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REPRESENTING VISION: MANNERIST ART AND THE BODY OF CHRIST  
Being a dissertation submitted to the University of Cape  
Town, September, 1987, in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.

by

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declaration

I declare this dissertation to be my own unaided work.

signature removed

..... 7/9/87 .....

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## ABSTRACT

The essay departs from the iconographical and interpretative studies of the Warburg Institute in the field of art history, seeking to define pictorial context in a way that avoids the notion of a fixed content behind works of art. Specific paintings are contextualised according to the psychological/physiological accidents of vision. A theoretical precedent for this approach within "art history" has been established by Norman Bryson, and the methods of Bryson, of J. Derrida and of J. Lacan are applied to specific works. The essay defines a motif common in Florentine and Roman mannerist religious paintings: the central significance given to Christ's torso in many works. This motif is related to its sources (Michelangelo and antique sculpture), and developed through an analysis of three paintings, J. Pontormo's Descent from the Cross, Rosso's Dead Christ with Angels and the Deposition by the Roman artist D. Ricciarelli da Volterra. The paintings are analysed according to their status as fictions, as devotional images and as representations of the human body. Various definitions of maniera are offered. The essay concludes with an appeal that visual ambiguity be recognised as central to the understanding of pictorial representations.

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One can indeed call this Idea perfection of nature, miracle of art, foresight of the intellect, example of the mind, light of fancy, rising sun that from the East inspires the statue of Memnon, fire that warms into life the image of Prometheus. This induces Venus, the Graces, and the Cupids to leave the Idalian garden and the shores of Cythera and to dwell in the hardness of marbles and in the vanity of shadows. By her the muses on the slopes of Helicon mix immortality into the colours, and for her glory Pallas disdains Babylonian cloth and proudly boasts of Daedalian linen. Because the Idea of eloquence falls as far below the Idea of painting as sight is more potent than words, I here lack for speech and am hushed.

G. P. Bellori, "The Idea of the Painter, Sculptor and Architect," lecture before the Academy of St. Luke, Rome 1664

If, as Norman Bryson has remarked in his Vision and Painting "The gap between philosophy and art history is now so wide that in practical terms it is now almost filled by a single work: Gombrich's Art and Illusion (Bryson, 1983:xii)," then Ernest Panofsky's Idea: A Concept in Art History (1924) must surely cement the remaining gaps. And while it is to Panofsky that one may turn for a clarification of how artists implemented the dominant ideas of their day in their paintings, it is also from Panofsky that one must immediately depart, for the concepts he uses have changed greatly during the previous fifty years. This period has seen the re-invention of the visual field in terms of discourse, so that now the viewing subject can replace the image at the centre of the field. The mechanisms of the image, we now suspect, are founded upon dissimulation; and the presentation of the image can be clarified if we move away not only from the fallacies of perception propagated in Gombrich's psychological exercises, but also from that excessive devotion shown towards the fixed iconographical content of images that has been Panofsky's signal legacy to the methods of art history.

In a sense, explanations of pictures do not satisfy us, however they are conducted. Always supplementary, always subordinate, the mapping of a context by means of which one can comprehend a given work finally defers to a superior process, to the self-evidence of a picture that permits all arguments and still retains some residuum of significance for itself. The only resort is to thematise the aloofness of the work as part of the analysis. We may not, in criticism, be able to recreate the whole of the history of the image, as it has come down to us; instead we can perhaps visualise that history in a rather precise way, permitting our vision to emerge as analytically determined by the broader terrain covering the written, the seen and the spoken together - the terrain of representation. This essay takes the field of "viewing a picture" as its own criterion of distance from pictures themselves.

For our own time the act of viewing a picture often involves a perception that divorces itself from the context of the picture, marked out as pictures so often are on the expanse of a gallery wall. Outside of galleries the situation is little different: the frescoes and sculptures of past ages stand immured as fragments or - at best - as relics, signs of vanished cultures whose own artistic sophistication was founded on a lively sense of distinctions and on a fluency in the ideational context of the fine arts that for the most part is lost to us today. The two realms of artistic evaluation, art history and formal criticism, fall further and further apart because of the régime that rules perception, whose cardinal law is the mediation of origins.

Since the only truth in history is its charting of what may be authoritative at any one time, the loss of a possible history for the work is all the greater, and the task of a formalist analysis that seeks to generate meaning from the given work is all the harder. Eventually history and criticism operate in a way that thematises their own distance from the original moment of creation. Theories of production, representation and reception, cyclical histories and scholarly projects, undertake to provide more or less authority-ridden responses to the problem of determining a context for the work of art.

But the context of any pictorial image is boundless, and the play between history and significance proliferates and over-determines itself at all times. Really this is not a struggle for origins but against them. The context is a con-text, a distancing that dissimulates in order to represent the work to us in a unified way. In the process the forces that work with and against meaning are reorganised so that the image appears to us like Athene, fully-formed from the brow of Zeus. It is this process that I would like to contest. In my own comments a fair degree of reflexivity and an unavoidable adoption of metaphor will be all too evident. I can only defend this by pointing to the meaning of *theoria*, which refers to untroubled contemplation or to vision, and suggesting that the place of metaphor in a *theoria* of art is not unjustified. Indeed if the image can be constituted outside of its narrowly historical context and if its workings within the general sphere of representation can be laid bare, it is metaphor and its privileging of visual references that will make this possible. The will to link together in a single perspective two incommensurable spheres or two such independent terms as a formal and aesthetic spirit of the work and a vaster historical matter that has accrued to it, demands the flexibility of a discussion able metaphorically, in the manner of its object, to transfer related elements of the terms of comparison in order to make them intelligible by combination. In the process any hierarchy of history over meaning will be reorganised into a situation subsisting somewhere between the momentary occurrence of the visual sign and the system of such signs, activating the endless connotations which ultimately comprise the historical fabric itself.

Something needs to be said here concerning the relationship between elements of psycho-analytic theory and speculations about art. In a discussion that departs from a paper of Freud's written in 1914, "Remembering, repeating and working through," Jacques Lacan makes a very simple point: repetition is something which is never clear in analysis, because it always takes place within a superimposed context

- the transference. But what is being repeated has not only to do with the analyst's presence, it has also to do with the patient's past, and with his wish to achieve whatever he lacks by acting it out. Repetitions should therefore be highly specific; but instead they appear as random, as chance encounters with some occurrence that prevents the patient's wishes from being fulfilled. What motivates them is this missed encounter, and what is significant about the missed encounter is that it is never present, or rather, as Lacan says, it is present as a rupture (Lacan, 1979:53-56).

Lacan's well-known analysis of "that non-temporal locus between perception and consciousness," the gaze, follows these premises, and has been taken up by Norman Bryson in his Vision and Painting: the Logic of the Gaze (1983), a compressed work that attempts to chart the rupture necessitated by the visual field against the easy assumptions that we tend to make based on our perceptions. This position comprises one element of my own analysis.

My other guiding assumption proceeds from the recognition that paintings frequently "remember" their sources by repeating them through citation: an arm movement from Raphael will re-appear in later mannerist works, for instance. Furthermore, the continuation of the plastic tradition proceeds aggressively, by the sons murdering their fathers: Harold Bloom's well-known theory of a creative "anxiety of influence" has been adapted by Norman Bryson in his Tradition and Desire: Painting from David to Delacroix (1984) in a sophisticated way that exploits to the full the extent of changes between the contexts of an Ingres, say, and his "remembered" source, Raphael. The constant emphasis in Bryson's book is the inter-textual character of such quotation, which effects a layering of artistic efforts surprisingly similar to the Freudian account of repetition, and which works to repress that rupture in consciousness thematised by Lacan, by assimilating the field of representation to the tradition of Great Works. In the next chapter I hope to reconstruct the nature of representation according to the lead which has been given by Bryson, in his single-handed reorganisation of the representational field.

### Theoria: The Primal Scene

If we may imagine our vision informed by a peculiar speculativeness and then directed onto a picture, perhaps we will be in a position to pose, rather tentatively, the following question.

Does painting have its primal scene?

Can it be spoken of as an act that covers over - or that externalises - the mechanisms of an original witnessing, a witnessing effaced from consciousness?

The answer that suggests itself relates to two witnesses, the artist and the spectator, but it is not an easy answer to give, tending as it does to lose significance by being stated at the outset in too exclusive a manner. Nevertheless we can note at least one suppression that takes place in the histories written about painting styles: in general, it is usual for cultural historians to ignore the manner in which the artist is related to the medium with the same intimacy as he is to his own body. We can trace a contiguity of the work and the body very simply, in the etymology of words of fabrication: the Latin verb to make or do has given rise to the English facility and the creative Renaissance term *facilità* (with its corollary *difficoltà*, the special province of Michelangelo); in another connotation the doing has become a province of the artisan and the poet - Italian *fabbricare*, construction, and *fabbro*, craftsman. This last has a distinguished history stretching all the way from Provencal poetry and Dante through Petrarch to Ezra Pound's use of the term.

Active senses in the informal etymology of the word for making, therefore, reveal to us a complicity between the artist and his domain of production. Perhaps the first picture was an outlining, in pigment or friable material, of the image of a desired object: a horse, an eland, a woman. At any rate, once such a pure act of representation is completed its character mutates, for it becomes a transcription, not merely an outlining, on the wall of the cave.

For an exemplary insight into this occurrence, it is worth examining some exercises from the Pedagogical Sketchbook of Paul Klee (1925):

**Material Structure.**  
in nature.

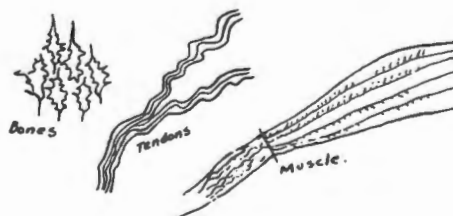
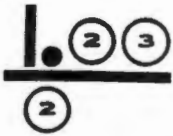


Fig. 21

We might add to the commentary: "Structural concept in art: structure in line and form simultaneously," as an earlier exercise has shown us:



An active line, limited in its movement by fixed points (Fig. 6):

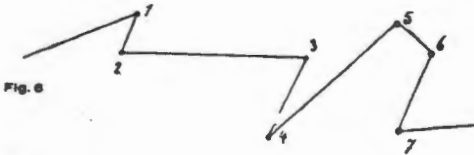
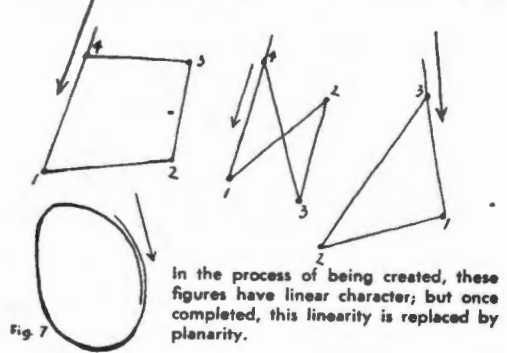


Fig. 6

3

A medial line which is both: point progression and planar effect (Fig. 7):



In the process of being created, these figures have linear character; but once completed, this linearity is replaced by planarity.

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The Pedagogical Sketchbook is a treasure-house of visual aphorisms from which I have taken only a single theme, the comments on line and plane. With Klee line becomes a practical logic and a conceptual metaphor at once, displacing the sphere of perception into the sphere of representation in a manner that seeks to examine the dilemmas of line and motion (1):

the question is no longer: "to move there"  
but to be "everywhere" and consequently also  
"there." (Klee, 1953:61)

A complicity between form and the working limits of illusion takes over from what has produced the form, namely, the line and its manumittance. With the object committed to representation, as it is on the cave wall, the pictorial event becomes internalised. Compliance between the artist's body and its out-lined activity on the wall, yes; but now also between the artist's being and his Idea (for the Renaissance, *concetto*, or *fore-conceit*). It is not particularly important whether representation preceded outlining or followed it; but taken together they comprise the inscription of the work. Which is to say: the actual inscriptions of the artist become inscriptions of his subjectivity also, in order that a representation can be born. Let us imagine another primal scene in order to clarify this process.

A group of beast-keeping people moves into the territory of a coastal race, whose livelihood is disrupted in consequence. Land is no longer a secure habitat fronting the shoreline, but a resource for grazing. The result: an efflorescence of hand-prints amongst the rock paintings of the coastal region.

Obviously a hand-print bears a peculiar relation to the body. Its symbolism is more directly corporeal, less

anthropological, than the symbolism of a human figure or of an animal. Some of the hand-prints of the region are decorated, after the manner of the body itself (2). Imprinted on the rock faces, therefore, are direct assertions of the bodies of the coastal people, at once personal signatures like modern fingerprints and also representative signs referring to the body. In this way the representational art of the coastal people can be seen as a medium where the hand-prints bear witness to the living relation between humanity and its land: the prints are pieces of history as well as pieces of meaning.

Painting, however, as an externalised transcription of the traces of bodily desire, actually becomes more meaningful the further away it moves from such imprintation. By the time the body of the painter has been completely replaced by a figure in the painting or by an abstract form so that the activity of the artist can only be inferred from the painting, representation has matured. The person of the artist has become a representational fiction. The numerous codes and actual verities of the fiction work hard at erasing the history of their own production, so that in the final instance only a hypothesised origin can be postulated for such noisy workings.

Indeed the hypothesis of the primal scene is really only useful as a construal. By inferring a conceivable moment of representation, witnessed by ourselves as we stumble upon it and for whom it appears to hold an unbearable significance, the importance of reconstructing the genesis of the image remains functional rather than substantive (whatever the scene may have contained, its truths concern the generalised burden of humanity itself, a knowledge of good and evil that is only made known in a belated way). The scope of representation can be said to be limited by various prohibitions of desire from the outset; and in painting itself what is lost from an (originary) picture is first of all the body. If a hand-print inscribes the humanity of the rock artist directly into representation, the brushstroke signs its author away, and embodies him in a completely different manner, one where his presence becomes important as a fiction. The traces of his physical activity are relegated to memory, mere stimuli that the brushstrokes evoke: an effacement of the body's activity by the finished image. The trace can be recalled as no more than an outlining between the artist's physiognomy and his activity, a kind of mark of separation that works inside the image to lift the out-line to the dimension of a plane and thence to an illusion of space. In a strong sense, therefore, the artist bears witness to representation because it is the activity that defines him in the moment of getting rid of him. His act is always a testament to his

own vision and a legacy of desires transmitted beyond himself, and the significance of his painting is carried by its messages and codes (3); painting represents the artist in a legal sense by standing for him, as his badge, his seal, his ambassadorship. In this way the subject in the painting can exceed the person of the artist; subject-matter, and the address to the viewer, work as figures concealing the artist's efforts yet also carrying their own significance, in the actual play of forms that makes up painted matter. The work as an object that makes itself meaningful through such ruptures demands our consideration.

### Historia: Accession of the Image.

The Quattrocento presents us with an art born of rationality, the Cinquecento with one born of fantasy. So goes the conventional wisdom, but we ourselves know that fantasy and rationality are stamped from the same mould. I would like to give a quick reading of some concerns of mannerist artists by comparing their activities with the ideas of the *fontes et origo* of artistic theory for the Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti.

For Alberti painting is an enviably complete process. His term for representation is *pictura*, referring to an image participating equally in the mind and in reality. A scheme of fixed-point perspective governs the perceptions that will mediate between the mind and reality, so that in Alberti's conception the neoplatonic *speculum mundi* is enacted in a manner that confirms the gaze of the viewing subject, by showing him his own position. That position, the only point from which an Albertian painting is fully intelligible (4), works to deny to the viewer his own corporeality. All that is necessary is a viewing eye, determined by the vanishing-point and frequently several more feet off the ground than the physical organ would ever be. Perspective here has taken over the function and the attributes of vision, comprising the genetic rule of space itself.

"The represented", similarly, becomes matter and not an effect of subjective perception: Brunelleschi had devised a famous *speculum mundi* which he called a "veduta": the viewer applied his eye to the mouth of a funnel and apprehended a reflected image on a mirror placed in front of a painted board, showing the Baptistery in Florence. In order to increase the realism Brunelleschi had covered the sky with burnished silver so that the real sky and moving clouds would be reflected in it (5). The effect of Alberti's *pictura* is to frame the world in this manner, fixing the image, so that it appears as a moment frozen in space.

Alberti's framing of a concrete space that envelops the viewer as well has its counterpart in the structures of the mind. The model of the psyche implicit in the representational process is derived, like so much else in Alberti, from Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*, specifically the section there concerning memory (Quintilian, XI ii 17-33). For Quintilian, memory structures the mind like an apparatus; Cicero's memory palaces or *loci* display an architectonic order that can be reproduced outside the mind in the speech of the orator, who links his words to things or to other words (*memoria rerum verborumque*), with the aid of an extraordinary visual

capacity that animates the whole process of expression (Yates, 1966:1-26). When Quintilian speaks of the parts of rhetoric (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, pronuntiatio*), he is able to unite affective language to this active and (we presume) highly pragmatic process; such self-mastery, should the orator attain it, raises his speech to such a level that he is able to enact its rationale as if he were realising images in front of his rapt audience, and not solely in front of his own eyes. The ambiguity of such moments, which Cave has penetrated as part of his discussion of *copia* (Cave, 1979:125-156), has to do with the paradoxes of a vivid speech versus vivid speaking, and with the realisation of *enargeia* or metaphorical vividness which, as Quintilian says, "*quia plus est evidentia vel, ut alii dicunt, repraesentatio quam perspicuitas, et illud patet, hoc se quodammodo ostendit (Quintilian VIII iii 61).*" The whole conception is most elegant, although it is rather enigmatic; it is, besides, an extremely powerful justification of movement and gesture for debates in the law-courts. For Alberti, the principle of an eloquence for pictures depends upon this actuation of performative *enargeia* to bring all the qualities of impassioned yet ordered speech to a notoriously silent medium (Spencer, 1957; Lee, 1967).

As always, the price paid for conceptual order is high. Alberti's transcription of rhetorical codes into a static art form necessitates a move away from the endlessly productive principle of *copia* animating Quintilian's discussion, and a theoretical focus on the ethics of limited movement instead, according to the notoriously neoclassical code of *mediocritas* (restraint) and the machiavellian ideal of *virtù*. What the subject of the Albertian *theoria* finds staring out at him from the painting is a beautifully articulated set of variations on the theme of repose. Thus, while Giotto's art (he is the only artist discussed in detail in the *De Pictura*) is praiseworthy for its *enargeia*, this dynamic is dissipated into each of the figures of the Apostles, with an accompanying caveat from Alberti concerning figures that move too much:

*motus enim nimium acres exprimunt, efficiuntque in eodem simulacro et pectus et nates uno sub prospectu conspiciantur, quod quidem cum impossibile factu, tum indecentissimum visu est. . . Suaves enim et gratos atque ad rem de qua agitur condecetes habere pictura motus debet (Alberti, 1972:44).*

Figures which express too much by moving too much really show (*conspicere*) too much of themselves, becoming far too ornamental. Much of Alberti's discussion takes up Quintilian's topic of ornament and relates it to movement, opting for a decorous variety of poses limited to some seven or eight contained postures. This is not an art of the

possible but of the permissible, in which meaning is circumscribed - a fundamental Albertian term and the basis for his technique of synthetic composition (Alberti, 1972:33). The painting that embodies *vāpīs* is the colossus and the work that exemplifies good decorum is the narrative *historia*, really a social record (Baxandall, 1972), but also something more. "Parts of the *historia* are the bodies, part of the body is the member, and part of the member is a surface (*superficiūm*, an ambivalent term referring both to the face and to the planar surface) (Alberti, 1972:33). If the surface and the plane unlock the narrative codes of the *historia*, they also exist as a connective tissue covering the sinews of bodies and the mortar of buildings; the energy of bodily movement is dissipated into the process (*ratio*) of circumscription, so that the apogee of Albertian style becomes a standard reliant upon a degree of technical virtuosity in relating light and form to volume (*rilievo*) and bodies to architectonic space.

The equation between bodies and space is an obsession of Alberti's (Hedrick, 1987:118), one where the visual becomes the spatial and what is physical is rendered in terms of how it can be ordered. For example, Alberti advises the painter to arrange the bones and muscles of a figure before adding appropriate flesh and skin. The clear differentiation implied in the use of *ossa*, *musculūm*, *carnis*, *cutis* comprises a *symmetria membrorum* that will be used to map out the exact outlines of figures down to their veins and wrinkles, but equally to correlate the parts of buildings (such as pillars) and to distinguish one abstract volume from another (Alberti, 1972:36). Paradoxically, the law of *enargeia* - that metaphorical enigma that makes image-realisation into a matter of transmutation, from the realm of the mind into the speaker's words or from the layering of the brushstroke into the painted surface - has been supplanted by the debased, functional dynamism of *energeia*, a principle of efficiency merely. In the process the Idea (which should resolve, in the photographic sense, a net of metaphors concerning the immanent and dynamic forces of the depicted body), is dispersed into the play of intersecting surfaces that leads the eye equally to smaller forms or to larger ones. A game concerning the articulation between depth and representational perspective, between shadows and solid objects, between strong compositional arrangements and emphatic movements, is acted out in the Albertian arena of forms.

These ceaseless voyages around the pictorial planes on a perceptual level is analogous to the diffusion of the trace as a sign of the artist's presence, into the flattened, extended plane of representation which the Albertian *pictura* exalts. The loss of the artist's signs of presence (his

brushwork) corresponds to Alberti's hierarchy of volume over line. Quintilian had postulated that the origin of painting might have been the outlining of shadows cast by the sun: "non esset pictura, nisi quae lineas modo extremas umbrae, quam corpora in sole fecissent (Quintilian, X ii 7)." For Alberti the surface is more important than the resolution of its outline from points and angles. Surfaces resemble a skin, stretched like a face over the forms and structures of the painting: "altera superficierum qualitas referatur, quae est, ut ita loquar, tamquam cutis per totum superficierum dorsum distenta (Alberti, 1972:4)."

If the psyche of the Albertian subject is a productive machine its physicality is that of a speaking surface, displaying a facility of gesture, speech and facial expression. The serene repose of the subject of normative neoclassicism has taken the gravitas of the law courts as the model for its disposition...



This engraving from Colonna's Hypnerotomachia Poliphili (1449) epitomises the process by making an explicit connection between the bodies of two lovers and their architectural setting, and letting us know that what Alberti is interested in is the mapping of space, not of sight. A blind man could find his way around the Albertian image.

Alberti's personal emblem was the winged eye, and his motto was that of the sweeping, insistent beam of the gaze itself - "Quid tum?", or "What follows?" The critical sensitivity Alberti reveals toward movement, however, shows this doctrine of awareness to be one that cancels all physical presence in its search for measure - not merely the presence of the viewer and that of the artist, but also what for Alberti was the unsettling and excessive physicality of the depicted body itself. The figures of Piero della Francesca, to take an example of an artist generally considered to have followed Alberti, reveal a finish and an inscrutability

impossible to overcome, this being indeed a calculated part of their effect. It is not that the viewer's gaze is not returned when confronted with such pictures; rather, it returns in such assembled measures that the viewer himself is lost to the planned intricacy making up the image. In return for wonder he renounces his judgement; in return for a display of painterly skill, his own corporeality.

A point of comparison with mannerism may be made here, by noting a lack of immanence in the character of the "trace." The extent to which artists can paint without a formalised intention guiding their movements is extraordinary. In effect, what is important for the picture is not so much the errors and messes made by the stippling action of the brush as the actual laying-down of a material deposit in the brush-movement, which in its momentary flow really inscribes the artist's individuality into the picture. The fact that there is a surface of such painted traces, however, effectively supercedes this individual labour and the site of its occurrence, the studio, which as Norman Bryson has pointed out, can be considered as a lost space extending perpendicularly outwards from the painted surface (Bryson, 1983:164). The picture is lifted out of this space, to become an object on its own.

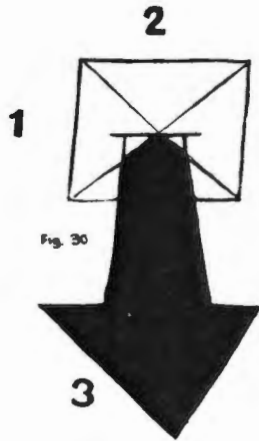
Many pictures, quite naturally, thematise this occurrence: self-portraits, for instance. A famous mannerist self-portrait has the artist Parmigianino addressing himself in a convex mirror (figure 1). Parmigianino's hand, covering the lower portion of the picture, is distorted sufficiently to resemble a luxuriant flower or even, as John Ashbery suggests in his poem, a puzzling kind of aquatic creature (6). Our ambiguous perception of the hand is reinforced when we turn to the small, clear face of the artist, whose sensuously shadowed mouth and direct gaze are provocative and self-possessed. The key to the picture lies in its conception, of course; mirror portraits work within a convention established by Leonardo, whose system of directed light facilitated the artist's attention to only the most meaningful parts of a painting, in a startling and progressive recognition of the physiological supports for vision (Ackerman, 1978:122). Such a principle of selective "focus" became commonplace: "*Ac veluti in speculis convexis, eminent ante/ Aspenor reipsa Vigor, & Vis aucta colorum Partibus adversis; magis & Fuga rupta retrorsum/ illorum est (ut visa minus vegetibus oris) Corporibus dabimus Formas hoc More rotundas (du Fresnoy, 1769:30).*" We are a long way from Alberti with mirror portraits, for in them the representational principle is activated by the visibility of the gaze itself. Moreover, owing to the small size of Parmigianino's work, which is plainly intended to resemble a mirror, being only a few inches

across, the entire image takes over the function of the eye as "mirror of the soul", transposing this doctrine from the province of the artist to that of the abstracted subject, where the spectator's response is to stand where the artist has stood viewing the artist viewing the viewer as viewer and artist at once... Because mirrors were small and convex, able to reflect only the face, the "fit" between the face and the glass had spawned an occult tradition, the bearded mirror, where the physical reflection becomes a wicked image of the depths of the soul. Faces become demonic in mirrors: this is the doctrinal extreme of a principle of portraiture which Parmigianino, Pontormo and Dürer embraced. Pope-Hennessy has noted the visual clues by which the topic is invoked: the eyes on different planes, the mouths drooping or shadowed, and the problem of the hands. (Pope-Hennessy, 1979:86). Painting from a mirror of course necessitates a reverse image of the sitter, and while this is accomplished for the face, the hands of the artist suffer because the right hand is always involved in painting and so cannot be reproduced, except as the left hand in reverse. A famous sketch by Dürer shows an obviously mirror-painted face accompanied by a large left hand (figure 2). Parmigianino's self-portrait, in which the hand is portrayed as if holding the mirror, seeks to overcome this problem by lifting it to a higher plane. The necessary distortion of the hand in painting, of that bodily trace which joins the picture to its author, now partakes of an intimate dialectic concerning the necessary correspondences between hand and eye, which is played out between Parmigianino and the spectator in a most unsettling manner. It is significant that the arena for this exchange is the interface between the physiology of vision and its psychology, so that the inaccessibility of the painted image relies upon a shifting of the problems of perception into the arena of meaning.

We may conclude that the accession of the image necessitates the loss of the trace in any perceptible form. The trace will not be found in an image if we look for it there, for the presence of metaphor and conventional play in pictures works to cover this loss, by signifying it; so much is obvious. But the graphic and autographic potentialities of the brushstroke and the line have not merely been replaced by the image; for the image itself is formed out of the difference between line and form. Again, a reference to the schemas of Paul Klee helps to illuminate the character of the image:

Dimensions

14



1. Dimension: left (right)
2. Dimension: top (bottom)
3. Dimension: front (back)

35

Unlike Brunelleschi's marvellous frame for clouds, the image is not a recording device. Its partiality and its subjective nature is extreme, to the same degree that its visual enticement is complete. It is possible to say that the image rescues the viewer from being confronted by visual contradictions, at the same time as it defers the possibility of reading the heart of these contradictions - which of course have no "heart" at all but renew themselves endlessly. The image as a totalising force cancels its own primary nature as a signifying device, that first nature which the ancient tradition of hieroglyphs, devices and emblems attests. In cancelling its "original" function the image cancels its own production also, and we need only to refer back to Klee's utterances to find a concise and evocative statement of the anatomy of the image in pictures:

The work as human action (genesis) is productive as well as receptive. It is CONTINUITY.

Productively, it is limited by the manual limitation of the creator (who has only two hands).

Receptively, it is limited by the limitations of the eye.

The limitation of the eye is its inability to see even a small surface equally sharp at all points.

The eye must "graze" over the surface, grasping sharply portion after portion, to convey them to the brain which collects and stores the impressions.

THE EYE TRAVELS ALONG THE PATHS CUT OUT FOR IT IN THE WORK.

## Eidos

A form that has spoken to artists across time is the famous Torso (figure 3).

At the turn of the sixteenth century it already formed part of a collection where antique pieces had been gathered and displayed in a small building built by Bramante next to the Vatican. The well-staged effects of this papal project have been evoked by F. Haskell and N. Penny in their book Taste and the Antique :

As he entered the court, the sixteenth-century visitor would have seen first the rows of orange trees symmetrically placed on the paving stones which covered the enclosed space. Opposite him was a loggia, at one end of which was a fountain to water the oranges, and, outside the court itself but well visible from above it, there towered above this loggia the tall mulberries and cypresses which grew in an informal garden behind. To his right was the old-fashioned villa of Innocent VII on to which one could climb by means of a small spiral staircase in order to see the papal palace at the front of the hill and, in the opposite direction, uninterrupted by open countryside. In the centre of the court were two huge reclining marble figures of the Tiber and the Nile, each mounted as a fountain - and still more fountains were placed elsewhere. It was in this cool, fresh and orange-scented atmosphere that the visitor was able to view the great sculptures placed in elaborately painted and decorated niches at the four corners of the court and in the centre of each enclosing wall; around, and set into the walls, level with the upper parts of the nudes, were thirteen antique masks. (Haskell and Penny, 1981:7)

The discovery in 1506 of the Laöcoon and its addition to this courtyard had a profound effect on, amongst others, Michelangelo: "It was the Laöcoon, with its sense of all-embracing effort, its disciplined emotional excess, that released in Michelangelo not only new formal rhythms and vastly enhanced tactility, but a state of self-immersion in his sculpture, whereby the statue was no longer something external to himself, but a projection of his total personality (Pope-Hennessy, 1963:13-14)."

The genesis of the figura serpentina that for many became the hallmark of Michelangelo's art (7) dates from this moment and from the moment of the display of the Torso,

where the free-standing sculpture in its delightful setting doubtless contributed to Michelangelo's expanding conception of how a human form could be staged in three dimensions, even in paint.

Concerning the Torso itself Michelangelo remarked: "This is the work of a man who knew more than Nature; it is a great misfortune that it is lost" (that is, broken) (8).

The invention of the torso as an artistic motif, dating from Michelangelo's appreciation of it and reverberating right down to the eighteenth century, when Winckelmann seized upon it as a profoundly "Hellenistic" form, is most suggestive when the disposition of meaning that the form embodies is recognised as eidetic in the modern sense of the word. The Torso is a fragment, and therein lies its eloquence. We need to acknowledge that the *conceito* of the Torso as it now appears is not so much that of a lost classical harmony, nor is it an intensified Romantic nostalgia; but rather, as Walter Benjamin urges, an insight into ruination (Benjamin, 1977:176). The Torso lacks its extremities, but these lost limbs are not to be perceived with regret; for the significance of what is missing lies in the fact that this ruined form is nevertheless a body. It is a figure of loss, in the most literal sense; the loss is the Torso itself.

We need look no further for a context in which the torso became significant than the famous *Pietà* of S. Pietro. The Sistine chapel and the frescoes of Raphael were uncovered in 1512 but already various young artists - Barruguete, Pierino del Vaga, Beccafumi - had imitated cartoons by Michelangelo which sketched the figure of a dead Christ. A cartoon (figure 4) executed in 1519 as a study for what became the *Pietà* had a profound influence on Rosso and the completed sculpture had an equally notable effect on Pontormo. The depositions and lamentations produced by these two artists and their contemporaries display typical features - elongated frames, a crowded and flattened pictorial space, divisions of composition effected by the cross and by various ladders and an intense and unreal stage-lit effect. The torso of the dead Christ also retains a central significance in these works, for example in the *Pietà* (1537-1540) by Rosso now at the Louvre, and in his *Dead Christ with Angels* (1526), now in Boston; works which feature an obsessive and unsettling attention to the portrayal of Christ's corpse (see figures 5 and 6). In common with similar works by other artists, the Christ-figure expresses an extreme lassitude with the trunk frontally displayed, the legs collapsed together, the head dangling and the arms hanging limply. At the same time however, the figure is not undignified and almost appears perfectly in repose - it has none of the grotesqueness of

another crucifixion by Rosso (figure 7). Christ's story is rendered for us during those moments after the indignities and torments of the Passion.

The torso finds its significance, I would contend, in the very ambiguity of these moments after the Passion and before the entombment. In the process it becomes more than a site for religious symbolism or for artistic expression; as a fundament for the head and limbs and a form upon which great beauty may be articulated, the torso can become an intriguing signifier in itself. I would like to spend the rest of this essay exploring some of its effects.

## Corpus

Veronese: Michelangelo in Rome in the Pontifical chapel painted our Lord, Jesus Christ, His Mother, St. John, St. Peter, and the heavenly host. These are all represented in the nude - even the Virgin Mary - and in different poses with little reverence.

Tribunal: Do you not know that in painting the Last Judgement in which no garments or similar things are presumed, it was not necessary to paint garments, and in those figures there is nothing that is not spiritual? (Veronese before the Holy Tribunal, July 18, 1573)

Under the pressures of a cross-examination the Tribune's reply to Veronese creates such authority for itself that it reveals involuntarily, beyond the cynical mask of an evoked dogma, the only yardstick by which nudity could be perceived in a religious painting. For the nude body is undoubtedly shocking; but it can be made palatable, by the removal of nudity from the bodily form.

Michael Baxandall, in an examination of a minor text from the school of Alberti, points out that "the intellectual background to the easy acceptance of appropriate nude representation in the Middle Ages was remarkably secure (Baxandall, 1963:308)," the key word in this statement being appropriate. Alberti's admirer, Leonello d'Este, was one of the first humanists to conceive of nudity as an artistic problem, and significantly, d'Este sees the nude body as a principle of sexual restraint, because it is derived from nature and has no artifice or ornamental excessiveness in its portrayal:

Sed innumerae sunt huius modi apud poetas picturae: ut non ab re dixerimus maximum omnium apud pictores et poetas in nuditate rerum. hoc est naturali artificio constare ministerium. Nam quid senem nudum incuruum rugosum. et si terentiane pingere uolumus uietum ueterem ueternosum colore mustelino. ac barbaram magis quam infantulum Signarius ille conflavit: ut Plinius minor de corinthio signo studiose commemorat suae bibliothecae deliciis (Baxandall, 1963:321).

The famous letter by Pliny, discussing an expressive Corinthian bronze which he kept in his study, forms an example of how even an old man can be portrayed faithful to nature's order. The nude form has value for d'Este because it is eternal, and can provide a solution to the problematic artistic individuality which a "style" of

painting seeks to efface. In all cases the representation of the nude turns on the question of the individually possible in representation. Thus, Veronese's reply to the examining Tribunal emphasised, in a disingenuous way that matched the tone of the questions put to him, that the canvas was simply large enough for figures to be added to it, and that the additions he carried out were merely ornamental, as was traditional in art. However Veronese's half-hearted citation of the Last Judgement as a defence of his own piece did not serve him particularly, because that work had already been under attack by the zealots of the Counter-Reformation for some years. Gilio da Fabriano's invective against the picture in 1564 had taken the opposite position to Veronese over precisely the same issue: for Fabriano, nakedness as an order of bodily representation is untruthful because it has no reverence, no theological necessity (Blunt, 1982:113). The license of artistic vision was therefore licentious. Indeed this position was interpreted quite literally by the commentators of the Counter-Reformation. Johannes Molanus makes an explicit kind of connection between the effect of viewing a painting, the scandalous material contained in it, and the dangerous inventio of the artist who has produced it:

Et rursus ad verba Clementis Alexandriae presbyteri, qui post acrem reprehensionem paganorum, eo quod in cubili decumbentes Venerem nudam respiciunt in tabellis depictis, habeant quoque Paniscos & nudas puellas & ebrios Satyros & membrorum erectiones quae picturis nudantur, tantem concludit, Horum non solum uses sed etiam aspectus & auditus deponendam esse memoriam vobis annunciamus. Scortatae sunt aures vestrae, fornicati sunt oculi. Ed quod est magis novum, ante complexum vestri adulteriam admiserunt aspectus (Freedburg, 1971:24).

If paintings are to be the libri idiotarum, then viewing nudity is to be made corrupt from the start: "fornicati sunt oculi", as Molanus says.

Within the context of a burgeoning debate over Michelangelo's use of nude figures (carried on by L. Dolce, P. Aretino, G. da Fabriano, G. Paleotti and Molanus, and inspired by Caraffa), two features of the nude portrayal of figures appear as significant. The first is the latent eroticism of all nude figures, which the strictures of reform attempted to domesticate by proscribing it in individual artistic practice. General pictorial erotic ideals handed down from Botticelli and rewritten by Michelangelo, such as the lengthened ankles of female forms, the gently swelling stomachs, the round and prominent breasts, the limbs extended to unlikely proportions, were so ingrained in the courtly artistic codes of the period that they were maintained by official

consent, as Blunt (1982) has pointed out, in mythological genre-paintings. The Marian cult, which flourished during the Counter-Reformation, provided a rationalisation of female virtues and vices under a theological province that included mythical elements, the Virgin being also a Venus and a Diana (Wind, 1980:75).

The second feature of a discourse of nudity concerns the truth of the body as a nude body. *Nuda* originally meant open or honest, and the significance of nudity for art of the time lay in its ambivalent characterisation of philosophical truths. Thus, for the Holy Tribunal "it was not necessary to paint garments" on the figures of Michelangelo's Last Judgement (although this was in fact shortly to be done). Michelangelo's figures wear their nudity already, in the style of an intense spirituality; those thickened torsos, pin heads and flailing limbs are apprehended as expressive and beautiful because the subject of a shocking body has been lost to a formal play of spiritualised qualities. The dangers of an uncaged nakedness are pre-empted by the conception of the body worn as clothing, with its own style and its own fashionableness. We need to examine this displacement further.

What is the natural body? Through nudity the body can become strong and beautiful; the qualities of a *natura naturans* work to efface the original shameful of the uncovered form. The nakedness of Adam and Eve is permissible on these grounds, and their pathos is a necessity of doctrinal teaching which can be expressively rendered in pictures, as well as being sanctioned by the scriptures. The question of naturalism, however, is subordinate to the qualitative perception of the human form: *natura naturata* is a code that can only operate through signifying the nakedness of the body. The nude becomes no more than the supplementary term, dependent upon nature, of a relation which must constantly link the image to its exteriority. The body becomes an abstract frame for style: Bronzino's serene figures and Caravaggio's sleazy revelations are two extremes of the realisation of the human figure according to a double possibility, the spiritualisation of the body on the one hand, and its demystification on the other. When Alberti sought to portray beauty in his figures he invoked the topic of Zeuxis, who, "because he believed that all things he desired to achieve could not be found by his own intuition, but were not to be found even in Nature in one body alone, chose from all the youth of the city five outstandingly beautiful girls, so that he might represent in his painting whatever feature of feminine beauty was praiseworthy in each of them (Alberti, 1972:56)," he relied on what Panofsky calls "a metaphysical version of selection-theory" that is really a neoclassical frame through which the natural body is marked out.

While such a classicised body can appear as impoverished, in the minimisation of the possibilities of figuration by the erasure of "accidents of nature" such as age, sex and un-classical physical detail, classical nudity nevertheless encodes a totalising surface, material and yet dematerialised, of sumptuousness: as the body wears rich garments, so it wears its own physique. The seductive optical spectacle of nudity also works at once in a total and in a partial way. If a bodily plenitude is abstract and unattainable, if the full body can only be signified through absence, then the invocation of plenitude through codes of nudity tends to dispose of the parts of the body in tension with what the body is not. The nude, because it displays what should not be seen, can only speak if it looks back at itself in a disguised form. The principal realisation of this "second nature" for nudity was clothing. Clothing throughout Renaissance art works in a lacunary manner, always covering over or breaking up or displacing or alluding to the body beneath it. Thus, the genitals are not hidden by those minute draperies that are so ineffective but revealed, as shrunken swellings, by being guessed at. Artificial and outrageous shapes duplicate and parody the bodily parts; the spectacular codpieces that were so popular are only one extreme of a fragmentation of the human form that plays on the cuts and edges between clothing and flesh, seen as more erotic than the naked form itself.

On several levels, then, the body was carried by its codes.

The reformers' disavowals of the body's sexuality denied any artistic identification of eroticism other than the sublimated forms that suffering and ecstasy permitted, which determined erotic nudity as an new object of attention, frequently under the régime of confession.

More fundamentally, the body as it could be pictured was idealised or made the subject of a polemical realism, and perhaps one other way of perceiving it should be mentioned here: the nude as anatomical study, forced into rendering up its truths from within by means of observation from without. This focus upon the scientific appearance of the human form tends to dispense with the humanity of the body, but such a humanity had its own representations, and was carried in the endless displacements of desire which the artifices of dress achieved so successfully in courtly pictures.

The fragmentation of the entire figure into its thresholds and outlines, often capriciously distorted, made the nude body into an organ that could be stretched and compounded at will, and contributed greatly to the narcissistic and decorative maniera that Alberti found so distasteful. The mannerists, indeed, discarded Alberti's system of

representation, based as it was on the framing of the vision of the spectator, and extrapolating from this as it did metaphors concerning surfaces and integuments, devices which really worked to extend the application of paint on the canvas to the projection of planes and figures "within" it. For mannerism, the corpus is no longer an image-repertoire of basic or complex structures (circles, planes, polygons); no longer a body defined by the articulation of elements among themselves, the mannerist corpus is at once fragmentary and self-generative; it finds itself in the disappearance of its integral appearance, in the joints of articulation between figures that Alberti had sought to clothe in connective tissue and that Leonardo had swallowed in shadow. Because the mannerists organised the body as an effect of the passionate gaze rather than as the product of science, the harmonious measures of neoclassical representation are avoided in favour of the relative noisiness of fragmented part-objects: limbs, artefacts and architectural fragments alike. The expressiveness of these part-objects derives from the nature of their production, for they are, quite simply, incompletely objects. They do not constitute finished images, and any settled representational function is lacking. *Ut pictura rumoris*: their peculiar energy consists exactly in the absence of a mimetic support, in the lack of a specular image through which we can recognise ourselves in the paintings. That does not exclude us altogether from the domain of self-recognition, for our own visual drive is persistent enough to perceive shapes in the clouds and faces in the patches of damp on old walls, as Leonardo discovered. What the part-object signifies is the persistence of artistic vision in the absence of any organised visual syntax. Thus, when Lacan observes that the "mark of the cut is no less present in the object described by analytic theory: the mamilla, the phallus (imaginary object) the urinary flow (an unthinkable list if one adds, as I do, the phoneme, the gaze, the voice, the - nothing (Lacan, 1977:315)," he reiterates in the constitution of a partial body that emits flows such as milk and blood but also the voice, the organ-speech that, for example, the Passion attests. "My God, why have you forsaken me?" At this point those grouped around the Cross feel profoundly moved. But Christ's words are not a confession of His disinheritance. In the Passion Christ's utterances concern themselves with the infidelity of appearances at the moment when appearances become related to the far deeper truths of suffering. In Christ's body, like any other body, the truth speaks plainly and insistently not in a confessional mode (for confessions deliver only what the confessor wishes to hear) but in the language of suffering, which after all is a state beyond subjectivity. In pure subjection the body cannot retain meaning; and so, it ceases to be the body as we know it. Separated from its own humanity the pre-disciplinary flesh is miraculous, for it can speak without the organs of

speech. Its clamour is the production of everything that is not human: when we are invited by Possevinus to experience the horrors and sufferings of the Passion to the full before we can represent it properly, we begin to suspect that the truth of the Crucifixion is the miracle of Christ's wounds, those ruptures that speak louder than words (figure 8), enabling the seven words of the Passion to be mystically adduced in an "understanding without discourse" - or, as in the case of Marino's Dicerie Sacre, repeatedly and deliriously incarnating the Word.

"Integrum humanum corporis symbolicam iconem nigredi non posse, partem tamen corporis ei constituendae non esse ineptam (Benjamin, 1977:216)."

This contemporary opinion quoted by Walter Benjamin, concerning the way in which the emblem should be made to give up its meanings, is glossed by him as follows:

The human body could be no exception to the commandment which ordered the destruction of the organic so that the true meaning, as it was written and ordained, might be picked up from its fragments. Where indeed could this law be more triumphantly displayed than in the man who abandons his conventional, conscious physis in order to scatter it to the manifold regions of meaning (Benjamin, 1977:216)?

The sensuous stimulation afforded by representation is thematised in Florentine mannerism by means of the body itself functioning to encode its own partial visibility. These marvellously sophisticated figures maintain their finish and self-sufficiency by saturating our perceptions of them in such a way as to spread the desire of our gaze to see them partially and passionately into a generalised investment, into the endless play and renewal of the registers of desire. Roger des Piles in the seventeenth century, drawing on Lomazzo, characterised mannerism in terms of its division of the basic emotions into endless sub-registers:

The painters have multiplied them, not only by their different Degrees but also by their different species: for they will make, for Example, six Persons in the same Degree of Fear, who shall express that Passion all of them differently. And it is the diversity of species which distinguishes these painters who are able artists, from those whom we may call Mannerists, and who repeat five or six times over, in the same picture the same airs of a Head (du Fresnoy, 1769:117).

Lomazzo in some felicitous phrases had noted that con questa (cioè, con lo spirito, chè la vita dell'arte) i pittori fanno conoscere differenti i morti da i vivi; i fieri da gl'umili, i pazzi da

i savii, i mesti da gli allegri, et in somma tutte le passioni, e geste che puo mostrare, e fare un corpo humano tra se distinti (Lomazzo, Trattato, quoted in Lee, 1967:71)

This might be seen as an overcoding that flows between codes as well as in them, for the image has no well-articulated semes to encode. Its functioning is a matter of visibility, not of the structured representation of an autonomous body. The notable sexual ambiguity of figures in the work of Pontormo, Rosso, and Parmigianino, which departs from the customary sixteenth-century definition of masculinity by means of the torso and its bulging muscles (itself a play on masculinity: the genitals of many sixteenth-century Herculean types are absurd, adventitious organs) exploits the almost-coded nature of the image's visual seductiveness with regard to nudity, desire and humanity. In a famous work by Bronzino aptly called Christ in Limbo (figure 9) (9), we can easily perceive Christ in terms of a modish ambiguity - because, like the body itself, he is the bearer of a troublesome and only half-perceptible humanity.

## Figura

We all know Christ better than we think, for He is the Word made Flesh, and behind every religious image there is a biblical text. Scripture stands in a peculiar relation to painting, whether the nature of this *doxa* is acknowledged by the image or no. It would be hard indeed to conceive of a Christ crucified without the Gospel or the iconographic tradition in mind, just as the humanist tradition had been unable to proceed without reinventing its past from the "sacred" texts of Pliny, Lucian and Aristotle. Such a power - akin to the force of a legal fiction - overcomes the figure of Christ and the possibility of its being represented or depicted. Icon-o-graph: between the two *semes* is *o*, a round nothing and yet a mark, just as in the pictorial tradition the human figure is all by which Christ can be represented, and yet there are often certain traces of his divinity, some of which - doves, lambs and, of particular importance to ourselves later on, rays of light and the True Cross - some of which work even to replace Him.

The topic of *deus pictor* is a neoplatonic notion dating back to at least the twelfth century, where it was treated in Dante's *Commedia*. Pico della Mirandola's famous *Oration* (1486) tangled innumerable strands of esoteric doctrine in such a way as to make the equation between the artist and the Creator indispensable to painters, if not actually - with Michelangelo, for instance - to art's *raison d'être*. We can see that the topic takes the notion of Christ as *anima mundi* quite literally: only God and the artist can animate matter and grant it life-saving grace. From the standpoint of the artist, the analogy could be taken further. Pontormo saw the very artifice of the artist's role, that spreading of illusion in a way that signified reality, as a supreme virtue, creatively piling paradox upon paradox: "what I call *troppo ardito*, that is the most important thing; if the painter is to surpass nature in wishing to give spirit to a figure and make it seem alive, and do it on a flat surface (Summers, 1981:52)." One particular work by Pontormo proffers Christ's body as a hallmark of authenticity on the canvas, in lieu of a written "signature" but not at all unlike one of Jacob Boehme's mystical trace-signs. Individual yet universal as a footprint, the image of Christ de-animated tends for Pontormo away from two norms of representation: away from the iconography attached to crucifixions, and away from the divine pathos evoked by the drained Christ-figure in the most famous *Pietà* of all (figure 10). David Summers points out in his book on Michelangelo (Summers, 1981:473) that Pontormo's comments on artifice,

quoted above, present an explicit and daring reversal of Alberti's prohibition against *movimenti troppo ardit* in the De Pictura, where Alberti had castigated works with figures showing their fronts and their backs simultaneously and displaying the devices of the artist in too fervid and intense a manner. Pontormo's Descent from the Cross certainly pits itself against Alberti quite literally, presenting us with a divine body that shows itself too much. Here Christ, snakelike and mobile, presents an optically impossible girth, extending at rib level virtually from the spine around to the left shoulder (figure 11).

Pontormo's abridgement of Michelangelo's patent, the "figura serpentina", extends further than this. The central group is plainly rotating in an anticlockwise direction, mimicking a sculptural dynamism that is, as Leo Steinberg has noted in a bold and speculative paper, the depicted event (Steinberg, 1974:390).

The other broad movements in the work are perplexing: for example it is likely that Christ is being lifted, and not helped down from the cross, there being no cross nor indeed any contextual markers to indicate the scriptural moment being depicted (an early ladder was painted out and a cloud put in instead). The narrative *historia* is completely undercut. Steinberg suggests that Pontormo utilised his sources by rethinking them in episodic terms and representing the moments after the mourning of Christ, thereby indicating his distance from the iconographical burden of the Pietà.

One final feature of the work merits attention and that is the distracted and wandering glances of nearly all the figures, whose eyes are anguished (the famous Pontormesque anguish), but at the same time resemble mask-like eye-sockets. Owing to the fact that the lunette above the painting has been destroyed, it is impossible to decide with any certainty whether or not the figures are gazing upwards with tilted heads, at God as Steinberg suggests; from even a cursory glance at the extant picture however, it appears that the viewer's gaze is not returned, that in fact the figures are looking everywhere but there. Christ's own eyes are closed. The singular exception to this scattered gaze is the direct glance of the graceful and oddly powerfully-poised youth, whose significance in the work (he manifests an optical distortion similar to the Christ-figure's) is evident but unclear. What is extremely clear is the way in which Christ is devalued in the work, and the central positioning of this ambiguous youth who according to the iconography should represent either Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea but hardly does so, plays a large part in the devaluation. So does the well-known "empty centre" of the picture - the Virgin's untenanted lap, "the widowed center of the design (Steinberg, 1974:387)."

Deus Pictus: the paradox of representing Christ founders on our identification of him, which is not the same as our identification with him. When we are invited to identify with Christ in terms of Christ's salvation, (that is, according to the burden of a divinity who stands for humanity by representing its sins to itself), we are able to turn our own evil acts to good, and our own fundamental lack of integrity is at once a division from grace and a permissible return to it. Crucifixion as unwitting aggressivity, Christ as the cure - presumably at the moment of His Ascension, but all the more effective for that. Michelangelo knew that katharsis, a term honoured from poetics, implied a rebirth in the case of the sculptural arts. The Pietà, marvellously, drew its own image from the solid and imprisoning stone; the Prisoners themselves enact this process. The importance of the artist's personal intervention in this divine work is emphasised in one of the sonnets: "Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto, /Ch'un marmo solo in se non circoscriva/ Col suo soverchio, e solo a quello arriva/ La man, che ubbidisce all'intelletto (Ferroni, 1978:145)."

Problems arise, however, when we move away from the province of creativity in representation, to that of fictionality. Tertullian had been the first to make the joke about crucifying the Eucharist wafer:

Corpus illum suum fecit "hoc est corpus meum" dicendo, "id est figura corpus mei." Figura autem non fuisset, nisi veritatis esset corpus. Ceterum vacua res, quod est phantasma, figura capere non posset. Aut si propterea panem corpus sibi finxit, quia corporis carebat veritate, ergo panem debuit tradere pro nobis. Faciebat ad vanitatem Marcionis, ut panis crucifigeretur. Cur autem panem corpus suum appellat, et non magis peponem, quem Marcion cordis loco habuit? (Auerbach, 1968:188)

Any figure of Jesus in the reality of the flesh is bound to frustrate our knowledge of the nature of divinity. Nevertheless the Christian tradition is not an aniconic one, and figures of divinity serve fairly evident doctrinal purposes. During the sixteenth century the Gregorian topic concerning images of instruction was supplemented by a widespread and varying subjugation of the inner components of faith to the religious image. Frederick Hartt notes the "wave of Pietas that breaks over Italian art after 1517. . . They display a new content. No more are we invited primarily to participate in the grief of the sacred figures, nor to lacerate ourselves with Christ's sufferings. Rather, His body is presented mystically, as the Sacrament itself (Hartt, 1963:229)." I will return to this theme in my discussion of two pictures by Rosso; for the moment it is worth inquiring, in the light of Michelangelo's towering

influence over doctrines of artistic creativity: Who were the authors of these representations? Pontormo's Descent from the Cross perhaps attempts to force an answer to this question. Once we are offered Christ's limbs as pictorial values determined by a struggle against Michelangelo's divine genius, we suspect that Christ as an absolute Subject is already out on a limb, and that the identity of the figure in the work really depends on its author on earth, J. Pontormo. The figure of Christ has been deprived of any authority because it has lost its own representational power and has become the instrument of figural artifice. Christ's disinherited identity is at best supplementary: His mystery is now to be found by looking for the presence of the author in the work.

Everyone notices the uniqueness of Pontormo's work, how personal it is. But in the Descent a lack of any pictorial context cues us to the forces that went into such a work: imprinted as the figures are with Pontormo's personality, they do not speak as figures at all, really. Furthermore, they come into being owing to a kind of intertextual trick. Pontormo's portrayal of Christ still persists under this trick; but it is a "figure" merely in the sense of a "figure of speech" (*figura dicendi* in Quintilian): to see God in this painting is to see a textual gloss that attempts to invert its precedent through virtuosity.

We can begin to suspect from this appropriation of the site of figuration by the artist, that accounting for the image by means of its creative and constitutive split from the tradition is not enough. It is in the traces of a pathology of this difference, in the evidence of those suspicious marks that engender a Holmes-like reading of appearances, that our analysis can find its object. In order that we may deny the demand for a totalising identification that is invested in every picture, even in one as un-orthodox as Pontormo's, we should recognise the real significance of the erotic factor in art, desiring as it does to summon the absent one: the absent one may already be present in ourselves, in our realisation that the repressions operating in images come about owing to the fractured nature of our visual drive. I would like to discuss some paintings by Rosso in order to substantiate my argument.

Moses and the Daughters of Jethro (figure 12) is so composed that the bodies appear to be tumbling out of the picture, or even deflating. The extreme violence of the scene is supplemented by the curiously tumescent quality of the figures, whose blank and monochromatic flesh derives from the unthinkable proximity of the erotic to death. Liam Hudson remarks in Bodies of Knowledge that "What the odalisque or pin-up offers is magical access to the body of someone who is really not there. And what distinguishes the

run-of-the-mill image from the more distinguished are, ultimately. the terms on which this access is offered. At its coarsest, the pin-up offers irresponsible access to a body that is, in effect, a decorticate preparation: a body that will go through the moves of sexual response, but whose movements are uninformed by reflective intelligence or sensibility. It serves the spectator as a triggering device, much as an egg serves the herring gull (Hudson, 1982:111)." In more contemporary terms, these figures have lost their spiritual humanity, which is to say their spiritus or life's breath, and the open mouths and blank eyeholes of both human and animal figures in the painting reveal the emptiness within. What animates these figures? To ask this question is to query the situation of the soul (anima) when its occupation of the body has been forced, and I would suggest that the motor of the work depends on its communication of the perversity of erotic codes to the viewer. The easy opposition of life and death is disrupted: here is where interpretation of the work should begin, in that the painting performs something of a sacred function without it being at all an orthodox religious work. Blasphemy or pornography? Probably some space between the two.

A subject that does place itself within at least iconographical reach is Rosso's in the Dead Christ and Angels (figure 6). But here also, the certain perception of divinity is lost from the outset. For visual representations at least, Christ's body after the moment of death becomes illegitimate to the extent that it becomes merely human. No longer distinguished in paint by the hieratic stances, by the repertoire of gestures or by the numinous surrounds that are Christ's semiotic markers, the deposed form is no more than a huddle of humanity. Yet even this moment of divine subjection has its paradoxes in the painting of it. The tanned and greenish colour of the central figure suggests a corpse, while the dignity of posture and the solicitous support offered by the angels suggest, in common with the representations of effigies of dead people who were important, that Christ's death is merely temporary repose, a prelude to resurrection. If death represented as sleep suggests the afterlife, other notable features of the painting overcode this Renaissance commonplace. Shearman has suggested that the figure is that of an Adonis (Shearman, 1967:51); but even then the Christ is not grounded, for its enormous size in relation to the frame of the canvas, and its massive limbs (especially the outthrown knee and the splayed right foot just visible beneath the thighs) are hardly harmonious pointers to our conception of Adonis's athleticism and erotic charm. It is almost as if the figure is intended to displace our conceptions of it, and certainly the eroticism is

sufficiently unsettling for us to query what kind of sacred mystery is being referred to here.

Saint Gaetano of the Theatines had initiated in 1524 (two years prior to the painting of this picture) the officially sanctioned adoration of the Eucharist as a figure representing the body of Christ. He drew on the well-established theatrical tradition of the *sacra rappresentazione* to install what eventually became a semi-perpetual adoration of the Sacrament in churches, by displaying the Eucharist in the middle of a painted architectural setting, lit from behind by many candles. The ceremony of the "Forty Hours" as it was called, took place in Advent for the specified period, although later excesses regarding the length of time the Sacrament was on view had to be curbed, as the original intention of displaying the mystery of Christ's body was in danger of being supplanted by the spectacle and power of the presentation itself. Also on view during Advent was the prototype for the present-day draping of altars: a casket, or the altar itself, covered with a black cloth and heavily decorated, acting as the sepulchre of Christ. The host was watched over for forty hours, at the end of which it was carried to the high altar, in a ritual enacting Christ's deposition and His subsequent resurrection. The symbolism of the Forty Hours became extremely important to the propagators of the faith, and its visual markers - the sunburst surrounding the Eucharist, the clouds signifying the passage between earth and heaven - were immortalised in the painted dome of the Gesù and in Bernini's design crowning the chair of Saint Peter at S. Pietro.

Frederick Hartt remarks on the sudden appearance of lamps and candles in paintings at this time, and notes that Pontormo's Descent would probably only have been visible in the gloom of the Capponi chapel with the illumination provided by some of Gaetano's altar-lights actually placed in front of the painting (Hartt, 1963:231). For Gaetano took the Pauline symbolism of light extremely seriously, and intended to make a sacrament out of the shining torches that enabled the Eucharist's mystery to be represented. "It is altogether marvellous how a Christian man can exclude and deny from hospitality his Lord and God, to go in darkness toward the Highest, through the forest of this life thronged with eternal enemies, and to refuse the certain protection that is the food of life (Gaetano, quoted in Hartt, 1963:231)."

Rosso's application of this symbolism is fairly evident. Not only do the supporting figures hold large candles, they frame the work in a ceremonial manner and provide a formal impetus for the interpretation of the central figure, where the play of dark and light is most important in resolving

the represented body. The anti-naturalistic illumination of the scene, derived as it is from Leonardo, is put to symbolic use in the lower part of the painting, where almost a quarter of the canvas space is taken up by a dark region. Drapery and a ledge of marble can just be discerned in this area, and the intimate linking of darkness to Christ's own body is evident in the extensive shadow down His left side. **Corpus christi**: this figure is its own fiction, a representation occupying a line between life and death which has suddenly materialised, or a conceptual relation between the sufficiency of the visible and a symbolism evoking the invisible. Freedburg in a discussion of Rosso's Deposition makes an astute point when he ascribes to the facilitation of figures in the painting a specific agency, the action of light: "There is no physical content in these shells of humanity; they exist only by virtue of the response of the geometry of their surface to the light. This light is both pretext and cause for their character of form (Freedburg, 1961:556)." Not only is the sepulchre present in the picture, it partakes of the presentation of the picture, so that the central body itself is flooded with the mystery of the *sacra rappresentazione*. The work is a definite advance over the rather unpleasant theatre of Rosso's own Pietà (figure 5), where the appeal to the viewer is explicit if not morbid, and where Christ's body is an object of voyeuristic curiosity common in Northern art of the period.

If the central figure in Rosso's Dead Christ encodes its own sacred symbolism in the very play of liquid traces over the divine form, it also disrupts any simply sacramental interpretation for the picture as a whole, for this flow and counter-flow is the insistence of the perversely erotic. Here is a form upon which the beard and the hint of pubic hair verge on obscenity. The slickness of the body's finish, and the disturbing sickliness that results from a lack of bodily differentiation in the massive torso (and even a distortion of the body as a whole, truncated as it appears) derive from the situation of this figure at the limits of the permissibly representable. An impossible, subjective fantasy, this ambivalent figure operates in a register that resembles the workings of that nineteenth-century dream, Girodet's Sleep of Endymion, which Norman Bryson has located in the prevailing Parisian culture with its "Eastern fantasies" and promises of sexual transgression (Bryson, 1984:130-144).

The fact that such a liminal piece can operate at all is evidence of a certain logic in the inscriptions of meaning into the painting. It is possible to conclude that Rosso's Christ traces a rupture in the work considered as an object for analysis, becoming a sophisticated "fundamental signifier" (the term is Lacan's) that acts against the very

plastic values organising the way the image is produced. Who is to say where the paint stops and the body begins?

A by now fairly well-known short story by H. de Balzac explores the implications of an art where figurative values rule unchallenged.

In Le Chef d'oeuvre Inconnu (1845) the painter Frenhoffer's ultimate canvas, the one that will overcome the entire spectrum of Western representational norms in figure-painting, appears to its viewers Porbus and Poussin as an unintelligible, chaotic mess. Only a single foot emerges from the destruction. Amongst all the possibilities of colour and form, this feature alone has retained its significance in a work that is as random and expressive - that is to say, as unmediated - as the universe itself. If this extraordinary representation has crushed the logic that makes a figuration (in the mediaeval sense of a signifying allusion and a physical figure together - see Auerbach, 1968) possible, then it is unconditioned investment, it is the total body. Rosso's figures point to such a state. The material and metaphorical play they enact overturns the settled grounding of an image in the iconographical order or in the scriptural doxa. This transmutation of knowledge into the visual field is only achieved in the slippage effected between figuration and the bare fact of representation. Asleep in the picture, Christ patiently awaits the alchemy of anointments and the seclusion in the tomb which for Him will be the hidden scene of resurrection. This is not a depiction of a divine image, but of divinity in the image; the staging of Christ's reappearance/disappearance will be accomplished at a single stroke, just like the workings of all good metaphors, which are always already transformed into their objects.

If, in Rosso's picture we have equally representations of death, sleep and orgasm, then perhaps these motions can only be solicited from the work at the expense of a narrow analysis of representation, one denying the presence of the viewer's eye as the chemical transformation of a pictorial catalysis. Perception is, amongst other things, a movement of the eye that desires to overcome the supplementary and mediated nature of figures and to restore to the image the visual complexity that it has lost through being interpreted.

### Persona

In the church of Santa Trinità dei Monti at Rome a work remarkable for its conception of the human form, Daniele Ricciarelli da Volterra's Deposition of the mid-sixteenth century (figure 13) now adorns a side-chapel. Vasari's judgement of the painting is worth quoting:

He first did a Deposition from the Cross, displaying great judgement in the richness of the composition and the finely foreshortened Christ with the feet foremost and the rest of the body further back. Very fine also are the figures of those who are on the ladders lowering the body, showing the nude in many places and executed with much grace (Vasari, 1927:74).

Foreshortenings (scorci) were generally considered as highly charged semiotic markers, a local application of skill whose province was definitely *difficoltà* and not *facilità* (Ricciarelli's own temperament, Vasari says, lent itself to such representation because his execution was painfully slow and exacting). As such, scorci were not for everyone to appreciate - the truths of foreshortening were, like the foreshortened matter, abbreviated, veiled to the observer(10).

In 1582 a report governing the conduct of painters published by Cardinal Paleotti commented on the wilful bent of artists who were determined to show obscurity in their every activity:

It happens every day that in all sorts of places and most of all in churches, one sees paintings so obscure and ambiguous, that while they should, by illuminating the intelligence, both incite devotion and sting the heart, in fact they confuse the mind, pull it in a thousand directions, and keep it busy sorting out what each figure is, not without loss of devotion. (Klein, 1965:125)."

The doctrines underlying Ricciarelli's work constitute perhaps the very substance of Paleotti's dissatisfaction. Daniele was part of Michelangelo's immediate circle, a group which included Danti, Vasari to an extent and the poet Giovanni della Casa. Ludovico Dolce's Aretino dialogue fastens onto the ambivalent artistic legacy of the group: Michelangelo is stupendous, truly miraculous, and more than human. . . But only in one species, viz. a muscular body strongly marked with violent foreshortenings and action, which show every difficulty of the art and every part of the body (Klein, 1966:65).

Dolce calls this *maniera*, a mannered style, and we may infer that the very elements Vasari found so pleasing in Riciarelli's Deposition (namely, an abbreviated central figure and a wealth of nude limbs peeking through drapery in various unexpected positions) became distasteful to the Church reformers. Riciarelli in fact was personally involved in the single great moment of artistic prudery of his time, for it was he who eventually painted drapery onto the Christ of the Last Judgement, in an effort to prevent the work from being destroyed altogether.

Scorci, then, are unstable, representing for some the desintegration of artistic coherence and for others the heightened effectivity of art. At all events their importance is primarily functional, and is significant in constructing the represented body of the time. Dolce presents the customary topic:

I must put you in mind that I have said, it is of greater importance to clothe the bones with plump, soft flesh, than to make an *écorché*; and, as a proof of this truth, I add, that the ancients have, for the most part, made their figures tender, and with few parts strongly marked (Klein, 1966:66).

An *écorché* was an anatomist's model made of clay, showing the sinews and muscles of a human figure instead of its skin. Danti's treatise on proportion (Florence, 1567) takes the Michelangesque rendition of flesh as an *écorché* to be his starting-point, and develops out of its emphasis on anatomy at the expense of the bodily surface an aesthetic of the *gludizio dell'occhio* (11), based on the principle that "ordinarily, neither the human figure nor any other natural or artificial object can be portrayed with perfection exactly as it is seen (Klein, 1966:100)." A direct refutation of Alberti's metaphysic, Danti's account of the *Idea* departs from the principle that beauty is born from the order in which the human members are disposed, and locates beauty rather in the purpose for which the body's members are destined (Klein, 1966:101). The *Idea* of beauty, scattered as it is into the body, makes for a reformulation of the anecdote concerning Zeuxis and the beautiful maidens, a tale Danti is able to inject with neoplatonic pathos:

Nature, because of many accidents, almost never brings its products, and man in particular, to total perfection, or even to a greater degree of beauty than ugliness. . . And I do not know whether all the beauty that a human body can possess has ever been seen all together in one man; but one might well say that we can see one part in this man and another in that other, and that, scattered among many men, we can find it in its entirety. So that, since we wanted to imitate nature in the figure of men, and since it is almost impossible to find perfect beauty in a single one, as we said, Art, conscious of its

power to comprehend all that beauty in a single man, tries through imitation to include in the composition of one figure all the beauty which is divided among many men. Because Art knows that nature has not brought the human product to full perfection, i. e. apt to attain its own end, through which it becomes absolutely beautiful (Klein, 1966:104).

Here, the constraints of the object itself are to replace decorum. Various inherent qualities of the object-matter are realised in the work: stone becomes sculptural by nature, since the realm of art supplements nature in a particular way.

Because the artist who wishes to copy this or that object with no reasoning or elucidation concerning the being of the object, only tries to remember what he sees with his eyes; and in this case memory is used, since once a thing has been seen, the memory retains the image of it until the hand and the eyes of the artist are put to work. And for this reason one can say that copying is as different from imitating as the writing of history is from making poetry. . . This road of imitation uses all the powers of the intellect, treading in this pursuit the most noble and perfect paths of philosophy, which are the reasoning upon, and consideration of, the causes of things (Klein, 1966:183).

The *giudizio dell'occhio* will translate reality by the mediation of the intellect, and in this context we may recall not Zeuxis but Phidias, whose province is not verisimilitude but fantasy:

either moulding in wax or constructing by addition of a number of small stones, or sculpturing the rough and formless stone as though by subtraction (G. Bruno, Seals, quoted in Yates, 1984:253).

The double constitution of Riciarelli's image in terms of a neoplatonic doctrine (which attempts to legitimate the outer form from immanent conditions of production) and a scientific vision (which reads the body's inner nature from the ridges and membranes of its own materiality) creates something of a tension within which we can situate the operations of foreshortening. Michael Baxandall has remarked on how *scorci* operate a differential play between familiarity, inferred reality and novelty, since they can be read in two ways:

the first is foreshortening proper, a long thing viewed from one end so as to present a short stimulus to the eye; in this, the exercise of the mind, inferring the long from the short, is pleasant. The second is the unfamiliar view. A human face seen from its own level, full-face or in profile, is hardly less "foreshortened" than faces seen from above and below; but these are

less familiar and more easily claim our attention  
(Baxandall, 1974:143).

Scorci merely thematise the inevitable foreshortening that occurs in two-dimensional representation, but good foreshortening also translates the image into the realm of three-dimensional significance. It is possible to speculate that the "message" of Christ in Riciarelli's painting is conveyed by the very difference between these representational spaces: His self-evidence is quite particular, having to do with the loss of His fullness. Rather than being any logical extension of the Albertian projection, which seeks to convey the image from life, as if it were present, Riciarelli's Christ ruptures the smooth skin of fixed-point perspective, turning the representational surface back into itself to produce a figure that flaunts its own abbreviated presence and engenders a localised outlining and a localised space, questioning the principle of the body as surface form. Departing from the most well-known foreshortened Christ that had preceded it (Mantegna's superb Dead Christ, notable for its "hardness" of execution, amongst other things: figure 14), Volterra's figure with "the feet foremost and the rest of the body further back" is a condensed form working to displace the significance of the pressures of figuration. In the case of this particular painting, those pressures comprise the force of liturgy and the tendency of the artist to counter such a force in his attempts to portray Christ not merely as a form like any other.

In a sense genres such as the deposition of Christ are superfluous unless they stand as a humble reminder of scriptural narrative - as do the Stations of the Cross, for example. The deposition is supplementary to the Christian myth because the words of Scripture should be enough for the faithful, and yet they are replaced by an image; the scope for such images should be extremely limited. "Representation," Barthes says in The Pleasure of the Text, "is embarrassed figuration, encumbered with other meanings than that of desire: a space of alibis (reality, morality, likelihood, readability, truth, et.c)(Barthes, 1975:56)." Riciarelli's efforts to make his Christ readable can be contextualised if we consider the notion, consequent as it is on the uniqueness of the Passion, of an actual portrait of Christ. We approach hubris and the realm of the unrepresentable with this idea, but of course only in doctrinal terms, and this is where sacred images do indeed supercede the scriptural text, for they are not the best purveyors of doctrine, as the Tridentine council recognised. Let us briefly examine a contemporary portrait of Christ.

Dürer's astonishing study of Christ's somewhat bloated and fairly un-Scriptural features (figure 15) is a direct

product of the fantasy-work of painting. Panofsky records a passage by an excited Dürer:

The mind of artists is full of images which they might be able to produce; therefore, if a man properly using this art and naturally disposed, therefore, were allowed to live many hundred years he would be capable - thanks to the power given to man by God - of pouring forth and producing every day new shapes of men and other creatures the like of which was never seen before nor thought of by any other man (Panofsky, 1945:280).

In terms of the religious demand for images this sketch would be arbitrary and place-less; in fact it supplants these demands by virtue of its mere existence as one of the forms of the mind, and also because of its unsettling and unsanctioned realism. Neither formal portrait nor icon, it is rather a personal essay. A protestant picture, its faith is internally rather than externally stimulated. A large signature anchors it to its author, Albrecht Dürer, who is responsible for it in the fullest sense: Dürer's pledge of authority and his strength in portraying God on personal terms are one and the same. There is no question of a referent for the picture outside the context we wish to give to Dürer himself, as its producer.

It will be seen that we have to some extent solved an earlier difficulty raised in the context of the Descent by Pontormo, and it might be suspected that Ricciarelli's piece merely repeats the struggles with tradition so evident in the innovativeness of that work. But Ricciarelli's painting has nothing like the same introspection that we see in Pontormo's; it is related to its context in more interesting ways. To follow Vasari:

He finished the work in seven years of extraordinary labour. But as works thus produced are always bad, it lacks the light ease which charms. He himself admitted the effort, and fearing what actually happened, that he might be blamed, he did two bas-reliefs in stucco. . . In one of these scenes he represented a number of satyrs weighing legs, arms and other members to pass the good ones of correct weight and give the bad to Michelangelo and Fra Bastiano who are judging them; in the other Michelangelo is looking at himself in a mirror, the meaning of which is apparent. . . (Vasari, 1927:75)

These wry comments on the terms of Michelangesque art nevertheless place Ricciarelli within the ambit of Michelangelo's conception of maniera in quite an unproblematic way, one that acknowledges the presence of Another, of the master, in the interstices and the supports of his own painting. The companion piece to the

Deposition was an Assumption where in place of the twelve Apostles Riciarelli represented the most talented painters of the century, Michelangelo being one of those included.

If we are seeking more of a theological context for the figure of Christ we need look no further than the scriptural theme of the Rovere chapel, devoted as it is to the widely-attested magical properties of the True Cross according to the legend of St. Helena. Following the precedent established by Rosso in his Deposition (figure 16), where the Cross and various ladders form a frame or grid for the depicted scene, Riciarelli's painting centres the Cross and the heads and arms of the supporting figures so that the body of the dead Christ is relayed, or pulled away, from this central area. The doctrinal theme of the Cross is further extended in the stucco decorations of the chapel, where it appears as the *lignum vitae*, healing a sick man and even raising "a dead man, the nude body displaying a close study of the muscles and parts of the body, as do the bystanders who stand amazed at the miracle (Vasari, 1927:75)." The chapel project denies the authority of Christ and ascribes His power to the Cross instead, which imprints its force on Him, so that our knowledge of Christ as the representative of human salvation is displaced into the open-ended corpus of beliefs concerning the innumerable relics and bodily bits of saints and martyrs. In this way the message of the *écorché* is really the message of a martyred body, its attributes ascribed to the rack of suffering which has permitted its accession, the Cross itself. However there is a dialectic inscribed within this figure that is only half a figure, which reveals to us its true significance.

If the Cross and the swirling figures of the work cut up the two-dimensional pictorial spaces, the far from flattened perspective of the lamentation at the bottom of the work (which almost seems to be depicted on a different plane from the deposition) points us to the slight distortions of size and depth that the three-dimensional image encodes. The lamenting figures recede in size in a self-enclosed vignette, contradicting our perception of the size of the figures who appear to be behind them but are larger than they are. The extent to which mannerist artists arbitrarily manipulated pictorial space is well known; in this case the fragmentation proceeds by the layering and grafting of figures and planes, by the juxtaposition of crowded and empty spaces, and by the play of flesh and billowing clothes that Vasari found so fascinating. But perhaps the singular universe of the figure of Christ is especially notable, with its "feet in front and head behind" that demands from us a perception of depth at odds with the flattened off-vertical tilt of the body's angle as it

appears in foreshortened form. This particular contraction of represented space has a specific intention to guide it.

The monastery attached to S. Trinità cultivated the science of perspective amongst its scholarly community, and the cloister of the monastery has one of the finest surviving examples of anamorphic art painted along one of its walls (figures 17 and 18).

Strictly speaking anamorphic perspective, invented by Leonardo during his experiments with viewing points, is a logical extension of the techniques of *costruzione legittima* or fixed-point perspective, making use of elaborate tools and constructions to distort the projection of a figure to an extreme degree. Its distortion is as much perceptual as technical however, and depends upon the spectator being manoeuvred into the correct position from which to view the anamorphosis, so that a recondite significance might leap out at him from the image. The Franciscan theorist of perspective, J-F Nicéron, speaks of Riciarelli's Deposition in terms of this kind of theatrical peepshow:

Christ is so depicted that viewed from the left He seems to be lying down and leaning across the picture, with His right foot thrust out towards the left; but viewed from the other side His whole body appears almost vertical, much more foreshortened, and the foot which seemed to protrude on the left side appears to advance toward the right (Baltrusaitis, 1977:49).

Suddenly the body of Christ reproduces itself: here is an extraordinary consequence of the ~~maniera~~ where figures show themselves too much. Riciarelli's preoccupation with an image that simultaneously unveils itself (if this is not too paradoxical) is attested by Vasari, who notes that Giovanni della Casa demanded, and received from Riciarelli, a small clay David with a painting depicting the model "so as to show every side (Vasari, 1927:77)." Once the mind entered into the process of production, as it did in the process of *giudizio dell'occhio*, then the possibilities for representing the figure according to the spaces surrounding it were increased. The apparatus that produced such representations makes an automaton of the body itself: in his Treatise on the Passions of the Soul (1649) Descartes reiterates a notion we have seen already in Lomazzo, when he postulates that

all the movements which we make without our will contributing thereto (as frequently happens when we breathe, walk, eat, and in fact perform all these actions which are common to us and to the brutes), only depend on the confirmation of our members, and on the course which the spirits, excited by the heat of the heart, follow naturally in the brain, nerves and muscles, just as the measurements of a watch are produced simply

by the strength of the springs and the form of the wheels (Descartes, 1927:369).

The relation between materialism and idealism emerges fully here, in the play of the viewing eye that is able to apprehend two images in one: a landscape in a saint's clothing, a vignette in the hollow of a giant's eye. The fantastic theatrical extravagances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries utilised complicated stage machinery to propagate the unfolding illusions that anamorphosis affords, illusions where "images and meanings flow out of each other and change according to the direct or oblique perspective of the concept (Galileo, quoted in Baltrusaitis, 1976:56)." But of course there are not two different images in Ricciarelli's painting, merely a single image redoubled. The anamorphosis speaks of itself. One could say that this is a doubting image: it has to reproduce itself by means of the spectator's attestation, it has to increase its own materiality by extending its viewpoints and beoming an extended form in the process, midway between the second and the third dimensions (the substance of the third dimension being supplied by the gaze of the spectator himself). The image is also a forgetful image, which is to say it is extremely mindful of what it seeks to repress, namely, its own *superflicium*. The *écorché* style points us to an inner being for the image, that is then "opened up" as the spectator moves around the chapel altar; but of course this inner substance can only be signified, by a complex oscillation that sites representation in the play of the visible within the image. Finally, the image seeks to replace its mirror self, its specular point of self-recognition; which is of course the *giudizio dell'occhio*, that principle of mimesis in the subject, that innate geometry of the eye, which gives way to a split at the level of the field of viewing.

How then does the image work? It is important to note that it is not simply a devotional icon; its readability depends on more than submission. Our internal state of receptiveness and our actual bodily movements are equally important, so that the image really functions better as a vision than as a painting, especially in the light of the Tridentine decree concerning the honour that images should (or rather, should not) be accorded:

*Imagines porro Christi, deiparae Virginis et alienorum sanctorum in templis praesertim habenas et retinendas, eisque debitum honorem et venerationem impertiendam, non quod credatur inesse aliqua in iis divinitas vel virtus, propter quam sint colendae, vel quod ab iis sit aliquit petendum, vel quod fiducia in imaginibus sit figenda, veluti olim fidebat a gentibus, quae in idolis spem suam collocabant: sed quoniam honos, qui eis exhibetur, refertur ad prototypa,*

quae illae repraesentant, ita ut per imagines, quas osculamur, et coram quibus caput aperimus et procumbimus, Christum adoremus, et sanctos quorum illae similitudinem gerunt, veneremur (Canones, 1640:209).

It is typical of the period that the word used for the worship of the religious image is *veneratio* or homage, while the state of ecstasy desired for the worshipper is signified by a different word and one that the decree seeks to avoid, *adoratio*, the state from which Saint Theresa's famous visions derived, where the adoring gaze passed through the image to its signified content. This was a dangerous condition because the potency of figuration was acknowledged as confusing and seductive: worshippers might end up adoring the image itself, as the protestants alleged. Typical too is the cleverness of Riciarelli's foreshortened device, which enacts the revelation of Christ for those without mystical resources. Nevertheless, the viewer is asked to play a specific part in order for the picture to work. The viewer must perceive himself perceiving the picture, in order to become a true viewer of it, one who says "I am the persona of this picture, the principle of its visibility and its animating power. Only I can bring the image into being. I occupy its effective space, it works because it works for me." In the same way that the jesuit methods of meditation supplemented the idea of a devotional image with internal representations that constructed the image from the experience of it, so this incarnation of the viewing gaze happens because the work as a devotion of Christ relies upon His emergence as a privileged object only insofar as we are able to sustain ourselves, in the play of absence and sudden appearance that the disinherited figure inscribes. Christ's image is really the principle of our own gaze: partial, shifting, annihilating any certain perception in order to promise a final, founding perception ~ which, when we reach it, is only intelligible because it is based on a fragmentation of our own viewing position. The Body of Christ, His very figure, assumes that we ourselves cannot occupy a settled relation to it, and can only reach a "good" viewing position in the act of renouncing a situation outside this dialectic. In our moment of non-identity with the image, we realise that Christ's resurrection is really a matter of promise, that His story can be represented only by analogy and parable, that in the picture He does not exist for us in the place from which we see Him re-presented. His truth is not only abbreviated, it is always to be found somewhere other than the situation in which we apprehend it. *Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem.*

This essay has attempted to show that one of the verities of representation is its constant construction of a vision that has little to do with what our eyes can see. I would like

to end by reconstructing the artistic vision, using a simple illustration.

Every aspiring painter is made aware of his own gaze by being asked to draw a bottle. To master the exercise, he has to realise that the bottle cannot be drawn upright, as he might have thought, but that to be faithful to his vision of it, the bottle must be depicted tilting away from him. Underlying his very perception, he realises, is a rupture of space that is overcome when he learns to look at pictures. To draw, he must unlearn what his vision has taught him: that the eye ignores its own visual desires in order to make order out of represented space.

## Notes

(1) Klee deals with the classic paradoxes of the Eleatics in this regard: Zeno's sophisticated paradoxes of motion rely for their success upon a truly speculative conception of represented time and motion.

(2) See Manhire, Parkington and van Rijssen, 1972:90.

(3) See Umberto Eco's "On the possibility of generating aesthetic messages in an Edenic language," Twentieth Century Studies 6, number 7, 1972: 90, which deals with the function of metaphor in the production first of all of codes and then of their messages.

(4) See Michael Baxandall's comments on the "correct" way to view a Piero della Francesca, in his Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy, 1972: 34-36.

(5) For a general account of the place of mirrors in art, see H. Schwarz, "The mirror in art," Art Quarterly volume 15, 1952: 97-115.

(6) As Parmigianino did it, the right hand  
 Bigger than the head, thrusts at the viewer  
 And swerving easily away, as though to protect  
 What it advertises. A few leaded panes, old beams  
 Fur, pleated muslin, a coral ring run together  
 In a movement supporting the face; which swims  
 Toward and away like the hand  
 Except that it is in repose. . .

John Ashbery, "Self-portrait in a convex mirror" from the volume of the same name, 1975, :68.

(7) Hogarth records that Michelangelo had not merely admired the Belvedere sculptures in the abstract but had actually "discovered a certain principle. . . which principle gave his works a grandeur of gusto equal to the best antiques (Haskell and Penny, 1981:312-313)." The birth of aesthetic taste (Italian, gusto) out of a spatial setting is also manifest in this passage.

(8) Quoted by Bernini. See Vatican Museums, 1972: 55

(9) This un-biblical subject reflected a real historical need: Beccafumi had executed his Christ in Limbo in the year of the sack of Rome, dramatising the saving role of Christ for the pope, the emperor and the people (Hartt, 1963:238).

(10) Or so went the doctrine. Scorci could be painfully evident to the viewer also. Vasari condemned scorci in the

work of Quattrocento painters such as Botticelli, Castagno, della Francesca, Mantegna, Fra Lippi and Signorelli, who "sought with great efforts to do the impossible in art by means of labour, particularly in foreshortenings and in things unpleasant to the eye, which were as painful to see as they were difficult for them to execute (Vasari, quoted in Klein, 1966:76)." Uccello could be added to the list.

(11) David Summers in his Michelangelo and the Language of Art, 1977, offers a full treatment of this concept.



Figure one: Parmigianino, self-portrait

AD



Figure two: Dürer, sketch with left hand



Figure three: the Torso

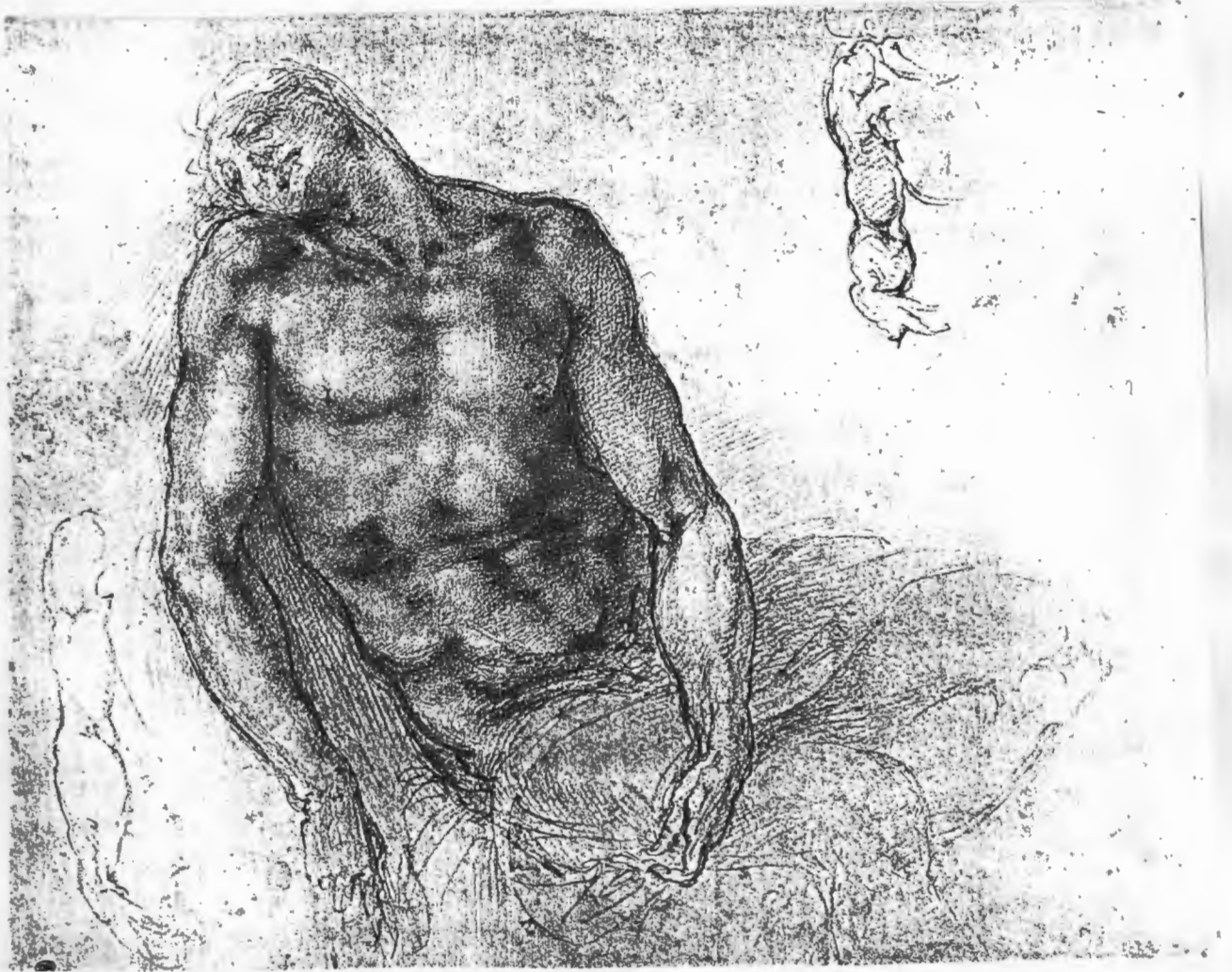


Figure four: cartoon by Michelangelo



Figure five: Rosso, Pietà

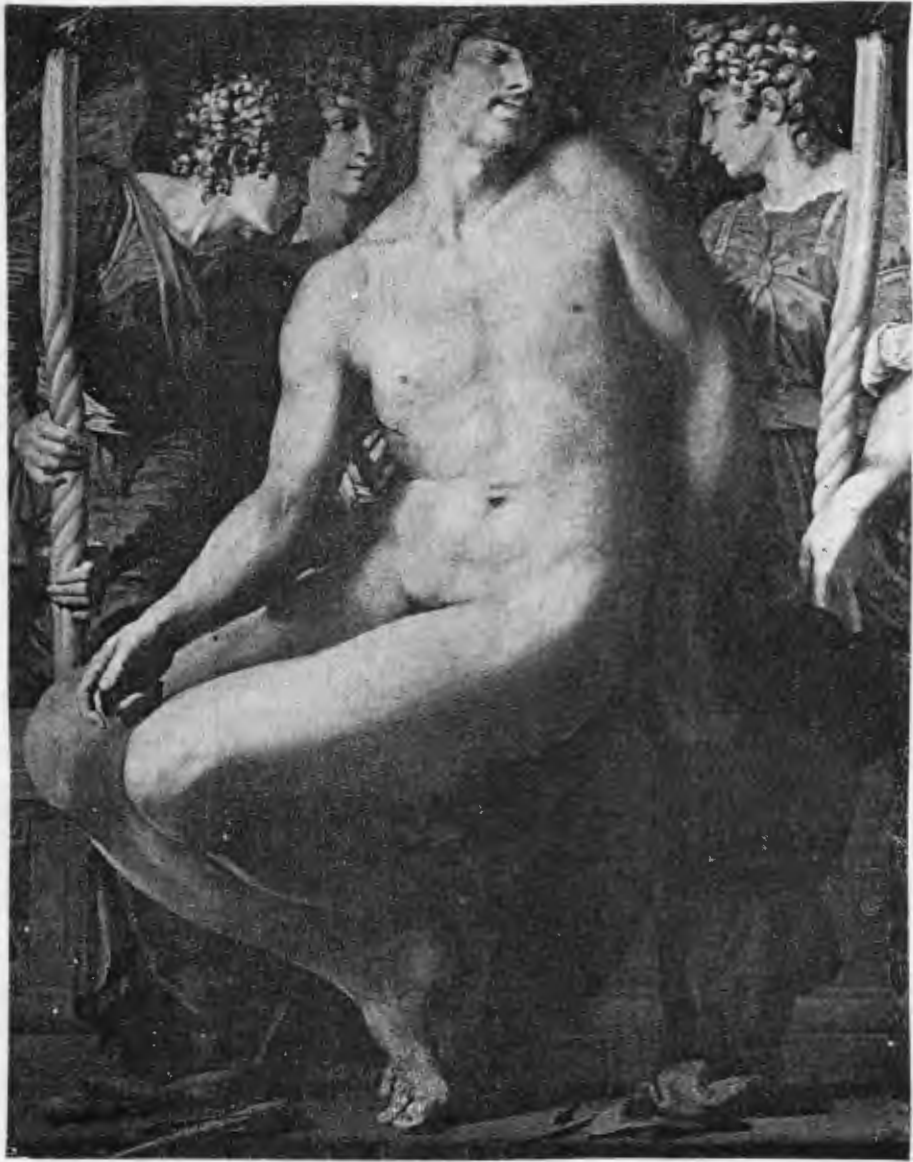


Figure six: Rosso, Dead Christ with Angels

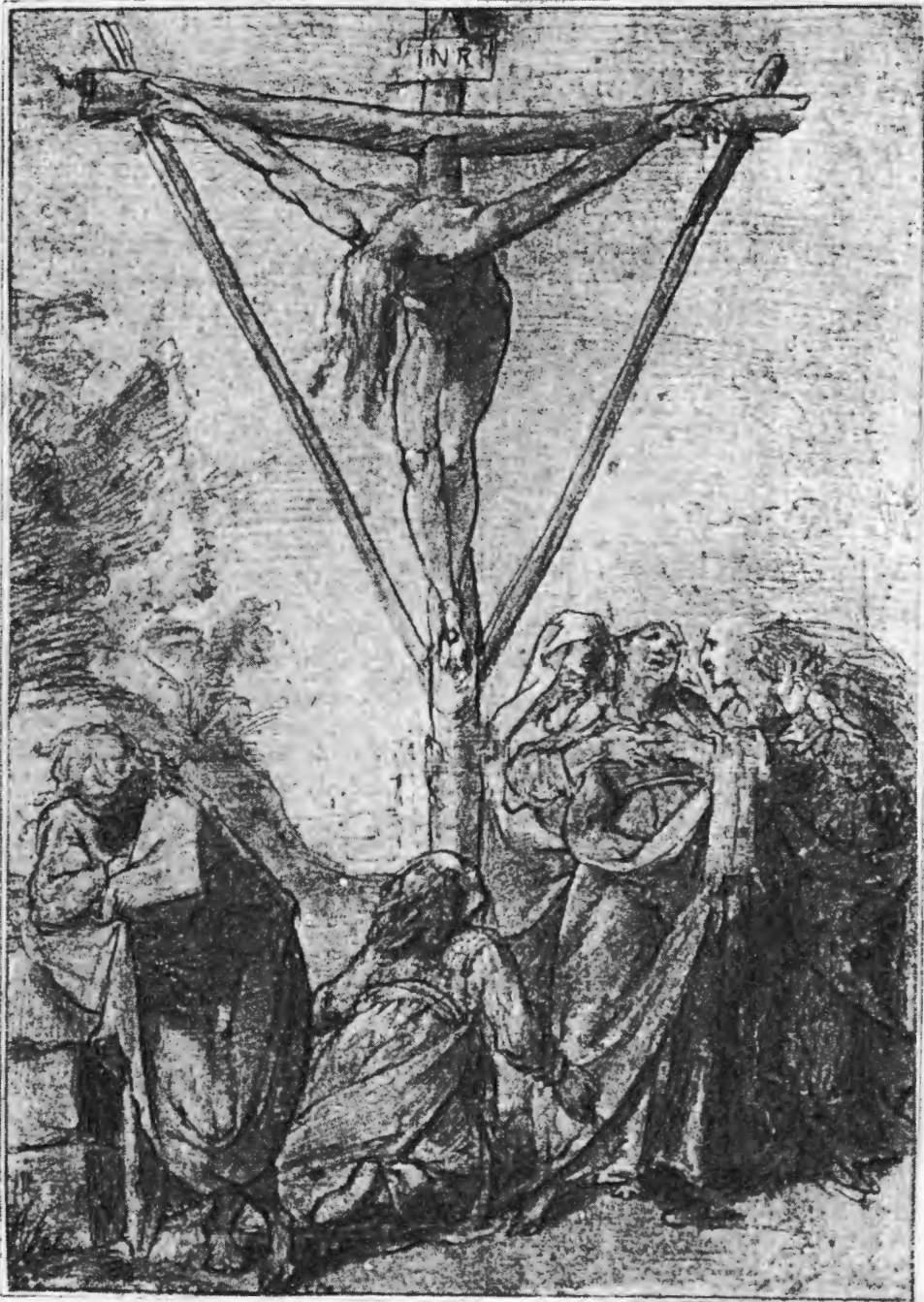


Figure seven: Rosso, crucifixion



Figure eight: Ignaz Gunther, Pietà (detail)



Figure nine: Bronzino, Christ in Limbo



Figure ten: Michelangelo, Pietà



Figure eleven: Pontormo, Descent from the Cross



Figure twelve: Rosso, Moses and the Daughters of Jethro



Figure thirteen: da Volterra, Deposition

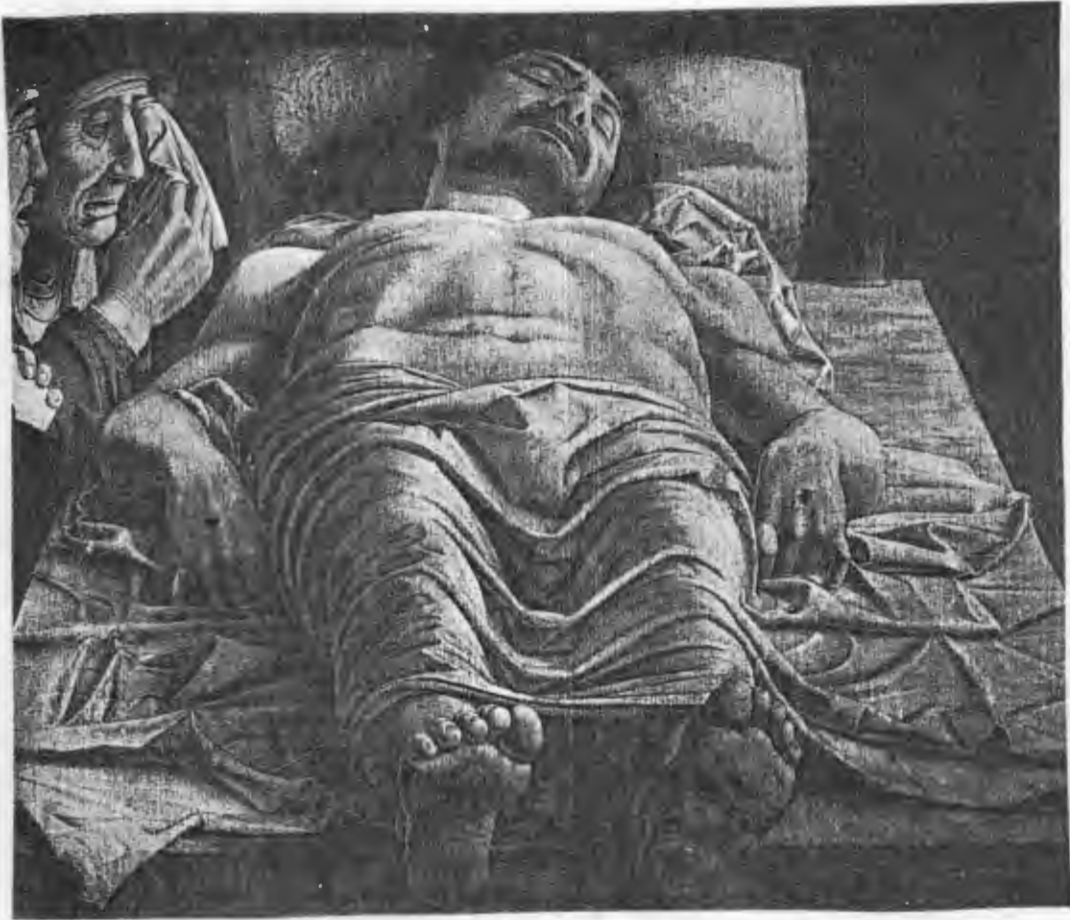


Figure fourteen: Mantegna, Dead Christ



Figure fifteen: Dürer, Portrait of a dead Christ

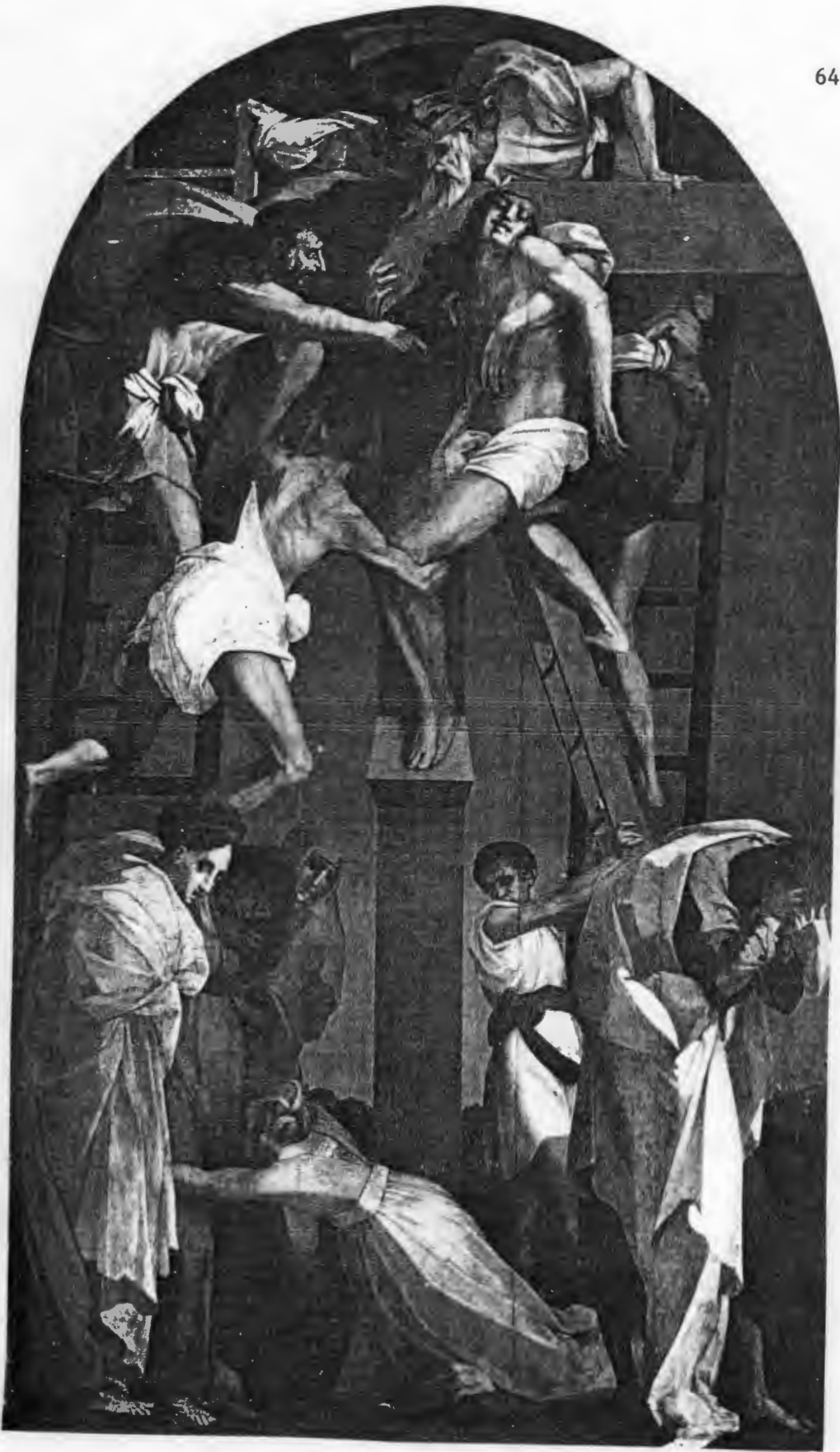


Figure sixteen: Rosso, Deposition

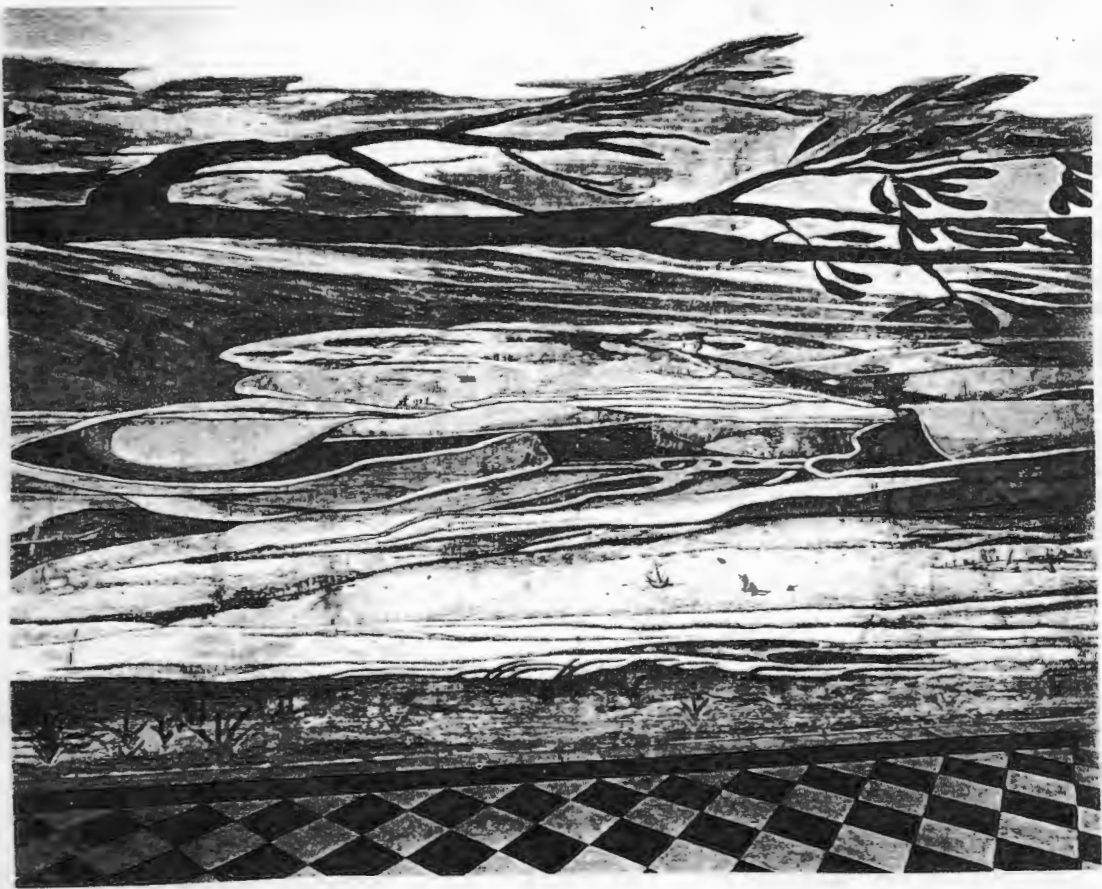


Figure seventeen: anamorphosis



Figure eighteen: anamorphic perspective

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