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In the Wake of Production:  
A Study of Bruegel's  
*Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*

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Preface

Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* appears, as so many things do, like the surface of a pond after a rock has been dropped in at its center (figure 1). The concentrically generated lines appear in the furrows made by the plowman; they appear again in his clothing, at the outlines of the shore, and are repeated in the billowing of the sails, which cut shapes into the sky, complementing those of the plow lines on the shore. What has caused all these reverberations? Is it the fall of Icarus, so infinitesimally small, like a stone, creating such a vast response, or are these reverberations set off by the actions of the plowman, shepherd, fisherman, and sailors? Despite their inability to see Icarus' fall—for they clearly do not see it—is Bruegel pointing to how they, in their own daily acts, not only absorb but unwittingly perpetuate the repercussions of ingenuity and overreaching? Do they, just like the painting, contain this fall within themselves, in an inconspicuous way? The lines the plowman makes and the sails of the ship register the shock, but the individuals go on unaware of how the forms they create in their daily acts of subsistence reverberate with the unnoticed fall of Icarus.

I

Bruegel's re-inscription of the myth of Icarus into his modern sea and landscape of production echoes Ovid's account of the tale in the *Metamorphoses* (2: Book viii, lines 215ff). Ovid writes,
"Now some fisherman spies them, angling for fish with his flexible rod, or a shepherd, leaning upon his crook, or a plowman, on his plowhandles—spies them and stands stupefied, and believes them to be gods that they could fly through the air." From a comparison of the painting to this account in the *Metamorphoses*, we can see that Bruegel knew Ovid's version very well. Directly in the foreground, much more prominent than Icarus himself, we see the fisherman, shepherd, and plowman. In striking contrast to Ovid's account Bruegel depicts the workers as unaware of the falling Icarus. Their relationship to the fallen boy is not that of observers or witnesses, which points to a question contained in the painting.

However inconspicuously or unnoticed Icarus may enter into this sea and landscape, he does not innocently fall beside a sea-going commercial ship. The wings he wears and falls by were made with the same kind of ingenuity and industrious tapping of natural resources which made this handsome sea vessel and its exploits possible. His fall and this particularly Netherlandish sign of industry are thus conspicuously linked from the outset. As we look on, though, we find that it is not only commercial sea-going production which is associated with casualties; for strangely enough, Bruegel posits another almost invisible dead body on the Netherlandish soil itself (figure 1a). Above the head of the horse in the bushes, at the border of the last plow lines, lies a dead man, unacknowledged. His head and closed eyes barely visible, yet once seen, like the quietly falling body of Icarus, his presence jars the viewer and disrupts the pastoral serenity of the painting. There is no famous Roman myth, (such as Icarus') that attends this death, but rather a Netherlandish proverb: "No plow stops for a dead man." By placing Icarus next to the merchant ship and the dead man at the borders of the plow lines, Bruegel invites us to wonder what the relationship between these two deaths and two contemporary forms of production.

We might ask are these deaths the often invisible traces or marks left by the motion of western expansion and its civilizing process? Is Bruegel asserting, as Walter Benjamin does in his notes on historical materialism that, "There is no document of civilization which is not also a document of barbarism."
lines, cultivation of soil and the going out to sea are all signs of civilization. And the making and breaking of territories, the crossing of distances, all in the name of curiosity, knowledge, or progress have long caused the barbarous deaths of many people, not to mention parts of nature itself. If this is Bruegel’s point, he has made it conspicuously subtle. He places the fallen Icarus and the dead man in the margins of his painting. They constitute a frame, which visually and contextually plays like a theme, resounding through the image, leaving us to wonder what it is that the frame contains, and how do the internal and apparently central elements relate to one another?  

When we first look at the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* it is not Icarus nor the dead man we notice, but rather the plowman who absorbs our attention. First we follow the furrows, as the plowman does, left foot first, entrenched and then the other. Then, from the top of his head we are next led out to sea along a line accented by a few rocks, distant boats until finally we end with the setting sun. If we think of the myth which this painting contains, we might feel uncomfortable in our attraction to the sun, for is this not the same fascination that led the boy to melt the wax, which bound his wings, and fall?  

Bruegel, at first, wants us to follow this central trajectory. It is our initiation into the myth and its reworked present condition in this Netherlandish landscape. This first look along a perspectival progression amounts to a path towards something limited and specific. This plotted out motion for our eyes links us to the self-absorbed plowman, shepherd, and fisherman; and it leads us to the cause of Icarus’ fall. At the same time, if we get caught in this compelling single sightedness we will not see Icarus himself; in a subtle way, our viewing replaces or replicates his flight. Our looking into the center of the image amounts to a certain unrewarded attempt to understand.  

Unsatisfied or perhaps uncomfortable with this single sighted view we may choose to begin again. This time we are attracted by another accented line, which leads us not to the cause of the fall, that is the sun, but to the fallen boy himself. Bruegel begins this progression with a single individual at the far right, modestly fishing and ends it with a large merchant ship heading towards the port of a distant harbor off to the left (figure 1b).
As we follow this trajectory from the fisherman to the merchant ship we notice between them the falling Icarus and an oddly placed bird who stands out on a branch. Through this progression Bruegel leads our eyes, once again along a trajectory which re-actualizes the dynamics of the myth. From man to bird to bird-man, he re-stages for us the ingenious process by which Daedalus observed and copied the wings of birds for his escape. By ending this trajectory with the merchant ship, Bruegel explicitly associated the ingenuity of Daedalus and the fate of Icarus with the crafting of ships and the sea-going enterprise (figure 1c). With this trajectory Bruegel exposes the potential for mis-adventure in the products and uses of technology. By depicting the fisherman as an unaware participant in the step-by-step reconstituting of Icarus the bird-man, and thus by implication a participant in the process of industrial crafting and commercial exploits, Bruegel raises the question, again, of how the separate individuals in this painting relate to their own acts of production and the casualties which surround them.

These two linear progressions, from the head of the plowman to the sun and from the fisherman to Icarus and the merchant ship compel the viewer’s eye to move into the illusory space of the painting. The two trajectories actually involve us in the process and problem of Icarus’s fate. One takes us in towards the sun, the other, step-by-step, from man to bird-man, takes us through the materials and process of invention and finally to demise. These trajectories, however, constitute only one specific kind of making and viewing in this image. They focus our attention, as if we were in a tunnel, or as if we, too, were traveling somewhere, absorbed in following a single path to a single goal, and thus they fragment our perceptions and distract us from reading across the surface of the image. We may, however, like the surrealist Andre Breton, choose to look across the surface of the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, searching for a different relationship between things (figure 2). Breton cut out this segment of Bruegel’s image for his 1942 exhibition, which contained what he thought to be surrealist moments in previous mythological depictions.
Breton's cutout constitutes a reading of the painting which moves from the fisherman and Icarus to the plowman and shepherd and ends with the mid-sea rock formation and harbor city. Together all of these exist as fundamental elements in a single cultural system representing nature and society. Raw materials, production and the place of trade are shown to cohere under the resounding shapes made by the workers and an ancient fall off to the right. For Breton, what is surreal or beyond apparent reality in this image is that it brings to the surface what is generally subterranean, that is, the connections between things across the barriers of place and time. When we read across Breton’s cutout, we perceive the cluster of the fisherman, plowman, shepherd, and Icarus all together. Each is in the midst of a self-defined goal, each self absorbed on the outskirts of the other’s activity; yet all are part of a momentum building from the sea and landscape towards the harbor city. Acts of sixteenth century production and classical flight and fall are in this way depicted by Bruegel and seen by Breton as linked to one another.

Our first encounter with the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, however, encourages us to look, unaware of Icarus, into the image from the plowman to the shepherd to the setting sun. We thus see in this painting an untainted image of work, leisure, technological advance, and the fruitful seeds of capitalist expansion. Breton’s cutout, on the other hand, encourages us to read across the surface of the painting. Looking at this cutout we begin to wonder about the latent significance of acts of production as they relate to an ancient myth of ingenuity and excess, and thus we begin to look for the particular terms upon which Bruegel re-applied the myth of Icarus to his modern times. Both ways of seeing help us to search out the commentary on sixteenth century production and notions of progress which this painting contains.

II

Bruegel uses inward pulling trajectories and surface patterns in ways that reflect back upon specific sixteenth century European practices and notions of inquiry as well as production. These
modes of depicting and perceiving constitute two ways in which Bruegel and his society confronted and constructed the world for themselves. Illusory trajectories were made possible by the rationalization of sight, that is perspective. Depictions of geographical areas in which figures and places can be seen and recorded in relation to one another were made possible by map making. Both of these skills, used by Bruegel in the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, were essential and particular to sixteenth century technological advance and economic growth. They were part of a system of production which effected the society and culture in which Bruegel worked.

In Art of Describing Svetlana Alpers sees Bruegel's mode of depicting as part of what she terms the "map making impulse" in Netherlandish art and society. Like Andre Breton, she reads the relationships between the plowman and Icarus, or the fisherman and the shepherd as different localities on a mapped surface. And, for Alpers, "the mapped view suggests an encompassing of the world, without however, asserting the order based on human measure that is offered by perspective pictures." She explicitly reveals the value judgement embedded in this distinction between mapping and perspective when she asserts that, "what maps present is not land possessed but land known in certain respects" (142). (For Alpers to map knowledge is less pejorative than to possess.)

In the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, however, Bruegel visually articulates both the mapped and perspectival modes of imaging. Knowing and possessing are not separated out from one another, perspective and mapping are here intrinsically linked. In another painting by Bruegel, the Children's Games he also yokes these two modes of depicting together (figure 3). In this image the content which is structure, that is mapped and perspective areas, and the content which this structure contains, that is children at play, function together, commenting on and conflicting with one another.

In the Children's Games Bruegel foregrounds a primarily mapped surface, not of different geographic regions, or different forms of production, as in the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, but of different ways that children play. In the foreground of the partially enclosed area Bruegel places children
and clusters of children at different "topological" locations. He places these pockets of activity in much the same way that Cornelis Golyath would place trees and land/water divisions on his map of the Brazilian coast, a new world coast which came into the hands of the Dutch West Indies Company in the seventeenth century (figure 4). The green grass area at the right of the Children's Games is differentiated from the brown road and composed like the marshlands and water-ways on the maps. The winding river at the center of the map, which zig-zags and leads to the city view in the right corner, is compositionally equivalent to the zig-zag in Children's Games, which moves from a hooded woman at the left, who moves out from the wall with her arms stretched out, to the somersaulting boys, back to the wedding procession, and out to the boy on stilts who leads to the street and city view which is here, as in the map, in the far right corner. The topological and perspectival areas of both the painting and Brazilian map work together to represent the complex ways in which this society perceives and constructs experiences and confronts the world.

In the Children's Games Bruegel composes the image, employing the visual paradigms of a map maker; trying with structural turns to represent the relationships between children at play. This laying out of children in relation to one another forms a type of systematic social anthropology, in which different modes of interacting are set out in a non-hierarchical, almost encyclopedic way. The surface organization of this part of the composition is, however, juxtaposed to, and thus altered by, the vacuum-like pull of the perspectivally rendered street, far off to the right. The tunnelled formation of the street sucks the children in towards the city steeple. In the mapped-out foreground the children are absorbed in their respective simultaneous acts, ironically unaware of this compelling pull of the street behind them. It pulls our eyes as it does the children away from the diverse games, and towards a single point of view or goal.

At first mapping appears to function as a tool for cataloging things, whether they be children at play, domestic production, or geographic regions. Strongly accented perspectival trajectories, on the other hand, appear to have a different purpose, they pull us somewhere or show us something very particular,
something singular which appears as an over-determined unavoidable pathway. In Children's Games, the Brazilian map, and in the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus one might ask, however, is this really all a matter of neatly delineated dichotomies, with things like plowing and playing linked to mapping and other things like sailing and cities linked to perspective, one about knowing and one about possessing? Which part of the map of the Brazilian coast was a tool for knowing and which part enabled and records the ravishment and possession of this new colony?

In the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus Bruegel may be deliberately setting up the visual distinction between mapped and perspectival views, yet he is also presenting them in relationship to one another. The individual worker on the Netherlandish soil, the plowman, shepherd, and fisherman, are each set out on individual plots, placed, as the children were, like different regions on a map. There is no single perspectival organizing principle which links them. They even diminish in size in what appears to be an anti-perspectival way. But, within their own plotted out areas, again just like the children in Children's Games, they are unable to see beyond the limits of their own physical and visual boundaries. The plowman follows his neatly crafted lines, the shepherd is caught in his own gaze upward, and the fisherman, absorbed in his own occupation cannot hear or see the boy who falls into the sea just in front of him. Each is absorbed in his own single-sighted goal; thus, Bruegel twists these distinctions by exposing the multiple perspectives within the mapped out area itself.

In the mapped out area we are rendered blind in our own single sightedness, unable to see the organizing principles, the boundaries, myths, and proverbs that define our lives. We may verbally repeat them, we may even have the myth of Icarus on our tongues or have just said that silly proverb about the dead man at the outskirts of our plow lines, and our verbal repetition may give us a sense of distance, yet in, or perhaps, through our blindness we repeat and re-actualize these myths and proverbs in our daily acts.

Bruegel especially emphasizes this kind of irony in the way he places the plowman between his depiction of the myth of Icarus
and the Netherlandish proverb. At first the plowman appears to be innocent in this painting where people fall and die like flies. He simply plots the middle route that Icarus shunned. He appears safe in his moderate self-enclosure, unconcerned with ancient myths or contemporary proverbs. But, through his motion in circles and his map-making gesture of marking territories, he unknowingly and ironically partakes in the actualization of the Netherlandish proverb, "no plow stops for a dead man": for it is he who pushes the plow which does not stop. This visual construction taints the apparent innocence of the plowman. His role as the self-absorbed laborer shifts from self-contained neutrality to contextual causality. His act of labor in conjunction with a certain obliviousness proves explosive. The dead man and the falling Icarus constitute the frame of the plowman's labor. They are the margins, but if we connect the area across the surface of the painting the feet and legs of the falling Icarus and the head of the dead man form one body. The plowman is not the cause of the death of the man or the fall of Icarus, but through his labor and blindness Bruegel subtly implicates him in both. In the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus Bruegel depicts areas and figures as separate from and unaware of one another, yet he persists in intertwining them. In broader terms, pertaining to mapped and perspectival imaging, it is the mapping of territory that facilitated much of sixteenth century excessive ambitions, especially ambitions associated with sea-going merchant ships and land cultivation. A mapped surface may appear to emphasize non-hierarchical relationships as a tool for knowing something; and, perspectival rendering may at first appear to epitomize a tightly constructed single point of view which seeks to possess that which it depicts. Yet, perspective and mapped renderings are part of a shared social system. It is only after committing the world to conceptual paradigms, that is maps, that then could be used to track and re-track, that Europeans came to impose their singular views, their perspectives beyond themselves. It was only after knowing a territory, that is crossing an ocean and naming and renaming lands abroad, and subsequently placing them on a map, such as the Dutch map of the Brazilian coast, that Europe came to possess and exploit civilizations other than their own.
In the Wake of Production

In the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus mapping and perspective are irrevocably associated as are the dead man and land cultivation, and Icarus and the setting out at sea. Embedded in these visual and thematic yokings is a critique of production and tools of perception in the city and country in which Bruegel worked, that is Antwerp and the Netherlands in the mid-sixteenth century.

III

In the mid-sixteenth century Antwerp was the international trade center of the Western world. The prominence of the city, which lasted from 1500 to 1560, was based upon its ship building expertise, its advances in the textile industry and art production and its ambivalent relationship to the growing empire of Spain. Because of its international importance Antwerp was crowded with merchants from the economically prominent societies of Western Europe, and Bruegel was one of the many artists who provided these multinational and indigenous merchants and politicians with images which contained the specific concerns of their lives.

In the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, as in many of his works, Bruegel depicts the fecundity and tensions which attend such rapid expansion. He consistently treats his canvases as if they were a playground or battlefield where figures are shown working out their relationships to the material conditions of subsistence, tradition and persecution.

Domestic land production, sea trade, and the mediation of a harbor city, all of which Bruegel represents in the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, were the essential components of sixteenth century Netherlandish commercial economy. In this image of a Northern sea and landscape, which is so breath-takingly beautiful, Bruegel invites his contemporaries to see as much as they are willing to find. Like Antonioni does in his film, Blow-Up, he leaves his viewers to find Icarus out at sea and the dead man in the bushes. His subtle placement of Icarus and the dead man and their powerful, though at first inconspicuous roles in the painting, protects his commodity, as well as himself from the censor of the highly politicized and ambitious society in which he worked. In a very shrewd way Bruegel allows for
multiple entries into the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*; he allows for multiple readings of this painting, which must have appeared to be a lovely image of contemporary life, but which upon close observation contains two bodies, the deaths of which are related to an excess of ambition and the every-day acts of production in the Netherlands.

Once Icarus and the dead man are seen within, and as framing elements of the painting, the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* begins to reveal itself, in part, as a study of the social impact of production and technology. In this painting Bruegel actually employs the same methods of map making, mimetic technical rendering, and perspective, which his contemporaries used to advance agrarian, maritime, and even war technology. Though he employs these methods in his own mode of painting, he is critical of technological advance in the hands of those who cannot see beyond the realm of their own production. The beautifully crafted, indigenous ship at sea sails on its course to the harbor city (figure 1c), yet the sailors do not see the falling Icarus, an event which might give them pause in their daily exploits. We, however, cannot look closely at the ship without seeing the feathers of the fallen boy scattered over its surface. Rich natural resources and the products of ingenuity, like the plow, carrack ship, and map-making expertise increased the wealth of the North, helping to keep Antwerp a world trade center for sixty years. This centrality of Antwerp and these advances in production, when blindly maintained in the name of progress or personal gain, had their grave repercussions. Though fighting a war with Spain the Netherlands often folded back on itself, furnishing its enemies with weapons and advancing production with little concern for the outcome.

Daedalus’ ingenuity and Icarus’ careless use of it corresponds to this propensity to fight and facilitate the destruction of one’s own society. Bruegel places this myth into his painting implying that such ambitions and their countless visible and invisible casualties were not so uncommon in contemporary Flanders. To make this point more local he adds to the fallen Icarus the dead man off to the far left. In 1558, when Bruegel made this work, the Flemish people revolted against Spanish Imperialist rule. The countryside and urban centers were often ravished by
soldiers, revolutionaries and iconoclasts (see Geyl). In a more overt, yet still subtle way, Bruegel focuses on the relationship between production and these occurrences in his placement of a purse and sword on the rock in line with the head of the plow horse and the dead man (figure 1a). This little cluster corresponds, like the dead man, to another Netherlandish proverb. This time it is one about weapons, riches, and a certain lack of care, that is, "the sword and purse need careful hands." Here, they are carelessly left unattended at the edge of the image, offered to the viewer or any stranger who may pass by.

The role of the plowman, unaware of the dead man and inattentive to the purse and sword, all of which totter at the edge of his plow lines, becomes even more problematic. He plows so rhythmically, and so many of Bruegel's figures become absorbed in their work, and thus oblivious to all but what they produce. Like this plowman, whose clothing resembles the lines he plows, Bruegel depicts cherry pickers in a scene of production whose heads actually become indistinguishable from their produce (figure 5). In this image other social and cultural acts are left unrecorded as if subordinated or contained in such labor and fecundity.

In the Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, however, Bruegel does not simply show workers engrossed in their acts of production. Amidst the neglected instruments of war and the dead man, the plowman may seem to be innocently productive, but his proximity to them raises the question of complicity. Rather than simply the plowman, it is more the act of daily labor that Bruegel depicts as sadly abstracted from social and political concerns. This kind of abstraction of labor and self-absorption of the laborer brings us to Icarus and his blind absorption in the act of flight, and subsequent fall. This plowman methodically plots his course with no concern for the context in which he or the product of his labor exist. When carried to an extreme such oblivion can leave us as mechanical and devoid of humanness as the workers in Bruegel's most surreal drawing of the Bee Keepers (figure 6) where the identities of the individual workers have been subsumed into their products. The beekeepers' faces have become reflections of their hives. The one in the middle pauses in a daze like the shepherd, the one near the tree
loosens the top of his hive ready to find his keep like the fisherman on the shore, while the one at the corner in the foreground, with his feet apart like the plowman, looks out yet evidently sees nothing.

Postscript

In his cutout of the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* André Breton is concerned with the role of the laborers in the painting and in society: his own and Bruegel’s (figure 2). He focuses on them as they work the land and appear, at a time of severe social conflict, to be politically uninvolved. Beneath his cutout, made in 1942, he writes, “Dusseldorf was bombed for the fiftieth time yesterday.” To intensify the prominence and to focus on the role of this plowman Breton cuts out his detail in the shape of the plowman’s foot. By doing this Breton leads us to wonder what the relationship might be between bombs at Dusseldorf, the single step of the plowman, and the falling Icarus. Which fall or step corresponds to incessant shocks and their reverberations? From some distance one might see how our daily acts are fundamentally related to the structures and destruction of the societies to which we belong. Icarus falls into this sea and landscape unnoticed. Like the bombs in Germany of 1942 his fall is absorbed, it is like a foot step, not of an irrational giant, or alien power, but the modest step of an individual unaware.
Figure 1 Painting: Peter Bruegel, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, 1558; Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts, Brussels.
Figure 1a Painting: Peter Bruegel (detail of sword and purse, horse and dead man's head), *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, 1558; Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts, Brussels.
Figure 1b Painting: Peter Bruegel (detail of fisherman, bird, Icarus, merchant ship), *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, 1558; Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts, Brussels.
Figure 1c Painting: Peter Bruegel (detail of carrack merchant ship), Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, 1558; Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts, Brussels.
Düsseldorf a été bombardé hier pour la cinquantième fois.

(Les journaux)

_Figure 2 Photographic Cutout:_ André Breton, _Detail of Bruegel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, 1942_; from _First Papers of Surrealism_ 1942.
Figure 3 Painting: Peter Bruegel, *Children's Games*, 1560; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
Figure 4 Engraved Map: Cornelis Golyath, *The Brazilian Coastal Strip Around Recife*, 1648; Netherlands Scheepvaart Museum, Amsterdam.
Figure 5 Painting: Peter Bruegel (detail of cherry pickers), Haymaking, 1565; National Gallery, Prague.
Notes

1. For the proverb which refers to this dead man see Arpino (92), and Robert-Jones. In his painting *Netherlandish Proverbs* Bruegel constructs an entire image out of similar proverbs. We sense in looking at these images that daily actions amount to a working out of such possibilities, possibilities delimited by our verbal sayings. For an extensive study of this painting see Dundes and Stibbe.

2. This line is taken from Section VII of Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (256) where he wonders about those who are “lying prostrate” under the “triumphal procession” of civilization. He wants a history “against the grain” that can record what is lost as “progress” brutally moves on.

3. For an agile reading of the possible relations between Bruegel’s landscape with the fall of Icarus and written texts see Caws. Her essay on Bruegel, Auden, and Williams encouraged me in my notions about how Bruegel’s works could be seen within a social context full of verbal proverbs, written myths, and history.

4. The bird on the branch between the fisherman and the fallen Icarus is a possible iconographic reference to another place in Ovid’s account after Icarus’ wings have melted and the boy has fallen dead to the earth: “As Daedalus was confining the body of his ill-fated son to the tomb, a chattering partridge looked out from a muddy ditch and clapped her wings uttering a joyful note” (*Met.* 2 VIII, 235-240). The chattering bird is the transformed body of Daedalus’s inventive nephew whom Daedalus, out of jealousy, pushed off the Acropolis. “Athena, who favors the quick-witted, caught the boy up and made him a bird, and clothed him with feathers in mid-air” (*Met.* 2 VIII, 260-265). With the presence of this boy turned into a bird all due to Daedalus’ ambition, Bruegel again poses in this painting the dangers and loss which haunt technologic competitiveness and overreaching.

Also, see Klein plates 10-18, for reproductions of Bruegel’s maritime prints. The three myths that Bruegel chose to depict in this series are of Icarus, Phaethon, and Arias, the former two are about youths who fall due to excessive ambition in their careless adoption of their father’s mastered art; the latter myth is about a musician saved at sea by dolphins after he had been thrown out to sea by sailors turned pirates. In all three prints sea-going enterprise and ships are haunted by images of the abuse of craft and power. In these and the other maritime prints Bruegel brings attention to his own status as a craftsman. His depiction of these ships associates him with the craft he is depicting as well as criticizing.

5. See Baxandall for a discussion of how ways of making and viewing are integral parts of a social system. He writes, “the beholder must use on the painting such visual skills as he has, very few of which are normally special to painting, and he is likely to use those skills his society esteems highly. The painter responds to this; his public’s visual capacity is his medium” (34).

6. Alpers subtly differentiates between mapping and perspective rendering in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; yet her insistence upon polarizing them on moral terms is puzzling (142).
7. See Gowing for a description of how figures in this painting participate in the forms and visual structures which define them: "The baffling behavior of men requires complex interpretation; children act out the patterns of life for themselves. Bruegel shows them self-absorbed in trance-like realization of companionship and competition, solidarity in common dreams, mimic cruelty, automatic joy. They rehearse the business of life together; separately they explore qualities of person and thing. Even those who are occupied on their own, like the gymnasts in their paddock and the turd stirrer in the middle, are linked invisibly to the rest. The picture is a portrayal of social cohesion, with its radical tensions and circular organization" (19).

8. See Van der Wee for a description of the importance of the arts in Netherlandish society and its economy. Crucial here is his discussion of how urban life became more dependant and conscious of its dependence upon the goods of the countryside, and how in turn the countryside became increasingly more industrialized in order to meet the demands of an international market. This network of productivity and trade intensified the relationship between merchants and laborers in the fields, and it is at this time that images of such laborers, such as the ones Bruegel produced in paintings and countless engravings, began to sell in the Antwerp market (2:178ff., 226ff.).

9. See Arpino for the most complete list of collectors of Bruegel's works from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries.

10. Many of Bruegel's contemporaries, whose views were more overtly critical of Spain and Catholicism, left the country or lost their lives. Carl van Mander writing shortly after Bruegel's death, makes it clear that Bruegel was aware of the biting criticism in some of his work: "Many of Bruegel's strange compositions and comical subjects one may see in his copper engravings. But he has made many skilful and beautiful drawings; he supplied them with inscriptions which, at the time, were too biting and too sharp, and which he had burned by his wife during his last illness, because of remorse, or fear that most disagreeable consequences might grow out of them" (156). Some prints that were not burnt contain scathing visual commentaries on the state of justice and the effects of avarice and war. See Klein, especially Plates 29-64.

11. Spain often armed herself with Flemish artillery in its attempt to subjugate the Netherlands. After 1570, however, they were no longer able to obtain arms from their Flemish subjects in revolt, who were finally able to resist having their labor and expertise co-opted for the purposes of their own defeat. For a discussion of the exchange of arms in wars amongst Europeans, and about the infiltration of western artillery into the Turkish and Asian Empires see Cipolla.

Works Cited


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