ON PICTORIAL ORGANIZATION

by

RICHARD WOLLHEIM

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The E. H. Lindley Memorial Lectureship Fund was established in 1941 in memory of Ernest H. Lindley, Chancellor of the University of Kansas from 1920 to 1939. In February 1941 Mr. Roy Roberts, the chairman of the committee in charge, suggested in the *Graduate Magazine* that

> the Chancellor should invite to the University for a lecture or a series of lectures, some outstanding national or world figure to speak on "Values of Living"—just as the late Chancellor proposed to do in his courses "The Human Situation" and "Plan for Living."

In the following June Mr. Roberts circulated a letter on behalf of the Committee, proposing in somewhat broader terms that

> The income from this fund should be spent in a quest of social betterment by bringing to the University each year outstanding world leaders for a lecture or series of lectures, yet with a design so broad in its outline that in the years to come, if it is deemed wise, this living memorial could take some more desirable form.

The fund was allowed to accumulate until 1954, when Professor Richard McKeon lectured on "Human Rights and International Relations." The next lecture was given in 1959 by Professor Everett C. Hughes, and has been published by the University of Kansas School of Law as part of his book *Students' Culture and Perspectives: Lectures on Medical and General Education*. The selection of lecturers for the Lindley series has since been delegated to the Department of Philosophy.

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On Pictorial Organization

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1. Paintings are organized objects. That much we know, and, in an area where not much is secure, it is worth hanging on to. The organization of his painting is something of which the painter is to some degree aware, and it is something of which he wants — again to some degree — the spectator also to be aware.

Painters are inclined to talk of their paintings as "working" or as "not working". Furthermore a painting that at one moment is found not to work may, at a later stage, through the ingenuity of the artist, or through sheer application, be made to work. It is inviting to think that whether a painting works or doesn't work has something to do with its organization, and this idea gains support from the fact that it is only at a late stage in the creative process that the painter will start to think about the painting's working. No serious painter starts out with the bare intention of making a a painting that will work: he first sets out to make a painting for this or that reason, and then later tries to make certain that it will work.

2. I start with a painting and a piece of criticism.

The painting is by Pieter Brueghel, it hangs in the Vienna museum, and it is generally called *Christ Carrying the Cross to Calvary*, or *The Procession to Calvary* (Fig. 1). It is dated 1564, and is therefore a work of Brueghel's maturity, and it depicts one of the three moments when Christ, on his way from prison to execution, accompanied by a large and indeterminate body of soldiers, sightseers, hostile citizens, and believers, stumbles under the weight of the Cross, which, as an exceptional punishment, he has been condemned to carry to the place where he will be crucified.

The criticism is by Roger Fry, the English formalist critic and art-historian. Fry, by upbringing a Quaker, by training a scientist, brought with him from his formation a strong belief in first principles. When an argument threatened to lead to an absurd conclusion, he showed a powerful disinclination to retrace the absurdity to an exaggeration in the premises.

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The essay of Fry's that I wish to consider is entitled "Some Questions in Esthetics", and it appears in a volume of essays called *Transformations* [1]. The essay criticizes Brueghel's painting on general grounds, and it fixes on a particular point to drive home his argument. The general criticism is that the painting is so cluttered up with undigested detail that the spectator is obliged to crane forward in order to make out what he is looking at. In doing so, he loses all sense of the whole. And, as a flagrant example of what is generally wrong with the painting, Fry concentrates on an element that he refers to as something that "looks like a black ring": it is be found some way up on the right hand side of the painting. Of it Fry says that it lacks "any significance in a plastic sense" [2]. Nothing, it turns out, could, within his scheme of things, be more damning.

I don't have to say why the element is there, or what it represents. You can use your eyes to see it in the picture: a phrase that will recur. The black ring represents a crowd of citizens grouped around two unoccupied crosses. They have presumably risen early, they have made their way to the barren hillside outside the city, known as the place of the skull, and there they will wait, occasionally jostling for a better position, until the procession, which is now making slow and painful progress along the foreground of the painting, arrives. When it does, the third cross will be set up between the two that are already there, and the great event of the day, which is — or so the circle of people tells us — something not to be missed, will unfold. What these sombre figures do for the overall drama is that they bring into the present, so far given over to mere haphazard bullying and abuse, a premonition of the suffering and the terror that will be experienced for certain in the future. They are, in a critical phrase of yesterday, the "objective correlative" to the passion of Christ.

Now, if Fry uses the phrase "something that looks like a black ring" to designate the detail that so offends him, it is not that he has failed to recognize its representational role. He is fully aware of it. Indeed he describes what is represented by it in terms not at all dissimilar from those I have just used. Furthermore, on one level, he shares my admiration for Brueghel's introduction of the crowd of bystanders into the painting. It is, he says, "a great psychological invention". It sets up, he says, "profound vibrations of feeling within us by its poignant condensation." He compares it to an invention of Shakespeare's.

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[1] Roger Fry, *Transformations: Critical and Speculative Essays on Art* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1926).

[2] *Op. cit.* p15.

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But ultimately for Fry the black ring, which is how he thinks that this part of the painting should be referred to when we are trying to evaluate the painting as a painting — is a bad thing. "Judged as a plastic and spatial creation" — that is to say, judged by the standards appropriate to paintings — this detail is "entirely trivial and inexpressive". In the very act of rising to the heights of Shakespeare, Brueghel contrived to betray his mission as a painter. He has subordinated plastic considerations, which should be his true imperatives, to psychological considerations, which are irrelevant.

3. In this passage, Fry tells us that Brueghel's painting doesn't work. And as if in confirmation of the connexion I was suggesting earlier, he ascribes its failure to a fault in its organization. And he goes on to explain explain why the fault is a fault. In other words, he inserts his criticism of a single painting into an overall view of pictorial organization, into which he compresses a view of what pictorial organization is and a view of what it is that makes for pictorial organization.

The overall view of pictorial organization that Fry produces combines three general principles.

My names for these principles are, in descending order of generality, the Principle of Normativity (that is the most general), the Principle of Purity, and the Principle of Formalism, and a few words on each.

First, there is the Principle of Normativity, and this states that pictorial organization is a value: it is something that artists should pursue, it is something that a picture is the better for having. A step beyond thinking that a picture organized is better than a picture not organized is to think that there are better and less good ways of organizing a picture. The principle of Normativity pronounces pictorial organization a norm, at once for painter and for spectator and critic.

Secondly, there is the Principle of Purity, and this states that there are a number of aspects of a painting that are irrelevant to the organization of a picture. They have nothing to contribute to pictorial organization nor do they stand to benefit from it. On Fry's view of the matter, which is by no means peculiar to him, these irrelevant aspects include (as we have seen) psychological considerations, and also literary or narrative considerations. The likeliest thing that such considerations can do is to distract the artist from the problems of organization through involving him in what Fry disparagingly calls "illustration": consider Brueghel and the crowd of sightseers. The Principle of Purity in effect quarantines the organization of the paint-

ing, and so, by extension, the painting itself, from issues of direct human interest.

Finally, there is the Principle of Formalism, which states that the organization of a picture is always a matter of the arrangement of, or the interrelations between, elements, or units, into which the painting may be segmented. The favoured name for such elements is "form". There are various views about what a form is, or how forms are to be identified. Some Formalists, including Fry, think that the elements into which a picture can be resolved are units that lie on the surface, where a sensitive critic will discern them. Others, also Formalists, think that the units of organization, which they often misleadingly call the syntax of the painting, lie below the surface, from which they have to be retrieved in special ways reminiscent of grammatical parsing.

4. I shall now consider these principles in ascending order of generality, starting with the Principle of Formalism, and specifically with the version in which Fry subscribed to it: that is, that the organizational units, out of which pictures are composed, lie on the pictorial surface. Perhaps not everyone may spot them immediately, but there they are.

However the Principle of Formalism is of little use to us unless we have a settled way of picking out the forms of a picture. We need a way of doing it for ourselves, and then we shall need assurance that, once we have done this, we — and "we" is now a community of spectators — have all done the same thing.

A solution to this difficulty would be to develop an operational understanding of the notion of form. We should try to come up with a process, a physical process, by means of which we can, in the presence of a picture, extract the forms from its surface.

One suggestion how this might be done is that, standing in front of a painting, say of the Brueghel, we should put, or we should imagine ourselves putting, a sheet of plain glass over or parallel to its surface. The glass completely covers the surface, and it is placed in such a way that our line of vision passes through its centre, and at right angles to it. We look through the glass, and then we trace on to the glass all the lines that can be seen through it, and, somewhat unrealistically, it must be assumed that we can do this without moving our heads. The task completed, we are to remove the glass, and, as we lift it off, we find, inscribed on the glass, a total record of the forms of the picture, and hence, once we have noted how the forms are interrelated, a record of its organization, such as it is.

Where this suggestion comes from is clear enough. It comes out of the processes devised by thinkers of the Renaissance, at once to exhibit the theory, and to facilitate the practical application, of perspective, or *costruzione legittima*. An example is Durer's "gate". In effect, the present suggestion proposes that the process of extracting the organization from a picture is a reiteration of that very process initially used by the artist to extract the picture itself from Nature.

Now, straightforward though the proposal may sound, there are very real difficulties with it. They need to be confronted.

5. As we start to draw on the glass, we shall, from time to time, find ourselves asking ourselves one or other of the following questions, Should we not at this point draw in a line, because, though none is visible through the glass, certain forms — that is, what we can independently recognize as certain forms — will otherwise go unrecorded? Alternatively, Is there not here a line that, though it is visible through the glass, we should not draw in, because it does not describe, or help to describe, what we can independently recognize as a form? So, standing in front of the Brueghel, with the glass in place, we are about to trace on it the lines that indicate the singular thorns in Christ's crown. Should we do so, or will that record a form where there is no form? Next, our attention turns to the clouds. Surely here there *are* forms, the forms of the clouds. Yet here and there Brueghel provides no line: rather he allows the clouds to blend, or merge, into the blue of the firmament. So do we not need, for the sake of completeness, to insert a line around them?

It goes without saying that it would be a serious matter if a process that was introduced for its operational value, like Durer's gate, turned out to be plagued with difficulties of application.

6. These last problems arise only because Brueghel's painting is not in a fully linear style. When a painting is not in a fully linear style, and most are not, the pictorial surface will under-determine, or it will give insufficient specification, which lines are to be inscribed on the glass.

But there is a further problem. For, even when it has been resolved how the glass is to be marked, the question arises, How are to look at the glass, with its lines, with its marks, if it is to serve us as a true record of the forms that the picture contains?

An obvious suggestion is that we should see the lines as constituting a flat or two-dimensional pattern on the surface of the glass. This

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suggestion takes up on what was presumably the rationale for ever thinking of the sheet of glass as an adequate process for extracting form from painting. For, given that what the glass does best is to reproduce with great fidelity a flat or two-dimensional pattern lying on the pictorial surface, the original thought must have been that the organization of the picture is itself something flat or in two dimensions.

But to this obvious suggestion there is a powerful objection, which incidentally would have found some support from Fry himself. It is that, since we do not ordinarily look at a painting as a flat or two-dimensional surface, it is implausible that pictorial organization, which is the core of a painting, should be in the flat or two dimensional. What this objection reminds us of is the all-important fact that, unless we are otherwise manipulated by the artist, we bring to bear upon a painting a special mode of perception, which I call "seeing-in".[3] This mode of perception is not unique to looking at pictures, and, just for this reason, it can be used to explain certain features of our pictorial experience.

Seeing-in is likely to be triggered by looking at a marked surface of any real complexity, and what is characteristic of seeing-in is its particular phenomenology, or what the experiences to which it gives rise are like for the observer who has them. When we see something in a surface, we simultaneously notice the way the surface is marked and are made visually aware of something in front of, or behind, something else. So we look at a wall stained by dirt and damp, like the wall photographed in Chicago by Aaron Siskind (Fig. 2), and, as well as taking in the textured surface, we see a boy carrying a mysterious box. Or we look at a frosted pane of glass like that photographed by Minor White, and, as well as taking in the textured surface, we see dancers in gauze dresses. And, in doing this, we manifestly do not look at the marked surface as a flat pattern.

Seeing-in is prior to painting both logically and historically. Logically, in that we can things in surfaces that neither are, nor are thought by us to be, paintings: historically, in that our ancestors must have engaged in these activities long before they decorated the caves in which they lived with the images of the animals they hunted. However, when seeing-in is taken up into painting, a major change occurs. Seeing-in acquires a criterion of correctness. When we look at a paint-

[3] See Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art: the Andrew W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts for 1984* (Princeton University Press: Princeton NJ, 1986), Lecture II, and "On Pictorial Representation", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Volume 56, number 3, Summer 1998, pp.217-226.

ing, there are certain things that can be correctly seen in it, and whatever else we might see in it is incorrectly seen in it. When we look at a certain sixteenth-century portrait, we correctly see in its surface Henry VIII of England, and, if, being old film buffs, we see Charles Laughton in it, we have made a mistake. When Proust went to the Louvre, and saw in the Ghirlandaio double portrait, not an old Italian prelate with a polyp at the end of his nose, but his friend from the Faubourg, the genial Marquis de Lau, he too made a mistake: the difference here is that he set out to do so. By contrast, in the case of stained walls, or frosted panes of glass, anything can be seen in them with equal legitimacy. There is no room for a mistake.

A question to ask is, What is the ground, or source, of the criterion of correctness that seeing-in gains for itself when it is tied to the intentional activity of painting?

It is my view that this criterion is provided for each painting by the intention, more specifically by the fulfilled intention, of the artist. What we see in a picture is something that it is correct to see there when it concurs with the fulfilled intention of the artist. But this is not, I stress, the only view of the standard of correctness, and, for our present purposes, it suffices to recognize that there is such a standard.

I return to the dependence of painting, of representational painting, upon seeing-in, and its scope. When we something in a marked surace, we are not confined to seeing in this surface things like boys and dancers, mysterious boxes and gauze dresses: we can equally see solid shapes and floating patches of colour. In consequence, when painting derives from seeing-in, it can assume either of two forms: it can be either figurative or abstract, and the history of art has borne this out. Since both kinds of painting invoke a form of looking that leads us, while remaining aware of the marked surface before our eyes, to see one thing in front of, or behind, another, the figurative/abstract distinction is best regarded as marking a difference within the representational: the concept of representation finding its unity in its dependence upon seeing-in.

I go back then to the objection to looking at the marked sheet of glass as giving us a record of a two-dimensional pattern, which in turn is the organization of the painting that lies the other side of the glass. We can now strengthen it like this: Given that when we look at paintings, our looking at them leads us to see what we can see in them, it is deeply implausible that their organization should be captured in something that we are supposed to see another way, or that requires us to inhibit seeing-in. Of course, what is drawn on the sheet of glass

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is a two-dimensional pattern: that goes without saying. But that it should be seen as such is another matter.

7. However, once we recognize that the sheet of glass with its tracings has no hope of giving us the organization of a picture unless we look at it with the express aim of seeing what we can see in it, we might start to ask, Does the sheet of glass, does Durer's gate, give us the best operationalist understanding of form? For all that this procedure gives us as its output are lines, and, when we see something in a picture, we normally depend on something more than lines. So we might go on to wonder whether a better process might not be the following: By use of the relevant projective system, or that employed by the artist, we derive from the pictorial surface, either in reality or in imagination, a groundplan that corresponds to the picture. Then, on this groundplan, we construct a three-dimensional model of the represented scene, and it is this model that gives us the forms whose interrelations constitute the organization of the picture.

But this suggestion, taken literally, has one highly paradoxical consequence. For it follows that all paintings that depict the same scene but in different conditions, or from different points of view, have the same organization. The notions of form, and of pictorial organization, seem again derailed.

To forestall this consequence, it looks as though all that is needed is a simple addition. What we need to add is a sight-line, or a perspective. The forms of a painting are such and such three-dimensional objects *seen from such-and-such a point of view,* or *cutting such-and-such profiles,* or *occluding such-and-such a space.* These are intended to be equivalent formulations.

But this new suggestion as to how to extract the forms, hence the organization, from a painting presents problems of an order that were not to be anticipated so long as the organization of the painting was held to be something two-dimensional, or the favoured operation for arriving at this record was the plane sheet of glass placed over the painting.

Initially there are the problems of under-determination, or the multiple ways in which the relevant marks on the surface fail to determine how the organization of the picture is to be recorded.

Under-determination is something we have already encountered when (one) the organization of the painting was thought to be something two-dimensional, and (two) the painting fell short of total linearity. However, when the organization of the painting is recognized

to be three-dimensional, the possibilities of under-determination massively enlarge. In addition to the case where the painting is less than fully linear, there are those cases where, for instance, there is more than one projective system in use — as in the Giottesque *The Vision of Thrones* at Assissi, where oblique projection in the upper, or heavenly, register is contrasted with perspective in the lower, orterrestrial, register — or where there is just one projective system, but there are changing viewpoints — as in Matisse's *Interior at Nice*, of 1921, or in the *Nympheas* of Monet, where the foreground of the scene is looked sharply down upon and through as from above.

However further reflexion suggests that, when pictorial organization is thought of three-dimensionally, or in terms of what we can see in the picture, the very idea of under-determination by the relevant marks on the surface, or, more precisely, the very idea of the relevant marks on the surface, becomes problematic. For now there is no clear way of ruling out, at any rate in advance, any aspect of the painting on the grounds that it does not contribute to what we see in it, hence that it does not contribute to its organization. Over and above contour, which was all that passed through Durer's gate, there are all those undelimitable aspects of the paint-surface that represent, or reveal, or intimate, the effects of light as they model, or obscure, or dissolve, volume, and each of them has therefore some claim to be counted as formal, or to be included in any record of the forms into which the painting can be analyzed.

With a question mark over the Principle of Formalism, I am ready to turn to the other two principles, the Principle of Purity and the Principle of Normativity. And I shall consider them in relation to the broad notion of pictorial organization, *where this is now freed from any necessary connexion with Formalism*. After all, there are many different ways of organizing a picture, of which the arrangement of constituent forms is only one.

8. So, the Principle of Purity.

This principle asserts the mutual independence of pictorial organization and subject-matter, both ways round. Neither depends on the other. For many devotees of the arts, it has the appeal of austerity. However it certainly flies in the face of every pictorial tradition we know. Painters, in organizing their paintings, have drawn on subject-matter, and, in developing their subject-matter, they have made use of organization. And, since this is what painters have done, and — far more important — much of the interest of their work has de-

pended on it, it is difficult to see what prevents that from concluding the matter.

I pick out two paintings for very disparate reasons, both of which illustrate the two-way street. The first painting is Raphael's *The Expulsion of Heliodorus* (Fig. 3). It is in the Vatican, and it shows the punishment wreaked on the Syrian general Heliodorus when he tried to despoil the Temple in Jerusalem of the money belonging to the widows and orphans. A heavenly rider descended, and trampled the robber underfoot, while two men flogged his battered body. I have chosen *The Expulsion of Heliodorus* because there is in existence a remarkable analysis of this painting, which makes the point that I wish to make more forcefully, and more subtly, than I could ever hope to do, and this analysis is by the most distinguished critic ever to think of himself as a Formalist, the great Swiss art-historian Heinrich Wolfflin.[4] Evidently there are Formalists and Formalists.

I select two of Wolfflin's observations. They read like throw-away obsevations, but they have been carefully studied. Both are about an odd element in the picture: the two boys who can be seen climbing up the column at the back of the Temple. The first observation goes from organization to subject-matter. Wolfflin observes how the boys' upward movement counterbalances the prone position of Heliodorus. "The scales" he says," are tipped down on the one side and rise on the other". And this formal contrast, he goes on to say, gives "real meaning" to the prostration of Heliodorus. He is not just down, but he will not get up the next moment. He is down forever. Wolfflin's second observation picks out another function that the representation of the boys perform, also interrelating form and content. But this time the observation takes us, at least initially, from subject-matter to organization. The climbing motion of the boys, he points out, serves to lead the eye backward into the picture, towards the comparative void in the centre. If we missed this organizational element, we should also miss – and now we are being taken back from organization to subject-matter — the significance of the High Priest, who is , according to Wolfflin, the expressive heart of the work. "The basic theme of imploring helplessness" Wolfflin tells us, "is central in the composition."

The second painting that I have chosen to illustrate the interweaving of subject-matter and organization, Terborch's *The Paternal Admonition* (Fig. 4), does so, not, as with *The Expulsion of Heliodorus*,

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[4] Heinrich Wolfflin, *Classic Art: an Itroduction to the Italian Renaissance*, trans. Peter and Linda Murray (Phaidon Press: London, 1963), pp 101-103.

on the local, but on the global, level. For it shows how, when our over-all view of the subject-matter of a painting changes, so too does our perception of its organization.

When Goethe introduced this painting into his great sombre novel, *Elective Affinities,* it figures there as one of three paintings that the flirtatious Luciana stages as a *tableau vivant* in order to while away the hours of boredom in her aunt's castle. As to its subject-matter, Goethe, and Luciana, he in the way he wrote her scenario, she in the way she en-acted it, had no doubts whatsoever about its representational content. It depicted a modest young girl, approaching womanhood, about to be admonished for a minor fault by her noble, knightly-looking fa-ther, while her mother conceals her slight awkwardness behind her glass of wine. You can all see the scene, and you will allow the eye to divide up the picture accordingly. The girl, who has turned away to spare us her embarrassment, faces a tribunal of mother and father: the father more exigent, the mother more withdrawn, more hesitant. Modern scholarship disagrees with all this. It maintains that Goethe made an egregious mistake about what the picture represents, or what is to be seen in it. The scene is a brothel, the noble knight is an eager client, the awkward mother is the beady-eyed madame of the house, and with her back to us is an aspirant young whore who forces up the bidding for her favours. Accept this interpretation, and, with the change in the narrative that unfolds, there is a corresponding change in the pictorial organization. The client, now sandwiched be-tween the two inhabitants of the brothel, is isolated against the dark ground. For the young girl, who still turns away from us, but no longer in modesty, or to mask from us the gentle expression that passes across her face, but now to conceal something that we do not wish to see, pairs off with the old woman who sits across from her. One is in effect the shrunken mirror image of the other. The young girl's pre-sent is the old woman's past, and the old woman's present is the young girl's future. The old woman averts her eyes from what she once was, the young woman will not allow us to see how much she recog-nizes what she will become.

9. I turn now to the Principle of Normativity.

On one level, this principle must be unobjectionable. It must be right to think that pictorial organization is a good thing, and a picture is better for being organized. It must be right to think that organiza-tion is something that an artist should pursue. And it cannot be alto-gether wrong to think that there are different ways of organizing a

picture, and, though they all bring some value with them, some are more valuable than others.

However there are dangers connected with the Principle of Normativity, of which I wish to consider two. One is a misapprehension about the relationship of a painting to its organization. The other is a failure to recognize that, there are, not merely different ways of organizing a painting — indeed every painting may be said to be differently organized — but there are different modes, or grades, of pictorial organization.

First, then, how a painting stands to its organization.

The danger I have in mind arises when, influenced by those familiar diagrams of great paintings which we find in manual of art appreciation, we start to think of the organization of a painting as something that can be separately identified, and that can somehow be bodily extricated from the physical context of the painting, and held up for public demonstration.

It is worth emphasizing that this transcendent way of understanding pictorial organization is not bound up with any one particular procedure for abstracting the organization of a picture from the picture. It is not, for instance, bound up with the procedure we considered earlier of placing a sheet of plane glass over the picture, and tracing the outlines of the forms on the glass. Indeed thinking about pictorial organization in an objectionable way does not require that we think of pictorial organization in terms of form. This point can be seen when we realize that the various diagrammatic representations of paintings that I have illustrated we have been looking at have been arrived through different operations. The first diagram – Degas's *Cotton Exchange* (Figs. 5, 6) — was arrived by something equivalent to the Durer gate: the second — Ingres's *La Source* (Figs. 7, 8) — was arrived at by tracing — do not ask how — the movements of the eye as it wanders across the surface of the work: and the third — Crivelli's *Crucifixion* (Figs. 9, 10) — is the product of some more intuitive method of capturing the dynamics of the work. We can see this when, in the last case, we substitute for the operation actually used the operation that has taken up so much of this lecture (Fig. 11).

Now, if it really were possible to gut in the way suggested the heart of a painting and capture it in a diagram, a remarkable conclusion would follow. That is that, if we were then to pair diagram and painting, the diagram would explain the interest, the value, of the painting. We would admire the painting because it is the fleshed-out diagram, and we would hold that the fleshing-out itself makes small

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contribution to the value of the painting.

If it is now said that there is no harm in thinking this, only so long as the diagram is complex enough, we are back on the same slippery slope that we tried to negotiate in connexion with form. For, short of absorbing into itself the totality of the picture, there is no point at which the diagram can be assured of claiming sufficiency for itself as an explanation of the interest that the painting holds for us.

And yet this conclusion of mine will seem excessively dismissive to some. For there will be those, even amongst the readers of this lecture, who will claim that they learnt to appreciate paintings through a study of diagrams of just the sort that I have been suggesting are worthless. Are they deceiving themselves? I suggest an analogy.

We are, let us imagine, standing in a gallery in front of a painting that, for some reason or other, we have done too little to get to know. On either side of us are friends, friends who have worked harder at the painting than we have. They want to get us to see something that we haven't. Their hands move. Their fingers trace in the air arabesques, and diagonals, and rhyming shapes, sometimes following lines inscribed on the two-dimensional surface of the picture, sometimes jabbing into the third dimension as this is to be seen in the flat surface. All the while their fingers move only a trifle above the surface of the painting.

My suggestion then is that the diagram is the analogue to the moving fingers of our friends as they work for our benefit. If we accept this, then it would seem to follow that the diagram has a use, just as the fingers have a use, only in combination with the picture. The picture is needed for the diagram to do something for us. The diagram in isolation is useful only if we are blessed with such powers of internal imagery that we can visualize the picture while we have only the diagram to look at, or we can visualize the diagram next time we see the picture.

I turn now to the second danger connected with the Principle of Normativity, and that is the failure to recognize that there are different modes, or grades, of pictorial organization. I believe that we can fruitfully distinguish three.

The lowest grade of pictorial organization is just that: it is a matter of finding a place for everything that the painter wants to introduce into the painting. It is a form of good housekeeping. In this respect, pictorial organization is inseparable from painting itself, every painter is necessarily an organizer in this mode, but it achieves prominence at either end of a certain spectrum. It achieves promi-

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nence within archaic or tribal, art, or art of a certain unworldliness, where the sense of orientation, or there being a right and a wrong way up, perhaps even the sense of there being a bounded surface, have not been established, and it achieves prominence again within an art, like northern Mannerism, of such extreme worldliness that it wishes at all costs not to place things in the most anticipated place. On this bottom grade, we think of paintings as organized or not, or possibly as more or less organized, but we have as yet no reason to think of them as well or ill organized.

It is only at the second grade of pictorial organization, which is incidentally that which we are likeliest to think of when we think about how paintings are organized, that thoughts of good organization versus bad organization arise. This is because pictorial organization is now undertaken for some value that it will secure for the painting. But what is distinctive, indeed definitive, of this second grade of organization is the kind of value that it aims at: it aims at what we might call an "organizational value". By this I mean that it aims at a value that can only be elucidated by reference to organization itself. Examples of such values would be order, harmony, symmetry, proportion, balance, tension of opposites. When any such value is intentionally realized, I say that the painting displays "good" organization, where "good" goes into inverted commas.

Pictorial organization of this second grade was the great achievement of the painting of Central Italy and the Netherlands in the century that included the last three quarters of the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth century. Later ages have admired it immeasurably, but they have less often pursued it.

This second grade of pictorial organization is the locus of deep, but widely unrecognized, confusion. Consider once again Roger Fry. For Fry, having established to his satisfaction that the essence of a painting lies in the interrelations between the forms of which it is constituted, concludes, without recognizing that this is a further step to his argument, that it lies in the *harmonious* relations between the forms. In organizing his painting, the painter, Fry tells us, strives after harmony. But two questions are thereby begged. The first is whether the painter pursues an organizational value: the second is which organizational value he pursues.

The final grade of pictorial organization is undertaken when the painter successfully arranges his painting so as to advance some further end, *and* this end is not one to be understood through the nature of organization itself: is some end internal to what the artist

hopes to achieve in, or through, his painting. What is important to see is that, not merely do most of the most interesting paintings aim at this third grade of pictorial organization, but this grade can – *can*, I emphasize, nothing stronger — be realized without any concern for, and sometimes in defiance of, the second grade. A painting can be brilliantly organized for the fulfillment of the painter's own ends, which may themselves be highly pictorial, without cultivating, without even exhibiting, "good" organization.

One thing to do at this moment would be to return to *Christ Carrying the Cross to Calvary*, and to point out how, in all but submerging the Gospel story in the disorganized mellee of figures, Brueghel is organizing his painting in his own way to express his own sense of that common humanity, in which Christ, and Christ's followers, and Christ's tormentors, share in alike. In point of fact, one extremely interesting thing about Brueghel's arrangement of the elements is that, however much he relaxes the demands of spatial unity, he keeps a strong hold on the temporal unity of the picture as is to be observed in the way he binds together the successive parts of Christ's cortege as he deftly threads it through the mass of confused citizenry. But, to make my point, I turn instead to another great painting and another great Northern painter, both less well-known: *The Castle of Egmont* by Jacob Ruisdael (Fig. 12).

10. Look at *The Castle of Egmont*, and you will see straight off two things about it.

In the first place, you will receive the very powerful impression of an organized object. Ruisdael seems to have got the parts as he wanted them, and he seems to have put them together as he wanted to. But — and this is the second thing to be observed — the painting is just as surely without that form of organization which I am calling "good" organization: its organization does not seem to realize an organizational value. On the contrary, *The Castle of Egmont* sits on the canvas in a peculiarly lopsided way. Those who are unconvinced — and great paintings that dispense with good organization persistently obfuscate this fact — might choose to draw a line down the middle of the canvas, and they will observe that everything that is of immediate interest, or that commands our attention, lies one side of that line. The great rose-red ruins of the castle, even more superb in decline, stand there, and, on the right side, there is minor detail. Once we recognize these two facts, we seem driven either to re-evaluate the painting or to use our eyes to see what might justify the grave asymmetry.

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So the eye goes searching in the right hand part of the picture to find something that, without rectifying the imbalance, will somehow make up for it. If the eye resists initial discouragement, and persists, what it will unearth is a small jewelled scene consisting of a timbered cottage, sheep, a shepherd, flowers, and a pool whose surface is patterned with dark mysterious reflections. The scene has a completeness and a lack of drama that painting learnt from Giorgione. Does this hold its own with the castle and its stormy setting? In organizational terms, is the asymmetry justified?

Clearly Ruisdael thought so, and whether the spectator also does depends, I should say, on whether or not he can accept the revelation that small things can be as interesting as big things, and that uninteresting things can be as poignant as interesting things. It depends on whether things that the spectator finds out, or, more precisely, can have the sense that he has found out, for himself can have the same weight as things to which his attention has been directed.

To make my point, I bring forward another painting that hangs in the obscurity of a nearby room in the same museum, and which, when I first saw it, made me think back to *The Castle of Egmont*. It too is organized with scant concern for "good" organization. It has the same lopsided arrangement as *The Castle of Egmont*. But this second painting, which is called *Antonia Resting* (Fig. 13), and is by the bravura painter, Antonio Mancini, doesn't "work". But the reason for its not working is not that it lacks "good" organization. It doesn't work, I should say, because the rationale of its "bad" organization, of its lopsidedness, betrays a certain banality of mind.

Unlike Ruisdael, Mancini does nothing to encourage the eye to move into the right-hand side of his painting. On the contrary, he would as soon that it remained under the spell of Antonia's body, which dominates the left-hand side of the picture. If the spell is momentarily broken, and the eye wanders to the right, Mancini has seen to it that it will go visually unrewarded, and will be forced to return to its starting-point. In other words, Mancini is fully prepared to waste one half of his canvas, loading it with triviality, in order to ensure that the other half retains its relentless pull. Surely a highly talented artist, which Mancini was, could have found a more telling way of celebrating the power of sexuality than by revealing it as triumphant over boredom: the erotic deserves a worthier rival.

11. But this is not to say that Ruisdael's way of organizing his painting does not also raise questions. It does. I have said that, if we let our

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eyes loose on the canvas, they will start to probe into the right-hand side, and, when they do, they will come up with things that we would otherwise never have noticed. But, after all, whatever the eye finds are all things that Ruisdael put there, so would it not have been better if Ruisdael had used a more orderly form of organization, and allowed the particularities of this dark, northern idyll to be discovered without any painstaking exploration of the picture?

To answer the question, we are brought back, as we always are when the the picture is organized in any way that departs from good organization, to the artist's ends in so far as these go beyond formal organization. The answer in this particular case lies, I suggest, in whatever value there is in rewarding only the eye whose curiosity has been aroused. In this way, Ruisdael puts the spectator's eye, the eye that receives and takes in, on a par with the artist's eye, the eye that discovers and arranges. Ruisdael arranges the countryside to celebrate the very virtue for the cultivation of which a more teleologically minded age might very well have thought God had invented the landscape: visual curiosity, visual devotion.

Fig. 1 Pieter Brueghel, *The Procession to Calvary,* Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
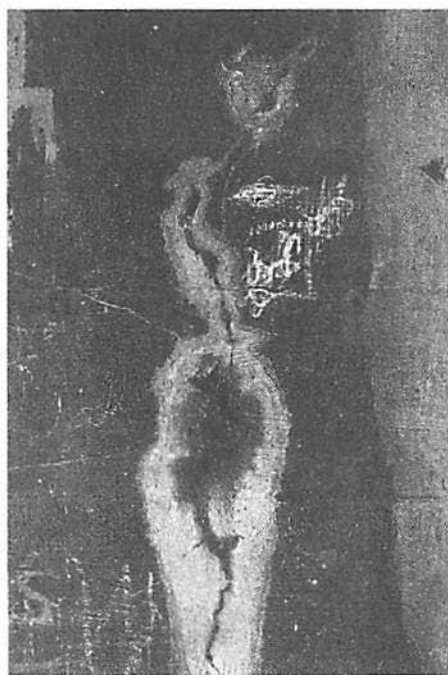

Fig. 2 Aaron Siskind, *Chicago 1948,* photograph

Fig. 3 Raphael, *The Expulsion of Heliodorus*, Vatican, Rome

Fig. 4 Gerard Terborch, *The Paternal Admonition*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Fig. 5 Edgar Degas, *The Cotton Exchange,* New Orleans, Musee d'Art, Pau

Fig. 6 diagram of Fig. 5

Fig. 7 Jean-Auguste-
Dominique Ingres,
La Source

Fig. 8 diagram of Fig. 7

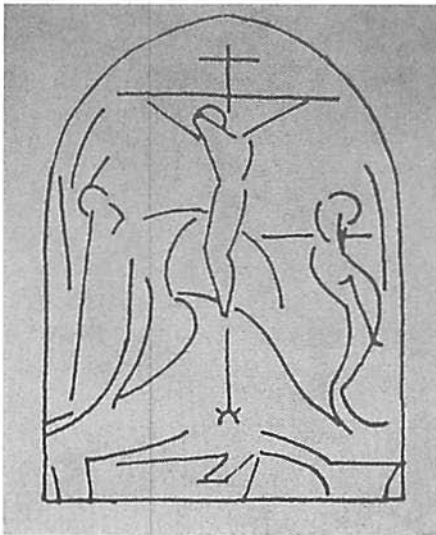**Fig. 9** Carlo Crivelli, *Crucifixion*, Art Institute Chicago
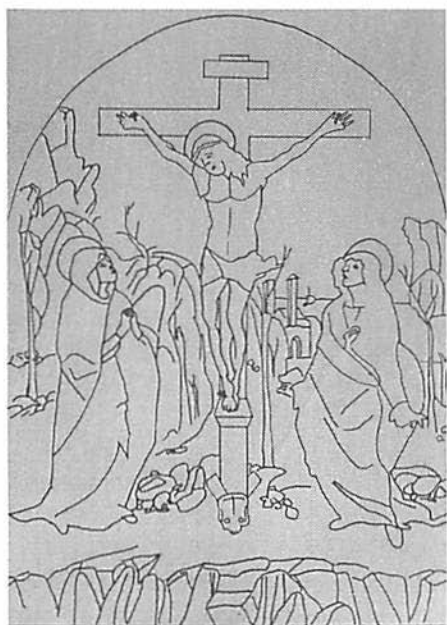

Fig. 10 first diagram of Fig. 9

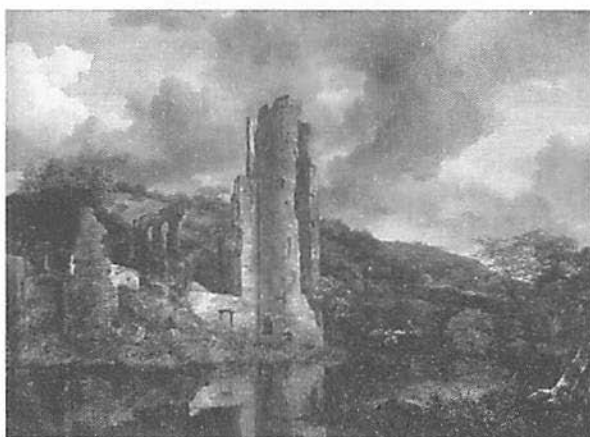**Fig. 11** second diagram of Fig. 9

Fig. 12 Jakob Ruisdael, *The Castle of Egmont,* Art Institute Chicago

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Fig. 13 Antonio Mancini, *Antonia Resting,* Art Institute Chicago

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* Pamphlet out of print.
† Reprinted in *Freedom and Morality*.
†† Printed only in *Freedom and Morality*.

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