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Aertsen's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary,* Serlio's Architecture and the Meaning of Location.[1]

Abstract

Aertsen's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* is a complex image in which a distant background tableau is related to an accessible foreground still-life. Both pictorial realms present the dialectic between worldly and spiritual implied by the Biblical narrative. These realms are defined and mediated by Serlian architecture, which is used elsewhere in Antwerp for similar purposes of public address. The specifity with which the architecture is employed suggests that it functioned as a rhetorical *locus*, a 'place' where a particular form of argument may be found.

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In 1514 Erasmus wrote a letter, responding to criticism from the theologian Martin Dorp, in which he sought to explain and justify the brief and witty book which we know as *The Praise of Folly*.[2] This work had elicited a considerable amount of adverse commentary, and Erasmus evidently felt compelled to account for himself. In places the letter is filled with disingenuous self-deprecation — he wrote the work quickly while travelling and away from a library; it was merely a way to occupy time while recuperating from illness; he never intended to publish the piece, but was forced to do so by unscrupulous pirate editions and by the urging of his friends; and so forth — but elsewhere the letter offers a compelling view into the rationale behind this complex and difficult book. One point which appears particularly to have concerned him was that the wit and humor of *The Praise of Folly* would be mistaken for frivolity and vain virtuosity. First citing an aphorism of Horace – 'There is nothing to prevent you from telling the truth, as long as you do it with a smile.'[3] — he defends himself in the following manner:

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[2] Erasmus 1517. The modern edition used here is Erasmus 1979 (C.W. Miller, ed. and transl.).
[3] Horace, *Sermones* I.1.24-25.

> Of this the wisest men of ancient times were quite aware: they preferred to deliver the most wholesome rules of conduct in humorous and (to all appearances) childish fables because *the truth, which is in itself somewhat forbidding, penetrates more readily into the minds of mortals when it comes recommended by the allurement of pleasure.*[4]

This is a most intriguing thought, because it underscores that those qualities of literature in which we take pleasure, those which we today commonly take to be questions of style and taste — grace, humor, wit, elegance — were in fact perceived as being rhetorical in function. They served to make the audience receptive to the serious import of the piece in question; they were a crucial element in the construction of a persuasive argument.

Although Erasmus' way of expressing this may seem to suggest otherwise, the 'allurement of pleasure' is not separable from the 'truth' which it recommends. The division here is comparable to that between *verba* and *res*, or between the rhetorical processes of *inventio* and *elocutio*, which may be examined apart from one another for didactic or analytical purposes, but which in practice form a seamless whole. What we say is inextricably bound with how we say it. The constantly shifting personæ of Dame Folly, the deeply ironic imbrication of folly and wisdom, the sensuous delight in multifaceted and multivalent jests and plays on words, transform the schoolboy exercise of the ironic encomium — the praise of unworthy things — into a masterpiece of religious, moral and social commentary.

The Praise of Folly is a typically humanist product, marked by the peculiar transformation of classical rhetoric from a fundamentally oral tradition into the fixed and immutable medium of print. By genre Dame Folly's speech is a spoken declamation, explicitly signalled as such by repeated appeals to her listeners, but it is also a written text created to be read and not heard, to have its many allusions and self-references scanned and reconsidered at leisure. This hybrid mode places conflicting demands on the reader, who must simultaneously imagine the text as an extemporaneous performance and contend with the book as a physical object. With this volume, Erasmus in effect created a work *sui generis*, with its own conventions, albeit one which could nonetheless lay claim to a distinguished classical pedigree.

The precedents for Erasmus' ironic encomium — classical eulogies to frogs, baldness and so forth — were well known in the sixteenth century as exempla of brilliant but empty virtuousity. The form was used frequently in the classroom to allow students to flex their rhetorical muscles, making pedagogical use of the pleasure of the game to motivate these budding orators to greater levels of achievement. Erasmus' book raises the ante exponentially by employing the inherent qualities of the genre — rhetorical pyrotechnics and amusing games of

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[4] Erasmus' Letter to Martin Dorp (1514), in Erasmus 1979: 143. Emphasis mine. This letter, and that of Dorp to which Erasmus is responding, were included in the 1524 Badius and subsequent editions of *The Praise of Folly*. These letters in essence framed the entire work, adding still other voices, authorially and critically wise or foolish, to those of the text itself. In this regard, it is significant that Erasmus acknowledges Dame Folly's voice as his own by speaking of his authorial intentions.

wit — to lure his readers into an ever more complex web of voices, where the tone shifts imperceptibly between foolish wisdom and wise folly and back again, and inexorably leads the readers to the recognition of the paradoxically divine folly of Christ.[5]

Such inventiveness was not limited to works of literature. During the same century a wealth of new genres of visual art were also created in the Low Countries under very similar conditions.[6] By the beginning of the century, classicizing Italianate art had made its way into the consciousness of Netherlandish artists and patrons, borne along some of the same routes by which knowledge of classicizing humanism reached Europe north of the Alps, and carrying with it the prestigious associations granted to all remnants of classical culture by the humanists. This provoked something of a crisis for local artists, who were for the first time faced with distinct stylistic alternatives. Some chose to buy wholeheartedly into the new style, others to champion and transform native traditions and still others to attempt hybrids between the two.[7] The work of art under consideration here, Pieter Aertsen's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, is an example of stylistic hybridization, interweaving aspects of Netherlandish and classicizing art into a spatially and conceptually complex composition (fig. 1). As with the innovative literary forms of the period, we must come to terms with the particular demands that formal innovations such as Aertsen's place on the beholder's share in the creation of meaning; we must assess the habits of mind which underlay the production and reception of this art.[8]

As we shall see, this painting offers its viewers 'the allurement of pleasure' to quite a substantial degree, albeit a pleasure now evoked more by sensuality than humor, and the question we shall address is whether the visual delight of the image serves a function similar to the comic delights of Erasmus' book. A rhetorical address or appeal to the audience must be understood as being at the service of a particular agenda. If the pleasure offered by Aertsen's work is comparable in rhetorical terms to that of Erasmus, as I believe it to be, we must then assess what the 'truth' is that this pleasure recommends, or, to put it another way, what the 'argument' is that requires the cultivation of a receptive audience. Of greater interest, however, is the manner in which that argument is conveyed, how it is structured, and thus the greater part of this essay will be devoted to examining how the formal aspects of the image — particularly the architecture

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[5] Kennedy 1978: 79-94, and Screech 1988, for discussions of Erasmus' formal and stylistic manipulations of the ironic encomium to elevate his parody of rhetoric into a theological disquisition.
[6] See Reindert Falkenburg's essay in this volume for a discussion of Aertsen's compositions and genre theory.
[7] Frans Floris stood as the model for Italianate, classicizing painting in mid-century Antwerp, and Pieter Bruegel the Elder for the nativist, vernacular tradition. See 'Inuectiue, an eenen Quidam schilder: de welcke beschimpte de Schilders van Handwerpen', in Heere 1969: 80-82, for a telling commentary on the polemic between these two schools.
[8] Previous scholars have associated Aertsen's so-called 'inverted still life' compositions with Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly*. See Melion 1978: esp. 5-11, for an analogy between the strategies of 'inversion' employed by Aertsen and Erasmus. Falkenburg 1989, argues that by combining high and low subject matter, or low subject matter and a high form, Aertsen creates a uniformly ironizing pictorial equivalent to Erasmus' ironic encomium. See also the latter author's contribution to this volume.

which defines the different spaces of the composition and mediates between them — allow the viewers to construe its meaning.

Fundamental to my argument is the idea that sixteenth-century rhetoric has spatial, and thus visual, aspects that were determining factors in how knowledge was ordered and meaning apprehended. Such spatial qualities provide a point of intersection between the fundamentally verbal art of rhetoric and the various visual arts of painting, architecture and sculpture. An awareness of the habits engendered by rhetorical education can help us better understand what the repertoire of perceptual and interpretive skills were which contemporaries brought to bear when examining images. The verbal and the visual, rhetoric and the arts of painting and architecture, also met in the concrete and practical spaces of theater and public spectacle, which we shall have cause to examine in some detail in the course of this paper.

Rhetorical practice in the sixteenth century was particularly emphatic about its visual aspects. Rudolph Agricola, Erasmus and their successors transformed rhetoric into a practical, teachable discipline in which the *loci* of invention and memory dominated. The *loci* were developed by Roman orators, principally Cicero and Quintillian, from the *topoi* of ancient Greek rhetoric. Both terms best translate as 'places', and refer then to the places where one goes to find standard forms of argument, or the places where one stores and retrieves memories. These *loci*, the abstract 'places' of classical rhetoric, were taken increasingly literally in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with the eventual result that these 'locations' for rhetorical arguments and tropes could be perceived as existing within the physical world.[9] To phrase this somewhat differently, the world itself was construed according to the spatial dictates of rhetorical practice. Aertsen's painting can, I believe, be taken as an example of this process of making physically manifest the abstract places of rhetoric.

Several paintings of Pieter Aertsen have long intrigued historians of art because of their unique compositions which appear to reverse the now historically normative hierarchy of genres.[10] This hierarchy places history paintings — or as we would now call them, narratives — at the highest level, and still lifes at the lowest. In these compositions of Aertsen, and in others of his nephew and follower Joachim Beuckelaer, still life elements dominate the images, filling the foregrounds, while the Biblical narratives after which the paintings are usually named are relegated to distant and isolated background spaces. For this reason this group of images has been dubbed 'mannerist inversions' or 'inverted still

[9] This is an argument advanced principally by Ong. While some scholars feel that Ong has overstated the case, there is much tangible circumstantial evidence to support it. Theaters, musea and Kunst- or Wunder-kammern were constructed according to the dictates of place theory and were commonly perceived as being so ordered. Many types of books — perhaps most notably commonplace, proverb and emblem books — were also structured according to these principles. See Ong 1958.
[10] The literature on Aertsen is extensive. Of immediate relevance to the issues discussed in this essay are the following: Emmens 1973; Grosjean 1974; Irmscher 1986; Falkenburg 1989; Buijs 1989. See especially Falkenburg, 1989: 41-43, for an overview of the literature.

lifes'.[11] Leading directly from this is the now almost universally assumed reading of the images as presenting a polar opposition between the 'good', spiritual background and the 'bad', worldly foreground.[12] There is no evidence, however, that this hierarchy of genres had any meaning for artists or viewers in sixteenth-century Antwerp, which then throws into question the entire interpretive framework normally employed with these images. I would like to offer an alternative way of looking at these paintings, concentrating on a single image: Aertsen's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, painted in oil on panel and signed and dated 1553.

In the background we see the Biblical scene after which the painting is named, while the foreground is filled by an elaborate kitchen scene with a detailed still life closest to the picture plane. The image displays a clear structure in which foreground and background are not antithetical, as many previous scholars have argued, but instead offer the viewer parallel versions of the dialectic embodied in the story of Martha and Mary.[13]

The story of Martha and Mary is told in the Gospel of Luke:

> Now it came to pass as they were on their journey that He entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him to her house. And she had a sister named Mary, who also seated herself at the Lord's feet, and listened to his word. But Martha was busy about much serving. And she came up and said, "Lord, is it no concern of thine that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her therefore to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things; and yet only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the best part, and it will not be taken away from her".[14]

Aertsen has depicted this story as what we might call a dumb-show or tableau vivant, in which the words and actions of the participants are reduced to static gestures. Christ is shown seated in the middle of a small group of listeners. At his feet we see Mary seated on two cushions, devoutly lifting her hands in a gesture of prayer and submission. To Christ's left stands Martha, who points an accusatory finger at her sister Mary, while gesturing with her other hand towards the kitchen. Christ raises his left hand to admonish Martha, while holding up his right towards Mary in a traditional gesture of blessing. The dialectic in this story is not between bad and good, but between good and better. Christ does not tell Martha to abandon her mundane tasks, but to acquiesce in performing them alone so as to leave Mary in peace to listen to his teachings.

The worldly-spiritual poles as represented by Martha and Mary are reiterated in the two bas-relief metopes that ornament the elaborate architectural construction framing this group of figures. To the right, above Martha, Aaron gathers

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[11] See Bergström 1956: 22-24, for the use of the term 'inversion' in relation to Aertsen's compositions. Bergström sees this as a Mannerist device.

[12] The argument advanced in Jan Emmers 1973 is a good example of this approach. Emmens sees the foreground and background of this painting as representative of the Augustinian dyad of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, respectively.

[13] Dialectic is used here in the modern, Hegelian sense and in no way refers to classical, medieval or humanist *dialectica* or logic. The term 'synthesis', as used in this essay, is directly related to this modern sense of dialectic.

[14] Luke 10:38-42.

the miraculous Manna from heaven which provided sustenance for the Israelites during their flight from Egypt. On the left, above Mary, is Moses, Aaron's brother, carrying down the Tablets of the Law. The relationship between the two pairs of siblings is typological. The Old Testament narrative pre-figures that of the New, confirming the pre-eminence of the path chosen by Mary, but also establishing a validating precedent for the worldly engagement of Martha, who is after all preparing food for Christ and his followers.

Moses and Aaron are prefigurations not only of Martha and Mary, but of Christ himself. Moses brings both the Law and the word of God to mankind, as does Christ. Aaron is shown wearing a miter which identifies him as the first high priest of the Hebrew church, analogous to Christ's role as the first priest of the new church. Christ established this role by presiding over the Last Supper, which was the first Mass. We should note also the typological relation between the Manna that Aaron gathers and the body of Christ transubstantially present in the wheaten communion wafer of the Eucharist. The two bas-reliefs representing Moses and Aaron occupy the interstices between the three arches of the elaborate architectural backdrop. Christ, placed between the figures, in the region of the central arch, represents the third term or synthesis of the dialectic offered by the models of Moses and Aaron.

More precisely framed by the central arch is a female figure we have yet to mention. Her blue, nun-like robes, her older features and her coequal seating with Christ indicate that she is the Virgin Mary. Her presence is apocryphal, not part of the gospel narrative. The Virgin Mary, Christ's mother, nurturer and bride, is the female embodiment of the same synthesis, the ideal incorporation of the roles of Martha and Mary. This, then, is the message, the truth, of the courtyard scene. Just as the models of Aaron and Moses are both found in Christ, just as the models of Martha and Mary are both found in the Virgin, so also must those of us in the mundane world find a balance between physical and spiritual needs, always with the understanding that the latter is the 'best part'. But how does all this relate to the copiously depicted kitchen that dominates most of the image?

An elaborate still life, rich in colors and textures, fills the kitchen scene in the foreground. A large table is laden with the makings of a meal. Among the many objects shown are a round platter bearing a few wheaten rolls and bunches of white and red grapes. Located directly below him, these are clearly related to the figure of Christ, representative as they are of the body and blood of Christ consumed in the Mass.[15] Here they are part of the feast prepared for Christ's consumption, but they are also part of the visual feast prepared by the artist for our own consumption. Elsewhere on the table we find two glasses and a pile of

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[15] While iconographic elements — as part of a formal analysis — make up part of the argument of the present essay, they are not employed as the primary interpretive tool. Thus the diachronic history of these motifs and an exploration of their textual sources, both essential elements of iconographic analysis proper, are omitted here. Nor is any claim made for a special status for the particular objects mentioned — wheaten rolls, white linen, etc. — vis à vis the other objects in the painting. For the purposes of the present essay, it might be best to consider these objects to have iconographic resonances rather than iconographic meanings per se.

crisply starched white napkins. These are not attributes of Christ, but of the purity of the Virgin Mary, confirmed by the stalk of white lilies in the majolica vase. These sacredly resonant objects are interspersed with much humbler fare, such as the stew and vegetables arrayed on the stool to the right. This intermingling of sacred and profane is echoed in the types of figures found in the kitchen.

Gathered around the large and ornate fireplace, we see a group of figures whose proximity to the courtyard scene and pseudo-classical garb help us to identify them. The seated figure wearing the bright yellow mantle is St. Peter, recognizable by his balding head and white beard. The buxom woman, whose shoulder he caresses, is the servant Marcella, and the beardless youth at Peter's feet is presumably John the Evangelist.[16] These historical and apocryphal figures inhabit a space somewhere between the kitchen and the courtyard. Indeed, Peter, leaning back on his stool, is the only figure to transgress the boundary between the two realms. While part of the entourage of Christ, they have left his side, left off attending to his words, in order to cheer themselves with wine and food before the warmth of the fireplace.

A third group of figures are hemmed against the left wall by the abundant still life, framed by the stem of lilies and the market basket. A man, turned to the wall with his hand resting on the sill of a high window, twists his body towards the viewer as he turns to look across the room at the group near the fireplace. The two female figures near him both direct their gazes at him, both watch him watching.

These figures, dressed in sixteenth-century clothes, are depicted as stand-in viewers, faced with a dilemma of how best to behave in the face of the worldly riches spread before them. Located closest to the picture surface, they inhabit a world physically and temporally close to that of the original audience for whom this painting was created. They are the protagonists of this drama, figuring for the viewer the dilemma that is both mirrored and resolved in the background. The emphasis they place on the act of looking implicates the viewer's own gaze in the questions the image raises, a process which is heightened by the manner in which the artist has depicted the still life.

The objects that fill the kitchen are similarly familiar, and the richness of detail in the depiction of their surfaces allows the viewer to imagine touching them, reinforcing the sense of physical presence and proximity. The plucked and dressed duck ready for roasting, its pale surface stippled with the raised marks left by the feathers; the aged, greenish cheese just above, grainy with crystalizing salt; the taut smoothness of the grapes; and the marvelous contrast between the rough, matte skin of the carrots and the smooth, gleaming interior surface of the copper kettle delight and seduce the viewer into a sensual, even synesthetic engagement with the image. The surfaces upon which these and the other

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[16] Peter was first identified as such in Moxey 1971: 335-336. The figures of Marcella and John are so identified in Craig 1983: 30-31. Moxey 1971 was also the first to draw attention to the remarkable similarity between Aertsen's depictions of the Martha and Mary story and Erasmus' condemnation of artistic license in including irreverent depictions of holy figures such as St. Peter. Buijs 1989: 93-128, presents a number of images of similar type contemporary to Erasmus.

objects are disposed tilt out towards us, furthering the sense that we are the audience for whom this lavish display was created. Indeed, we might take this a step further and say that the still life necessarily posits its own audience, and in a very fundamental way dictates the nature of that audience's response to the image as a whole.

The still life exists on the border between the worlds of the painting and our own. It is equally resonant with the tableau of Christ in the background as with our own sensual experience of the world and of the image. The visual delight of the still life, that as richly describes humble objects like stems of rhubarb and roots of parsnip as it does the sacredly resonant wheat and linen, entices the viewer into an engagement with the question of what attitude to take towards the material world. The function of the still life as a means of drawing the viewer into the broader interpretive and moral issues raised by the image is comparable to Erasmus' comments concerning his motives for writing *The Praise of Folly*. We can again speak of 'the allurement of pleasure', albeit now a more sensual allure, which here recommends the truth of the Biblical exemplum depicted in the courtyard, even as it dictates the nature of the problem to be solved by that exemplum. Thus the still life to some extent does serve a rhetorical function: it serves to make the audience receptive to the deeper significance of the image and to assist in the task of persuasion, and even functions to establish the problem to be solved. And, again, the very qualities which we take to be indications of style, of art — the richness of description, the very handling of paint — are what endow the still life with the capacity to so engage and move its viewers.

As mentioned above, the usual approach taken to this image is to see an oppositional relationship between foreground and background.[17] Thus the lavishly rich display of foodstuffs is taken to be representative of worldly nourishment, and thus worldly temptation, which is seen in contrast to the spiritual sustenance offered by Christ in the background. The opposition of worldly to spiritual is echoed in the story of Martha and Mary, and such an interpretation sees the artist exhorting his viewers to renounce the pleasures of the flesh offered in the kitchen and make their way via a sort of visual denial to the distant courtyard where Christ offers the Word of God to his followers.

Background and foreground are not antithetical, however, but are instead parallel manifestations, each figured in different terms or different modes. The foreground is immediately accessible to the viewer: physically closer; temporally closer in terms of costume and furnishings; visually more engaging through the detailed description of surfaces and textures; theatrically more engaging through the anecdotal richness of the human drama there enacted. By comparison, the background scene is removed physically and temporally; the very treatment in paint differing in the more limited range of colors and looser brushwork; and the scene, despite the location there of Martha and Mary acting out their dispute, is relatively more static, much like a tableau vivant. The figuration of the dyad of worldly and spiritual in the sculpted reliefs of Aaron and Moses places

[17] Renckens 1949: 30-32, is an earlier example of this interpretation.

the entire background in the realm of an allegorical or symbolic mode, and thus again at a level removed from the comparative naturalism of the foreground.

The two realms of the image, foreground and background, are architecturally defined. The treatise from which Aertsen derived the architecture for his image was written by the Italian Sebastian Serlio as an illustrated, practical summation of the classical author Vitruvius, and was first published in 1537. Only two years later a Dutch edition appeared in Antwerp, translated, published and provided with newly engraved illustrations by the artist Pieter Coeck van Aelst (figs. 2 & 3).[18] Aertsen does not copy any single model from Serlio, but instead creates a rich pastiche from among the plates. All identifiable architectural elements, from the Ionic fireplace and Composite column bases in the kitchen, to the elaborate backdrop in the courtyard, derive from Serlio.[19]

But what purpose does this Serlian architecture serve? Does it merely provide an appropriately classical setting for the Biblical story? Or does it carry particular associations for Aertsen and his contemporaries with the type of argumentative strategy we have seen at work in the painting? When we look to see where else this architecture was used, we find that it is consistently associated with similar issues of public address. Other than the paintings of Aertsen and his followers, Serlian architecture would appear to have been used only in various forms of public spectacle, including the arches and other ephemeral architecture for the Joyous Entry of Philip ii in 1549; the stage design for the 1561 Antwerp *landjuweel* or rhetorical drama competition; and for the town hall of Antwerp, built between 1561-1565.[20] In all of these instances the architecture serves as a mediating structure between different modes of address, between what we might term the everyday and the allegorical — in short, between different levels of argumentation. An examination of the application of Serlian architecture to public spectacle can help us better understand its role in the Aertsen painting.

In 1549, on the occasion of the imminent abdication of Emperor Charles v, a series of joyous entries were organized to introduce his son and successor, Philip ii, to his future subjects in the Low Countries. The itinerary included a ceremonial entry along a carefully prepared route into the city of Antwerp. The prince was led through a series of triumphal arches erected by the city, the local guilds and the trade representatives of various nations. A complete description

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[18] Serlio 1539. This is the fourth volume of Serlio's five volume set, but was the first to be published in both Italian and Dutch, presumably because it was the most immediately practical. Serlio re-issued this volume in 1549, changing the title and the introduction, altering the typeface to gothic for purposes of legibility and adding some labels to elements of the illustrations. No indication exists as to which of the two editions Aertsen consulted.

Leunsingh-Scheurleer 1947: 123-134, was the first to draw attention to Aertsen's use of the Serlio-Coeck treatise.

[19] The following elements derive from the Coeck edition of book iv of Serlio; all references are to folio numbers in the 1539 edition. The kitchen fireplace: Ionica, folio i ii recto. The column bases in the kitchen: Composita, f. P iiii verso. The backdrop in the courtyard: Dorica, f. G iiii recto; Ionica f. L ii recto; and Ionica, f. L iii recto. The central doorway in the backdrop: Corinthia, f. N i verso.

[20] For the town hall in Antwerp in this regard, see Bevers 1985: esp. 30-34 and 87-92.

of the procession, written by the city secretary Cornelius Grapheus,[21] was richly illustrated and also published by Pieter Coeck van Aelst, who was, as we remember, the illustrator and publisher of the Serlio treatise (fig. 4).[22]

Entries such as this were symbolic events of enormous significance for all involved.[23] The city demonstrated its allegiance and obeisance — in effect its submission — to its new ruler by erecting triumphal arches to mark his entry in a deliberate evocation of the triumphs held in ancient Rome. In return, the visiting prince was expected to acknowledge the various rights and privileges historically granted to the city. The entry was seen as an opportunity for the community to represent itself, its points of pride and its worries to its new ruler. It was also an opportunity for the city to portray the ruler to himself, to depict the virtues he was expected to embody, such as clemency, justice and temperance, as well as the princely vices he was to eschew, tyranny being the chief of these. The entry served to confirm the roles of governed and governor, to emphasize their mutual obligations and responsibilities.

All of these messages were not to be left to chance. Those who organized the event took every possible opportunity to make explicit the lessons all were to learn. These included oratorical declamations, recitals of poetry, the staging of dramas and musical concerts. Architecture, sculptures, paintings and tableaux vivants were created and combined in various ways to enrich and enhance the allegories of the occasion.

The distinctions between viewer and viewed, between spectator and spectacle, were in many ways blurred in this event. The arches and their tableaux were erected for the benefit of Philip, but he was himself an element, indeed the central element, in the procession as a whole, there both to see and to be seen by the populace of the city. The various corporate bodies which defined economic, social and political life in Antwerp were part of the procession, even as their broader membership made up the audience as a whole. And both Philip and Antwerp were integral parts of the iconographic program for the ephemeral architecture which lined the route of the procession, parts, that is, of the very spectacle which they themselves observed.

In one example, the city erected a stage, in the center of which stood an over-life-sized Philip II, surrounded by a series of famous Philips through time, each clearly labelled (fig. 5).[24] To the right of the Prince stood St. Philip Apostle; Philip King of Spain, who was our Philip's grandfather; Philip of Arabia, the Roman Emperor; and Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. To

[21] Grapheus was a polymath, trained in painting, drawing and music, the translator and co-publisher with his brother Jan of a sculptural treatise by Gauricus and a renowned Latinist who delivered the city's welcoming oration to the Emperor Charles v on the occasion of his entry into Antwerp. On Grapheus see Roobaert 1960.
[22] Grapheus 1550. This is a translation of Grapheus' original text in Latin, which was also published by Coeck van Aelst. A French translation was issued by the same publisher.
[23] For a general, descriptive history of the joyous entries in the southern Netherlands, see Roeder-Baumbach 1943. For the 1549 entry of Philip into Antwerp, see Roobaert 1960.
[24] 'Der stadt triumphale Stellagie opte Meerbrugge,' Grapheus 1550: folios h ii verso-h iiii verso.

his left were St. Philip Deacon; and Duke Philip the Good; Duke Philip II and Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy. Their power, and military prowess, and sanctity, and benevolence are here evoked as wishful types for Philip, simultaneously validating his ascendency through their historical eminence and urging him to emulate their virtues.

Just in case this message was not clear enough for Philip and the townspeople of Antwerp, inscriptions were added above the tableau. One addressed Philip directly:

> Sijt gegroet Groote Philippe / onder so vele vroemdadige duerluchtige Philipsen / so duer uwer voervaderen Heerlijcheyt / so duer ws Princelijcx wesens aensien / so oock duer de groote verbeydinge die van v is / dalder voernemenste.

A second inscription, albeit briefer, even more strongly emphasized the historical typing between Philip and his namesakes: 'Der edelder namen gelijckenisse / is een stercke spore tot nauolginge der vroemdadicheyt'.[25]

Later in the procession, after viewing many other such scenes, Philip and his entourage would have passed through a triumphal arch erected by the city with a similar program to that we have just examined (fig. 6).[26] Again the architecture is fitted with a tableau which included the Prince, this time surrounded by those of his immediate ancestry who determined his succession to sovereignty over Antwerp. Thus we begin with Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, and proceed by generations to his son Charles of Burgundy, his daughter Mary of Burgundy, her husband the Hapsburg emperor Maximilian, their son King Philip of Spain, his son Emperor Charles V, and finally to Philip II. In this case, however, the representation of Philip and his illustrious forebears is conjoined with a second group of figures. Arrayed just below him are the virtues of Fides (Faith), Obsequentia (Compliance or Obedience) and Candor (Openheartedness), who present Philip with the female personification of Antwerp, shown as a 'scoone ionge maegt', and wearing a short white overdress and a longer red underdress, both of silk and representing the colors of the city's traditional livery. On Antwerpia's head is a hat in the shape of the city's most recognizable landmark, the bell tower from the cathedral of the Blessed Virgin.

It will again be useful to follow the description of the spectacle provided by Grapheus:

> Hier sachmen dat Fides / Candor / ende Obsequentia / Antwerpiam metter hant namen / ende presenteerdense seer ond.danichlijck onse Prince Philippo. Ende hy scheense metter hant vriendelijck tontfangen. Ende all vander vori. personagien schenen haer een gunstich aensicht te bieden.

The description continues:

> Wat dit al inne hadde / wat het beduydde / ende werwarts het henen wilde / wesen claerlijck wte de gescriften int viercant perck bouen de coronice vand. stellagien staende / luydende aldus: QUAM INCRED. &c. dat is:

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[25] Both inscriptions from Grapheus 1550: folio hiiii verso.
[26] 'Der stadt triumphael Boge aen de vlasmerct', Grapheus 1550: folios m i verso-m ii verso.

> Met hoe ongeloofelijcker gunste / uwe voervaderen / grootmachtige Prince / de stadt van Antwerpen altoos bemint / gheholpen / ende veruordert hebben / is eenen iegelijcken wel bekent. Maer hoe de selve huer dancbaerheyt thoonende / haer tegens hen / bouen alle andere steden / met onuerbrekelijker ombevlecter trouwen / ende altijts bereydden dienst / tot nu toe gedragen heeft / ende hen (na de saken gelegentheden) bijstandich ende behulplich geweest is / hebben sij oock daer teghen wel bekent: het welcke sy met ongetwijfelder hopen betroudt / dat ghy hun voetstappen nauolgende desgelijcx oock doen sult.[27]

Here is enacted the very exchange which the procession as a whole was meant to represent. Antwerp welcomes her new ruler and offers her obedience, but with expectations, however humbly suggested, of his promotion of her interests.

The procession was not a purely symbolic event. Before ever entering the city, a ceremony took place at the exact boundary of Antwerp's jurisdiction, in which the new ruler signed his name to a charter dating back to 1356 and guaranteeing the rights of the municipality and its citizens. This document was itself called the *Blijde Inkomste*, the Joyous Entry.[28] Thus the processional entry was an adjunct to, and a dramatization of, a legally binding ceremony. This ceremony in many ways resembled a marriage, as is clearly alluded to in the iconography of the tableau we have just examined, in which the hand of a female Antwerp is presented to her Prince.

For the watching crowd, the spectacle encompassed both the procession of Philip, his entourage and the city notables, and their personifications in the ephemeral architecture which lined the route. In the examples we have just seen, we must imagine the effect of seeing the living Philip II passing in front of the tableaux which bore his likeness and those of his historical namesakes or his forebears. So, too, would the audience have seen in the personification of Antwerp a distanced and abstract representation of themselves. Just as in the Aertsen painting, then, the tangible present, the here and now, is placed in spatial and temporal relation to the abstract, distant and historical precedent. And, again as in the painting, the Serlian architecture, perhaps because of its connections to the age of Imperial Rome and thus to classical rhetoric, serves as the mediator between the two.

We might consider the Joyous Entry of Philip II into Antwerp to have been public theater on an enormous scale, but it was a theater in which the distinctions between audience and actors were almost completely effaced. This breaking down of the boundaries between the two realms, between the present reality of the audience and the fictive world of the drama, is comparable to the effect we noted in the Aertsen painting, where the still life was so rendered and so positioned as to place it on the threshold between the space of the viewer and that of the image. The transgression of the boundaries between reality and allegory, between audience and stage, is also a characteristic typical of theater proper at the time, to which we will now turn.

Theater in the Netherlands was primarily the domain of the *rederijkers*. The most important theatrical genre produced by the rederijkers in the mid-century

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[27] Grapheus 1550: folio m ii verso.
[28] For an introduction to the political issues surrounding the signing and subsequent publication of the *Blijde Inkomste*, see Fontaine Verwey 1975: 113-132.

was a type of rhetorical drama known as the *spel van sinne*, literally a 'play of meaning'. The *spel van sinne* is a development of an earlier form of morality play, which it closely resembles. Several characteristics typify the *spel van sinne*, including the use of *togen* or tableaux, a strong emphasis on the allegorical, the use of the play to resolve a problem or answer a question of religious or social import, and the common, albeit not necessary presence of characters known as *sinnekens*, whose name encompasses the terrains of both sensuality and signification, and who are nominally comparable to the Vices of English morality plays.

The earliest versions of the Dutch *spelen van sinne* were morality plays in the strictest sense, but the genre underwent a transformation in the course of the sixteenth century. At the beginning of that era, the plays displayed all the characteristics mentioned above, including the use of tableaux, but there was a fundamental difference in the underlying premises between these and those produced by the mid century. Like their later successors, the fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century plays purported to solve a problem or answer a question. In actuality, however, the outcome of any given play was hardly ever in doubt, and the argumentative structure of the play was more directed towards explicating a known truth than exploring new possibilities.[29]

This is decidedly not the case in many of the plays written at the mid-century, where the issues raised were by no means commonplace.[30] Thus, we must imagine their audiences to have been genuinely at a loss to know where each play might lead. Indeed, as one of the characters asks in a play from a drama competition held in Antwerp: 'Wie weet aen dbeghin hoe stuck eynden sal?'[31] Given the breakdown or transformation in the sixteenth-century Netherlands of those social structures by which identities and social roles were defined — church, state, economy — new structures had to be created, new options explored, and these plays must have been one of the means by which this was done.[32]

In the great drama competitions of the time, the Netherlandish *landjuwelen*, between ten and twenty *rederijker* chambers from cities across the land were invited to participate, and each would write a play answering the same question.[33] Each play presented and explored a range of possible answers before finally deciding on a single solution. If one imagines what it must have been like to stand in the audience and watch this multiplicity of possibilities, the final result must have been an enormous opening up of discussion, rather than a dogmatic insistence on a single correct solution, despite the ultimate selection of a single play with its single, final resolution of the problem as the winner of the competition.

[29] For the argumentative structures of *rederijker* drama before 1551, see especially Spies 1990.
[30] A specialized study of the change in argumentative structures in these plays following the mid-century is much needed. See the Ph.D. dissertation of Anneke Fleurkens, *Stichtelijke Lust. De toneelspelen van D.V. Coornhert (1522-1590) als middelen tot het geven van morele instructie* (Universiteit van Amsterdam) (Fleurkens 1994) for a study in this regard of the plays of Coornhert.
[31] *Spelen van sinne* 1562: folio a ii.
[32] These issues will be more fully explored in my forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation *Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the Practice of Rhetoric in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries*, University of California at Berkeley, [1994].
[33] See especially Autenboer 1981 for a description and history of the *landjuweel* phenomenon.

These competitions were lavishly conducted, with lengthy processions, banquets, tournaments, church entries and masses, and contests for poetry, various forms of drama and for the fools attached to each chamber. The financial and cultural investment in the *landjuwelen* was enormous: the competition with which we are concerned today, that held in Antwerp in 1561, lasted over a month, included thousands of participants — not counting the audience — and was estimated by a contemporary visitor to have cost about 100,000 marks, which would be equivalent to several million dollars by modern reckoning. The same witness described the ceremonial entry of the *rederijker* chamber from Brussels alone as 'the strangyst matter that I ever sawe, or I thynke that ever I shall see; for the comyng of King Fylyppe to Andwarpe, with the cost of all the nasyons together in apparell, was not to be comparyd to thys done by the towne of Brussells'.[34]

The 1561 competition, the most magnificent ever, was hosted by the leading rederijker chamber of Antwerp, the *Violieren* or Gillyflowers, which had been incorporated with the painters' guild since the close of the previous century. The focus of this festival, as described above, was the competition for *spelen van sinne* written in answer to a posed question. Each of the fourteen participating chambers was to write a play of fixed length and form upon the given theme, and each of the plays was to be performed upon the same stage, here shown as depicted in the printed edition of the plays which followed the *landjuweel* (fig. 7).[35] While some props may have been used in the plays, scenery as such did not play a part, and the view of the stage would in each instance have been much as we see it here.

In this stage built for the Antwerp *landjuweel*, the same basic type of Serlian architecture separates the open forestage from the curtained areas used at times for interior scenes, but also, and more crucially for our interests, for the *togen* or tableaux which served to exemplify the points of resolution reached in the discussions on the forestage. Both the painting and the stage share a common spatial structure of accessible foreground and distanced background, which house scenes that are typologically linked to one another. The most immediate connection between the theater and the painting, therefore, is formed not by their dramatis personæ but by the architecture which frames them, which acts as a locus for a culturally specific way of configuring a persuasive argument.

The stage is divided into a broad forestage, unbounded by walls or curtain, and a set of smaller spaces separated from the forestage by a two-story Serlian facade. We see again the triple portal motif found in the back of the Aertsen painting, although this time with two arches flanking a central post and lintel opening. The open outer arches on the ground floor of the *rederijker* stage served as doorways through which the characters could make entrances and exits. The central, curtained inner space, on the other hand, was where the tableaux or tableaux vivants were located. These tableaux served an extremely important function in the *rederijker* drama.

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[34] Both the financial estimate and this quote are taken from a letter dated August 4, 1561 by Richard Clough, agent for Thomas Gresham, cited in Burgon 1839: 377-389.
[35] *Spelen van Sinne* 1562. See also *Uyt Ionsten Versaemt* 1994.

Each play was to present a solution to the question 'What most awakens Man to study of the arts?' given in the invitation to the competition. The form of a *spel van sinne* written for a *landjuweel* competition required an explication of the assigned theme, an analysis of possible solutions and then the selection of that answer deemed most appropriate. Thus these 'dramas' were really something more in the line of deliberative arguments — and here I am thinking in particular of the play offered by the chamber from Herenthals — with the various lines of the argument embodied by characters on stage. Within the Herenthals *spel van sinne*, the discussion of issues took place on the forestage among figures representative of contemporary stock social types: the merchant, the peasant, the teacher, etc. As the solution to the play was reached — in this instance, that Man's natural inclination best awakens him to the arts — the curtains covering the central opening were parted, and the figures on stage stood aside to reveal the tableau contained therein. This tableau showed the mythological story of Hercules at the crossroads, in which his own 'natural inclinations' led him to choose the path of virtue.

The *toog* could thus be said to be the heart of the play. All of the activity and debate on the forestage serves to prepare the audience to be receptive to the message embodied in the tableau. In cases where there are multiple *togen* these define the argumentative structure of the play in question.[36] In this *landjuweel*, the *togen*, always single, were primarily derived from classical mythology and literature, although in other *rederijker* productions Biblical tableaux were much more common.

It is important to remember that the activity on the forestage was couched in the vernacular, spoken by characters in modern dress who represented elements of contemporary society. They were physically close to the audience, in a space which protruded out into that of the public. While we might find the rather heavy-handed didacticism of their dialogue a bit oppressive, it is, in fact, liberally sprinkled with small jokes and proverbial expressions and therefore pleasantly amusing. Despite the essentially non-dramatic qualities of this theater, these were living, breathing, talking and moving figures, whose discussion helped prepare the audience for the message the play was meant to convey. Having performed this role, the figures moved aside to reveal a tableau which confirmed and validated that same message by translating it into a culturally sanctioned precedent, into a classical or Biblical exemplum which, like the scene in the Aertsen, was typologically related to the everyday scene in the foreground.

The tableau was physically distant from the audience, concealed and then framed by the architecture of the stage. The figures in the tableau, whether alive or painted, did not move, and did not speak. They were presumably dressed differently from their counterparts on the forestage, in some form of classical

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[36] This is similar to an argument first put forward in Kernodle [1944]. In this pioneering study, Kernodle states that the tableaux 'were so important on many occasions that we may consider the plays they adorned as illustrated dialogues or as dramatized visual art [...]'. Kernodle perhaps overstates the case, which again applies only to the plays written for the *landjuwelen*, but his general point is still valid: the *togen* were integral to the argumentative structure of the plays involved. I am glossing Kernodle by suggesting that the architecture itself facilitates the structuring of the arguments involved.

raiment, which means that the scene was temporally distant from the audience as well. On some occasions, and this was apparently not one of them, a *toog* was provided with an accompanying text, written on a scroll above or beside the tableau, but written normally in Latin, again distancing it from the audience.

All this should remind us of the structure of the Aertsen painting.[37] In both instances that which is physically near is presented in apprehensible terms, in familiar words or in images of familiar objects from contemporary culture. Each presents a problem to be solved, which is figured in words or images in the foreground. In both instances a physically, temporally and conceptually more distant scene is displayed in a contained background space, echoing the argument of the foreground and providing the resolution to the posed problem.

I am not proposing that there is necessarily a direct link between the *rederijker* stage or the joyous entry and the paintings of Aertsen, certainly not in the sense that Aertsen is here visually imitating what he must have seen during his long residence in Antwerp. I would argue, however, that all these phenomena share a mode of thought, a way of presenting an argument, and that that mode is mediated by the architecture each uses to frame — physically, literally and metaphorically — the components of the argument. All three share a manner of structuring present and past, type and prototype, reality and allegory, through the mediating diaphragm of Serlian architecture.

This classicizing architecture must have carried with it not only associations with the ancient Roman empire, but also with Latin rhetoric. The consistency with which this particular architecture is used to frame typological arguments, or arguments by exempla, suggests that it served as a rhetorical *locus*, a place where an argument of a particular type and form could be found, but a *locus* now present in the physical world. We must imagine that a contemporary viewer, conditioned by the use of that same architecture in ceremonial spectacles such as Philip's Joyous entry, would have expected similar uses for it each time it was encountered. The account I have just given speaks to a structure common to the *rederijker* stage, the processional architecture and the Aertsen painting. Ultimately this structure is rhetorical in nature, given that it functions to condition its audience towards receptivity, that it seeks to persuade.

Aertsen has taken the relatively simple near/far structure used to present typological exempla in procession or *rederijker* stage and elaborated it into a complex and subtle means of engaging his viewers in the act of creating meaning. Not content with the simple typology established by playing the tableau of Mary and Martha against the present reality of the kitchen scene, he has added a further typological level in the form of the bas-reliefs of Aaron and Moses. The group of Apostles near the fireplace provide a bridge between near

[37] Previous scholars have also linked Aertsen's paintings to the *rederijker* stage. For the most part this discussion has centered around the various peasants or kitchen servants who populate the kitchens and markets of the foregrounds, relating these to the figure of the *sinneken*. See Emmens 1973. For a refutation of Emmens, see Hummelen 1992: esp. 117-120 and 136-139. Reindert Falkenburg offered a reassessment of these issues at a recent colloquium in honor of Prof. Hummelen, which will be published in a forthcoming volume. For a general overview of the relations between painters and *rederijkers* see Gibson 1981.

and far, between present and past, between worldly and spiritual. They serve to remind us that the sacred figures of the Bible also lived in the material world, also ate and drank and warmed themselves before the fire. The three contemporarily dressed figures carry the subject of the image one step closer, implicating the act of looking itself in the dilemma of the image. And the exquisitely painted still life, poised on the boundary between the painted and real worlds, pleasurably ensures that the viewers will be drawn into the games of sensuality and cognition that so subtly reverberate among the different realms of the painting.

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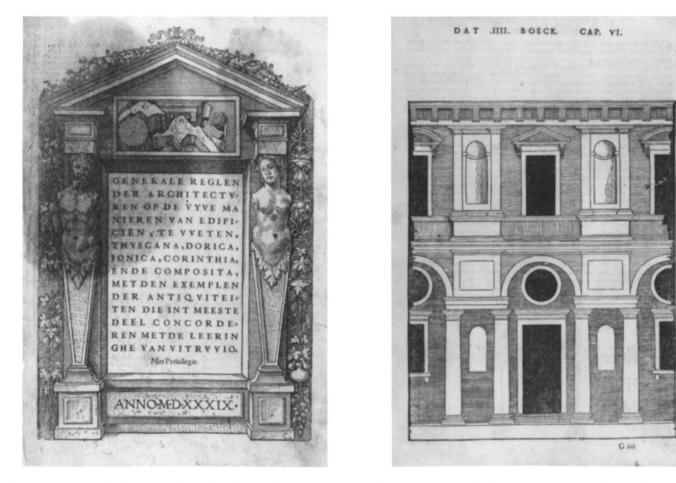Fig. 1. Pieter Aertsen, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1553). Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen.

Fig. 2. Sebastian Serlio, *Generale Reglen der Architectvren*, Antwerpen: Pieter Coeck van Aelst, 1539. Title page. (Courtesy of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities.)

Fig. 3. Sebastian Serlio, *Generale Reglen der Architectvren*, Antwerpen: Pieter Coeck van Aelst, 1539. Dorica, fol. G iiii. (Courtesy of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities.)

Fig. 4. Cornelius Grapheus, *De seer wonderlijcke, schoone, triumphelijcke incompst*, Antwerpen: Pieter Coeck van Aelst, 1550. Frontispiece. (Courtesy of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities.)

Fig. 6. Cornelius Grapheus, *De seer wonderlijcke, schoone, triumphelijcke incompst*, Antwerpen: Pieter Coeck van Aelst, 1550. City triumphal arch on the Vlasmerct. (Courtesy of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities.)

Fig. 5. Cornelius Grapheus, *De seer wonderlijcke, schoone, triumphelijcke incompst*, Antwerpen: Pieter Coeck van Aelst, 1550. City stage on the Meerbrugge. (Courtesy of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities.)
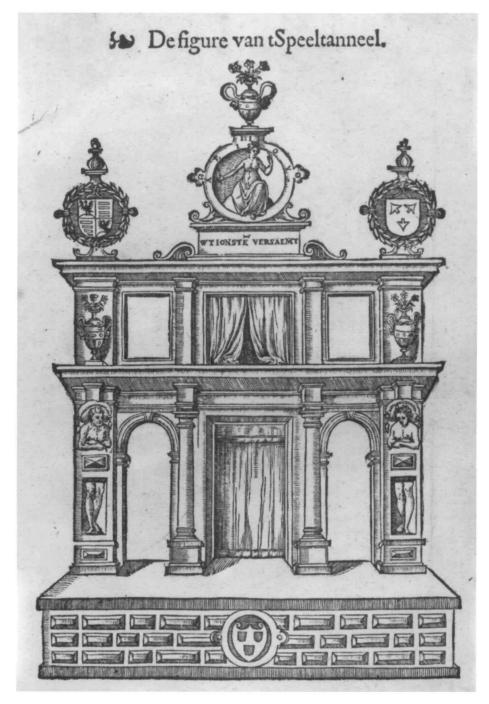
Fig. 7. *Spelen van sinne vol scoone moralisacien vvtlegginge ende bediedenisse*, Antwerpen: Willem Sylvius, 1562. Stage design for the *spelen van sinne*. (Courtesy of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities.)