METAPICTURES

I worry about images. Images are what things mean. Take the word image. It connotes soft, sheer flesh shimmering on the air, like the rainbowed slick of a bubble. Image connotes images, the multiplicity of being an image. Images break with a small ping, their destruction is as wonderful as their being, they are essentially instruments of torture exploding through the individual's calloused capacity to feel powerful undifferentiated emotions full of longing and dissatisfaction and monumentality. They serve no social purpose.

—E. L. Doctorow, *The Book of Daniel*

This is an essay on pictures about pictures—that is, pictures that refer to themselves or to other pictures, pictures that are used to show what a picture is.[1] It is not exactly an unprecedented subject. Self-reference is a central issue in modernist aesthetics and its various postmodern revisions. On the side of modernism, one thinks of Clement Greenberg's claim that modern art aims to explore and present the essential nature of its own medium or Michael Fried's characterization of the self-referential "absorption" and antitheatricality of modern painting.[2] With postmodernism, one thinks of

1. I am grateful to Akeel Bilgrami, Arnold Davidson, Leonard Linsky, and Joel Snyder for reading and criticizing, if not totally approving of, this essay. I also want to thank the Center for Twentieth Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, especially Katherine Woodward, Herbert Blau, and Jane Gallop, for an extraordinarily stimulating discussion of this paper in its earliest stages.

2. See Clement Greenberg's "Avant Garde and Kitsch" and "Towards a Newer Laocoon" in vol. 1, edited by John O'Brian, of *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986 and 1993); and Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood," *ArtForum* 5 (Summer 1967): 12–23.

Thierry de Duve's claim that "the work of art is self-analytic." This self-analysis is directed, not only at the medium, but at the determining conditions of the work—its institutional setting, its historical positionality, its address to beholders. As John Rajchman puts it:

> To say 'the work of art is self-analytic' is . . . to say that it consists in the crises it goes through, that it is punctuated by moments of breakthrough or 'revelation,' which require that one question one's conception of who one is or how one has invested oneself in it. It is to say that a work is constituted through those events that arrest the self-evidence of one's identity and that open other possibilities that retroactively reinterpret it.[3]

From a sufficiently embracing perspective these versions of the fundamental task of modernism may not seem opposed; that is, what Fried means by a "medium" could be understood to *include* all those determining conditions.[4] My point here is only to suggest that self-reference is the uniting theme for accounts of modern art that might seem, at first glance, to be radically opposed. This point would hardly come as a surprise to anyone who attended the Whitney Museum's 1978 exhibition, "Art about Art," which ranges freely from ancient gems to Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol, or read Leo Steinberg's catalog essay with its argument that "all art is infested by other art."[5]

This is not an essay, however, on "art about art," but on the related but distinct topic of "pictures about pictures." I want to separate, at least provisionally, the problem of pictorial self-reference from the polemics of modern and postmodern aesthetics, the battles to determine what is "authentic" or "good" or "powerful" in twentieth-century art, and resituate the issue in a rather different context. We might call this context the "ordinary language" view of pictures and images, a treatment of representation as a vernacular phenomenon. The disciplinary name of this context is "iconology," the study of the general field of images and their relation to discourse. The debates over modern art need not disappear or lose their identity in this larger context. My hope is that their stakes will be clarified by being juxtaposed with an account of pictorial self-reference that starts outside the institutions of art and cuts across the debates about modernism.

Another road not taken in this essay would lead us toward the rich literature on self-reference in logic and the philosophy of language. This approach would lead us into the whole question of "metalanguages," second-order discourses that attempt to reflect on first-order discourses. It would lead us into the knotty philosophical literature on self-referentiality, circularity, and paradox.[6] Above all, it would analyze the use of that whole class of verbal expressions typified by "I" and "this," the use of deictic terms, indices, and what are called "shifters" to establish reference—and especially self-reference—to the medium and the users of language.[7] But this is an

3. John Rajchman, from the foreword to Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism,* translated by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. xvi.

4. This, I take it, is the point of Stanley Cavell's analysis of the concept of a medium in *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

5. Jean Lipman and Richard Marshall, *Art About Art,* introduction by Leo Steinberg (New York: Dutton, 1976), p. 9.

6. The index to Jon Barwise and John Etchemendy's important book on this subject, *The Liar: An Essay on Truth and Circularity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), illustrates the connection between the semantic issue of self-reference and the geometrical figure of circularity quite nicely. If you look up the word "self-reference," you will be told to "see *circular argument.*" When you turn to "circular argument," you are told to "see *self-reference.*" Nevertheless, no one to my knowledge has been able to demonstrate that there is a *necessary* relation between self-reference and paradox. I am grateful to Leonard Linsky for coaching a very dull pupil on this subject.

7. See Elisabeth Anscombe, "The First Person," in *Mind and Language,* edited by Samuel Guttenplan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 45–65. An ordinary language account of pictorial self-reference that started with language might start with two distinct forms of self-reference in language: (1) in metalanguages, words about words, sentences that refer to themselves, propositions about propositions; (2) in linguistic expressions that refer to their producer, the use of words to point to their originating agent, the "first person" or "I" of an utterance. We might think of this as the difference between "this" and "I," the shifters or indices whose meaning shifts radically according to context: "this" only means in relation to a specific context of pointing; "I" only means in relation to a context of utterance. Is it a mistake to even think of these expressions as "referential" in the same sense? Does "I" actually "refer" to the speaker? The two versions of the Liar's Paradox illustrate the limits of these two forms of self-reference: "The Sentence between these quotation marks is false," and "I always lie." Self-reference in the first statement takes the form of metalanguage; it refers to "the sentence," its own existence as a piece of language. The "self" referred to in the second expression is the producer of the expression, the speaker. This is like the difference between something that shows "itself," versus something that shows "oneself," the difference between showing *showing,* and showing the shower. We might picture the two forms of self-reference by

essay on pictures about pictures, not on words about words. Its aim is not to derive a model for pictorial self-reference from art or language, but to see if pictures provide their own metalanguage. I want to experiment with the notion that pictures might be capable of reflection on themselves, capable of providing a second-order discourse that tells us—or at least shows us—something about pictures. My procedure, therefore, will be ekphrastic.[8] That is, I'm simply going to attempt faithful descriptions of a series of pictures that seem to be self-referential in various ways. This raises some obvious problems about the whole claim implicit in the concept of the "metapicture," which would seem, on the face of it, to be an attempt to construct a second-order discourse about pictures *without* recourse to language, without resorting to ekphrasis. But this is an essay *about* pictures about pictures; it is not an essay *in* pictures, but in words. I will return to the problem of "words about pictures" (and what metapictures say about them) in my conclusion. In the meantime, I'm not going to claim that these words are free of special knowledge or interpretation or speculation, nor are they to be seen as innocent about related issues of self-reference in art and language. I also make no claim that the pictures are artistically important or philosophically profound; they are only presented to illustrate the ways pictures reflect on themselves. Each example should be understood, then, as a kind of specimen that is to be explored for what it tells us about itself and for what it might suggest about other metapictures.

The Picture Itself

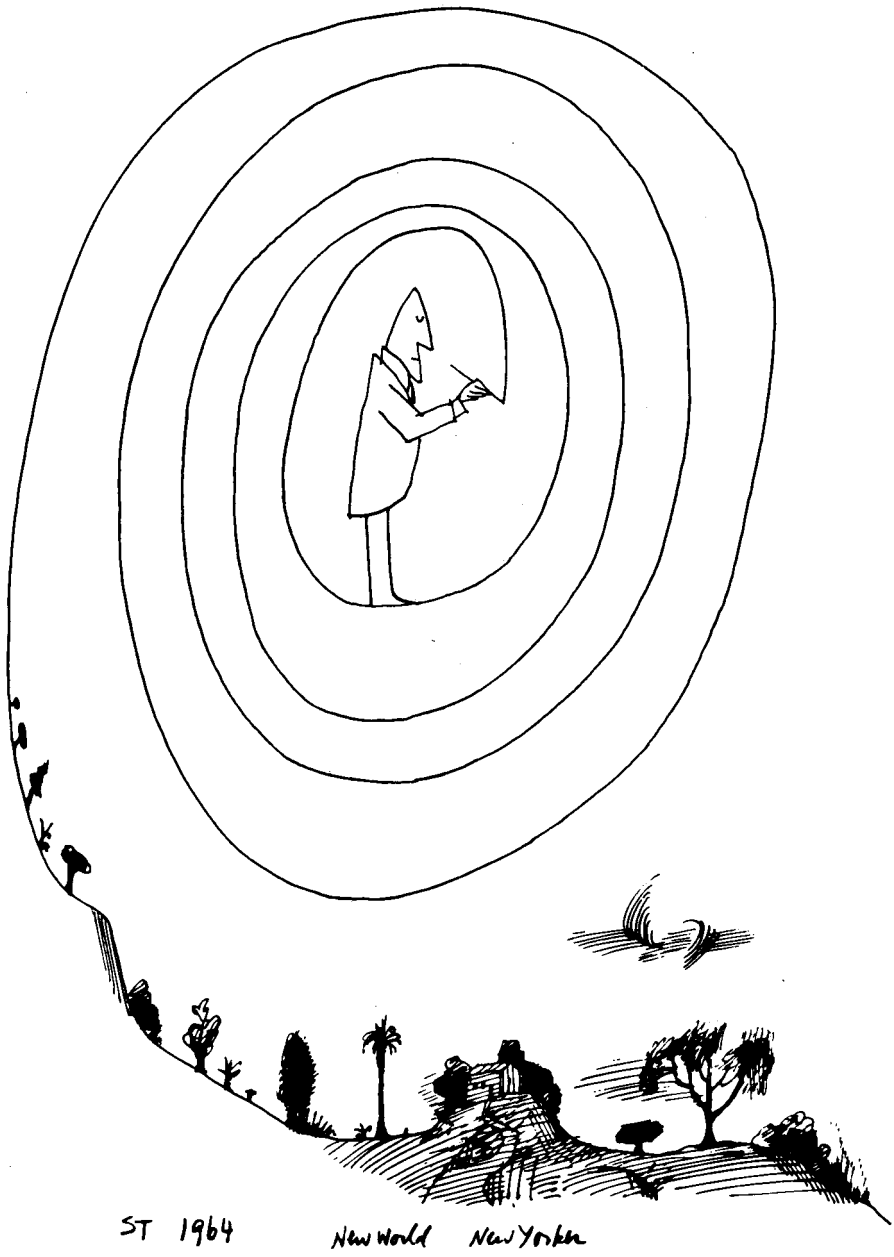
An important part of the "psychoanalysis" of the painting is conducted by the painting itself.

—Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*

A rather ordinary gentleman in a cutaway coat is drawing a picture (figure 1). He is close to the end; the available space is almost filled,

imagining two portraits, one of a sitter in profile pointing to herself, the other of a face staring directly at us. The first picture says "she is there"; the second "I am here." Meyer Schapiro makes this point about frontal/profile images in *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* (Hague: Mouton, 1973), pp. 38–39.

8. See chapter 5, "Ekphrasis and the Other," for an extended account of this verbal strategy.



1. Saul Steinberg, *The Spiral* (1964), from Steinberg's *New World* series. Drawing by Saul Steinberg; © 1963, 1991 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

and the drawing has nowhere to go but into the draughtsman's own body, for the man is in his own picture, standing in the center of the spiral he has drawn, a spiral whose outer ring has been elaborated as a rural landscape with trees, a wisp of cloud, and a cottage on a hill. The gentleman dominates this landscape; he stands above it like a sky-god in a whirlwind above his creation. Yet he looks indifferent to it, his attention (if any) confined to the point where his pen touches the line it is inscribing, or withdrawn inward, veiled under his hooded eyelids and impassive mouth. He is serene and poised in just a hint of contrapposto with his weight slightly forward. Everything in his world, including himself, has been created by himself. Even the signature, title, and credit line at the bottom ("ST 1964 New World New Yorker") is the product of his pen.[9]

This is the fiction of the drawing. Seen as fact, as the trace of a real event, an act of drawing by Saul Steinberg, we may read its narrative in the opposite direction, and the temporal line will run from inside to outside, from center to circumference. Seen as fact, we do not look at the scene of the drawing, but imagine the activity of the artist. We see him beginning with a drawing of a man in the center of an empty sheet of paper, drawing the pen in the man's hand, drawing the widening spiral outward from the pen until it begins to fill the page, elaborating the outer sweep of the line with landscape features, and then adding the signature, title, and destination of the drawing. Read clockwise, the drawing could be taken as an allegory of a familiar history of modern painting, one which begins with representation of the external world and moves toward pure abstraction. Read counterclockwise, the drawing shows another history, one that has moved from the figure to abstraction to landscape to the writing at the bottom—to a "New World" that lies beyond the circumference of the drawing.

Saul Steinberg has described this as "a frightening drawing," one which "gets narrower and narrower," like "the life of the artist who lives by his own essence. He becomes the line itself and finally, when the spiral is closed, he becomes nature."[10] Steinberg gives us an artist's

9. The actual title of Steinberg's drawing is *The Spiral*, but it first appeared in *The New Yorker* with the title *New World*. This title established the drawing as the exemplar of a whole series of drawings on the theme of the artist as world-maker.

10. Quoted in Harold Rosenberg's text for the Whitney Museum catalog, *Saul Steinberg* (New York: Knopf, 1978), p. 19.

reading of the drawing, a reading from inside. He sees this as a terrifying, sublime image of the danger in self-reflexive art. But there is another view of the drawing which comes at it from the outside. From this angle, the drawing is not "art," but a *New Yorker* cartoon; it is not sublime but ridiculous. This view notices that the drawing is not a portrait of the artist as expressive individual creating a world from nothing, but of the bourgeois gentleman doodling aimlessly on his scratchpad. This is certainly not the modern stereotype of the bohemian artist. It is more like an image of a possible viewer of the picture, perhaps a "New Yorker," an average reader of the *New Yorker*, a comfortable, affluent, urbane man of business enjoying a moment of leisure. If Matisse created an art for the tired businessman, Steinberg seems to be showing us the art *of* the tired businessman. The "New World" designated by the title is not the abstracted world of the autonomous, alienated artist, but *our* world ("America" or "1964," as the caption puts it), a world that is not merely represented by pictures, but actually constituted and brought into being by picture-making. It is a perfect illustration of what I have called the "pictorial turn" in postmodern culture, the sense that we live in a world of images, a world in which, to paraphrase Derrida, there is nothing outside the picture.[11]

This view of the drawing may finally be as frightening as Steinberg's view from the inside. We spectators can defend ourselves against it by differentiating ourselves from the figure (not everyone is a white male in a formal cutaway suit) or removing ourselves from its time (we can say that the "New World" of "1964," the drawing's date, is not our world of 1993). But both of these defenses are easily breached by a recognition of the way the picture reaches out to us, lays a claim on us. "I" the spectator may not be a well-to-do bourgeois, but this "I" knows that she or he lives in a world dominated by business. The "New World" constituted by pictures may be old news at the end of the twentieth century, a cliché of postmodernism, but it is still our world. In a post–Cold War era of the final victory of capitalism, of global culture of images and simulation, the drawing has a feeling of prophetic realism. Steinberg's drawing is a metapicture, a self-referential image; it is quite strictly and formally a drawing that is "about itself." That doesn't prevent it from being about a great many other things and, even more fundamentally, from calling into question

11. See chapter The Pictorial Turn, for further discussion of this laim.

the basic issues of reference that determine what a picture is about and constitute the "selves" referred to in its structure of self-reference.

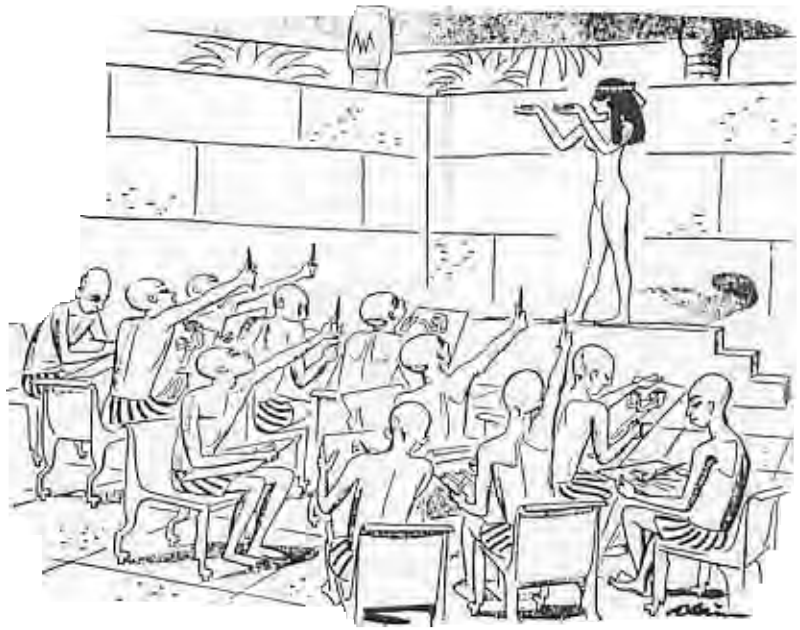
Perhaps the most obvious thing called into question by this metapicture is the structure of "inside and outside," first- and second-order representation, on which the whole concept of "meta-" is based. An image of nested, concentric spaces and levels is required to stabilize a metapicture, or any second-order discourse, to separate it cleanly from the first-order object-language it describes. Thus, most metapictures depict a picture-within-a-picture that is simply one among the many objects represented. Even a picture-within-a-picture that duplicates its framing image (the effect of the *mise en abîme*) can, in principle, keep its levels, boundaries, and frames distinct. Consider a drawing that shows a man painting a picture of a man painting a picture of a man . . . etc. The infinite regress of simulation, duplication, and repetition does not blur the distinctness of levels, except at the vanishing point; one simply has *n*-levels of nested representation, each level clearly distinguished as an outside to another inside. Steinberg's drawing is a kind of deliberate evocation and transgression of this clearly demarcated "nesting" structure. The spiral form constructs an inside-outside structure that is continuous, without breaks or demarcations or duplications. It is a metapicture in a strict or formal sense, a picture about itself, a picture that refers to its own making, yet one that dissolves the boundary between inside and outside, first- and second-order representation, on which the metapictorial structure depends.[12]

Other Pictures

> It is a subversive operation, hidden by and within a limpid discourse, a Trojan horse, a panoptical fiction, using clarity for inserting an otherness into our "epistemè."
>
> —Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*

Alain's well-known cartoon (figure 2) from the *New Yorker* (1955) is a metapicture that refers, not to itself, but to a class of pictures that are generally understood to be different in kind from itself. Alain shows us a class of Egyptian art students "drawing from the life,"

12. See Roland Barthes, *All Except You* (Galerie Maeght, 1983) for further reflections on "*le représentant d'un représentant*" in Steinberg's drawings.



2. Alain, "Egyptian Life Class." Drawing by Alain; © 1955, 1983 by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

rendering the figure of a nude model who stands in a stiff, flat pose remarkably similar to those flat, stiff figures we find in Egyptian painting. In contrast to Steinberg, whose artist-gentleman's eyes are closed in a kind of parody of modernist "absorption," Alain's artists are clearly involved in the traditional problem of representing the visible world. If Steinberg shows us a modernist narrative of art history embedded inside a postmodern counternarrative, Alain depicts a classical narrative of art history as the progress of visual representation from the ancients to the present day.

Ernst Gombrich employs this picture as the opening illustration to *Art and Illusion,* arguing that it provides a key to the "riddle of style" in the history of art, the puzzling fact that ways of picturing the world are different in different times and places.[13] "Egypt" is

13. Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 2. Further page references will be cited in the text.

Gombrich's figure for the most radical form of this difference: it stands for both historical and racial otherness, for a static, stereotyped, repetitious Oriental art, the "prehistory" of art before the "Greek revolution" introduces the dynamic progression of "schema and correction" into the development of visual representation. For Gombrich, Alain's cartoon "hints that they [the Egyptians] perceived nature in a different way" (p. 3) or, even more fundamentally, that they did not see nature at all, but merely copied the same formulas they already knew: "We have often looked back to the Egyptians," says Gombrich, "and their method of representing in a picture all they knew rather than all they saw" (p. 394).

Gombrich's reading of Alain's cartoon is curious, if only for its failure to say anything about what makes this cartoon funny, much less anything about the details of the picture. One is almost tempted to say that he brings his schema or stereotype of "Egypt" to the picture and sees in it only what he is prepared to see. The most conspicuous problem in Gombrich's reading is his suggestion that the cartoon shows the Egyptians "perceived nature in a different way." In fact, the whole point of the cartoon is that the Egyptian art students are not shown as "different" at all, but behave just as modern, Western art students do in a traditional life-class. They sight along their thumbs to "put the model in perspective" and establish proportions, and the drawings they produce seem to duplicate quite faithfully the contours of the model. They are shown drawing exactly what they see, not some "stereotype" or conceptual schema. What is funny about the cartoon, I take it, is not that ancient Egyptians are shown (as we might expect) to be exotic, alien, and different from us, but that they are shown (against all expectation) to be just like us.[14]

The point of the cartoon may be clarified further by asking ourselves just who the joke is on. Gombrich, I take it, thinks it is on the myopic Egyptians who cannot see (much less depict) nature because they are trapped in their stereotyped conventions. From this standpoint, all Egyptian art and artists "look alike," in both the relevant senses. The art of the other continues to be relevant to us, in Gombrich's view, because it is a "beginning" to a history of pictorial progress that must always be repeated, in the way children must go through the drawing of basic shapes before they can begin to "correct" them against visual reality. As Gombrich puts it: "The 'Egyptian' in *us* [emphasis mine] can be suppressed, but he can never be quite defeated" (p. 395). In the alternate reading, the joke is on us,

14. n grateful to ›el Snyder for explaining this joke to me.

on modern beholders who expect a picture of an alien, exotic way of picture-making and who come to realize that this is really a picture of the way we make pictures. The stereotypical "sameness" we project on the Egyptians is actually a reflection of our own conventions; our "dynamic" and "progressive" exploration of "nature" in the "life-class" is revealed by Alain to be as deeply entrenched in sameness and repetition as were the paintings of the Egyptians.

I'm not suggesting, however, that this second reading is simply "right" in contrast to Gombrich's "wrong" reading. In a very real sense, the second reading depends upon the first: it is the expectation of insight into difference that sets up the deflating revelation of sameness, like finding out too soon that the secret of Polish humor is—timing. Gombrich's reading is, as it were, the necessary straight man or straw man for the joke of Alain's cartoon. The two readings of Alain, like the two readings of Steinberg's "New World," stand in a dialectical relationship, by which I mean that they contradict one another, oppose one another, and yet they also require, give life to, one another. Whatever these cartoons amount to as totalities, as metapictures, is not reducible to one reading or the other but is constituted in the argument or dialogue between them.

Dialectical Images

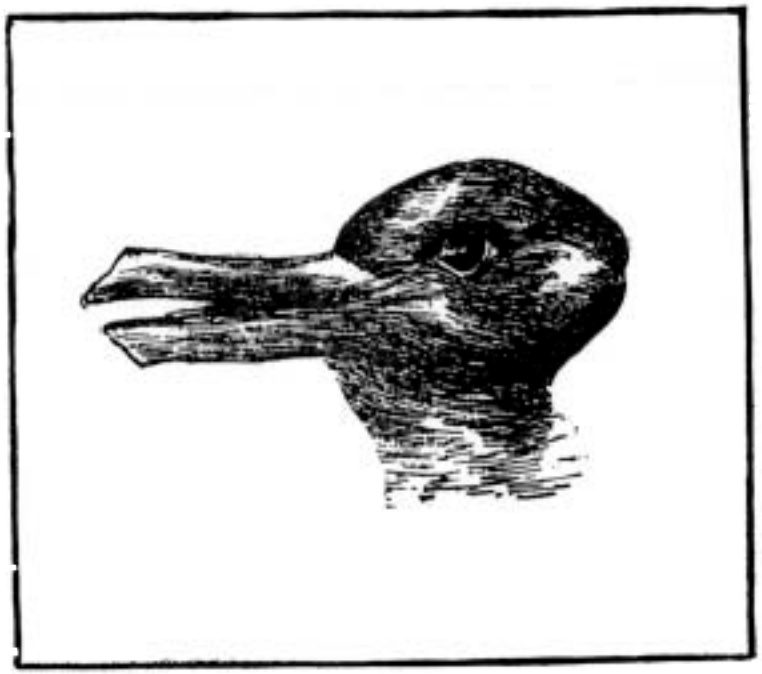
Ambiguity is the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectics seen at a standstill.

—Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*

I want to consider next a class of pictures whose primary function is to illustrate the co-existence of contrary or simply different readings in the single image, a phenomenon sometimes called "multistability."[15] Ambiguous drawings and diagrams such as the Necker cube (figure 4), the "Double Cross" (figure 5), and "My Wife or My Mother-in-law," (figure 6) have been, along with the classic "Duck-Rabbit" (figure 3), a familiar feature of textbooks on the psychology of vision since the late nineteenth century. Multistable images are also a staple feature in anthropological studies of so-called "primitive art." Masks, shields, architectural ornaments, and ritual objects often display visual paradoxes conjoining human and animal forms, profiles and frontal views,

15. See Tsili Doleve-Gandelman and Claude Gandelman, "The Metastability of Primitive Artefacts," *Semiotica* 75, no. 3/4 (1989): 191–213.

3. Joseph Jastrow, "The Duck-Rabbit," from *Fact and Fable in Psychology* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1900).

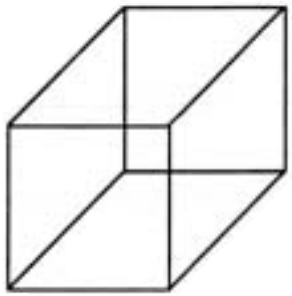


Do you see a duck or a rabbit, or either? (From *Harper's Weekly*, originally in *Fliegende Blätter*.)

or faces and genitals. The "fort-da" or "peek-a-boo" effect of these images is sometimes associated with forms of "savage thought," rites of passage, and "liminal" or threshold experiences in which time and space, figure and ground, subject and object play an endless game of "see-saw."[16]

The appearance of multistable images in studies of both the "savage" and the "modern" mind, quite aside from their recurrence in

16. On "split representations," see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of Masks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), and Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (New York: Dover, 1955); on the "fort-da" game, see Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 18, p. 271; on the use of the multistable image to provoke "liminal" or "threshold" experiences, see Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, 1960).



4. Necker cube.

5. "Double Cross," in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1958).

6. *My Wife and My Mother-in-Law*. Reprinted from Norma Scheidemann, *Experiments in General Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

My Wife and My Mother-in-Law

Boring considers this cartoon the best puzzle-picture in the sense that neither figure is favored over the other. (From *American Journal of Psychology*, XLII [1930], 444–45.)

artistic practices of all ages, ought to make us skeptical of any attempt to think of these images as uniquely "primitive" in any anthropological sense. They may be primitive in a rather different sense, however, in their function as reflections on the basic nature of pictures, places where pictorial representation displays itself for inspection rather than effacing itself in the service of transparent representation of something else. Metapictures are pictures that show themselves in order to *know* themselves: they stage the "self-knowledge" of pictures.

Most multistable images are not metapictures in the formally explicit way the Steinberg and Alain cartoons are. They display the phenomenon of "nesting," presenting one image concealed inside another image, but, like the Steinberg, they tend to make the boundary between first- and second-order representation ambiguous. They do not refer to themselves, or to a class of pictures, but employ a single gestalt to shift from one reference to another. The ambiguity of their referentiality produces a kind of secondary effect of auto-reference to the drawing as drawing, an invitation to the spectator to return with fascination to the mysterious object whose identity seems so mutable and yet so absolutely singular and definite.

If self-reference is elicited by the multistable image, then, it has as much to do with the self of the observer as with the metapicture itself. We might think of the multistable image as a device for educing self-knowledge, a kind of mirror for the beholder, or a screen for self-projection like the Rorschach test. The observer's identity may emerge in a dialogue with specific cultural stereotypes—for instance, Alain's "Egyptian" or Steinberg's "Gentleman"—that carry a whole set of explicitly ideological associations. Or it may locate itself in something as simple (and apparently neutral) as the position of the observer's body. The multistable aspects of the Necker cube (see figure 4), for instance, are best activated by imagining oneself alternately looking up and looking down at the image. If the multistable image always asks, "what am I?" or "how do I look?", the answer depends on the observer asking the same questions.

These questions and answers—the observer's dialogue with the metapicture—do not occur in some disembodied realm outside of history but are embedded in specific discourses, disciplines, and regimes of knowledge. Metapictures may be employed as ritual objects in a cultural practice, or as examples and illustrations in an anthropological model of such a practice; they may appear as occasions of middle-brow leisure and amusement in magazines like *The New Yorker* or *Fliegende Blätter,* or as illustrations to treatises on philosophy and psychology. Most notable, perhaps, is their ability to move

across the boundaries of popular and professional discourses. The metapicture is a piece of moveable cultural apparatus, one which may serve a marginal role as illustrative device or a central role as a kind of summary image, what I have called a "hypericon" that encapsulates an entire episteme, a theory of knowledge.[17] Gombrich employs Alain's "Egyptian Life Class" to summarize his entire argument about the history of pictorial representation, placing it at the beginning and end of his book. Panofsky and Althusser employ the scene of civil greeting to inaugurate and epitomize the sciences of iconology and ideology. Discursive hypericons such as the camera obscura, the *tabula rasa,* and the Platonic Cave epitomize the tendency of the technologies of visual representation to acquire a figurative centrality in theories of the self and its knowledges—of objects, of others, and of itself. They are not merely epistemological models, but ethical, political, and aesthetic "assemblages" that allow us to observe observers.[18] In their strongest forms, they don't merely serve as illustrations to theory; they picture theory.

Wittgenstein worried about these theoretical pictures. He could see their value from a pedagogical standpoint: the "advantage" of a concrete, visual model is "that it can be taken in at a glance and easily held in the mind."[19] This "advantage" is, however, from another standpoint a disadvantage. It may be *too* easy to "take in" the hypericon, which may "hold" the mind in the paralysis of a misleading analogy, a beguiling metaphor: "a picture held us captive, and we could not get outside it."[20] Wittgenstein seems, at times, to prefer the possibility of a "naked theory" that would be articulated "in sentences or equations" and that would dispense with the "model" or "symbolism" that "dresses up the pure theory" and allows us to picture it.

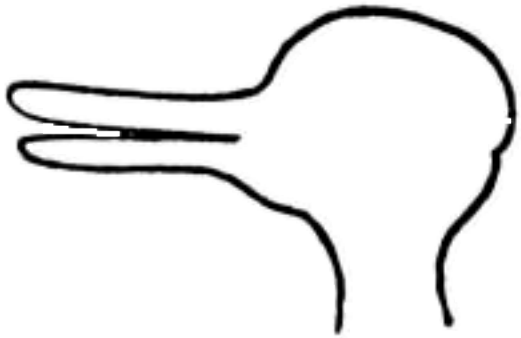
Yet Wittgenstein's own resort to the figure of the naked and clothed body of theory reveals the impossibility of getting outside the picture, except into another picture. I suspect that Wittgenstein's

17. See *Iconology,* pp. 5–6, 158.

18. Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990) discusses the fortunes of the camera obscura as apparatus, metaphor, and cultural assemblage in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century optics and optical physiology. See my critique of Crary in chapter 1.

19. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 6.

20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953).



7. Wittgenstein's Duck-Rabbit, in *Philosophical Investigations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1958).

obsession with the Duck-Rabbit, arguably one of the most famous multistable metapictures in modern psychology, is traceable to this anxiety about the fixation of discourse on certain images, especially pictures of/in the mind, visual analogies, etc. The advantage of the Duck-Rabbit is twofold: (1) it is a weak or peripheral hypericon; it doesn't serve as a model of the mind, for instance, but as a kind of decoy or bait to attract the mind, to flush it out of hiding; (2) its central "effect" is at odds with the stabilization of an image to be "taken in at a glance and easily held in the mind." The Duck-Rabbit is the ideal hypericon for Wittgenstein because it cannot explain anything (it remains always to be explained), and if it has a "doctrine" or message, it is only as an emblem of resistance to stable interpretation, to being taken in at a glance. Wittgenstein's own drawing of the Duck-Rabbit in *Philosophical Investigations* (figure 7) eliminates all the features of realism (shading and modeling) that would facilitate such a glance, reducing the image to a schematic, minimal abstraction that "looks like" *neither* a duck nor a rabbit.

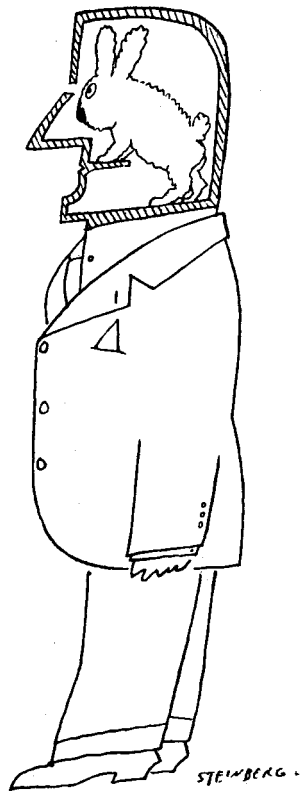
Some day a proper history of the Duck-Rabbit will be written, tracing its migration from the pages of a nineteenth-century German humor magazine that was a favorite of Freud's, to its long sojourn in Gestalt and American cognitive psychology; from its thoroughly canonical and stabilized role in Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* to its surprise appearance in a painting by Jackson Pollock, to its apotheosis in the pages of *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein's immediate aim with the Duck-Rabbit seems to have been a negative one: the image served to unsettle the psychological explanations that had stabilized the Duck-Rabbit with models of mental picturing in the beholder. For Joseph Jastrow, whose *Fact and Fable in Psychology* first subjected the Duck-Rabbit to scientific discipline, the spectatorial

model was explicitly based in photography: "The eye may be compared to a photographic camera, with its eyelid cap, its iris shutter, its lens, and its sensitive plate,—the retina."[21] This model of the eye then generates a familiar model of the mind: "The pictures that are developed are stacked up, like the negatives in the photographer's shop, in the pigeon-holes of our mental storerooms." The Duck-Rabbit, and multistable images in general, reveal the presence of a "mind's eye" roving around this storeroom, interpreting the pictures, seeing different aspects in them. The bodily eye simply transmits information: "the image on the retina does not change" (p. 282), and the identity of the observer, his "difference" from other viewers, is located in the mental eye: "physical eyes see alike, but . . . mental eyes reflect their own individualities" (p. 277).[22] When I see the duck, my mind's eye interprets the Duck-Rabbit as a duck; when I see a rabbit, my mind's eye interprets it as a rabbit.

It is easy to see why this explanation explains nothing. Saul Steinberg shows us a picture of its absurdity in his wonderful cartoon of the scared rabbit inside the head of the businessman, looking out through the windows of the eyes (figure 8). This is a kind of literalization of Jastrow's notion of the "identity" of the spectator in the "mind's eye": if the spectator sees the rabbit, it doesn't mean that he has a picture of the rabbit in his head, but that there *is* a rabbit in there looking out for its kin. Wittgenstein is impatient, vexed with this fable. He warns repeatedly against thinking about seeing in terms of "internal mechanisms" ("the concept of the 'inner picture' is misleading, for this concept uses the *'outer'* picture as a model" [*Philosophical Investigations,* p. 196]). He shifts the inquiry from speculation on inner visual mechanisms to observations on what we might call the "grammar of vision," the language games employed in things like interpretations, descriptive reports, and exclamations prompted by visual experiences. He compares the experience of "noticing an aspect" to the application of captions or textual labels to a book illustration (p. 193) and, in general, replaces the causal linkages of the "mental" and "bodily" eye with the interplay of the visual and

21. Joseph Jastrow, *Fact and Fable in Psychology* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1900), p. 276; further page references will be cited in the text. Jastrow is cited by Wittgenstein as his source for the Duck-Rabbit in *Investigations.*

22. I am grateful to Ruth Leys for her help with the psychological literature on identity and spectatorship that would have been relevant to Wittgenstein. See her article, "Mead's Voices: Imitation as Foundation, or the Struggle Against Mimesis," *Critical Inquiry* 19:2 (Winter 1993): 277–307.



8. Saul Steinberg, *The Rabbit.* Drawing by Saul Steinberg; © 1958, 1986 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

the verbal. This doesn't mean that he replaces the model of the inner eye with "inner speech" or writing. The point is rather to *flatten out* the field of inquiry, to replace the model of deep, inner causes explaining surface effects with a surface description of complex intersections between different codes and conventions. Instead of "looking inside ourselves" to find a mechanical explanation, we ask ourselves what different kinds of *sense* can be made of expressions like "I see a rabbit," or "*Now* I see a duck," or "It's a duck-rabbit," or "a rabbit!"

Even the familiar negative "doctrine" of the Duck-Rabbit, that "we cannot experience alternate readings" of the figure "at the same time" (Gombrich, p. 5), is unsettled by Wittgenstein's suggestion that we can in fact experience it as a composite, synthetic figure: "I *may* say 'It's a duck-rabbit' . . . The answer that it is a duck-rabbit is again the report of a perception" (p. 195). Anyone who has spent hours

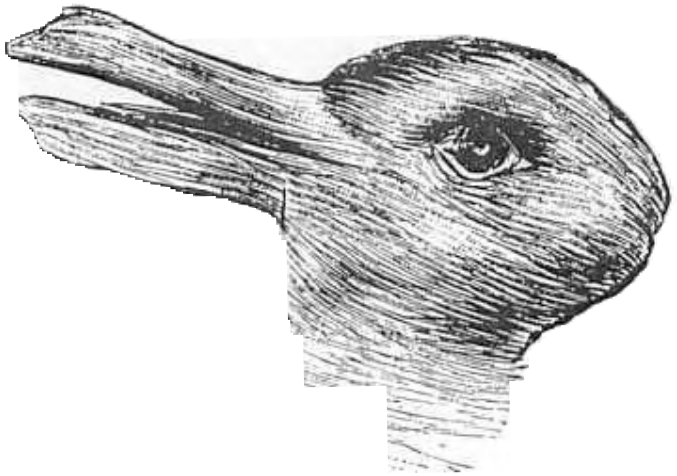
looking through the pages of *Fliegende Blätter* for the image will know that Wittgenstein is right, that the search is neither for a duck nor a rabbit, but for a curious hybrid that looks like nothing else but itself.[23] Wittgenstein uses this strange creature to make us see "that we find certain things about seeing puzzling, because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough." The Duck-Rabbit is not just a puzzle that emerges against a background of stable, ordinary visual experience, but a figure, like Steinberg's "New World," of the "whole business."

Wittgenstein restores the "wildness" of the Duck-Rabbit by freeing it from its domestication by psychology and by photographic models of the psyche. Another way to recover that wildness would be to go back to the "flying leaves" of *Fliegende Blätter,* to track the Duck-Rabbit into its original habitat (see figures 9, 10). There we find a forest of signs, a heterogeneous image-text field in which human and animal figures freely interact in cartoons and anecdotes. The Duck-Rabbit is not alone in this world, but is juxtaposed textually to the beast-fable that precedes it and graphically to the illustration of this story, particularly to the pair of laughing rabbits shown eavesdropping on the scene of narration. The story is "The Bear in the Eagle's Nest," translated from the tall-tale language of *Jägerlateinischen* ("Hunter's Latin") a fable about the ability of different animals to "pass" for one another and to co-exist in a "friendship pact" (*Freundschaftsbund*). The hunter who discovers the fat bear cub in the eagle's nest contrives a story in which the young eagles agree to co-exist with the bear cub and let him eat the food brought by their parent as long as he agrees not to eat them. This *realpolitik* arrangement persists until the hunter arrives and shoots them all.

The Duck-Rabbit's "native habitat," then, is a world of beast fables and animal cartoons where questions of representation, appearance, and identity abound (the previous page of this issue of *Fliegende Blätter* shows a skeptical observer thrusting his head into the mouth of a painted lion). The specific placement of the Duck-Rabbit may well be accidental, a mere whim of the layout editor, or it may serve as a pictorial answer—a kind of coda or colophon—to the narrative of the "Bear-Eagle." It is difficult without this context to get the point of the question that accompanies the figure labeled *Kaninchen und Ente: "Welche Thiere gleichen einander am meisten"* ("which animals

23. On the relation of this "hybrid" image to the figure of the mulatto, see footnote 39. I want to thank my research assistant, John O'Brien, for tracking down this creature.

Welche Thiere gleichen einander am meisten?



Kaninchen und Ente.

Ra *gende ätter* (1892

Der Bär im Adlerhorst.

(Aus dem Jäger-Lateinischen.)

„Wie? Ein Bär im Adlerhorst! Und den wollen Sie selbst gesehen und geschossen haben?!“ „„Eigenhändig““, entgegnete der Graf mit aller Gemüthsruhe. „„Die Geschichte klingt allerdings unglaublich, aber sie ist wahr und darum die Erklärung sehr einfach!““

Allen stand der Verstand stille, aber der Graf erzählte mit ernster Miene weiter:

„„Der alte Adler sieht drei junge Bären, die in einem unbewachten Momente sich auf einer baumfreien Lichtung herumtummeln. Alle drei zugleich zu fassen und mit in die Lüfte zu nehmen, ist ihm unmöglich. Er packt also den jüngsten beim Fell und bringt ihn seinen Jungen zum Adlerhorst. Statt ihn aber zu tödten, setzt er ihn lebendig in's Nest und fliegt rasch wieder fort, um den zweiten Bären zu holen. Der junge Bär, nachdem er sich vom ersten Schrecken erholt, benützt die Abwesenheit des alten Adlers, um den jungen Adlern zu imponiren, indem er einen derselben frißt. Wie er den alten Adler, diesmal ohne Beute, wiederkommen sieht, versteckt der junge Bär sich in eine Felsenspalte; der alte Adler aber meint, seine Jungen hätten mittlerweile den Bären gefressen und wundert sich nur, daß sie noch Hunger haben. Da er nicht bis fünf zählen konnte, entging ihm der Verlust des einen Adlers, den der

Der Bär im Adlerhorst. 1

Bär gefressen hatte, und alsbald ma
er sich wieder auf, um Beute zu ho
Natürlich ließ sich auch diese wieder
junge Bär vortrefflich schmecken, und
kam es, daß er jeden Tag stärker u
größer wurde, während die jungen Ad
über deren Appetit sich der Alte n
genug wundern konnte, in der E
wickelung sehr zurückblieben. Die jun
Adler fürchteten sich, von dem Bä
gefressen zu werden, und duldeten
darum in ihrem Neste, ohne ihn d
Alten zu verrathen; der Bär aber
wohl ein, daß für ihn ein Entrinn
aus dem Felsenneste unmöglich sei u
daß, wenn er die jungen Adler ein
um den andern verspeisen wollte, d
Alte es merken und keine Nahrung me
zutragen würde. Darum entstand zwisch
dem Bären und den jungen Adlern ei
Art Freundschaftsbund, der so lan
währte, bis ich eines Tages, nachde
ich den alten Adler mit einer sicher
Kugel getödtet, das Nest ausnehm
will und bei den ziemlich mageren Adle
jungen den fetten Bären im Horste fa
und erlegte . . . Sehen Sie, mei
Herren, so kann es gehen!““

Welche Thiere gleichen einander am meisten?

Kaninchen und Ente.

A Leb'n.

Beim Wirth is iatza g'rad a' Leb'n.
So werd's es net glei' wieder geb'n.
Dös is a' Gaudi und a' Freud,
Und Alles juchezt, singt und schreit;
A' Jeder schnack'lt*), draacht an Huat
Und stampft vor lauter Uebermuath.
„Was gibt's denn?“ frag i', wia i' '
g'hört.
„„Geh' eina!““ ruafa s'. „„a'zapf
werd!““

*) Mit der Zunge schnalzen.

Das genügt.

„. . . Spricht Ihre Tochter fremde
Sprachen?“ „Nicht fertig jedoch
kann sie in fünf Sprachen „Ja“ sagen
falls ein anständiger Mann um sie an
halten sollte!“

Duck-Rabbit, reprint of full page from *Fliegende Blätter* (1892)

resemble each other the most?"). Certainly the rabbit and the duck don't "resemble" each other: like the Bear and Eagle they are "nested" together—that is, located, imagined, or pictured *in the same gestalt,* the one a narrative representation or fable, the other an equivocal picture.[24] The Duck-Rabbit is about difference and similitude, the shifting of names and identities—that is, metaphoricity—in the field of vision: it solicits the self-knowledge of the human eye by aligning it with the eye of the animal, depicted as a still center across which waves of shifting identity may be seen to flow.[25]

This trio of images, the Duck-Rabbit, Alain's Cartoon, and Steinberg's "New World," will serve, I hope, to map out a rough, preliminary typology of the metapicture, exemplified in three distinct forms of pictorial self-referentiality. Steinberg's "New World" exemplifies strict or formal self-reference, the picture that represents *itself,* creating a referential circle or *mise en abîme.* Alain's cartoon is *generically* self-referential; it exemplifies the sort of picture that represents pictures as a class, the picture about pictures (cp. here the genre of studio, atelier, gallery, museum, and collector's cabinet pictures). The Duck-Rabbit, finally, involves discursive or contextual self-reference; its reflexivity depends upon its insertion into a reflection on the nature of visual representation. In principle, this means that any picture or visible mark no matter how simple, from the Necker cube to the single stroke which served as the signature of Apelles, is capable of becoming a metapicture. Pictorial self-reference is, in other words, not exclusively a formal, internal feature that distinguishes some pictures, but a pragmatic, functional feature, a matter of use and context. Any picture that is used to reflect on the nature of pictures is a metapicture.

These three examples should also suggest some of the basic features of metapictures, their typical uses, effects, and status as a genre. The principle use of the metapicture is, obviously, to explain what pictures are—to stage, as it were, the "self-knowledge" of pictures. We may want to say that self-knowledge is "only a metaphor" when applied to pictures that are, after all, nothing but lines and shapes and colors on flat surfaces. But we also know that pictures have always been more than that: they have also been idols, fetishes, magic mirrors—objects that seem not only to have a presence, but a "life" of their own, talking and looking back at us.[26] That is why the use of metapictures as instruments in the understanding of pictures seems inevitably to call into question the self-understanding of the observer. This destabilizing of identity is to some extent a phenomenological issue, a transaction between pictures and observers activated by the internal structural effects of multistability: the shifting of figure and ground, the switching of aspects, the display of pictorial paradox and forms of nonsense. We might call this the "wildness" of the metapicture, its resistance to domestication, and its associations with primitivism, savagery, and animal behavior.

But the question of "effects" and "identity" does not merely reside in the encounter between an image and an eye: it also engages the *status* of the metapicture in a wider cultural field, its positioning with respect to disciplines, discourses, and institutions. Here we also find what I can only describe as a another form of wildness in the ways metapictures tend to resist fixed cultural status. Metapictures are notoriously migratory, moving from popular culture to science, philosophy or art history, shifting from marginal positions as illustrations or ornaments to centrality and canonicity. They don't just illustrate theories of picturing and vision: they show us what vision is, and picture theory.

24. In its original context, the rabbit would seem to be the dominant figure, the one we see first, the one whose name appears first. He resembles the neighboring rabbits in the picture of the storyteller and his audience that accompanies the story; the rabbits, in fact, are depicted outside the central circle of the hunters. The duck-rabbit's position at the end of the story suggests a moral for the hunted as well as the hunters. If the story of the bear who passed for an eagle shows the logic of a *freundschaftsbund* of mutual fear and respect between feathered and furry predators, the Duck-Rabbit transposes this moral into the realm of the animals preyed upon, a bond of mutual *camouflage* in which Duck and Rabbit disguise themselves as one another. The evident futility of these reciprocal disguises (both duck and rabbit being "fair game" for hunters and predators) darkens the joke even further.

25. See chapter 10, "Illusion: Looking at Animals Looking," for further thoughts on the animal as object and spectator of pictures.

26. For a comprehensive survey of this phenomenon, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

A Meta-metapicture

Man is then able to include the world in the sovereignty of a discourse that has the power to represent its representation.
—Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

The metapicture that summarizes all these features of the genre most fully is Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (figure 11). From a formal standpoint, *Las Meninas* equivocates between the strict self-reference of Steinberg's "New World" and the generic self-reference of Alain's cartoon. It represents Velázquez painting a picture, but we will never know whether it is *this* picture or some other, since he shows us only its back. The formal structure of *Las Meninas* is an encyclopedic labyrinth of pictorial self-reference, representing the interplay between the beholder, the producer, and the object or model of representation as a complex cycle of exchanges and substitutions. Like "New World" and Alain's cartoon, it offers a totalizing historical image: Foucault calls it a "representation, as it were, of Classical representation,"[27] a comprehensive figure not only of a painterly style, but of an *episteme*, an entire system of knowledge/power relations. We might amend this slightly to say that it is a *classical* representation of classical representation, to contrast it with the kind of apocalyptic and historicizing self-reference we find in Alain and Steinberg: Alain's Egyptian life-class shows archaic representation within the frame of classical representation; Steinberg shows modernist representation (as "abstraction") within the frame of a "New World" we might want to call postmodernism.

The status of *Las Meninas*, however, may seem radically different from the metapictures we have examined, and I suspect there will be some resistance to thinking of it as belonging to the same genre, much less the same essay, with the Duck-Rabbit. The two pictures are about as unlike one another as one could imagine. *Las Meninas* is a canonical masterpiece of Western painting and the subject of a massive art-historical literature. The Duck-Rabbit is a trivial, anonymous drawing from a humor magazine that became a key illustration in psychological literature. *Las Meninas* is an endlessly fascinating labyrinth of reflections on the relations of painting, painter, model, and beholder. The Duck-Rabbit has been employed to establish a kind of degree zero in the interpretability of the multistable or ambiguous image: it is not generally taken to be paradoxical, allegorical, or (in itself)

27. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 16.

11. Diego Rodríguez de Silva Velázquez, *Las Meninas*. Courtesy of Museo del Prado; © Museo del Prado, Madrid. Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY.

self-reflexive. If *Las Meninas* exemplifies the metapicture in its most complex, articulate, and exalted status, the Duck-Rabbit is the simplest and humblest member of the genre, inhabiting a site where human and animal perception seem to intersect, a place where popular culture enters into the basement of psychological and philosophical discourse. If Wittgenstein had not written about the Duck-Rabbit, it would scarcely be remembered, and it would not qualify as a metapicture. On the other hand, if Foucault had not written about *Las Meninas,* it would still be a great masterpiece, but it too would not be a metapicture.[28] Svetlana Alpers implied as much when she asked "why should it be that the major study, the most serious and sustained piece of writing on this work in our time, is by Michel Foucault?" Alpers answer was that the "interpretive procedures of the discipline itself . . . made a picture such as *Las Meninas* literally unthinkable under the rubric of art history."[29] I would put this a slightly different way. The problem with the art historical writing about *Las Meninas* was like the problem with the psychological literature on the Duck-Rabbit: it made the picture far too *thinkable.* Like Wittgenstein, Foucault sprung his metapicture loose from a professional discourse where it had an assured status and meaning into another way of speaking. This "way of speaking" is by now hardening into a disciplinary formation in its own right (that is, a set of clichés or rigid hypericons), one which sometimes forgets that the peculiar language-games Foucault and Wittgenstein brought to their images were designed to make them harder, not easier to talk about.

That is why calling this way of speaking "philosophy" would simply beg the question of Foucault and Wittgenstein's very problematic relations to their respective philosophical traditions and the curious sort of language they bring to the metapicture. The key features of this language are (1) its refusal of explanation and closure, its preference for surface description; (2) its application of a highly general vocabulary to pictures (Foucault confesses to his own use of "vague, rather abstract designations"); and (3) its strange passivity before the image, as if the point were to achieve a state of receptivity that would allow the image to speak for itself. Wittgenstein urges us

28. See Svetlana Alpers, "Interpretation without Representation, or The Viewing of *Las Meninas,*" *Representations* 1 (February 1983): 31–42, for argument about the revolutionary character of Foucault's essay. See also Leo Steinberg, "Velázquez' *Las Meninas,*" in *October* 19 (Winter 1981): 45–54.

29. Alpers, "Interpretation without Representation," p. 31.

not to explain the Duck-Rabbit, but to listen to what comes out of our mouths and to ponder its relation to our visual experience, as if the automatisms to be discovered were not "in our heads" but in expressions of body language, tone of voice, and grammatical inflection. Foucault argues that "we must . . . pretend not to know" who the figures are in *Las Meninas.* We must forego the "adequate" language of the anecdote and the proper name, the language that tells us who's who and what's what in *Las Meninas* and confine ourselves to a language that knows its inadequacy to the "visible fact." "It is perhaps through the medium of this grey, anonymous language . . . that the painting may, little by little, release its illuminations" (p. 10).

These "illuminations" are the by now familiar and canonical readings by which Foucault transforms *Las Meninas* from an art historical masterpiece into a metapicture, a picture about picturing, a "representation, as it were, of Classical representation" (p. 16). I won't rehearse the extensive literature that has been generated by this insight with any further reading of the intricacies of self-reference in *Las Meninas.* Suffice it to say that, like the other metapictures we have examined, it deploys its self-knowledge of representation to activate the beholder's self-knowledge by questioning the identity of the spectator position. In *Las Meninas,* this questioning has centrally to do with power and representation-the power of painting and the painter, and the power of the sovereign who is the implied observer. Velázquez portrays himself as a court servant, simply another member of the household, at the same time he insinuates a kind of mastery for himself, a sovereignty over representation, with a wit and discretion that makes the hint of usurpation acceptable. Sovereigns, after all, had to go to school like anyone else, had to subordinate themselves to the discipline of tutors and advisors. The discipline of the eye and control of visual representation is central to the technology of sovereignty, including those techniques of self-discipline adumbrated in the optical figure of "the mirror for princes."[30] *Las Meninas* portrays a political and representational power so pervasive that it need not display itself; it can afford to be discreet, even invisible, to disseminate itself in this scene of the courtly interior made public spectacle, and even to permit itself to be upstaged by the discreet master of courtly spectacle, Velázquez himself. Exactly how this speaks to the self-knowledge of modern observers, how it continues to astonish "sover-

30. See Joel Snyder, "*Las Meninas* and the Mirror of the Prince," *Critical Inquiry* 11:4 (June 1985): 539–72.

eign subjects" in a radically different social order, is precisely the question that makes this painting so endlessly fascinating.

Las Meninas' self-reflexivity is directed at its own *kind* of painting, at an entire institution of and discourse on painting which Velázquez epitomizes and masters. It is not strictly auto-referential and self-constituting like Steinberg's "New World," unless we imagine the painting with its back to us to be *Las Meninas* itself. And it does not refer, as Alain's cartoon does, to an*other* kind of painting. *Las Meninas* aims, like "New World," to give us a total picture of representation, one which, unlike Steinberg's, does not pretend to ignore its beholder, but solicits and even represents the spectator position. Foucault traces this totalizing gesture in *Las Meninas* as a "spiral shell" that "presents us with the entire cycle of representation" (p. 11)—the painter, his tools and materials, the completed paintings on the walls, the illuminated rectangle of the door, and, above all, the mirror on the back wall which seems to reflect dimly the beholders of this scene, who are themselves the implied spectacle for the gazes of the figures in the scene.

To enter into this cycle is something like "switching on" the ambiguous aspects of the Duck-Rabbit. In *Las Meninas,* however, the aspects are (at least) triple rather than binary, and they are located in an imaginary site of projection in front of the painting, the space occupied (1) by the painter as he worked on this canvas; (2) by the figures (presumably reflected in the mirror) who are modeling for the painter and addressed by the gazes of the figures; (3) by the beholder. These three projected beholders can be matched up with Leo Steinberg's three "vanishing points": (1) the "real" (geometrical) vanishing point by the man in the doorway (the keeper of tapestries, also named "Velázquez"); (2) the "false" or "symbolic" vanishing point in the mirror (whose figures may be the King and Queen beholding the scene or, if Joel Snyder is correct, the reflected images of their painted images on Velázquez's hidden canvas; (3) the little Infanta, who is the conventional "subject" of the picture and who is, as the royal child, the "image" of her parent-beholders.

There is no vulgar playing with illusion as in the Duck-Rabbit, no tricks on the senses. The only figure in the painting who lies outside the cycle of gazes and visual exchange is, appropriately enough, the one closest to the surface: the drowsy dog in the foreground. If the "aspects" of *Las Meninas* shimmer and shift, they do so in an invisible, unrepresentable space where the spectator's subjectivity is constituted. As Foucault puts it: "no gaze is stable, or rather, in the neutral furrow of the gaze piercing at a right angle through the canvas, subject

and object, the spectator and model, reverse their roles to infinity. . . . Because we see only that reverse side [of the canvas in the painting] we do not know who we are, or what we are doing. Seen or seeing?" (p. 5). It is the painting's ability to destabilize the position of the observer, engaging our fantasies of sovereign subjectivity—the mastery of space, light, and design we attribute to the painter, the mastery of people we attribute to the historical sovereigns, and the mastery of our own visual/imaginal field, its look and meaning, that we attribute to ourselves as modern observers, rulers of our private "mental kingdoms."

To summarize: our four theoretical pictures constitute an array, by no means exhaustive, of some of the key moments of force in the representation of representation. They show us four contrasting pictures of the producers, models, and spectators of pictures: Steinberg shows us the draughtsman as demiurge, creating a universe casually, almost as a byproduct of doodling, working abstractly, without a model, in indifference to a beholder who is simultaneously "sucked in" and repelled by the composition. Velázquez gives us a portrait of the artist as clever servant, holding up a seductive mirror to a beholder who is at once the sovereign, the painter himself, and any passing observer. Alain gives us a picture of the artist as a servile copyist of an equally servile model; the beholder, meanwhile, is placed in a position of superior visual mastery, beholding the whole scene of pictorial production as a historical moment, an archaic, alien convention from a position (apparently) beyond history, beyond style and convention. The Duck-Rabbit, finally, is addressed to the beholder as experimental subject, the sort of psycho-physiological being constructed by optical illusion tests. The "artist" of this drawing is not the draughtsman, but the scientist who puts it to use, and the model is neither a duck nor a rabbit, but a set of hypotheses about visualization and visual perception.

I want to return now to the question of the "grey anonymous language" by which Foucault transforms *Las Meninas* from an object of art historical interpretation into a metapicture. Foucault notes that this way of talking about pictures risks

> embroiling ourselves forever in those vague, rather abstract designations, so constantly prone to misunderstanding and duplication, 'the painter,' 'the characters,' 'the models', 'the spectators', 'the images'. Rather than pursue to infinity a language inevitably inadequate to the visible fact, it would be better to say that Velázquez composed a picture; that in this picture he represented himself, in his studio or in a room

of the Escurial, in the act of painting two figures whom the Infanta Margarita has come there to watch, together with an entourage of Duennas, etc.

"Proper names," Foucault notes, would "avoid ambiguous designations," and bring the chain of explanations, the stream of descriptive phrases to an end. Why, then, do we not take this obvious road to certainty and closure? Foucault's answer is an assertion about the nature of the relation between words and images:

> the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. (p. 9)

It is important to stress here that Foucault is not pronouncing what Wittgenstein would call a metaphysical law about the incommensurability of language and vision; it may be "in vain" that we "say what we see" (and vice versa) but no vanity is more common. The assigning of proper names to images, for instance, "gives us a finger to point with . . . to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as though they were equivalents." This search for proper equivalents, for closure of explanation, is the normal task of art history, perhaps even of the theory of representation. But it is not Foucault's goal, as he goes on to explain: "if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as starting-point for speech instead of an obstacle to be avoided, so as to stay as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task" (pp. 9–10).

Talking Metapictures

Words are not, then, proof against a relapse into images.
—Jean-François Lyotard, "Figure Foreclosed"

Foucault's strategy of holding open the gap between language and image allows the representation to be seen as a dialectical field of

12. René Magritte, *Les trahison des images* (1929). © 1993 C. Herscovici/ARS, New York.

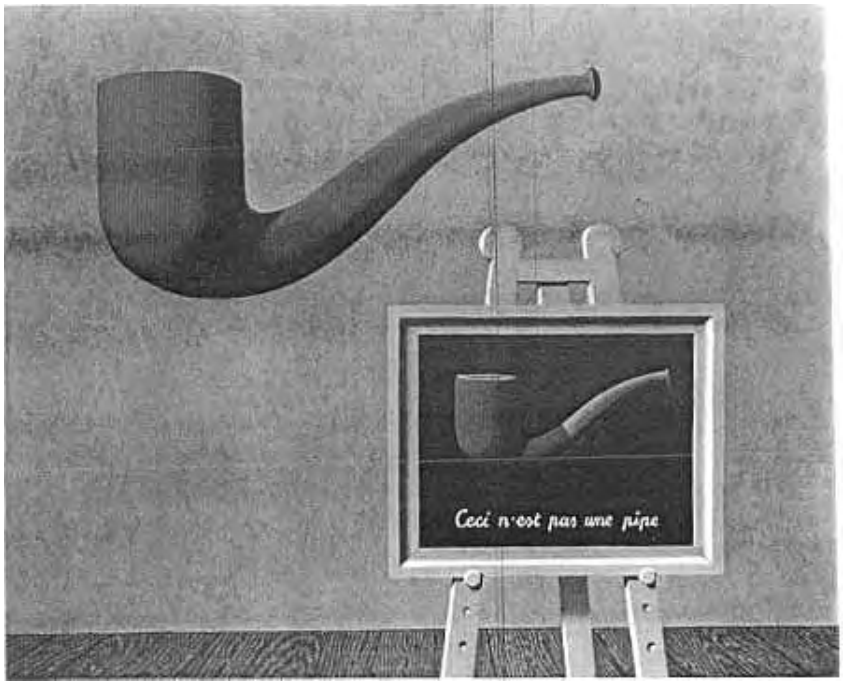
forces, rather than a determinate "message" or referential sign. So far, although we have noted the embedding of each metapicture in discourse, we have not yet seen a picture of this relationship as such, a representation of the relation between discourse and representation, a picture about the gap between words and pictures. Magritte's *Les trahison des images* provides a picture of just this relationship (figure 12). The self-reflexivity of this picture depends, in fact, upon its introjection of language inside the frame. The indexical "this" in "this is not a pipe" refers, we suppose, to the pictured pipe (though it could also refer to itself, that is, to the string of words, or to the entire ensemble of words and image). The structure of our third kind of metapicture, the one that depends on the "insertion of the picture into a discourse on vision and representation," is here internalized within the frame. We might want to object that this isn't really a metapicture, not really *pictorial* self-reference, in that it "cheats" by using words to achieve self-reference. The objection presumes that words cannot properly signify in a picture, that they remain alien to

its semiotic order no matter how firmly they are located in its pictorial space. Nevertheless, I take the point. Let us think of this as a "cheating" metapicture, slightly illegitimate, whose real purpose is to reflect, not on pictures, but on the relation of pictures and words, both the way we speak of pictures and the way pictures "speak" to us.

What image could be simpler, more calculated to let a whole theory of the relation between words and images "be taken in at a glance and easily held in the mind"? There are no optical illusions, no puns, no labyrinth of gazes, reflections, and self-reflexive references. We are shown a simple pipe, carefully rendered in a realist style, with modeling, shading, and highlights, accompanied by the straightforward statement: "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." If this is a puzzle, it is one that is decoded so quickly that all the pleasure of decipherment goes up in smoke immediately: of course it is not a pipe; it is only a picture of a pipe. The apparent contradiction dissolves in a moment, erasing even the slim pleasure of a double reading, the equivocal play provided by the two (or three) equally true perceptions of the Duck-Rabbit. The statement, "this is not a pipe," is just literally true: if there is a contest here between the statement and the image, it is clear that discourse has the final say.

And yet, what discourse is it that can only use language literally? As Foucault notes, there also is "a convention of language," the custom we have of talking about the images of things as if they were the things themselves. This custom makes the legend "this is not a pipe" literally true, but figuratively false. Moreover, insofar as the verbal figure is customary and conventional, it is no longer a figure at all, but a dead metaphor, like the leg of a table or the arm of a chair. The proposition which seems to deny the authority of the image winds up having its own authority called into question, not only by the picture, but by something internal to the conventions of language.

Magritte's pipe doesn't aim to astonish like *Las Meninas,* to beguile and divert like Steinberg's *New World,* to destabilize our knowledge of the other like Alain's life-class, or to activate the body's visual apparatus like the Duck-Rabbit. It is designed, rather, with all the connotations of pedantry and utility: it is a teaching aid, a piece of classroom apparatus, a point which is made explicit in a later version of the pipe motif, *Les deux mystères* (figure 13), which shows the same composition on a blackboard mounted on an easel. Its proper site is not the museum or gallery, but the classroom, and its function is as a pedagogical primer. It is like one of those illustrated elementary textbooks that teach reading by correlating words with pictures. Its purpose, however, is a negative lesson, an exercise in unlearning or



13. René Magritte, *Les deux mystères.* © C. Herscovici/ARS, New York.

deprogramming a set of habits which are second nature. It is not possible to gauge the effect of this negative lesson, therefore, without a patient working through of the forms of verbal and visual discipline that it seeks to overturn. A subversion of the "natural attitude" toward pictures is the least important of its objectives.[31] The picture is not aimed at people who believe that pictures transparently represent objects, much less those who are "taken in" by pictorial illusions. It addresses the much more fundamental issue of the relation between pictures and texts and those who believe they know what that relation is, who think they know what to say about pictures, what pictures say.

Magritte's pipe is a demonstration (to recall Foucault's words

31. On the notion of a "natural attitude" toward pictures, see Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), chapter 1.

about *Las Meninas*) that "the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation." This doesn't mean the relation is indefinite or indeterminate or perhaps even quantitatively large: it isn't that there are fifty or fifty thousand "readings" (or "viewings") of Magritte's composition. Two readings are quite sufficient to open out the infinite relation, just as the duality (and the significance of the duality) of the Duck-Rabbit suffices to "switch on" its multistable circuit of signification. Metapictures elicit, not just a double vision, but a double voice, and a double relation between language and visual experience. If every picture only makes sense inside a discursive frame, an "outside" of descriptive, interpretive language, metapictures call into question the relation of language to image as an inside-outside structure. They interrogate the authority of the speaking subject over the seen image. Magritte's pipe is a third-order metapicture, depicting and deconstructing the relation between the first-order image and the second-order discourse that is fundamental to the intelligibility of all pictures, and perhaps of all words. It isn't simply that the words contradict the image, and vice versa, but that the very identities of words and images, the sayable and the seeable, begin to shimmer and shift in the composition, as if the image could speak and the words were on display.

The best way to see this effect is to give voice to the silent dialogue of the painting by amplifying the arguments that might be mustered in support of its contrary readings. The first reading we already have: the text tells us that the drawing is not a pipe, and the drawing assents, declaring (silently, of course) that it is only a drawing and not a pipe; the argument is over. The second reading is more difficult to specify. It is only implicit, hesitant, like a murmur or demurral beginning "and yet. . . . " Perhaps it is only an echo of the beholder's voice saying,

> and yet it is, after all, a picture of a pipe. It represents a pipe. We could use it to pick out a real pipe from a pile of miscellaneous objects. We could even use it to pick out a particular pipe, one with just this specific shape and lustre, from a rack full of pipes. Surely it makes sense to say, 'This is a pipe,' so long as we understand ourselves to mean 'this is what a pipe looks like,' or 'this represents a pipe.' To write 'this is not a pipe' under this simple drawing is a perverse sort of pedantry. It tells us something we already know, tries to correct us and prevent us from making a mistake we were in no danger of making. If there is any "mistake" here, in fact, it is that of some overly-docile student, whose subjection to the rote discipline of penmanship is revealed in the mechanical handwriting of the legend. It takes no skill, learning, or imagination to write "this is not a pipe" under a drawing of a pipe; it is like a defacement of the drawing, something one could write under any drawing whatsoever. The drawing, by contrast, shows a mastery of draughtsmanship in its modelling, shading, and lustrous highlights. It shows us something about pipes, is a real aid to learning, whereas these words are merely a hindrance to knowledge.

I imagine this monologue to illustrate how quickly and abundantly a series of counterstatements to "this is not a pipe" can be generated in defense of the drawing and how readily they escalate into a counterattack. If the drawing could speak, we can readily imagine its quiet demurral turning into a tirade. The text, for its part, is not left silent. It never tires of repeating itself, and mobilizing support from readers who will say,

> and yet it is simply a literal truth that the drawing is not a pipe. How can the truth be a hindrance to knowledge? Why should this lesson be dismissed as elementary or perverse? Why do you want to cling to what you yourself concede is a mere figure of speech? Are you quite sure that you haven't fallen, by habit, convention, or ideology, under the spell of images? Doesn't your excessive defensiveness suggest that the simple truth is something you can't bear to hear? Why can't we just make peace and co-exist in the same space?

The problem is that Magritte's drawing exists precisely to question whether such a common space can be found. Magritte shows everything that can be shown: written words, a visible object. But his real aim is to show what cannot be pictured or made readable, the fissure in representation itself, the bands, layers, and fault-lines of discourse, the blank space between the text and the image.

Foucault calls attention to this gap in his commentary on Magritte's pipe:

> On the page of an illustrated book, we seldom pay attention to the small space running above the words and below the drawings, forever serving them as a common frontier. It is there, on these few millimeters of white, the calm sand of the page, that are established all the relations of designation, nomination, description, classification.[32]

The double-coding of the illustrated book, its suturing of discourse and representation, the sayable and the seeable, across an unobtrusive,

32. Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe,* translated by James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 28.

invisible frontier, exemplifies the conditions that make it possible to say "this is that" (designation), to assign proper names, to describe, to place in grids, strata, or genealogies. The dialectic of discourse and vision, in short, is a fundamental figure of knowledge as such. The collaboration of word and image engenders what Foucault calls a "calligram," a composite text-image that "brings a text and a shape as close together as possible" (pp. 20–21). The calligram is a figure of knowledge as power, aiming at a utopia of representation in which "things" are trapped in a "double cipher," an alliance between the shapes and meanings of words. Word and image are like two hunters "pursuing its quarry by two paths. . . . By its double function, it guarantees capture, as neither discourse alone nor a pure drawing could do" (p. 22). They are like the two jaws of a trap set for the real. But then Magritte

> reopened the trap the calligram had sprung on the thing it described. . . . The trap shattered on emptiness: image and text fall each to its own side, of their own weight. No longer do they have a common ground nor a place where they can meet. . . . The slender, colorless, neutral strip, which in Magritte's drawing separates the text and the figure, must be seen as a crevasse—an uncertain, foggy region. . . . Still it is too much to claim that there is a blank or lacuna: instead, it is an absence of space, an effacement of the "common place" between the signs of writing and the lines of the image. (pp. 28–29)

Foucault performs for us the impossibility of designating, describing, naming, perhaps even classifying this curious region between the word and image. One moment it is nearly abstract and geometrical (a "colorless neutral strip"); the next it is a sublime landscape ("an uncertain foggy region") or the margin of a seashore; the next a pure negation, an "absence of space." At other times he will describe it in terms reminiscent of Lessing's account of painting and poetry, as something like a frontier separating two armies:[33] "between the figure

33. Lessing, *Laocoon* (1766), translated by Ellen Frothingham (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969), p. 110; further page references will be cited in the text. As Lessing puts it in *Laocoon*: "Painting and poetry should be like two just and friendly neighbors, neither of whom indeed is allowed to take unseemly liberties in the heart of the other's domain, but who exercise mutual forbearance on the borders, and effect a peaceful settlement for all the petty encroachments which circumstance may compel either to make in haste on the rights of the other" (p. 110). See *Iconology*, chapter 3, on Lessing and the battle of the temporal and spatial arts.

and the text a whole series of intersections—or rather attacks launched by one against the other, arrows shot at the enemy target, enterprises of subversion and destruction, lance blows and wounds, a battle" (p. 26).

Whatever we call the No Man's Land between image and text in Magritte's drawing, it seems clear that, for Foucault, it is foundational for both the structures of power/knowledge that are the object of his genealogies and for his own practice as a writer. I think it is no exaggeration to say that the little essay on Magritte, and the hypericon of "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," provides a picture of Foucault's way of writing and his whole theory of the stratification of knowledge and the relations of power in the dialectic of the visible and the sayable. Michel de Certeau has commented on Foucault's "optical style," with its scenes, tables, figures, and illustrations:

> Actually, these images institute the text. . . . Forgotten systems of reason stir in these mirrors. On the level of the paragraph or phrase, quotes function in the same way; each of them is embedded there like a fragment of a mirror, having the value not of a proof but of an astonishment—a sparkle of other. The entire discourse proceeds in this fashion from vision to vision.[34]

Gilles Deleuze argues further that this interplay between "seeing and speaking," the "visible and the sayable," is not merely a matter of style or rhetoric, a way to seduce the reader, but a constitutive feature of Foucault's epistemology. Knowledge itself is a system of archaeological strata "made from things and words . . . from bands of visibility and bands of readability." Foucault's "visual style" is built, then, upon the most venerable oppositions of rhetoric and epistemology, the traditional interplay between *res* and *verba,* words and things, *les mots et les choses,* arguments and examples, discourse and image. (Deleuze remarks that "Foucault enters into a logical tradition that is already well established, one which claims that there is a difference in nature between statements and descriptions . . . the description-scene is the regulation unique to visibilities, just as the statement-curve is the regulation unique to readabilities."[35]) Foucault's characteristic procedure might be described, then, as his identification of the visual-

34. Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other,* translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 196.

35. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 80.

verbal dialectic as a kind of "historical a priori" which serves, not merely as one of the structures of knowledge and power, but a key to the relation of theory and history. The dialectic of the visible and the sayable is the closest Foucault comes to a set of foundational Kantian categories; they even play something like the role that time and space serve in Kant's epistemology. But Foucault refuses the phenomenological account of visual perception, insisting on the historicality of the senses and perceptual fields. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* is his closest brush with a transcendental a priori, a moment whose abstractness and generality is undone by its reliance on this particular, concrete example. It is only, after all, a reading of a picture, and only a picture of a theory.

To return to the picture, and to the most obvious, banal question, one that is rarely asked about this drawing: Why a pipe? Why wouldn't any other object—a hat, a shoe, a glove—do as well? The answer is that they would do as well to illustrate the abstract "theme" of the composition, but they would completely lose the specific force of the image. Foucault finds a hidden calligram in the similarity of the shape of the "p" in "pipe" to the pictured pipe. (To this one might add the hint of a physical motivation in the link between the plosive lip-action required to pronounce a "p" and the act of puffing on a pipe.) But there is an even more obvious and naively literal connotation to the depicted object, in its reminder of the "effect/affect" of metapictures on beholders. Metapictures are all like pipes: they are instruments of reverie, provocations to idle conversation, pipe-dreams, and abstruse speculations. Like pipes, metapictures are "smoked" or "smoked out" and then put back in the rack. They encourage introspection, reflection, meditations on visual experience. Their connection to history, politics, contemporaneity is equivocal, for they clearly serve (like puzzles, anagrams, conundrums, paradoxes) the purposes of escapist leisure, consumptive and sumptuary pleasure, a kind of visual orality in which the eyes "drink" in and savor the scopic field. Indeed, as some of Magritte's other "pipe" drawings make clear (figure 14), the pipe is an instrument of auto-fellatio, a device to link the pleasures of masturbation and orality.[36]

36. Dawn Ades and Terry Ann Neff, "Addendum: It Certainly Was Not a Pipe!" in *In the Mind's Eye: Dada and Surrealism*, catalog for an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1984. Louis Scutenaire also points out the pun in French on the pipe and the penis. See *Avec Magritte* (Brussels: Le Fil Rouge, Editions Lebeer Hossman, 1977), p. 31. I'm grateful to John Ricco and Alison Pearlman for calling these matters to my attention.

14. Rene Magritte, *Untitled Drawing, 1948.* Ink on paper. Private collection, Brussels. © 1993 C. Herscovici/ARS, New York.

The pipe's function in smoking rituals—for peace, worship, exchange of gifts, and festivals, associates it with utopian social practices as well as with solitary introspection and narcissism. It also has (as the shadows of Magritte's drawing indicate) darker sides: excess, addiction, narcosis, habituation to self-destructive pleasures. Even the festive, utopian aspects of the pipe are linked with death and sacrifice—the burnt offering, the spectacular destruction of wealth in potlatch rituals.[37]

37. See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1950), translated by W. D. Halls (New York: Norton, 1990), pp. 70–71.

These readings of the public and private symbolism of the pipe might seem incompatible at first glance with my earlier remarks about the pedantic, pedagogical character of the drawing. I would argue, however, that the idleness and reverie connoted by the pipe are not incompatible with disciplinary pedagogies, especially the sort that involve initiation rituals and exercises in self-understanding. I would also want to stress that these interpretations involve a seeing of the picture that forgets about the legend, or replaces it freely with other legends, such as "this is a pipe," or "why is this a pipe?" Magritte's pipe does not "symbolize" these things, of course. It has been snatched away from these uses into the space of abstraction: it has become a philosopher's example, illustrating a simple negative lesson about pictures, statements, and objects. But we can put it back into touch with the world simply by erasing the legend (which is clearly the sort of writing that is meant to be erased)[38] and substituting something else, or by returning it to its probable "origin" in the real world, as a self-sufficient indexical, a sign-board over the entrance of a tobacconists' shop.

The *effect* of the metapicture, in short, shouldn't be confused with themes or topoi. I take the theme of "This Is Not a Pipe" to be the relation of statements and pictures but the effect to be a certain infinite reverie activated by the density of the image and the legend, how they are drawn and inscribed. Let us call this the "Pipe Effect." There are other effects that seem more or less "programmed" into the hypericons we have considered. The Duck-Rabbit has, according to some phenomenological theories, a mechanical effect on perception; it activates a potential for the "switching" of aspects, one which Gombrich believes is "wired in" as an inability to see both aspects simultaneously. Wittgenstein hinted at some skepticism about this supposed inability, suggesting that it's possible to see the drawing as "the Duck-Rabbit," a form which is neither one nor the other, but both or neither.[39] In any event, let us call this the "multistability

38. Even more so in *Les deux mystères,* where the writing is shown as chalk on a blackboard.

39. This point was brought forcibly home during a discussion of the Duck-Rabbit at the seminar on "Image and Text" at the 1990 School of Criticism and Theory, when Linda Beard of Michigan State University pointed out that the problem of the Duck-Rabbit is exactly analogous to the question of the mulatto, the ambiguous visual/verbal coding of race in the binary system of black and white "identity." The possibility of a third term, an image of both-or-neither, is what makes sense of the original question that accompanied the Duck-Rabbit: "Which animals resemble each other the most?"

effect,"[40] noting that it too seems to be a recurrent feature of the metapicture. We noted that the "time-line" of Steinberg's drawing can be read in two opposite directions; Magritte's Pipe requires two contrary and symmetrical readings; *Las Meninas* is a veritable whirlpool of interpretative "aspects," switching and alternating the places of painter, beholder, and model, the viewer and the viewed, with dazzling complexity.

The figure of the "whirlpool" suggests a way of specifying (or picturing) the multistability effect in a graphic form. We might call this the "Vortex Effect," locating its most explicit rendering in Steinberg's "New World," where the graphic abstraction of reverie finds its appropriate icon in the spiraling doodle. Versions of the vortex are implied in our other examples as well—in the rotation of the Duck-Rabbit around the axis of the eye, in the cyclical scanning of Magritte's text/image composite, and in the "cycle of representation" that Foucault compares to a "spiral shell" in *Las Meninas.*[41] All these effects are mobilized in the service of an overarching effect that is most vividly realized in *Las Meninas,* and that is what we might call (following Althusser) the "Effect of Interpellation," the sense that the image greets or hails or addresses us, that it takes the beholder into the game, enfolds the observer as object for the "gaze" of the picture. This is true even when no figure in the image looks out at the beholder. Magritte's pipe addresses, even lectures the beholder, broadcasting two contradictory messages (the legend: "This is not a pipe"; the picture: "this is a pipe") simultaneously. Steinberg's "New World" challenges the beholder to find a position outside it. The Duck-Rabbit addresses us across the gulf between animal and human perception, between mechanical illusion and interpretive "seeing-as."[42] That may be why this particular example, rather than the numerous multistable

40. See Gandelman's discussion in "The Metastability of Primitive Artefacts," pp. 191–213.

41. See Foucault, *Order of Things,* p. 11. See my essay, "Metamorphoses of the Vortex: Hogarth, Turner, and Blake," in *Articulate Images: The Sister Arts from Hogarth to Tennyson,* edited by Richard Wendorf (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 125–68.

42. See chapter 10, "Illusion: Looking at Animals Looking," for more on this issue.

geometric diagrams that appear in psychology textbooks, has emerged as the canonical example for philosophical reflection. The Duck-Rabbit, like the pipe, is not a neutral motif. It brings all the associations of game, hunting, decoys, and the linkage of the visual field with power, entrapment, and violence. What does it mean that the key shift in the Duck-Rabbit is the flashing between ears and a mouth: does the picture alternately "listen" for its observer, like a rabbit trembling in the weeds? Or does it quack at us insistently?[43] Alain's Egyptian life-class seems to "capture" the geographical and historical "other" in the net of "our" gaze. More typical of the strong hypericon, however, is the interpellative return, the multistable vortex that brings the net itself to our notice, or tears holes in it. Recall Foucault's comparison of Magritte's pipe to a "double trap, unavoidable snare" that falls open, allowing the object to escape (*Pipe,* pp. 22, 28).

I want to conclude these reflections, not with generalizations but with a pair of final examples that might suggest further directions of inquiry. The first is Poussin's Arcadian Shepherds (figure 15), the subject of a large scholarly literature that includes classic essays by Erwin Panofsky and Louis Marin.[44] I hope it is clear by now how we might proceed with this example. It is clearly a representation of representation, but with the poles of Magritte's pipe reversed: here, instead of a text surrounding or commenting on a picture, we have an array of pictured figures surrounding a text inscribed on a cenotaph—a picture of textuality and reading. If Magritte shows us the relation of a declarative statement to a picture, Poussin is concerned with picturing the *narrative* statement, the classic problem of Western history painting. I won't try to reconstruct the multistable aspects of the painting in detail, except to say that it "puts on stage" another generic feature of the metapicture: its role as a *scene of interpretation.* The shepherds have discovered the cenotaph with the ambiguous inscription, "I too was (or am) in Arcadia." Like the ambiguous deictic "this" in Magritte's pipe, the "I" may be a dead shepherd speaking

43. Note that the scene of the hunter's story in *Fliegende Blätter* is framed by a pair of listening rabbits whose toothy grins suggest they are about to burst out laughing at the absurd scene.

44. Marin, "Toward a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts," in *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France,* edited by Norman Bryson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 63–90; Panofsky, "*Et in Arcadia Ego:* Poussin and the Elegaic Tradition," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 295–320.

15. Nicolas Poussin, *Et in Arcadia Ego.* Reproduced courtesy of Musée du Louvre; photograph courtesy of Musées Nationaux—Paris.

from the past, or Death himself, speaking ominously in the eternal present. The painting stages a double vortex of interpretation. The first is explicitly represented by the complex drama of the shepherds' gestures and interwoven gazes, the sense that they represent stages in a process of encounter, apprehension, puzzlement, and discussion, culminating in the calm comprehension/recognition of the sibylline shepherdess at the right. The second is the implied vortex of the implied beholders' colloquy in front of this picture. I have in mind a secondary image, one in which a somewhat reduced copy of the Arcadian Shepherds is placed on display in some academic pastoral setting and is photographed surrounded by curious students and a wise instructor to show us something about the continuing function of the metapicture as teaching aid—a scene of sublime instruction that contrasts sharply with the hilarious anarchy Foucault imagines in Magritte's pipe-ridden classroom.

My final example comes from well outside the canon, not just of art history, but of philosophical reflection as well. It comes from the

popular culture of the adolescent white American male in the second half of the twentieth century, a whole realm of pubescent transgression that has marked the maturation of boys in this country since the 1950s. I'm speaking, of course, of *MAD* magazine,[45] and I have in mind a particular cover that brings the metapicture into the territory of sexuality, voyeurism, gender difference, pornography, and the pictured body (figure 16). It does this, not by showing a representation of representation, but a representation of *pre*sentation, a picture about the body as spectacle.

The picture shows us a scene at a nude beach. The nudists are discreetly screened from our view by a board fence with the words "nude beach" painted on it. Beyond the fence we see the faces and upper bodies of the nudists reacting in horror to a spectacle that confronts them atop the fence, where we see from behind a figure standing on the fence, his legs spread wide, holding open a trench coat to expose himself to the nudists. We recognize the flasher, of course, by his knobby knees, shock of red hair, and distinctively large ears. It is Alfred E. Neumann, the crazy, perverted nerd who is the closest thing *MAD* magazine ever had to a hero. Exactly what Neumann is exposing to the nudists to cause such consternation is withheld from us behind the open trench coat. It is clear that he is showing them something that causes women to cover their mouths in horror and cover their children's eyes; it leaves men gaping in amazement, even managing to distract a distant volleyball player who is transfixed in midair. The picture leaves us asking what it is that could arouse such horror and astonishment.

I will spare you a comprehensive set of speculations on what it is that Alfred E. Neumann is exposing to the nudists. The facial expressions all evoke a determinate genre of presentational imagery that might be summed up as the "Medusa Effect." Whatever Neumann is exposing evokes a set of responses that cycles between repulsion and attraction, disgust and fascination. The figures seem paralyzed by the awful spectacle, their faces registering a sequence of emotions that range from terror to puzzlement to gaping amazement. The only "articulate" signs and conventional gestures in the crowd are those of the man at the left, who points toward the hidden monstrosity and calls others to come and see. We recognize, in short, the classic responses to what Gombrich calls the "apotropaic" image, the danger-

45. The editors of *MAD* inform me that their million readers around the world consist predominantly of boys from the ages of twelve to fifteen.

16. Front cover of *MAD* Magazine #257, painted by Richard Williams and used with permission. © 1985 by E. C. Publications, Inc.

ous representation. (These were often multistable images of faces, genitalia, and dangerous animals, all summed up in the snaky locks of Medusa.) As in traditional representations of Medusa, we are protected from a direct view of the paralyzing spectacle; it is mediated by the expressions of the pictured beholders.

Medusa, of course, is not quite appropriate to what I suppose is our first surmise about the displayed object. But then anyone who knows Alfred E. Neumann should have already suspected that he is not to be imagined as being well endowed. He is a nerd, a weirdo, a crazy, witty pervert. The suspicion begins to dawn that what Neumann is showing the nudists is not a prodigious phallus, but exactly its opposite, a prodigious absence, a gaping wound (the empty cleavage at the tail end of his trench coat already suggests far too much empty blue sky between his legs). Perhaps Neumann is a castrato, a hermaphrodite, a sexual monster with snaky scales on his genitals.

The truth, alas, is much more prosaic, a veritable anticlimax. To guess at it we need to ask what form of visual transgression would be most threatening in a world defined by the free visual access to the naked body, the open, illuminated world of nudism? The answer: not merely a lack of visible genitalia, a wounding absence, but a positive prohibition, an interdiction on display, a form of negation possible only in language. Neumann's secret (figure 17) turns out to be nothing but some words, the slogan "Flashers Against Nudity" printed on his tee-shirt. It's hard to imagine a clearer illustration of what Foucault calls "the repressive hypothesis" concerning sexuality. Exhibitionism doesn't simply violate the law against a certain kind of visual display; it relies on that law for its very effect. Nudism is the deadly enemy of exhibitionism, for it offers the possibility of bodily display without sex, secrecy, or transgression; it threatens the regime of concealment and surveillance, and overturns the alliance between voyeurism and exhibitionism. Alfred E. Neumann "assumes the position" here of the classic figures of patriarchal repression and the law, maintaining their hold on visibility and sex "through language, or rather through that act of discourse that creates . . . a rule of law,"[46] which in turn constitutes desire as lack.

If the *MAD* cover pictures a theory of sexuality, its more fundamental mission is to picture the relation between the visible and the

46. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction,* vol. 1, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 83. Further page references will be cited in the text.

17. Back cover of *MAD* Magazine #257, painted by Richard Williams and used with permission. © 1985 by E. C. Publications, Inc.

readable in the intersections of power, desire, and knowledge. Like our other "wild" metapictures, it doesn't merely illustrate the repressive hypothesis, but undermines it, holds it up to ridicule, revealing the law itself as mad and perverse. Like Magritte's pipe, it reveals the relation of the visible and the readable to be one of negation and interdiction, a site where power, desire, and knowledge converge in strategies of representation. Like *Las Meninas,* it interpellates its beholder in a scene of recognition and spectacular power, replacing the sovereignty of painter/monarch with the contemporary figure of the walking billboard, speaking in the body language of the tee-shirt. Like the Duck-Rabbit, it opens up contrary readings with infinite possibilities: on the one hand, a mysterious sexuality that circulates through discourse and representation, requiring an intricate *scientia sexualis* to trace what Foucault calls its "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure" (*HS,* p. 45); on the other hand, an *ars erotica* that would have its own forms of visibility and concealment, "a different economy of bodies and pleasures" (p. 159), and a different nexus of the seeable and the sayable.

It will be objected that I am comparing apples and oranges (not to mention neglecting history) in juxtaposing such disparate examples—*New Yorker* cartoons, gestalt images, surrealist conundrums, Renaissance masterpieces, and juvenile comic books. I hope it is clear that this miscellaneous and heterogeneous array is fundamental to the claims of this essay. The study of metapictures is not a special problem in art history, but an issue in a much larger field theory of representation, the hybrid discipline of "iconology." The metapicture is not a subgenre within the fine arts but a fundamental potentiality inherent in pictorial representation as such: it is the place where pictures reveal and "know" themselves, where they reflect on the intersections of visuality, language, and similitude, where they engage in speculation and theorizing on their own nature and history. As the words "reflection," "speculation," and "theory," indicate, there is more than a casual relation between visual representation and the practice called theorizing (*theoria* comes from the Greek word "to see"). We tend to think of "theory" as something that is primarily conducted in linear discourse, in language and logic, with pictures playing the passive role of illustrations, or (in the case of a "theory of pictures") serving as the passive objects of description and explanation. But if there is such a thing as a metalanguage, it should hardly surprise us that there is such a thing as a metapicture. Our search for a theory of pictures may best be advanced by turning the problem upside-down to look at pictures of theory.