GUMENTATIVE,
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Res 46 Autumn 2004

Polemical objects

Contents

DOCUMENTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Figure 5. Hieronymus Bosch. *Adoration of the Magi,* ca. 1510. Panel, central field 138 x 72 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Detail of central panel. Photograph: Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

Fashion and the now-time of Renaissance art

ALEXANDER NAGEL

BORACHIO: Seest thou not, I say, what a deformed thief this fashion is? how giddily a' turns about all the hot bloods between fourteen and five-and-thirty? Sometime fashioning them like Pharaoh's soldiers in the reechy painting, sometime like god Bel's priests in the old church-window, sometime like the shaven Hercules in the smirched worm-eaten tapestry, where his codpiece seems as massy as his club?

CONRADE: All this I see; and I see that the fashion wears out more apparel than the man. But art not thou thyself giddy with the fashion too, that thou hast shifted out of thy tale into telling me of the fashion?

Shakespeare, Much Ado about Nothing, III, 4

Shakespeare calls it a deformed thief. Fashion takes from the past not to redress a lack, not to dress its naked body, but needlessly, excessively, and as a result emerges misshapen, a monstrous fabrication. The giddy hot bloods between fourteen and thirty-five seek out modes long out of style but useful right now in making the present unrecognizable. Fashion muddles times, and when it reaches into the past, it finds the deformed results of earlier anachronic collisions. Dismantling and remantling the present, fashion makes itself susceptible to revival: every moment in fashion is an anachronic time bomb, waiting to explode back into the now. And there waits Baudelaire, ready "to extract from fashion what it may contain of poetry within history, to draw the eternal from the transitory."[1]

And also Walter Benjamin, who saw in the chronic volatility of fashion a key to grasping the explosive temporal disruptions of revolutions. Like fashion, revolutionary thought reaches back into the past and releases the "now-time" [*Jetztzeit*] from history into the present:

> For Robespierre the Rome of antiquity was thus a past charged with now-time, a past which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution regarded itself as Rome reincarnated. It quoted ancient Rome as fashion quotes past costumes. Fashion has the scent for the contemporary [*das Aktuelle*] wherever it stirs in the thicket of long ago. It is the tiger's leap into the past.[2]

Fashion, like the revolutionary dialectic, carries inside it a powerful critique of historicism. It disregards the logical progression of linear time, finding a contemporaneity in the past that breaks through to the present. Benjamin knows this is rash advice in urgent times. Under modernity, an embrace of the contemporaneous is the only way out of the progression of history. For medieval clerics, fashion worked the other way. Its claws were sunk deep in secular time and would not let go. The historical register may be essential to Christian theology, but too tenacious a grip on history gets in the way of temporal revolution. The now-time of fashion can be the messianic chip that blows history open, or it can be the shredder in the eschatalogical works.

"I have before my eyes a series of engravings of fashions beginning with the Revolution and ending more

1. Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*, IV, "La Modernité," in idem, *Oeuvres Complètes*, II, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 694.

2. Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte, These 14" in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II, 2, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974, 701: "So war für Robespierre das antike Rom eine mit Jetztzeit geladene Vergangenheit, die er aus dem Kontinuum der Geschichte heraussprengte. Die französische Revolution verstand sich als ein wiedergekehrtes Rom. Sie zitierte das alte Rom genau so wie die Mode eine vergangene Tracht zitiert. Die Mode hat die Witterung für das Aktuelle, wo immer es sich im Dickicht des Einst bewegt. Sie ist der Tigersprung ins Vergangene. " I have relied on and modified the translation offered in *Selected Writings*, IV, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1996, 395. Benjamin's idea is a positive construction on the famously wry opening paragraphs of Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, New York: International Publishers, 1962, 15: "And just when [the living] seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from their names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language." I owe this connection to Ian Balfour, whom I thank for helpful discussions on the Benjamin passage generally.

or less with the Consulate." Baudelaire's meditation on fashion and modernity already relies on a set of images packaged into a history of fashions. The catalogue serves to bring fashion to the level of the symbolic, making it possible to see in the past modes "the ethics and aesthetics of the time (la morale et l'esthétique du temps)."[3] Fashion is almost an image, almost a symbol, and that is why images rush to it, collect around it, in an effort to fulfill fashion's symbolic promise. In turn, that symbolic activity feeds back into fashion as it does its transhistorical work. The endless quotation of past styles relies on a continual raiding of the visual record, and even some deep digging in the bric-a-brac of art history. Shakespeare makes this clear in the passage quoted at the head of this article, where the hot bloods get themselves up "like Pharaoh's soldiers in the reechy painting, sometime like god Bel's priests in the old church-window, sometime like the shaven Hercules in the smirched worm-eaten tapestry." The fashion sense is drawn to the reechy painting and finds amidst the grime something it can pull into the present. In the process and by the way, it gets its hands dirty with art history. Before there were art historians, there were hot bloods with a scent for the contemporary wherever it stirs in the thicket of long ago.

This paper studies an array of art-historical reflections and interventions during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance as collateral effects of fashion's traffic in the past. It does not attempt an overview, but only an analysis of several related issues raised by a number of disparate cases during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This intertwined history stands at the origin of the discipline of art history, and has shadowed it ever since. When the discipline was fully organized in the nineteenth century, fashion continued to crop up, at once as the unavoidable model of art-historical development and as the demon to be exorcised from the discipline.

To take one notable example, Heinrich Wölfflin famously compared Gothic architecture to the style of contemporary shoes.[4] He believed such visual manifestations expressed a "will," a "feeling of the *Volk*" that pervaded both the spirit and the products of the age. Transmitted primarily through the body—through

the way people carry themselves and move—this feeling is clearly registered in costume.[5] As Frederick Schwartz has shown, Wölfflin's view fits into a larger cultural polemic against the disintegrating effects of modernity: it became the mission of cultural historians of the nineteenth century to find in the past an organic *Kultur* to oppose to an alienated *Zivilisation*, a communal *Gemeinschaft* to contrast with a capitalist *Gesellschaft*.[6]

According to this view, art-historical style—a visual uniformity expressing a spiritual unity—was one aspect of the organic, precapitalist unity of past societies, a unity no longer available to the modern age. In opposition to *style*, the modern age had only *fashion*, associated with the rootless consumer commodity and an autonomous logic of accelerated and arbitrary change that can no longer express an age. In contrast to the Baudelairean painter of modern life, who loses himself to the ephemeral parade, a disciplined history of art mobilized past styles, and the very concept of style, as a stronghold against the devalued spectacle of modern fashion. As Wölfflin put it:

> The real kernel of a style is in the new outlook upon the human body and in new ideas about deportment and movement. This conception of style is a much more weighty one than that which obtains nowadays, when styles change like fancy dresses being tried on for a masquerade. However, this uprooting of style dates only from our own century and we have really no longer any right to talk of styles, but only of fashions.[7]

The concept of style was concocted as an antidote to fashion, and so it is little surprise that the cure should taste of the poison: as it happens, the Gothic shoes that Wölfflin saw as a "weighty" expression of their time were in fashion for a brief moment at the end of the twelfth century and then disappeared.[8] In the Middle Ages, fashion's secular disobedience—its insistent now-time—provided an early working model for the history of art. Under modernity, its temporal instability—its tiger's leap—rips through the art-historical project.

3. Baudelaire, 684.

4. Heinrich Wölfflin, "Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture," in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics 1873–1893*, ed. and trans. Eleftherios Ikonomou and Henry Francis Mallgrave, Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994, p. 183.

5. Ibid., 182: "How people like to move and carry themselves is expressed above all in costume, and it is not difficult to show that architecture corresponds to the costume of its period."

6. Frederic J. Schwartz, "Cathedrals and Shoes: Concepts of Style in Wölfflin and Adorno," *New German Critique*, 76, 1999, 3–48.

7. Wölfflin, *Classic Art* (1899), trans. Peter and Linda Murray, London: Phaidon, 1952, 231, quoted by Schwartz, 27.

8. Schwartz, 35, citing Wölfflin's own source, Hermann Weiss's *Kostümkunde*, vol. 2, Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1864, pp. 874–880.

The image as temporal disruption

Around 1420, the Byzantine prelate Symeon, archbishop of Thessalonica, unleashed a scathing critique of European religious art:

> What else has been invented by them [the Latins] against the custom of the Church? The holy and ancient images have been piously set before the faithful in honor of their divine prototypes and in reverence of the saints whom they represent, and in truth reveal in representing them. They depict the Word made flesh for us, and all the divine works and miracles and mysteries he effected for us, as well as the image of his most holy Mother always virgin, and the figures of his saints, and also all that is reported in the evangelical histories and in the rest of sacred Scripture, as well as in other writings, and they instruct us with pictures, like another alphabet, using colors and other materials. These men, however, inventing everything outside the law of custom as has been said, often confect holy images in a different manner.

The next sentence brings Symeon to specific observations:

> In place of painted hair and garments they paint human hair and clothes, which is not the image of hair and vestments but the hair and vestments of a man, and thus is not the image or figure (tupos) of the prototypes. Thus they fabricate and adorn images in an irreverent manner, which is indeed inimical to (the images).[9]

When Symeon says that Western painters "confect holy images in a different manner" he is saying not only that they make unfamiliar images but that they undermine a whole system of replication that was designed to ensure the faithful transmission of prototypes through copies. In Symeon's words, the holy images had been "piously set before the faithful in honor of their divine prototypes." According to the prototype theory he espoused, icons represented authentic and authoritative likenesses; they thus transmitted and shared in the power of the prototypes. As a result of this transmission, the worshipper's reverence before the image passed to the saint represented by it. Symeon is alluding to a distinction made canonical by St. John of Damascus between the "relative worship" of the saints and the "absolute worship" accorded God alone. Veneration is given to the saints, "not because they deserve it on their own account, but because they bear in themselves Him who is by nature worshipful."[10] In the wake of the Iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century, the theoretical elaboration of this mechanism of transferences—from the image to the prototype, from the saint to God—was articulated to safeguard image worship against the abuse of idolatry.

Those transferences effected a series of topological and chronological dislocations. A legitimate copy—a true "symbol [tupos] of the prototype"—was inherently anachronic: of recent manufacture, it also reached back into antiquity. It stitched through time, pulling two points on the chronological timeline together until they met. The Patriarch Nikephoros, in the ninth century, said this about an icon produced in his own day: "the depiction of Christ is not a new invention. The picture has the authority of time: it is pre-eminent in its antiquity; it is coeval with the proclamation of the Gospels."[11] A legitimate substitution declared identity across apparent difference. The now-time of the prototype, impressed on the first portrait of Christ or a saint, was reactivated in its copies.

A coincidence that denies chronological remove— this was an idea that had something in common with the typological thinking of biblical exegetes, according to which sacred events, though embedded in history, also contained what theologians called a mystery, figure, or sacrament, a spiritual meaning that lifted the event out of the flow of history and connected it with other events and with divine truth. The figura represents a disruption of the logical flow of discourse: it both belongs to the chronological sequence and opens it to a series of supratemporal associations. These associations come as an effect of God's point of view, which grasps history all at once, topologically and not in a linear sequence.[12]

The metaphor of figura in textual exegesis was concretized in the physical image, which unlike discourse has the capacity materially to embody its own signified, and thus to collapse time. Images were an occasion of Christian theology at work. The historical existence of

9. Cyril Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972, 253–254. With the help of Martina Meyer and Kimberly Pixley I have modified Mango's translation; see the original text in Patrologia Graeca, ed. Migne, vol. 155, 111–112.

10. St. John of Damascus, On The Divine Images, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997, 85.

11. Quoted by Henry Maguire, The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 11.

12. Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in idem, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature, New York: Meridian Books, 1956, pp. 11-76; and Henri de Lubac, Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de l'Écriture, 2 vols., Paris: Aubier, 1959–1964.

Christ and the saints made their images possible, but the behavior of their images in turn reveals and releases their "supratemporal" virtue. Effecting a rift in secular time, the image not only represents but instantiates the operativity of the divine in temporal affairs.

According to St. Augustine's highly influential meditation on time in the *Confessions*, nothing passes away in the eternity of God and the whole is simultaneously present; secular time, on the other hand—the time of the *saeculum*, of chronological sequence—is the order of succession where everything cannot be present at once.[13] God's eternal now-time is invisible to us; we see only a *succession* of now-times, events that follow one another. Even past and future are strictly non-existent for us; we only have the present, and yet the present, under Augustine's famous withering analysis, turns out to have no extension at all, disappearing continually as it passes from future to past.[14] We wander in the transitory passages of secular time, and only with effort might we be able to see through it and "glimpse the glory of that eternity that abides forever."[15]

The prototype theory of images espoused by Symeon was designed to resist the effects of temporal process: if in secular time succession produces difference, the image's relation to its prototype allowed for the possibility of temporal durée without change, succession without difference. This resistance was made possible through a distinction between signifying vehicle and its referential content. The ninth-century theologian St. Theodore the Studite compared the relation of image to prototype to the impress of an engraved ring on different materials at different times:

> The impression is one and the same in the several materials which, however, are different with respect to each other; yet it would not have remained identical unless it were entirely unconnected with the materials. . . . The same applies to the likeness of Christ irrespective of the material upon which it is represented.[16]

Despite the metaphor of mechanical replication invoked by Theodore, a good deal of drift was introduced in any chain of replication. Participants in such a substitution system reflexively looked past the time-specific features that attached to any given replication. And yet the danger of drift and distraction was always present. Already in the fourth century, at the very beginning of the history of the Christian icon, St. Basil the Great complained that although artists made every effort to copy faithfully the older images they wandered from the prototypes.[17] To compromise fidelity was a serious problem, as it struck at the very core of the legitimacy of images, which derived from their antiquity. If the substitution mechanism failed, the image's link with antiquity was severed. It was new, and therefore a fabrication, something obviously "fashioned" in the present. To worship it would be idolatry. The idol, the facititious "work of men's hands" (Psalm 115:4), was in turn the primary conceptual basis for treating, and appreciating, images as artifacts, as manmade things, as authored works of art.

The archbishop Symeon's diatribe, quoted in full above, was a direct response to these developments, and a clear-sighted account of their implications. It also described the fault lines where the replication mechanism broke down, and so offers a penetrating piece of early art criticism: "In place of painted hair and garments they paint human hair and clothes, which is not the image of hair and vestments but the hair and vestments of a man." Painters introduced the *actual* hair and clothes that they saw around them, elements of the world around them—in particular elements of fashion—that advertised the moment of the artifact's production. Symeon mentions not only portrait icons but also narrative subjects—"all that is reported in the evangelical histories and in the rest of sacred Scripture, as well as in other writings"—and there too the loading of paintings with time-sensitive details of costume and setting would, in Symeon's view, have disrupted the "figural" function they were meant to serve.[18] For

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13. Augustinus, *Confessiones*, lib. XI, cap. XI: "non autem praeterire quicquam in aeterno, sed totum esse praesens; nullum vero tempus totum esse praesens."

14. Ibid., lib. XI, cap. XV.

15. Ibid., lib. XI, cap. XI: "et paululum rapiat splendorem semper stantis aeternitatis."

16. See Mango, 174.

17. Maguire, *Icons*, 11.

18. Narrative scenes, no less than portrait-icons, were in theory also understood as iterations of prototypes. Thus, for example, the thirteenth-century atrium mosaics in the Venetian church of San Marco were carefully modelled on a manuscript of the type of the fifth-century Cotton *Genesis*, which were taken as ancient and authoritative models. See Kurt Weitzmann, "The Genesis Mosaics of San Marco and the Cotton *Genesis* Miniatures," in Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco* II, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 105–142. This is just one instance of a general operating principle: all biblical and hagiographic paintings were understood as illustrations to the originary text, and thus as substitutes for a putative originary set of illustrations. This applied even to narrative paintings of less canonical subjects, such as those painted for the Venetian Scuole in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Patricia Fortini Brown, "Painting and history in Renaissance Venice," *Art History* 7, 1984:263–294, demonstrated that

Symeon, these "indexical" traces were stains left by the intrusion of secular time into the domain of the image. The insistent now-time of these paintings occluded a vision of the eternal now-time of God.

The things observed by Symeon can be found in countless examples of late medieval and early Renaissance European art. The elaboration of architectural and interior settings, a new attention paid to the details and textures of materials and clothing, a new concern for the description of individual bodies and faces (and hair)—textbooks and art history classes continue to echo Symeon on these points. One need only think of the fat wine-taster in Giotto's *Wedding at Cana* and his many descendants, or the countless stylishly armored and coiffed St. Georges of the International Gothic, or the aristocratically garbed St. Catherines of Alexandria, or the thugs in scenes of martyrdom in contemporary plebeian dress, not to mention the increasingly frequent appearance of actual portraits in religious scenes, to grasp what aroused Symeon's contempt.

The major thrust of recent scholarship on late medieval religious art has been to argue that these devices were not employed in opposition to spiritual ends, but in tandem with devotional practices. The theology of incarnation drove an intensified interest in the visualization of Christ's earthly life in late medieval spirituality, and prompted the development of techniques to coordinate those temporal references with the circumstances of devotion. A powerful strategy of late medieval devotions was to fill out narrative contexts, from the bible and from hagiographic literature, as a field for meditation, and this often involved visualizing the religious subjects in familiar, contemporary surroundings.[19] This strategy was a perfectly logical elaboration of the "tropological" level of traditional exegesis, by which the meaning of the biblical text was applied to the spiritual experience of the believing subject, and this was indeed a principal

motivation for the inclusion of contemporary portraits, and other familiar features, in narrative scenes.

Symeon's attention was drawn especially to hair and clothes—"they paint human hair and clothes, which is not the image of hair and vestments but the hair and vestments of a man." And in fact nothing registers "secular" change more sensitively than do clothing and coiffure. Later in his diatribe, in fact, Symeon takes direct aim at the grooming practices of Europeans, which he characterized as a decadent departure from ancient and pious custom:

> For if the prophets saw that God had hair and expressed this in a perfect image, therefore it is in honor of nature and by the grace of God that we have hair. And therefore those who shave and groom themselves act against the assent of God and in dishonor of nature, and especially priests and monks, who are prohibited from ministering to the flesh.[20]

Western painters, in his view, had made the fatal secondary error of rendering the self-stylings of secular men in their pictures. Symeon was not the only one to notice the hair and clothes in painting. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as we will see below, viewing old art became an occasion to observe outdated fashions. In one of Erasmus's *Colloquies*, a character looking at an old copper plate with the likeness of a knight "dressed in the English fashion of that period as we see it in old pictures" quips that weavers and dyers had a hard time in those days, since the knight was bearded like a goat, and his clothing did not have a single pleat, and was so tight it made the body itself thinner.[21] Again, the hair and clothes clamor for attention, prompting the viewer to bend closer and inspect the picture—now not as a devotional object but as a historical artifact.

The encounter between East and West produced surprised responses on both sides. The scandalized reaction of Symeon and other Byzantines was matched by the wonder and admiration of the Latins when confronted with the living, continuous tradition of antiquity embodied in Byzantine dress. Recounting the spectacle of the Florence Council, intermittently in session from 1439 to 1445, which was intended to effectuate a humanist and reform-minded dream of reconciliation between the Eastern and Western churches, Vespasiano da Bisticci reserved special praise for the garments worn by the Byzantine prelates: "For

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Venetian chroniclers regarded even recently produced narrative paintings for the Venetian Scuole as historical documentation and took them as evidence in verifying events of the past. In other words, contemporary viewers looked "through" the fact of their contemporary production, understanding them to report back to the time of their subject matter. This conception, she shows, then governed literal substitutions, explaining the presence of paradigmatic continuities in the sixteenth-century renditions of the lost fourteenth-century frescoes of the Story of Alexander III in the Palazzo Ducale.

19. See the excellent study by Frank Büttner, *Imitatio Pietatis: Motive der christlichen Ikonographie als Modelle der Verähnlichung*, Berlin: Mann, 1983.

20. *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, vol. 155, 111–112.

21. Erasmus, "A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake," in *Ten Colloquies*, trans. Craig R. Thompson, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, p. 66.

the last fifteen hundred years and more they have not altered the style of their dress; their clothes are of the same fashion now as they were in the time indicated." He knows this by the testimony of visual artifacts: "This may be seen in Greece in a place called the field of Philippi, where were found many records in marble in which may be seen men clothed in the manner still used by the Greeks."[22]

The image as substitution and the image as relic

The innovations and sensitive registrations of context to be found in Western painting in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did not break down the prototype-and-substitution model overnight. The old habits persisted, even as a new culture of volatile stylistic variation arose. In the short term, the advent of this new culture only meant that substitution had to be *accelerated.*

Guido da Siena's *Maestà*, known as the Palazzo Pubblico Madonna, was very likely painted for the high altar of the church of San Domenico in Siena in the 1270s (fig. 1). However, the face of the Virgin, the flesh of the Christ child, the faces of the angels in the gables, and the lower part of the throne were repainted in a Duccesque manner ca. 1310. It is unlikely that the painting was dirty or damaged by then, raising the question of why it needed to be repainted so soon. Scholars have claimed that in 1310 it was recognized as old-fashioned and in need of updating.[23] It is true that the restored painting did emerge updated. But it would be a mistake to claim that the aim of the intervention was simply to modernize the image. That the painting should emerge from the intervention with a modern face was rather a purposeful part of a project of *restoration.*[24] Inscriptions painted on restored icons in the Byzantine tradition refer to the restoration process as a form of

"renewal."[25] With a new face the disruption caused by unfamiliarity is removed and the panel regains its functional "presentness." The fresh overpainting restores the work to its original *functionality,* if not to its original appearance.[26]

The criteria here are different from those of modern restoration, in which fidelity to the formal appearance of the original is paramount. The greatest paradox, from the perspective of modern restoration, is that the especially revered images were the ones most frequently overpainted.[27] Only in the Counter Reformation, which saw the beginnings of a systematic collection of the documents and artifacts of ecclesiastical history, do we see the standardization of a modern approach where restoration is understood first and foremost as the excavation and preservation of the original work of art beneath the later accretions, now seen as corruptions or disfigurations. In the earlier period, different priorities resulted in a work that to modern eyes, trained in making fine formal distinctions, is marked by a disturbingly disjunctive quality: we have a Duccesque face on a primarily Dugento body. In 1300, the antiquarian concern with remaining faithful to the *look* of the original would have been considered a distracting and trivial preoccupation.

The incongruous date of 1221 included in the inscription (fig. 2) presents another anachronic disruption. (The inscription reads: ME GUIDO DE SENIS DIEBUS DEPINXIT AMENIS: QUEM XRS LENIS NULLIS

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22. Vespasiano, Life of Eugenius IV, in *Renaissance Princes, Popes, and Prelates. The Vespasiano Memoirs: Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century,* trans. William George and Emily Waters, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, p. 26.

23. Bruce Cole, "Old and New in the Early Trecento," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz,* 17, 1973, 229–240.

24. This is essentially the thrust of the argument presented by Cathleen Hoeniger, *The Renovation of Paintings in Tuscany, 1250–1500,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chap. 2, although I disagree with her contention, 26, that the restorations were intended to link up the old images with the style of Duccio, which since the installation of the Maestà in 1311 had become associated with "religious efficacy."

25. Suzana Skalova, "The 17th-century Icon 'Mother of God of Smolensk,' Rediscovered," *ICOM Committee for Conservation,*

Preprints, Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1987, 1127–1131; cited by Hoeniger, 32.

26. Alessandro Conti, *Storia del Restauro e della Conservazione delle Opere d'Arte,* Milan: Electa, 1988, 12, discusses in these terms the documented restorations of paintings and sculptures carried out by Martino di Bartolomeo in 1404 in the Cathedral of Siena. According to Conti, "il lavoro compiuto da Martino si individuava come un aggiornamento della pala a nuove esigenze di culto, cambiando ed aggiungendo figure di santi e come un recupero dei colori che non rispondevano più alla loro funzionalità ottica, diremmo con un linguaggio da restauro moderno. L'intervento avviene unicamente (ma anche necessariamente) in nome della funzionalità della tavola come oggetto di culto e parte dell'arredo che dà prestigio alla cattedrale."

27. The portrait of *St. Dominic* in the Fogg Museum in Cambridge, Mass., considered one of the oldest portraits of the saint, was first painted shortly after the saint's canonization in 1233. In the 1260s the head was repainted, and then was painted over again in about 1280 by the school of Guido of Siena. The hands were repainted at least once, as well as the tunic. In the early fourteenth century the halo was redone. See Carmen Gómez-Moreno, Elizabeth H. Jones, Arthur K. Wheelock, and Millard Meiss, "A Sienese *St. Dominic* Modernized Twice in the Thirteenth Century," *Art Bulletin,* 51, 1969, 363–366. See also Hoeniger, 88–99.

Figure 1. Guido da Siena, *Maestà*, 1270s. Panel, 283 x 194 cm. San Domenico, Siena. Photograph: Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

Figure 2. Guido da Siena, *Maestà*, 1270s. Panel, 283 x 194 cm. San Domenico, Siena. Detail of inscription. Photograph: Courtesy of Robert Nelson.

VELIT AGERE PENIS ANO. Di. Mi. CCXXI. "Guido da Siena painted me in the happy days; may the gentle Christ be willing to spare him all punishment, AD 1221.") Early art historians took it, naturally, as the date of the authorship of the panel, a possibility that was discounted as scholarship on Dugento painting developed. More recent explanations have explored the painting's ideological content and institutional affiliation. The most recent, and now widely accepted, explanation is that the date refers to the death date of St. Dominic, founder of the order of the church for which the painting was made.[28] But how is the abstract,

ideological significance of this date linked to the concrete circumstances of this site and this work? In light of the preceding discussion, the more attractive hypothesis is that proposed earlier by Enzo Carli, according to whom the date was inherited from an older work which Guido's painting substituted.[29]

In fact, in 1528, the diarist Sigismondo Tizio stated— inaccurately but revealingly—that Guido's painting stood on the high altar of the church that *preexisted* San

28. James Stubblebine, *Guido da Siena*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964, 40, and Julian Gardner, "Guido da Siena, 1221, and Tommaso da Modena," *Burlington Magazine*, 121, 1979, 107–108. The best evidence for this association is the inscription placed in the chapel in 1706, which reads: "GUIDO DE SENIS HANC TABULAM PINXIT ET / DIVUS DOMINICUS OCCUMBIT ANNO MCCXXI / FELIX PICTOR CUIUS PITTURA FORTASSE CELIS OSTENDIT QUI EA COMPLETA CELIS ASCENDIT." However, an inscription of the early eighteenth century can hardly count as evidence about the meaning of an inscription on a painting of the late thirteenth century. It is, instead, evidence of what was on the mind of Domenico Venturini, patron of the chapel, in 1706. As the second part of the inscription makes clear, he read the inscription on the painting to mean that Guido painted it in 1221 (thus making it possible that St.

Dominic "displayed it to heaven upon ascending there"). Indeed, in the document that records the installation of Guido's panel in the Venturini chapel, it is said that the installation greatly pleased Domenico Venturini "per havervi divozione speciale e perché pittura di Guido da Siena, in tempo che per l'Italia era perduta l'arte di dipingere. E detta immagine è quella istessa tanto nominata da' sanesi nelle loro historie, per abbattere l'oppinione falsa di quelli che dicono che Giovanni Cimabue fosse il ritrovatore della pittura nella Toscana, essendo questa immagine dipinta 59 anni avanti che egli nascesse, come si vede dall'inscrizzione che è sotto il medesimo quadro. . . ;" see *Die Kirchen von Siena,* ed. Peter Anselm Riedl and Max Seidel, II, 1.2, Munich: Bruckmann, 1992, 936. In other words, Domenico Venturini already subscribed to an art-historical view of artifacts, one that saw paintings as indices of their time, and thus he would have been constitutionally disinclined to acknowledge a substitution function for the painting and its inscription.

29. Enzo Carli, *Dipinti Senesi del Contado e della Maremma*, Milan: Electa, 1955, p. 177.

Domenico on this site, San Gregorio.[30] Was Tizio's historical "inaccuracy" not a mistake but a form of substitutional logic at work? Is it possible that he saw Guido's painting as a reiteration, in effect a perpetuation, of the original painting in the first church? Something like this logic seems to be at work in the inscription on Guido's panel, although with direct reference to the first foundation of the church of San Domenico. In fact, the church and convent of San Domenico that substituted for San Gregorio go back to a donation made in the very year we find in the inscription, 1221.[31] The painting may have been physically painted in the 1270s, and it may loudly proclaim its individual authorship (ME GUIDO DE SENIS . . . DEPINXIT), but at the same time it was subsumed in a larger institutional identity, and thus in a system of substitutions.

It was common practice, especially in Tuscany, for new paintings to replace and take over the function of the original paintings on the altars of churches. Guido da Siena's *Madonna del Voto* had replaced the *Madonna degli Occhi Grossi* on the high altar of Siena Cathedral also in the 1260s, and was in turn replaced by Duccio's *Maestà*. Bernardo Daddi's *Madonna* in Orsanmichele in Florence followed and replaced two successive earlier Madonnas.[32] Each substitution was visually quite different from the painting it replaced, indicating that formal resemblance was not the dominant criterion in substitution. Guido's prominent signature is certainly a proud proclamation of authorship, but typologically it has less to do with modern artists' signatures than with the tradition of inscriptions added to churches and chapels at times of significant restoration. (A good example of successive inscriptions, each proudly proclaiming the date and "author" of a significant campaign of restoration, occurs at Santa Maria in Cosmedin in Rome.) Those inscriptions take pride in having served and preserved a venerable institution: the work is not exalted as the work of an individual, but rather the individual is exalted by affiliation with the monument. Both Guido's painting and its restoration

were undertaken according to the rules of a system of substitution and preservation.

But Guido's panel was in its turn restored. That it was restored so soon is a symptom of changes, of new pressures on the system of substitution outlined above. Traditionally, restoration was one form of substitution. The painting was restored, or replaced, when it was physically necessary, when the painting got dirty, or damaged. To replace the image was considered a form of maintenance of the original image. By the late thirteenth century we see a rise in efforts of restoration because the problem was increasingly no longer one of strict physical maintenance. It was a problem of *defamiliarization* due to the accelerating pace of artistic change.

The problem seems to have become acute, not surprisingly, around 1300, the era of Duccio and Giotto—a time when painting was undergoing especially volatile change. Painting styles were being superseded within a generation, and restorers—that is, painters—were called in even before dust accumulated. A well-known example is Coppo di Marcovaldo's *Madonna del Bordone* in the church of the Servi in Siena of 1261, whose faces were repainted in the early Trecento.[33] Coppo's *Madonna* in the church of the Servi in Orvieto, also from the 1260s, underwent a similar intervention even before the end of the thirteenth century.[34] The *Saint Francis* by Margarito d'Arezzo in the Arezzo Pinacoteca was almost entirely repainted, with quite significant changes to the head, within twenty years.[35] As the time interval shrinks, modern art

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30. Cited by Cesare Brandi, *Duccio,* Florence: Vallecchi, 1951.

31. *Die Kirchen von Siena,* II, 1.2, 452.

32. On the Madonnas for the high altar of Siena Cathedral, see Henk van Os, *Sienese Altarpieces,* I, Groningen: Bousma, 1984, chaps. I and III. On Daddi and Orsanmichele, see Wolfgang and Elizabeth Paatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz,* IV, Frankfurt am Main: Lostermann, 1952, 499, and Nancy Fabbri and Nina Rutenberg, "The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context," *Art Bulletin,* 63, 1981, 385–405.

33. See Hoeniger, chap. 2.

34. Michele Cordaro, "Il Problema dei Rifacimenti e delle Aggiunte nei Restauri con due Esempi Relativi a Dipinti Medievali," *Arte Medievale,* 1, 1983, 263–276, noting the presence of oil paint in the overpainting, argued that it was done much later, in the eighteenth century. In this he was followed by Joseph Polzer, "The Virgin and Child Enthroned from the Church of the Servites in Orvieto Generally Given to Coppo di Marcovaldo: Recent Laboratory Evidence and a Review of Coppo's Oeuvre," *Antichità Viva,* 23, 3, 1984, 5–18. Hoeniger, 160, n. 1, also concurs with this view. Conti, 9 and 329, n. 4, however, argued that the oil medium was used in binding agents in the early period, as indicated by Theophilus writing in the twelfth century and Cennino Cennini writing ca. 1400. According to Conti, the repainting was done by a painter influenced by Cimabue ca. 1280. According to Miklos Boskovits, "Intorno a Coppo di Marcovaldo," in *Scritti di Storia dell'Arte in Onore di Ugo Procacci,* eds. Maria Grazia Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto and Paolo Dal Poggetto, I, Milan: Electa, 1977, 94–105, the repainting was done early, by the late thirteenth-century Master of the Madonna of San Brizio.

35. Hoeniger, 77–82, dates the original painting to ca. 1260 and the repainting to ca. 1270–1275, believing the repainting to be by Margarito's shop. Anna Maria Maetzke, "Nuove Ricerche su

historians have understandably felt compelled to postulate "external" conservation disasters to explain the early interventions: Coppo's panel in Orvieto suffered "probable harm by fire"; Margarito's original painting was "perhaps ruined."[36] The arguments advanced here suggest another explanation, namely that the practice and mentality of substitution persisted unquestioned even as it was recruited with greater frequency to deflect the increasing pace of change.

The acceleration of restoration efforts itself inevitably effected a change in attitudes. The entire development only brought to light the evidence, and possibly the problem, of style change, a realization that ultimately worked against the attitudes at the basis of the substitution practices that drove the restorations. Ultimately, this realization produced new approaches to restoration altogether. The most important new technique, which was to become dominant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was to preserve the old image intact and to add to it only through the use of framing elements.[37] These framing devices were given the job of bridging the gap between the revered image and the worshipping public, and thus of bringing the old images into the cultic present. As a result, that gap itself became semiotically charged, and the unfamiliarity of the old image—palpable manifestations of antiquity, like gold ground or a strange figure style—themselves became meaningful to contemporary viewers as signifiers of venerability. Guido's Madonna, in fact, underwent this type of reinstallation procedure in 1705, and this is the arrangement that we now see in San Domenico in Siena (fig. 3).[38]

The history of this one painting, therefore, serves as an epitome of the history of preservation. First Guido's painting itself was undertaken as a form of restoration, substituting for an earlier image at San Domenico, or perhaps from the original church of San Gregorio. Second, the Duccesque overpainting of parts of the panel was undertaken as a form of functional maintenance. Third, the Baroque installation was designed to preserve and stage the earlier work in its "primitive" form.

The last technique brings us close to modern practices: the old image was no longer preserved by substitution but by methods of conservation designed to preserve the material integrity of the original painting. Venerated images dropped out of the substitution chain and were treated increasingly like *relics*, which are by definition unsubstitutable. Their now-time no longer had the capacity to collapse history; instead, reverence for them took the form of a historical relationship to the image as artifact. This step marks the beginning of a formally attentive history of art. A basic premise of modern *Kunstwissenschaft* is that art works are relics, artifacts bearing the imprint of a time and a place. Before art history became a secular and academic discipline these ideas arose as part of the cult practices surrounding Christian images.

The shift begins to occur, generally, in the thirteenth century. The venerated ancient Madonnas of Rome, for example, were repainted successively until about that time. The logic of substitution that governed the practice of overpainting gave way to a desire to preserve the original material artifact. After that point, the icons were either preserved in their thirteenth-century state or, through the removal of overpaint, returned to an earlier state.[39]

Margaritone d'Arezzo," *Bollettino d'Arte*, 58, 1973, 108, believes the repainting to have been done in the Florentine ambient of the Magdalen Master.

36. Conti, 9: ". . . le teste principali erano state completamente ridipinte in seguito ai probabili danni di bruciature." Maetzke, 108: "La seconda stesura . . . ricalca fedelmente la figura sottostante (che si era forse rovinata). . . ." (On Margarito, Hoeniger, 82, sees "no reason to believe that the image was repainted to repair a damaged original," arguing that it was done instead to emphasize different aspects of the saint's personality.) Interestingly, no restoration-as-repair hypothesis has been proposed for the Duccesque repainting of Coppo's *Madonna del Bordone*, probably because in this case the 50-year interval does not so urgently demand it.

37. Martin Warnke, "Italienische Bildtabernakel bis zum Frühbarock," *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 19, 1968, 61–102; and Hoeniger, chaps. 3 and 5.

38. *Die Kirchen von Siena*, II, 1.2, 933: "L'anno 1706 il signore Domenico Venturini adornò la detta cappella con stucchi alle par[e]ti laterali, pitturò tutta la volta, vi fece le spalliere di noce, e nell'altare fu levata la Pietà, che di presente è posta in crino, e vi fu collocata l'immagine della Madonna in atto di sedere, che prima era situata

sopra la porta maggiore, nella parte interiore della chiesa, pittura antichissima."

39. Most scholars agree that the latest interventions on the St. Luke icon in Santa Maria Maggiore date to the thirteenth century. Gerhard Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani: Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter*, Weinheim: VCH, 1990, 24–28, convincingly disproved Joseph Wilpert's dating of the panel to ca. 1250, arguing that the original painting was done in the sixth century, shortly after the founding of the church. The same applies to the early eighth-century Madonna della Clemenza in Santa Maria in Trastevere; see Carlo Bertelli, *La Madonna di Santa Maria in Trastevere: Storia, Iconografia, Stile di un Dipinto Romano del Ottavo Secolo*, Rome: n.s., 1961. The Madonna of San Sisto in Santa Maria del Rosario also seems to have been retouched last in the thirteenth century, to judge from the pre-restoration photos. Unfortunately, the main study on the work, Carlo Bertelli, "L'Immagine del 'Monasterium Tempuli' dopo il Restauro," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 31, 1961, 82–111 does not stop to consider this question. Besides some overpainting of the nineteenth

Figure 3. Guido de Siena, *Maestà*. 1270s, as installed in Venturini chapel in 1705. Panel, 283 x 194 cm. San Domenico, Siena. Photograph: Courtesy of Robert Nelson.

Custom and costume

It is not a coincidence that as old paintings were being converted into relics, the time-specific elements in contemporary painting were becoming increasingly insistent. Vigilant eyes discerned obtrusive modern features in contemporary paintings, and disqualified them as legitimate bearers of religious meaning. The early fifteenth-century reformer Giovanni Dominici, for example, believed old and smoky images ("vecchie affumate") to be closer to "the figures, or to the truth represented by those figures," than the highly

ornamented pictures of his day.[40] The new and garish paintings refused to slide smoothly into the chain of replication, and thus compromised the "truth represented by those figures." Instead they advertised themselves as the result of current *custom,* and in turn invited curiosity and criticism. These developments eroded the function of substitution, without of course eliminating the habits of thought associated with it.

Custom designates the markers and practices by which people become accustomed or associated with one another as a group. Custom establishes identity, and in drawing a line around a community it also designates a boundary, it marks difference from other communities. As countless travel accounts show, the most overt marker of group identity, and of social difference, is dress, and this is why the word custom is closely related, and in several languages is still identical, to the word costume.[41] The primary training ground for the

century removed in 1950, the latest layer of repainting on the seventh-century icon from Santa Maria Antiqua, now in Santa Francesca Romana, was a layer of tempera paint dating to the thirteenth century; see Ernst Kitzinger, "On Some Icons of the Seventh Century," in *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955, 132–150. In this case, the thirteenth-century restoration also involved the preservation and insertion of the faces of the Virgin and Child in their original state, as relics, thus signaling a move towards a more modern approach to restoration already at that stage; see Pico Cellini, "Una Madonna Molto Antica," *Proporzioni,* 3, 1950, 1–6. The Madonna of the Pantheon in Santa Maria as Martyres is the exception: it was repainted several times up to the eighteenth century; see Carlo Bertelli, "La Madonna del Pantheon," *Bollettino d'Arte,* 46, 1961, 24–32, n. 3, 30.

40. *Regola del Governo di Cura Familiare,* ed. Donato Salvi, Florence: Garinei, 1860, 113.

41. For the case of Renaissance Venice, see Bronwen Wilson, "Reproducing the Contours of Venetian Identity in Sixteenth-Century Costume Books," *Studies in Iconography,* 25, 2004, 1–54.

perception of custom was costume. Sartorial habits were a primary introduction to a foreign *habitus,* eliciting further observations about a foreigner's otherness. Custom also has a social axis, marking off different classes from one another. Here again the clearest marker of class distinction is dress, which introduces further features of class identity.[42]

During the fifteenth century the geographical conception of custom was supplemented by a chronological one: past styles were increasingly perceived as something foreign. Conversely, the geographical conception assumed a temporal significance. Byzantine visitors to the West, for example, were seen as living relics of ancient dress, as we saw in Vespasiano's account of the Florence Council of 1439. When the emperor Manuel II Palaeologus with his retinue visited Paris and other northern European centers in the years around 1400 in the hope of raising money and troops for the defense of Constantinople, their costumes made an enormous impression. They were soon incorporated by artists attempting to portray ancient figures in ancient dress, as can be seen in the illustrations for the *Térence* produced for Jean, Duke of Berry before 1416.[43]

By the end of the fifteenth century, the array of outmoded, if relatively recent, styles of dress available to painters allowed them to open up temporal references through quotation and assemblage. The long and elaborate robes of the international Gothic style of ca. 1400, in particular—although only two generations old—emerged as powerful signifiers of the antique in painting from Botticelli to Bosch.[44] In his *Primavera,* for example, Botticelli gave to Flora a dress with jagged edges of the sort that was in fashion around 1400. As Charles Dempsey argued, the "fanciful and appropriately old-fashioned" costumes of the *Primavera* bring this representation of the first spring of all time into the present through its assimilation into a vernacular stream, a native lyric tradition, itself an amalgam of contemporary references and antique traditions (fig. 4).[45]

The structure of multiple citation destabilizes temporal reference, opening up the painting to a vision of the primordial theophany. In his *Adoration of the Magi* in Madrid, Bosch produced for his youngest magus a gown with an extravagant, billowing sleeve of the sort known in Italy as *a gozzi,* with the large sack closed at the end with tassles—a garment modeled, again, on a type of gown worn ca. 1400 (fig. 5). By 1500, the fashions of ca. 1400 had crossed over the historical horizon, and thus became manipulable as signs of temporal dislocation, even as signs of a foreign antiquity.[46]

During the fifteenth century observers in the West became increasingly aware that the dress around them was subject to the most extreme variations over time. Some historians have asserted that beginning in the late Middle Ages modes changed with greater frequency than ever before—indeed, that a modern fashion culture emerged at this time.[47] Others have placed emphasis instead on the new *attention* paid to dress—for example, in the burgeoning field of sumptuary law—as a result of

46. Hence I disagree with Newton's contention that Bosch's costume has "Gothic connotations" (106). Certainly for a costume historian the reference is specifically to late Gothic dress, but it is more likely that in Bosch's historical imagination the grandiose robes of the International Gothic were on the far side of contemporary memory, and linked up to the antique. The notion of "Gothic" would, needless to say, have been meaningless to him. In that sense he would have been in step with a widespread archaizing tendency in northern art ca. 1500. Bernhard Decker, *Das Ende des Mittelalterlichen Kultbildes und die Plastik Hans Leinbergers,* Bamberg: Lehrstuhl für Kunstgeschichte und Aufbaustudium Denkmalpflege an der Universität Bamberg, 1985, has offered several examples of the revival of International Gothic style in the period around 1500 not as a reference to the "Gothic" but as signifiers of ancient purity and ideality.

47. Max von Boehn, *Modes and Manners,* trans. Joan Joshua, I, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1952, 215, correlated it to the rise of the burgher class in the cities of fourteenth-century Europe: "fashion, in the sense of incessant fluctuation, perpetual striving after improvement, now came on the scene." Or p. 216: "costume of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries . . . no longer follows any definite style, the whole tendency is toward violation of style." He is followed by Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes,* New York: Viking, 1978, 362: "Fashion as we know it thus began roughly with the rise of towns and the middle class, along with the consolidation of monarchical power." Until the twelfth century, in Hollander's view (p. 363), clothes show "a fairly static simplicity of shape. . . . Once pronounced formal elements began to distinguish elegant dress, fashion could become truly competitive, as it has been ever since, in a battle fought chiefly on aesthetic grounds between members of the same class, generation after generation." According to Carole Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, 180, "[T]he first mention in Florentine records of a phenomenon called 'fashion,' of the need to constantly change and update one's (still-wearable) clothing, is probably to be found in Villani's early fourteenth-century *Cronica.*"

42. Georg Simmel, "Fashion" (1904), in *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings,* ed. Donald Levine, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971, 294–323.

43. See Paul Durrieu, *Les Très Riches Heures de Jean de France, Duc de Berry,* Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1904, 98. The costumes are analyzed in some detail by Stella Mary Newton, *Renaissance Theatre Costume and the Sense of the Historic Past,* London: Rapp & Whiting, 1975, 64–66.

44. For examples of this phenomenon I have relied on the excellent analysis of Newton, 97–106.

45. Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 50–78.
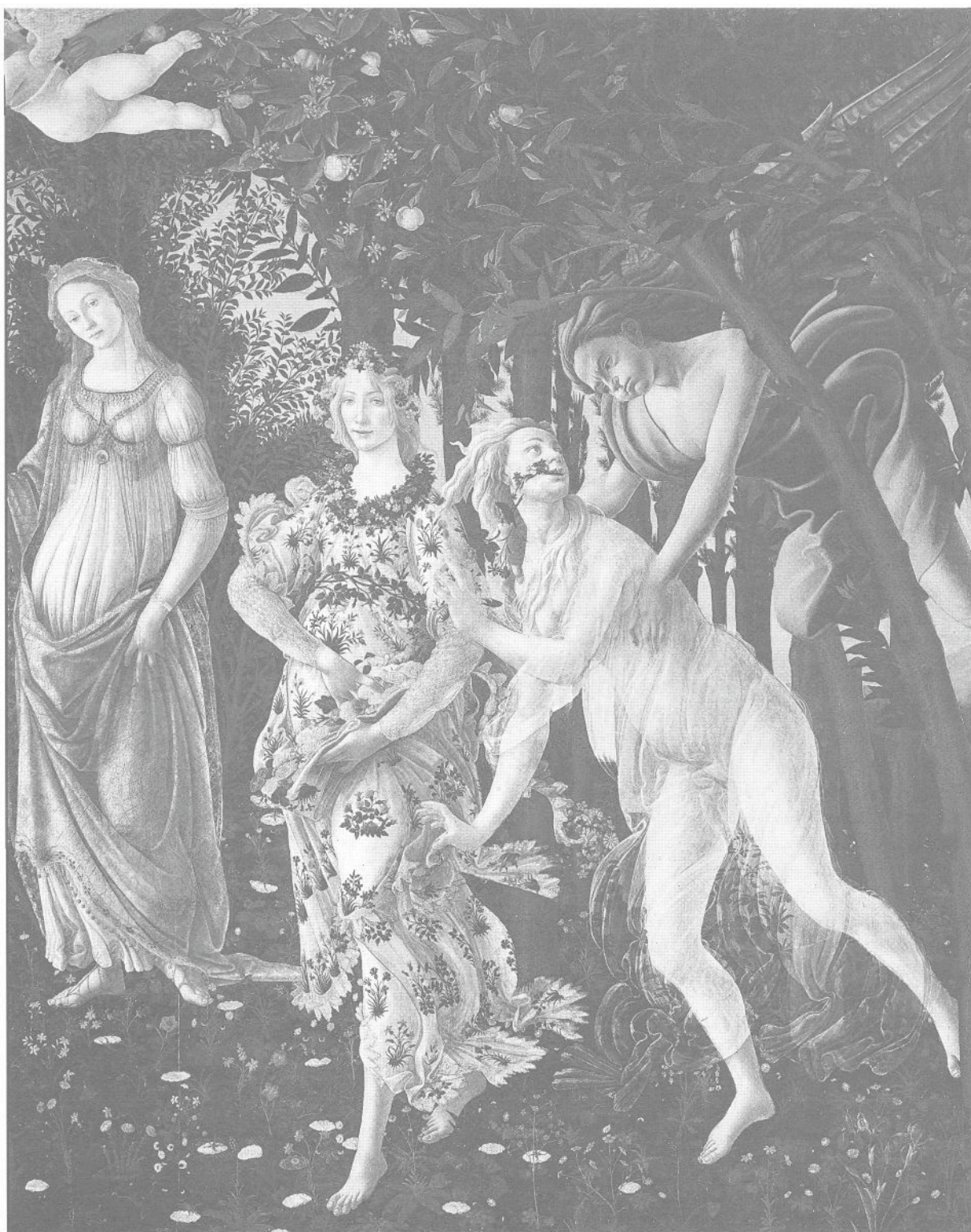
Figure 4. Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, 1470s. Panel, 315 x 205 cm. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. Detail.
Photograph: Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

the disturbing effects of new forms of social mobility in the period.[48] On the level of cultural production, one of the most significant consequences of this new awareness was a fascination with the pageantry of historical costume, and with its arbitrariness, a fascination that constitutes a form of early ethnographic thinking. It became obvious to many that though climatic conditions do not vary drastically modes of clothing do, continually, exhibiting "an absolute indifference to the material standards of life."[49] Or, as Shakespeare put it, "If only to go warm were gorgeous, / Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st" (King Lear, II, 4).

Costume, it was observed, was supremely semiotic in its supplementarity and arbitrariness. The perception of arbitrariness entailed the perception that costume was meaningful as well as functional, that it said something about a place, or a time. These interests produced, in the sixteenth century, a cascade of books devoted to the illustration of habits and costumes/customs, arrayed both geographically and chronologically.[50] Art was directly implicated by these developments. In a concrete sense, people became aware of the vicissitudes of clothing over time through encounters with older works of visual art: coins, sculptures, tapestries, paintings. Erasmus's interlocutors, quoted above, can quip about the odd fashions of past times because they are looking at old images. Shakespeare's Borachio, in the passage quoted at the head of this article, finds visual sources of fashions in the "reechy painting," "the old church window," and the "worm-eaten tapestry."

The spectacle of historical fashions offered by old art also served as an introduction to the idea that art itself was something that had a history. Perhaps the clearest account of the relationship of artistic style and fashion was offered by Erasmus, in his lashing dialogue on the historicity of literary style, the Ciceronianus, published in 1528. According to Erasmus, Cicero's language was appropriate to the age he lived in and thus was not to be reintroduced wholesale and unthinkingly into the present. Erasmus points to the domain of fashion, where "what was admired a hundred years ago wouldn't be acceptable now"—a statement that elicits the following exchange:

> NOSOPONUS: No, indeed, everyone would laugh and boo. Just look at pictures that aren't all that old, painted, say,

sixty years ago, and see what was being worn by those of the fair sex belonging to prominent families or living at court. If a woman went out in public dressed like that now, the village idiots and street-urchins would pelt her with rotten fruit.

> HYPOLOGUS: Only too true. Who would put up now with a decent married woman wearing those huge horns and pyramids and cones sticking out from the top of the head, and having her brow and temples plucked so that nearly half her head is bald; or with men wearing those hats stuffed like a cushion with a great tail hanging down, coats with scalloped borders and enormous padded shoulders, hair shaved off an inch above their ears, tunics far too short to reach the knees, hardly covering their private parts, slippers with a long pointed beak sticking out in front. . . .[51]

After this well-observed catalogue of ridiculous fashions of the not-too-distant past—it is easy enough to find examples of each of these fashions in works of art made during the previous century[52]—the interlocutors agree that they are "of one mind about clothes." But then the conversation shifts to address the history of painting itself:

> BULEPHORUS: Suppose that Apelles, who was the supreme portrayer of gods and men of his age, by some chance returned to life in our time. If he now painted Germans as he once painted Greeks, and monarchs as he once painted

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48. Diane Owen Hughes, "Sumptuary Laws and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy," in Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West, ed. John Bossy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 69–99.

49. Simmel, 297.

50. Von Boehn, II, 102–111.

51. Erasmus, Ciceronianus, ed. A. H. T. Levi, in Collected Works of Erasmus, XXVIII, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988, 381.

52. Many of them could, in fact, have been described by Erasmus as "pictures that aren't all that old, painted, say, sixty years ago." "[H]orns and pyramids and cones sticking out from the top the head:" Jan van Eyck, Portrait of Margarethe van Eyck, Vienna Kunsthistorischesmuseum (horns); Hans Memling, Portrait of Maria Baroncelli, New York, Metropolitan Museum (cone); Master of Mary of Burgundy, "Mary of Burgundy at Prayer," Hours of Mary of Burgundy, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett of the Staatliche Museen. "[B]row and temples plucked so that nearly half her head is bald:" Profile Portrait of a Lady sometimes attributed to Limbourgs, Washington, National Gallery; Master of the Virgo inter Virgines, Annunciation, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans van Beuningen. "[M]en wearing those hats stuffed like a cushion with a great tail hanging down:" Pisanello, Costume Study, Bayonne, Musée Bonnat; Eyck School, Portrait of Marco Barbarigo, London, National Gallery. "[C]oats with scalloped borders and enormous padded shoulders:" Domenico Veneziano, Adoration of the Magi, Berlin, Staatliche Museen. "[H]air shaved off an inch above their ears:" Robert Campin, Portrait of a Man (Robert de Masmines?), Madrid, Thyssen Collection; Jan van Eyck, Virgin of the Chancellor Rolin, Paris, Louvre. "[T]unics far too short to reach the knees, hardly covering their private parts:" Master of René of Anjou, "Amour takes the Heart of the King," Livre du Couer d'Amour Espris, Vienna, Nationalbibliothek. "[S]lippers with a long pointed beak sticking out in front:" Rogier van der Weyden, Bladelin Triptych, Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

Alexander, since people are not like that anymore, wouldn't he be said to have painted badly?[53]

This is not quite Rimbaud's "Il faut être absolument moderne." Erasmus is not defending the modernity of art per se, but expressing a concern for historical appropriateness *in* art, which later became a premise for a more aggressive modernist aesthetics. Erasmus's remarks are typical of a trend in Renaissance writing on art that adapted classical discussions of decorum, or appropriateness of expression and character, to the question of historical accuracy. The theorist Filarete warned, in 1464, against using contemporary costumes for the figures of Caesar and Hannibal.[54] The sentiment was echoed in 1557 by Lodovico Dolce: "If, for instance, [the painter] should be depicting a military action of Caesar or Alexander the Great, it is inappropriate that he should arm the soldiers in the fashion which prevails nowadays."[55] Leonardo da Vinci also warned his fellow painters against using contemporary dress in their works:

> The garments of figures should be in keeping with their age and decorum, that is, an old man should be robed; the young man should be adorned with clothing that doesn't quite cover the neck down to the shoulders, with the exception of those who have professed religion. And avoid as much as possible the dress of your own day, unless they belong to the [religious] category just mentioned. Contemporary dress is only to be used in figures like the ones used on tombs in churches [i.e., donor portraits]. In this way perhaps our successors will not be provoked to laughter by the mad inventions of men, but rather will be made to admire their dignity and beauty.[56]

These calls to decorum reflect concern over the increasingly apparent fact that whatever subject or time the painting may represent, it "belongs" to and registers the time of its manufacture. This recognition was even used as a means of defending outmoded art as a historical record. Giorgio Vasari defended Trecento painting, "although it is not very beautiful," for its value as a historical record, and specifically as a record of period costumes.[57] Rather than offering a positive argument for the historicity of artistic style, these various statements function negatively, as a symptom that faith in the chain of transmission was weakening, that paintings were increasingly seen as contemporary *malgré elles*. The first measure to counter drift was to institute a new vigilance about historical accuracy in matters of "time-sensitive" content, such as dress.

This was a symptomatic response to the problem, far from a robust conception of historical style, which postulates a change in the *way* the world is represented from period to period. Even Erasmus, so sensitive to matters of style in writing, was not making that point

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53. Erasmus, *Ciceronianus*, 381.

54. *Treatise on Architecture; Being the Treatise by Antonio di Piero Averlino, known as Filarete*, trans. John R. Spencer, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965, I, 306; II, f. 179v.

55. *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, ed. and trans. Mark Roskill, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000, 119. On the question generally, see Reiner Haussherr, *Convenevolezza. Historische Angemessenheit in der Darstellung von Kostüm und Schauplatz seit der Spätantike bis ins 16. Jahrhundert* (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz. Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwiss. Klasse 1984, Nr. 4), Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1984.

56. Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting: Codex Urbinas Latinus 1270*, trans. A. Philip McMahon, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956, I, 107r.: "Li abiti delle figure siano accomodati all'età e al decoro, cioè che 'l vecchio sia togato, il giovane ornato d'abito che manco occupi il collo da li omeri della spalle in su, eccetto quegli che fanno professione in religione, e fugire il più che si può gli abiti della sua età, eccetto quando si scontrassino essere delli sopradetti, e non si debbono usare se non nelle figure ch'anno a somigliare a quelli che son sepolti per le chiese, acciò che si riservi riso nelli nostri successori

delle pazze invenzioni degli uomini, ovvero che gli lascino admirazione della loro dignità e bellezza." Translation mine.

57. Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più Eccellenti Pittori, Scultori e Architettori nelle Redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini, with comments by Paola Barocchi, II, Florence: Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 1967, 173 (on paintings by Bruno di Giovanni and Buffalmacco in Santa Maria Novella, Florence): "Questa pittura, ancora che non sia molto bella, considerandosi il disegno di Bonamico e la invenzione ell'è degna di esser in parte lodata, e massimamente per la varietà de' vestiti, barbute et altre armature di que' tempi; et io me ne sono servito in alcune storie che ho fatto per il signor duca Cosimo, dove era bisogno rappresentare uomini armati all'antica et altre somiglianti cose di quell'età. . . . E da questo si può conoscere quanto sia da far capitale dell'invenzioni et opere fatte da questi antichi, comeché così perfette non siano, et in che modo utile e commodo si possa trarre dalle cose loro. . . ." It is likely that he used them for details in *The Expansion of Florence* in the Salone dei Cinquecento. Vasari, I, 23, says similar things about the frescoes depicting the Longobard queen Theodelinda in the Cathedral of Monza: "dove si vedeva che eglino dalla parte di dietro erano rasi e dinanzi avevano le zazzere e si tignevano fino al mento; le vestimenta erano di tela larga, come usarono gl'Angli et i Sassoni, e sotto un manto di diversi colori, e le scarpe fino alle dita de' piedi aperte e sopra legate con certi correggiuoli." The odd thing is that these frecoes date from the fifteenth century, something Vasari surely would have known, especially as a very legible inscription on the wall dates the painting work to 1444. (On the fresco cycle, see Janice Schell, "La cappella di Teodolinda: gli affreschi degli Zavattari," In *Il Duomo di Monza: la Storia e l'Arte*, Milan: Electa, 1989, 189–214.) Was he aware of them as substitutions, even as he was relying on them as context-sensitive records of sixth-century dress? If so, then this would indicate a capacity at this early stage of art-historical thought to shuttle between a substitutional and an artifact model of artifact production.

about painting. The painting of Apelles would not suit present circumstances not because his painting style is outdated but because the things he depicted are; it is because "people are not like that anymore." Paintings were thought to be of their time as it were inadvertently, by registering *things,* features of a world recognized as past. It was content, caught in the net of representation, not the style of a picture as such, that pegged paintings to a historical moment.

Styles of painting change because cultural conditions change: this is a self-evident truth to modern historians but it was an extraordinary idea in this period, and it is disputable that it even existed in ancient times. Pliny is extremely concerned with changes in art-making, but these are presented as technological achievements, not as changes in style. Likewise, Vasari attributes the strangeness and, in his view, the deficiencies of earlier art to lack of technological know-how, not to different conceptions or motivations of art-making. The crucial turning point comes in the preface to the third part of the *Lives,* where his criteria shift. According to Vasari, what distinguishes the art of Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael from the art of earlier eras is a sort of autonomy from purely technical and functional imperatives, a grace that cannot be measured, a *"non so chè"* not possessed by earlier art. This comes close to a conception of historical style, but in fact it is a sort of meta-argument about the role of style as an index of the historicity of art. It is not that the style of the third era succeeds the style of the second era, but that the third era brought into being a conception of style as such.[58] This break in effect launched the idea of an art culture that is subject to a succession of styles, and it also prompted the quasi-scholarly capacity to look at the art of the past *as* a history of styles.

In the Renaissance it was not clear that paintings were linked stylistically to different periods, yet it was obvious that clothes changed. It is not that the idea was absent from art criticism; it is that art criticism of the kind we take for granted barely existed. And yet where

there is interest in costume, it is likely that interest in artistic style is not far behind. Perceptions about one were facilitated by perceptions about the other. Not only did people learn about historical costume through art, but in becoming aware of the historically sensitive accessories registered in art, such as dress and hair styles, they also came to a new understanding of the historicity of artworks themselves.

Castigation as art criticism

Before a developed language of art criticism was in place—that is, before the seventeenth century—there were other arenas of discourse where these problems were debated. "Vanities," the "secular," "decorum"— nowhere were these words applied with more ideological force and critical acumen than in the polemics of religious reformers. The historicity of art was a concern of disgruntled religious clerics well before it became one for art connoisseurs. The rhetoric of reform is a primary laboratory for thinking about the historicity of art and culture in the early modern period.

The idea that paintings themselves—and not just the content they recorded—changed with the times was one byproduct of the reformers' criticisms of the secular in religious art. In 1450 St. Antoninus, archbishop of Florence, declared:

> It appears vain and superfluous in the stories of Saints or in churches to paint curiosities [*curiosa*], which do not serve to excite devotion, but laughter and vanity, such as monkeys and dogs, and the like, or vain adornments of clothing.[59]

It is clear that his criticisms were directed at paintings in the international Gothic style, of which Gentile da Fabriano had recently offered a demonstration in his altarpiece of the *Adoration of the Magi,* at the time in the church of Santa Trinita in Florence.[60] Later in the century the reformer Girolamo Savonarola objected to the introduction of contemporary features in the religious art of his day, in the conflation of saints and contemporary portraits and in the use of contemporary dress:

> You painters do badly, and if you knew the scandal that follows from it and the things that I know, you wouldn't paint them. You put all the vanities in the churches. Do you think that the Virgin Mary went clothed in the manner that you paint her? I tell you that she went dressed as a poor

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58. In some ways this view corresponds to that of Philip Sohm, *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, who argues, 105–114, that Vasari not only described different styles in his Third Preface but also historicized the concept of style itself: "Style as a visible form was well known to be the most reliable indicator of historical change. Vasari realized, however, that if the practice of style changed with time, so too might the concept itself, and that it might change in ways that mirrored the styles of historical periods to which they were attached" (112). I argue that in the Third Preface Vasari heralds not a shift in styles and concepts of style but the very advent of style and the corresponding art-theoretical armature.

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59. *Summa Theologica,* III, Verona, 1740, col. 321. Pars III, tit. VIII, cap. IV, sec. XI.

60. Creighton Gilbert, "The archbishop on the painters of Florence, 1450," *Art Bulletin,* 41, 1959, 75–87.

woman, simply, and covered so that you could hardly see her face; and so did Saint Elizabeth go simply dressed. You would do a great good if you removed those figures that are painted there so improperly. You make the Virgin Mary appear dressed like a prostitute [meretrice].[61]

In an effort to shame ordinary women into decency lawmakers often exempted prostitutes from sumptuary legislation, thus turning them literally into monstrous showpieces of the latest fashions.[62] When Savonarola and others accused artists of dressing their figures like prostitutes they were not only referring to immodest or revealing clothing, but also categorically to the introduction of modish, highly contemporary clothes.

That clothing should change with the times was simply a signal instance of the vanity of earthly things. Clerics were, and still are, distinguished among their contemporaries by wearing anachronistic robes that signal their independence from time and custom. The dress that changes with time—the dress that is arbitrary, excessive, and vain—is secular, it is subject to history, to the *saeculum*. This is why Leonardo, in the passage quoted above, instructs the painter to resist contemporary dress except in the case of religious people: the dress of the clerics was, as it were, already anachronic, and so was exempt from these strictures.

The crucial move was in seeing a parallel between these frivolities, suspect because "secular" and timebound, and the loosening of artistic discipline that allowed these distractions into religious art. Paintings themselves came under the criticism of reformers when they entered the arena of the secular—that is, when they ceased to behave like clerics' robes and began behaving like secular dress. The castigation of such context-sensitive features in art, in fact, simply concretizes a venerable metaphor of reform rhetoric. From the beginning of Christian thought the concept of reform had been likened to the process of restoring a work of art. In describing the reform of man and his restoration to the image and likeness of God, the Greek Fathers continually compared it to the process of cleaning a painting that has been marred but not completely ruined by the addition of unsuitable colors and by the

accumulation of dirt.[63] The introduction of corrupting contemporary features *in* painting was not thought of as functionally different from the accretion of concrete context-sensitive features, such as dirt, *on* the painting. It was a form of disfiguring overpainting, occluding the traditional and pristine prototype-image.

Until this point I have discussed all the visual arts together, but in fact painting was a particular target of critiques of modishness. In the concrete matter of physical survival painting was always thought to be more sensitive to the effects of time. In the *paragone* between sculpture and painting perhaps the most-often repeated argument in favor of sculpture was that it stands the test of time better than painting. Whereas few paintings survive from antiquity, many works of sculpture have come down to us. This is an inherent virtue of sculpture but also a question of utility, for, in Baldassare Castiglione's words, "being made to preserve memory, sculptures fulfill this function better than painting."[64] The relation between endurance and utility also comes up in the letter of 1547 from Agnolo Bronzino to the forum on the *paragone* organized by Benedetto Varchi, where he reports the sculptors' argument that sculpture is a magnificent adornment for cities, "because it serves to make colossi and statues . . . that honor illustrious men, and adorn the land." Sculpture's durability gives it a civic function, and makes it an appropriate ornament for enduring institutions, such as buildings and tombs. With painting, on the other hand, "one can only make fictitious things of no utility other than pleasure."[65]

These arguments thus touch on more than the physical frangibility of painting. When the sculptor Tullio Lombardo calls painting "an unstable and transient thing

61. *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria,* ed. Paolo Ghiglieri, II, Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1971, Sermon 18, 25–26. Savonarola's contemporary in Germany, Geyler von Keysersberg, made exactly the same criticism, accusing artists of portraying the female saints in contemporary dress, like whores. See Bernhard Decker, "Reform within the cult image: the German winged altarpiece before the Reformation," in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance,* eds. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 97.

62. See Hughes, 91.

63. See Gerhard B. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 7, 1953, 1–34, esp. 12; and idem, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969, 91–94, 128, 194–195.

64. Baldassare Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortigiano (1528),* in *Opere di Baldassare Castiglione, Giovanni della Casa, Benvenuto Cellini,* ed. Carlo Cordié, Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1960, 83. Adducing the same point, Bronzino concludes (*Trattati d'Arte del Cinquecento,* ed. Paola Barocchi, 3 vols., Bari: Laterza, 1960–1962, I, 64): "adunque è più utile che la pittura."

65. Bronzino, in *Trattati d'Arte del Cinquecento,* I, 65–66. The final phrase reads: ". . . dove della pittura non può farsi altro che cose finte e di niuna utilitade, altro che di piacere; e per questo essere più utile la scultura." I follow the English translation in Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, *Italian Art 1500–1600,* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966, 11–12. Bronzino's unfinished letter does not offer an answer on this particular point from the painters' side.

(*cosa instabele e caduca*),"[66] he is referring primarily to its capacity for physical survival, but it is possible that he was also alluding to time-sensitivity in a larger sense. Painting was *caduca* not only in its tendency to decay, but also in its tendency to undergo change and thus become decadent. Of all the visual arts, painting was especially sensitive to the drift of the *saeculum*. It was less linked to the life of public institutions and so was more autonomous and arbitrary in its development. It was the most amenable to change, and the least reliable medium when working within a system of substitution. It was especially receptive to technological innovation, as painters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries discovered. It was also especially well suited to record the details and textures of fashions, as well as the features of décor and setting that would in retrospect emerge as glaring indices of specific historical moments, of a succession of now-times. All of this makes it, like clothing, an especially sensitive seismograph of history. These were the positive, belated lessons that *Kunstwissenschaft* drew from the same observations that caused consternation to medieval and renaissance reformers.

Painting offered a more extreme instance of the logic that applied to costume. Variable as it is, costume at least responds to a necessary function, whereas painting is entirely supplementary, suitable to making "fictitious things of no utility other than pleasure." Like costume, too, it is a colored covering that began to lead an unruly, independent life, and to attract inordinate attention to itself, as time went on. The rise and proliferation of independent panel painting was a relatively late development in western Christian art, following on the post-crusade importation of Byzantine icons in significant numbers from the thirteenth century. Until the later middle ages, painting was most often used to adorn the outer surfaces of other, more sacred things, like reliquaries, altar frontals, church walls, and sculpture itself. But from the thirteenth century on, and especially in Italy, painting began to peel itself away from those surfaces and to displace sculpture and other sacred objects at the center of Christian worship. In this light, it is possible to see the intensive exploration of illusionistic devices in painting from the late thirteenth century on—that is through the history of early renaissance art—as part of a compensatory drive to take over the claims of sculpture and architecture, an anxious

trace of a process of supplementation. The thinness of painting, its costume-like quality, was to haunt it throughout its early modern history. In his *Apologhi*, Leon Battista Alberti tells the fable of a man who asks a king for the golden robe that he has seen the king wearing on a painted insignia. The painting responds: "If you take the garment I will be nothing."[67]

Alternative genealogies of the work of art

In the short term, these concerns produced efforts of reform, interventions designed to return art to an imagined former state of timelessness. The developments studied in this paper were considered aberrant, and reversible, throughout this period. It was still the norm to think of images in a "vertical," paradigmatic way. In the same way, even as the spectacle of unruly fashion arose in early modern Europe it was still the norm to think of clothing in traditional ways, not as detached signifiers but as forms of identification that leave a print or character on its wearer and set him or her in a social order.[68] These persistent beliefs drove efforts of reform, which included humanist-inspired efforts of *repristinatio* that were linked to some of the most notable trends in Renaissance art.

One conspicuous expression of this sensibility was Alberti's *De Pictura*, which recruited the model of classical rhetoric in the service of a new conception of pictorial *compositio* that would stand as an alternative to the copious *dissolutio* of the painting admired by the school of Guarino, that is, the painting of Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello—a polemic quite in line with the reform-minded critique of St. Antoninus discussed above.[69] Perspective, moreover, was not merely a forward-looking modern innovation; it was also an excellent means of cleaning up the surface of painting in the face of the most recent, modern developments. It drew attention away from the crowded surface—indeed,

66. For a reproduction of the letter, see Alison Luchs, *Tullio Lombardo and Ideal Portrait Sculpture in Renaissance Venice, 1490–1530*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, fig. 100.

67. Leon Battista Alberti, *Apologhi*, ed. Marcello Ciccuto, Milan: Rizzoli, 1989, 96: "Quidam a rege, inspecto stemmate picto, quod esset regium, uti munificentia petit uti vestem illam auream, qua esset indutus, mutuo concederet. 'Hanc si detraxeris vestem,' inquit pictura, 'iam nullus sum.'"

68. Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 11.

69. Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, chap. 3. Gilbert, "The archbishop on the painters of Florence," correctly draws associations between the criticisms of the archbishop Antoninus and the art of Masaccio and others associated with Alberti.

notionally removed the pictorial surface. In this sense, it directed attention towards the prototype, which it presented as a virtual, purely visual experience distinct from the material existence of the picture.

Likewise, the revival of the antique and the related interest in the body without trappings—the nude—were motivated not, primarily, by an interest in ancient culture for its own sake, but by a belief in the timeless perfection of ancient art and by a desire to make the works of modern art participate in that pristine atemporality. The humanist Pierio Valeriano, for example, linked the emphasis on the nude in antique statuary with the pure forms of primordial wisdom.[70] The recourse to antique forms was an effort to resist the historicity of art, even if in the process it mobilized the instruments of historicism, such as archeology and philology. Likewise, many of the features that Wölfflin observed in what we call High Renaissance art—an increase in the amplitude of the figures, an effect of monumentality and idealization, a reduction of incidental detail—constitute a form of internal castigation within art that can often be linked to reform agendas.[71]

To recapitulate: As religious images increasingly exhibited drift, advertising their historical moment in features of dress and, ultimately, of style, they were exposed as the results of artistic fashioning, and thus as subject to fashion themselves. Before it was dignified as a work of art, the image that insisted on its own manufacture and that advertised its *saeculum* was deplored as a fabrication, a fetish. Before it became the concern of connoisseurs and aestheticians the modern work of art began its life in the late Middle Ages as a factitious idol.

A direct result of this shift was the advent of forgery, which began to take hold around 1500 and became an ineradicable fact of the art world by the seventeenth century. The forgery is a byproduct of a culture in which what matters above all in a work of art are the features that link it to the circumstances of its making—to its author, to its time, to its place. In contrast to the modern "original and forgery" culture, traditionally the fraud was precisely not the copy but the free creation. But when what matters above all is the authorship and material originality of the artifact, copies will no longer do; instead, a new species of fraudulent copy arises to take its place. But forgery is not merely the modern, pejorative term for the traditional, benign copy. In the forgery the copy assumes a new, monstrous form. It is the bastard child of a system in which the singular artistic performance is paramount. If the traditional copy concentrated on transmitting the referential content of the model, the forgery crawls over the surface of art, imitating with obsessive care every detail of the original—and where an original is missing, it provides a plausibly dense surface for the connoisseur's inspection. It therefore challenges and sharpens, in its turn, the prevailing techniques of critical viewing.[72]

Fashion, fetish, fabrication, forgery: to consider the connection among these words is to grasp some of the conflicts that attended the formation of the modern conception of the work of art. It is possible to say that these conflicts resurfaced violently in the twentieth century, which subjected the work of art, and the institutions surrounding it, to a process of critical dismantling, in turn making possible a critical understanding of their genealogy. The continuing, harassing presence of art forgeries functions as one very effective form of internal critique and historical reminder. Disgruntled late medieval clerics hissed "Idolatry!", and forgeries now perpetuate the criticism as a form of curse. Shadowing the history of modern European art, they make a mockery of the obsession with originals and the fetishism of the art object.

To bring this historical configuration into view is also to see this history in terms of conflict and internal contradiction, rather than progress. It is possible that many of what we consider to be the signal achievements of Renaissance art—the moment of Masaccio and Alberti, the idealizing High Renaissance—were in fact reactionary moments, compensatory and highly innovative backlashes against the "modern" trends that threatened to break down traditional modes of image-making. The virtualization of the image imposed by perspectival construction and the recurrent concern with an ideal of "stylelessness" in Renaissance art can be seen as efforts to remove images from the realm of

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70. Piero Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, (Lyons: Frelon, 1602), bk. 34, 349: "Nam vetustas illa, ut minus vitiosa fuit, ita simplicius apertiusque de una quaque re philosophata est: neque erat tunc temporis in humano corpore quicquam, quod vel visu, vel nuncupatione sua, turpe iudicaretur. Pravis vero moribus succrescentibus, multa decernenda fuere tam factu esse, quam dictu turpia . . . ." Quoted in translation by Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 22.

71. I treat some of these issues in "Experiments in art and reform in early sixteenth-century Italy," in *The Pontificate of Clement VII: History, Politics, Culture*, eds. Kenneth Gouwens and Sheryl Reiss, London: Ashgate, 2004, chap. 20.

72. This dialectic, as it unfolds in the literary arena, is well analyzed by Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

material things, radical bids to return to a pure transmission of referential content. At times this involved explorations of new forms of viewer-responses: these were images designed to appeal to the mind, to engage complex acts of reading and interpretation, rather than to serve as material fetishes or objects of quid-pro-quo devotional transactions. The basic thrust of this development was perfectly in line with a reformist tendency in religious practice, which drew emphasis away from the objective power of the sacraments and towards the spiritual experience of the believer.

The inadvertent result was, of course, essentially modern: a new conception of the work of art as the place where competing models of the image are staged. Many of these experiments ultimately brought about shifts in conceptions of art that ran exactly counter to the impulses that drove them. In attempting to reinstate an absolute, uncontingent form of image, Renaissance artists put in place a new and more powerful conception of art and authorship, and new modalities of viewing. Van Eyck, Leonardo, Dürer, and Michelangelo each in their own way were obsessed with the idea of a nonauthored work, a work that suppresses the evidence of its own manufacture and offers an unmediated manifestation of ideal form. But these experiments were in the end more than ever linked to the charisma of the artist, and their viewers were more than ever inclined to see them above all as meta-experiments that in fact defined a new conception of art, of which the easel picture emerged as the primary embodiment. For centuries painting had been dedicated to the representation of other objects; the fetishism occasionally directed to it was really the misplaced worship of more venerable objects of worship. These efforts of idealization and the distancing effects that attended them, however, had the paradoxical effect of making pictorial experience itself the primary object, and thus of bringing into being a true cult of painting, whose future home would be the picture gallery.

A more abstract conception of pictorial experience only concretized a new status for painting as such, and introduced a different kind of fetishism associated with a new breed of collector and dealer. This reconstitution is at the basis of a conception of painting so familiar that a century of critical dismantling still has not succeeded in defamiliarizing it: the picture on the gallery wall that, unlike functional objects, is designed to offer a disinterested, spiritual, dematerialized experience, but cannot do so except by proclaiming itself first of all and insistently as a material product. The newly dematerialized pictorial field proceeded lockstep with a new, overtly materialist function for the frame, which now guaranteed the ultimate reification and commodification of the work as "painting."

For Theodor Adorno, nothing exposed this strange conception of art more effectively than the kitsch continually spewed out by industrial society. The inane trash of the culture industry "blurts out the secret of art," revealing the processes of material production at the core of the art work's claim to ideal perfection, and so raises the issue of instrumentality—the question "what for?"—that art aims to negate.[73] Especially since the advent of Pop Art, the inadvertent critical work that Adorno attributed to the products of popular culture has become the express preoccupation of advanced art.

The result of this critique, ultimately, may be a reevaluation of the entire era of art—the era of the academy and the picture gallery—on terms other than the worn modernist assaults against the easel picture, against academic painting, against bourgeois forms of art, and so forth. It could be that the bastion was never very stable. A different approach may take a form similar to the critique of the literary critics offered by Paul de Man, for whom there was no need to reproach the literature of the classical period for its logocentric blindness, since logocentrism is already continually demystified by literature, and blindness is an inherent feature of the rhetorical nature of literary language, including that of the critic.[74] The era of the work of art, now so starkly historically circumscribed, has begun to emerge in its own strangeness, and to effect its own dismantling. The most classical works of art may be the very ones that, in Adorno's words, push their internal contradictions to the extreme and realize themselves in their downfall.[75] It seems obvious now that the victory for enlightened visuality was never really won, and that the forces of repression that went into shaping it in the early modern period marked it with inexorable internal conflicts from the start.

73. Theodor Adorno, "145: Art-object," in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life,* trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, London: Verso, 1974, 225–227.

74. Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism,* 2nd ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 102–141.

75. Adorno, 227.

POLEMICAL, A
BELLIGERENT,
CANTANKEROU
PLOSIVE, COME
LICOSE, CRABB'
ERISTIC, FEIST'
HUMORED, ABR,
FOR TROUBLE,
ED, MEAN AS A