BRUEGEL'S *VIA CRUCIS*: (VISUAL) EXPERIENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION

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Introduction: Visual Pedagogy

This talk will focus on the close reading of a painting, Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Via Crucis*, or, *Carrying of the Cross* (figure 1), with the idea of suggesting how such sustained engagement with a single work of art over the course of one or several class sessions in a seminar, or even as the basis for an entire course, poses similar challenges and has a similar pedagogical value as the close reading of texts. I will also briefly indicate the rich dialogue between Bruegel's picture and a number of major Renaissance texts. My simple mention of these texts can in no way do justice to them, but I merely hope to suggest ways that a work of visual art can function meaningfully as part of an interdisciplinary course built around close reading and discussion of texts. In addition, as an image that is self-reflexive in a characteristically Renaissance fashion, the picture explicitly directs the viewer towards the problem of interpretation and suggests the framework within which that interpretive process operates. In other words, I would like to argue that the picture itself teaches. And I will mainly do this (due to lack of time) simply by going through some of the problems of interpretation to which the picture calls our attention. This interpretative problem, as Bruegel's *Via Crucis* presents it, is

effectively that of finding a middle way between absolute truth and complete absence of determinate meaning; it is an understanding of the interpretive act as directed by, and actively responsive to, its object, in a way that for that very reason is also open and multivalent in its mode of address. Furthermore, this mode if address implicates another kind of "middle way" as a defining characteristic of interpretation: the dialectical relationship between reflective detachment and experiential embeddedness, both of which play an important role in the interpretation of Bruegel's painting. In both senses, I would argue, this interpretive mode is particularly relevant to the goals and values of liberal education.

I. Pictorial Structure as Meaning

Bruegel's *Via Crucis*, painted in 1564, probably on commission for his frequent patron Nicolaas Jonghelinck,[1] stands not only at a crucial point in Bruegel's mature oeuvre but also near the end of a long tradition of similar Netherlandish pictures of the subject that stretches back to Jan Van Eyck (figure 2). The uniqueness of Bruegel's picture, however, lies in the degree to which the narrative is embedded within a field structured and articulated by juxtaposed signifying elements and, even more importantly, divergent but coordinated (geometrically-defined) points of view. Furthermore, this pictorial structure presents itself, on the level of expression, as a unified and atmospheric landscape, such that the structural principles and affective power specific to landscape become the principal means through which the semantic dimension of the work is articulated and the problem of interpretation itself brought to the fore.

The picture is characterized first and foremost by the horizon and the literal and metaphorical breadth of vision it provides, even if the horizon itself is only glimpsed at the

[1] A *Via Crucis* by Bruegel is mentioned in Jonghelinck's inventory of 21 February 1565.

center of the picture. Far from being a destination for receding orthogonals, it is rather more of an emblem for the picture's spatial generation and expansion: a radical alternative to the recession of architectural units toward a center of vision that is the norm for perspectival representation (figure 3). Just as the horizon indicates a notional infinity that is simultaneously a mathematical concept and a visual intuition (the limit of vision), in the *Via Crucis* one senses that the structure of pictorial space shapes the narrative and guides its interpretation not only in a geometric but also in an intuitive sense: the experience of landscape as a lived environment is not only evoked for the viewer of the picture but also shapes the experiences of the principal figures in the narrative as well; that is, their apparent relationships with and experiences of the place they inhabit play a decisive role, in the narrative itself and the interpretation of that narrative.[2] Once this experiential dimension is taken into account, pictorial space grows from a means of telling a story into a means to suggest and to multiply the possibilities for its interpretation into, ultimately, a means to reflect upon knowledge itself and, on the other hand, to empathetically share in a range of experiences.[3] Indeed, the notion of point of view, grounded in the modality of perspective, carries with it not only a literal visual sense and a metaphorical, interpretive one in relation to the given subject matter, but also an epistemic one with respect to the world at large.

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[2] Numerous scholars have commented on the sense that Bruegel's pictures provide commentary on the interdependence of humanity and nature: see for instance Max Dvorák, "Pieter Bruegel der Ältere" (1920), in *Kunstgeschichte als Geistgeschichte: Studien zur Abendländischen Kunstentwicklung* (Berlin, 1995), p. 236; Walter Gibson, *"Mirror of the Earth": The World Landscape in Sixteenth-Century Flemish Painting* (Princeton, 1989), p. xxiii; and Justus Hofstede, "Zur Interpretation von Pieter Bruegels Landschaft: Aesthetischer Landschaftsbegriff und Stoische Weltbetrachtung," in *Pieter Bruegel und seine Welt*, ed. O. von Simson and M. Winner (Berlin, 1979), pp. 140-41, with its comparison of the Via Crucis to Reanaissance Stoicism.

[3] Cf. Nils Büttner, *Die Erfindung der Landschaft; Kosmographie und Landschaftskunst im Zeitalter Bruegels* (Göttingen, 2000), and the argument for landscape's role in the rise of cosmography and geography as sciences in the modern sense.

In other words, the doubling of the literal and the cognitive in the reading of pictorial space mirrors the doubling of literal and cognitive implicit in the horizon line itself, and indeed in the theoretical foundations of perspective. In this sense the acts of viewing/painting and of thinking are inseparable.[4] Furthermore, I would argue, there is also an affective sense to the perspectival depiction of viewpoint, as the geometrical-defined subjectivity of perspective theory (the viewing eye as mathematical point) implicates a more broadly-based subjectivity when one is looking at actual, physical paintings.

The procession to Calvary moves in a gradual helix from Jerusalem in the left background, around the well-trodden tract of semi-barren landscape, to the desolate hilltop of Golgotha, whose edge is framed by the calm domesticated space of a village. At the same time, the curving trajectory with its predominantly festive crowd scene, continues past a bleak, seemingly unending series of gallows (figure 4; compare: Goya, *Disasters of War*, number 36) that carries with it both contemporary social commentary (these means of execution were currently, and commonly, in use in the sixteenth century), and, beyond this, empathetically produces a powerful emotional effect, even a sense of despair. The trajectory continues toward the open sea and the infinity of the horizon, and thus charges that infinity with an affective power (as both the implied extension of the foreground suffering, and a sense of calm and perhaps release from it). The picture's turning produces a harmony between, on the one hand, the coordinated movements of hundreds of otherwise heterogeneously dispersed and individually motivated, and characterized, figures and, on the other hand, the great meteorological shifts in the sky. This change in weather from sunny to stormy also reflects the narrative itself, the

[4] Cf. Edward Snow's characterization of Bruegel as "a *thinker*, a Renaissance artist whose range and penetration rival Shakespeare's" (E. Snow, *Inside Bruegel : The Play of Images in Children's Games* [New York, 1997], p. 160).

passage from life and Jerusalem to death on Golgotha, and builds toward the darkening of the sky described in Matthew, chapter 27.[5] The small strip of maritime horizon visible around the picture's central vertical axis seems just as much a possible origin of this vast turning articulation of space as a destination, while the forces that guide pictorial exploration emphasize neither alternative, but rather the wholeness of the turning universe depicted here. The open character of landscape thus conditions the interpretation of the image as a whole, and the combination of an interdependent unity and the lack of a simple focus informs the character of this world and its inhabitants at the microcosmic level as well (as we will see). At the same time, the sense of a holistic vision given by all of these aspects of the picture emphasizes the viewer's cognitively elevated and, at least initially, emotionally detached position, from which the narrative as a whole appears within a global context, literally and metaphorically.

At the literal center of the panel we find Christ (figure 5), embedded unobtrusively in the narrative while marked as the focal point by the semiotics of the pictorial field, a fact that has often been noted.[6] Likewise, the small scale of the principal figures and the coordination of multiply-dispersed foci of attention among the largely indifferent crowd hide iconographic and theological significance, and appear at first glance to subvert it. This coordination of apparent contradictions functions both structurally (in terms of the relationship of surface to space) and narratively (in terms of the relationship of Christian iconography to contemporary genre), and is

[5] Matthew 27: 45.

[6] See Robert Genaille, "La Montée au Calvaire de Bruegel l'Ancien," *Jaarboek Antwerpen* (1979), p. 160; also Joseph F. Gregory, "Toward the Contextualization of Pieter Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary;* Constructing the Beholder from Within the Eyckian Tradition," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 1996, p. 216.

one of the means by which the problem of interpretation is self-reflexively indicated.[7] Furthermore, this particular view, defined perspectivally by horizon and frame, determines a privileged access to the Christian meaning of the narrative—that is, to revealed truth. This knowledge is itself far from an absolute point of reference, however, circumscribed as it is by its own perspectivally relativized horizon. Indeed, the uncertainty of central, or at least unquestioned, subject matter remains, something true of an entire category of Renaissance religious pictures in the Netherlands known as *Andachtsbilder* (figure 6; compare: Brunswick Monogrammist, *Via Crucis*), where the act of thought, contemplation, or prayer before the image is understood to involve sustained reflection upon the subject matter and its significance as opposed to mere recognition.[8]

II. Coordinated Viewpoints: Perspectival Epistemology

While other Netherlandish depictions of the subject include a ring of spectators within the work, implying a relationship of viewer (with a high vantage level) to surrogate viewer (lower and nearer vantage level) to earthbound narrative scene, in Bruegel's picture the varieties of spectatorship are both more varied and more coordinated, ranging from passionately engaged to indifferent and including numerous pockets of localized attention or self-absorption (figure 7). Here the use of commensurable horizons, with the metaphorical implications (particularly cognitive ones, i.e., viewing as knowing) of the range of vantage points they coordinate,

[7] Cf. Pierre Francastel, *Bruegel* (1969; reprinted Paris, 1995), p. 144; Mark A. Meadow, "Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary:* Aemulatio and the Space of Vernacular Style," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (1996), p. 188; and Gregory, "Toward the Contextualization," p. 216.

[8] See Gregory, "Toward the Contextualization," p. 210. On intentional ambiguity as an invitation to contemplation of religious meaning, see Reindert Falkenburg, "Pieter Bruegels Kruisdraginig: een proeve van 'close-reading,'" *Oud Holland* 107 (1993), pp. 17-33. See also Ethan Matt Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel: Parables of Order and Enterprise* (Cambridge, 1999), esp. pp. 5-7.

becomes a foundation for interpretation of the subject matter. The representation of multiple responses to the Christian narrative in terms of viewers whose points of view are different in ways that are measurable, proportional, *analogous* in the original Greek sense of the word, frames interpretation as a problem of knowledge, or more precisely, frames vision as an epistemic position and an interpretive act. [9]

In Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, the allegorical figure of Folly imagines the perspective of a viewer observing the vanity of human activity from high above and gives expression to a long-familiar literary trope: the high vantage point as a position of epistemic superiority.[10] Indeed, Erasmus invokes similar passages from the *Iliad* in which Zeus or Poseidon gaze at the battle from the clouds above,[11] with the difference that in Erasmus the bird's-eye view primarily serves the function of moral commentary and social criticism.[12] In the case of Bruegel's *Via Crucis,* however, the high vantage point engenders juxtapositions that are much more complex: for Bruegel's picture is a perspectival view, situating the viewer in a particular spot with a spatial relationship to objects not only below but also above, and to the vantage points, themselves differentiated, of numerous central and marginal figures within the narrative. Perspective makes

[9] Cf. Francastel, *Bruegel*, p. 130, discussing the paintings of 1559-60: "L'universe de la connaissance et celui de la representation coincident, toutfois à travers l'image, qui est ton signe."

[10] Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, 15 (trans. H. H. Hudson, Ware, Hertfordshire, 1998]), p. 31: "Come, then, and suppose a man could look from a high tower, as the poets say Jove is in the habit of doing. To how many calamities would he see the life of man subject!"

[11] See especially *Iliad* XI, 80-83; XI, 353-54; and XIII, 11-18.

[12] The parallel between Erasmus and Bruegel is especially striking in the paintings of 1559-1560—the *Netherlandish Proverbs*, *Carnival and Lent*, and *Children's Games*—with their at least partially satirical character. See Gibson, *Bruegel* (London and New York, 1977), p. 78.

these viewpoints commensurable even if their relationships remain enigmatic,[13] since in a perspective image the metaphorical viewpoint is always necessarily doubled by a literal, geometrically-defined one. For instance, the pair of foreshortened circles seen one from below and one from above near the right edge of the picture are not only thematically related as two sites of execution, they also calibrate our vantage point as lying between them, and consequently between that of the crowd below and the blackbird above. (It is also worth noting here that the numerous birds in the picture, including notably a flock of starlings flying near the windmill, also serve to invoke the imaginary flight of pictorial exploration. Thus the painting evokes not only fixed vantage points but also moving ones, with all the implications that holds for the experience of viewing pictures.)

We are indeed elevated above the crowd—we see more, we know more—it is for us, only us, that perspectival vision pins Christ at the crux of the picture's central horizontal and vertical axes. Perhaps only we recognize the divine incarnation amidst the contemporary crowd, and significantly, it is only from our vantage point that the anachronistically rendered group of holy figures, facing toward us, appears in meaningful juxtaposition with the rest of the scene.[14] Yet at the same time we perceive vantage points above ours, we are aware of the limits of our vision. The miller leaning by the side of the windmill and observing the scene (figure 8) sees farther than we, and also differently: through him we can imagine a vantage point at the center of a circle of which Christ moves along the circumference. The procession turns around the axis of his viewpoint, a continuous motion like that of the sails of the windmill beside him, further echoed in the circular base of the mill that itself seems designed to rotate—a turning suggestive

[13] Cf. Michael Gibson, *The Mill and the Cross: Pieter Bruegel's 'Way to Calvary,* author's trans., Lausanne, 2000, esp. p. 76.

[14] See Meadow, "Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary*," p. 189.

of a conflation of the passion cycle and the cycles of nature: changing weather, the seasons, processes of growth and decay, death and life. In fact, our vantage point is calibrated between an opposing pair of viewers on a vertical axis, for directly below sits a peddler, independently absorbed in his own thoughts and perhaps even unaware of the procession before him (figure 9).[15] Between self-enclosure and breadth of vision, the immediacy of presence and the detachment of knowledge, runs the alley toward Christ that Simon of Cyrene, aware of Christ's presence but not his significance, resists taking (figure 10).[16]

This epistemic coordination doubles an affective one: the dialogue among a range of emotional responses to the shared experience of the central event. Bruegel indicate the varieties of response at ground level in the juxtaposition of spectators within the crowd —most indifferent or preoccupied with their own activities, some carried along exuberantly with the procession (culminating in the fool sounding a horn), some curious, a few sympathetic or grieving—and this reaches a focused intensity in the pair at far right: one sorrowfully leans on a tree and another, sometimes taken to be the artist's self-portrait, gazes out perpendicular to our line of vision, with both intellectual detachment and sincere interest (figure 11; compare: the possible self-portrait in Bruegel's *Peasant Wedding*).[17] There's even a sense that the epistemologically-charged axis

[15] M. Gibson offers as one possible reading of the juxtaposition of miller and peddler a symbolic opposition between Catholicism and Protestantism (*The Mill and the Cross*, pp. 62-64). The problem with iconographic and contextualizing readings such as these is that, in my view, they don't take adequate account of the visual and structural specificity of pictures, especially in the case of such a striking and idiosyncratic depiction as that of the windmill atop its rocky pinnacle in this painting. Commentary on the relationship of the Protestant Reformation to Catholicism may or may not be implied here, but in any case, I would argue, it would be subsidiary to the larger epistemological issues raised by the picture in the terms specific to its idiom as visual representation.

[16] Cf. Matthew 27: 32.

[17] On the identification of the self-portrait, see Michael Auner, "Pieter Bruegel—Umrisse eines Lebensbildes," in *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 52 (1956), pp. 107-09.

discussed above—peddlar and windmill, with the Simon group in the center—is paralleled on the right by an axis of compassion, or affect, defined by the mournful Marian group below and the gallows above, with the wretched and suffering condemned prisoners in the center (figure 12).

Although the picture's structure of coordinated and respectively limited viewpoints and experiences may imply the possibility of relativizing Christian meaning, nevertheless it does not allow us to rest comfortably with that reading, or any other that would purport to claim absolute authority, guiding us rather to the middle ground of a carefully calibrated interpretive pluralism. The vantage point given by the windmill suggests at once a perspective higher and more godlike than ours, one that more fully brings narrative and theological interpretation into harmony with a larger vision of nature, but it is also, in the mathematical terms of perspective, necessarily also an arbitrary and contingent viewpoint, just as ours is. Consider, by contrast, the central pane of Hieronymous Bosch's *Haywain*, or a miniature painting of *The Baptism of Christ* from the margins of a page in the Turin-Milan Book of Hours, probably by Jan van Eyck (figure 13): each indicated the possibility of a divine, i.e., absolute, vantage point, something absent in Bruegel's picture. The dialectic between the power of vision and its necessary limits is played out in the *Via Crucis*, through the coordination of different but necessarily limited viewpoints, as its own unending cycle, and one that carries with it the possibility of commentary on the very problem of knowledge.

In the dedicatory letter to *The Prince*, Machiavelli signals that text's participation in this discourse about knowledge created by perspective. To quote the relevant passage: "For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know

well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people."[18] A third position, knowing both princes and people, and the relationship between them, may be the one the reader (like Machiavelli) actually occupies, though that point of view too of course has its necessary limits. Machiavelli's use of this pictorial metaphor is far more than a rhetorical device, given its deep significance for the entire text, with its politics based on mutual perceptions of appearances from various distances (i.e., with various degrees of deception involved) that nevertheless constitutes, on the whole, a genuine form of knowledge. Indeed, *The Prince* may be one of the first non-pictorial works to use perspective as an epistemological metaphor, as the *Via Crucis* does.[19]

III. Towards a Perspectival Metaphysics

Finally. to consider one additional Renaissance text, perhaps the most relevant of all for Bruegel: in his *De docta ignorantia* of 1440, Nicholas Cusanus presents the following thought experiment: "Accordingly, as it will always seem to the observer, whether he be on the earth, or on the sun or on another star, that he is in the *quasi*-motionless center and that all the other [things] are in motion, he will certainly determine the poles [of this motion] in relation to himself; and these poles will be different for the observer on the sun and for the one on the earth, and still different for those on the moon and Mars, and so on for the rest. Thus, the fabric of the world (*machina mundi*) will *quasi* have its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere,

[18] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Mansfield, Chicago, 1985, p. 4.

[19] Cf. Claudio Guillén, "One the Concept and Metaphor of Perspective," in Stephen G. Nichols, Jr., and Richard B. Vowles eds., *Comparatists at Work* (Waltham, Mass., and London, 1968), pp. 28-91. Guillén, however, discusses the origins of perspective's metaphorization in both epistemological and metaphysical terms within the philosophical and literary traditions of the seventeenth century, apparently not taking into account Renaissance pictures, and to some extent texts (e.g., Machiavelli's *Prince*), that evidently use perspective in these metaphorical senses one or two centuries earlier.

because the circumference and the center are God, who is everywhere and nowhere."[20] This cosmological interpretation of perspective, part of Cusanus's notion of a physical universe that is both centerless and unbounded (*interminatus* is Cusanus's word in the Latin[21]), would later inspire Giordano Bruno, maybe the first thinker to unequivocally assert the absolute, mathematical infinity of the physical universe.[22]

In the *Via Crucis,* the central vertical axis not only governs the depiction, via perspective, of a centerless and unbounded universe but also suggests the metaphysical problem of physical infinity as a contraction of the divine infinite, as Cusanus describes it at various points in *De docta ignorantia*, and as his analogy between physical universe as infinite sphere and God as infinite sphere in the passage quoted above implies. On that pictorial axis Christ, God made man, appears, midway between the rocky outcropping where we presumably stand and the marine horizon. The central vertical axis on the picture's *surface* thus also constitutes an axis of *depth* leading to the horizon, articulating the relationship between subject and object, between the viewer and the physical infinity of nature. In other words, the image of Christ appears in the center of perspective's foundational orthogonal axis, between the viewer and the horizon, collinear with the vertical axis on the panel, of which he also occupies the center. In this sense the image of infinite physical space is juxtaposed with the image of God, of the metaphysical

[20]Cusanus, *De docta ignorantia*, II, cap.xii, 21v.

[21] See Alexandre Koryé, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore and London, 1957), pp. 6-8 and 11-13.

[22] See Bruno, *La cena de le ceneri* (1584), in *Opere Italiane*, ed. G. Gentile, vol.1 (Bari, 1907), p. 73, and Bruno, *De l'infinito universo e mondi* (1584), in *Opere Italiane*, vol.1, p. 309. Bruno presents this conception of an infinite universe specifically in terms of the horizon: see esp. Bruno, *De l'infinito universo e mondi* (1584), in *Opere Italiane*, vol.1, p. 309; English trans. from D. Waley Singer, *Giordano Bruno, his Life and Work* [New York, 1950], p. 280.

infinite. The shift from infinity as God to infinity as Cartesian space,[23] a shift for which, historically speaking, the development of perspective plays the decisive role, could thus be said to find visual expression on the central vertical axis of Bruegel's picture. Indeed, this axis becomes emblematic of the broader shift in the notion of infinity from metaphysical to physical that is central to Cusanus's theology: namely, the relationship of the absolute infinite (God) to the contracted infinite (the physical universe). And in fact, there is another pair of viewers in dialectical opposition that emblematize these alternatives and their coexistence: the miller looks down at Christ, God incarnate within the physical world, from the windmill's rocky outcropping, while beside him and turning in counterpoint to his turning, a blackbird in a tree looks out towards the horizon, the indication of the mathematical infinity proper to that physical world itself (figure 14; compare this detail with the related dialectic of paired gazes in Bruegel's *Two Monkeys*).

Conclusion: Modes of Experience

A consideration of pictorial structure, and more significantly still, of perspectival space as a coordination of analogous viewpoints, is crucial in that it allows the process of interpretation to grow from a direct response to the painting *qua* visual representation, that it gives the object itself and its pictorial idiom its due—and furthermore, in that it allows one to remain sensitive to the picture's own "thought processes," its internal interpretive self-reflexivity.[24] However, it is in the specific character of organic unity and experiential immediacy—the experiential dimension

[23] See Koryé, *Closed World to Infinite Universe*, pp. 18-19.

[24] Cf. Gregory, "Toward the Contextualization," p. 210, n. 7, speaking of the inverted narrative compositions of the *Via Crucis*: "Insofar as the *form* of the image assumes an epistemological function here, insofar as it is not reducible to a determinate, iconographical meaning, it subverts the traditional dependency of images upon determinate and extrinsic textual relations."

through which the *Via Crucis* is in the deepest, phenomenological sense a landscape—that much of its peculiar power, semantic and expressive, ultimately resides. And thus the best interpretations are those that emerge from close attention to the full experience the painting offers to a viewer. With this in mind, I would like to close with a brief consideration of some experiences depicted in a small area of the painting in the lower right (figure 15), with the suggestion that in returning to the microcosmic aspects of the picture (the experiences of the individual figures), the viewer's experience of the picture as a whole and the problems of knowledge, attention and emotional response that it raises are the surest guide. For it is this macrocosmic interpretive mode itself, raising as it does the question of the necessary incompleteness of any interpretive act, that encourages us to consider more deeply precisely those figures who might otherwise seem marginal but whose cognitive or emotional states seem particularly perplexing.

Near the foreground group of holy figures, in addition to the figures expressing astonishment or grief at the sight of the condemned criminals passing by, and in addition to the one mourning in empathy with the Virgin, oblivious to the imminent passing of Christ himself (to which two figures attempt to direct her attention), there are two other typically Bruegelian figures whose experiences of the event are harder to account for. One is a very young child looking at the viewer, the face mask-like, with a combination of innocent curiosity and disturbing proximity to dangerous or troubling events encountered so often in the figures of chidren elsewhere in Bruegel's work, including elsewhere in the *Via Crucis* (figure 16). Another figure, also a child, crosses the river, or more likely pauses, and extends his hand. Perhaps he is reaching to his companion across the river, though it is not clear that this gesture actually expresses such a desire for effective action or communication. Perhaps he is preoccupied with

something he holds in his hand but that we can't quite see. There's something more enigmatic than mere focused attention here: an immediacy of ordinary, momentary experience that is not clearly directed to any end, or, as a state of attention, that is multiply directed. It suggests a kind of being in the world that involves active effort without obvious purpose, of a type that is very much a part of everyday life, though often unobserved (figure 17; compare this with a detail from Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow*, where the varieties of work and leisure activity depicted there include one figure whose engagement with the world suggests such non-goal-oriented yet earnest negotiation, viz., the man grappling with a small tree by the riverbank).

In a picture which addresses various modes of knowing and feeling and that raises the problem of attention in the highly charged context of divine immanence within ordinary life, there is always a remainder that escapes meaning, that is irreducible to any coordinated system of alternatives, however exhaustive. And for me it is in the character of those experiences, both ordinary and strange (strange because they are usually unobserved in actual life) that much of the continuing fascination of Bruegel's painting lies. The abiding strangeness and ordinariness of the world as re-presented in directly visual terms, if one does the work required to be able to begin seeing it, provides, I think, the best support for the interpretive and responsive activity that constitutes the shared encounter with a work of art in the context of a discussion seminar.

Figure 1: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Via Crucis (Carrying of the Cross)*, oil on wood panel, 1564

Figure 2: Copy after Jan (and/or Hubert) van Eyck (artist unknown), *Via Crucis*, oil on wood panel, early 16th century

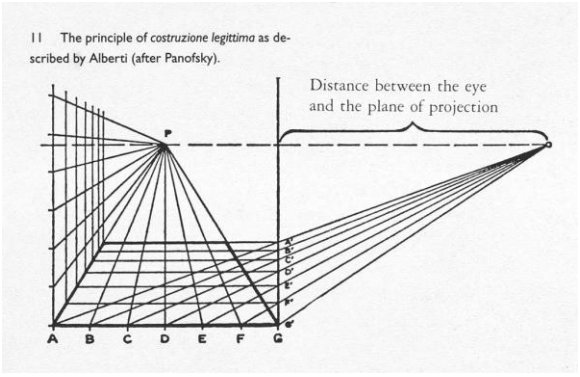

Figure 3: Bruegel, *Via Crucis*; Perspective diagram from Leon Battista Alberti, *Della pittura*, 1435-36

Figure 4: Detail from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*; Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *Disasters of War*, number 36, etching with aquatint, c. 1810-20 (published 1863)

Figure 5: Detail from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*

Figure 6: Brunswick Monogrammist (Jan van Amstel?), *Via Crucis*, oil on wood panel, 1530s? (Paris, Louvre)

Figure 7: Details from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*

Figure 8: Detail from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*

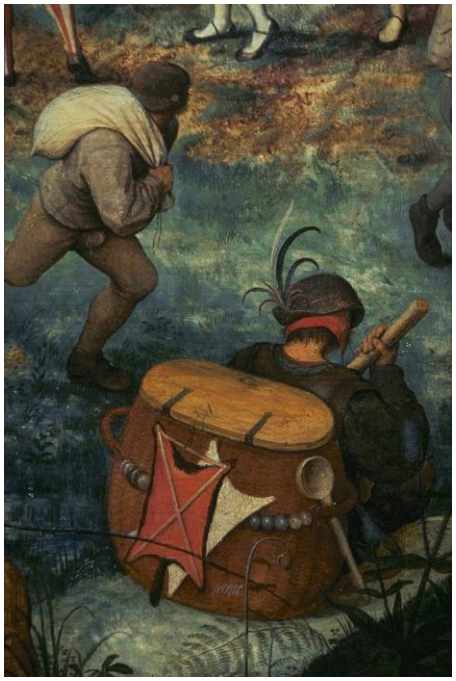

Figure 9: Detail from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*

Figure 10: Detail from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*

Figure 11: Details from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*; Detail from Bruegel, *Peasant Wedding*, oil on wood panel, c. 1567-68

Figure 12: Detail from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*

Figure 13: Hieronymus Bosch, *The Haywain*, central panel, oil on wood, 1500-02; Hand G (Jan van Eyck?), *Baptism of Christ*, manuscript illumination from the *Turin-Milan Hours*, c. 1417-30

Figure 14: Details from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*; Bruegel, *Two Monkeys*, oil on wood panel, 1562

Figure 15: Detail from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*

Figure 16: Detail from the following pictures by Bruegel, all oil on wood panel: *Children's Games* (1560); *Hunters in the Snow* (1565); *The Census at Bethlehem* (1566); *Via Crucis*; *Children's Games*; *The Adoration of the Magi in the Snow* (1567); *Via Crucis*

Figure 17: Details from Bruegel, *Via Crucis*; Detail from Bruegel, *Hunters in the Snow*