Forms, caught in an arc of extenuation, walk across a fold of clothing in this snow from which they're made, and they stumble--illuminated in the direction of their steps, or by the moment when memory freezes them once more. The emanation, the thick gas, the return of the scenery amidst the bodies launches this march against stopped time. The horseman merges eternally with the silhouette on its knees that forever crumbles before being struck by the blade. They walk on photons, in the land of the luminous ghost. These subtle bodies trapped in the middle of time can no longer stop the light that crosses them. Simultaneously black and white, they're forever falling under the same moon. The world from which they emerge doesn't reach the sun's orbit; shadow can't follow a body there, it remains within it.

This horse was never anything but a knoll, a pile of earth fashioned without water. Three points disarticulate the physics of this little image: the horse collapses beneath a pile of earth, the rider drives a white standard into this powder, the woman on her knees is opposite a cloud of grass; there is no more complete body to reunite these motions, and so they disappear.

This film reinstalls a scene seen in the supreme paralysis of a memory, fixed on a moment before the horror of yet another murder in the world of the living-and since this sacrifice can't be transfigured and has no place in sacred memory, the palpitation of images is immediately immobilized, they are destroyed only on these white shadows.

If the earth trembles it's because an unstoppable stream of flakes, dusts, and grains cannot be fixed and because, simply, these immaterial souls are shaking the world--an angle opening onto the darkness, before the apparition of any object, as if its speed or the first disorder of its composition had to cross the whole world; as if every object of the world (and in nocturnal imaginings) had a double somewhere in another universe where there's no matter or substance, where the only the space between points

is lines, where an immobile horse crosses the darkness in a seedbed of revolving points, billions of them, photons, grains caught up in a whirlwind over some of the emptiness that's limited only by the mysterious gravitation which closes up a body upon this addition of emptiness; and as if, before getting to the reflection and the collapse of the rider on a protuberance of dirt, and before locking up the images of men in waves of sand, this sand, this horse, and these men were all crouching in a kind of anticipated extenuation of their substance; as if upon this angle opened up by an unknown sun in the path of the luminous ghost, the rapid dance and the flow of atoms and the enigmatic bundle above our heads (that children avoid touching for fear of being reduced to ashes by the light of this unknown world, by the stifled rattle of the projector), as if the horse that's forever falling and the woman eternally on her knees had begun by flying off into the darkness of a million dots; and as if the vermin that infests bodies whose images disappear were attached to those dots.

### scrolls

The larger figures, melding with the smaller ones, the little ones finally indistinguishable from the larger--the child indistinguishable from the adult, because the former entirely takes over the latter's visible power, that is, the aureola of looks for which this mise en scene exists; are these figures hiding something? Aren't they hiding the very logic of the painting, whereby something disappears into a luminous tension and by way of those hands, and because of the forehead of the Virgin that juts out like a star, and this something that disappears is only shadow? Or all the shadow of this light erecting a wall of black cardboard cut out behind the characters? Because, then, the centre of the picture is simply given back, invariably and incessantly, to a species that's

perhaps only the most luminous; given back to this luminous necrosis where a metamorphosis dies, rays of looks, eternal jealousies.

Or are these figures, their skin strained, incessantly charged with just the reliefs of a red material and a yellow material, just to suppress all the shadow that disappears into them?

One figure in the picture is offered as the whole species of the visible only insofar as it stops dissimulating the actual proportions of the visible, that is, the anticipated place of the grand convergence of a geometric world that contradictorily shines from within it.

And these figures, don't they immediately become the delegation of the invisible world that, by means of such colours, is constantly gazing upon the blind spot within us that we can't manage to locate on the canvas, so uncertain remains the splitting by which we're held in the ultimate desire of obscenely recovering these three volumes of the sacred world that comes to us only in fragments? on the Virgin's jutting brow-that's even more prominent because of her lowered eyelids--the body of a child-god, floating in the light of her closed eye, blushes, turns yellow, or is carried off like

Ganymede towards the coma of the saint, and the set of a hand, the handle of a sword, of the same very elongated hand on the broken wheel, but smashed like a soft stone by the suspension of a primitive torment--and that's still revolving behind the saint's eyes and pursuing the god in a fit of haste? But that pursuit exhausts the metamorphoses, or a hook silently lodging in a fish's flesh, no cry, and so this god, huge beneath the lowered eyes, rules by a series of endless swoons, because the decrease that realizes the union of light and body ceaselessly kills the victim in an infinite desire as she offers up the expiation of her vow.

the broken wheel

Have we ever been in this picture?--we're attached to this hand, but attached like a fly; so, this figure, this little invented body, coveted, gazed at and animated from below, like a puppet, is the only speck in the painting where we can put ourselves because in the end it remains incomprehensible. That's why this incomplete body is destined to become our place of residence in the picture. So it's this incompleteness that we have to complement by way of our own incompleteness; so it's this missing or lopped off head that our gaze can't supplement.

So you're here--or you were--so as to add nothing to what's already incomplete. You passed this way in order to add to this albeit finished world the incomprehension of another body within yourself.

But this object that contains all the other objects, that is, the object that contains all the looks and is the limit of the imagination of all desires, doesn't go through us. This tiny or inordinate prey is the picture's highest prize. I mean also, exactly, that this graceful and obscene knot is a prisoner of space.

But why didn't we leave this circle, or the incomplete centre of this circle, or this "wounded circle" of the divinity (or, finally, the shadow of this broken wheel)?

As if they had been pressed into a sphere or as if they just constituted this circle, the characters lean towards the centre at varying angles. But this centre is just the thing that has the power to send them back to the light, that is, back to the eye of their colour.

We <u>are</u> here, in the logic of these turning bodies, the fly or the moth that's stuck to this light, the quarter circle that isn't figured and that could close up this circle and render it invisible; a wall, or a supplementary fragment of the world where time resides and that rounds off the earth.

We can't get out of this hand, nor the long trajectory of the painted faces or the eyes resting on the hand; we can't leave this strange colloquium where we constitute a fifth incredulous gaze--like all the characters, we're incredulous at the identity of the thing we are looking at.

That thing, that's simply the smallest, has just returned us to the perpetual light of this assembly, to this light that's uncrossable only because it's round or still worn on the ring of time. Because, finally, we too turn our back on the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, on his sky, that's to say, on that which is not transparent.

We've only ever been in this picture for a quarter of an uncertainty.

## propositions

Looked at for a long time, the picture irrevocably loses its sublime character; in the incessant sliding of its forms, in the stretching and shortening or the ineluctable escape of its figures, it begins to reflect the corruption of our spirit. So it enters into these images endowed to it by the gaze of this spirit, simply corrupted by the duration of the images within it.

The same thing can't fail to happen if you yourself enter a field of mirrors: "You will see yourself infinitely multiplied, strolling now in the air, now in the deepest pits, then suddenly with two, three, four, five heads and sometimes with mutilated or monstrously deformed limbs.

"If you place yourself in front of a spherical concave mirror, at its centre, your head will appear upside down, your feet will be in the air. If you get closer, your usual face will be seen gigantic and your finger will take on the dimensions of an arm.

"The huge face of Bacchus will show a finger as thick as an arm." (Leonardo, Notebooks)

And then if you leave this world of linked mirrors, the image of your deformed body (the memory of being accompanied by your second monstrous figure) never leaves the picture; it actually explains why you keep looking at it—and why, as you keep searching for a sublime reflection of yourself there, your image returns with mutilated limbs.

The image you see is the figure of the whole. This whole isn't the sum of its parts, but each part of the whole that you look at is a whole image of the universe. And still you can only properly see the detail of the universe transfigured in a mirror: all worldly things are just different tokens of death.

How to paint the distancing of your figure, that is, the depth of shadow; how to add flesh to the image, the colour of the invisible body: "if you want to know what depth of shadow is best for flesh, cast the shadow of your finger above it, and depending on whether you see more light or more dark, put your finger closer or further away, and then copy the shadow" (Leonardo).

Yet, caught between the painting, the shadow and the mirror, suppose your fingers are dangling, and are lifted up by other fingers from beneath, and another hand immobilizes this greasy flower, if stumpy fingers are then attached to your palm, you'll not be pointing to any object, any place, any point, any name even. All you'll see then will be time, and if it could move, this new hand would show only the time from which all the bodies are equidistant. You'll see time, that is, the equidistance of all bodies from the fingeer that you draw close to or pull away from the painting. Yet no point can mark that distance.

The center of the mirror is constituted in a point that's situated nowhere; it's a point that no finger can show. This point is the one from which your second image is engendered; the irreducible extremity of this point is its obscenity; this extremity is neither physical nor geometric: it's the memory of what constitutes movement in all bodies.

And if the observer steps back sufficiently far, the picture is reduced to a single point that contains all possible points. This dot is immediately the one by which we disappear from the picture.

So it's because it isn't a mirror that the picture reflects the corruption of our spirit.

clocks

So we have to find out what this sublime is--a sublime whose power resides in being snatched away. Find out how, stopping all our movement to look at a picture, in the same gesture we fix ourselves alongside death. This sublime is characterized--like time's internal aspiration--by the paradoxical power of being suppressed by its very effect: it makes us enter the consciousness of death. Yet this picture doesn't represent death; rather, it represents the extenuation of the sublime upon a single figure (and this extenuation is an effect of the sublime); from that moment on, the only actor in the painted scene is the half-coma of the saint.

The picture destroys in us the picture's image; and that's no paradox.

So an hour-glass hung beyond time filters the material of the world as if it were time; the grain of mankind is poured out, and the final pile of sand represents

only the abandonment of the most lasting time. No hand feels this powder flowing, no finger touches this image that falls beyond time.

The sublime, then, crosses this circular look and this perpetual convocation of twirling shadows that the figures of the picture look at, obfuscating them rather, one after the other, as on a dial.

And if the image of time begins to turn, one can imagine that in taking body it immediately exposes it to being deformed by time, or it grinds it up. And if time turns on the image of a wheel, the body attached to this time and to this wheel will lose its figure, will feel its limbs being detached.

Thus the filtered time in the hour-glass, the fluid time of the water-clock--since it happens across the destiny of an entire species rather than across a single body--is aware of this archaic return that recalls the mediaeval idea of time's "innards" in the workings of a clock.

So the notion of time and the body that no longer stretches out, no longer filters but simply begins to devour its own mechanical noise and the grinding of its wheels, hasn't managed to become illuminated except by the spectacle of an arc, of cries, a second machine of groans--or by the very idea that a body, slipping into this machine, could write down, in the sequence of beatings and sounds, the moment of its own disappearance, could inscribe exactly the time it takes for an organism to leave not only its image but also this composition of organs in which an animal body can be discerned.

Thus the grid of this time is just this battery of pulleys, wheels, gears, and teeth turning in opposite directions where there's no pointer to record the trace of any of its revolutions; it cannot but consume the creatures that have been abandoned to the experience of time.

So it's a pound of flesh that this primal machine takes, these strange wheels, this hand-powered motor where, like Moloch, a barbarian obstinately flattens, lacerates, and devours the interior of unfinished clocks.

"...In three days four wheels, studded with iron saws and sharp nails, should be made ready, and by this horrible device the virgin should be cut to pieces, that the sight of so dreadful a death might deter the other Christians. It was further ordered that two of the wheels should revolve in one direction, and two be driven in the opposite direction, so that grinding and drawing her at once, they might crush and devour her."

The imagination of time reinstalled upon this machine, and the imagination of a clock measuring just the acceleration of the body's laceration, produce this clock without a pendulum in which a body is accelerated by the effect of its own death and, along with its dangling flesh, loses its entire image. The spoked machine whose iron teeth tear up the most rudimentary time--that which measures the span of human life--is also a machine for tearing up images. So in the grinding of the wheels, pins, and wooden joints, a body disappears: because an even smaller wheel is grinding out all its moments.

A pendulum of flesh is attached to time's torture and, since the machine's motion doesn't impose a sentence on his body that's stretched across this quarter circle, man will aspire to rejoin the geometric image of the god of whom Plato had said: god is a circle but wounded.

The missing quarter, the body curved like a bridge, would be replaced by this soldering of flesh that seals up the image of eternal time.

Or this circle that from now on is open, like a spiraling enticement, demanding of all the bodies in the story an impossible repetition, or this continual flight that invokes in them a despair of being able to stop the motion.

So they say, "Catherine comes from catha, total, and ruina, ruin; for the edifice of the Devil was wholly destroyed in her....Or Catherine is the same as catenula, a chain; for of her good works she fashioned a chain, whereby she ascended to Heaven...."

Yet no body (since the body immediately broken), no geometric figure can remain attached to the fatality of time. Dead parts were inserted into the body and the the image reveals those parts within the composition of bodies.

Thus the spiral of the story never comes back to the same place, and this ring that carries us deposits us next to historical cadavers; in the perfection of this eternal return, we're obliged to be nothing more than phantoms, that is, simply images.

## but a dog

But, lying in a Titian hanging just opposite the Correggio and a bit higher, there's a dog who would see the whole painting in the blink of an eye, in a camber shot, like a long grimace of white and pink skin half hidden by the materials below, and wooded with copse, with branches and grass towards the top. This dog, probably not being able to distinguish all these hairs and fibres, would stare from his wall at the enlargement and the corruption of a lightly pinkened star opposite him; exactly to the right of that enormous frame in front of which visitors conglomerate, shuffling and whispering.<sup>10</sup>

# a dog's story

This dog, having come down from the opposite wall and then crossed the width of the room, sniffed at a young girl lying on a museum bench, and then disappeared with a bound into the picture.

Once he's melted into the picture, the dog then leaves the thickets of the painting, its unclean undergrowth, and the groans of the metamorphoses. He goes back down the wall:

[I] finally succeeded, with the occasional aid of projections in the cliff, in reaching the bottom without accident.

It was some time before I could summon sufficient resolution...but I did at length attempt it. I fastened [a] rope to the bushes, and let myself down rapidly, striving, by the vigour of my movements, to banish the trepidation which I could overcome in no other manner....But presently I found my imagination growing terribly excited by thoughts of the vast depth yet to be descended, and the precarious nature of the pegs and soap-stone holes which were my only support. It was in vain I endeavoured to banish these reflections, and to keep my eyes steadily bent upon the flat surface of the cliff before me....

But now there came a spinning of the brain; a shrill-sounding and phantom voice shrieked within my ears....and, sighing, I sunk down...<sup>11</sup>

This series of anamorphoses, of diversely and necessarily corrupted images, is not perceptibly different from the view that an animal would have of the world in which it defines the spheres of action. So the picture makes inhabit within us, or groan within us, this animal outline that lives on just one part of the world, on just a fringe of colours and shapes that we can see. So that's why the sublime spirit of the painting is at the same time so close to the initially inexplicable terror that it awakens in us. This almost animal awakening within an awareness of a partial world is only the liquid moment, the most submerged moment of such a consciousness: through

corrupted images alone an unfinished part of the world contemplates the universe attached to it, to its shallow perception, to a synthesis of visible objects that gains ground like a blot fatally spreading across the whole portion of space to which it directs its gaze. Where its rolling eyes make it disappear. But in contemplating this mutilated world we are nonetheless subjected to an astral journey across the imaginary circles that distance us from the contemplation of figures, hunting down within us a world that's determined not to become visible.

An animal would, then, leave this world--and if some part of the awareness of the world disappears, then immediately some part of time ceases to live within it; yet another part of the visible breaks away, leaving in its wake a field of ruins, uninhabited strips, or barer surfaces. And if a beast loses his eyes, then all its skin pushes towards the light, and it enters the picture again.

The shard of skin, constantly sustained like a miracle, turns every possible animal into this kind of nervous, weakened being, and both melt into the same figure--the spasm or the convulsion, experienced and prolonged in each of them, depending on the successive states of their movements and actions. A sort of experimental frog, anesthetized upon a table, would thus represent a second incarnation of the god in an unfinished image and a third saintly martyrdom.

Imagine, then, how this sightless body reacts to light. It can't grasp visual space, but the shadow or the disappearance of light would produce the effect of the caress of a ball of cotton wool on its photosensitive skin.

Sightless, this nervous blot can do no more than adjust the rhythm of its palpitations to the modification of luminous intensities, eyes and bodies following these sensory orders, or this dis-order, this change of proportion in slight pains, making them grow, compressing them. And Saint Sebastian, who cannot touch the body attached to him just by his gaze, thus mutilates his fingers.

The painting renders this incomplete world to us as a universe of dogs, of molluscs or nervous cells--this incomplete world where we don't live, where we can't sustain any imagination of our acts for very long. the painting rejects us, then; consequently it's a mirror, parallel to our universe but in spheres a long way away from death, or in the knowledge of the deadly resemblance that delivers us up to images. Or that delivers images up to time.

And this visit to the museum lasts, for example, only for as long as it takes to expose our bodies to the picture's light, during that time these words roll around in an indistinct chaos, like the lightning of the desire to destroy these images.

It's not resemblance that guides us in this picture; it's something else, something more fragile--the allure of our own destruction, incomprehensibly attributed to the picture.

But which of all these points arrests death within us?

We approach on an axis that, the closer we get, imperceptibly deviates and makes us bang our heads against a brick wall. This curved trajectory allows the picture to pass alongside us, so we can't annul it in ourselves as we would any other memory.

The dog, invariably like the counterweight of a clock, rolls down the slippery slopes, catching on to the ledges. A strident cry in his ears had caused him to fall into the darkness.

"....The spot where the hill had fallen. The place was one of singular wildness, and its aspect brought to mind the descriptions given by travellers of those dreary regions marking the site of degraded Babylon."<sup>12</sup>

museum

The topic of the painting is also the story of that other "devotion" evoked by Louis Massignon in his "Preface to the Javanese Letters;" so the painting can be turned away from that mystical element of history. That's why, in another way-unpredictably, but most of all elsewhere and beyond ourselves--it manages to retain something that nonetheless strikes us as an image of the interior life.

#### "The Pact with God"

"Circumcision sanctifies the male organ in the sight of future holy generations; Abraham makes Elijah swear 'on his loins,' when he sends him to the wells of Harran to choose the woman whom his son Isaac will marry. Circumcision is a sacred exposure of the virility of the race (we are aware of the maternal kiss given to the infant's sex, a widespread custom in the lands of the Mediterranean, the "mare nostrum"). Circumcision is tied to the imposition of the Name (known first by the Mother) that will one day will "raise up" the child. Theseider has shown how far, in the unconscious of the purest and most Christian of women, the symbolism of circumcision can carry. The ring in the mystical marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena (1367) was the ring of flesh from the circumcision of Jesus; she recognized thereby her betrothal to the Faith, and her promotion to a masculine and militant role in the dialectical spiritual combat where she would have to defeat men (like Saint Catherine of Alexandria before her). We know that in 1404 Isabeau of Bavaria gave her unfortunate champion, Charles VI, the Goldenes Rössl (now kept at Altotting) in the form of a marvellous piece of Parisian jewellery that it took her twenty years to make, a reproduction (perhaps the oldest) of the mystical marriage of Catherine of Siena to whom she was related by way of the Visconti of Milan. We know, too, that Joan of Arc in her manner meditated upon the example of two

masculinised holy women: Catherine of Alexandria (because of the mystical marriage that turned her into a militant), and Marguerite, alias Pelagia of Antioch (because of her audacious decision to dress in men's clothes for spiritual battle)."<sup>13</sup>

The picture is destroyed, it's already destroyed in the space where it's shown; it's subjected to this noise of shuffling feet passing before it...

The details of the picture are only its deformations, its opposite numbers, the other pictures in the museums, the painted animals hanging opposite it, the coming and going of visitors, the gigantic details of small objects within it, like a skull, for instance, as if it were only ever being dressed up by the painting. But if this object drops into the middle of the museum, it's like the remains of a wind that blows through a hollow bone.

Like the details of that strange copy done by Delacroix: the foreground brusquely disappears, something begins to weigh on the faces, as if they're beginning to realize that someone else has taken away their light.<sup>14</sup>

Since men's last words have always been either incomprehensible—"bread," "light," "again"—or sibylline—"the source will not flow"—theatres have had to suffice as the site for the artificial and lengthy pronouncement of such final, incomprehensible words. The same with museums…except the picture is destroyed. And perhaps at first by means of its image within ourselves.

A museum is also a place for conversation, whispering, confiding, for a stab at aesthetic judgement; like the conversation that follows, for example, or this monologue alongside a friend:

So is it because the picture isn't a mirror that it reflects the corruption of our spirit?

### resemblance

One thing, perhaps, that's striking today when we look at the painting of the 16th century: in the end it's not ourselves that we see in these mirrors; it's a sort of humanity that we might suspect is linked to us in some way, an anatomical resemblance, relations of colour; as if guards had been placed in a circle around the human species to indicate that after or behind them there comes an end, that what we'll see will no longer quite be men. We don't know what we'll see—changing forms or unknown animals. As if the pictures were guarding something, within the historical memory that they constitute: the frontiers of a species that resembled itself for a certain while, and that still cleaves to those frontiers; imagination and memories will never cross those limits beyond which there is, probably, nothing. Or as if these stars were guarding some kind of gateway to the universe....

This is something I've never thought about before, but, we might wonder why these pictures are painted only on one side and why it's the painted side that's turned towards us...And we might reply as follows. The unpainted side of a canvas has its back turned to an unknown world, to uncreated beings, to shapeless animals. So we are there, in the middle of these faces, these pictures, and we grow older as we look at them. But the pictures don't grow older, except in the case of Dorian Gray's portrait: more than the eternal youth of the model, or the horror of growing old that's deposited in that picture, what we feel most acutely there is this suspicion that the picture is becoming porous to the point of shapelessness, that is, to the point of becoming an uncreated world; and if at that moment it reflects the physical and moral corruption of Dorian Gray, it's because he alone can reflect the uncreated world that's within him. So we can imagine replying like that, saying it first to ourselves (silence).

That's what produces the pressure that pushes us to question or to reproduce the fragments of the visible (since obviously there aren't any commercial imperatives that oblige us to do it). Where does such an anxiety come from? isn't it a case of trying to decide whether the history of art is true and, if it is, to find out what it all really resembles? and whether resemblance has by some chance already actually happened in the history of our species? Is it the case that resemblance between a present thing and a thing of the past has already occurred in the history of human kind? So we work to try to find that out, discover something that will tell us about it.

"So the question of growing old is unimportant?"

Yes, and so are the pictures. Aging has no importance in that we're simply there, beyond anything we can do and which might after all give pleasure to someone someday (who knows who); really we're there for nothing. So growing old is not so important within that nothing--though it's fundamental just the same. It's fundamental because we always imagine that it's going to bring us closer to something, to something more important than us--I believe we still haven't found exactly what it was. Is it time that we'll finally resemble?

"And so what did Correggio want to paint?"

The picture was commissioned and so he would have painted what he was told or what was suggested to him. Realistically, he painted what we see there, what we can see. So long as we go in imagining what we see--since we don't see without imagining, that is, without the suggestion of some immobile movement on the part of our bodies: we can't see without this hampered motricity, that makes the colours in front of us move a bit, that changes the shadows a little, because focus isn't possible in such a space--so long as we go in imagining, we'll see what Correggio painted. As much as we solicit this painting, this mise en scene, we'll always see what Correggio painted, forever:

we'll never be able to add to what he painted by adding something else to the picture. That's to say, strangely enough this visible isn't limited; the picture's limit is always we who are looking at it (and who despair of resembling it). We used to talk about "looking at it well or badly," but it's better to say, "a lot or a little"; this is an undefined visible, unsaturated, open. Perhaps that's what painting is good for. Not so much to fix or represent figures without movement or words, mute or immobile figures where the colours don't change or vary with the lighting—a world sheltered from the wind or bad weather—but rather, to represent a world characterized by an indefinite prolongation of the visible itself: the infinite opening of the visible. And its possible opening is us, that is, we're its moments of interpretation. That's why we can recognize, for example, that it's sublime, because it contains what of ourselves we can never add to ourselves.

And yet, in front of the picture, provisionally, we become its law. We can't stop it, or fix it, or rule over it. Which means that it's the picture that adds to me at any given moment. That's why I feel so good when I leave the museum, in Brussels, where I saw this pietà by Rogier van der Wyden, for example; and that lasts for just a moment (silence).

The problem that we can pose is that of knowing whether pictures are mirrors. It's true that they're mirrors, but it's not our figures that they reflect: what they reflect is what we lack. That is, the sublime. That's why the obscene--in which we aren't lacking--is always incomplete in painting.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, <u>The Golden Legend</u> (tr. G.Ryan & H.Ripperger). New York: Longmans (1941), 708-716.

<sup>7</sup> This page from Proust is in fact from the sketches to <u>A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs</u> and the original French (slightly different from what Schefer here transcribes) is to be found in <u>A la Recherche du temps perdu</u> (tome II; Cahier 23, Esquisse LVI). Paris: Pléiade, 968-975. The sketch is for the depiction of Elstir, modeled on Gustave Moreau.

<sup>8</sup> Ovid, Metamorphoses (Book I) (tr. A.D.Melville). Oxford: Oxford Univ. P. (1986), 17-18

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Quotation invented by Schefer.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Heraclitus, <u>Fragments</u> (tr. T.M.Robinson). Toronto: U. of Toronto P. (1987), 23

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Leonardo 2:226 in french version

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> George Berkeley , <u>Philosophical Works</u>. London: Dent (1975), 312

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Bernard Berenson, <u>The Italian Painters of the Renaissance</u>. London: Phaidon (1967), 195-6

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid, 228-229 (Book X). The bard here is Orpheus, of course.

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<sup>10</sup> At the time Schefer wrote this text, <u>The Mystical Union</u> was positioned in the Louvre next to Leonardo's <u>Mona Lisa</u>; since then, it has been removed to another room.

<sup>11</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, <u>The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym</u>. New York: Heritage Press (1930), 247-9

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Poe, <u>Arthur Gordon Pym</u>, 250

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Louis Massignon, Paroles Donnees

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> The Delacroix copy referred to is to be found in the museum at Lyons.