

Spinning top

I

The impetus of course is to make it unlivable. The houses look like they are spun year-round to weave the incoming monsoon into crops. A potter's wheel the only time this landscape ever knows, clouds ascending to clouds like girders flashing on a stormy day. But the careful composition can just as easily unravel if its viewer slowly whirls in front of the picture. Nor will she be alone in this. Just outside one of the houses, silver-stamped leather, a grandmother tells her stories. A bowl of fruit stands on the balustrade next to her untouched by children or birds, which the landscape has been emptied of. To someone stationary, she is pointing at the heavens, but to a mobile viewer viewing the painting from the front (caught up in her own breathing by now) she is undoing what the painter has done by calling down the crushing weight of the clouds.

Of course, even the greatest blasphemies can be corrected by resolving rotation, letting its lightning drain out across two paths, or making it draw back into the shadows long enough to make it disappear. Carravagio's *The Entombment of Christ*, (1602-1603) features two such series. The three figures to the right of the painting, almost joined at the waist are nevertheless tied together with the other receding series, using a white cloth whose only knot is at the Savior's waist. The painting itself remains a net that pulls down the entire composition as if the Christ figure were falling to earth while the angels desperately held onto it. Seen from the other side however, the figures help each other along the way to unrolling a prayer mat from where rises their *yidam*, a spinning cloud of *affectus* without a stitch on it.

II

Woman_with_a_Parasol
Claude_Monet (1840 - 1926)

Up close the child's face is a coulrophobic's nightmare-- odd patches of red parodying lips and cheeks and a nose, eyes looking away into nothing. The clouds are feathers thrown into blue tar and stuck to the painting which anyway is too narrow to accommodate a sky with any dignity. Let alone the towering figure of the woman with a parasol whose face is crisscrossed with the blue of a failed sky. It is a parody. A voyeur's dream gone wrong, an entry into mindless matter.

A step back and things sway into focus. Foci. An artquake that begins at the feet of the woman, shadows greeting shadows and climbing over each other to a brilliant sky that sends back its message to the field. The meadow reflects the sky, its light, while the parasol takes on its green tinge, a decimal point. The sky is a cone of color, a planisphere, a spinning top.

All things bright and beautiful, all things reflecting and reflected.

After Altdorfer painting in a dream

Armies and clouds drape around the axis mundi of the Altdorfer painting, itself in ascendance. For someone looking at it from outside, the moon is disappearing in a well to the northwest. Diagonally from there, the Sun emerges, tongues and streaks arranged around it. There is ascendance littered throughout the painting, which passes from gold to aquamarine and through innumerable hands sometimes in the shape of weapons, and sometimes slow enough to form miniature human figures in labor, each floating on a boat-shaped bone, moving northwest in a spiral the painting bears on its back. The spiraling is troubling to the viewer because the clouds seem to be in danger of crashing to the ground, or, what is worse, the human figures blurred in a final gasp of air and launched at the sky.

A more mundane if less apt analogy: a bottle of champagne.

Concavity itself is a standing ovation suspended above the room that is the world of the painting.

Only one figure operates the lever that keeps the painting from falling back into an illusion of itself. To anyone looking at the painting closely, this is a matter of anxiety. Every figure is potentially the one with the lever and all that is needed is to rest one's gaze on a particular figure, abstracting it from the anxieties of this world.

It is the sense of touch

That protects us from telepathy and the crushing weight of antiquity. A wave that tastes the entire shore as a single point, as an inflamed tongue loud as the ghats at night and the dogs wearing down stairs.

When we die, the sense of touch is always the first to go. Once we learn to swim, it's difficult to drown without showing some initial promise.

Like walking out to the verandah under a sky shot through with cirrus, quinces in a bowl shaded under a palm by Zurbaran.

Reading without

The cotton of the text as I keep my eyes on it and take it away from the corridor into the light. Later, the burr of the text under a night sky. Not vaster than the world above it, and not so easily approachable. Not a world, or a world drifting to a vaster code, or a consignment to a new world.

Like

Rubbing my face with both hands for minutes on end, or a wasp weighing itself against the fluorescence from a shop window. Magnetic. Magnified.