



1 Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, *Monument to Marshal Maurice of Saxony*, 1776, Strasbourg, temple Saint Thomas

Stratas of Memory. The Steps in Pigalle's Tomb of Marshal Maurice of Saxony

Étienne Jollet

Encore about Pigalle's tomb of Marshal Maurice of Saxony (fig. 1), but this time not so much the figures as the planes—the various layers of the monument,¹ with a special emphasis on what is at the center. These steps play a major role in this work, being the most characteristic of mausoleums since the origin of such monuments. Marigny, the *Directeur Général des Bâtiments* of the period, sums up the project he chose this way: “It is the one where the hero seems to descend into the grave that Death opens at his feet.”² A question of “steps”: both a place (the steps) and an action (a step—here, forward). What is of importance here is the idea of illusion—in two different senses. First, illusion as unreality; as a feature of life, as opposed to death, as the ultimate reality: a life in which so many temptations (celebrity, sensual pleasures) can be considered illusions. Then, illusion as a mean to reinforce reality: the steps belong to a fictional topography which has several peculiarities, all of them drawing attention to the mixing of reality and fiction (an un-real world). The steps here are a way to place the monument in a fictional space, united by a common downward movement, where we find the different layers that usually constitute a tomb, on which the various signifying motifs (symbols, allegories, ornaments) are located. The steps refer also to the principle of gravity, the one which reigns in the real world. Finally, these steps lead to the open coffin which is itself so close to the real space in which the beholder is situated: that is, outside of the fictional space. The interplay thus defined permits the tomb to be placed in some sort of general interweaving between fiction and reality,

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- 1 Victor Beyer, *Le Mausolée du Maréchal de Saxe*, Strasbourg, 1994; Laurence Vander Veken, “Représentation et conception de la mort dans le Monument funéraire du Maréchal de Saxe de Jean-Baptiste Pigalle”, in *Annales d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie* 21, 1999, pp. 77–94; Wiebke Windorf, “Jean-Baptiste Pigalles Grabmal des Maréchal de Saxe (1753–1777): Manifestation einer irdischen Unsterblichkeit”, in Stefanie Muhr and Wiebke Windorf (eds.), *Wahrheit und Wahrhaftigkeit in der Kunst von der Neuzeit bis heute*, Berlin, 2010, pp. 25–43.
 - 2 “[...] c'est celui où le héros paraît descendre au tombeau que la mort ouvre à ses pieds” (letter from Vandières to Lépicié, 19 March 1753, in Marc Furcy-Raynaud (ed.), “Correspondance de M. de Marigny avec Coypel, Lépicié et Cochin”, in *Nouvelles archives de l'art français* 1903, pp. 33–34).



Gravé par Nicolas DUPUIS

Collection de l'auteur

LA STATUE DE LOUIS XV. par J.-B. LEMOINE
Monument élevé à Rennes par les États de Bretagne.

2 Nicolas Gabriel Dupuis, *Monument to Louis XV at Rennes*, 1754, Paris, BnF

That relationships exist between these levels is by no means a novelty, as they provide the link between the allegories on both sides of the grave with the deceased. Bernini and others did the job well before: the interplay between the seated figure and the allegories on one side, between the fictional and the real places on the other side, in Alexander VII's famous tomb at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. What was new here was this type of an animating configuration, being used now in another type of props for remembrance: the royal monument. Pigalle's master, Jean-Baptiste II Lemoyne, began his project for the statue of Louis XV at Rennes in 1748, not long before the moment when Pigalle elaborates his project: there, he accentuates the links between the king and allegories of *Hygeia*, goddess of health and the figure of Brittany (fig. 2): *Hygeia* has an arm on the base of the statue of Louis XV; Brittany gesture towards it; Louis XV's arms seem to point at both figures.

What we see here is some sort of "contamination", the influence of the structure of a tomb on the design of a public monument—and that was entirely new at the time. I would like to associate this concept to the strange texts written by the architect Pierre Alexis Delamair in the 1730s, as in the *Livre de la pure vérité* of 1737, a manuscript of the

but also between the expressiveness of the figures and the one of the levels on which they are placed. I will study first the significance of the steps as a place for allegories, in the sense of personifications. I will then deal with the allegory of the place, and the meaning created through the context and association with other works where steps have an unequivocal signification. I will finish by addressing the way in which the steps define a new relationship between the fictional space and the "real space", to use David Summers' formula.

**The steps:
a place for allegorical personifications**

Maurice of Saxony's tomb includes a succession of horizontal levels: a pyramid, referring to immortality; a place for the deceased; a coffin and a base on which the marshal's coat of arms is surrounded by a

Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal.³ He proposed a new type of public monument that would feature not just one but several figures. He wrote that the architects and sculptors:

“have wrongly imagined until now that a variety of human figures places on a the same platform bore too much of a resemblance to a tomb, like those, for example, at Saint-Denis in the Chapel of the Valois.”⁴

His words are a testimony to the interdependence between the two forms, where the tomb lends a sense of legitimacy to the representation of a multitude of characters on the same tier.

The difference in Maurice of Saxony’s tomb is the existence of narrative relationships. They are even easier to notice due to the use of a common color, white, for the figures: it creates a sensual link between them, in contrast with the different types of marble, the turquoise blue of the pyramid, the green of the sarcophagus, and the grey *Gris de Senones* of the pyramid. And the question of this link is here central here: it is illustrated by the hand of France clasping the hero’s arm, a way to evoke the relationship of the French people to their salvation and the victory of Fontenoy.

So a hero on steps. Usually, that what is called the “terrace”, the fictional surface on which the protagonists act, is flat. Here, the status of the steps is unclear. We have no testimony by Pigalle; only documents of the monument’s reception can help—though there are limitations with such sources. For most of the numerous authors, anonymous or not, who wrote about the monument during the long period of its creation—say, from 1753 to 1777—there are the gradations (“degrés”), the steps or tiers against the the pyramid in the background.⁵ But there is also the way down to the grave, and then, finally, what unifies the monument is the fact that the standing figures form part of the narration, since Death opens the lid of the coffin, a feature which might not have been present in the beginning, if we refer to a drawing from the art market.⁶ These steps accompany the movement of the main figure: downwards. This is the particular feature, which distinguishes this monument from others that are similar, such as the project identified by Victor Beyer in an collection in Basel and attributed by the author to

3 Pierre-Alexis Delamair, *Le Livre de la pure vérité*, 1717, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, ms. 3054.

4 “[...] Tous les architectes et sculpteurs, même parmi ceux des savants fort discernés, se sont spécieusement imaginés jusqu’à présent qu’une multiplicité de figures pédestres posées sur une même plate-forme sentait trop le tombeau comme celles faites par exemple à Saint Denis dans la Chapelle des Valois.”

5 “Lettre à un ami sur le tombeau du maréchal de Saxe”, in *Collection Deloynes*, vol. 11, Paris, BnF, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, p. 236: “Le lieu de la scène est au pied d’une pyramide, symbole de l’immortalité [...] La pyramide est élevée sur plusieurs degrés, au bas desquels on voit un sarcophage ou tombeau. Cinq figures font tout le sujet.”

6 Alexis Bordes, *Esquisse pour le tombeau du maréchal de Saxe*, Dessins et tableaux anciens du XVI^e au XX^e siècle, vente du 15 septembre au 20 octobre 2006.



3 Jean-Baptiste II Lemoyne, *Project for a tomb*, Basel, private collection

Jean-Baptiste II Lemoyne, in which the tomb is opened by a human figure, an not by Death (fig. 3);⁷ no clear movement towards the grave is really seen. And the step forward changes everything: in Lemoyne's version, opening the grave can be interpreted as a sign: death is coming. It reminds us of the fact that here the movement in the fictional space is a direct visualisation of a metaphor. According to Charles Huré's *Dictionnaire universel de l'écriture sainte* (1715), "'To walk down to the grave' means to die".⁸ This is what we see here. The marshal is shown dying: it is a type of action, located in a specific space, with the surrounding figures participating in the narration. The most problematic aspect of the personification of France is, in fact, its location. Several texts express the feeling that this personification of France in relation to its place is not proper. A text from October 1756 suggests that France should be seated "in a place that is more decent than on the steps of a pyramid".⁹

Such a criticism belongs to a culture of propriety and of conformity to implicit rules of behaviour, but also present was more sophisticated system of valorisation of place. The

7 Victor Beyer, "La triple sépulture de Maurice de Saxe à Saint Thomas de Strasbourg", in *AAF* 25, 1978, pp. 181-190.

8 Charles Huré, "Tombeau", in *Dictionnaire universel de l'écriture sainte*, Paris, 1715, p. 832: "'Descendre dans le tombeau', c'est mourir."

9 "Réponse d'un élève de l'académie royale de peinture et de sculpture : à l'auteur de la petite brochure ayant pour titre: 'Observations sur le projet du mausolée de M. le Maréchal de Saxe'", October 1756, in *Collection Deloynes*, vol. 11, p. 232, 3 p. ms.: "La France, dites-vous, aurait dû être dans un lieu plus décent, assise sur un Trône, ou sur un Trophée. Je réponds qu'il n'est point question ici de nous représenter la France sur un Trône."

steps are to be associated with a reference to scale, a progression by degrees: a notion well known in the academic field as *Gradus at Parnassum*, but which exists also in the religious literature on the Counter-Reform. The powerful cardinal Bellarmine published his *Escalier spirituel portant l'âme à Dieu par les marches des créatures* in 1616, mentioned in the first lines of the *Introduction à la vie dévote* by Saint François de Sales, which was still very popular in France during the 18th century. There is a *Scala coelestis* which leads to God—the one which, according to Howard Hibbard, is represented in Poussin's *Madonna of the Steps*.¹⁰ Is it present in Pigalle's work? The number of steps corresponds to various stages, so what be the significance of the evolution from five, as in the drawing of the Musée Magnin (fig. 4), to three? And, obviously, the *Scala coelestis* is hardly a way to describe a movement in the opposite direction, towards the earth. But in fact this *Scala coelestis* is conceived of in two ways, as in Bernard de Clairvaux's conception borrowed by theologians like Fénelon, still popular in the middle of the 18th century: there are two directions, a *Scala humilitatis* up to the sky, and a *Scala superbiae*, a way down for the proud. This could be the one represented in Pigalle's monument—but it could also be seen in a positive perspective: the *Kenosis*, the way of becoming humble. This is not really the case here, as far as the facial expression is concerned—a very proud one, based on what one knows about Maurice of Saxony's pride. Nevertheless, what is shown is a moving away from glory, step by step, which corresponds with the flags and allegoric personifications of the vanquished nations: to go down, to accept the common fate—death.

Or memory: since the figure not only goes to the coffin, but also in the direction of the beholder: in the direction of living people. There is also another topographical level: where the tomb itself and the two lateral figures, Hercules and Death, stand. So what is defined here is a scalar link between the fictional space and the one of the beholder. In this reading, Pigalle's steps are no longer an exception, but on the contrary one more example of the valorisation of the link between the two spaces due to what can be described as stairs, a spatial link recurrent in religious painting in Paris during the first half of the 18th century.

From fictional to real place: steps as stairs

The first major exemple declining such a configuration might be René-Antoine Houasse's *Pentecost* at Saint Merri—before 1710 (fig. 5). Here the steps lead the beholder to the top. But it is Charles-Antoine Coypel who, in different Parisian churches in the first half of the century, made popular this way of depicting space. Three of these must be mentioned. The first is the *Ecce Homo* painted for the church of the Oratoire in 1729, destroyed but fortunately engraved by Joullain (fig. 6); an impressive configuration where there is a

¹⁰ Howard Hibbard, *Poussin. The Holy Family on the Steps*, London, 1974.



4 Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, *Preparatory drawing to the tomb of Maurice of Saxony*, Dijon, Musée Magnin

strong contrast between the standing figure and, on the steps beneath, a mourning female figure on the left, and on the right a man pointing with his right hand in the direction of the Saviour. We discover here a composition that is similar to that of our monument. What is very useful is the comment written by the artist himself in the *Mercure de France* of

June 1729: “This great man at the very center of the turmoil and confusion has created this order and the sort of majestic arrangement which imposes itself as soon as one looks at it.”¹¹ The second work by Coyppel that we can compare with our monument is again in Saint Merri—in fact a kind of adaptation of the older work of Houasse (fig. 7). It was completed in 1749 with the help of Pierre Louis Subro, a painter of architecture. I would like to stress here the fact that the table in front of Christ plays the role that the coffin does in Pigalle’s work: it both closes the scene to the front and welcomes people coming from below. But the most comparable example might be the work for the altar of Saint Nicolas du Louvre, with an *Entombment of Christ*, of 1734 (fig. 8), where there is movement downwards to the grave, and importantly a direct link between the scales and, in front, an altar which is also the grave. It is a composition of the whole setting, wrote the Abbé Du Maine in his description in the *Mercure de France* of October 1734, of “a table, a picture and a glory”¹²—the table here being the altar, designed by the painter himself in a shape like that one of of Pigalle’s projects, the pedestal of the Saxe Monument which was condemned by Vandières: called a “piédestal” by Marigny, when he asked Pigalle on August 11, 1754 to “entirely suppress the round shape” of the “pedestal”.¹³ The angels are in-

11 “[...] ce grand homme au milieu même du tumulte et de la confusion, a conféré cet ordre et cette espèce d’arrangement majestueux qui impose dès le premier coup d’œil”, in *Mercure de France*, June 1729, p. 1290.

12 *Mercure de France*, October 1734, p. 2169: “[...] d’une Table, d’un Tableau et d’une Gloire [...].”

13 Archives Nationales, O1 1908, 1754, p. 92: “[...] il faut en supprimer entièrement le rond.”

- 5 René-Antoine Houasse, *Pentecost*, 1690, Paris, Musée Carnavalet (formerly Paris, Saint Merri)



volved in the drama—and may be even more so in the print, which Pigalle might have seen. And, beneath, a Veronica, alongside the Marshal’s coat of arms—two ways of referring to the identity of the deceased.

There is no direct link between Coypel and Pigalle; but they knew each other at the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*, where Pigalle was *Reçu* (became a full member) in 1744, and Coypel became director of the institution in 1747; the churches mentioned above were rather close to Pigalle’s place of residence in rue Meslay; and the prints by Joullain circulated in Paris. So I think there is a further reaching relationship: the presence of stairs in front of paintings, as a way to define nobility for the figures above, the model being the *School of Athens* that Pigalle might have discovered in Rome during his stay from 1735 to 1741. Herein we can find a preliminary of a monument to *Grands Hommes avant la lettre*, especially with Aristotle standing proudly and Diogenes, in front of him, sitting on the stairs, like France in the monument to the Marshal of Saxony.

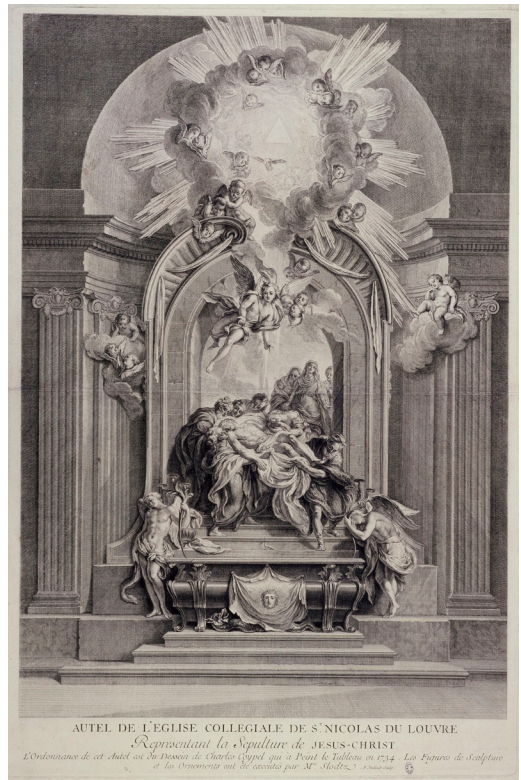
But referring to this revival of the depiction of stairs in painting is not enough: there is another important example of the use of scale, in popular culture, where the downward movement is present, and, even more significantly, so is Death. It is the corpus of works on the *Ages of Man*. A popular Spanish print from the beginning of the 19th century which certainly has its roots in the culture of France of the 18th century, it not only shows the figure of a soldier who is in the age of 30, but also, in the foreground, a composition similar to what of Pigalle’s mausoleum (fig. 10): Death on the right, a naked figure on the left and above, Christ seen from the front. This is part of a long tradition in which various fundamental motifs of Pigalle’s tombs were presented and committed to the same principles of a literal visual transcription of “gnomic” knowledge—proverbs, maxims, aphorisms, etc., as the “un pied dans la tombe” in Niccolo Nelli’s print that portrays an older man with a leg in a grave (fig. 9) or Jörg Breu’s example with the coffin beneath (fig. 11). But, after all, when stepping down to limbo, Christ is not humble anymore—there are no other contemporary works to compare with, just Mantegna’s *Descent*



6 François Joullain after Charles-Antoine Coyppel, *Ecce Homo*, 1729, etching and engraving, Paris, BnF



7 Charles-Antoine Coyppel, *The Pilgrims of Emmaus*, 1749, Paris, Saint Merri



8 François Joullain after Charles-Antoine Coyppel, *Entombment of Christ*, 1734, Paris, BnF

to *Limbo*, with a door on the ground that we may associate with the lid of a coffin. And this way down means that the steps are no longer just a place for allegorical personifications, but that they work too as an allegory of what is at the centre of our attention here: the passage into another world.

The mausoleum for Maurice of Saxony and “real spaces”



9 Anonymous, *The Ages of Man*, before 1834, Spain, Marseille, Mucem

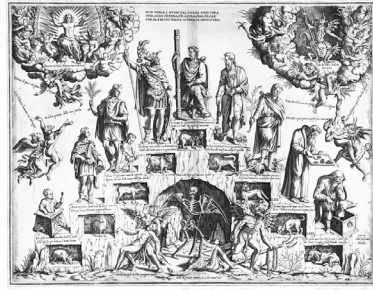
The notion of “real space”, as described by David Summers, is interesting for our study due to the fact that it not only refers to the space in which the beholder exists but also to the surface on which a painting is painted, or the surfaces of the bodies, or the various planes: foreground, middleground, and background of a representation.¹⁴ The steps at the center describe, in an intense and dramatized way, the relationship between the horizontal and the vertical, and at the same time they convey the idea of a passage in two ways: first, the passage from one step to another; second, the passage into the coffin. This visual poetics around the threshold reminds us the one deployed by Watteau in *The Shop Sign of Gersaint*: here it is inverted, in that we’re stepping upwards, rather than down, but we are still moving from one world into another. This here is the main issue, the one Michel-Ange Slodtz also translated spatially in the tomb of Languet de Gergy in Saint-Sulpice, created in the same years, from 1750 to 1757. But the concept can be also dramatised as in the frontispice of La Font de Saint-Yenne’s *L’Ombre du grand Colbert*, of 1752, where the shadow of the great minister is deliberately falling down into the abyss, when seeing what is happening to the Louvre (fig. 12).

On the topic of the relationship of the monument with the real space, I must refer again to Charles Antoine Coyvel’s works, since they all include an interaction with what is outside the painting. At the *Oratoire*, in 1729, Coyvel introduced a third objective: “the place of the scene could, in being unified with the architecture of the church, make it seem bigger, and my work would be even more illusory.”¹⁵ And it is the same in Saint Nicolas du

14 David Summers, *Real Spaces*, New York, 2003.

15 “Lettre de M. Coyvel [...] au révérend père de La Tour”, in *Mercure de France*, June 1729, p. 1291: “Enfin

- 10 Nicolo Nelli (attr. to) after Cristofano Bertelli (attr. to), *The Ages of Man*, ca 1580, Spain, London, British Museum



Louvre, where Coypel's work, according to the Abbé Du Maine, is "composé d'une Table, d'un Tableau et d'une gloire."¹⁶ He described the interaction between the work and the surrounding space:



- 11 Jörg Breu, *The Ages of Man*, ca 1540, woodcut, Gotha, Landesmuseum

"Its edge is linked to the theme and belongs to it; because there is with the picture an artificial edge which has the thickness of a portico, the real edge of which builds the foreground. The steps, of the same imitation marble as the portico, occupy the lower part and come to join the tiers of the altar, and thus of the top of the tomb."¹⁷

We see the same result in Saint-Merri, in 1749. Here the pleasant, absorbing account of illusion seems to both corroborate and contradict Marian Hobson's book, *The Object of*

que le lieu de la scène pût en s'unissant à l'architecture de l'Eglise l'accroître et rendre mon ouvrage plus trompeur."

16 "Lettre de M. l'abbé du Maine [...] à M.D.L.R.", in *Mercure de France*, October 1734, p. 2170.

17 Id., pp. 2172-2173: "Sa Bordure est liée au Sujet et en fait partie ; car il se joint au Tableau une Bordure feinte qui représente l'épaisseur d'un Portique, dont la Bordure réelle forme le devant. Des Marches, du même marbre (feint) que ce Portique, occupent le bas et reviennent rejoindre le gradin de l'Autel et par conséquent le dessus du Tombeau."

Art which explains how, around 1750 again, there was a shift: no longer a “soft illusion”, a gratifying mixture of fiction and reality, as in Coypel’s works and in Pigalle’s but a “hard illusion”, where only that which corresponds to the material characteristics of an object is taken into account. Various texts of the period described this phenomenon. The most characteristic might be Suard’s comment in 1786: “I don’t know what is the setting of the scene : I see Maurice descending the steps, without seeing any building to which these steps would belong.”¹⁸ Cochin, on a more philosophical level, asks a critic of the *Observateur littéraire*:

“What does it mean ‘because the physical is rightly what is concentrated on, what most strikes the artists who are consistent enough that they do not need metaphysical illusions’: does it simply mean that the artists can’t represent anything without pretending it has a physical consistency? Then it was not necessary to twist your sentence in order to say something so ordinary.”¹⁹

Here, Pigalle mixes the two modes to a third: a “soft illusion”. Nevertheless there were many negative reactions to some of the features of his works, symptomatic of proponents of an opposing artistic conception. The main debate centred on the direction in which the lid of the coffin opens: it can’t be so, since it would prevent the marshal from entering the grave. One could show who that, in fact, it is possible to slip down the steps and descend easily. This kind of coherence was emphasized by Denis Diderot, who in the case of the monument to Maurice of Saxony imagined two grenadiers sharpening their sabres on the stone of the tomb.²⁰ We might understand this as a consequence resulting from criticism of the mixed allegory—half history, half allegory—, but this position was not new, such ideas had already been expressed by Abbé Dubos in 1719.

What may have been new here was this confrontation between the work and the beholder in the very particular context of the church of Saint Thomas. Firstly, it is surprising that we see this constellation where an altar would usually be placed, and that the descent of the marshal emphasises the association between grave and altar. Secondly, the pictorial dimension is enhanced by the scenography and its design that creates a play of

18 Jean-Baptiste Suard, “Eloge de Pigalle”, in *Mélanges de littérature* 3, Paris, [1760], pp. 285–309; *Collection Deloynes*, vol. 11, p. 898: “Je ne sais quel est le lieu de la scène : je vois Maurice descendant des degrés sans voir aucun édifice auquel ces degrés appartiennent.”

19 Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Les Misotechnites aux enfers*, Paris/Amsterdam, 1763, p. 10: “Que veut dire, car le physique est avec raison ce qui occupe, ce qui saisit le plus les Artistes qui ont assez de consistance pour n’avoir pas besoin des illusions métaphysiques. Veut-il simplement que les Artistes ne peuvent rien représenter, qu’ils ne lui supposent une consistance physique? Alors ce n’était pas la peine d’entortiller ta phrase pour dire une chose si commune.”

20 “Salon de 1767” in Jules Assézat and Maurice Tourneux (eds.), *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, vol. 11, Paris, 1875–1877, p. 356.

- 12 Jacques-Philippe Le Bas after Charles Eisen, frontispiece of *L'ombre du Grand Colbert* by La Font de Saint-Yenne, 1752, etching, Paris, BnF



D.L.F. inven. Eisen idæam expres. Le Bas ære calav.

L'OMBRE DU GRAND COLBERT.

light, with the stain-glass window, named E on the plan—the windows on the right, from the point of view of the beholder—given by M. d’Antigny, informant of M. d’Angiviller about Pigalle’s work. Thirdly, the nature of the predominantly frontal view: we can see a connection here with Coyvel’s work, and evidence of the concepts that lend the work a pictorial quality. This was made possible by the destruction of the rood screen in the nave. And there are some elements in the monument that describe a new articulation of the interweaving between two and three-dimensions: like the pyramid which, from further away, seems to translate depth in a vertical sense, where the lines that are orthogonal to the princilan plane meet. In the work itself, the artist made a major change, redirecting the marshal’s gaze away from the animals, and turned it instead towards Death, there is no clue to really know exactly what he is looking at. And, a discrete but important feature, the upper edge of the lid of the coffin is slanted slightly, which creates some movement in the composition. This effect is enhanced by the horizontal lines formed by the steps, and those that extend to the left and to the right below the windows which make the slant even more perceptible. But in the other direction, always down: *encore* down; as an inevitable fact that, even with the bravura both of the marshal and the artist, everything is going down: the real steps, as do the steps of the vault, where the real corpse remains.

Pigalle’s project for the Marshal of Saxony presented a new approach in the art of the funeral monument: the juxtaposition of various elements, the ambiguity of beeing something between grave and altar, and then, in the space of Saint Thomas, the consequence of the creation of some sort of a cult around the figure, which is somehow still surprising to us today. This corresponds to ideas of levels, topographical levels, and levels of reality which are associated with each other here in a joined movement. It would be easy to define the monument in terms of a teleological framework, considering the monument as a precedent for ones dealing in an even more complex way with the levels of reality, as we can state with the monument to Madame Favart by Jean-Jacques Caffiéri or Canova’s monument to Maria Cristina in the Augustinerkirche in Vienna. Such a play on the multiplicity of “degrés” can bee understood both as “levels” and “degrees” that describe places and qualities. This is based on the topographical sense of the word as well the causal, as something defining the implicit legitimacy of the presence of a figure in a particular place: as here, for the marshal, simultaneously above and descending. At the same time, what Pigalle experienced was that this complex series of steps of spatial relationships in which movement and immobility are associated with a play on the notion of threshold, was located so far from Paris that it might have remained largely unseen by the public. Of course, this was not the case: a real form of tourism was documented and two prints circulated, one by Christian de Méchel and the other by Cochin et Dupuis. But it was no longer what the artist seemed eager to create: the meeting of the body standing upright with the viewer, whose gaze is directed upwards, and the marshal moving downwards, somewhere near the lid of the coffin; nobody looking inside, into the invisible inside of the grave; into the meaning of the grave; or into all of the memories associated with both

lives. It is here that studying such a work can teach us a lot about what it might mean to face a monument, how we or the artwork finds a way to avoid the central void—death, or the absence of sense; which is also a way to learn about the work of visual art generally speaking; thanks to a step on a step, a step downward, a step forward. The questioning continues, with Duchamp's *Nude descending a staircase, N° 2*:²¹ from one step to another—to the totality, which is the mystery of the animation of a human figure.

21 Marcel Duchamp, *Nude descending a staircase - No. 2*, 1912, 147 x 90 cm, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art.