Portraying the unrepresentable: “the methodical eye” of the early modern meta-painting. “Las Meninas”, from Velázquez to Picasso

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine and define a new aesthetical paradigm, claimed by the speculative painting, following two different but connected artistic discourses: Las Meninas by Velázquez, and its 58 replicas of Pablo Picasso, the self-portrait being possible only as representation of the fictional author and its authorial Ego. The working hypothesis is that, by resort to this premise, the authorial representation of the painter performed through a self-portrait or the perennial relation between interior and exterior dimensions were created each time differently, using the insertion of a mirror representing a particular manner to give form to auto-reflexivity. Taking into account the elements and the conclusions of the current analysis, the present contribution aims to synthesize general characteristics of the mirror motive and the negative painting as meta-referential discourse. Las Meninas, both in Picasso’s and Velázquez’s representations, include exophoric and endophoric elements. I shall argue that this two types of elements generate two registers of visibilities, remarked as “visible” and “invisible” levels, in Foucault’s terms, the problem of Self’s representation being, in fact, originally constructed as the genuine difference between seen and unseen forms of pure representation. Inspired by Velázquez, Las Meninas, performed by Picasso, created a new artistic discourse, in which the problem of the pure representation is abolished, the construct being replaced by the couple “self-reflective”-“self-reflexive” representations. “Portraying the Unrepresentable” is nothing else than creating an aesthetical dimension where visible and invisible contents can coexist and generate a fluent and consistent materiality for the pure representation’s Subject, testing on what conditions the terms of the critique change if “visible” is understood as “presence”, while any “invisible” – or at least speculated element as “invisible”- is recognized as “absence”.

Keywords: pure representation, figurative anthropology, self-reflective vs. self-reflexive representations, Self, Subject, exophoric vs. endophoric elements, tableau-objet, speculative painting.

I. What Is the Methodical Eye? Consequences of Descartes’s (Aesth)Ethics Self-Representation in Modern Meta-Painting

Descartes’s century inaugurates the modern paradigm of the relation between the work of art, the author as a reflected image and the receptor.

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Reflecting the artistic creation in the dignity of the author’s image is nothing else than the source of the “contextual self-representation” technique, which consists of “a process that allows the insertion of the author’s representation into a work whose creator, in one way or another, it declares himself, showing multiple ways of self-achieving, such as: the textualized author, the masked author, the guest author, the author reported as self-portrait” (Stoichiţă 1999, 282). The philosophical source of this new expression of self-representation could be interpreted as a technique inspired by Gassendi’s objections to the Cartesians Meditations, developed as it follows:

«... Considérant pourquoi et comment il se peut faire que l’œil ne se voie pas lui-même; ni que l’entendement ne se conçoive point, il m’est venu en la pensée que rien n’agit sur soi-même: car en effet ni la main, ou du moins l’extrémité de la main, ne se frappe point elle-même, ni le pied ne se donne point un coup (…) Donnez-moi donc un miroir contre lequel vous agissiez en même façon, et je vous assure que, venant à réfléchir et renvoyer contre vous votre propre espèce, vous pourrez alors vous voir et connaître vous-même, non pas à la vérité par une connaissance directe, mais du moins par une connaissance réfléchie, autrement je ne vois pas que vous puissiez avoir aucune notion ou idée de vous-même ».

Gassendi suggests that the corporeality must be regarded as materiality of the body. Understanding that Descartes’s je pense (“I think”) “may be rendered equivalently by variants such as je sens (“I feel”), the truth of the cogito lies in the subject’s self-reflection” (R. Koch 2008, 23). As the body becomes interpreted as an aesthetic machine, the subject can be regarded as a construct in which material forces, representations and sensations, passions and affectivity are all taking exterior forms, once they are communicated. But this is not the main source of Descartes’s (Aesth)Ethics consequences in inspiring the canonical structures of self-representation in The Early Modern Meta-Picture. The mirror that Gassendi reminds, during his objection proposes, in a tacit form, of new instruments for the representation’s techniques. What I am trying to argue is the fact that gradually, Descartes-Gassendi controversy generates the transition from common painting, as a metaphor of any discourse, to opened representations, remarked by the speculative painting’s insertion in a hybrid context consisting of poetic and aporetic dimensions, that became paradigmatic coordinates for the postmodern art. From the image-in-mirror to the image-in-picture, inspired by Carracci, the synthesis of specular and speculative is

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3 “In the Cartesian system, the machinelike body is first and foremost a sensory substance and he source of passions and sensory representations, that is, the body as an aesthetic machine. The body is subjected to the play of forces from the outside world that provoke those received responses. This development marks an increased differentiation and distancing of body from mind, a phenomenon that Anne Deney-Tunney qualifies as the ‘exteriorization’ of the body” (R. Koch 2008, 23–4).
possible by creating the painter’s authorial insertion as a mirror’s self-reflection. This is why I claim the fact that the specular image, supported by the Port-Royal Logic, guides the artistic creation to distinguish reflection of representation, act which, mutatis mutandis, requires the difference between “curiosity” and “method” in generating the authorial picture.

Both in modernity and postmodernity, the creator must be in picture and outside the picture, performing the game of the otherness as a play of contextual complicities at the end of which “the art must see itself”, as Gassendi required. Naturally, this kind of movement created an artistic impasse occurring the early ‘20s-‘30s of the seventeenth-century, a period remarked in the history of art as the time when the fictional author and the criticism of the work of art in fieri as self-portrait are attributed to an authorial Ego who claims to originate from what is generically called “a cuadro de la familia”. In my opinion, the paradigmatic example of this process is the painting “Las Meninas”. Chronic life or self-creation, the painting “Las Meninas” by Velázquez, conceived in 1656, was going to inspire 58 artistic replicas of Pablo Picasso, the work of art becoming a production scenario written or designed in the first person. “Las Meninas”’s discourse is not only a transepocal construct, it is also the inspiration source in creating an aesthetical paradigm from “the methodical eye”, by which meta-painting is regarded as an opening process for representation through the insertion of the speculative painting.

II. The Mirror and The Negative Painting, Exophoric and Endophoric Elements of “Las Meninas”

Velázquez ensures the syncretism of cloth, mirror and space, the last one being always the dimension “du dehors”, beyond the painting itself, where the imagological labor develops a game of perspectives that will inspire the later Picassian Weltanschauung. Justifying the allegory of artistic creation in competition with the divine one, by exploiting the relation between painting and meta-painting, Velázquez inserts in his work of art two pieces of Ruvens and Jordaens. The aesthetical discourse of Las Meninas becomes, by this manner of suggesting art through art, a relational network of possible contexts and situations for one particular subject. Creating the frame by reflex, a process analogue with the aperture development, or deepening communication flaws through inter-textual elements of the intimal goals suggested by mirrors and

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4 To avoid any representational advertence, I should mention the fact that I took as reference Vélazquez, Las Meninas, 1656, oil painting, 318x276 cm, Prado, Madrid. Foto: Museo del Prado, Madrid.
paintings, leads to the creation of “the negative-painting”, a creation reverse located in the foreground, to the left of *Las Meninas*.

![Las Meninas by Velazquez](image)

*Las Meninas* by Velazquez

The mixt of light and shadow and the mosaic of perspectives create the illusion of reproducing a reality through the mirror effects, the reflection of the rear sight suggesting, in Searle’s terms, the lack of power of the modern subject in resisting to the artistic realism. The mirror reveals the body and the face of two royal characters, embodying the author’s goal: his axiom becomes, implicitly, proclaiming any perspective as possible as long as it is assumed as position of a body in space, at a given time. Although in reality, an eye that seeks to track an object, at its turn, is a chimera, the receptor of Velázquez work of art succeeds in following the same road of visual carnality with the creator of the painting. His glimpse is the glimpse of the creator. What I want to point out at this level is the fact that the conventional principle, according to which it can be painted only what is seen or had to be seen, is abolished. We can speculate, therefore, that Velázquez did not painted a scene reflected in the mirror because the loyal representation of that potential reflection would have result from changing the perspective angle that contributed to accomplish the figure’s illustration. The mirror is situated in a center position, otherwise, the representation of the royal couple would not have been possible. A good support for a suitable comparison might be represented by the artistic and visual discourse of *The Arnolfini Portrait* by Van Eyck, regarded in contrast with *Las Meninas*. 
The painter is reflected in the central mirror, if not included in the act of artistic creation, but it appears recreating the experienced situation from past, providing a memory of visiting the two members of the Arnolfini family. On the other side, *Las Meninas* have a direct look but they cannot perform the reverse. This is why, taking for example, the portrait of Venus looking into mirror (*Venus in her Mirror*), it can be seen only the reflected character, not the image viewer itself. The Self represented as the contemplator of *Las Meninas* is far away an exponent of the royal look: at a second thought, we discover that is the authentic representation of a Kantian transcendental Ego. The dynamics experienced by Velázquez’s painting proposes the biography of the author as a silent operant instance: the painter represents authorial himself by a self-portrait. “In order to be visible, the painter had to break away from his work… if he got the idea of reflected mirror from Van Eyck, it was to reverse its function: the painting is reflecting in it, not the reality, in this way, succeeding to adapt and criticize the mannerism”\(^5\). Both painting and meta-painting, Velázquez’s work

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\(^5\) Stoichiă 1999, 346. This aspect is signaled by Zuccari during his conference realized in November 1986 in Hertziana Library from Rome, “Velazquez e Zuccari”, pointing out the fact that the painter was approaching the motive of reflection by extraction. He also reminds about the mannerist legacy that Palomino, Velázquez’s biographer, assumes in narrating his relationship
of art combines limit-elements, *not-yet-images* and *more-than-images*, but this kind of *opera in fieri* leads to legitimize the technique of “opening the frame” which calls for speculation. This will inspire all the interpretations that Picasso creates for *Las Meninas* in more than 58 pieces, “replacing the painting easel with a coffin and making the painter to disappear”\(^7\). Picasso proceeds by applying the deconstruction process constituting what generically is called a “*Obra culminante de la pintura universal*”, using the duplication of the Infant’s portraits to expose the postmodernism as an innocence’s vanguard. Creating a twisted motion of the subject both by a frontal and profile view of the Infant, Picasso uses a *d’après technique* to design a painted genealogy of his own work of art: inheriting from Velázquez only the apparently significant items, Picasso prefers in-depth case-studies, extrapolated either in a hybrid meta-painting, either in details that insists on space as generative dimension, not only as simple coverage. If Velázquez transforms the canvas into “the metonym of a curtain”, having the role to hide and to reveal constructs, the speculative painting exploiting the denial power of the painting itself, Picasso exposes the artistic meta-discourse of *Las Meninas* not as a reverse, but as dismissal of a visual space charged to dimension affects, not reflections.

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\(^{6}\) For this aesthetical analysis, I took as reference Picasso, *Las Meninas*, 1957, oil painting, 162x130 cm, Museu Picasso, Barcelona.  
\(^{7}\) Stoichiţă 1999, 351.
Picasso represents the dehumanization of contemporary art, following the interpretative model of Ortega y Gasset, which proposes understanding the representation technique as an undermining process of reality. It happens, therefore, the identity dissolution and the schizoid affirmation of the modern subject, that Arnold Hauser found tributary to Picasso. In this terms, the exercise of destroying the unity of the personality of an artist involves accepting that the reality is dependent by representation and that nature and art are two coexisting phenomena, but disparate. Hauser, for example, believes that Picasso offers the complete suspension of individualism and subjectivism, denying classical art with personality. His works become notes and comments of reality, not claiming at all their sovereignty as paintings of world and totality, as a synthesis and an epitome of the immediate existence. Postmodernism can be experienced as a propagandistic process for a schizoid fragmentation of the subject, remarked by inaugurating a new technique for representing the selfhood, completely different of any method applied in Renaissance.

The authorial representation of the painter performed through a self-portrait or the perennial relation between interior and exterior dimensions were created each time differently, using the insertion of a mirror representing a particular manner to give form to auto-reflexivity. Taking into account the elements and the conclusions of the current analysis, the present contribution aims to synthesize general characteristics of the mirror motive and the negative painting as meta-referential discourse. Las Meninas, both in Picasso’s and Velázquez’s representations, include exophoric and endophoric elements. On one hand, the exophoric constructs point out towards something outside the discourse: the mirror, in this case, has the power to create an extra-visual reference; it reveals what is in front of the subject, but it also takes the contemplators of the painting outside the painted discourse altogether. On the other hand, endophoric elements point out towards something within the discourse: here is the context in which the mirror plays the role of an endophoric element, keeping the author, through self-reflection, inside the painting. By all means, it helps performing a reference to something already mentioned in the visual discourse: the creator himself. Being alternatively an endophoric and an exophoric element, the mirror provides, for Las Meninas, the right measure of the swift of exterior and interior dimensions. Moreover, it would be not implausible to speculate the fact that Picasso’s duplicates, pieces and recreations of Las Meninas represent exophoric elements, responding in the same context with an external discourse to an already constructed one.
III. Visible and Invisible in Las Meninas. Foucault’s Interpretation of The (Dis)Order of Things in Velázquez’s Painting

There is no doubt that in the original version, Las Meninas suggests what Foucault recognized to be, in his The Order of Things, the source of a “figurative anthropology”. The whole humanity is surprised in the power of a painting that forces its interpretation to an exercise of meta-language. The figurative subject is expressed by a fragmented language, and the unity becomes more like a Faustian striving. In order to offer itself, the subject is inserted into a figuration in frame: painting in painting, the result is a matryoshka of representations, created to constitute a space for the continuous generation of the self. The romantic autonomy of the relation developed between the subject and its own self, by what generically is called by Foucault the aesthetics of existence, is designed as symbol for modern alternatives that legitimize the cult of the self as “tableau-objet” or “painting as materiality”.

What could really approach Picasso’s reworkings of Las Meninas and Velázquez’s figurative discourse in Foucault’s interpretation is the problem of the pure representation. First of all, we shall not forget the fact that Foucault is a partisan of the idea that a pure representation is possible only in paintings that define the Classical age. But, (re)presenting means taking the visible and the invisible to a common discourse having equal powers to support both elements. The painting is something more than just inert materiality. In order to be a spectacle, a dynamic discourse, the painting must be something beyond object: subject, interpretation, speculation, interval. Then, what is visible and what remains invisible in Las Meninas? I shall offer a deconstructive reading of Velázquez’s painting, following Foucault’s assumptions, arguing that by all means, principles, ideologies and involved techniques, Las Meninas is the exponent of a specific paradigm that proposes “portraying the unrepresentable”, by making visible what, by its own nature, can not be like that. Las Meninas involves a different type of figurative discourse, in which the painter is visible and masked, and his show is invisible. Foucault explains: “The painter, on the other hand, is perfectly visible in his full height; or at any rate, he is not masked by the tall canvas which may soon absorb him, when, taking a step towards it again, he returns to his task; he has no doubt just appeared, at this very instant, before the eyes of the spectator, emerging from what is virtually a sort of vast cage projected backwards by the surface he is painting. Now he can be seen, caught in a moment of stillness, at the neutral center of this oscillation. His dark torso and bright face are half-way between the visible and the invisible: emerging from that canvas beyond our view, he moves into our gaze; but when, in a moment, he makes a step to the right, removing himself from our gaze, he will be standing exactly in front of the canvas he is painting; he will enter that region where his painting, neglected for an instant, will, for him, become visible
once more, free of shadow and free of reticence. As though the painter could not at the same time be seen on the picture where he is represented and also see that upon which he is representing something. He rules at the threshold of those two in-compatible visibilities” (Foucault 1971, 3-4).

Foucault argues that Velázquez performs, in the same painting, two different types of visibilities, apparently incompatible. I believe that there it can be speculated something deeper, originally constructed as the genuine difference between seen and unseen forms of pure representation. The two visibilities, claimed by Foucault, are nothing else than two registers of the same painting, generated by visible and invisible. The question is how succeeds Velázquez in portray ing the unrepresentable, where unrepresentable often means invisible? I shall try to construct a potential answer starting with the painter’s look. It is not directed to a dead-point, it is consuming something given at the beginning of his figurative discourse, which might be the inspiration point or the premise of all the work of art. Foucault himself tends to recognize this, but he assumes it vaguely by asserting that “the painter is starting at a point to which, even though it is invisible, we, the spectators, can easily assign an object, since it is we, our-selves, who are that point: our bodies, our faces, our eyes. The spectacle he is observing is thus doubly invisible: first, because it is not represented within the space of the painting, and second, because it is situated precisely in that blind point, in the essential hiding-place into which our gaze disappears from ourselves at the moment of our actual looking” (4). The invisibility is brought to our eyes. Furthermore, visible and invisible are two registers situated in reciprocity and mutual recognition, each one possessing a different space materiality given to the other in order to receive a proper shape and dimension. In other terms, more simply stated, the invisible is present in any surface that represents the artist’s observation; the visible exists in any figurative space (re)constructed by the painter who creates, from his own work of art, a painting-in-painting.

In consequence, it appears logical to admit that this kind of interpretation serves to a better understanding of Foucault’s figurative anthropology, by proposing two ways to (de)construct and criticize the subject. Although, it is not a complete support, taking into account the fact that Las Meninas contains a particular note that changes all the classical theories of Foucault about the pure representation. As the poststructuralist clears out, “we are looking at a picture in which the painter is in turn looking out at us” (5). The network of visibilities created by a perennial switch of perspectives is, in my own terms, the only way that Velázquez found to create the subject as an intersection element, a confrontation that puts the visible and the invisible into an equation of multiple spaces: material, immaterial and neutral, all of them generating the scene of a spectacle. The meta-painting is the spectacle itself, while the painting, discovered as painting-in-painting, painting-as-materiality, masked-painting and
other possible constructs, represent the spectacle’s discourse, the script, generated in all the figurative and variable forms. In this way, the (de)construction is construction, the interpretation is (re)creation, and the subject is anyone, anywhere, anytime, once that the painting and the meta-painting are allowing a spectacle with different roles: the painter’s, the Meninas’, the spectators’, the models’, the observers’, the authors’. Foucault blames the looking for this figurative spectacle: “The painter is turning his eyes towards us only in so far as we happen to occupy the same position as his subject. We, the spectators, are an additional factor. Though greeted by that gaze, we are also dismissed by it, replaced by that which was always there before we were: the model itself. But, inversely, the painter’s gaze, addressed to the void confronting him outside the picture, accepts as many models as there are spectators; in this precise but neutral place, the observer and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange. 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 the model, reverse their roles infinity” (6). Even if they are not inserted in the painting, the spectators are made visible. In fact, any spectator “sees his invisibility made visible to the painter and trans-posed into an image forever invisible to himself” (6).

Visible and invisible are two different types of discourse, but their instruments become, during their mutual support and insertion, exophoric and
endophoric elements. For example, the spectator, as an “outsider”, is inserted into a continuous figurative discourse, not only to make the meta-painting possible, but also to create an extra-visual reference, pointing out what is in front of the subject. At his turn, the spectator himself becomes a subject: then, all the mutual relation between the artist from the painting, the painter in person, the spectators, the models and the characters discovers the fact that they communicate into the same discourse, so they are an endophoric element one for each other. We shall see that this conclusion comes as a confirmation for one of the most pregnant attributes of the Dutch painting and its classical cannons, creating a loyal duplicate for our reality, by involving the mirror’s motive, Foucault himself agreeing with this kind of interpretation. Invisibility is what is hidden, not what is inexistent, and the mirror succeeds in reflecting the invisible as a visible representation. It not only presents and makes visible the materiality, but it also opens a space where the invisibility gains corporality.

IV. “Visible” and “Invisible” Meanings in Picasso's Las Meninas: “Self-Reflexive” and “Self-Reflective” Representations

The classical relation between visible and invisible allows, in Foucault’s terms, criticizing Velázquez’s painting, performing the representation of a “psyche” understood as a symbol for otherness, through which it is suggested the resemblance between different spaces, corps and materiality’s exponents, creating the meta-painting’s discourse as imperfect language. Although,

8 “It must be admitted that this indifference is equaled only by the mirror’s own. It is reflecting nothing, in fact, of all that is there in the same space as itself: neither the painter with his back to it, nor the figures in the center of the room. It is not the visible it reflects, in those bright depths. In Dutch painting it was traditional for mirrors to play a duplicating role: they repeated the original contents of the picture, only inside an unreal, modified, contracted, concave space. One saw in them the same things as one saw in the first instance in the painting, but decomposed and re-composed according to a different law. Here, the mirror is saying nothing that has already been said before. Yet its position is more or less completely central: its upper edge is exactly on an imaginary line running half-way between the top and the bottom of the painting, it hangs right in the middle of the far wall (or at least in the middle of the portion we can see); it ought, therefore, to be governed by the same lines of perspective as the picture itself; we might well expect the same studio, the same painter, the same canvas to be arranged within it according to an identical space; it could be the perfect duplication. In fact, it shows us nothing of what is represented in the picture itself”. (Foucault 1971, 6).

9 “It is in the painter’s hand the power to create the other face of a psyche. But the relation between language and painting is an infinite one. Not because the word is imperfect, but because in front of visible, it is incapable to recover what is expressing. It is useless to say what can be seen, because what is visible has no place in what is said, and so is in vain the effort to express, through images, metaphors, comparisons, what we are about to say, because the place where they shine is not the eye’s one, but the syntax’s succession’s one. The resemblance, the similitude governed the representation. The world spun around itself: the earth repeating the sky, the human
Velázquez represents just one moment of Foucault’s scheme of the pure representation, in which he includes also Manet and Magritte. Deleuze believed that this was Foucault’s way to become a painter himself, but in a different manner: “Foucault’s passion for describing scenes, or, even more so, for offering descriptions that stand as scenes: description of Las Meninas, Manet, Magritte, the admirable descriptions of the chain gang, the asylum, the prison and the little prison van, as though they were scenes and Foucault were a painter” (Deleuze 1988, 80). In his *The Order of Things*, he wanted to give a proper language to the subjective consciousness, a construct that he closely followed in *Las Meninas*, but that was declared as invisible. From Velázquez to Picasso, *Las Meninas* becomes the image for itself, the subject’s developed and framed process of consciousness.

“When Velázquez painted *Las Meninas* in 1656, Man, as Foucault conceives him, was not yet knowable as such; Man was still unthought. Man, so defined, still lay outside the limits of the classical episteme. Picasso, painting his versions of *Las Meninas* three hundred years after Velázquez, postdates Man. A different field of representation is yielded up as a result, one that finds its center in a subjective consciousness that willfully appropriates the image for itself” (Kleinfelder 1993, 63). Man couldn’t enter the scene until Kant proposed the finitude of knowledge by considering the relation between subject and object into the terms of transcendental Subjectivity. Picasso is not creating a suitable mimesis for *Las Meninas*, leaving the visible and the invisible in Velázquez’s terms. He converts *Las Meninas* in a possession problem, creating variations for an aesthetical representation of the individual consciousness. Picasso’s *Las Meninas* represent both “self-reflexive” and “self-reflective” (65) constructs. He plays the subject being spectator and artist.

For Velázquez, the subject’s sovereignty was leading in the capacity to represent the visible and the invisible and to contribute from inside and from outside to a meta-painting. Picasso gives power to the subject by considering it capable to relate the invisible in visible forms, putting in a fictional or narrative faces reflecting in stars, the grass hiding the secrets of nature serving the human being. Painting imitates space. And representation, being either a holiday or a science, passed for repeating: theater of life or mirror of the world, this is the title of any language, its proper way announcing itself and formulating its way to speak”.

10 “Suppose you just wanted to copy *Las Meninas*. If I were to set myself to copying it, there would come a moments what I would say to myself: now what would happen if I put that figure a little more to the right or a little more to the left? And I would go ahead and try it, in my own way, without attending any more to Velazquez. This experiment would surely lead me to modify the light or to arrange it differently, from having changed the position to a figure. So little by little I would proceed to make a picture, *Las Meninas*, which for any painter who specialized in copying would be no good, it wouldn’t be the *Meninas* as they appear to him in Velazquez’s canvas, it would be my *Meninas*” (Pablo Picasso, apud Kleinfelder 1993, 63).
figurative discourse biographical elements. Moreover, Infanta’s royal parents receive a mirror reflection from Picasso that puts the relation between visible and invisible into the terms of transfiguration. Picasso’s mirror turns upside-down all the reality, by creating a new order of things for the immediate society: “The artist has, in effect, undergone a transfiguration. The sense of inherent divinity associated with royalty has now been bestowed on the painter. The ultimate demonstration in this usurpation of power is evident in the mirror that no longer reflects the royal patrons but which now functions as a crown for the artists. The glorification of kings, of the sovereign onlooker, has been eclipsed, thus, by the emergence of the artist-hero as the transcendent Subject” (67). For Picasso, is visible what is self-reflected and is invisible only what the cannons dictated to exclude from the representation, for example, the subject who considers the picture for himself. “Under the self-reflexive terms of this new order of things, the subject of representation will inevitably be the subject representing” (67).

A last significant remark should be outlined at this moment: when Foucault described Velázquez’s work, he considered it a figurative and aesthetical paradigm for the classical episteme, in which the pure representation, the resemblance and the relation between subject and representation itself were playing the role of principal elements. Picasso, painting variations of Las Meninas, succeeds in creating a new episteme, one is inspiring from the breakdown between sign and its referent. For Picasso, a sign is just a referent for another sign. The painting can be meta-painting only be representing the act of representing. This is why his theory about creation defines and representation as a self-reflexive sense. “Visible” and “Invisible” are, in Picasso’s language and because of the sign’s role, “Presence” and “Absence” equivalents.

V. Conclusion

At the end of this analysis, it is fair at least to admit the fact that “Las Meninas is much more than an anthology of self-representational-theories” (Awret 2008, 34-35). Of course, Las Meninas remains an open representation,

11 It is less known the fact that Picasso appropriates the dog from Velázquez painting into a drawing of his own dog, Lamp, and that Velázquez’s handmaidens are reflections of Jacqueline’s portraits, including, as it is speculated, a self-portrait into one of his owns Las Meninas.

12 In his article, Awret discusses Las Meninas as an allegorical enactment of elements coming from the philosophy of cognition and self-representation. Considering two different ways of approaching Las Meninas, the first one, an analytical trajectory, linked with David Rosenthal, Robert Van Gulick or Bruce Mangan theories, and the second one, a continental one, inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological “embodied self-representation”, Awret concludes: “Las Meninas is much more than an anthology of self-representational theories. It is the story of two progressions: (1) an ‘ontogenetic’ progression that describes the temporal evolution of the observer’s cognitive response to Las Meninas; (2) a more ‘phylogenic’ progression (in the sense
illustrating the perfect model for the relation between painting and meta-painting, the two qualities being reflected by the same work of art. Even if Velázquez created from his Meninas a paradigm for the early modern meta-painting, it is still qualified, in Foucault’s terms, as an exponent of the “classical age”\textsuperscript{13}, claiming a specific episteme. As a figurative discourse, Las Meninas supports different hermeneutic treatments: the problem of the pure representation, discussed by Foucault, was clarified, during this article, in two different ways, according to its appearances. Regarded both as painting and meta-painting, Velázquez’s Las Meninas develop, through its instruments, motives and techniques, the paradigm of the negative-painting, of the \textit{tableau-objet}, proposing the mirror as space for any pure representation constituted by a sum of endophoric and exphoric elements. Then, Las Meninas become a succession of replays performed by Picasso, who created a new artistic discourse, in which the problem of the pure representation is abolished, the construct being replaced by the couple “self-reflective”-“self-reflexive” representations. “Portraying the Unrepresentable”, as I mentioned at the beginning of the article, is nothing else than creating an aesthetical dimension where visible and invisible contents can coexist and generate a fluent and consistent materiality for the pure representation’s subject, testing on what conditions the terms of the critique change if “visible” is understood as “presence”, while any “invisible” – or at least speculated element as “invisible” – is recognized as “absence”. This is a different way to treat Las Meninas, from Velázquez to Picasso, constructed with “a methodical eye”. At the end of the road, of course, “we have invented nothing”\textsuperscript{14}. Picasso himself believed it.

\textsuperscript{13} In interviews given after the apparition of OT, Foucault was asked to provide examples from the domain of art to encapsulate modernity in the way that Las Meninas captured the Classical age’s experience of representation. In both cases, he cited Paul Klee. In the first instance, he presented Klee’s art in many of the terms he used to describe the modern episteme and the art of Manet. In tandem with the general movements of modernity, Klee’s art is the becoming-self-reflexive of painting. It constitutes itself through a “knowledge of painting” (\textit{savoir de la peinture}), much like Manet’s critique of representation and the analytic of finitude” (Tanke 2009, 107-8).

\textsuperscript{14} Pablo Picasso, on exiting the Lascaux cave in 1940.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


