

Metonymy and its manifestation in visual artworks: Case study of late paintings by Bruegel the Elder

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Postprint* v1.0

*Somov, G. (2009). Metonymy and its manifestation in visual artworks: Case study of late paintings by Bruegel the Elder. *Semiotica*, 2009(174), pp. 309-366. Retrieved 6 Oct. 2017, from doi:10.1515/semi.2009.037

Abstract

Being the object of semiotic studies, metonymy demands investigation in the non-verbal domain, i.e., visual sign systems. When analyzing the metonymies of visual artworks, they prove to have different sources: verbal and visual sources refer to codes, languages, contexts, and sign forms of a work (denotations, connotations, and organizing sign structures). Different particular metonymies promote incarnation of a general metonymy of work. In the work structure (or coding), particular metonymies are joined and organized on the basis of this general metonymy. The metonymies interrelated in a complex way on the basis of general metonymy are revealed in the course of semiotic analysis of the paintings by Bruegel the Elder. The sign structures of his works underlie the philosophic generalizations of the great painter and philosopher.

Keywords: semiotics; metonymy; connotation; organizing form; structures; sign systems; metaphor; Bruegel the Elder.

1. Metonymy as the object of semiotic studies

Metonymy is one of the central sign structures of human communication. According to semiotic ideas, the metonymy is formed transversely to metaphor. The metaphor relates objects of the same level of commonality, while metonymy links a concrete object to a class of objects or interpretants (Eco 1976; Chandler 1994). In semiosis as understood by Peirce (Lang 1993; Hoffmann 2001), metonymy appears as the transformation of sign object into the representamen of another sign. The specificity of metonymy realization, which separates it from other signs, is the directed character of sign relation with a sign system (sign) of a higher level of commonality.

The studies of metonymy seem to be important for the development of theoretical semiotics and demand to include not only the verbal domain, but also less known non-verbal ones. Complex manifestations of metonymy are represented in various objects of visual perception and visual artworks. In visual perception, the representamens, objects, and interpretants are quite uncertain. The same features can point to several classes of objects and (or) interpretants. Signs form various lines of semiosis. This is related to the formation of indefinite visual meanings in visual art (Panofsky 1983 [1955]; Somov 2006). At the same time, the lines of semiosis and included sign structures are potentially conditioned.

The conditionality of metonymy in visual perception and visual artworks can be regarded in different modification and terms. The experience of analysis of visual artworks and different objects of artificial environment proves that it is efficient to regard metonymy in Jakobson's model of the communicative act. I modified the latter by approaching it with the specificity of the analysis of visual artworks (Somov 2007a). In my model, the realization of a sign (sign structure) proceeds under the effect of codes, languages, sign forms of artwork (text, in particular), and context. All of these conditionalities have verbal and non-verbal sources (Somov 2007b). In the aspect of sign form, the conditionalities of sign formations can be divided into denotations, connotations, and sign structures of organizing character (Somov 2007a). In connection with this, when analyzing visual artworks, different particular metonymies gravitating to different types of conditionalities are found. The metonymies can be based on: (1) codes, (2) languages, (3) sign forms subdivided into (3.1) denotations, (3.2) connotations, and (3.3) sign structures of an organizing character, and (4) contexts. In semiosis, these different metonymies contribute to the implementation of general metonymy of artwork. In the course of artwork creation, a reverse motion can occur: from one general artwork metonymy to its particular metonymies. Many artists have created their works as sign systems subordinated to a general metonymy expressing some global meaning. Bright metonymies of this kind are especially striking in the works of those artists who rise above the perceived reality in their generalizations, relate the visual domain to verbal texts of culture, and create concepts and meanings of ideological and social character. This becomes noticeable at the transition from the Medieval art to that of New Time.¹ In Medieval European art, sign tools were mainly directed to the formation of metonymies of Christianity and obtained the character of language units. Stable metonymies were formed linking verbal and visual semiotic systemities. Earlier, analyzing *The Holy Trinity* by A. Rublev, I have tried to demonstrate the metonymies of this kind (Somov 2007a). In the New Time, the sign tools of visual art

changed. The tools of canonic character gave way to more independent sign forms. However, the metonymic character and symbolic direction of Medieval art were preserved. Individual depicted objects (elements of environment, goods, or clothes) were related to biblical texts. The artworks of this period obtained the character of metonymies through concepts and meanings. This was especially typical for the visual art of the Northern Europe of the Reformation epoch. The artworks of this period were constructed as visual sign structures of metonymic character, turned into concepts and allegories, and obtained the character of global generalizations. These processes became pronounced in the New Time in the works by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Roberts-Jones 2002). He treated visual art as a philosopher, linking the models of life and human being to sign systems of visual art and everyday environment. Large generalizations of his paintings are related to this.

Already the painter's contemporary Abraham Ortelius paid attention to the fact that his pictures represented something that is beyond depicted things (Stechow 1968). Ortelius interpreted Bruegel on the assumption of his activity as a gatherer and a spreader of information about "Dutch Revolt" (Harris 2005). Therefore, for him, the pictures of the artist carried first of all a generalized sense of epoch, the struggle of people against oppressors of authoritarian power, the common people's search for an exit from enslavement and depression, and the struggle for existence in the spiritual world. It allows one a better orientation for the search for metonymy in artworks of the great artist. In his pictures, generalizations are reached by the creation of different metonymies. Denotation-based metonymies become developed in connotations. Developed sign systems are formed, linking different types of codes and signs, different organizing structures, relations, and element groups. For this purpose, the painter used specific tools: standpoint, skyline, interrelations of geometrical bodies of represented objects (planes, surfaces, configurations, axes, and object centers), interrelations of straight and curvilinear configurations and contours, color contrasts, analogies of groups of visually active elements, and rhythmic structures of element groups. Some of these features of Bruegel's pictures were interpreted in a structural-semiotic manner, in particular, the rhythm of falling people as the basis of meaning of the picture *The Parable of the Blind* (Arnheim 1974). Being organized internally and interrelated in denotative, connotative, and organizing sign forms, these and other sign tools produced a powerful effect of picture under a common metonymy. When analyzing the works of Bruegel semiotically, the most developed metonymies are revealed in his last works. These works will be addressed to in order to elucidate the essence of metonymy in visual art.

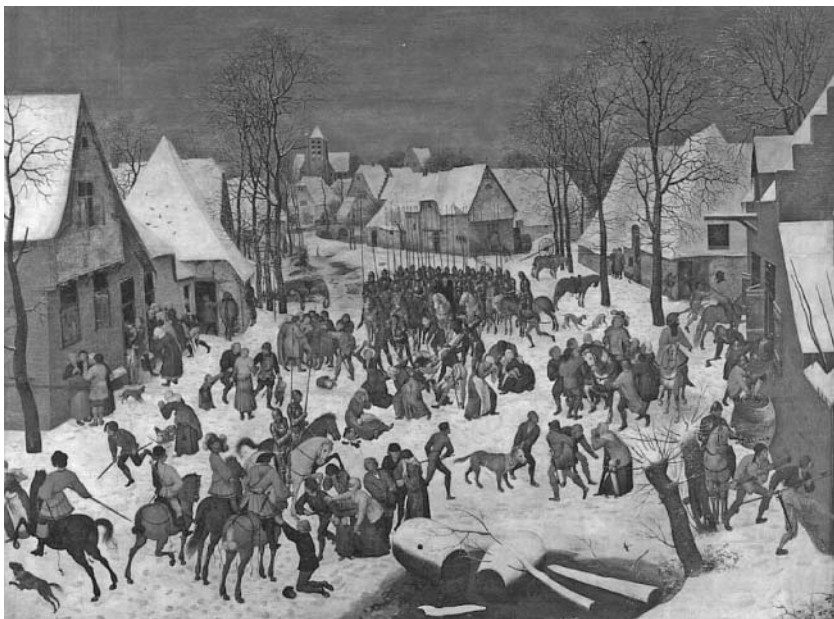


Figure 1. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, "Slaughter of the Innocents" (1565–1566, oil on panel, 111 × 160 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).

2. The triumph of violence

For *The Slaughter of the Innocents* (Figure 1), the name of the picture itself is a sign opening up a complicated context. This is true for any artwork dealing with biblical subject or devoted to historical events. Visual artworks of this kind usually actualize several contexts: known verbal texts describing the events, related non-verbal cultural objects, first of all, visual artworks, and the phenomena of everyday life of which the events depicted are a reminder. In the painting by P. Bruegel, *different contexts are finely used for the formation of general metonymy of the work.*

Artists painting the subject *Slaughter of the Innocents* usually represented the features of the biblical environment. Bruegel made no hints at the historical reality of the Bible. His painting illustrates the eternal theme of human history. This generalization was enhanced by a historical context. The war of occupation against the people was a reality for the artist and affected him gravely. In connection with this, the picture represents a Flemish city and massacre of its citizen by occupants, as it is considered: the uniform of the troops of Duke Alba is denoted; the mounted com-

mander placed in the center has some likeness with the Spanish duke. The interrelations between the eternal subject of slaughter of the innocents by Herod and concrete events of Flemish history form the basis of a general metonymy of the picture. The rejection of the depiction of biblical environment and the representation of reality of the sixteenth century are the sign, which denotes the universality of slaughter of the innocents in human history. The infants are almost imperceptible in the picture, while the scenes of violence are perfectly visible. This enlarges the meaning: the massacre of innocent and defenseless and lawless violence of authoritarian power are denoted. Therefore, two directions of metonymy development are traced: the expansion of spatial and temporal context (biblical country — history as a whole) and that of action (the slaughter of the innocents as ordered by Herod — the violence of power in general). A certain general metonymy of the power of tyranny in history is formed. This metonymy is based on verbal texts — the ideas of “Herod’s power.” But these texts and ideas form only the context of the artwork. Its basic sign systems are constructed “inside” the picture, in its general sign form (Somov 2007a).

The sign form of the artwork generates three main sign formations: denotation, connotation, and sign formations of organizing character. The denotations of artwork designate the massacre of citizens and possess their own reinforcing connotations and action-denoting organizing sign formations (dynamics, anxiety, sharpness, injuries, death motions, etc.). We shall see that individual metonymies are formed along the line of denotation strengthening, developing the general metonymy of power tyranny and assigning the character of philosophic generalization to the painting. The development of connotations is accompanied by organizing structures, features, and elements, as this happens in the process of creation of masterpiece of visual art (Somov 2007a). Organizing sign formations of the work (color configurations, active contours, axes, and centers, geometrical and proportional constructions, etc.) make a significant contribution to the formation of a complex “connotative web,” and the expression of general emotional status of anxiety, tension, and pain. Refined interrelations of different sign formations of the painting at different levels (signals, representamens, signs, and intersections of semantic fields) create the conditions for an integrated and plural effect of the artwork and polysemantic interpretation of its general metonymy.

Central denotations, which determine a general emotional effect and individual metonymies of the artwork, are spatial peculiarities of situation and mutual relations of people and actions in it. *Denotations of spatial peculiarities of situation* form the basis of semiosis of other denotations. This is explained by the fact that the codes of identification of situations

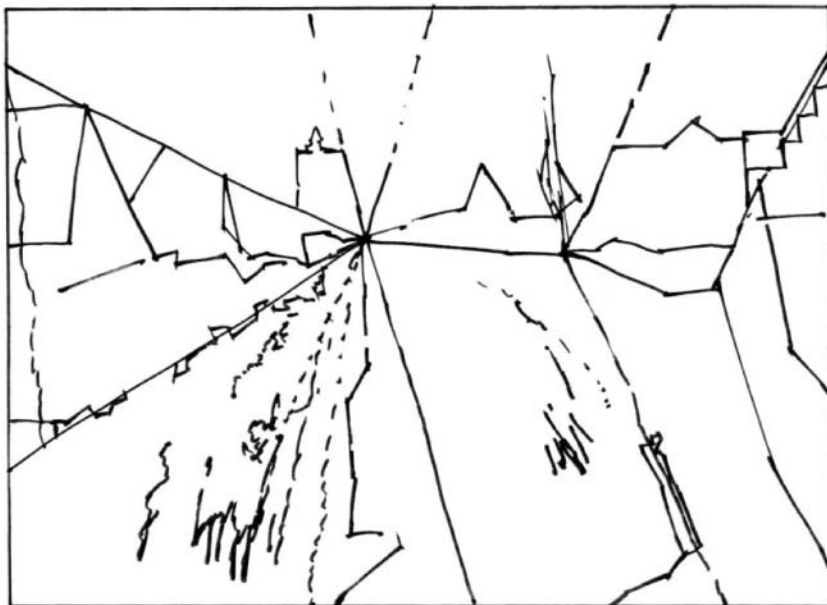


Figure 2. “Slaughter of the Innocents.” The broken lines of houses, its sharpness, connect with general dynamic contours of the picture. It is creating the meanings of dynamics, uncertainty, and anxiety.

(dangerous or safe, dynamic or quite) and codes of object interrelations in space and time are fundamental (Somjen 1972; Somov 2006). They are included in semiotic systems of visual art as the basis of production of visual information. Therefore, an important role belongs to the allocation of objects and spectator in space and time when denoting any situation of life and character of action, which takes place. The analyzed painting by Bruegel represents a classical example of denotations of this kind. A high skyline perspective (bird’s eye view) is depicted in the painting, as though exposing the evil happening on the earth. The view from above makes natural the ascending enlargement of the houses. These inclinations of buildings stress the dynamics of action. The inclined lines of the walls of the houses and the church produce the impression of collapse. In its turn, falling architectural elements produce the feeling of anxiety and danger. These meanings are reinforced by other sign tools. Broken planes of houses are underlined; the lines of walls, roofs, and pediments are turned at different angles to each other (Figure 2). Dynamic steps also are created by the contours of the house on the right side. They denote the ascent to heaven and strengthen the meaning of fall and collapse.

These senses also are emphasized by the outline of trees. Together with walls, their stems incline. This is reinforced by the inclinations of axes of figures of horses and riders on the background and configurations of people and things on the forefront. Dark-colored lines accent the dynamics still more. In general, the sign systemity of sharp and dynamic inclinations is formed and the spirit of alarm and agitation is produced. Inclinations and spherical lines underline the spherical terrestrial surface. In the case of the view from above, this produces the meaning of integration of the earth and historical events. This method continues earlier paintings by Bruegel, in particular, his *The Land of Cockaigne*, where the spherical form of the earth denoted the country. Due to circular motions of people, horses, dogs, and other objects, the meaning of action gyre is produced.

In the context of the historical totality of Herod's deeds, this denotes the historical repetition of violence occurring on the Earth. The violence is expressed in developed sign systems. Running soldiers, resisting citizens, and sharply curved figure contours denote aggravated confrontation. Characteristic features of running people, horses, and dogs are generalized. General shapes of human figures, weapons, bristling legs, boots, prominent pikes and clubs of the attacking side, horse hoofs, and animal tails are created. These features reinforce the impression of bustle, chaos, and fortuitous death. Repeating S-shaped, as if writhing configurations of layouts of living creatures strengthen the expression of sharp motions, counteraction, resistance, and asking for mercy. Differences and specificity of layouts of figure groups and individual characters are linked by a general idea of bustle. The central group is surrounded by soldiers from the front and back. The importance of this group is underlined by color configurations, and the impression of despair of victims is produced. Active signals (configurations of different colors and texture, lines, and points) are connotative elements in this case. Complexly rounded and mutually interflowing configurations of central groups are mild. They are surrounded by the groups of strict elements where sharp vertical configurations predominate. Therefore, the victims are placed in the rings and surrounded by sharp elements, i.e., violence. This meaning is also developed through the triangle and trapeziform contours of buildings. In this context, a pike-like sharp vertical line of houses produces the meaning of severe military order (Figure 3). This order suppresses and kills gentle organic forms of life (Figure 4). These meanings are developed in the connotations of bleeding wounds, which also form the part of general metonymy. In the representation of crowds, wound-shaped large and small, rounded, ragged configurations are outlined (Figures 5 and 6). Puddles coated with a thin ice crust and trampled snow enhance this connotation. The connotation of injury also is expressed by reddish

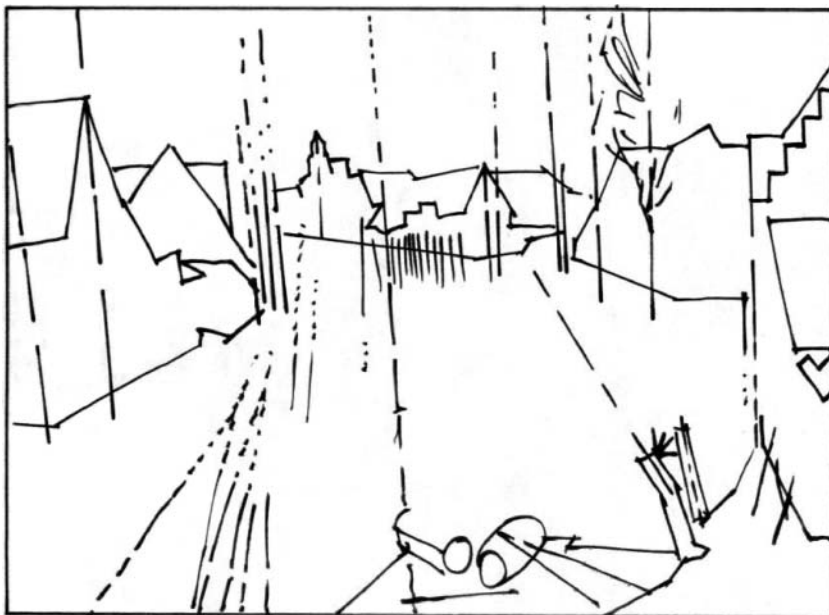


Figure 3. "Slaughter of the Innocents." The dark lines of trees and the riders' spears form regular order. The static character of the vertical axes are opposed to the anxious dynamics of the action.

configuration edges. Red-brown colors are present where the scenes of massacre are represented (bright red figures of riders directing the slaughter of the innocents and red trousers of executioners pulling the victims). In this context, red and red-brown spots resemble fresh and clotted blood. *Denotations and connotations of weapons* also increase the impression of injury. Spears, swords, and other pointed forms wedge in rounded configurations-wounds (Figure 4). This produces meaning approaching the feeling of pain.

The metonymy of death flow represents a specific sign structure inside the painting. The street where the action happens is perceived as a motion of jelly-like flux, which flows out from the center of the city and spreads towards a spectator (Figure 7). Conversion of snow into water followed by the transformation of moving flux into mud and stagnation forms an important meaning. In the foreground, the motion of ice and water is concluded with a dirty puddle. The flux moves from the city center, from the church (that is, from the authority). The flux begins from the city square, from the crystal purity of the temple, and ends in a dirty puddle. The transformation of ice into water and then into mud, the conversion



Figure 4. “Slaughter of the Innocents.” *The sharp verticals go into the soft rounded configurations. The meaning of a murder of living organisms is created.*

of motion into chaos and stagnation is an independent metonymy in the context of the artwork. This metonymy possesses distinct levels:

1. *the level of denotates*: (1a) ice — water — mud; (1b) crystal clarity, lucidity, and order — motion energy — chaos; (1c) the center of power and city life, ideological and spiritual center — bloody deeds — collapse and immersion into sewage.
2. *the level of ideologems*: the ideas of violence issued from the authority — collapse, degradation.

Generalizing the structure of this metonymy, we may say that the flux of death goes out from the center (church and authority). This flux begins from the crystal purity of the church and first resembles clear crystal ice; then it melts and spreads as a muddy slush. Crystalline forms going this way turn into chaotic conglomerations, as if they degrade in the flow of dirty events. This connotative metonymy acquires a clear meaning in a verbal context of authority — its decision, actions, and their results. An authorized decision directing the executors of a bloody deed finally turns into a dirty chaos. Flux motion contributes to the formation of metonymy of death motion. *The metonymy of death motion* is formed in sign



Figure 5. "Slaughter of the Innocents." The lacerated rounded configurations remind one of wounds and flows of blood.

systems of denotation of people actions. The extermination of infants is expressed by the motion along the whole street. The tranquil and static character of riders and horses in the background (especially on the back right side) means that it is all over down there and the order is established. In connection with this, nobody is depicted in the background of the city. This emptiness soon will reach the citizens and spectator. The empty street leading from the center is already "cleaned" by soldiers. Closer to the forefront, the figures of soldiers and their victims become more mobile and fussy. The massacre is going on. The dynamics of soldier groups of the medium shot makes a contrast with the tranquility of condensed alignment of riders in the background. The differences in the motions of people in the background, medium shot, and foreground reinforce the meaning of death approaching to a spectator. Different actions are outcropped: finding infants, pulling them out together with their defenders, and asking for mercy. Each of these actions is denoted by its own indices. These sign features even more increase the metonymy of death motion.

The metonymy of denotations separated from the main action can be used to describe the sign structure of elements allocated along the edges

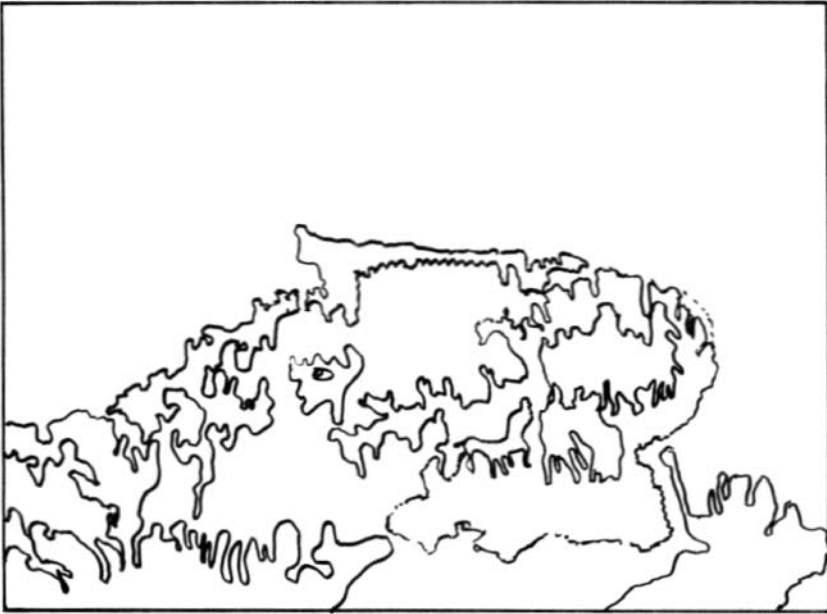


Figure 6. *“Slaughter of the Innocents.” Configurations of the groups of people as a whole form organic bodies with wounds and blood.*

of the image field. The U-shape of the image field for the differentiation of sign systems of different levels (when the text is placed in the center and basic symbols occupy the periphery) is a traditional tool of European visual art. The elements placed at the periphery of the picture traditionally were used in icon painting as symbols to aid in reading the major metonymy of a visual artwork. In the compositions of artworks of the New Time, this tradition was developed in different genres: in multigure compositions, portraits, and still lifes (the signs of Venice in multigure compositions by Carpaccio; celestial beings, emblems, and banners in the works by Veronese; celestial signs in the paintings by El Greco, symbolical things in the portraits by Holbein the Younger, etc.). Bruegel is in the course of this general tradition. Denotative elements separated from the main action form an independent metonymy. These elements are: the church in the background, the puddle in the forefront, a crow’s nest high on a tree, and a stepped pediment of a house on the right rising to the sky. These elements are united in a sign system as they are placed on the edges of the picture separately from the main action and outcropped visually (Figure 8). This assigns them a special importance and symbolic

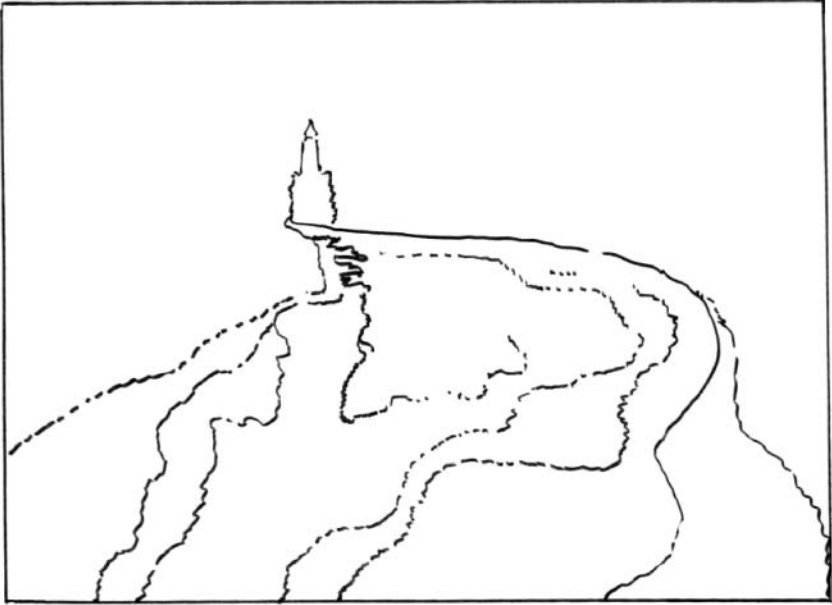


Figure 7. "Slaughter of the Innocents." The contours of the street remind one of a flow towards a spectator.

character. Visual meanings of each of these signs are indefinite when taken separately. Church, puddle, nest, and steps are the elements of different sign systems and are thus polysemantic. However, within the systemity of the painting, the semantic fields of these signs intersect and specify each other. Each of them represents a sign formation possessing a context and organized as a sign form. The chaotic character of the puddle is opposed to the crystal clarity of the church. Broken barrel and board are thrown in the puddle; the mud spreads. This produces the impression of immersion in the chaos of dirtiness and the meaning of inanity of human deeds. The perfect construction, logicity, and harmony of the spiritual world and dogma are expressed in the crystal clear form of the church and opposed to a disorder and absurd of a real life — puddle, broken barrels, and boards. Due to the semantic contrast of these elements, a single large nest high over the ground also obtains the character of symbolic generalization. It denotes the isolation of birds from humans. Down on the ground, horses and dogs participate in awful human deeds. A bird living high over the ground is free from abomination happening on the ground. The steps of the pediment of a house have the same importance. They denote a huge staircase leading to the heaven. This seems

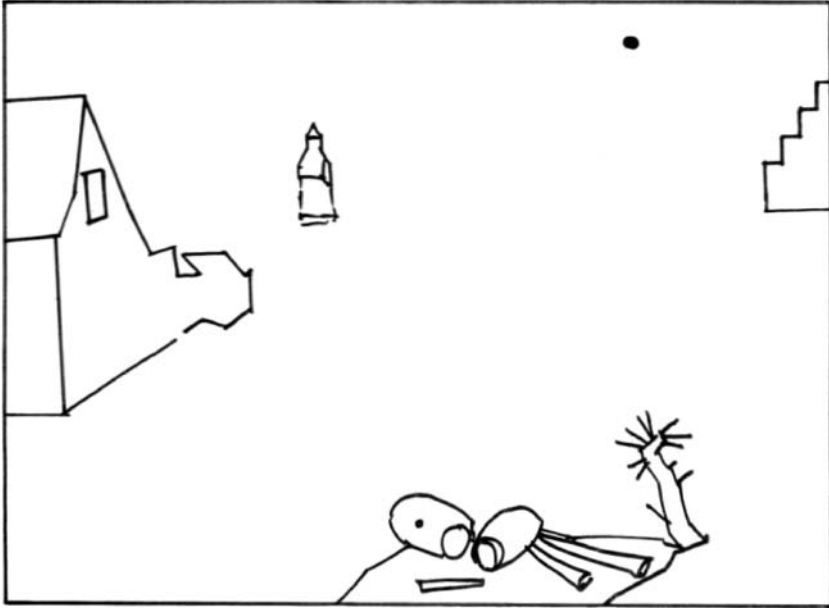


Figure 8. “Slaughter of the Innocents.” Denotative elements outside of the action and on the edges of the picture form an independent sign system. These elements are: the church; the pool with barrels and boards below; the bird’s nest high on a tree; the shape of the steps on the house on the right, rising to the sky.

to symbolize the exit from “Herod’s kingdom,” hinting at the way of spiritual liberation through the denial of participation in unsavory deed of authorities.

Structural organization of signals contributes to their transformation into connotations (Somov 2005). In this painting (and other works by Bruegel), this layer of sign systems turns into the mean of metonymy development. Signals are organized, first of all, by configurations, lines, and centers uniting visually active elements (Somov 2005). Basic configurations, lines, and centers of the painting organize the image field in general following the principles of subordination to a composition center. This organizing tool increases the importance of the action, which takes place in the center, and divides the image field. The field is divided into color configurations: the sky, the ground, and two groups of houses on the right and left. These basic configurations, with their internal division, penetrate into each other in a complex way. Their mutual penetration is achieved by common configurations, lines of contours, axes, and directions of motion of active visual elements. General color partitioning of the painting

makes it possible to organize visually its semantically important elements. Configurations form a general systemity. Triangle and stepwise constructions of buildings are strengthened by the configurations of the entire painting, its major masses, and points. Triangle constructions are reinforced by structural organization of proportions of picture partitioning and its diagonal structure. Interrelations and oppositions of sharp, inclined large organizing configurations and lines and rounded, gentle outlines and flowing contours generate the organizing form of this artwork. Organizing characteristics contribute to the junction of indefinite meanings to a general metonymy. Due to the joining of opposite organizing forms, characteristics, and structures, the synthesis of different connotative meanings is implemented: cruelty, sharpness, disintegration, diffluent organisms, circular motion, fluxes of biomass, and disrupted organic forms.

The general composition of geometrically correct configurations of the picture can be seen in the constructions of the major depicted action. The organization of signals is built in connotations and produces new connotations enhancing the general metonymy of the picture. The central group of people surrounded by soldiers forms a strange configuration. Sharp-angled stakes cut into wounds; a crowned head peeps out from general contours reminding of the king Herod who is a key person of the event (Figure 9). Color configurations are organized into larger integrated ones and organize people masses. The main tool of this organization is the integration of small groups of people (riders, prowling soldiers, and slaughtered people) by a large white configuration. In the contours of the street on top and on the right, Bruegel creates regular rounded lines, their gyres corresponding to circled outlines of victims. Rounded white configurations of snow resemble infant heads with large dark eyes (Figures 10 and 11). The rise from the earth to heaven (also as, destruction of life on the earth) is expressed by the general order of active elements of the picture (Figure 12).

3. Rhythms of life

Unlike *The Slaughter of the Innocents*, Bruegel's *The Peasant Dance* has no subject line relating it to verbal texts. In the history of visual art, it has been regarded traditionally as a "life scene" depicting the reality of everyday life of Flemish peasants in the sixteenth century (Figure 13). Therefore, first of all, various visual, verbal, and other sign systems of Flemish culture of that period represent the context of this work, together with multiple illustrations of everyday life of North European countries.

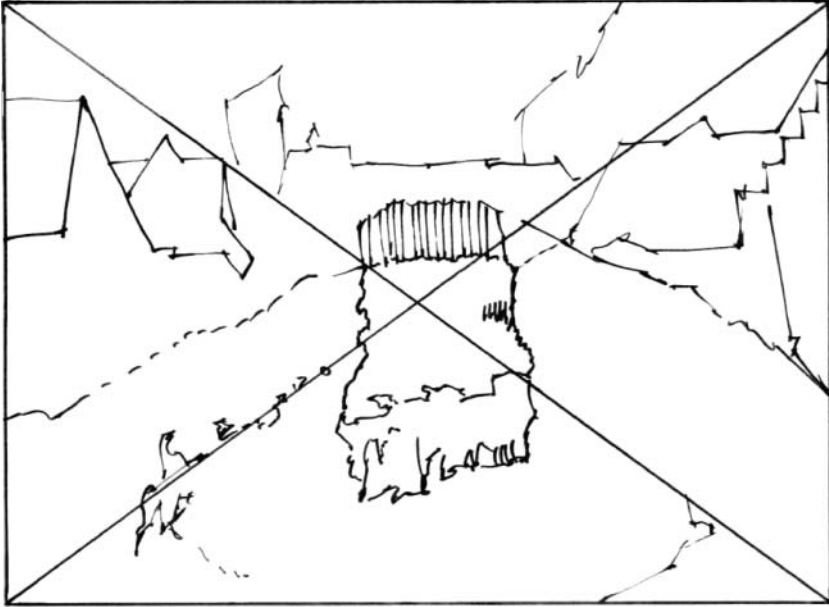


Figure 9. "Slaughter of the Innocents." The entire configuration reminiscent of King Herod is formed at the center of the composition.

The picture itself forms a sign system, which generalizes this historical and ethnographic reality. This context of the picture (unlike the contexts of the works devoted to biblical texts) can be understood better if it is related to its general metonymy through the examination of sign form. In connection with this, it is reasonable to make the semiotic analysis of the work examining the role of context.

The sign form of the artwork forms the basis of its metonymy. Explorers of Bruegel's works have outlined many times that *The Peasant Dance* is much more than the representation of a typical scene of peasant life. This painting incarnates the energy of life itself and generalizes it (Stechow 1968). This finding of art critics makes it possible to suppose that the *general metonymy of the work is a kind of a generalized denotation and representation of life*. This general metonymy is developed in a sign form along three directions: denotations, connotations, and organizing sign formations (Somov 2007a). Metonymy-forming denotations of the picture are expressed as the representation of people, their poses, motions, gestures, expressions, houses, clothes, and utensils. The denotations of the picture get importance and differentiation being reinforced in connotations and organizing formations. The connotations of the picture are

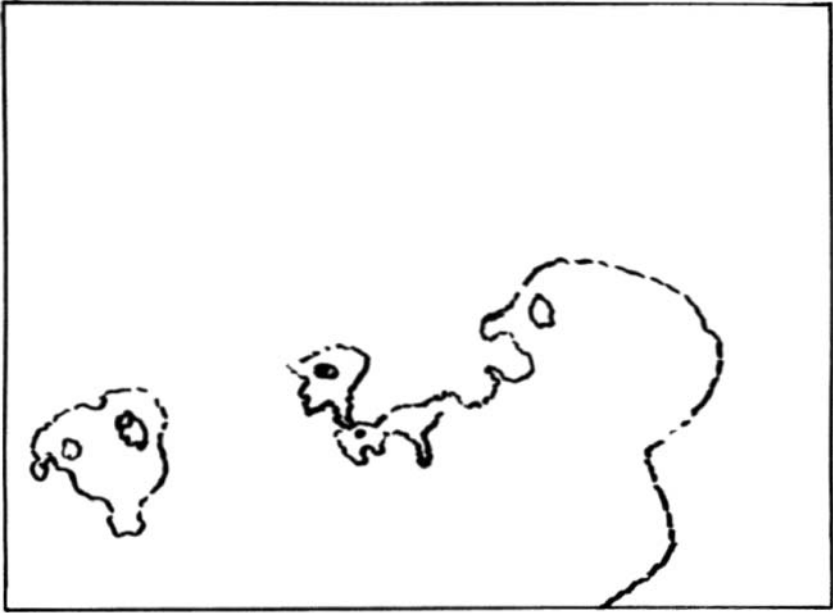


Figure 10. “Slaughter of the Innocents.” The contours reminiscent of babies’ heads.

formed as complex and independent sign structures (dancing rhythms, couples of male and female elements, intensification of bagpipe sounds, etc.). Organizing sign structures of the picture take on special significance, which is related to the denotation and representation of dance rhythms. Multiple groups of configurations, form-generating lines and contours, directions of motion of represented objects, element groups related by rhythmic structures, and other features of the work form specific metonymy-accompanying connotations and promote the emergence of emotive meanings. In general, a unique sign structure possessing an independent influence is produced: the generation of rhythms, directions of motion, moving and breathing color configurations, and similar living groups of elements. *The general metonymy of life* is formed *along the line of denotations* in several interrelated particular metonymies, which conditionally can be determined as festival, human psychic world (interrelations of reflection and emotions and human communication), interrelation between male and female natures, diversity and unity of human society, and a uniting environment and culture. All of these denotations of life form the basis of different metonymies of the picture, which are subordinated to the general metonymy of life.

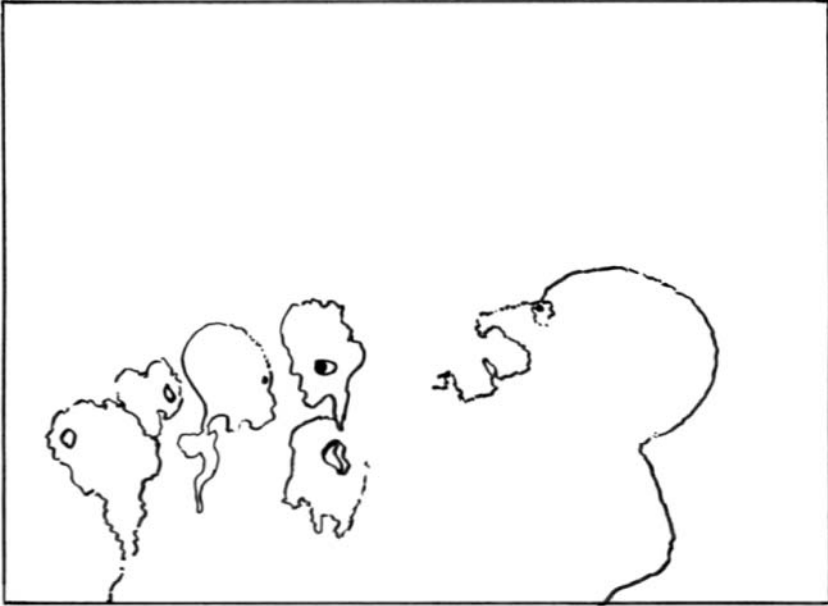


Figure 11. "Slaughter of the Innocents." The contours reminiscent of babies' heads and living organisms.

The metonymy of festival forms an important domain of the picture. The atmosphere of festivity is produced by a general picture of dance and masses of well-dressed dancing people, smart architecture, and brightness of the color spectrum. A certain generalized meaning of life festival is formed. This meaning, being treated as an event or episode, is opposed to the generalization of life as the picture of human psychic world. This broader and more important picture relies upon numerous peculiarities of sign systems of the work and demands a special description.

The metonymy of the psychic world is based, first of all, on the representation of people, their faces, poses, and motions. In different works, Bruegel creates a personification of human nature (Foote 1968: 116). The faces of depicted people cannot be called celebrating and joyful; the expression of pain, spite, perplexity, and sorrow can be read on them. These faces are far from the atmosphere of festival elevation and light-hearted fun. The peasants dancing on the forefront move sharply forward and cry something with anger. The open mouth and look of the bagpiper's interlocutor seem to express the surprise and even horror in front of something awful. A peasant sitting at the table and arguing with another

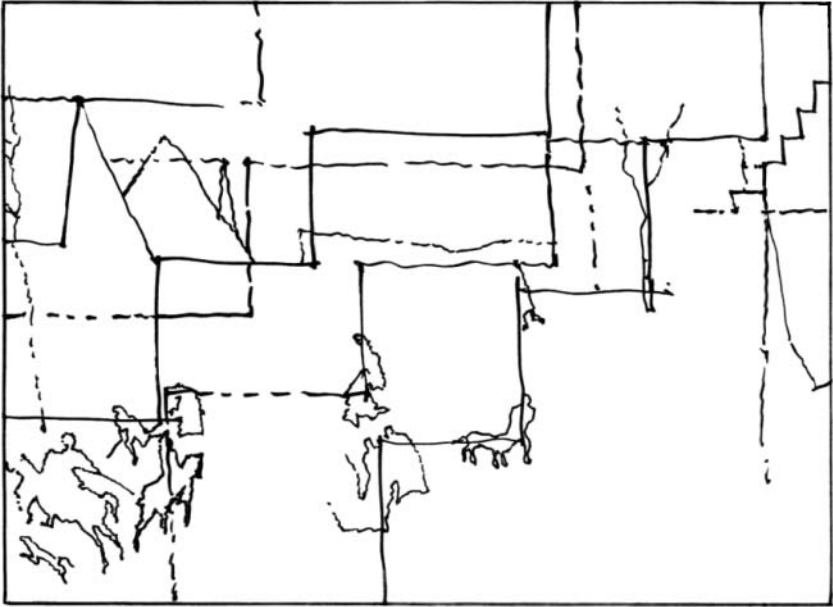


Figure 12. "Slaughter of the Innocents." The organizing elements of the picture. The rectangles strengthen the significance of steps leading to the sky.

peasant opens his mouth in shout and spiteful grin, which points to an evil nature of their dispute. A peasant woman lifting a mug cries something angrily. Another woman with a lifted hand dancing in the background seems to be sad. The bagpiper is sorrowfully thoughtful. Hence, the faces and gestures of people denote rather the world of negative emotions and feelings. This obviously contradicts to the atmosphere of festival. But Bruegel would not have assigned negative emotions to the faces out of the frames of a global metonymy of the picture. The festival and dance are only the episode of life and one of its sides. Its other substantial sides are related to human existence and the emotional world. The most fundamental of these metonymies are grouped by the characteristics of male and female natures, different human emotions and communications, unity of dance rhythms, and unity of people with their environment. A man leads a woman into the dance. In the system of life metonymy, this means that men lead women in the course of life. In the context of heavy peasant life, this also means the overcoming of obstacles and misfortunes. This interpretation explains severe features and cries of people. They cry when overcoming the severities of life. A peasant, who leads a woman into dance and cries, sharply looks forward. Leading a woman, he must



Figure 13. *Bruegel the Elder, "Peasant Dance" (1568, oil on oak panel, 114 × 164 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).*

see the obstacles he may face and prevent blows of fate. A look forward is especially difficult for a peasant and a person in general. Two centuries later, this idea was very clearly expressed by Burns in his poem "To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest, With The Plough." Therefore, the picture of course of life, as though, arises from the sign systems of dance and builds over them. The central position of the bagpiper means that the music is the central, uniting substance of human life. Near the bagpiper, there is a wise interlocutor and a big jug. Music, reflection, intellectual communication, and good ale constitute the basis of human society and the psychic world. This is a possible verbalization of meanings of these persons and things. *Daily communication* forms another important component of general metonymy of the picture. In the left part of background, a common meal is represented. Certainly, it is accompanied by the discussion of everyday problems. This discussion is accompanied by spite and sorted out relationships. This is why the repast is penetrated by anger. Hostile feelings predominate in this materially-minded communication opposed to music and reflection. These emotions and feelings are surmounted by irony. But Bruegel does not allow simple peasants to be ironic. Moreover, in his last works, the painter himself seems to lose the irony that was intrinsic to his early paintings. This is related to the

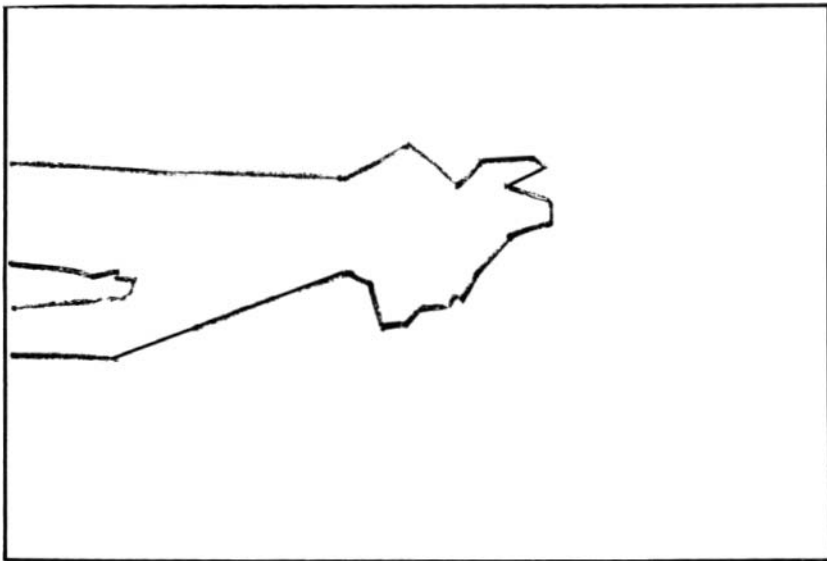


Figure 14. “*Peasant Dance*.” The arm of the peasant at the left is raised in an uncertain gesture. It either points at or asks a question. This sign is strengthened in the picture. The configuration of the arm forms outlines of elements outgoing in perspective (lines of houses and fences; outlines of human figures). Thanks to it, the arm of the inquirer, as it were, extends into the distance. This sign is of special significance; a question about a sense of all being present in the picture.

transition to the representation of real life by the artist. This approach is usually accompanied by pessimistic and rigorous interpretation of human beings. The gesture of the last figure at the left denotes this view more generally. The extended hand inquires about a sense of this world and, therefore, is developed into a special sign system (Figure 14). The severe and pessimistic character of last paintings by Bruegel, and *The Peasant Dance* in particular, does not mean that the great artist does not see a light and good nature in humans. The face of a maid dancing in the background is marked by the tints of love, passion, and tenderness. She aspires. Therefore, her face and figure are developed as special sign formation (Figure 15). And the girl in the forefront gives a piece of bread to an even smaller defenseless girl as if extending her a helping hand. These sign formations have a common interpretant: in the awful appearance of the dance of life; there is still a glimmer of faith in human feeling united by music, thought, love, and hope of happiness. In general, in the interrelations of groups of people, their actions, expressions, and represented emotional status, a certain *general metonymy of human interrela-*

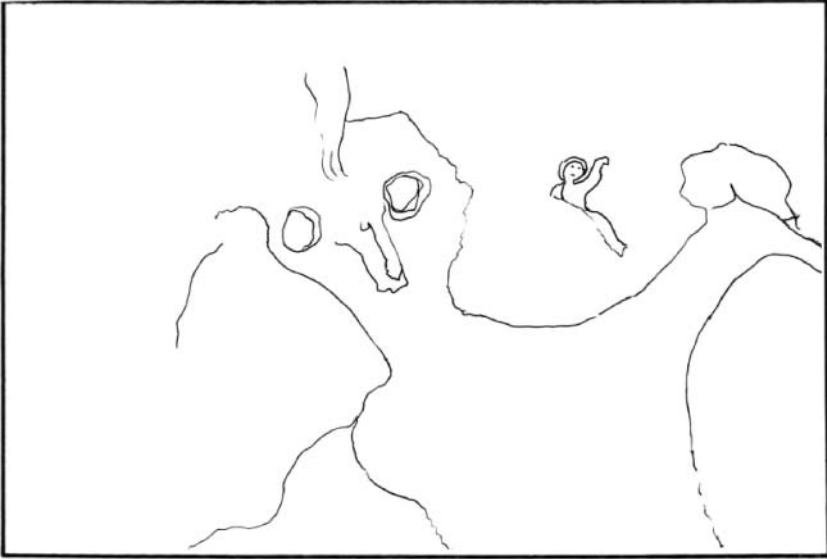


Figure 15. “Peasant Dance.” The young peasant woman dances in the background with a raised arm. Therefore, the repetition of configurations and contours of this figure are essential in the picture. Its meaning, importance of kind senses, and hope of happiness are strengthened.

tions, unity, and diversity is seen. When interpreting these interrelations, relying upon the role of people and things in the compositions, the following picture is formed. A powerful wave of male and female natures bursts into human and social life and forms its basis. This is expressed through the swift motions of a man and a woman on the right side, waves of this movement, and strong rhythms. An active energy of male and female overwhelming the picture is continued in the movement of energies of quarrelling and shouting people at the table. Evil feelings burst by splashes in the energetics and rhythmic of the most active moving persons. A kind of a hard and emotionally negative atmosphere of life is formed. However, in calmer persons, motions, and things, other proper spiritual fundamentals of life become visible. Spiritual centers of life are expressed by specific groups of people, motions, and expressions of their faces. Music and thinking are the centers of life, which is expressed by the figures of bagpiper and his interlocutor. From one’s very childhood, help to the weaker, care, and good feelings are certain spiritual bases of human life, which is expressed by the figures of girls on the right where the elder gives a piece of bread to the younger one. Love and hope illuminate the face of a maid dancing in the background and lifting her hand. These light, love-based feelings, uniting people as though shone through the

dominating heavy and emotionally negative atmosphere of life. It is clear that this metonymy is quite indefinite and semantically diffused, like other sign structures of a visual nature. In any case, the philosophical generalization of life made by Bruegel seems to be quite clear in the process of analysis of this painting, especially since it is concordant with a Christian world view.

Aforementioned metonymies of the picture have a denotative character, i.e., they are based mainly on denotations. *The metonymies of connotative character* also develop the general metonymy of life. First of all, this is related to the development of connotations of major elements of the picture. *Connotations of feet* form an important sign system of dance. The motions of dancing peasants have the character of rhythmic dynamic configurations. In this systemity, the main signs of dance are especially active — feet of dancing people. These configurations are topologically similar (Figure 16). Feet and surrounding configurations are of a similar color: black and black-and-white elements on the background of green. These configurations have analogies in those of the forefront, framing human figures. Signs of feet are related by a general system and points of the picture (Figures 17, 18, and 19). The denotation of feet also makes

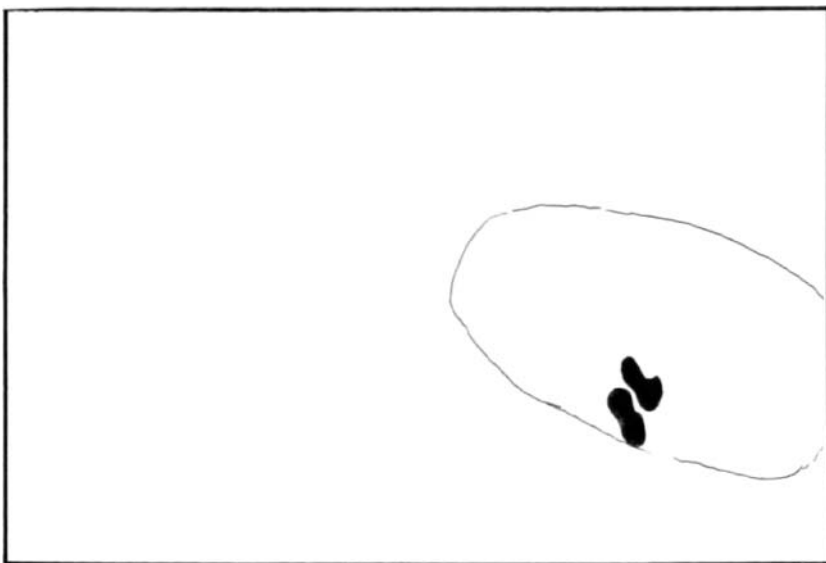


Figure 16. “Peasant Dance.” Configurations of dancing legs (male and female) designate the unity of male and female natures. The pair of black configurations here is the basis of a life dance. It is repeated in the large configuration of dancers.

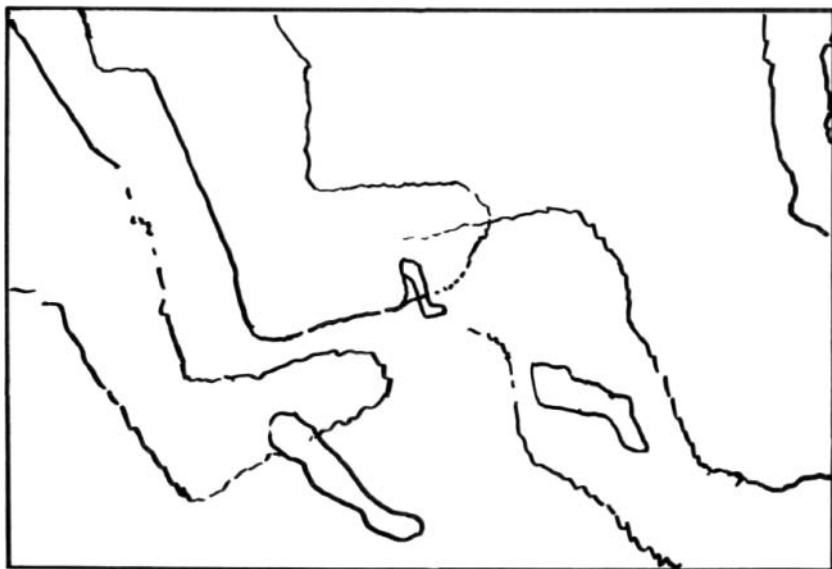


Figure 17. *“Peasant Dance.”* Legs, the signs of a dance, are “strewn” on the whole canvas. The repetition of the legs’ configuration brings the feeling of stamping footsteps into the picture. Huge legs carry the meaning of an invisible presence of giants.

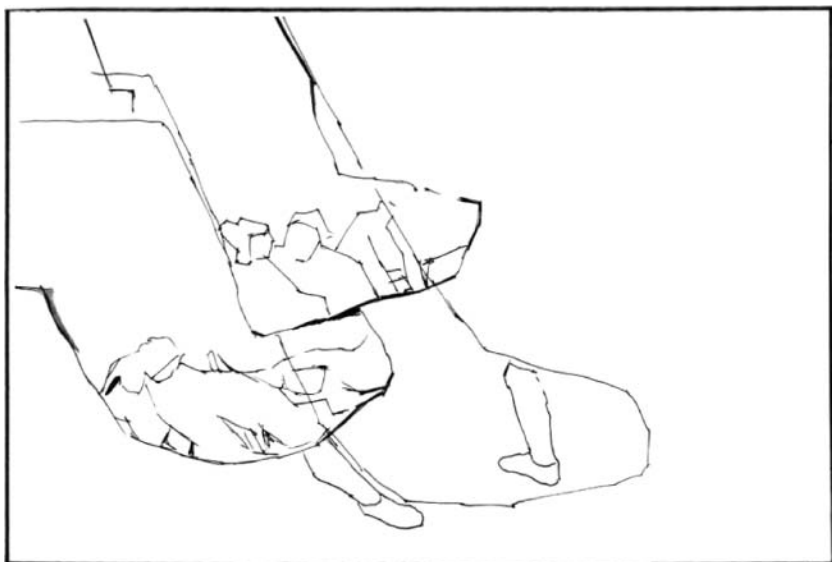


Figure 18. *“Peasant Dance.”* Legs are signs of a dance.

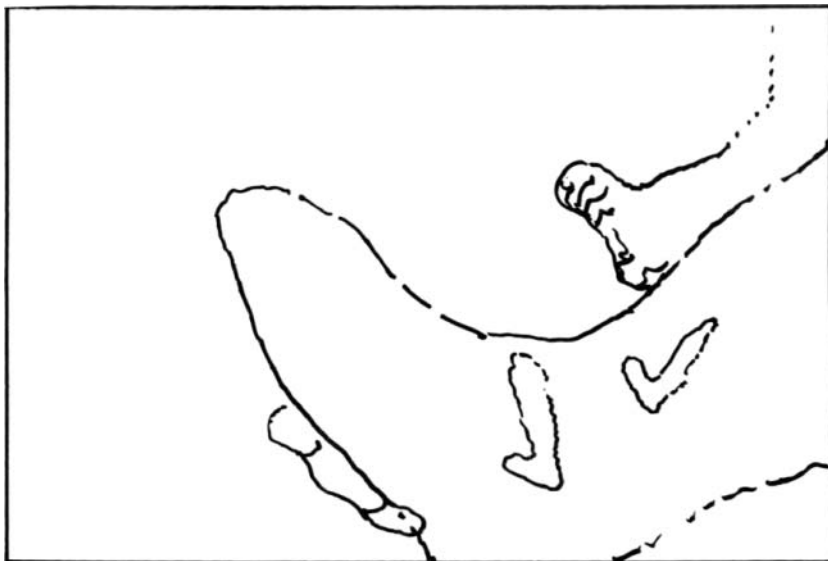


Figure 19. "Peasant Dance." Legs on the whole canvas are turned over and turned at different angles. The sense of careless fun is created.

it possible to emphasize symbolically an important connotation: the unity of male and female natures.

The metonymy of unity of male and female natures points to the basis of life. The dance is not only represented in the picture on several planes: large figures on the right side and small ones on the background. The dancing couples are reinforced by connotations: coupled elements and groups of elements (Figure 20). They resemble chromosomes. Male and female natures are represented as floating living bodies, which anticipates modern ideas of life. Analogies of feet complement the systemity of analogies of human figures. The configurations envelop each other and visually circulate. This complements the feeling of unity of dance, life energy, and general biorhythms of life.

Connotations of the heads and faces of depicted people become developed in the groups of analogical elements. The characteristics of peoples' clothes, ground fragments, and houses strengthen the rather rude appearance of peasants. These characteristics are developed in active configurations and lines. The development of these analogies makes the personages significant and organizes basic elements and interrelations at the levels of signals, representamens, and signs. Due to these general characteristics, different elements and interrelations are organized into integrities (Somov

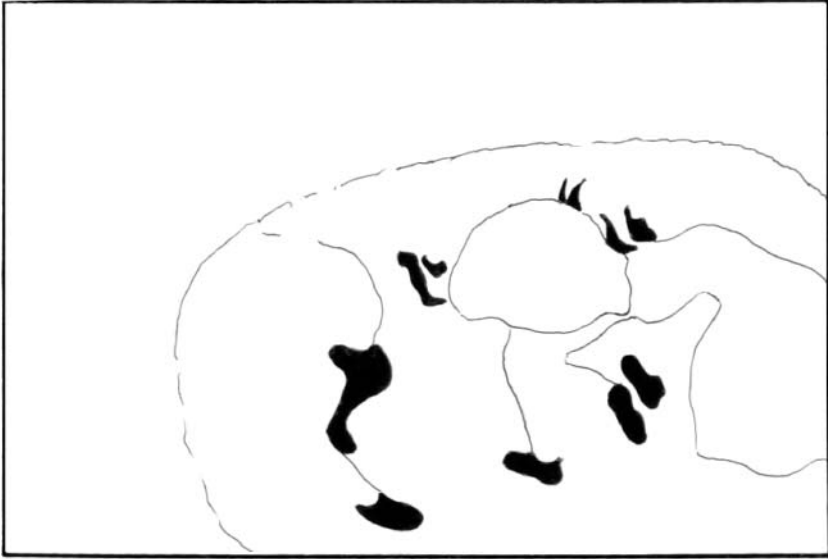


Figure 20. “Peasant Dance.” Configurations of dark boots straighten the meanings of paired origins of a life dance. These configurations are straightened in the picture as pairs of black signs. A united signed formation is created. Small black configurations are included in analogous large configurations. It reminds one of pairs of chromosomes floating in soft organic cells.

2006). These integrities “aspire” to become connotations, which are important for the intensification of emotive meanings and general effect of the picture. The profile of a woman going to dance on the right side is repeated in the contours, lines, and configurations of the left part of the picture (Figures 21 and 22). Houses form the signs of human faces. The connotations of heads and faces are revealed in the outlines of houses. These strange faces possess the features of represented peasants. The roofs resemble hats and caps pulled over the eyes. The spatial configurations of the roof have the features of the bagpiper’s head. Houses, faces, and clothes are united by common features. A visual integrity is formed. This is the basis for the formation of meaning of integrity of peasant life, its course, rhythms, events, and unity of people with their environment. *The connotation of the motion of dancing people* complements the unity of people and environment. The feeling of different bodies dangling from side to side is produced. Oscillating heads, bodies, and hands are complemented by “dangling” configurations of different elements of human figures (Figures 23–25). These configurations reinforce the general dynamics of dance and the feeling of festive mood (Figures 26–30). *The*

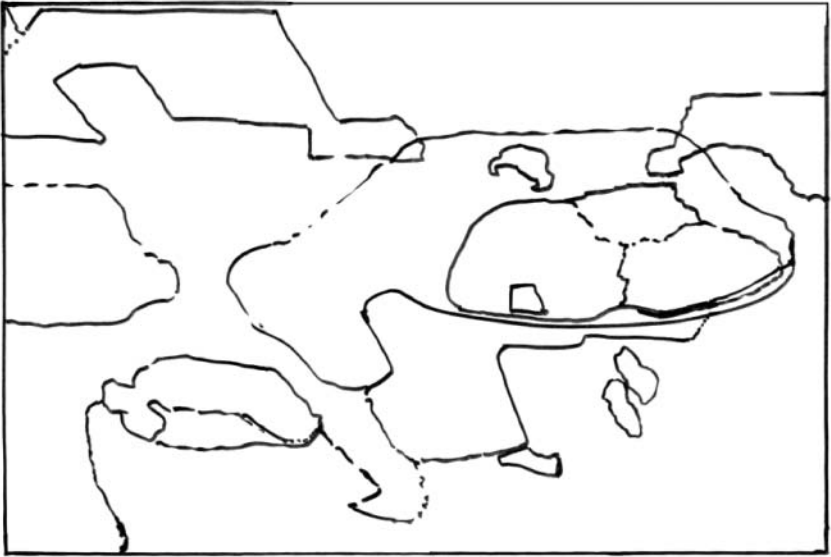


Figure 21. *“Peasant Dance.” The hat of the dancing man and its configuration. Configurations afloat in the air return for an evenness of the dance.*



Figure 22. *“Peasant Dance.” The kerchief on the head of a dancing women and its analogies in the picture. The fly-away kerchief signifies the whirlwind of the dance and life energy. Therefore, its typical configurations and outlines are developed on the whole image.*

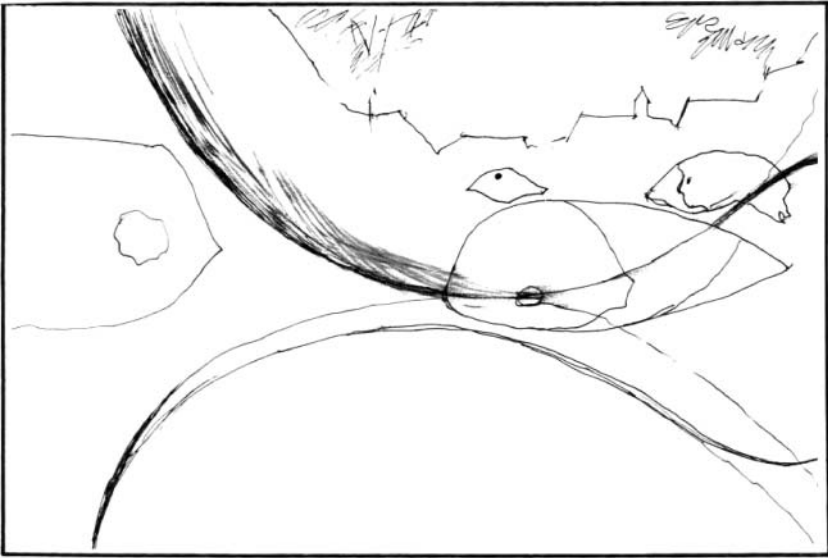


Figure 23. "Peasant Dance." The lines of heads, faces, and parts of clothes are organized as configurations of eyes. The outlines of the eyes are interrelated visually and semantically with the organizing configuration of the picture. The counters and color elements of dancing figures are subjected to the sphere outline. This sphere looks from above as it were a huge eye.

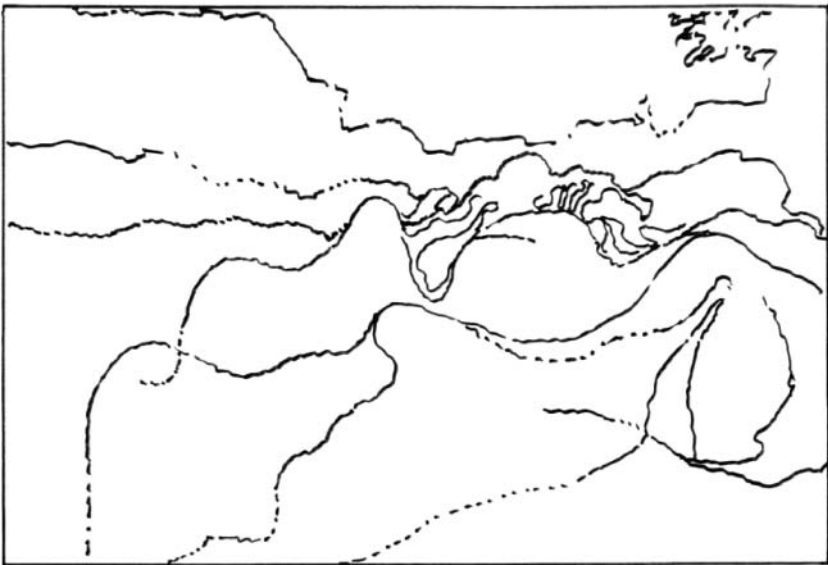


Figure 24. "Peasant Dance." Waves of dance. Surfs and crests of waves are in the distance, where young people dance.

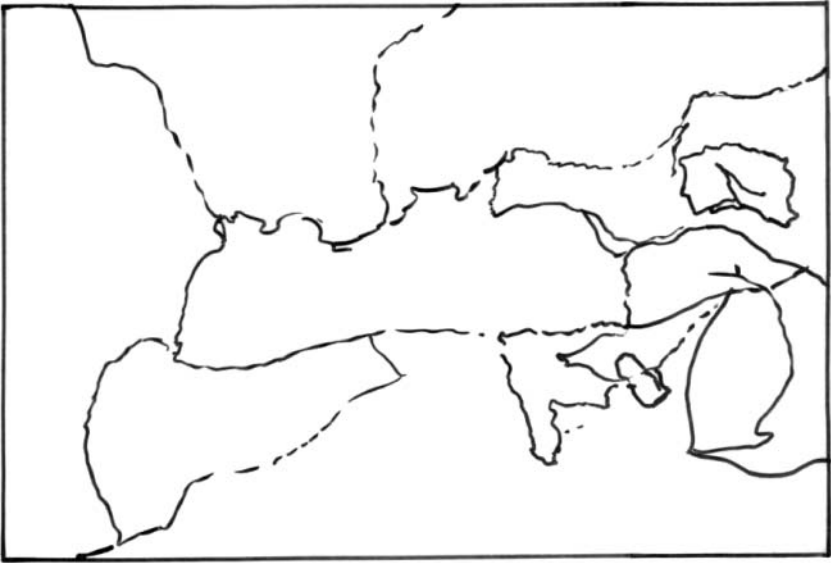


Figure 25. *“Peasant Dance.”* Waves of dance. The basic lines organizing color elements of the picture have an undulated character.

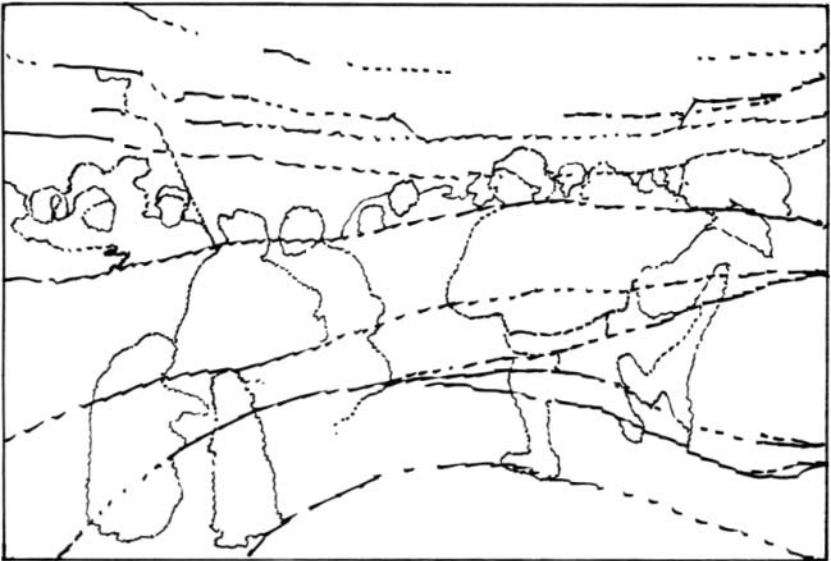


Figure 26. *“Peasant Dance.”* The heads of personages. Its strengthening in the large picture’s configurations makes the semantic contrast more active: the gust of dance — the calmness of the bagpiper and home peace.

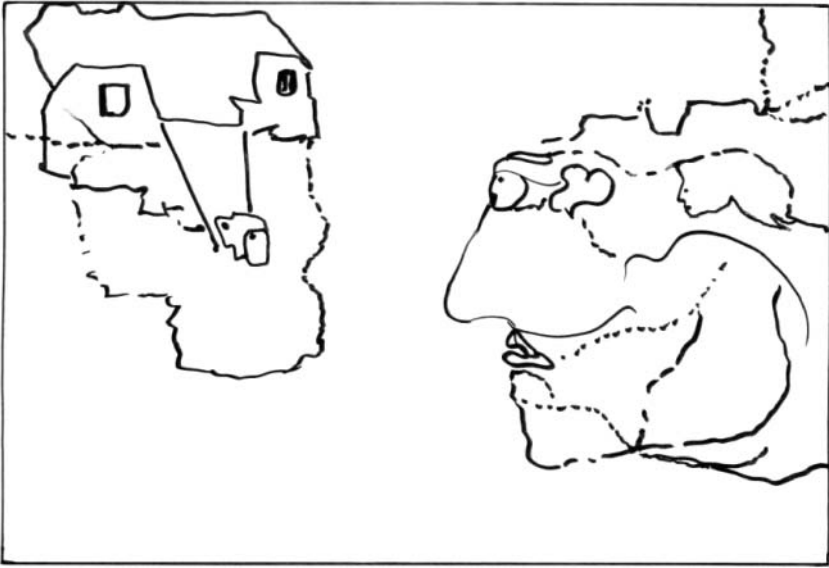


Figure 27. "Peasant Dance." Configurations of the bagpiper's head.

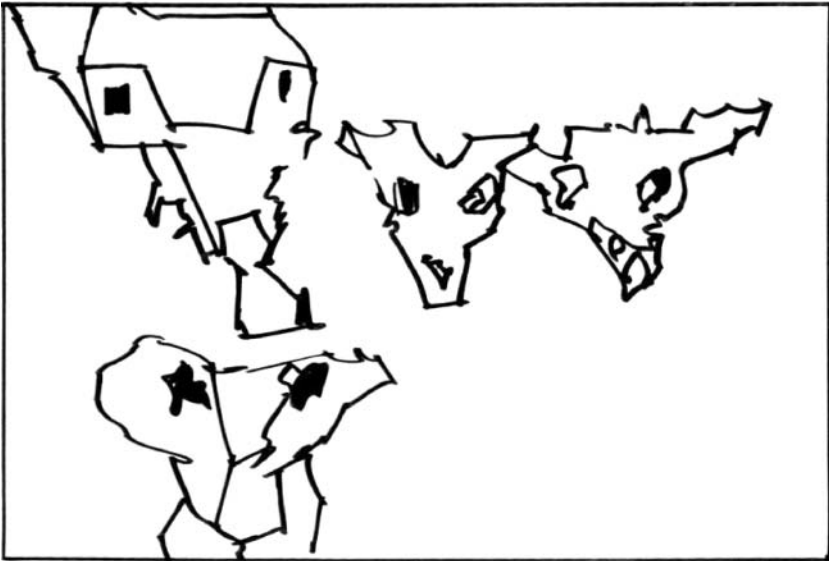


Figure 28. "Peasant Dance." Spirits on a holiday of life. Original color partitions of the large parts of the picture (the small color design of clothes, combination light and dark elements) allow Bruegel to introduce numerous hidden connotations into the picture. In a representation of real life, the artist continues his surreal motifs. Real denotations hide surreal connotations here.



Figure 29. "Peasant Dance." Monsters. Representations of hidden connotations are formed by active continuations of configurations and lines. The presence of monsters in a peace subject of the peasant dance imparts this scene (as other signed elements of the picture) with a more global character.

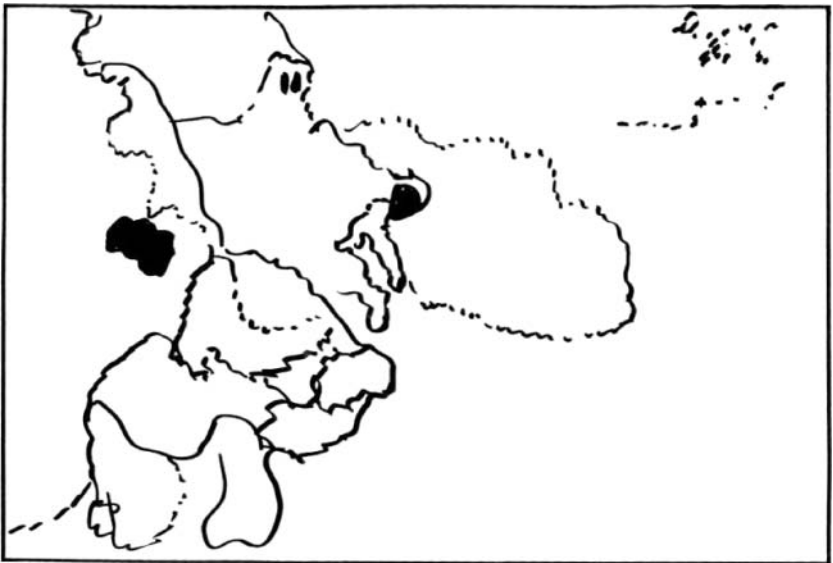


Figure 30. "Peasant Dance." Monsters. Various color elements of the picture's denotations allow the introduction of different connotations into the picture. Bruegel follows his intimate motifs of monsters. Hidden monsters make the more grim and create an atmosphere of mysticism.

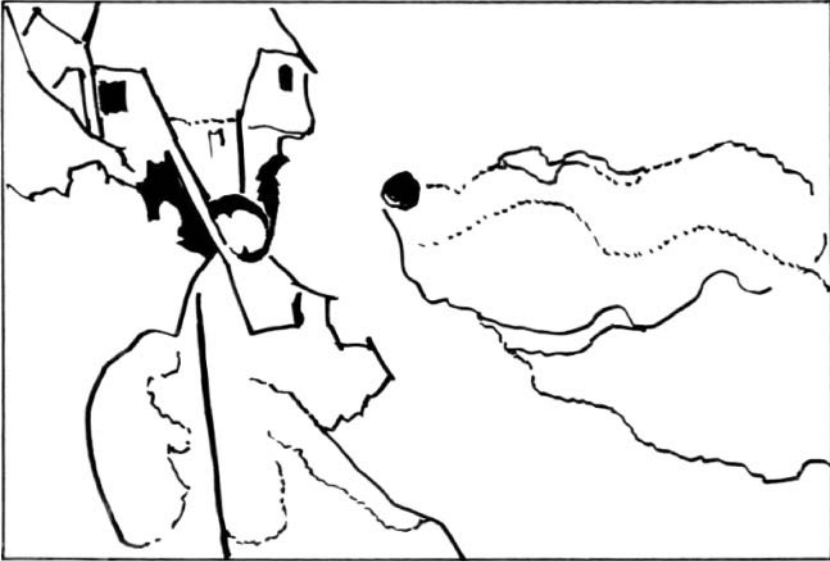


Figure 31. "Peasant Dance." *Flows of sounds. Signs of the bagpiper's mouth, head, and the bagpipe form active elements of the picture.*

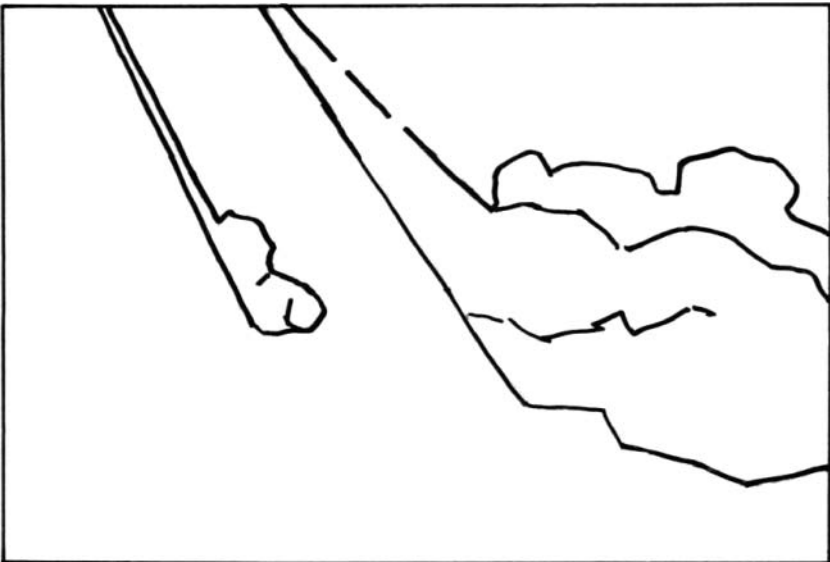


Figure 32. "Peasant Dance." *The outline of the bagpipe. Music as a basis of life gets an active expression.*

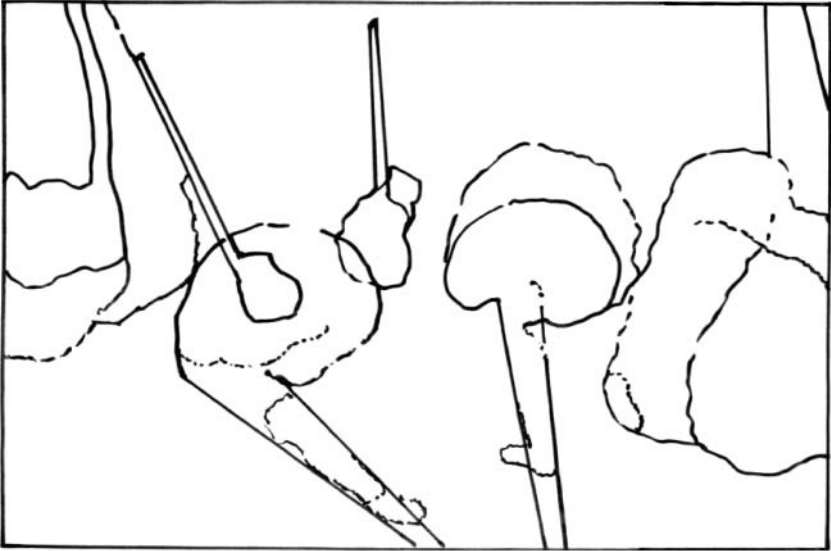


Figure 33. "Peasant Dance." The outlines similar to a bagpipe and reminiscent of several body organs are thrown about the entire field of the picture.

connotations of musical sounds complement the general emotional tune. Due to the analogies of bagpipe configurations, a specific sign role is assigned to the instrument in the picture. The configuration and inclination of bagpipe are likened to basic inclinations of the composition (figures 31–33). This strengthens the importance of bagpipe as the center of metonymy of life and produces a visual reinforcement of musical sounds.

Organizing sign structures of the picture complement and develop the general metonymy of life. In this work, these structures are mainly based on the combination of streamlined organic configurations and contours with sharp inclinations, triangle and trapeziform configurations. Inclinations formed by the contours of houses and the pipe of the bagpipe are organized into system-structural formations. In particular, basic configurations of dancing men and women become developed in specific sign structures (Figure 34). Analogies of configurations become actively developed in the entire composition of the picture and several analogous groups of elements and relations (Figures 35–39). These organizing structures promote the feeling of life integrity.

Visual meanings that develop a general metonymy are directly expressed in the sign form of a subjectless artwork such as *The Peasant Dance*. There is no doubt that denoted objects must possess the characteristics of real objects. But the most important moment is the generalization

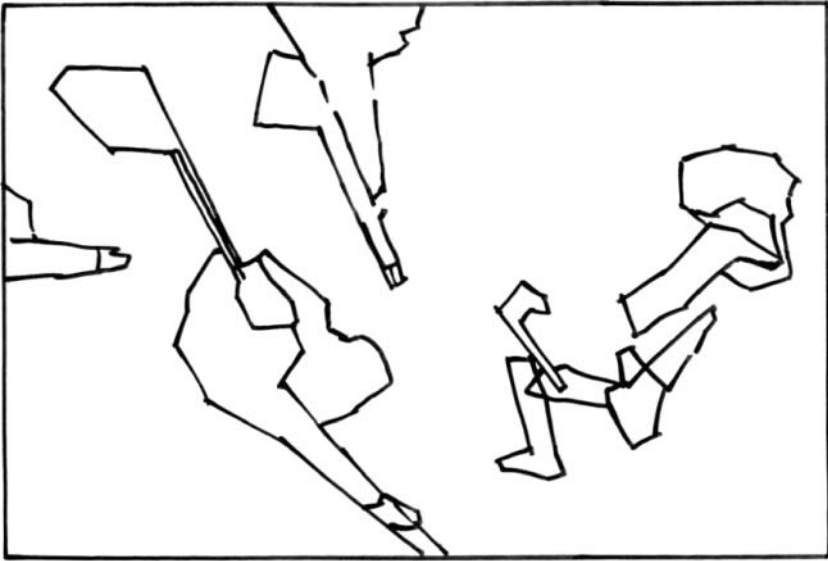


Figure 34. "Peasant Dance." Configurations reminiscent of bagpipes and boots form united signed formations in the picture.

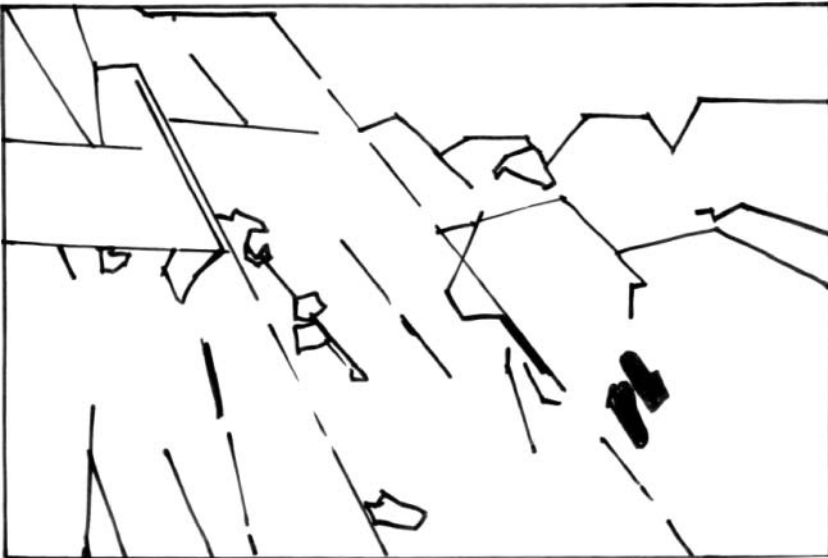


Figure 35. "Peasant Dance." Impetuous movement of a dance. Active elements are subjected to united diagonal movement of a flight on the left and up (into direction of a movement of general dancing personages).

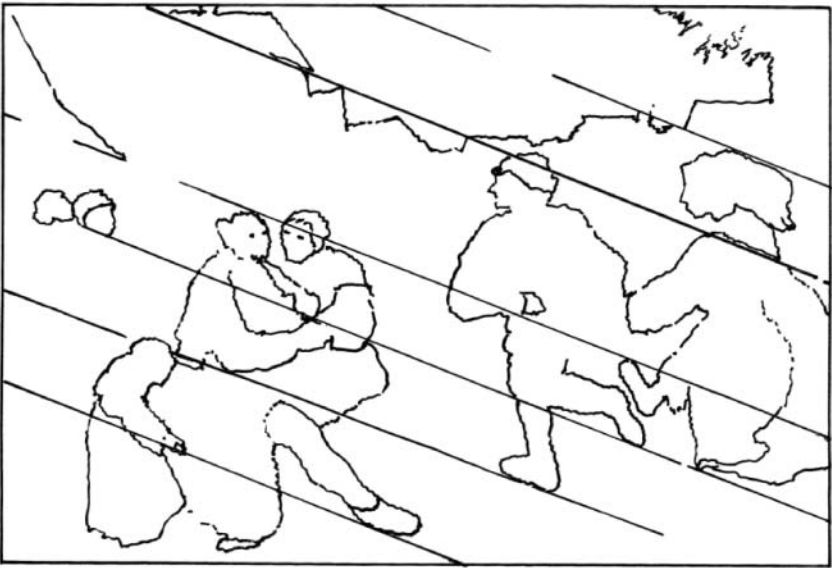


Figure 36. "Peasant Dance." Ascending diagonal movement. The formation of general dancing figures strengthens the meaning of a flight.

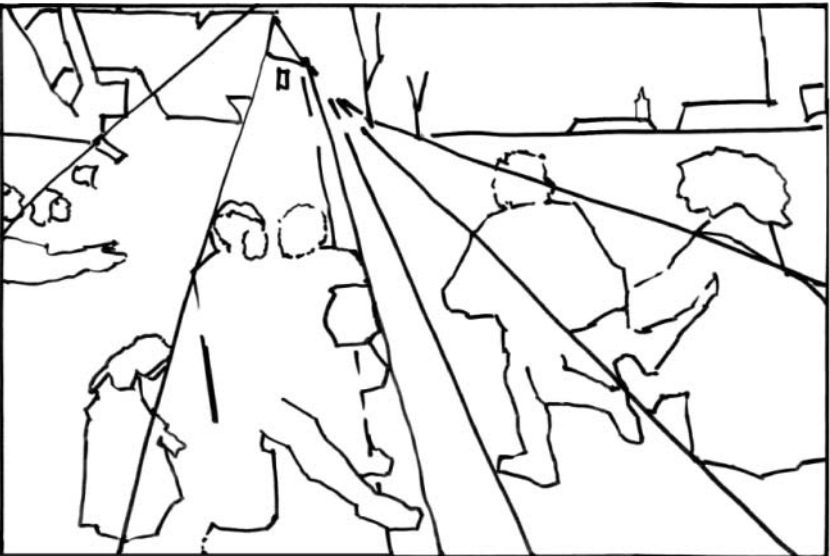


Figure 37. "Peasant Dance." Organization of general icons of the picture. The flag is the center of a formation. It strengthens its significance, and introduces the meaning of symbolic unity of people.

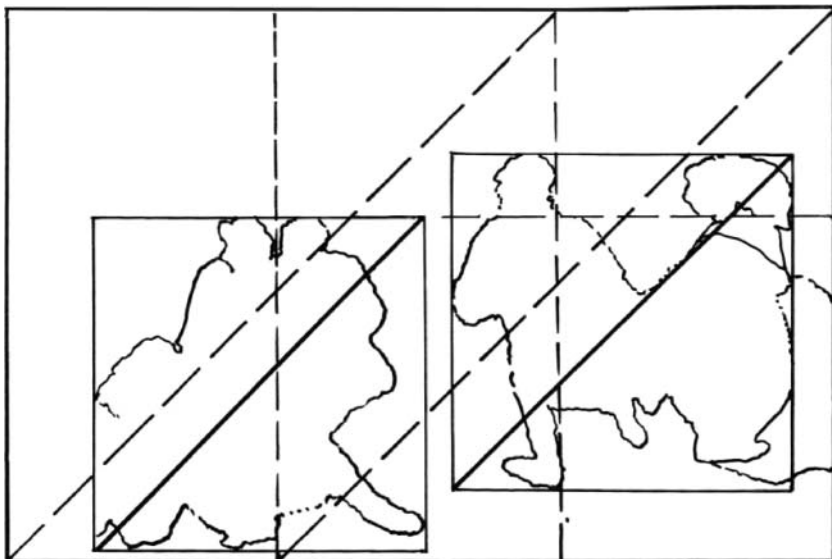


Figure 38. "Peasant Dance." Equal-sized squares organize general figures of people. It is created the unity of two basic groups of the characters.

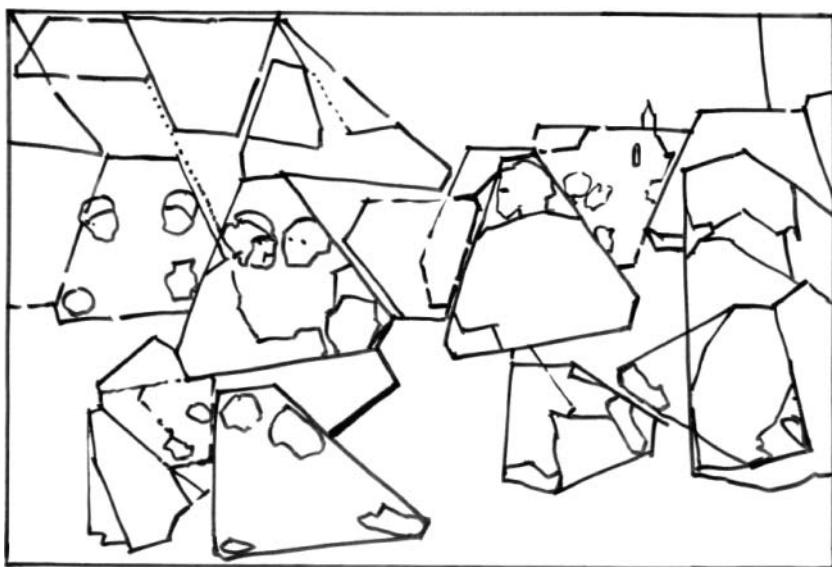


Figure 39. "Peasant Dance." Triangle and trapezium configurations of the picture. Dance of life is changed into color joyful pattern.

of these characteristics and creation of typical structures and their sign organization in a common sign form.

The context of the picture is a casual reality of Flanders of the sixteenth century. This context is incarnated in the convincingness of its sign form. Individual people, clothes, goods, and houses, being just “well depicted” as true and typical for their culture and time, would not be as convincing as those represented by Bruegel. This ethnocultural authenticity is formed semiotically. As a matter of fact, in our case we deal with a paradox: a spectator perceives houses, people, tools, and costumes as real things painted from nature and absolutely true; however, they are not taken from nature but, first of all, perfectly organized in sign formations of the picture.

The formation of the integrity of environment (architecture, tools, and clothes) in the picture by Bruegel coincides with the processes of formation of the same integrity in culture.

4. The world of social outcast, madmen, and victims

The Beggars is a painting by Bruegel that represents a fragment of a real life (Figure 40). At the same time, four main contexts help us to consider metonymies of this picture. (1) The cripples are signs of a grotesque, a carnival. A carnival is related to insanity. Insanity was considered to be a result of living together and the possibility of living in reality, under conditions of war, starvation, poverty, and torture. Related to this is a representation that God could be expressed only through deformity — through insanity in a cap of the fool and in ugly images (Dunning 1995: 47, 58–61). Here, ugliness has a godlike appearance (Eco 2007). The inability to find a way out of the inner yard is also a sign system in this context of insanity. (2) The beggars are cheaters representing the world of people-deceivers (Stechow 1968; W. Gibson 1977). This context was subjected to the greatest criticism since any deformities of the cripple are real; they surely did not amputate their legs to panhandle (Foote 1968). At the same time, several signs related to this context are possible. (3) The cripples are participants in, and pray for, a Flemish revolt. The closed space in which they are located is the Netherlands. The surrounding walls are the Hispanic power. The reality of this context is related by researchers to the exact image of the prosthetic devices that were made at that time by soldiers in the war. Noblemen used symbols of beggars, cripples, foptails, and empty spheres as emblems of Flemish resistance on their banners (M. Gibson 1989). There are no indications of leprosy on the cripples’ faces or hands. Therefore, the amputation of legs probably



Figure 40. *Bruegel the Elder, "The Beggars" (1568, oil on wood, 18 × 21 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris).*

testifies to their participation in the war (Foote 1968). (4) The dissension of people does not give them a way out of their poor, closed world into another, better world. Thus, it is possible to formulate a more general metonymy. There is the exact historical context of this metonymy that corresponds to Erasmus' teaching that violence from all sides is a cause of societal decline (Foote 1968). Signs of parts of social structure testify to a connection to this context (a mitre — the authority of the church; a crown — nobility; a combination of caps and foxtails — soldiers, burghers, and peasants involving in struggle). In this context, the allegory of the futility of the human struggle is created (the cripples' limp; the devout tax collector refusing to take responsibility for the condition of the cripples, for people's feelings). In this context, the picture shows the irony of an indictment of the uselessness of power and the infertility of the result. It is important as a comprehension of the complexity and concrete nature of these contexts that this picture was probably presented by Bruegel to Ortelius and assigned to the group of humanists (M. Gibson 1989;

Rocquet 1991, Sullivan 1991). Very competent people who understood the political, social, and philosophical facets of art, would have interpreted this picture.

In an analysis of *The Holy Trinity* (Somov 2007a) the author aimed to show how the combination of sign systems of different contexts is realized (wayfarers — angels — faces of the Holy Trinity as sign systems forming three levels). Something similar is realized in *The Cripples*. Sign systems of general metonymy overlay the sign systems that are conditioned on concrete contexts. The general metonymy, which creates the possibility of an infinite semiosis (Eco 1976) and unites different concrete contexts, can be approximately established with the help of a description of the visual semiotic systemities of the artwork, and the general context of life situations (a combination of semiotic systemities of different life situations: a space and its limitations; ways of movements; poses; gestures; expressions; efforts; movements; meanings of characters, etc.). This direction of semiotic analysis is further accepted as the basic idea. The author will try to tie together concrete historical contexts with a construction of the general metonymy.

The Beggars or *The Cripples* are considered as two names of this picture. Either name is possible, but it is important to see dependence: in this case the cripples become beggars. It is more accurate to see the theme of the picture is social outcasts — the beggars — cripples who have their own world and ways are shown. Further, the picture is connected with the idea of the cripples'/beggars' world and ways that also display the world and ways of many people. However, the artist does not restrict himself to credibility. He aspires to represent some generalization, which presupposes the formation of metonymy using the entire range of sign tools. The development of general metonymy in this work proceeds mainly along the lines of denotations and connotations. On the fundament of the central denotations of the picture, individual metonymies are formed, being subordinated to a general metonymy.

In the process of formation of general metonymy, *the sign form and context* of the picture are united in the verbal fundament of denotation. *The verbal fundament of denotation* generates a general metonymy of the picture. Picture title and the persons represented form the sign of “engaging.” The cripples themselves, independent of the character of their representation, picture composition, color peculiarities, etc., represent the sign-metonymy. The cripples denote pain, anguish, evil fate, and separation of the world of outcasts from the world of common people. These metonymies are developed in other metonymies of sign form of a denotative character (space structure, skyline, road, gates leading to a garden on the background, etc.).

The sign form of the picture is a complicated integration of denotations, connotations, and organizing sign formations. Among the picture denotations, several basic ones can be outcropped: that of space and major elements of the environment (walls, path, garden in the background, and wasteland); that of depicted persons (their interrelations, poses, and denoted emotional states), and that of clothes, supports, crutches of represented people, and other details. Each of these denotations contributes to the formation of metonymy of the picture. Each of these particular metonymies joins the general metonymy of the work.

Organizing sign formations of the picture substantially contribute to the systemity of denotative and connotative metonymies. However, their basic role is to create a specific emotional atmosphere of the picture and form the meanings of uncertainty, pain, shouting, and fighting and surviving biological bodies. Following the division of denotations, connotations, and organizing sign formations, I will try to represent the formation of metonymies of this work by Bruegel.

Denotative metonymy of the spatial allocation of objects and the cripples' environment seems to be a convenient term for the sign formation of the picture, which forms its central meanings. The cripples are placed in a grass-grown wasteland. A blooming garden is opposed to the insularity and roughness of the brick walls in the forefront. These walls separate the remote landscape from the wasteland where the cripples trample. The road leading to the gates and garden can be interpreted as the termination of the course of righteous life by the gates and gardens of paradise. Therefore, the manner of spatial denotation of the road, allocation, and movement of cripples is an important sign formation of the picture, or the fundament of its metonymy. The spatial structure is activated by the characteristics of the house walls. Brick houses have no windows. As a result, they generate a clear geometrical space of the picture, and limit and direct possible motion. The levels of metonymy are formed: the limitation of motion and its possible direction, choice of life course, and possibility to exit to another reality and follow the way of righteous men. These features of spatial organization are complemented by the motions of persons. The cripples crowd on a lawn. The absence of headway is opposed to the line of the road. They seem to have no way there. They move in different directions and circle-wise, and they stamp on the spot. Only a faceless dark figure moves away on the right. Its meaning will become clearer when we analyze the sign system of represented persons.

The denotations of space and time form the metonymy of future and the way leading there also due to a view from above. The exposure of the land from above is a sign system typical for pictures by Bruegel and continues the traditions of medieval icon painting, those of the works by

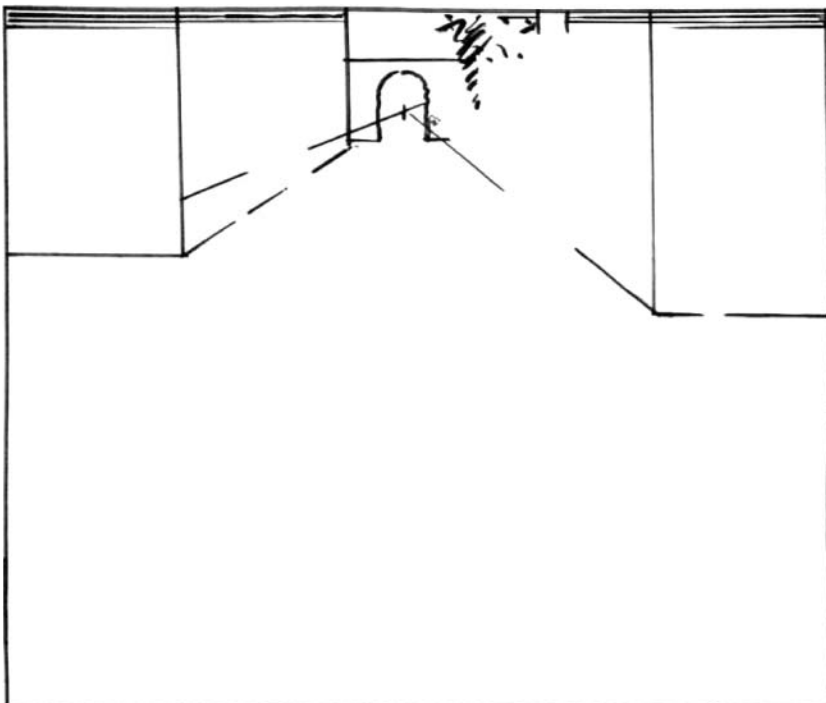


Figure 41. “*The Beggars.*” Sign systems of space. Geometrical perspective with the point of a line junction in the center of the gate denotes the way. The effect of escaping out of a closed space to this goal is created. Horizontal lines at the top form another system. They are raised over the junction point, located above the skyline. The meaning of border for movement upward is created. The sign system of space geometry forms meanings of limitation and predestination of the world and the destiny of the cripples.

Rogier van der Weyden, Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck, Hieronymus Bosch, and other Bruegel predecessors. To look at an event from above is to see the picture in a broader way and to combine heterochronous events in space and time. Sign possibilities of this vision have been partly demonstrated earlier in the course of the analysis of *The Slaughter of the Innocents*. In the system of the work analyzed, independent functions are inherent to the following elements: horizon, junction points, lines of perspective and ways to junction points, and the systems of denotation of horizons and junction points on the plane (Figure 41). A special role is assigned to the horizon. The skyline matches the top of the picture. The land and brick walls are opened up in the perspective. Wall height is equal to human height. This technique produces the impression as if a

man of a common height looked at the cripples. Active horizontal lines of brick rows in the upper part of the picture strengthen the combination of skyline with its upper edge. The future is as though opened along the upper cut border. The meaning of spiritual way to the heaven is reinforced. The rush upwards is the way of the righteous. *The metonymy of way* is formed on the basis of aforementioned sign systems. This is a conditional indication that the cripples may enter the paradise. Visually, the top is cut off, and thus, this is a kind of limitation of transition from the lower world of cripples to the upper one. This separation of two worlds is expressed by sharp visual barriers: horizontal lines and frame. The emphasized cut characteristic of the top and skyline also denotes the unattainability of the future. The meaning of the obstacle in the way is produced: the cripples will hardly inhabit heaven. Active horizontals generally denote the impossibility of rising above the horizon plane. These signs lead to a general interpretant: these people have little possibility to reach the “upper world” of radiant future. The impossibility of a way out of one closed space into another, better world outside the gate has been identified as a stable meaning of this space (Cooper 1978).

The denotations of space domains also create the basis of metonymy. The following spatial domains are formed: (1) the space of the cripples' habitation, or wasteland; (2) a lateral space on the right side where the faceless figure goes; (3) the gardens on the background, (4) and the glittering wet path, which begins on the right and leads to (5) the gardens in the center of the picture. The space of wasteland where the cripples trample denotes the area of the outcast. On the right, there is the casual world of urban residents. The remote gardens where the path leads are the world of radiant future and goal of the way. The road leading to the gates denotes the direction of motion towards this goal. The picture of these different domains is specified by sign tools. The faceless figure carries the money collected by the cripples. Hence, the space to the right where it directs its way denotes the world where money can be found together with accompanying goods, pleasures, temptations, and sins, i.e., the reality of casual life of urban residents, the world of money and amenities.

The world of cripples and that of urban residents are related to the paradise gates, each in its own way. The wasteland occupied by the cripples marks out a specific way to the goal, separated from that leading from the city. In the verbal context, the way to the gates and gardens denotes simultaneously the course of life and spiritual growth of a righteous man ending in heavenly crests. The main road leading there begins in the space on the right side — in the city inhabited by common people. The world of cripples is isolated from this main way, which is invisible from the wasteland. The direct way to the goal from the world of the cripples passes

through wet grass and mud. The beaten track begins not at the wasteland, but in the civil world on the right. An unobtrusive idea is produced that the way to the heavenly future is stricter and simpler for ordinary people. Nevertheless, the idea by Bruegel can be understood in the manner that the possibility to enter paradise is related not to health and welfare but to a spiritual choice of a person. Different variants of this choice are represented in the sign system of main personages of the picture — in the metonymy of differences of psychic world. *The metonymy of differences in the psychic world of personages* is based on their different allocation in space, difference and specificity of their poses, gestures, and expressions. Each personage is a symbol; taken together, they form a certain sign system simulating the differences in human psychic world. The black figure on the right differs markedly from the group of cripples. This is the figure of woman beggar. She carries the money collected by the cripples to the lateral space. Her toe and the plate with money are sharply cut off by the edge of the picture. The alms are separated from the cripples, together with goods and pleasures. The black figure is awful; its face is especially exaggerated and inhuman. This figure clearly symbolizes evil forces linking the world of cripples to the world of money and partially the world of money itself. The exaggerated inhumanity of this face in this sign system means that money and psychic world of anguish are situated in different realities. Making a contrast with the black figure of the beggar, the cripples notably express different aspirations, emotions, and moods. Differences and peculiarities of their psychic world form a certain sign system and express a definite philosophical concept.

As various researchers have noted, the orientation of the cripples' figures into diverse opposites of the space signifies conflict, differences in their aspirations and hopes. One crippled woman looks at the gates far off. This means that she sees the future and turns towards a spiritual way. Other cripples avert their faces from this future and the way leading there. Their figures and faces are turned to a spectator. The layouts of their heads and faces are opposed visually to a white circle of the head of cripple on the left. Another crippled woman looks at the lateral road to the right, i.e., she would like to approach to mundane things, to civil life, and pleasures of ordinary residents. Three persons turn their backs to both the ways to the future and the present life. Two of them are in a sorrowful and angry conversation. The face of a woman with a wry mouth definitely expresses the anger. A cripple with his face covered with a cap listens to her silently. He sees nothing around him. This can be understood as if he does not perceive the world of humans. The crippled woman in the center seems to lose all emotions besides the only primary response of a living organism — crying. She is turned into one

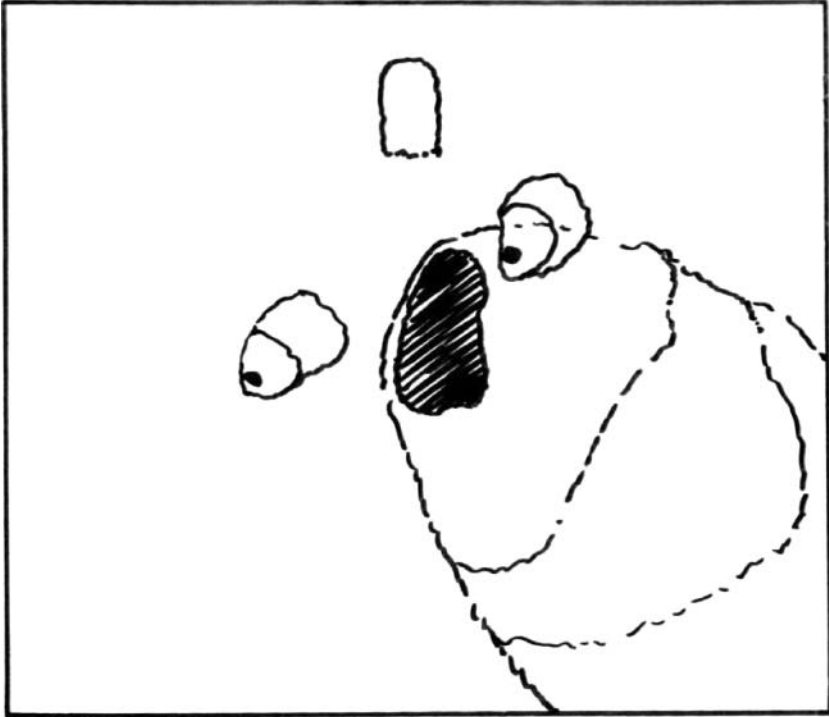


Figure 42. *“The Beggars.” Signs of crying. There are configurations of an opened mouth in the outlines of a crying cripple.*

big sign of crying. This strongest state becomes the strongest emotional meaning of the whole picture, which is non-visual and acoustic. In connection with this, the characteristics of the head and mouth of a shouting cripple become actively developed in the analogies of visually active elements and relations (Figures 42 and 43). Unlike the faces of other personages, the face of a crying woman is actively partitioned by the picture of lines. According to the rules of analogies, these features are developed in other elements of the picture as the most important characteristics of the face of a crying cripple: dark eyes, round mouth, and sharp lines. The development and enhancement of features is achieved by the accentuation of outlines of a crying cripple and by the configurations of groups of cripples' figures in general (Figure 44). The artist reinforces the importance of the crying person. He stresses the position of her head by the representation of column and its vertical lines. The cries are filled with tears (Figure 45).

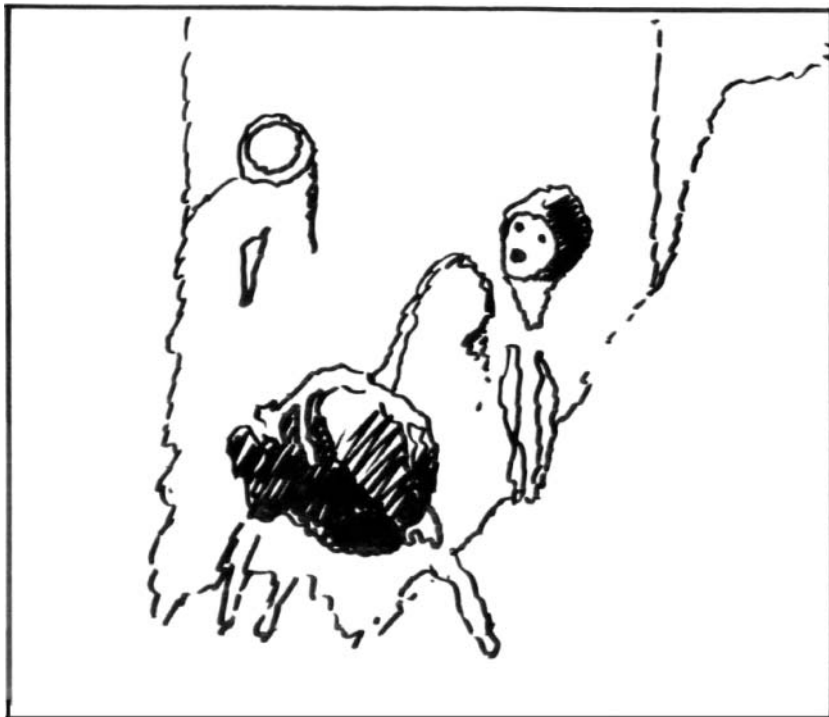


Figure 43. "The Beggars." Signs of crying. The signs of a crying cripple's face are repeated in the configurations and lines of the picture.

There is a conceptual moment in the contraposition of five cripples. As it can be seen from the interpretation above, the aspiration towards the future and spiritual way is opposed to the main "companions" of people rejecting this way: anger, lamentations, indifference, craving for pleasures, and pain caused by everyday severities. This concept seems to characterize not only the psychic world of the cripples, but the psychic world of humans as a whole. Bruegel painted *The Cripples* as a metonymy of human world. This comes to mind as all people can be helpless, address each other, complain, feel angry, shout of pain, lean on supports, and turn their back to spiritual life. If we interpret the image of the cripples as the model of psychic world of humans, the question arises: What does the dark figure carrying the money mean? If the cripples represent the picture of human psychic world, then the figure with money refers to another reality. The world of money, riches, and related evil forces lies out of the frames of human psychic world and forms a principally different

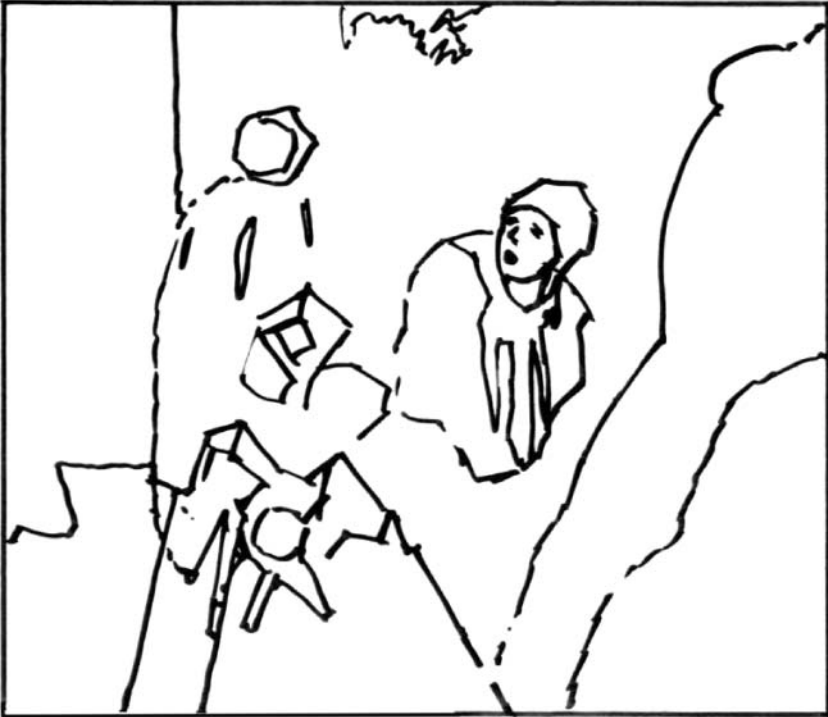


Figure 44. "The Beggars." There are signs of a crying cripple in the configurations and lines of the picture. A cry which is flying away. Crutches, together with the contours of the figure's bottom resembles ugly teeth in an open mouth.

reality. It is natural that the walking black figure on the extreme right painted half face is opposed to an extreme left white figure turning its back to a spectator. Visual contrasts of these figures reinforce the semantic opposition of spiritual aspirations and the world of money. A sinister sense of the figure of the money collector was noted by researchers (M. Gibson 1989); essentially, that she carries it away from the cripples into another world.

Organizing sign formations are to a great extent interrelated with the forming of differences and specificity of the cripples. The leading role in this organization belongs to various contrasts of visually active elements. The contrasts produce tension; color accents become emphasized. Clothes, head covers, and artificial organs are represented in different ways. The differences of these elements by configurations, contours, directions, color, and texture make it possible to increase the differences



Figure 45. "The Beggars." There are tears that are falling down from the sky. A drawing of small and big tears forms the united system of signs. The outlines of the tears tie together light configurations with several parts of clothes, pattern of grass, walls, and trees.

among cripples' faces and their meanings, to reveal poses and gestures, and relate designates of internal aspirations and emotional states. The differences in the color and forms of sleeves make it possible to relate the differences among figures with the similarity of crutches and hands leaning against them. The strong figures lean on crutches and the silence of the leftmost figure denote his will. The lean and internal efforts are underlined by the picture of sleeve folds resembling swelled veins. A serpentine ornament of sleeve folds of a speaking cripple reinforces the wriggling serpentine character of her figure and develops serpentine wrinkles of her face. Hardly noticeable sleeve folds of a crying cripple denote the simplicity and naturalness of her shout. Active contours of the sleeve and crooked fingers of the rightmost cripple strengthen his figure as a sign of a moving, creeping creature.

Systems of color elements form active configurations. Three groups of colors are distinguished in color balance of the picture: (1) warm red-

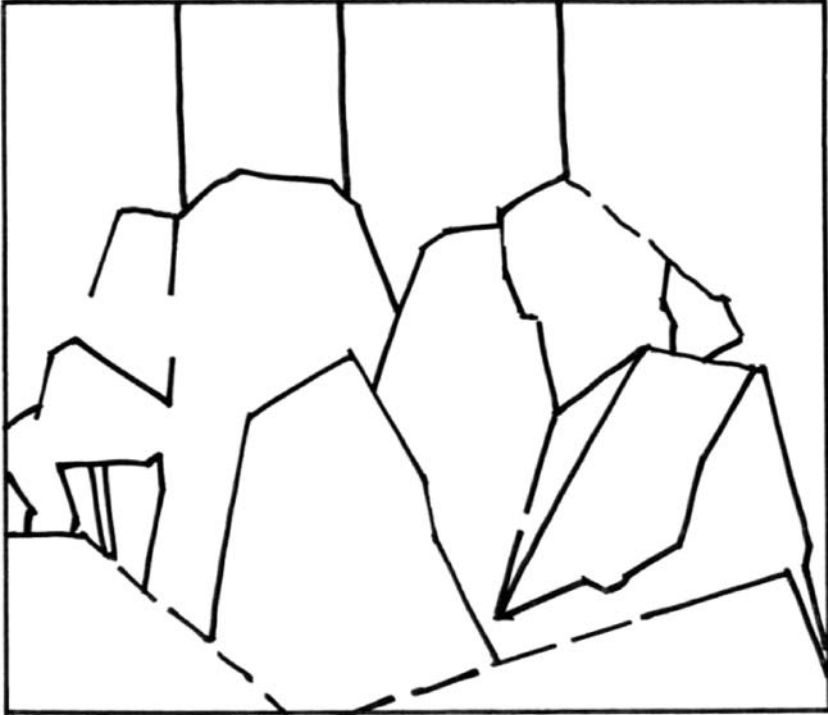


Figure 46. “*The Beggars.*” *Figures of cripples are organized as geometrical configurations.*

brownish and yellowish, (2) greenish, and (3) cold white-grey-black tints. Each of these groups of color configurations gets the character of an integer configuration. These integer configurations become connotative. They resemble stumps, artificial limbs, and crutches, which are the parts of cripples (Figure 46). The fragmentation of color pattern comes to a maximal tension in the front figure. A fine pattern of indented white configurations is created there. From left to right, these patterns rhythmically develop into larger white configurations.

The necessity of the organization of heterogeneous visually active color configurations, various lines, and contours demanded the formation of an integer systemity. Organizing outlines are produced in complicated configurations of contours (Figures 47 and 48). Some of them resemble beaks sticking into human beings. These contours resemble the contours of the bird-like monster represented in the picture of hell by Bosch (Figures 49 and 50). Bosch’s monster, who gobbles up people, was a strong sign stuck in Bruegel’s memory. In *The Beggars*, this metaphor contributes to the



Figure 47. "The Beggars." Configurations of cripples' figures are divided by similar triangular-trapezoid configurations.

metonymy: defenselessness of a human makes him a potential victim. Said less definitely, the penetration of raptorial beaks into a biological mass strengthens the connotative senses of the cripples and men as sacrifices.

Organizing structures relating denotations and connotations strengthen the general meaning of the artwork and form its cumulative effect on a spectator. Unified structures and features organize heads and faces, contours and configurations of the earth, outlines of clothes, parts of body, crutches, and artificial limbs. As a result, in combination with the systemity of space construction, new connotations are produced. Strong horizontals in the upper part of wall plane and geometric bodies of generated spaces are interrelated with the systemity of major denotations (division of spaces, goal of motion, road, and skyline). Therefore, these organizing elements and structures are included into the expression of metonymy of limitation and constriction of life of the outcast cripples. The planes, di-

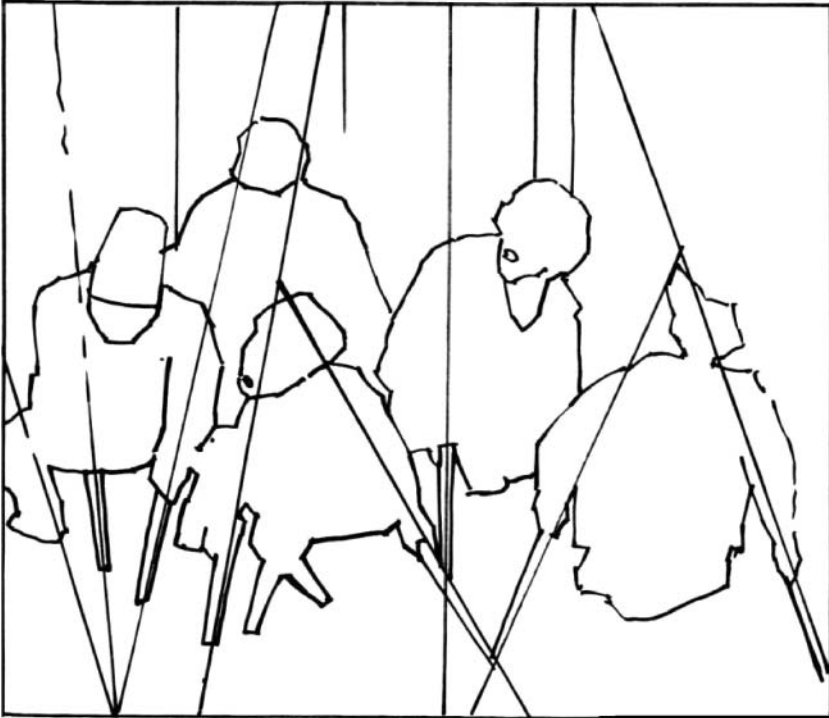


Figure 48. *“The Beggars.”* General configurations, lines, and axes form the systemity. Connection and persuasiveness these visual elements strengthen the significance of crutches, the cripples’ movements on crutches. Meanings of brokenness, tenseness, and opposition to external forces are created.

rections of motion, and different orientations of human figures form a general systemity. As a result, dispersed visual meanings are formed: bristling crutches supporting the cripples are organized as pronounced inclined lines and axes, triangle and trapeziform configurations. With the help of such analogies, the connotations of artificial limbs and crutches are developed across the whole visual field. This increases the general impression of crippled persons. Supports and crutches denote the main difference of cripples from common people and their separation from a healthy organic life in general. In connection with this, the connotations of this kind became actively developed in the picture. The system and structural formations of ovals are organized in order to make contrast with the configurations of supports and crutches. Together with bars and crutches, they produce the general sign structure. The interrelations of



Figure 49. "The Beggars." The outlines of heads of raptorial birds are developed in configurations and lines of the picture. Its presence reminds one of Bosch's bird-headed monster gobbling up people.

oval "remnants of soap pieces" and crutches generate a specific sign systemity (Figures 51–56). Remnant organisms exist, move, and envelop each other as far as they lean upon sharp and dynamic crutches. In the combination of organic oval and artificial geometrized sharp-angled bodies, the meaning of interrelation of natural and artificial natures in human existence is formed. The remnants rolled by life, like the gravel and wood rolled by water, move with the help of supports. Hence, the composition demands the development of rounded forms in the background. Faceless oval forms denote the bodies without organs of perception. These are simultaneously stumps and some living clots of energy. Connotative living organisms move into the group of cripples like souls of the parallel world. They live their own life, swim, somersault in space, breathe, and pulse in their own rhythm. The connotations of this kind mystify the picture and assign it a sinister mood. Present connotations

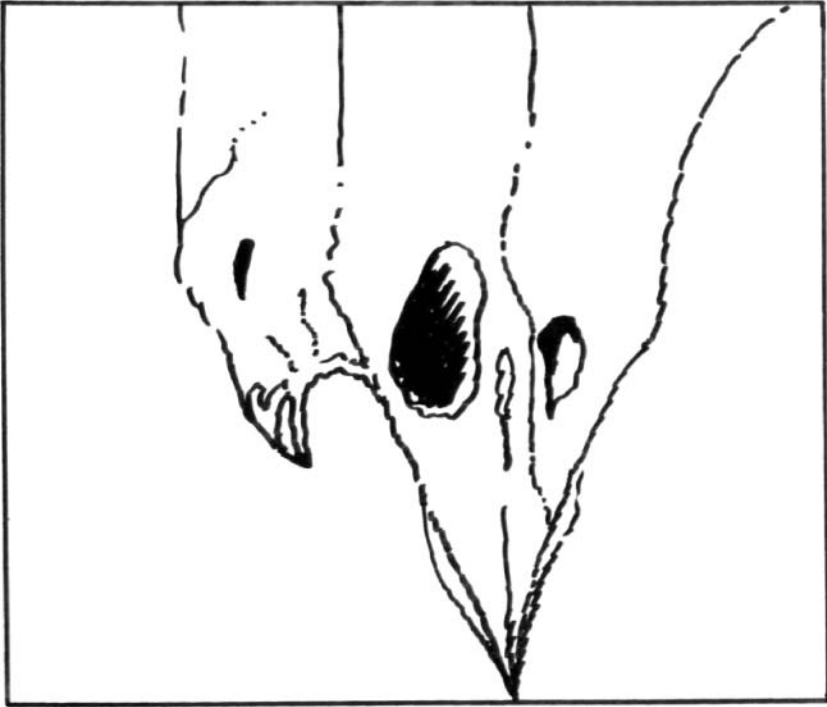


Figure 50. “*The Beggars.*” There are the outlines of heads of raptorial birds. In the context of Bosch’s bird-headed monster, it is a hint that the cripples are the prey of dark forces.

serve as an illustration of the concept of ugliness, as the appearance of a godlike nature. Configurations — stumps, deformed swimming organisms, bristling fingers, begging hands — correspond as well as possible to the idea of the controllability of human existence and their ugliness as the appearance of God (Dunning 1995).

Like in the picture *The Peasant Dance*, the context of the artwork is represented by everyday life. In the *Peasant Dance*, this context of life is maximally involved in the picture. On the contrary, in *The Beggars*, the artist tried to get rid of it completely. As can be understood from the role of denotations in metonymy production, this expulsion of the context of a real city (houses, inhabitants, and goods) carries specific functions. The houses were used in order to organize the space. They serve the creation of metonymy of different worlds and ways to the future. In addition, windows, doors, tables, and other household goods are important for the world of common people plunged into the arrangement of the

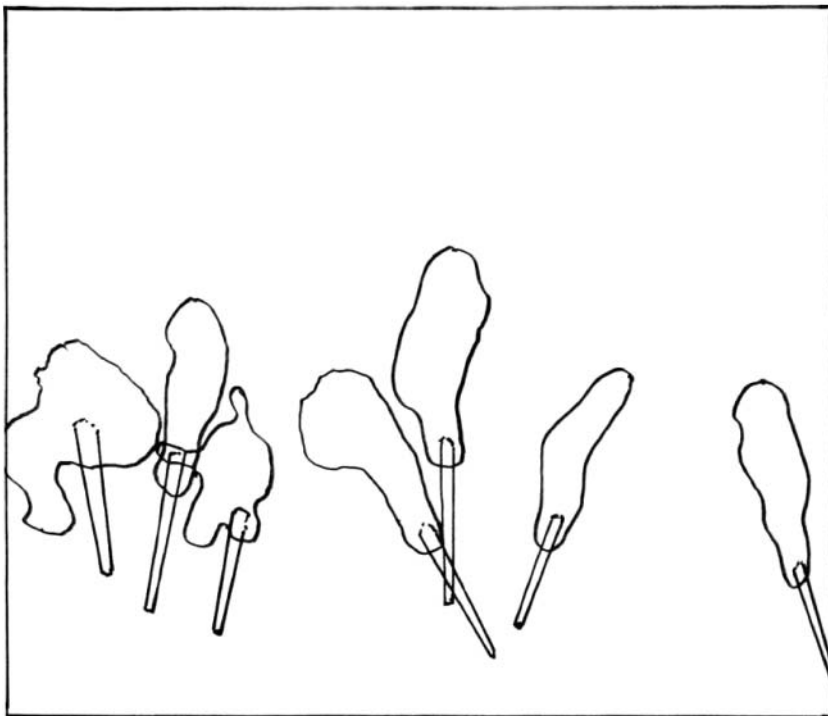


Figure 51. "The Beggars." There are periodic combinations of configurations of arms and crutches. Present repetitions make more active the meaning of tenseness. The hand squeezing a crutch becomes the sign of a vital support of the cripple.

comforts of life. In order to express the isolation of outcast cripples, their environment is represented as barren of goods and unattractive. This helps one to better understand that the metonymies of visual artworks and their basic meanings determine the involvement of this or that indispensable context. More broadly, this is the artwork which governs the context, but not vice versa.

The analysis of last works by Bruegel demonstrates that the subjects and life scenes selected by the artist were only the occasion for the expression of significant senses and the development of a world model. I have tried to demonstrate that this representation is achieved due to the systemities of metonymies. Individual metonymies form more general ones, which, in their turn, are united in a certain universal metonymy of visual artwork. In the works by Bruegel, these metonymies have the character of models of cognition of human being and life and become rich food for philosophical thoughts.

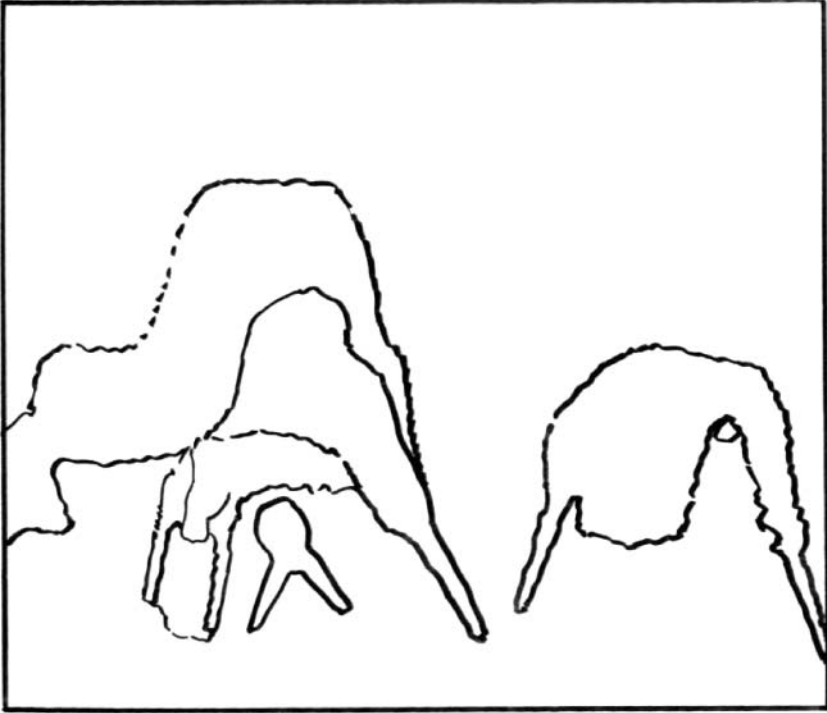


Figure 52. *“The Beggars.”* Analogy of the configurations of groups strengthens the significance of crutches and prosthetic devices.

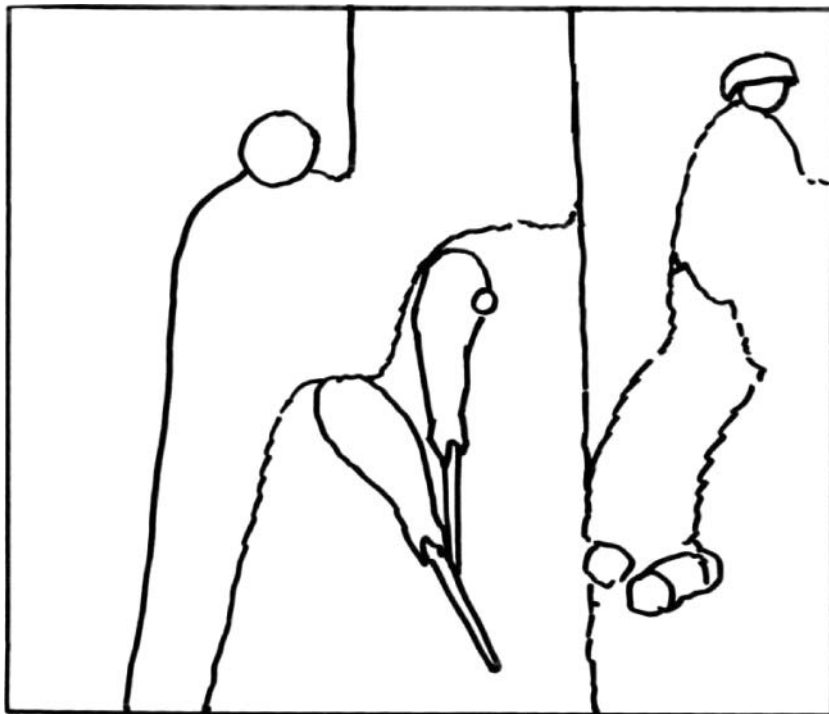


Figure 53. "The Beggars." There are periodic combinations of configurations of the hand and the crutch. General elements of strained poses and gestures of the cripples are strengthened by large configurations.

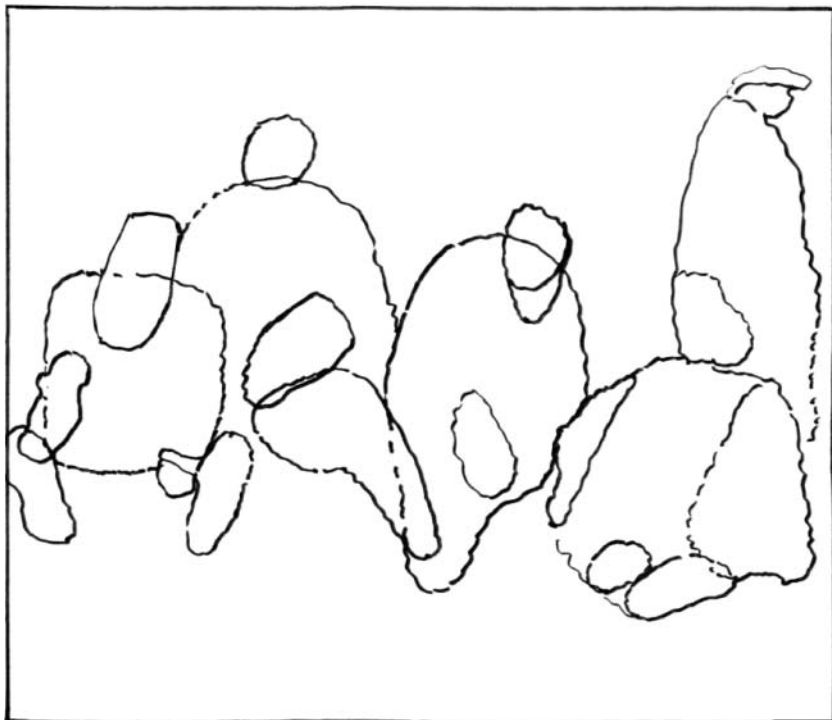


Figure 54. *“The Beggars.”* There are configurations of the rounded outlines. A picture of swimming living organisms is created.

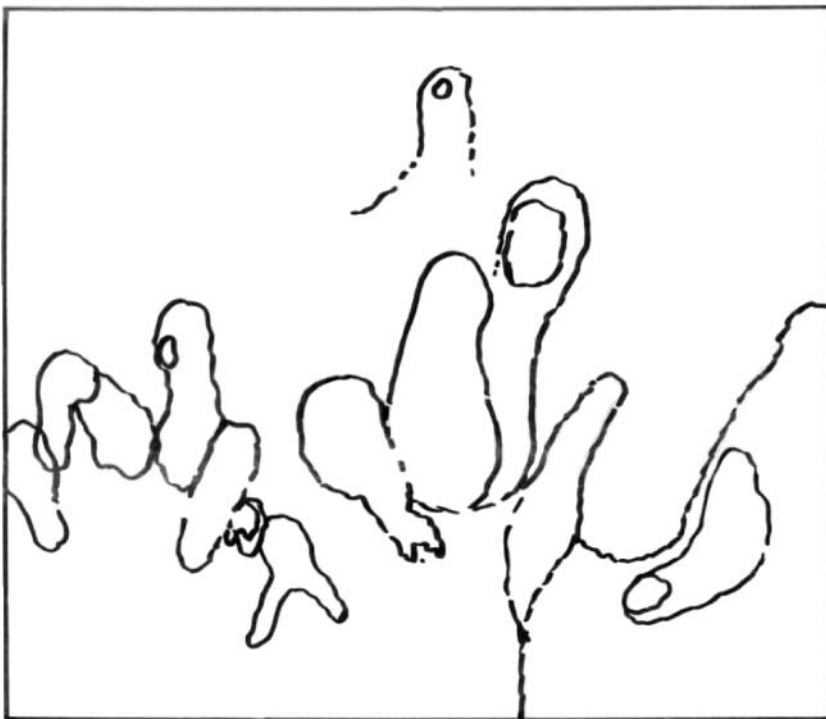


Figure 55. "The Beggars." There are interconnections of rounded, branchy, triangular-trapezoid configurations. Due to these interconnections, the united signed formation of living organisms, prosthetic devices, cramped arms (hands), is created. The meanings of an organism's survival under extreme conditions, symbiosis of organic and artificial is created.



Figure 56. "The Beggars." There is the hand asking for alms. Five fingers of this hand and hints at its nails in a combination with five squeezed hands are general characteristics organizing this sign formation of the picture. From the side of semantics, the formation of the present sign is evident.

Note

1. New Time is the period since epoch of Renaissance before our time in Europe.

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