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FABLES, FORMS AND FIGURES

If we return to the experiences of our youth, we perceive what had the power to awaken our curiosity and ambitions*. The nonconformism of the Surrealists was fostered by Romantic sources and every conceivable symbolism; even if in a roundabout manner, it was through them that the names of Klee and Kandinsky were first heard. The world of the marvellous, the only one decreed worthy of attention, opened out onto painting. The moderns of the group: Dali, Tanguy, Masson, received first prize for poetic adventure, but they harked back to certain selected precursors—rightly or wrongly—for the same gifts that they had themselves: Uccello, Bosch, Dürer, Blake, and Gustave Moreau. And indeed, by retaining only the unexpected, the fantastic, and (often indulgently) the scandalous, a taste was maintained for emotional shock and association, as exemplified by the sustained style of André Breton, and the more supple prose of Aragon.

How long could we go on talking about the bizarre Uccello, the hallucinatory Piero di Cosimo, the satanic Urs Graf, or the neurotic Caspar Priedrich, without wanting to *know*? Whilst seeming to ask a great deal, did people not ultimately make do with little? When, by the Fifties, surrealism was so prevalent that

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it had almost become the rule, it was noticed with what deplorable naivety everything had bowed down before the double spell of the occult and revolt. What was stimulating yesterday, because it was outside the norm, became—with a kind of fatalism about which one must wonder—guilty of a new conventionality. It seemed as though the evil was virtually triumphant. As Roger Caillois put it so well, for his own part, the marvellous and the fantastic demanded better treatment: and why not by way of an about-face, informed by historical criticism and evidence? How, for example, could we tolerate, that through lack of education and interest Dürer's fascinating engravings should be subjected to erratic commentaries precisely when there were within reach works accepted as "scholarly" and which opened up onto much more astonishing imaginative perspectives?

When we talk about method, we often forget to add that it is indispensable above all in the case of those manifestations which exercise upon us an attraction that is both powerful and worth exploring. This is not a question of some mechanical process of analysis and classification, such as we might dutifully adopt in the face of a neutral object. Each time, it must be extended to the *real* depth of a work or representation that moves us, and to those who have done it the honor of not being contented with a flattering or emotive response. It is in this sense, I suppose, that Titian by all accounts wore the look that one reserves "for close enemies" for his own paintings when starting on them again. Awareness of the irrational or troubled core had to be sufficiently controlled so as not to dissipate in the display of historical information.

A certain number of these studies stem, therefore, from the study of some of the themes in the domain of the marvellous: *The Queen of Sheba*, or the fantastic: *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, both of which are associated with memorable works, the one being the central register of the choir at Arezzo by Piero della Francesca, and the other the painting by Jerome Bosch in Lisbon (presented to the Orangerie in 1936), and both tackled with a concern to find out what lay *behind*. The tone of these explorations was conditioned by the choice of subject, but it was thought vital to reveal the pages of the poets or the striking memories that had contributed to their seduction. At the beginning

it was quite easy to identify certain strange tales, legends with bizarre details, and stories, in short everything that stems from the *Fable*: that universal and constant domain of the collective imagination. Yet, there were also concrete definitions, recognizable situations, complete and precise images, i.e., combinations of *Forms*, that had to be explored. The most remarkable works are to be found at the intersection of the two domains; they manifest the interagency of the two principles. Was it possible to establish a new path, if not a workable hypothesis, from such generalized evidence?

A discipline was envisaged, capable of embracing and uniting all those phenomena from myth to ritual, from fable to formalized practice, out of which is woven the life of human societies, certainly including our own. The difficulty lies in passing from the groups acknowledged as "primitive," in which writing plays only a feeble role if any, to those ruled by codes, identifiable stories, and books. It is always somewhat readily accepted that this opposition resolves itself in successive phases of history; but it is much more a question of phases that may co-exist, even in our own world. But what ultimately remains of magic, divination, or demonology... in societies in which our responses are shared between science and religion? How can we conceive of the archaeology and then the "poeticisation" of myths? How can we follow their metamorphoses? This seems a crucial question. Certain works opened up the way: for example those of the author of *Mitra-Varuna*; it was the privilege of our generation to perceive that if societies without history have myth, then historical societies have... history. The fable background immediately reveals itself in an all-too-beautiful narrative structure, but also in something else. It is the *singular detail* that will always drive the attention along. Let us take the legend of *The Queen of Sheba.*

Bilkis is the "Goose foot" (*Pé d'auco*) queen; a monstrous feature and a miraculous recovery permitted her personage to be associated with the story of the Salvation. With Shaggy Foot, or Goose Foot, this queen thereby resembled the heroes or gods of that Indo-European fable whose salient characteristic was blindness in one eye, or lameness. It is not sufficient to say: in the beginning there was the fable; like a dream, the fable *always* manifests the surprising detail, the disconcerting symmetry, the

trait of the marvelous that engraves itself upon the memory with such original force. This conspicuous imprint, a discovery of the collective imagination, is the basis for the reshaping to which the most recent cultural development yields, as is so well illustrated by the small dossier on *The Queen of Sheba.* The heart of the mystery, the paradoxical *unicum*, which has acted as the driving force behind legend during those epochs when stories were forms of knowledge, is also that which was able to ensure its survival in the hearts of those who retain only its outline. And finally, like the unexpected behavior trait, the oneiric motif or the repeated slip, that catch the attention of the psychoanalyst, the same singular detail alerts and triggers the historian.

Let us take the figuration of mourning, pain, introspection, distress, of *melancholy.* This is a constant and precise model. The *figura sedens* is found throughout literary history—it is the stereotype of the "la main à la maisselle" (the jaw resting on the hand) poetical motive—and the history of symbolic forms. In one manuscript it appears in the margin of Psalm XLII, 7, *Quare tristis es, anima mea?* In the *Melancholia 1* of Dürer, it draws the enormous wealth of saturnist theory. Between the poetic and the plastic forms the coincidence is so perfect and so ancient that it has in turn become permissible to treat the first as the description, the ἔκφρασις of the other, or the second as the illustration of the first. They are taken together and neither of the two forms can be taken as the key to the other, but only help us account for it. This conviction was the equivalent of a postulate. It has since met the problem of verbal/figurative relations, poisoned by the new linguistic philosophy: a problem that is more artificial than people seem to believe, and which we will have to negotiate on several occasions.

Analytical persistence is the *a priori* of an approach, which finds itself purged of its arbitrariness—the choice of *motifs*—only by maintaining its vigilance. At the same time the current notions of influence, or borrowing, must be held under some suspicion, and that of creation as being a little simplistic. It is only in relation to the continuity of forms in time and space that one can show up the weak points of imitation and the strong point of invention. The genealogy and charting of *motifs* are certainly provisional contrivances, but these little scenarios are convenient for provid-

ing access to the non-factual trove of expressive forms, and for grasping the functioning of a *pattern* in certain stages. E.R. Curtius thought it possible to treat the whole of Western literature on the basis of the interweaving *loci* and *topoi* that it has unceasingly exploited and disseminated.

Somebody once asked what was the best manual of iconography and symbolism. The reply is famous: read the Bible. By adding: read Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, it would be possible to embrace the very sources of the knowledge that we are trying to grasp. This, of course, is on the condition that we pay attention to its perpetual reverberations, and also on the condition that we understand that these canonical texts are embroidered, and could only be embroidered with what are lightly termed "involuntary descriptions" woven into the verbal tissue. "When Verse 13 of Psalm X says: *super aspidem et basilicum ambulabis et conculabis leonem et draconem*, it is describing a kind of Babylonian god or hero triumphant upon an animal or pair of animals from which will later emerge the figure of Saint Michael battling with the dragon, the Virtues overcoming Evil," etc. (E. Panofsky). From their inception, motifs manifest themselves in a dual version, verbal and figurative, for the simple reasons that Biblical or ancient poetry are metaphorical, and that ancient forms are symbolic.

These natural correlations have become strange to us, with our book culture. But what positive knowledge has even further alienated from our spontaneous perception is the suffusion of art in the *sacred*. If, with the same scholar, we take a look at the genesis of the motif of the animal trodden underfoot, "the animals forming the 'foot-couch' of the knights and princes represented on the slabs of medieval tombs were not originally attributes connoting praiseworthy qualities of the deceased, but symbols of evil bending to the immortal spirit." It is Christ, the Virgin, or the saints who rise up above the image of the vanquished monster. That which is "higher" must crush the "lower". It is only in a fourth instance that "the lion, originally the *leo conculcatus* of Psalm XC, has been interpreted as a symbol of force" and has taken its place at the knight's feet, the symbolic dog of the *Fides conjugalis* appearing at those of the Lady. This is a perfectly probable sequence, and one according to which a large corpus

of dispersed works may be intelligently classified: a relatively simple example of *formal genealogy*. It remains true that upon innumerable funerary slabs there is neither symbol nor support beneath the feet of the personage. Demonstration holds good only on the level of models, and, furthermore, should not make us forget the series of innovations, the truly bold strokes which take us from the upright sacred image to the supine profane figure. The adaptation involves a distortion which leaves us with an inevitable, and perhaps illusory, question as to who was responsible. Systematic history will tend towards omission; but wrongly so, for if the continuity of series reveals the anthropological constant underpinning them, distortions and insurgencies indicate the points of mutation where other forces make themselves felt. The fact of a figuration passing from the sacred to the profane, thus from the higher to the lower, leads to a consideration of the situation from a broader point of view. The necessary information bears upon the duality of the temporal and the spiritual, and the internal hierarchies of society. It teaches us about one episode, but not about a whole series. Methodology thus demands that we place particular situations in parentheses when constituting the series, and that we place the series in parentheses to deal with remarkable episodes. The commonplace is elucidated by the antecedent, and both are illuminated by the exceptional.

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Every departure that is brought to conclusion, every realized idea, every accomplished work, develops in some way *beyond* itself. We suddenly see it from the outside and soon can see it in no other way any longer. Then, everything that went for granted seems strange. Intentions become problematic for whoever was absent at the inception. The purer it was, the greater the risk, with distance, of its intriguing and leaving us perplexed. There can be no survival without accumulating deformations, meanderings, slips, and misunderstandings, which are like the patina on the work of mankind. Thus history always has to be recreated counter to historical evolution: the wisest and best conduct is itself finally condemned to be only one more episode, shining bright one moment, then obscured in its turn, waiting for someone to reanimate its flame.

This is reflected by the fate of artists. There is, in the very principle of their activity, a positive aspiration, a desire to be recognized. If, through pride, they do nothing to obtain this fame immediately, their very isolation is likely to enhance it later on. If they assume their public role with pride, coquetry, or deference, exaggerations and stories develop with their notoriety, and legends become lastingly attached to their names. This fact seemed important to us, and one should apply oneself seriously to this study of reputations; "critical fortune," in the Italian sense, must constitute a picture of vicissitudes, injustices, and emotional valuations as much as of critical judgements. Nothing better reveals the fact that we find ourselves in a world of partisanship and enthusiasms, with remonstrations, charms, and vanities striding unhindered down through the generations, until they founder in indifference. It is only that the public preservation, the appropriation by devotees, or conversely the tampering with, or even the destruction of works depend upon these fluctuations in the collective consciousness.

As for the works themselves, there is normally no suspicion of the pall of errors, irksome commentaries, and fantastic interpretations that surround them and from which they have to be disentangled. Obscurity does protect them against such improprieties, but exposes them meanwhile to inevitable tampering and deterioration. A troubled curiosity arises within us at the thought of the extraordinary mass of elaborate objects, paintings, and sculptures endlessly piling up in the immense storage vaults of our civilization, public or private. Accumulation is one of the inveterate characteristics of the human species; it provokes remarkable restorations and dubious activities; one of the most complicated to understand today remains the phenomenon of the copy, about which we have had occasion to pass some comment, and the most popular is the production of forgeries which, in their own way, also always show the state of learning. The paramount phenomenon, concerning which we have indulged in forty years of reflection, is finally, then, the museum with its overwhelming vastness. Those pieces, which often comprise the whole glory and sometimes the whole mystery of the world, which are born of passion and have kindled it in their turn, come in a slow procession to this modern and dignified place, "histor-

ically neutral, and spatially meaningless" (J. Ackermann). Negating location and epoch, the museum emphasizes the object. It is most essential that we conceive this as a discipline devoted to restoring lost dimensions rather than simply to developing those that are suggested by this solitude: therein lies the whole problem of the history of art.

To read our historians, one would sometimes gain the impression that bygone ages and societies are not lost to us, and that they cannot be lost to us; but perhaps we know too much and too little at the same time. If we open up the eyes of our awareness unsparingly wide enough, the prodigious knowledge of the human memory, so carefully stored away, stands out against a discouraging background; as a British scholar has put it so well: "The greater part of life as it is actually lived consists of minute details, of uncommunicated and even uncommunicable experiences that leave no trace..." (C.S. Lewis). History is a collection of that which is externalized, and only to the extent that it can be garnered. The totality is dizzying, but it remains incommensurable with the "unthinkable" sum-total of the thoughts and experiences of humanity. This is not a sterile attitude, but rather an invitation to us to give more serious consideration to forms of life that are traditionally neglected, and not to confine ourselves to the political system, social practices, or methods of production out of which our competing historical pictures are built up. Rejecting (on methodological grounds) their simplifications, and even turning their global views upside down in favor of well-defined *situations*, we obtain a new insight into masses of data that have been somewhat hastily incorporated into the general structure. The notion of *everyday life*, for example, unfolds over the whole range of existence; it orients us towards the sphere of the spontaneous and the vital, the unsaid, the implicit. A large part of new historical research has been engrossed by this evidence with remarkable results, of which the works of Lucien Febvre were able to give us a foretaste: people had forgotten about the concrete aspects of life and death, procreation, customs, currents of fashion, and the laws of memory. By breaking down the divisions one is free to order and redistribute the documentation in such a way as to obtain something different from the usual progressions, linking

together medical history and funerary art, court galantry and legend, the psychology of defeat and astrology.

Where does one notice the fraud, the simplification, and the glossed-over distortions that we have set ourselves to pursue? In the fact that works are not always as carefully related as they should be to the *situations* in which they belong, and for the simple reason that the latter are rarely clarified before we concern ourselves with them. Rather than slowly weaving the separate strands, it is preferred to relate the work to some concept of mankind or of society appropriate to each age. But this is certain perdition. Art, the vehicle of symbols, must naturally be examined from this point of view, it being vital to observe the relationship between figurative works and what are today called states of mind, each illuminating the other in its turn. But the relationship of artistic activity to "ideologies" is altogether another matter. It is not absurd to link artistic activity with the many manifestations of desire and pleasure: at the center of the activities designed to satisfy the primal needs, and sometimes in opposition to them. Seen in this light, the work of the painters, decorators, and architects that have stirred our interest is more closely related than we would have at first been prone to believe to styles of dress, play, dance, disguise, gifts, pet animals, retinues, and song: in sum, to the mass of data relating to the "recreational" in Huizinga's rather inflated sense of the word. The fund of anecdotes here is inexhaustible, starting with Donatello or Leonardo. Why should we hesitate thus to recognize that the "serious," in the dull sense of the term, does not constitute the whole of art? Certainly, Huizinga's shot at injecting play into every aspect of culture misses the goal; but he was not wrong in wanting to show, as against the reigning "unidimensional" history, the anthropological element that has to be remembered here. This is revealed in such a variegated and widespread area that it defies any definition: yet it is the historian's task to put things back together, not to juggle with "ideological" syntheses. Paul Veyne most felicitously isolated the essential attribute of ancient societies under the heading of *évergétisme*, which constituted the obligatory outlay for monumental foundations, offerings of works of art, or the free distribution of useful products: undertakings in-

cumbent upon the ambitious of every type. Having become virtually institutionalized, this practice only partially includes what we are seeking here, but it lies at the heart of what is rather vaguely termed the "patronage" of the Renaissance and the classical age. It is in this direction that we must try to see more clearly.

As was so observable in the colloquies organised some time ago by Jean Jacquot, there were all kinds of information simply asking to be disentangled, and no one had taken sufficient advantage of Nietzsche or Burckhardt: no one had perceived the meaning of the Surrealist upheaval. Their rediscovery was related to an increasingly apparent deficiency in the *ethos* of collective existence in the industrial age. It is this which doubtless excuses the arbitrariness, the way in which certain recent sociologies and even theologies have confused the notion of the festival, and dangerously enlarged it. One of the remarkable phenomena of the end of the twentieth century is the explicit connection of this factor with artistic life: certain groups, and even certain strong personalities, emulate, or wish to emulate, the prodigal or subversive mirth that it seems to provoke, as though the enterprise of the individual could compensate the failing of the collective. The life of the artist has always permitted a predisposition towards ostentatious, unconventional, and even extravagant postures: the historiography of the Renaissance is full of it, as is the record of the moderns.

It must not be forgotten that the festival (la fête) since it should be called by its name, supposes the alternation of workday and holiday, in order to explain the emotional fulfilment that sweeps it along. If we cleave to this notion here, to the point of making an essential feature of it, it is less out of compliance with recent fashion, which ultimately renders it suspect and useless, than to clarify the way in which we have been employing it in our essays for twenty-five years. There is one collective activity, far less pure and authentic than is sometimes thought, which makes it possible for us to outline the modality of the psychism to which we should ultimately like to relate a primordial element of the artistic drive. This, if you like, is the "Dionysian" element, the expansive irrationality, the conscious madness. Furthermore, when this phenomenon can be observed in full, as

happened in the sixteenth century, it clearly demonstrates how each facet of the social is imprinted upon the others, under the guise of the "costly show." From the economic point of view, the festival represents waste; from the psychological point of view: liberation, relaxation, and permissiveness, but with a part for everyone to play. Let us not, therefore, be too hasty to think of this as a mere subversive psychodrama on account of its licence, or simply as some mystification of power on account of its organised and propagandist element. The fact is that the festival is not superimposed upon the political and the religious: it is part of them. It contributes to the specifying of devotions and affections, or of calculated tergiversation. It represents discontinuity in the sense that it suspends collective time; but is it not a mere upheaval. We must therefore discard all the more crude conceptions, and have suggested a distinction between the festive, the ceremonial, and the theatrical, considering them primarily in their *place*, in their spatial situation.

If festivity can appear as the objective symbol of artistic behavior, architecture is its complementary element, and indeed, being of a social nature by definition it constitutes the analogous model of all production of artistic objects. It is possible to ponder indefinitely upon the existential value of the art of building. We live within the embrace of an organized expanse about whose character, imperfect or good, no man can ever be indifferent. The innumerable experiments that have been conducted by humanity in this realm testify to how much this fact has counted for all societies; none of those that has developed it into a culture has known the awkwardness and crudeness that abound in our time. During the Renaissance architecture was honorably and joyfully fêted. Filarete impurturbably associated it with the *libido*, speaking of it as "a voluptuousness comparable with that of the lover." Thus he describes that passage into externality, that projection outside of a mental form which is like the birth of an outstretched body; and it has proved possible to show how this metaphor of the *body* had become indispensable from the moment it was fully felt that architectural activity is not limited to the intitial plan or "idea." (F. Choay).

Thus we are not dealing with some mere naive anthropomorphism or anthropocentrism, simply pictured by the projection

of human limbs as architectural ones, but rather with a metaphor developed to its limits. The writings of the time are always concerned with tricks of the trade, practical information on proportions, matters of an esoteric nature such as Pacioli's observations on the apse enclosed by a dodecahedron (*De divina proportione*, chapter XXXII), legendary ones such as the reference to Noah's Ark or to the Temple of Jerusalem, or simply specious ones, as when a *cortile* is referred to as a "coliseum," to excite the attention. This means that ancient architecture demands an almost complete semiological about-turn. We have tried to demonstrate this with regard to the treatment of the *staircase*: probably the architectural element which has undergone the most grievous debasement in the twentieth century, and which previously counted most in the internal organization and exterior configuration, as highlighted in its particular way by the uncompromising genius of Palladio. In the tentative efforts of the royal house at Fontainebleau, one sees how the representative value of a type of monumental staircase can inspire a clumsy and ultimately abortive venture.

Between festival and architecture, between the ephemeral and the enduring, between waste and utility, there is no clear-cut opposition. This at least allows us to bring artistic activity back within the pale. In social practice the two manifestations require, under the direction of a foreman: "gaffer" or architect, the collaboration of extremely diverse professional groups. There is no festival without teamwork, no building without a work-site. One readily perceives manifold interconnections and "chiasmic" relations, the festival having its permanent programmatic kernel, the building its element of ostentation, and, as has been already remarked, structures even being interchangeable, since loggias and arches are raised up as entrances and since certain interior palace courtyards seem like theatre galleries.

We then wondered whether it were not possible, on the basis of this, to obtain a schema that would resolve into its constituent parts that attraction of certain works stemming from the creation of the marvelous, of what could be defined with Michel Leiris as "that which goes beyond the everyday, but is never reduced to the alien." A festive town introduces, for the duration, *another* society into the city; this *other* society is the living society, only

associated with the phantasmagorical, in a state of amusement and partially in disguise. More precisely, the *apparati* introduce into the town an imaginary and highly allegorized city, which is always conceived in relation to symbolic models. In short, there is a delightful tangency, an exciting coincidence between the two cohabiting orders: the familiar and fictive terrains momentarily predominating. The edifice, or the architectural corpus, also comprises a *coincidence*, but in an opposite sense. The imaginary project has been realized, the new piece of space, elaborated with its ornaments and effects, is like a fiction come true for whoever has seen its birth. To appreciate it is to discern and increase the feeling, there too, of a coincidence between the *mental*, that shaped the model, and the living, which orders the realized architectural space.

This mental approach that tends to combine the imaginary (or desirable) and the real (or useful), to mingle them in the same work—could this be taken as a valid principe and define a method of exploration? It is to be found in artistic manifestations which no longer have any but distant relationships with the higher categories of festival and architecture. We have looked at helmets and masks from this point of view. When the helmet is on the head—then it means war, the acknowledged seigniorial occupation; when the helmet is laid down, then it means courtesy and peace. There is nothing neutral in that metal dome and visor. Campaign helmets come to resemble parade helmets on account of the way they are decorated in the ancient fashion and because of the emblematic forms on their crest; and finally, in the series of imitation helmets, the fashion for which can be traced back, the elements become "canting," with the proliferation of animal symbols and a degeneration of the structure: the whole repertory flavored with a whimsicality that becomes rapidly enhanced with humor.

Is it possible to try and give their due to these calculated interference phenomena, to these "two-way" objects? We have long recognized in language, on the level of both spontaneous conversation and of poetry, the satisfaction that springs from the play on words, from the ambiguous construction, from a trick achieved through metaphor; from this is derived the humorous, as in the case of our helmets, as well as the most remarkable effects of

polished language, just as in that which remains for our consideration. The meaning couched within an artificially stressed rhythm is of the very essence of classical poetry: feet and rhymes charm by the reciprocal action of form and meaning. Such has been reiterated from Valéry to Jakobson with sufficient subtlety and discernment. Let us build on this, guarding against the fact that relationships generally become inverted when one passes from the literary to the plastic, from the verbal-musical to the extended, in the sense that the signifying is present before the signified. The simultaneous perception of means and ends, of sense and medium, is based in this realm upon a *licensed illusion*, all the more apparent as the formal arrangement renders it inevitable. The technique of the *intarsio*, in which an assembly of geometrical pieces of wood irresistibly conjures up an image in perspective, has struck us as an example of this.

We are no longer so far removed from the condition of all painting. The insistence—a somewhat tedious one—of Renaissance writers (and equally those of Antiquity and the Middle Ages) that the image produced conform to Nature does not exclude the consciousness of originality, nor that of the paradox of the operation. One might even be forgiven for thinking that eulogistic exclamations about the faithfulness of the figure and scene are designed to make us overlook the evidence of contrivance. Witness a little-known passage from Boccaccio which can only refer to the "Giottoesque" panels with their still relatively limited resources: "The goal of the painter's endeavor is that the painted figure, which is nothing other than a bit of color skilfully applied to a panel (...) so resemble the natural one (...) that the spectator's eyes may be partially or completely deceived" (commentary on Dante, *Inf.*, XI, 101). This says everything about the *licensed illusion* demanded by painting: a piece of wood covered with colors is turned into a figure by an operation as simple as it is overwhelming, whose force and conventionality have been familiar to the painters of all ages. It is simply that each generation redefines the standard of "truth," that is to say acceptability. One sees this each time a painter has occasion to represent a workfellow in one of his pictures.

The coincidence of two representations that are relatively, and sometimes extremely, distant from one another develops the tiny

event in the imagination out of the two-way symbol. Thus it is that on the directions of Medici friends Signorelli presented at Orvieto a preaching Antichrist, most of whose features were randomly borrowed from Savonarola, burned three years earlier. There are two possible interpretations for this. Such an opinion amounts to a constant and simply illustrated search into the superimposition of meanings, what might be called "legend on legend," or "sense on sense". The portaits of Diane de Poitiers, models of the allegorical portrait, make this clear in another department. Here the *coincidence*, or the *two-way*, is not an enjoyable addition to the compositions, but their precise *raison d'être.*

This is such a fundamental approach that one must always take the precaution of questioning the possible *double meaning*, before taking that of eliminating parasitic associations that come to mind. The discipline of "iconological" interpretation still awaits its rules, and will long await them, for the code is not a dream book, but the jumble of a repository into which the performer plunges to astonish the audience simultaneously by the coherence and the unexpectedness of the result. Given the theme—which is always metaphorical—coincidences spawn themselves progressively with the development. For in this sphere, each departure, each figurative discovery, raises some new aspect, an unexpected afflux of meaning of which not all will be able to take advantage. The short history of the *death's-head* reveals this inevitable alternation, linked to perception itself: anatomical precision accentuates the symbol of death: "Never have the skulls grinned so much as for us" (André Malraux).

The reduplication: *form on form*, is no less powerful. The Renaissance, enthusiastically collecting models and references of every order in its artistic treasuty, delighted in web-like effects whose key is lost to us. One of the exercises that modern scholarship has all the more propitiously brought to light as being recommended by the writers of antiquity and from the fifteenth century onwards, consisted of transposing some formal element from ancient art: torso, gesture, pose... into a composition with which it ostensibly had no connection. Quotations drowned in a text, in fact; and the instructions for use are indicated by the story of the *putti* of Ravenna. Thus a figure may bend according to the curvature of its model, simply for the sake of the memory

it revives. In this way people would elevate, or think they were elevating, the stylistic tenor of the work; yet the clumsy never managed to maintain the standard of their source, and the skilled made one forget it. Out of this a whole grammar can be reconstructed, but the principle of this systematic, and sometimes painfully mechanical, contamination is to give some kind of illumination to the style. The assimilation of form by form, which normally indicates the active recovery of the ancient form, confers a sort of universality upon expression, like a specific lustre. There also, the modern interpreter will never be too responsive to infiltrate himself into these practices, nor sufficiently vigilant not to suspect superfluous ones or invent erroneous ones.

If these observations be correct, what is of value in artistic products is the way they allow the superimposition of meaning on form; but it is this that sooner or later becomes difficult, and in extreme cases impossible, to discern. The analysis begins afresh on each occasion. One of the perennial reasons for the instability of works in successive ways of thinking is the fact that, as opposed to articulated language, "art cannot specify relations" (E. Gombrich). An image formulates no proposition, but unites all its elements in such a way as to induce the beholder to formulate the implicit proposition *in petto*. A piece of architecture is not the three-dimensional model of an equation, but combines all the demands incumbent upon the builder into one ensemble in which they fuse, and from which they should be able to be reconstructed after the fact. In these realms, but certainly in that of the figurative above all, the spectator's spontaneous, and therefore cultural, investment is enormous. Ready-made "interpretations" easily assume extravagant proportions, while conversely the meaning escapes notice. The history of art therefore involves a semiological expansion, and appears as the discipline that is constrained to encompass—as its "scientific" particularity—a permanent revision of interpretations.