CONFRONTING IMAGES

QUESTIONING THE ENDS OF A CERTAIN HISTORY OF ART

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GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

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Translated from
the French by John Goodman

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It is the curse and the blessing of *Kunstwissenschaft* that its objects necessarily lay claim to an understanding that is not exclusively historical. . . . This demand is, as I said, both a curse and a blessing. A blessing, because it keeps *Kunstwissenschaft* in constant tension, ceaselessly provoking methodological reflection, and, above all, continually reminding us that a work of art is a work of art and not just any historical object. A curse, because it must introduce into scholarship an uncertainty and a rift that are difficult to bear, and because the effort to uncover general precepts has often led to results that are either irreconcilable with scientific method or seem to violate the uniqueness of the individual work of art.

—Erwin Panofsky, "Der Begriff des Kunstwollens" (1920)

Not-knowledge strips bare. This proposition is the summit, but should be understood as follows: it strips bare, hence *I see* what knowledge previously had hidden; but if I see, *I know.* In effect, I know, but what I knew, not-knowledge strips it barer still.

—Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure* (1943)

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This book poses special challenges to the translator. Its diction is studied and its rhetorical machinery is intricate. There is much wordplay. As so often in postwar French critical writing, metaphors tend toward the extravagant. In a way reminiscent of Heidegger, the half-forgotten literal meanings of colloquial phrases are sometimes exploited. Likewise, secondary or archaic definitions of French verbs are often turned to account. These verb usages frequently—and cunningly—intermesh with the psychoanalytic lexicon, but the extent to which this is true only becomes apparent in Chapter 4, where the relationship between images and unconscious processes takes center stage.

Accordingly, I have included more than the usual number of translator's notes. This seemed the only way to retain something like the full polyvalence of the original. I hope readers will find them more helpful than cumbersome.

In the author's notes, I have tried to use authoritative English editions of important texts, notably the Cambridge editions of Kant's first and third critiques, the Standard Edition of Freud, and the recent Bruce Fink translation of selections from Lacan's *Ecrits*. *The Interpretation of Dreams* is a special case: here I provide references to both the Strachey translation and Joyce Crick's recent rendering of the original edition (without Freud's copious later additions). As with all the cited translations, however, I have felt free to modify them where necessary.

The original text is eloquent, playful, and elegant. Insofar as the English edition fails to convey these qualities, the fault is entirely mine.

JG

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION: THE EXORCIST

Un homme averti en vaut deux, goes the French proverb. (Roughly: "An informed man is worth two others.") It might seem self-evident, then, that an informed art historian is worth two others . . . the first-mentioned being an art historian who has discovered and knows how to integrate the principles of iconology established by Erwin Panofsky. An informed art historian is worth two others: the latter, in accordance with the teachings of Wölfflin, concerns himself with *forms* and stylistic evolution; the former, in accordance with the teachings of Panofsky, knows that the *content* of figurative works of art (or their "subject," as we awkwardly say) pertains to a complex universe of "specific themes or concepts manifested in images, stories, and allegories."[1]

Thanks to Panofsky, we now know better just how far allegory and "disguised symbolism" have been able to invest visual representation, if in its most discreet, most trivial elements: sartorial and architectural details, a carafe of water on a table, a rabbit in a landscape, even the famous allegorical mousetraps in the Mérode Altarpiece.[2] Thanks to Panofsky, we are aware that the very transparence of a window, in the context of an *Annunciation,* can serve as a vehicle for the most resistant of theological mysteries (the Virgin's hymen, traversed by the divine seed, remaining intact like a pane of glass traversed by a ray of light).

However, the French phrase *être averti* can be understood in two ways. The positive way pertains to *being aware of something:* in this sense, Panofsky definitively made us aware that the great scholarly traditions—notably medieval scholasticism and Renaissance neo-Platonism—were structurally decisive for all ideas of the meaning of images over the *longue durée* of the Christian and humanist West. From this point of view, Panofsky's teaching—like that of his peers Fritz

Saxl and later Edgar Wind and Rudolf Wittkower—remains admirable, absolutely necessary for the very comprehension of this *longue durée*. By making us aware of signifying complexities that can sometimes be operative in the visual arts, iconology has, so to speak, *deflowered* the image. How could anyone complain about that?

But *être averti* can also be understood negatively: in the sense of keeping at a distance something *of which one is wary*. In this case, the person in question is one who is well informed—in the history of art, we would say that he is scholarly, erudite—but also one who is alert to a danger that he absolutely must ward off in order to keep intact the very conditions of his knowledge, to make possible the serene exercise of his erudition. From this point of view, Panofsky's work bears the stamp of an emphatic closure, a veritable buffer zone meant to protect the discipline against all imprudence and all impudence: in other words, from all hubris, from all immoderation in the exercise of reason. That is why Panofsky's books often feature a preliminary "warning." The most telling of these is the one in the 1959 edition of *Idea:*

> If books were subject to the same laws and regulations as pharmaceutical products, the dust jacket of every copy would have to bear the label "Use with Care"—or as it used to say on old medicine containers: *CAUTIUS*.[3]

Panofsky knew well that it is the professional brief of the art historian to manipulate the *pharmakon:* the substance of the images that he studies is a powerful substance, attractive but altering. It brings relief, which is to say that it brings to scholars the most magnificent answers, but *CAUTIUS!* It quickly becomes a drug, even a poison for those who imbibe it to excess, who adhere to it to the point of losing themselves in it. Panofsky was a true and profound rationalist: his whole problem was to ward off the danger posed to the pharmacist by his own *pharmakon*. I mean the danger posed by the image to those whose profession it is to know it. How can we know an image if the image is the very thing (Panofsky never forgot his Plato) that imperils—through its power to take hold of us, which is to say its *call to imagine*—the

positive or "objective" exercise of knowledge? If the image is what makes us imagine, and if the (sensible) imagination is an obstacle to (intelligible) knowledge, how then can one *know an image*?

Such is the paradox to be investigated: in order to constitute iconology as an "objective science," it was necessary for Panofsky literally to *exorcise* something inherent in the very powers of the object that he tried to circumvent through such a "science."

One might figure this paradox in the form—seemingly arbitrary, in any case typically iconological—of a parable. I draw it not from the manifest world, humanist or Christian, of the works usually studied by this great art historian but from the more latent one of his very ancestry, by which I mean his Central European Jewish culture (his father was a Silesian Jew). Everyone in this culture, traversed from the eighteenth century by the Hassidic movement—and transmitted, in German intellectual circles, by Panofsky's contemporaries Gershom Scholem and, before him, Martin Buber[4]—was quite familiar with the popular story of the dybbuk.

This very simple legend would be to the arcana of the great Jewish mystical culture—in particular the cabala of Isaac Luria, transmitted as far as the shtetls in Poland—what the transparent window is to the mystery of the Incarnation in a painting of the Annunciation. It has many dimensions and I can present only a summary version of it here. It is the story of Khónen, a young male virgin, very much the scholar, very bold in his book-based research: Talmudic Judaism seems to him "too dry" and without life; he prefers the abysses of the cabala, a game all the more fraught with risk because, as Moses Cordovero wrote in his treatise *'Or Ne'erab* (The pleasant light), "It is forbidden to penetrate this science if one has not taken a wife and purified one's thoughts."[5]

Khónen has neither taken a wife nor purified his thoughts, but he is madly in love with Leah, a beautiful young girl who returns his love. They are predestined for each other. Now the father of the young girl has chosen a more advantageous match, and the marriage is about to take place. Khónen is so desperate that he dares to transgress the fixed limits of esoteric knowledge: he invokes the secret

names to thwart destiny. But he lacks the necessary experience and his desire is insufficiently pure. The sparks that he tries to manipulate by requiring the impossible becomes a fire that consumes and destroys him. He screams and falls dead amid his books.

The scheduled day of the wedding arrives. At the moment the bond is about to be pronounced, the young girl, beyond all despair, issues a scream of her own. She is not dead. But when revived she begins to speak, to scream *with the voice of the dead.* The errant, unredeemed soul of the young man has entered her: she is possessed by the dybbuk. The rest of the story is a harrowing description of the exorcism performed on the young girl under the authority of a miraculous zadik, the rabbi Azriel of Meeropol: it is a ritual drama that ends with the dybbuk being anathematized, excommunicated, and extirpated from the body of Leah.

But while the entire community hastens to make preparations to celebrate the marriage once more, the young girl herself breaks the magic circle of the exorcism so as to rejoin, in an improbable place—in some versions she dies, in others she penetrates a wall—her predestined ghost, the young dybbuk eternally hers.

This story was known primarily through a dramatic adaptation in Yiddish by Shalom Ansky (1863–1920), the author of tales and novellas and a remarkable ethnologist of Jewish folklore in Poland and Russia.[6] The play was first produced in 1917 by a troupe in Vilna in the original Yiddish. But it was the Hebrew version, due to the poet Haïm Nachman Bialik, that became known internationally: it was mounted in 1921 in Moscow by Evgenii Vakhtangov, a student of Stanislavsky; beginning in 1926 it toured the entire world with the Habima theater (which became less and less welcome in Stalinist Russia). Finally, it was made into a film in Poland in the 1930s: a kind of expressionist "musical tragedy"—the opposite of what emerged in Hollywood as "musical comedy"—shot in Yiddish by Michal Waszynski in 1937.

It is an oddly static but very moving film, one that makes no effort to hide its roots in popular theater. Today it seems like the ghostly but still animate vestige of a real drama that would carry all the actors in this imaginary drama toward the camps. The scene of exorcism—

which takes up the entire third act of Ansky's play—is here reduced to a few minutes. The director renounced the subterfuge, which could easily have been managed, of having the young girl speak with a man's voice; the ceremony (notably the successive calls on the shofar) was greatly simplified. But this sketch suffices for my parable, in which one must imagine Leah as a personification of the History of Art, the "holy assembly" of pious men as the "scientific community" of iconologists . . . and Erwin Panofsky in the role of Azriel, the miraculous rabbi, the sage, the exorcist.

The real question is that of knowing of whom the dybbuk himself—simultaneously a *person,* a young man of flesh and blood altered by his desire to know the occult, and a *non-person,* a ghostly variant of the living beings among whom or within whom he continues to wander, even to inhabit—is an allegory. Some fifteen years ago, I attempted—in a book the reader is about to encounter in the attentive translation of John Goodman—to establish a general framework for this question, commencing with a critical examination of the conceptual tools used by Panofsky to exorcise this dybbuk. The magic spells in question came not from the religious tradition but from the philosophical tradition. I saw there, *grosso modo,* a neo-Kantian adaptation of the grand "magic words" of Vasarian academicism: triumphant *rinascità* recast in a certain notion of the history of art as rationalist humanism; the famous *imitazione* recast in a hierarchical table of the relations between figuration and signification; the inevitable *idea* recast in a—typically idealist—use of Kant's transcendental schematism.

Not that this framework of transformations—a typically sixteenth-century Italian humanism, revisited by the great German eighteenth-century philosopher and adapted, first by Cassirer, then by Panofsky, to the exigencies of a "philological" history standardized in the nineteenth century—wasn't satisfying to the mind: French structuralism adopted it to counter the musty historicism of "antiquarian" art history. Hence the adhesion, manifested by cultural sociologists (Pierre Bourdieu) and then by semiologists of art (Louis Marin, Hubert Damisch), to the kind of transcendental schematism that Panofsky im-

ported into the realm of images. A *pure reason,* so to speak, was opened to art historians, allowing them to hope for something like a new epistemological foundation for their discipline.

Whether due to chance or to desire, my initial object of investigation, in the field of renascent painting, was an object *resistant* to Panofskian "pure reason."[7] The tools of the "master of Princeton" did not permit of an understanding of what first seemed an exception, then a *fecund* object on the plane of theory. It was necessary either to renounce understanding altogether or to project iconology toward an epistemological regime that went beyond it: a regime of *over-determination* in which Panofskian *determination* underwent a trial of reasons that are terribly "impure": amalgamated, contradictory, displaced, anachronistic . . . The reasons for which Freud created a framework of intelligibility under the aegis of the unconscious, the *pharmakon* par excellence of all the human sciences.

It would be quite mistaken—whether blaming him as destroyer or justifying him as "deconstructor"—to understand this detour through Freud as a decidedly post-facto attempt to jettison the whole tradition of *Kunstgeschichte.* Only buzzword mavens and fashion mongers could hold that, in this domain, anything is over: a way of swapping critical memory for a willed oblivion that often resembles a renunciation of one's own history. To effect a true critique, to propose an alternative future, isn't it necessary to engage in an *archaeology,* of the kind that Lacan undertook with Freud, Foucault with Binswanger, Deleuze with Bergson, and Derrida with Husserl? So it is to the rhythms of an archaeology of the history of art that the critique of iconology should proceed. More specifically, it was with an eye to Panofsky's own "master" in Hamburg that the present critique was conceived and then extended. I refer, of course, to Aby Warburg.[8]

Here, then, is our dybbuk. The great interpreter of the humanist sources of Florentine painting.[9] The revolutionary anthropologist of the rituals of Renaissance portraiture.[10] The genius shadow-founder of iconology.[11] But what audacity in his "fundamental questions," in his research into the "originary words" for figurative expressivity, these *Urworte,* as he dared to say, after the manner of a scholar of the cabala! Because he tried to *understand* images, not just interpret them,

Warburg was a man who, in a sense, tempted the devil and ended up falling mad amid his books before raving for five long years within the walls of psychiatric hospitals in Hamburg, in Jena, and then in the celebrated clinic in Kreuzlinger directed by Ludwig Binswanger, Freud's great friend. The maker of *Mnemosyne,* that heterodox and disturbing montage of images capable of sounding together in harmonies that elude all historicist demonstration.[12] The poet or prophet of the *Grundbegriffe,* those unpublishable manuscripts of "gushing" thoughts, obsessions, and "idea leakages" mixed together into an exaltation of theoretical reflection itself.[13] The phantom, the unredeemed soul who still wanders—less and less silently—through the (social) body of Leah, our beautiful discipline called the History of Art.

In his curriculum vitae of Panofsky, published in 1969, William Heckscher felt obliged to emphasize this feature:

> [Panofsky] disliked "unreliable" people. Of William Blake he said, "I can't stand him. I don't mind if a man is really mad, like Hölderlin. True madness may yield poetical flowers. But I don't like mad geniuses walking all the time on the brink of an abyss."[14]

It is probable that, like the exorcist in *The Dybbuk,* Panofsky was just as uncomfortable with the "knowledge without a name" on which Aby Warburg insisted as he was determined in his attempt to exorcise its "unreliable" tenor. He was in Hamburg the very year that the "mad genius," in a famous seminar on the history of art, evoked the abysses that the historian-"seismograph," the historian of temporal tremors and faults, had to skirt.[15] But Panofsky, wanting to warn us about this "unreliability" and the accompanying dizziness, acted as if the abysses did not exist. As if those who are "unreliable," those "suffering from vertigo," were inevitably wrong from the point of view of historical reason.

Now it was not so much the altered person—Warburg himself—that Panofsky wanted to exorcise from his own iconology. The dybbuk that he exorcised was the alteration itself: *the alteration effected by images themselves on historical knowledge built on images*. Two things

characterize this dybbuk. The first is its ghostly power to *rise again,* to effect a psychic haunting and to defy all chronological laws of before and after, of old and new: it is after being dead that the dybbuk begins to speak fully, to live its thought, its youth, even to "be born" for good in its substantial unity with Leah.

The second characteristic of a dybbuk is *adhesion,* in accordance with a like defiance of all topological laws of inside and outside, of near and far: it is because he has been separated from Leah by death that the dybbuk merges so completely with the body, voice, and soul of the young girl. Furthermore, the Hebrew root of the word "dybbuk" is *daleth-beth-kof,* which connotes, precisely, adhesion; it is used in Deuteronomy, among other books of the Bible, to signify a union with God.[16] This same linguistic root shaped the word and concept of *devekut,* whose destiny, from the cabalistic tradition (where it designates the most elevated degree of prophecy, the voice of God speaking through the prophet's own mouth), to the Hassidism in which it plays an omnipresent role, has been recounted so magnificently by Gershom Scholem: a contemplative fusion, a mystical empathy detached from all elitist or eschatological value.[17] The dybbuk of our story is only the fall or demonic reversal of a mystical process of *devekut* gone wrong. But its structure is identical.

Why recall these philological details? Because the history of art invented by Aby Warburg combines, in its fundamental concept—*Nachleben:* "afterlife" or "survival"—precisely the powers to *adhere* and to *haunt* that inhere in all images. By contrast with phenomena of "rebirth" and the simple transmission through "influence," as we say, a *surviving image* is an image that, having lost its original use value and meaning, nonetheless comes back, like a ghost, at a particular historical moment: a moment of "crisis," a moment when it demonstrates its latency, its tenacity, its vivacity, and its "anthropological adhesion," so to speak.

On the one hand, Tylor's ethnology of "survivals," Darwin's model of "heterochronies" or *missing links,* Burckhardt's theory of "vital residues," and Nietzsche's philosophy of the eternal return would have aided Warburg in his revolutionary formulation of a history of art conceived as "ghost stories for grownups."[18] On the other

hand, the aesthetic of tragic *pathos* in the late Romantics, Goethe's commentary on the *Laocoön,* Robert Vischer's notion of *Einfühlung,* and Freud and Binswanger's symptomatic understanding of images would have aided Warburg in his revolutionary formulation of anthropological—and psychic—"adhesion" of the primitive in the historical present of images.[19]

It is all of this that Panofsky wanted to exclude from his own models of intelligibility: where Warburg deconstructed the whole of nineteenth-century historicism by showing that the *Geschichte der Kunst* is a *(hi)story of ghosts* that stick to our skin, Panofsky wanted to reconstruct his *Kunstgeschichte* as a *history of exorcisms,* of safety measures and reasonable distancings. To be sure, Panofsky usefully warned us against the dangers of romantic vitalism in the history of art; but by the same token he exorcised all thoughts of *Leben* and *Nachleben*—the very paradoxical, very specific "life" of images that haunt time—in favor of a historical model that is essentially deductive, therefore less attentive to the rhizomes of over-determination and to the *dynamic* aspects of cultural phenomena. He usefully warned us against the aesthetic vagueness of nonhistoricized approaches to art; but he likewise exorcised the anachronisms and labilities specific to the world of images. He looked only for signifying values where Warburg—close to Freud here—looked for symptomatic values.[20] Panofsky reduced exceptions to the *unity of the symbols* that structurally encompass them—in accordance with the "unity of the symbolic function" dear to Cassirer—where Warburg had smashed the unity of symbols by means of the *split of symptoms* and the sovereignty of accidents.

That is why Panofsky brought his work to a close with a return to an iconography ever more attentive to the *identification of motifs* (isolated as entities), whereas Warburg never ceased subverting iconography through his analysis of the *contamination of motifs* (amalgamated into networks). There where Panofsky kneaded together the modesty of the humanist scholar and the *conquest of knowledge,* Warburg made the effacement of the philologist rhyme with a true tragedy of knowledge: a Kantian victory of the (axiomatic) schematism versus a Nietzschean pain of (heuristic) erraticism. Panofsky usefully warned us

against the subjectivist sufficiency of nondocumented interpretations, but he rather quickly became authoritative, explanatory, satisfied with his well-constructed answers. Warburg, for his part, remained an artist, uneasy, implicative, ever in search of questions that his extraordinary erudition never appeased. When Panofsky *explained* an image, it was a signification given beyond all expressive values; when Warburg *understood* an image, it was, he said, a way of liberating an "expressive value" transcending, in anthropological terms, all signification. But it is *dangerous,* of course, to want to situate an analysis beyond the principle of signification (that is, at the core of a metaphysical conception of symptoms): a special kind of *tact* is required to manipulate the *pharmakon* of images.

There are specific philosophical and historical reasons for Panofsky's exorcism. The perpetual warnings, the many cries of *CAUTIUS!* emitted by the great legislator, the great Talmudist of iconology, always come down to the same thing: the source of all evil is *unreason.* It is as "pure unreason" that Panofsky, a man of the Enlightenment, experienced in particular the rise of Nazism—to which some thirty members of his family fell victim—and his dismissal from the University of Hamburg in 1933. When one has read the extraordinary book by the philologist Victor Klemperer about the way the Nazi regime confiscated the German language, even its most prestigious philosophical vocabulary,[21] one can understand how Panofsky never cited Martin Heidegger after the war as he still did in 1932.[22]

But it is with a whole world of thought—that of the three first decades of the century in Germany: that of Heidegger and Jung, but also of Nietzsche and Freud, of Benjamin and Ernst Bloch—that Panofsky ultimately broke. Significant in this regard was his extraordinary and complete assumption of the English language and his symmetrical rejection of his mother tongue: he agreed to return to Germany only in 1967, one year before his death, and it was in English that he chose to give his lecture there.[23] He acknowledged, writes William Heckscher,

> the momentous impact that the English language had had on the very foundations of his thinking and on his manner of

> presenting ideas in a lucid and organic, euphonious as well as logical way—so very different from the "woolen curtain" that so many Continental scholars, above all German and Dutch, interposed between themselves and their readers.[24]

In a text of 1953 entitled "Three Decades of Art History in the United States: Impressions of a Transplanted European," Panofsky clearly articulated his retrospective distaste for the German theoretical vocabulary (he was horrified, for example, by the fact that the word *taktisch* can mean both "tactical" and "tactile").[25]

As a man alert to the dangers of unreason—which he saw even in the double meanings of ordinary words—Panofsky wanted to exorcise it from the very landscape in which his thought operated, the history of images. To exorcise means to separate, to disentangle at all costs: to disentangle expressive adhesions (the pathos of empathy) exterior to the sphere of meanings; to disentangle the obscure, impure survivals exterior to Renaissance clarities and ideals; to disentangle symptomatic returns (the pathos of the unconscious) exterior to the world of symbols.

But one cannot disentangle "pure reason" from "pure unreason" (and thus from the *Kritik der reinen Unvernunft* that Warburg pretended, on his side, to confront)[26] except by disincarnating the intrinsic power of images. Heir to Kant, the Enlightenment, and the teleology of the symbol invented by Cassirer, Panofsky did not understand that the image—like everything pertaining to the human psyche—requires of us a rationalism not of the Enlightenment but, so to speak, of the *Clair-Obscur:* a tragic rationalism expressed by Warburg in the face of what he called the "dialectic of the monster," and by Freud in the face of what he called the "discontents of civilization." But Panofsky, supported in this by the Anglo-Saxon context, wanted the unconscious to be nothing but a mistake: which entailed exorcising all of the dark—but efficacious and anthropologically crucial—parts of images. Such, doubtless, is the principal limit of the knowledge that he bequeathed to us. This is not, to be sure, a reason to exorcise Panofsky himself, only an incitement to read him and reread him—but critically, as true admiration requires.

Thanks to Panofsky's warnings, we know better just how the historian of art engages, at every instant, his reason and his "scientific" desire for verification: we know better just how we need not be afraid of *knowledge*. But despite Panofsky's exorcisms—and thanks to the risks taken before him by Aby Warburg—we also know how we needn't be afraid of *not knowing*. We must, in this history, have the courage to confront both parties, both "pictures": both the exorcist and the dybbuk itself. Both the veil that makes thought possible and the rend that makes thought impossible.

Georges Didi-Huberman

Question Posed

Often, when we pose our gaze to an art image,* we have a forthright sensation of paradox. What reaches us immediately and straightaway is marked with trouble, like a self-evidence that is somehow obscure.† Whereas what initially seemed clear and distinct is, we soon realize, the result of a long detour—a mediation, a usage of words. Perfectly banal, in the end, this paradox. We can embrace it, let ourselves be carried away by it; we can even experience a kind of *jouissance* upon feeling ourselves alternately enslaved and liberated by this braid of knowledge and not-knowledge, of universality and singularity, of things that elicit naming and things that leave us gaping. . . . All this on one and the same surface of a picture or sculpture, where nothing has been hidden, where everything before us has been, simply, *presented.*

We can, conversely, feel dissatisfied with such a paradox. Want not to let things lie, want to know more, want to *represent to ourselves* in a more intelligible way what the image before us still seemed to hide within it. We might then turn toward the discourse that proclaims itself a knowledge about art, an archeology of things forgotten or unnoticed in works of art since their creation, however old or however recent they might be. This discipline, whose status thus can be summed up as offering *specific knowledge* of the art object, this discipline is as we know called the history of art. Its invention was quite recent, by comparison with the invention of its object: we might say, taking Lascaux as our reference point, that it postdates art itself by roughly one hundred sixty-five centuries, of which ten or so were filled with intense artistic activity solely within the framework of the

**quand nous posons notre regard sur une image de l'art.*

†comme une évidence qui serait obscur.

western Christian world. But the history of art gives the impression that it has made up for all this lost time. It has examined, catalogued, and interpreted countless objects. It has accumulated stupefying amounts of information and has taken over management of an exhaustive knowledge of what we like to call our patrimony.

The history of art presents itself, in fact, as an enterprise ever more victorious. It answers needs, it becomes indispensable. As an academic discipline, it never stops refining itself and producing new information: thanks to which there is of course a gain in knowledge. As an authority for the organization of museums and art exhibitions, it likewise never stops expanding its horizons: it stages gigantic gatherings of objects: thanks to which there is a gain in spectacle. Finally, this history has become the cogwheel and guarantor of an art market that never stops outbidding itself: thanks to which people make money. It seems as though the three charms or three "gains" in question have become as precious to the contemporary bourgeoisie as health. Should we be surprised, then, to see the art historian take on the features of a medical specialist who addresses his patients with the statutory authority of a subject *supposed to know everything* in the matter of art?

Yes, we should be surprised. This book would simply like to interrogate the *tone of certainty* that prevails so often in the beautiful discipline of the history of art. It should go without saying that the element of *history*, its inherent fragility with regard to all procedures of verification, its extremely lacunary character, particularly in the domain of manmade figurative objects—it goes without saying that all of this should incite the greatest modesty. The historian is, in every sense of the word, only the *fictor,* which is to say the modeler, the artisan, the author, the inventor of whatever past he offers us. And when it is in the element of *art* that he thus develops his search for lost time, the historian no longer even finds himself facing a circumscribed object, but rather something like a liquid or gas expansion—a cloud that changes shape constantly as it passes overhead. What can we know about a cloud, save by *guessing,* and without ever grasping it completely?

Books on the history of art nonetheless know how to give us the impression of an object truly grasped and reconnoitered in its every aspect, like a past elucidated without remainder. Everything here seems visible, discerned. Exit the uncertainty principle. The whole of the visible here seems read, deciphered in accordance with the self-assured—apodictic—semiology of a medical diagnosis. And all of this makes, it is said, a *science,* a science based in the last resort on the certainty that the representation functions unitarily, that it is an accurate mirror or a transparent window, and that on the immediate ("natural") or indeed the transcendental ("symbolic") level, it is able to translate all concepts into images, all images into concepts. That in the end everything lines up and fits together perfectly in the discourse of knowledge. Posing one's gaze to an art image, then, becomes a matter of knowing how to name everything that one sees—in fact, everything that one reads in the visible. There is here an implicit truth model that strangely superimposes the *adaequatio rei et intellectus* of classical metaphysics onto a myth—a positivist myth—of the omni-translatability of images.

Our question, then, is this: what obscure or triumphant reasons, what morbid anxieties or maniacal exaltations can have brought the history of art to adopt such a tone, such a rhetoric of certainty? How did such a *closure* of the visible onto the legible and of all this onto intelligible knowledge manage—and with such seeming self-evidence—to constitute itself? The uninitiated and people of good sense will answer (a response not wholly irrelevant) that the only thing the history of art, being an academic knowledge,* looks for in art is academic history and knowledge; and that to go about this it must reduce its object, "art," to something that evokes a museum or a limited stock of histories and knowledges. In short, the said "specific knowledge† of art" ended up imposing its own *specific form of discourse* on its object, at the risk of inventing artificial boundaries for its object—an object dispossessed of its own specific deployment or unfolding. So the seeming self-evidence and the tone of certainty that this

**savoir.*
†*connaissance spécifique.*

knowledge imposes are understandable: all it looks for in art are answers that are *already given* by its discursive problematic.

A full answer to the question posed would entail entering into a veritable critical history of the history of art. A history that would take into account the discipline's birth and evolution, its practical ins and its institutional outs, its gnoeological foundations and its clandestine fantasies. In short, the knot of what it says, does not say, and denies. The knot of what is for it thinkable, unthinkable, and unthought—all of this evolving, circling back on itself, recurring in its own history. We will make do here with taking an initial step in this direction, first by interrogating some paradoxes induced by *practice* when it stops questioning its own uncertainties. Then by interrogating an essential phase in its *history,* namely, the work of Vasari in the sixteenth century, and the implicit ends that this would long assign the entire discipline. Finally, we will attempt to interrogate another significant moment, the one in which Erwin Panofsky, with uncontested authority, tried to ground *in reason* historical knowledge applied to works of art.

This question of "reason," this methodological question, is essential, now that history makes more and more frequent use of art images as documents, and even as monuments or objects of specific study. This question of "reason" is essential, because through it we can reach a basic understanding of *what the history of art expects from its object of study*. All the great moments of the discipline—from Vasari to Panofsky, from the age of the academies to that of scientific institutes—always came down to posing the problem of "reasons" anew, to redealing its cards, even changing the rules of the game, and always in accordance with an expectation of, a renewed desire for, *requisite ends* for these changing gazes posed to images.

To question anew the "reason" of the history of art is to question anew its *status as knowledge*. Is it surprising that Erwin Panofsky—who feared nothing, neither the exacting labor of erudition nor committing himself to a theoretical position—should have turned to Kantian philosophy when rearranging the cards of art history so as to give it a methodological configuration that, by and large, has not lost its cur-

rency? Panofsky turned to Immanuel Kant because the author of the *Critique of Pure Reason* had managed to *open* and reopen the question of knowledge, by defining the play of its limits and its subjective conditions. Such is the specifically "critical" aspect of Kantism; it has shaped and informed, consciously or unconsciously, entire generations of scholars. By grasping the Kantian or neo-Kantian key—via Cassirer—Panofsky opened new doors for his discipline. But no sooner were these doors open than he seems to have securely *closed them again,* allowing critique only a brief moment of passage: a current of air. Kantism in philosophy had done likewise: opened the better to close, called knowledge into question, not to unleash a radical whirlwind (the inalienable negativity of not-knowledge), but to reunify, resynthesize, and reschematize a knowledge whose closure henceforth found self-satisfaction through an elevated declaration of transcendence.

Are you already saying that such problems are too general? That they no longer concern the history of art and should be considered in another building on the university campus, the one off in the distance occupied by the department of philosophy? To say this (one hears it often) is to close one's eyes and ears, to speak without thinking. It doesn't take much time—only the time needed really to pose a question—to realize that the art historian, in his every gesture, however humble or complex, however routine, is always making *philosophical choices*. They silently aid and abet him in resolving dilemmas; they are his abstract éminence grise, even and especially when he doesn't know this. Now nothing is more dangerous than to be unaware of one's own éminence grise. This state of affairs can quickly lead to alienation.* For it is well known that making philosophical choices unwittingly is the fastest possible route to the worst possible philosophy.

So our question about the tone of certainty adopted by the history of art is transformed, along the bias of the decisive role played by the work of Erwin Panofsky, into a question about the *Kantian tone* that

**aliénation;* here, primarily in the sense of removal from office, but see below, pages 33, 39, 234.

the art historian often adopts without even realizing it. What's at issue here is not—beyond Panofsky himself—the rigorous application of Kantian philosophy to the domain of the historical study of images. What's at issue, and this is worse, is a tone. An inflection, a "Kantian syndrome" in which Kant would scarcely recognize himself. To speak of the Kantian tone of the history of art is to speak of an unprecedented kind of neo-Kantism: it is to speak of a *spontaneous philosophy* that orients the historian's choices and shapes the discourse of knowledge produced about art. But what, fundamentally, is a spontaneous philosophy? Where is its motor, where does it lead, on what is it based? It is based on words, only words, whose specific usage consists of closing gaps, eliding contradictions, resolving, without a moment's hesitation, every aporia proposed by the world of images to the world of knowledge. So the spontaneous, instrumental, and uncritical use of certain philosophical notions leads the history of art to fashion for itself not potions of love or oblivion but *magic words:* lacking conceptual rigor; they are nonetheless efficacious at *resolving* everything, which is to say at dissolving or suppressing a universe of questions the better to advance, optimistic to the point of tyranny, a battalion of answers.

I don't want to counter predetermined answers with other predetermined answers. I only want to suggest that in this domain the questions survive the articulation of every answer. If I invoke the name of Freud to counter that of Kant, this is not in order to place the discipline of art history under the yoke of a new conception of the world, of a new Weltanschauung. Neo-Freudism, like neo-Kantism—and like any theory issuing from a powerful body of thought—is far from immune to spontaneous, magical, and tyrannical practices. But there are, incontestably, in the Freudian field all the elements of a critique of knowledge fit to recast the very foundations of what are often called the human sciences. It is because he reopened in dazzling fashion the question of the *subject*—a subject henceforth thought as split or rent,* not closed, a subject inept at synthesis, be it transcendental—that Freud was also able to throw open, and just as decisively, the question of *knowledge*.

**pensé en déchirure.*

It should be clear that this appeal to the work of Freud concerns precisely the putting in play of a *critical* paradigm—and absolutely not the putting in play of a *clinical* paradigm. In particular, the fate allotted the word *symptom* in this book has nothing to do with any kind of clinical "application" or resolution. To expect from Freudism a clinic for art or a method of solving enigmas is tantamount to reading Freud with the eyes and expectations of a Charcot. What can be expected here of "Freudian reason" is rather that it resituate us in relation to the object of *history,* for example, about whose extraordinarily complex work psychoanalytic experience teaches us much, along the bias of such concepts as *Nachträglichkeit,** repetition, distortion, and working-through. More generally, Freudian critical tools will make it possible to reconsider here, within the framework of the history of art, the very status of this *object of knowledge* with regard to which we will henceforth be required to think what we gain in the exercise of our discipline *in the face of what we thereby lose:* in the face of a more obscure and no less sovereign *constraint to not-knowledge.*

Such are the stakes: to know, but also to think not-knowledge when it unravels the nets of knowledge. To proceed dialectically. Beyond knowledge itself, to commit ourselves to the paradoxical ordeal not to *know* (which amounts precisely to denying it), but to *think* the element of not-knowledge that dazzles us whenever we pose our gaze to an art image. Not to think a perimeter, a closure—as in Kant—but to experience a constitutive and central rift: there where self-evidence, breaking apart, empties and goes dark.

So here we are back at our initial paradox, which we placed under the aegis of an examination of the "presentation" or presentability of the images to which our gazes are posed even before our curiosity—or our will to knowledge—exerts itself. "Considerations of presentability" *(Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit):*† such is the language used

*Inconsistently translated in the Standard Edition, but often rendered as "deferred action" or "retrospective revision"; here (and below, pages 48, 100), the retrospective reinvention, sometimes radical, of an earlier experience. Cf. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis,* trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1973), 111–14.

†Not the translation used in the Standard Edition. Cf. below, Chapter 4, note 35.

by Freud to designate the work of *figurability* specific to unconscious formations. We might say, in very abridged form, that the requirement to think loss in the face of gain, or rather as coiled within it, and not-knowledge as coiled within knowledge, to think the rend as part of the fabric, amounts to interrogating the very work of figurability operative in artistic images—on the understanding that the words "image" and "figurability" here far exceed the limited framework of what is usually called "figurative" or "representational" art, which is to say art that represents an object or action of the natural world.

Let's not fool ourselves, by the way, about the "modern" character of such a problematic. Freud did not invent figurability, and abstract art did not implement pictorial "presentability" as opposed to "figurative" representability. All of these problems are as old as images themselves. They are also expounded in ancient texts. And it is precisely my hypothesis that the history of art, a "modern" phenomenon par excellence—because born in the sixteenth century—has wanted to bury the ancient problematics of the *visual* and the *figurable* by giving new ends to artistic images, ends that place the visual under the tyranny of the *visible* (and of imitation), the figurable under the tyranny of the *legible* (and of iconology). What the "contemporary" or "Freudian" problematics have to tell us about a work or a structural constraint was formulated long ago—in very different terms, of course—by venerable Church Fathers, and was brought into play by medieval painters as an essential *requirement* of their own notion of the image.[1] A notion now forgotten, and very difficult to exhume.

Which brings me to what occasioned this little book. It's only a matter of accompanying a project of longer gestation[2] with some reflections aimed at laying to rest, through writing, a land of malaise experienced within the framework of academic art history. More precisely, it is an attempt to understand why, during my study of certain works from the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the iconographic method inherited from Panofsky suddenly revealed its inadequacy, or, to put it another way, the nature of its methodological *sufficiency:* its closure. I tried to clarify all of these questions with regard to the work of Fra Angelico, then, in a class given at the École des hautes Études en Sciences sociales in 1988–89, through a reconsid-

eration of the book by the "master of Princeton" on the work of Albrecht Dürer. Invited to one of these seminars, the psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida answered some of our questions with still more questions, notably this one: "In the end, was Panofsky your Freud or your Charcot?" Another way of posing the question. And this little book is but a prolonged echo of the question, like the always open notebook of an endless discussion.[3]

1

The History of Art Within the Limits of Its Simple Practice

Let's pose our gaze for a moment to a famous image from Renaissance painting (Fig. 1). It is a fresco in the monastery of San Marco in Florence. It was very likely painted, in the 1440s, by a Dominican friar who lived there and later came to be known as Fra Angelico. It is situated in a very small whitewashed cell, a cell in the *clausura* where, we can imagine, for many years in the fifteenth century one particular monk withdrew to contemplate scripture, to sleep, to dream—perhaps even to die. When we enter the still relatively quiet cell today, even the spotlight aimed at the artwork can't conjure away the initial effect of luminous obfuscation that it imposes upon first encounter. Next to the fresco is a small window, facing east, that provides enough light to envelop our faces, to veil in advance the anticipated spectacle. Deliberately painted "against" this light, Angelico's fresco obscures the obvious fact of its own presence. It creates a vague impression that there isn't much to see. After one's eyes have adjusted to the light, this impression is oddly persistent: the fresco "comes clear" only to revert to the white of the wall, for it consists only of two or three stains of attenuated color placed against a slightly shaded background of the same whitewash. Thus where natural light besieged our gaze—and almost blinded us—there is henceforth white, the pigmentary white of the background, which comes to possess us.

But we are predisposed to resist this sensation. The trip to Florence, the monastery's transformation into a museum, the very name Fra Angelico: all of these things prompt us to look farther. It is with the emergence of its representational details that the fresco, little by little, will become truly *visible*. It becomes so in Alberti's sense, which is to say that it sets about delivering discrete, visible elements of signification—elements discernible as *signs*.[1] It becomes so in the sense

Image not available

FIG 1 Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation,* c. 1440–41. Fresco. Florence, Monastery of San Marco, cell 3.

familiar to historians of art, who today strive to distinguish the master's own hand from that of his students, to judge the coherence of the perspective construction, to situate the work in Angelico's chronology as well as in the stylistic landscape of fifteenth-century Tuscan painting. The fresco will become visible also—and even primarily—because something in it has managed to evoke or "translate" for us more complex units, "themes" or "concepts," as Panofsky would say, stories or allegories: units of knowledge. At this moment, the perceived fresco becomes really, fully visible—it becomes clear and distinct as if it were making itself explicit. It becomes *legible*.

So here we are, capable, or supposedly so, of reading Angelico's fresco. What we read there, of course, is a story—a *historia* such as Alberti deemed the reason and final cause for all painted compositions[2] . . . A story such as historians cannot help but love. Little by little, then, our sense of the image's temporality changes: its character of obscured immediacy passes into the background, so to speak, and a sequence, a narrative sequence, appears before our very eyes to offer itself for reading, as if the figures seen in a flash as motionless were henceforth endowed with a kind of kinetics or temporal unfolding. No longer the permanence of crystal but the chronology of a story. Here, in Angelico's image, we have the simplest possible case: a story that everyone knows, a story whose "source"—whose original *text*—art historians need not research, so central is it to the cultural baggage of the Christian West. Almost as soon as it is visible, then, the fresco sets about "telling" its story of the Annunciation as Saint Luke had first written it in his Gospel. There is every reason to believe that a budding iconographer entering this tiny cell would need only a couple of seconds, once the fresco was visible, to read into it: Luke 1:26–38. An incontrovertible judgment. A judgment that, who knows, might make one want to do the same thing for all the pictures in the world . . .

But let's try to go a bit farther. Or rather let's stay a moment longer, face to face with the image. Quite soon, our curiosity about details of representation is likely to diminish, and a certain unease, a certain disappointment begin to dim, yet again, the clarity of our gazes. Disappointment with what is legible: this fresco presents itself

as the most poorly and summarily recounted story there could be. No salient detail, no discernible particular, will tell us how Fra Angelico "saw" the town of Nazareth—the "historical" site of the Annunciation—or help us to situate the meeting of the angel and the Virgin Mary. There's nothing picturesque in this painting: it's as taciturn as they come. Luke relates the story in spoken dialogue, but Angelico's figures seem frozen forever in a kind of silent reciprocity, all lips sealed. No sentiments are expressed here; there's no action, no pictorial theatrics. And the peripheral presence of Saint Peter Martyr, hands clasped, won't change the story, because Saint Peter has exactly nothing to do with it; he just makes the event seem less real.

The work will also disappoint art historians well acquainted with the characteristic profusion of Quattrocento Annunciations: they almost always abound in apocryphal details, fanciful illusions, outrageously complicated spatial construction, realist touches, objects of daily life, and chronological reference points. Here—save for the traditional little book clasped by the Virgin—nothing of the kind. It would seem that Fra Angelico lacked aptitude for an aesthetic quality considered essential in his day: *varietà,* which Alberti made a major paradigm for "historical" pictorial invention.[3] In these times of "rebirth," when Masaccio in painting and Donatello in sculpture reinvented dramatic psychology, our fresco cuts a pale figure indeed, with its very poor, very minimalist *invenzione.*

The "disappointment" we are talking about has no other source, obviously, than the odd particular aridity with which Fra Angelico has grasped*—solidified or coagulated, by contrast with an instant rendered "on the wing"—the visible world of his fiction. Space has been reduced to a pure place of memory. Its scale (the figures a bit smaller than "life"-size, if such a word is appropriate here) impedes all vague trompe-l'oeil desires, even if the small represented enclosure in a certain sense extends the cell's white architecture. And despite the interplay of the ceiling vaults, the painted space at eye level seems to present only an abutment† of whitewash, its abruptly rising floor

***saisi.*

†*buté,* homonymous with *butée,* "mulish" or "stubborn."

painted in broad brush strokes very different from the pavements constructed by Piero della Francesca or even Botticelli. Only the two faces have been emphasized: heightened lightly with white, worked with crimson. The rest is but contempt for details, the rest is but strange lacunae, from the fleet pictography of the angel's wings and the unlikely chaos of the Virgin's robe to the mineral vacuity of the simple place that here comes to confront us.

This impression of "ill-seen-ill-said"* has led many art historians to a mixed judgment of both the artist's work generally and the artist himself. He is sometimes presented as a succinct, even naive painter—blissfully happy and "angelic," in a slightly pejorative sense—of the religious iconography to which he exclusively devoted himself. Elsewhere, by contrast, the artist's bliss and angelic temperament are turned to positive account: if the *visible* and the *legible* are not Fra Angelico's strong points, that is because his concern was with, precisely, the *invisible,* the ineffable. If there is nothing between the angel and the Virgin in his Annunciation, that is because the *nothing* bore witness to the indescribable and unfigurable divine voice to which Angelico, like the Virgin, was obliged to submit completely . . . Such a judgment clearly touches upon something pertinent to the religious, even mystical status of the artist's work in general. But it refuses to understand the means, the *material* in which this status existed. It turns its back to the specifics of painting and fresco. It does this so as to proceed without them—which is also to say without Fra Angelico—into the dubious realm of a metaphysics, an idea, a belief without subject. It thinks painting can be understood only by disembodying it, so to speak. In fact, it functions—like the preceding judgment—within the arbitrary limits of a semiology that has only three categories: the visible, the legible, and the invisible. Thus, apart from the intermediary status of the legible (where what's at stake is translatability), anyone posing his gaze to Angelico's fresco is faced with a choice. He either grasps it, in which case we are in the world of the visible, which it is possible to describe; or he doesn't grasp it, in which case we are in the region of the invisible, where a metaphysics is possible, from

***mal vu mal dit.*

the simple, nonexistent out-of-frame of the painting to the ideal beyond of the entire oeuvre.

There is, however, an alternative to this incomplete semiology. It is based on the general hypothesis that the efficacy of these images is not due solely to the transmission of knowledge—visible, legible, or invisible—but that, on the contrary, their efficacy operates constantly in the intertwinings, even the imbroglio, of transmitted and dismantled knowledges, of produced and transformed not-knowledges. It requires, then, a gaze that would not draw close only to discern and recognize, to name what it grasps at any cost—but would, first, distance itself a bit and abstain from clarifying everything immediately. Something like a suspended attention, a prolonged suspension of the moment of reaching conclusions, where interpretation would have time to deploy itself in several dimensions, between the grasped visible and the lived ordeal of a relinquishment. There would also be, in this alternative, a dialectical moment—surely unthinkable in positivist terms—consisting of not-grasping the image, of letting oneself be grasped by it instead: thus of *letting go of one's knowledge about it.* The risks are great, of course. The beautiful risks of fiction. We would agree to surrender ourselves to the contingencies of a phenomenology of the gaze, perpetually subject to projection and transference (in the technical sense of Freud's *Übertragung).* We would agree to *imagine,* the sole safety-rail being our poor historical knowledge, how a fifteenth-century Dominican named Fra Angelico could in his works pass on the chain of knowledge, but also break it up to the point of its unraveling completely, so as to displace its paths and make them signify *elsewhere,* otherwise.

We must return, for that, to what is simplest, in other words to the obscure self-evidences with which we began. We must momentarily leave behind everything that we thought we saw because we knew what to call it, and return henceforth to what our knowledge had not been able to clarify. We must return, then, this side of the represented visible, to the very conditions of the gaze, of *presentation* and figurability, that the fresco proposed to us at the outset. Then we will remember our paradoxical sense that there wasn't much to see. We will remember the light against our face and above all the omni-

present white—that *present white* of the fresco diffused throughout the space of the cell. What to make of this glare, and what to make of this white? The first constrained us initially to distinguish *nothing,* the second hollowed out all spectacle between the angel and the Virgin, making us think that Angelico had simply put *nothing* between his figures. But to say that is not to look, it is to be satisfied with what we're supposed to see. Let's look: there's not nothing, because there's white. It isn't nothing, because it reaches us without our being able to grasp it, and because it envelops us without our being able, in our turn, to catch it in the snare of a definition. It is not *visible* in the sense of an object that is displayed or outlined; but neither is it *invisible,* for it strikes our eye, and even does much more than that. It is material. It is a stream of luminous particles in one case, a powder of chalky particles in the other. It is an essential and massive component of the work's pictorial presentation. Let's say that it is *visual.*

Such is the new term that must be introduced, to distinguish the "visible" (elements of representation, in the classic sense of the word) from the "invisible" (elements of abstraction). Angelico's white self-evidently belongs to the mimetic economy of his fresco: it provides, a philosopher would say, an accidental attribute of this represented inner courtyard, here white, and which elsewhere or later could be polychrome without losing its definition as an inner courtyard. In this respect, it indeed belongs to the world of the representation. But it intensifies it beyond its limits, it deploys something else, it reaches its spectator by other paths. Sometimes it even suggests to seekers-after-representation that there's "nothing there"—despite its representing a wall, although a wall so close to the real wall, which is painted the same white, that it seems merely to present its whiteness. Then again, it is by no means abstract; on the contrary, it offers itself as an almost tangible blow, as a visual face-off. We ought to call it what it is, in all rigor, on this fresco: a very concrete *"whack"* of white.*[4]

But it is very difficult to name it as one would a simple object. It is more *event* than painted object. Its status seems at once irrefutable

*A colloquial meaning of *pan,* which can also mean "section" (of a wall), "panel" (in tailoring), "patch" (of blue sky—or of a painting).

and paradoxical. Irrefutable, because its efficacy is straightforward: its *power* alone imposes it before the recognition of any appearance—"there's white," quite simply, right in front of us, even before this white can be thought as the attribute of something represented. And it is, then, paradoxical as much as sovereign: paradoxical, because *virtual.* It is the phenomenon of something that does not appear clearly and distinctly. It is not an articulated sign; it is not legible as such. It just offers itself: a pure "appearance 'of something'"* that puts us in the presence of the chalky color, long before it tells us what this color "fills" or qualifies. All that appears, then, is the quality of the figurable—terribly concrete, illegible, presented. Massive and deployed. Implicating† the gaze of a subject, its history, its fantasies, its internal divisions.

The word *virtual* is meant to suggest how the regime of the visual tends to loosen our grip on the "normal" (let's say rather: habitually adopted) conditions of visible knowledge. *Virtus*—a word that Angelico must himself have declined in all its shadings, a word whose theoretical and theological history is prodigious, particularly within the walls of Dominican monasteries since Albertus Magnus and Saint Thomas Aquinas—designates precisely the sovereign power of that which does not appear visibly. The event of *virtus,* that which is in power, that which is power, never gives a direction for the eye to follow, or a univocal sense of reading. Which does not mean that it is devoid of meaning. On the contrary: it draws from its kind of negativity the strength of a multiple deployment; it makes possible not one or two univocal significations, but entire constellations of meaning, of which we must accept never to know the totality and the closure, constrained as we are simply to make our way incompletely through their virtual labyrinth. In short, the word *virtual* here designates the doubly paradoxical quality of the chalky white that confronted us in the little cell in San Marco: it is irrefutable and simple as event; it is situated at the junction of a proliferation of possible meanings,

*A concept expounded by M. Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927) and rendered by his French translators as *phénomène-indice;* the key passage is quoted in the Appendix, endnote 56.

†*impliquant,* which can also mean "implying."

whence it draws its necessity, which it condenses, displaces, and transfigures. So perhaps we must call it a *symptom,* the suddenly manifested knot of an arborescence of associations or conflicting meanings.

To say that the visual realm produces a "symptom" is not to look for some defect or morbid state floating hither and thither between the angel and the Virgin of Fra Angelico. It is, more simply, to try to recognize the strange dialectic according to which the work, by presenting itself *suddenly* to the gaze of its viewer, upon entry into the cell, simultaneously delivers the complex skein of a *virtual memory:* latent, efficacious. Now all this is not simply a matter of our contemporary gaze. The presentation of the work, the dramaturgy of its immediate visuality are integral to the work itself, and to the pictorial strategy specific to Fra Angelico. The artist could very well have executed his frescos on one of the cell's three other walls, which is to say on surfaces correctly lit and not *illuminating,* as is the case here. He could also very well have dispensed with such an intense use of white, criticized in his day as producing a tension that was aesthetically disagreeable.[5] Finally, the skein of virtual memory that we have hypothesized without, for all that, "reading" it immediately in the white of this fresco and in its very poor iconography—this skein of virtual memory might very well traverse our fresco, pass like a wind between the two or three figures of our Annunciation. Everything that we know about Fra Angelico and about his life in the monastery effectively teaches us this: the formidable exegetical training required of every novice, the sermons, the prodigiously fecund use of the "arts of memory," the armful of Greek and Latin texts in the library of San Marco, only a few steps from the little cell, the enlightened presence of Giovanni Dominici and Saint Antoninus of Florence in the painter's immediate entourage: all this comes to confirm the hypothesis of a painting virtually proliferating with meaning . . . and to accentuate the paradox of visual simplicity in which this fresco places us.

Such, then, is the not-knowledge that the image proposes to us. This not-knowledge is double: it concerns first the fragile evidence of a phenomenology of the gaze, which the historian doesn't quite know what to do with because it is graspable only through his own gaze, his own specific gaze that strips it bare. It also concerns a forgotten,

lost usage of knowledges of the past: we can still read the *Summa Theologiae* by Saint Antoninus, but we no longer have access to the associations, to the meanings summoned up by the same Saint Antoninus when he contemplated Angelico's fresco in his own cell at San Marco. Saint Antoninus certainly wrote some known passages about iconography (in particular, that of the Annunciation), but not a word about his co-religionist Fra Angelico, much less about his perception of the intense whites of San Marco. It just wasn't in the mores of a Dominican prior (or part of general writing usage) to record the rattling force given rise to* by a gaze posed on the painting—which obviously does not mean that the gaze did not exist, or that it was indifferent to everything. We cannot content ourselves with relying only on the authority of texts—or on the search for written "sources"—if we want to grasp something of the efficacy of images: for this is made up of borrowings, certainly, but also of interruptions effected in the discursive order. Of transposed legibilities, but also of a work of *opening*—and thus of breaking and entering, of symptom formation—effected in the order of the legible, and beyond it.

This state of affairs disarms us. It constrains us either to remain silent about an essential aspect of art images, for fear of saying something unverifiable (and it is thus that historians often oblige themselves to say nothing except quite verifiable banalities), or to use our imaginations and risk, in the last resort, unverifiability. How could what we are calling the realm of the visual be verifiable in the strict sense, in the "scientific" sense, given that it is not itself an object of knowledge or an act of knowledge, a theme or a concept, but only an efficacy on gazes? We can, however, advance a little. First by changing perspective: by noticing that to posit this notion of not-knowledge only in terms of a privation of knowledge is certainly not the best way to broach our problem, since it is a way of keeping knowledge in its privileged position as absolute reference. Then we must reopen precisely what seemed unlikely to provide Angelico's fresco—so "simple," so "summary"—with its most direct textual source: we must reopen the luxuriant and complex *Summa Theologiae,* which, from Al-

**suscitée.*

bertus Magnus to Saint Antoninus, shaped Angelico's culture and his form of belief; we must reopen the *Artes Memorandi* still in use in Dominican monasteries of the fifteenth century, and indeed those delirious medieval "encyclopedic" compilations called *Summae de exemplis et similitudinibus rerum* . . .

Now what do we find in these *summae*? Compilations of knowledge? Not exactly. Rather labyrinths in which knowledge loses its way and becomes fantasy, in which the system becomes a great displacement, a great multiplication of images. Theology itself is not construed here as a knowledge such as we understand the word today, which is to say as something that we can possess. It treats of an absolute Other and submits to it wholly, a God who alone commands and possesses this knowledge. If there is any knowledge at all, it is not "caught" or grasped by anyone—not even by Thomas Aquinas himself. It is *scientia Dei,* the science of God, in all senses of the genitive "of." That is why it is said in principle to transcend—to ground in one sense and to ruin in another—all human knowledges as well as all other ways and pretensions to knowledge. "Its principles do not come to it from another science but imminently from God, by revelation *[per revelationem].*"[6] Now revelation offers nothing for the grasping: it offers, rather, its *being grasped* in the *scientia Dei,* which itself remains by right, until the end of time—a time when all eyes will ostensibly open for good—ungraspable, which is to say productive of an inextricable loop of knowledge and not-knowledge. How could it be otherwise, in a universe of belief that ceaselessly asks one to believe in the unbelievable, to believe in something put in the place of everything that one doesn't know? There is, then, a real work, a constraint of not-knowledge in the great theological systems themselves. It is called the inconceivable, the *mystery.* It offers itself in the pulse of an ever singular, ever dazzling event: that obscure self-evidence that Saint Thomas here calls a revelation. Now it is troubling for us to find in this structure of belief something like an exponential construction of the two aspects experienced almost tactilely before the utterly simple chalky material of Fra Angelico: a *symptom,* then, delivering simultaneously its single blow and the insistence of its virtual memory, its labyrinthine trajectories of meaning.

The men of the Middle Ages did not think otherwise what constituted for them the fundament of their religion: namely the Book, Holy Scripture, every particle of which was apprehended as bearing within it the double power of event and mystery, of immediate (even miraculous) attainment and unattainability, of the near and the distant, of self-evidence and obscurity. Such is its considerable fascination, such is its aura. Holy Scripture was not for men of the period a *legible* object in our general understanding of the term. They were obliged—their faith required this—to mine the text, to open it up, to effect* there an infinite arborescence of relations, associations, and fantastic deployments wherein everything, notably things not in the "letter" of the text (its manifest meaning), could flourish. This is not called a "reading"—a term that suggests a process of narrowing down—but an *exegesis*—a word that signifies going beyond the manifest text, a word that signifies an openness to all the winds of meaning. When Albertus Magnus or his followers glossed the Annunciation, they saw in it something like a crystalline unique event, and at the same time they saw in it an absolutely extravagant efflorescence of inclusive or associated meanings, of virtual connections, of memories, of prophecies touching upon everything, from the creation of Adam to the end of time, from the simple form of the letter M (the initial of Mary) to the prodigious construction of angelic hierarchies.[7] The Annunciation was for them neither a "theme" (save, perhaps, in the musical sense) nor a concept, nor even a story in the strict sense—but rather a mysterious, virtual matrix of events without number.

It is in this associative order of thought—an order by nature subject to fantasy, requiring fantasy—that we must again pose our gaze to the white wall† of Fra Angelico. This whiteness is so simple, yes. But it is so altogether like the blank inside of the little book held by the Virgin: which is to say that it has no need of legibility to carry an entire mystery of the Scriptures. Likewise, it purged its descriptive conditions, its conditions of visibility, so as to allow the visual event of the white its full figuring force. It *figures,* then, in the sense that in

***pratiquer,* which can mean "to make"; "to open up"; "to bore," "to drill," or "to cut [a hole in]."

†*pan.*

its immediate whiteness it succeeds in becoming a matrix of virtual meaning, a pigmental act of exegesis (and not of translation or of attributing color)—a displacement strange and familiar, a *mystery made paint*. How is this so? Would it suffice then to imagine the space that faces us "folded" along the line in the floor, in the image of the open but empty book, in the image of the anagraphic Scripture of a revelation? Yes, in a sense this would suffice: I imagine that this might suffice for a Dominican trained, over a period of years, to draw out of the slightest exegetical relationship a veritable deployment of this mystery to which he dedicated his entire life.

Of the few enigmatic words uttered by the angel of the Annunciation, these are central: *Ecce concipies in utero, et paries filium, et vocabis nomen eius Iesum.* "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."[8] The Christian tradition used the exegetical relationship already present in the sentence itself—an accurate citation, except for a change in the person of the verbs, of a prophecy in Isaiah[9]—to open the little book of the Virgin to the very page of the prophetic verse: thus could be closed, from the Annunciation, a loop of sacred time. All this, which is found everywhere in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century iconography, Fra Angelico did not deny; he simply included it in the white* mystery that these sentences designate. The "empty" (rather: virtual) page in the fresco answers the closed lips of the angel, and both point toward the same mystery, the same virtuality. It is the birth-to-come of the Word made flesh, which in the Annunciation is just taking form, somewhere in the recesses of the Marian body. So it is understandable that the audacious clarification of the image, this sort of stripping-bare or *catharsis,* aimed first to make the fresco itself mysterious and pure like a surface of unction—like a body sanctified in some lustral water—so as to *virtualize* a mystery that it knew beforehand it was incapable of representing.

It is, then, the Incarnation. All of the unassuming painter's theology, all of his life in the Dominican monastery, all of his aims would have turned ceaselessly around this inconceivable, unintelligible cen-

***blanc,* which can also mean "blank."

ter, which postulated simultaneously the immediate humanity of the flesh and the virtual, powerful divinity of the Word in Jesus Christ. I do not say that the *bianco di San Giovanni,* the pigment used in the little cell of the monastery, represented the Incarnation, or that it served as an iconographic attribute of the central mystery of Christianity. I say only that it was one of the means of figurability used by Fra Angelico—labile means, always mutable, movable; means in some sense over-determined and "suspended"—and that, there, it *presented itself* to envelop the mystery of the Incarnation in an affecting visual network. Much of the intensity of such an art derives from this reckoning, always *ultimate*—because aiming at its beyond—with the simplest and most occasional material means of the painter's craft. For Angelico, white was neither a "coloring" to be chosen arbitrarily to emphasize or, conversely, to neutralize the objects represented in his works; nor was it a fixed symbol within an iconography, however abstract. Fra Angelico simply used the *presentation* of the white—the pictorial modality of its presence *here,* in the fresco—to "incarnate" on his level something of the unrepresentable mystery onto which his whole faith was projected. White, in Fra Angelico, does not pertain to a representational code: on the contrary, it *opens representation* in view of an image that would be absolutely purified—a white vestige, a symptom of the mystery. Although it offers itself straightforwardly and almost like a blow, it has nothing to do with the idea of a "natural state" of the image, or with that of a "primitive state" of the eye. It is simple *and* terribly complex. It delivers the blow—the whack*—of an extraordinary capacity to *figure:* it condenses, it displaces, it transforms an infinite and inappropriable given of Holy Scripture. It offers the visual event of an exegesis in action.

It is, then, a surface of exegesis, in the sense that we would speak of a surface of divination. It captures the gaze only to provoke an uncontrollable chain of images capable of weaving a virtual net around the mystery that links the angel and the Virgin in this fresco. This frontal white is nothing but a surface of contemplation, a dream screen—but one on which all dreams will be possible. It almost asks

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the eyes to close before the fresco. It is, in the *visible* world, that agent of "catastrophe" or foliation, that *visual* agent fit for casting the Dominican's gaze toward a realm of pure fantasy—the one ultimately designated by the expression *visio Dei*. It is, then, in all of the word's many senses, a surface of *expectancy:* it takes us out of the visible and "natural" spectacle; it takes us out of history and makes us wait for an extreme modality of the gaze, a dreamed modality, never completely there, something like an "end of the gaze"—as we use the phrase "the end of time" to designate the ultimate object of Judeo-Christian desire. So we understand how this white of Angelico's, this visible almost-nothing, will finally manage to touch, concretely, upon the famous mystery of this fresco: the Annunciation, the announcement. Fra Angelico reduced all his visible means of imitating the appearance of an Annunciation in order to give himself a visual agent fit for *imitating the process* of such an announcement. In other words, something that appears, that presents itself—but without describing or representing, without making visible the content of the announcement (otherwise it would no longer be an announcement, exactly, but a statement of its issue).[10]

There is here a marvel of figurability—in the image of everything that consumes us in the self-evidence of dreams. It sufficed that this particular white be there. Intense as light (we find it, in adjacent cells, in radiant mandorlas and divine glories) and opaque as rock (it is also the mineral white of all tombs). Its mere presentation makes of it the impossible material of *a light offered with its obstacle:* a patch* of wall with its own mystical evaporation. Should we be surprised to find the same paradoxical image within the thread of luxuriant Dominican exegeses of the mystery of the Incarnation? It matters little whether Fra Angelico did or did not read this or that commentary on the Annunciation comparing the Word made flesh to an intense luminosity that traverses all barriers and coils within the white cell of the *uterus Mariae*.[11] . . . The important thing is not some improbable translation, term-for-term, of a specific theological exegesis, but an authentic exegetical work that the very use of a pigment successfully

**pan*.

delivered. The point of commonality is not (or is only optionally) a shared textual source; it is first of all the general requirement to produce paradoxical, mysterious images, to figure the paradoxes and mysteries that the Incarnation proposed from the outset. The point of commonality is this general notion of *mystery* to which a Dominican brother decided one day to subject all his savoir-faire as a painter.

If this patch of white wall indeed succeeded, as I believe it did, in imposing itself as paradox and mystery for the gaze, then there is every reason to think that it likewise succeeded in functioning, not as an (isolable) image or symbol, but as a paradigm: a matrix of images and symbols. Moreover, only a few more moments in the little cell are needed to experience how the frontal white of the Annunciation manages to metamorphose into a besieging power. What faces us becomes all-encompassing, and the white that the Dominican brother contemplated perhaps also murmured to him: "I am the place that you inhabit—the cell itself—I am the place that contains you. Thus do you make yourself present at the mystery of the Annunciation, beyond representing it to yourself." And the visual envelope moved so close as to touch the body of the viewer—since the white of the wall and that of the page are simultaneously the white of the Dominican robe . . . So the white murmured to the person gazing upon it: "I am the surface that envelops you and that touches you, night and day, I am the place that clothes you." How could the contemplative Dominican (in the image of the Saint Peter Martyr within the image) disallow such an impression, he to whom it had been explained, on the day that he took the habit, that his own vestment, a gift of the Virgin, already symbolized in its color the mysterious dialectic of the Incarnation?[12]

But we must interrupt this material discussion* of the visual paradox of the Annunciation.[13] Our question here is one of method. Already, these few moments of posing our gaze to the whiteness of an image have taken us rather far from the kind of determinism to which the history of art has accustomed us. We have moved into the realm of

**cette entréé en matière.*

an iconology that is singularly weakened: deprived of a code, delivered up to associations. We have spoken of not-knowledge. We have, above all, by opening a caesura in the notion of the *visible,* liberated a category that the history of art does not recognize as one of its tools. Why? Isn't it too strange or too theoretical? Doesn't it amount merely to a personal view, an overly intellectual view, one that splits, if not hairs into quarters, then at least the visible in two?

There are, as it happens, two ways of responding to such objections. The first is to document and defend the historical pertinence of my hypothesis. I think that the rift between the visible and the visual is ancient, that it developed over an extended period.* I think that it is implicit, and quite often explicit, in countless texts, in countless representational practices. And I do not think that it is so ancient—at any rate in Christian civilization—only because I attribute to it a still more general anthropological value. But a demonstration of this generality would entail retracing, step by step, the entire history in question—and that history is long. For the moment, let's make do with a sketch, an overview of the problem. In any case, I am not unaware that it is in the course of the research itself that the hypothesis in question will demonstrate its pertinence or, conversely, its misdirection.

Christian art had not yet been born when the first Church Fathers, Tertullian in particular, had already effected a tremendous breach in the classical theory of *mimesis* through which would surge forth a new and specific imaginary mode, an imaginary mode dominated by the problematic—but central—fantasy of the Incarnation. A theology of the image, which had absolutely nothing to do with any artistic program, already provided all the fundamentals of an aesthetic to come: an aesthetic unthinkable at the time in terms of iconography or "works of art"—these words having, for the time being, no chance of corresponding to any reality whatever[14]—but an aesthetic just the same, something like the categorical imperative of a disposition to reinvent in the face of the visible world. This attitude opened up a paradoxical field, one that combined a fanatical hatred of appearances,

**dans la longue durée.*

even of the visible generally, with an intense and contradictory quest directed toward what I have called the *requirement of the visual:* a requirement for the "impossible," for something that was an Other of the visible—its syncope, its symptom, its traumatic truth, its beyond—and yet was not the invisible or the Idea, quite the contrary. This something remains difficult to think, just as the paradoxes of the Incarnation are "impossible."

But my most general hypothesis will be that, over the long term, the visual arts of Christianity actually took up this challenge. That they realized, in their imaging material, this syncopization, this symptomization of the visible world. They effectively *opened* imitation to the subject* of the Incarnation. How did they manage to do this, and how, in so doing, did they constitute the most image-rich religion that ever existed? Because the "impossible" paradoxes of the Incarnation, under cover of divine transcendence, touched the very heart of an imminence that we might qualify, with Freud, as metapsychological—the imminence of this human capacity to invent impossible bodies . . . in order to know something of real flesh, of our mysterious, our incomprehensible flesh. This capacity is properly called the power of *figurability.*

We saw this: figurability stands opposed to what we habitually understand by "figurative representation," just as the visual moment, which it makes happen, stands opposed to, or rather is an obstacle to, an incision in, a symptom of, the "normal" regime of the visual world, a regime wherein we think we know what we are seeing, which is to say wherein we know how to name every appearance that it pleases the eye to capture. Beyond the apparent contradictions of his apologetics, Tertullian really issued a kind of challenge to the image, one amounting to: "Either you are merely the visible, in which case I will abhor you as an idol, or you open onto the radiance of the visual, in which case I will acknowledge in you the power to have touched me deeply, to have made a moment of divine truth surge forth, like a miracle." The apparent discrepancy between the existence of powerful theologies of the image and the virtual inexistence of a "Christian"

***motif.*

art until toward the end of the third century, this discrepancy doubtless stems, in part, from the fact that early Christianity did not try to constitute for itself a museum of works of art; it sought first of all to ground, within a space of ritual and belief, its own *visual efficacy,* its own "visual art" in the broad sense, one that might manifest itself through very different things: a simple sign of the cross, an accumulation of tombs *ad sanctos,* even the imposed spectacle of a martyr accepting death in the center of an arena.

In this era of beginnings, we must remember, Christianity was very far from having rejected the Mosaic ban of images.[15] If Tertullian, and quite a few other Church Fathers and, later, many mystical writers, began by accepting the visible world, the one in which the Word had deigned to become flesh and undergo humiliation, this was on the implicit condition of its being made to suffer a loss, a sacrificial injury. It was necessary somehow to "circumcise" the visible world, to be able to lance it and place it in crisis; failing that, almost to extenuate and sacrifice it in part so as to give it a chance at miracles, sacraments, transfigurations. Which would be designated by a key word in this entire economy: a *conversion.* In effect, nothing less than a conversion was required to find within the visible itself the visible's Other, which is to say a visual index and symptom of the divine. Now we understand better how it was that Christians first laid claim not to the visibility of the visible—to what remained mere appearance, the *venustas* of figures of Venus: in short, idolatry—but to its *visuality:* in other words, to its character as "sacred," shattering event, to its incarnate truth traversing the appearance of things like a momentary disfigurement, the scopic effect of *something else*—like an effect of the unconscious. Getting right to the point, we could say that what Christianity ultimately summoned from the visible was not mastery, but the unconscious. Now, if we are to make sense of this expression—the "unconscious of the visible"—we must turn not to its opposite, the invisible, but to a phenomenology that is trickier, more contradictory, more intense also—more "incarnate." It is this that the visual event, the visual symptom, tries to designate.

The history of art fails to comprehend the vast constellation of objects created by man in view of a visual efficacy when it tries to

integrate them into the conventional schema of mastery of the visible. Thus it has too often ignored the anthropological consistency of medieval images. Thus it has too often treated icons as simple stereotyped images, and implicitly disdained their "impoverished iconography."[16] Thus it has excluded and still excludes from its field a remarkable series of *figural* objects and deployments not wholly consistent with what today's experts would call "works of art": frames, nonrepresentational elements, altar tables, and votive stones that occlude the visibility of sacred images, but that, by contrast, work efficaciously to constitute their visual value, through such intermediary "symptoms" as gleams, radiance, and withdrawal into shadow . . . all of which quite obviously impede the inquiry of the art historian in his desire to identify forms. The *visible* reality of a Gothic stained glass window is definable in terms of its specific treatment of iconographic themes and of its "style"; but all this can now be understood only thanks to telescopic photography, whereas the *visual* reality of this same window will be first of all the way in which the imaging material was conceived in the Middle Ages, so that individuals entering a cathedral had the experience of walking through light and color: mysterious color, interwoven above, in the window itself, into a network of disparate zones difficult to make out, but acknowledged from the outset as sacred, and here, on the floor of the nave, in a polychrome cloud of light devoutly traversed by the walker. . . . I say "devoutly," because this subtle encounter of body and light already functioned as a metaphor of the Incarnation.[17]

Writing the history of a visual paradigm amounts, then, to writing the history of a phenomenology of gazes and touches, a phenomenology that is always singular, borne of course by a symbolic structure, but always interrupting or displacing its regularity. A difficult task, writing such a history, for it requires finding the juncture between two seemingly foreign points of view, the point of view of the structure and the point of view of the event—in other words, the opening made in the structure. Now what can we know of the singular? Here indeed is a central question for the history of art: a question that brings it close, from an epistemic point of view—and far from any "psychology of art"—to psychoanalysis.[18] The rapprochement is strik-

ing, too, insofar as the destiny of gazes is always a matter of a memory all the more efficacious because it *is not manifest.* With the visible, we are of course in the realm of what manifests itself. The visual, by contrast, would designate that irregular net of event-symptoms that reaches the visible as so many gleams or radiances, "traces of articulation,"* as so many indices. . . . Indices of what? Of something—a work, a memory in process—that has nowhere been fully described, attested, or set down in an archive, because its signifying "material" is first of all the image. The whole point now being to know how to include, within the historical method, this—visual—efficacy of the *virtual.* But what, within the history of art, might the virtuality of a work of art mean? Will we be constrained, in order to think such a virtuality, to call upon the doubtful aid of an invisible realm of Ideas, lining the fabric of forms and colors? Isn't it obvious, moreover, that a picture "manifestly" shows all of itself, without remainder, to those who know how to interpret its slightest detail? What, at bottom, can *symptom* mean in a discipline wholly committed to the study of objects that are presented, offered, visible? This is without doubt the fundamental question.

But we should pose the question again on yet another level. How do such categories—the symptom, the visual, the virtual—concern the *practice* of the history of art? Aren't these categories too general, or too philosophical? Why insist on questioning a "visual" apparently used by no one to extract everything that we can know about works of art? So we must listen to the principled objections, in any case to the suspicions that this question can raise in a domain that today justifies itself by the internal progress of its method, and thus by its *legitimacy*—a legitimacy that we must, in turn, interrogate against the measure of its own methodology, in other words of its own history.[19]

The first suspicion concerns the very form of the interrogation, what we might call its philosophical tenor. It is curious, although readily observable, that the academic practitioners of a discipline so greatly indebted, in its history, to philosophical thought—a debt that

***marquages d'énonciation:* in the sense of radioactive traces.

"masters" like Heinrich Wölfflin, Alois Riegl, Aby Warburg, and Panofsky never really hid from themselves—should today be so inhospitable to theoretical thought.[20] One often senses a cowardly or frankly contemptuous distrust of "intellectual notions," as if art historians, sure of their savoir-faire, implicitly set up an opposition between *theories* meant to effect change and their own *discipline,* which, from catalogues to monographs, is meant only to advance.

But advance toward what? Toward greater accuracy, of course. For such is the form taken today by progress in the history of art. On all levels computerization proceeds apace,* which is to say that everything pertaining to *information* is being refined to the extreme. So goes the history of art in its average state (which is a conquering state): an exactitude ever more exact, which is indeed cause for celebration, provided that we know the *why*s of such a quest for detail and exhaustiveness. Exactitude can be a means to truth—it should not become an end in itself, much less an exclusive form. Exactitude is a means to truth only when the truth of the object being studied admits of exact observation or description. But there are objects, even physical objects, whose truth is inaccessible through exact description.[21] Are the objects of art history among those whose exact description is equivalent to speaking their truth? The question is worth posing, and worth posing again for every object.

If you want to photograph a moving object, let's call it a *relative object,* you can and even must make a choice: you can shoot a single moment, even a series of moments, or you can leave the shutter open through the whole movement. In one case you will obtain crisply defined images of the object and a skeleton of the movement (a form absolutely empty and disembodied, an abstraction); in the other you will obtain a tangible curve of the movement but a blurry ghost of the object (in its turn "abstract"). The history of art, in which the assertive tone of a veritable rhetoric of certainty now prevails—by startling contrast with the exact sciences, where knowledge is constituted in the much more unassuming tone of experimental variation:

**on informatise,* wordplay enabled by the derivation of the French verb *informatiser,* "to computerize," from *information,* "information."

"Let us now suppose . . ."—the history of art often ignores that, by its very nature, it is confronted by analogous problems: by *choices* of knowledge, alternatives that entail *loss,* whichever option is chosen. This is called, strictly speaking, an alienation.[22] A discipline that is "informationizing" itself throughout, that guarantees the "scientific" basis of the world art market, that accumulates staggering amounts of data—is such a discipline ready to come to terms with itself as *alienated,* as constitutionally alienated by its object, and thus inescapably subject to loss? Another question.

Finally, the impressive technical arsenal with which the history of art is today equipping itself must not gloss over this complementary query: indisputable progress in the way of means—is this what constitutes progress in a discipline or field of knowledge? Isn't it rather a renewed *problematics,* in other words a theoretical displacement, that makes for such progress? The hypothesis might seem banal. It is not in this domain, where old questions are still posed with new, more exact and efficient tools: accurate facts, even certainties, are hoarded, but only the better to turn away from the disquiet entailed by any broaching of the question of truth. Over and over, the history of art has been grounded in "the age of the world picture"[23]—but always with its back turned to this question. Now we must always, when we find an answer, revisit the question that gave issue to it. We must never be satisfied with answers. Art historians who glibly dismiss "theory" are actually dismissing, or rather expressing their dread of, the strange fact that questions can outlive answers. Even Meyer Schapiro, who renewed so many problematics and admirably reformulated so many questions, courted this risk—an epistemological and ethical risk perhaps definable by its ultimate consequence: methodological self-sufficiency and closure. When he opposed his boots by Van Gogh, "correctly attributed," to those of Heidegger, Schapiro certainly put his finger on something important; he displaced the question anew. But he gave many readers (probably not himself) the illusory impression that he had settled the question, resolved the matter—and had rendered the Heideggerian problematics altogether moot. It is again the illusion that the most exact discourse, in this domain, will necessarily be the truest. But close examination of the

two texts reveals that both authors contributed to the misunderstanding—its being questionable whether exact description, and in particular the *attribution* of ownership of these boots "of" Van Gogh, amounts to the *truth* "of" this picture.[24]

The other risk courted by debates of this kind is the reciprocal closure of the opposing modes of thought. The philosopher will remain "brilliant," which is to say pointless for the art historian, who, for his part, will justify the paucity of his problematics by telling himself that at least everything they advance is correct (he is accurate, he has found an answer). So goes the scientistic illusion in the history of art. So goes the *illusion of specificity,* with regard to a field of study nonetheless undefinable, save as a relative field, and, oh, how unstable! Perhaps art historians think they are keeping their object for themselves and safeguarding it when they enclose it within what they call a specificity. But by doing this, they enclose themselves within the limits imposed on the object by this premise—this ideal, this ideology—of closure.[25]

Where is the "specificity" of a Gothic stained glass window? Absolutely nowhere. It is in the firing of the glass, it is in the long route of traders in colored minerals, it is in the dimensions of the window piercing determined by the architect, in the tradition of forms but also in the *stylet* of the monk recopying his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, it is in a Sunday sermon on the divine light, it is in the tactile sensation of being touched by color, and of simply looking up toward the source of this contact. Visual objects, objects invested with a figurability value, develop all of their efficacy to establish multiple bridges between orders of reality that are nonetheless quite heterogeneous. They are luxuriant agents of displacement and condensation, organisms for the production of knowledge as much as of not-knowledge. Their functioning is multidirectional, their efficacy polymorphous. Isn't there something incoherent about separating their "definition" from their efficacy? So how could art historians not need, in order to think the dynamic and *economy* of visual objects (qualities that exceed the visible, physical limits of said objects), an intricate semiology, an anthropology, a metapsychology? Anyone who says: "I am going to speak to you about this visual object from

a specifically art-historical point of view" has a chance of missing what is essential. Not that the history of art must by definition miss the essential, quite the contrary. But the history of art must constantly reformulate its epistemological extension.

Like every defense and like every denial, the discourse of specificity aims to gloss over—but without ever managing to—this self-evidence; it is itself determined by a system of thought that, originally, was foreign to it. The whole problem starts here, for it is by glossing over its own models that a knowledge alienates itself from them, forgets itself, and ruins itself. The defense consists in rejecting all "imported" concepts; the denial consists in refusing to see that this is all anyone ever does—use and transform imported concepts, borrowed concepts. Doing a catalogue does not come down to a pure and simple knowledge of objects logically laid out, for there are always choices to be made from among ten sorts of knowledge, ten logics of laying-out, and every catalogue is the result of a choice—implicit or not, conscious or not, ideological in any case—with regard to a particular type of classification category.[26] Beyond the catalogue, attribution and dating themselves engage a whole "philosophy"—namely a way of understanding various "hands," the paternity of a given "invention," the consistency or maturity of a "style," and many other categories that have their own histories: that were invented, that have not always existed. So it is indeed the *order of discourse* that, in the history of art, leads the whole game of practice.

Doing iconographic analysis is not a pure and simple matter of knowing textual sources, symbolism, and meanings. What exactly is a text? What is a symbol, a source, a meaning? The art historian quite often doesn't want to know too much about such things. The word "signifier," like the word "unconscious"—all of this at worst makes him afraid, at best gets on his nerves. Years having passed, and the practice having become fashionable, he will perhaps agree to use the words "sign" and "subconscious" . . . indicating by the same token his complete unwillingness to understand them.[27] But his main argument, his final thrust against categories that he deems foreign or too "contemporary," consists of a ritual jab that we might call the *historian's blow:* "How can you think it pertinent in history to use contem-

porary categories to interpret past realities"? Such, in effect, is the consequence, for the very notion of history, of the discourse of specificity. Such is its most radical, most self-evident, most pervasive formulation. Tertullian never stated—in these exact words, we must understand—the difference between the visible and the visual; the Middle Ages never spoke about the unconscious; and if medieval texts refer to the *significans* and the *significatum,* it is certainly not in the sense of Saussure and Lacan. Conclusion: the visual does not exist in Tertullian, the unconscious does not exist in the Middle Ages, and the signifier is nothing but a tic of contemporary thought. There's nothing "historical," nothing medieval in all that.

The argument is, in more ways than one, enormous;* it has the weight of a self-evidence in which, in the eyes of many, a whole discipline seems grounded (and the "weight" here could be called *gravity*); but it also has the weight of an epistemological naïveté that is extremely tenacious despite some decisive critical work, notably that of Michel Foucault (and in this sense the "weight" would be called *clumsiness* or *inertia*). For one perceives soon enough that such a "self-evidence" engaged from the outset a complete philosophy of history . . . a philosophy of history that itself has a history and that, from confused sediments, has never ceased camouflaging its ins, the better to exhibit, on the screen of self-evidences, the outs of its own practice.† So it is as a historian that we must respond to the "historian's blow," but also as a dialectician, and proceeding from the simplest—the aporias of practice—to the most complex—the aporias of reason.

Thus we must begin our interrogation of the "historian's-blow" proposition by positivizing it,‡ in other words by reversing it: is it possible, *in practice,* to interpret the realities of the past using categories from the past—from the *same* past, of course? And what then would be the content of this "same"? What can the "same" be for the historical

**énorme,* which can also mean "outrageous."

†*n'a cessé de camoufler ses tenants pour mieux exhiber, sur l'écran des evidences, ses propres aboutissants pratiques.*

‡*en le positivisant.*

discipline? How are we to grasp the "sameness" of a vanished rite, of a medieval gaze, of an object whose world has *passed,* in other words whose world has crumbled? There is in every historian an empathic desire (a desire that is absolutely justified); it can sometimes become an obsession, a psychic pressure, even a Borgesian delusion. Such a desire names simultaneously the indispensable and the unthinkable of history. *Indispensable,* because we can comprehend the past, in the literal sense of "comprehend," only by surrendering to a kind of hymenal bond: by penetrating the past as well as ourselves, in other words by feeling that we have married it in order to grasp it completely, while in return we are, by this act, gripped by it ourselves: grabbed, clasped, even stupefied. It is difficult to misconstrue, in this empathic movement, the deeply mimetic character of the historical operation itself. Like the conservator who goes over with his own hand every brush stroke of a picture that he "restores to life," and about which he can have a feeling of being its quasi-creator, of *knowing everything* about it—likewise, the historian will place the words of the past in his mouth, the dogmas of the past in his head, the colors of the past before his eyes . . . and thus will proceed in the hope of knowing it carnally, this past, even, in a sense, of *anticipating* it.

This mimetic character is, at bottom, only the conquering advance of the desire discussed above. As for the "conquest" itself, whose strictly verifiable solidity cannot help but be exceptional, it will reveal under many aspects its consistency as fantasy. It will be, at the very least, an act of the imagination.[28] It can be deployed, as in Michelet, within a veritable poetics of the past (which, again, is not to say that it is "false," although it will indeed produce inaccuracies). But it will always be the *relative* victory of a Sherlock Holmes who has arrived at the scene much too late to investigate: some clues may have disappeared, unless they are still there, among millions of others that have accrued since; neither the number nor the name of all the players in the drama can now be remembered; the weapon used to commit the crime has disappeared or been wiped all too clean by time; it might be possible to infer the motive from extant documents—but aren't there other pertinent documents that are lost or that remain hidden? Couldn't the documents in hand be deliberately misleading, so many

"plants" intended to obscure the real motive? Why would the motive have been written down anyway? And for that matter, was a crime committed at all? That's what Sherlock Holmes dreamed from the beginning, of course, but something that he can't, from where he is, absolutely swear to . . .

The grandeur and misery of the historian: his desire will always be suspended between the tenacious melancholy of the past as an *object of loss* and the fragile victory of the past as an *object of recovery,* or object of representation. He tries to forget, but cannot, that the words "desire," "imagination," "fantasy" are there precisely to remind him of a fault that makes constant demands of him: the past of the historian—the past in general—stems from the impossible, stems from the *unthinkable.* We still have some monuments, but we no longer know the world that required them; we still have some words, but we no longer know the utterances that sustained them; we still have some images, but we no longer know the gazes that gave them flesh; we have descriptions of rites, but we no longer know either their phenomenology or their exact efficacy value. What does this mean? That everything past is definitively *anachronistic:* it exists or subsists only through the figures that we make of it; so it exists only in the operations of a "reminiscing present," a present endowed with the admirable or dangerous power, precisely, of *presenting* it, and, in the wake of this presentation, of elaborating and representing it.[29]

Any historian might respond that he knows all about this, namely the perpetual constraint of the present on his vision of the past. But that, precisely, is not all that's in question. In question, too, is its contrary: namely that the past, too, functions as a constraint. First as a *Zwang* in Freud's sense, for the past offers itself to the historian as a sovereign obsession, a structural obsession. Second, because it sometimes imposes itself as an alienating element of the historical interpretation itself—a vexing paradox. What would we gain, in fact, by fully realizing the program of interpreting the realities of the past using only the categories of the past, supposing that this has any concrete meaning? We would perhaps gain an interpretation of the Inquisition armed solely with the arguments—"specific" arguments—of the inquisitor. Even if it were also armed with the arguments (the defenses

and screams) of the tortured, this interpretation would nonetheless become a vicious circle. Marrying the past in imagination is necessary, but it is not sufficient. We thereby gain access, without doubt, to the subtleties of a given period, which we then try to *understand through its own intelligibility.* But we must also know how to smash the ring, break its hymen, insofar as we want to *understand the intelligibility itself.* This can be achieved only at the price of a distanced gaze: it is suspended in the present and knows this, knowledge that in turn renders it fruitful.

The situation, here again, is that of the alienating choice, a choice that is always perilous. There is, on one side, the danger of contemporary logocentrism: the danger of a strictly Saussurian or Lacanian approach that would strip* the Okhamist *signum* or "reference" of its substance.[30] There is, on the other side, the danger of an empty totalitarianism in which the past—the supposed past, which is to say the ideal past—would act as absolute master of the interpretation. Between the two, the salutary practice: to proceed dialectically. For example, the fruitfulness of an encounter in which viewing the past with the eyes of the present would help us to clear a hurdle, and literally to plunge into a new aspect of the past, hitherto unperceived, an aspect buried *since then* (for such is the veritable plague of the historian: the insidious work of the *since then),* and which the new gaze, I do not say naive or virginal, will suddenly have revealed.

What is it, in the history of art, that justifies such encounters, such qualitative leaps? Often, the history of art itself—I specify immediately: the history *of* art in the subjective genitive sense, which is to say in the sense that art is the bearer of its own history, as opposed to the objective genitive sense (where art is understood first as the object of a historical discipline). Much too often we confuse, we collapse these two understandings of the history of art, doubtless because we dream of an objective discipline that could speak wholly in the name of a subjective practice. Obviously, that's not the way things are. The history of art in the subjective sense is too often ignored by the objective discipline, even though it preceded and conditions it.

***décharnerait.*

Goya, Manet, and Picasso *interpreted* Velàsquez's *Las Meninas* before any art historians did. What did their interpretations consist of? They each *transformed* the seventeenth-century painting by playing with its fundamental parameters; in the course of which they each showed them, even demonstrated them. Such is the interest, authentically historical, of looking at how painting itself has managed to interpret—in the strong sense of the word, and far beyond questions of influence—its own past; for its game of transformations, while "subjective," is no less rigorous for that.[31] But aren't we reverting here to the "insidious work of the *since then*"? Yes, we are. But we are constrained to do so in any case—and it is this that we must constantly bear in mind, or at least take into account. To proceed dialectically, then, and without hope of synthesis. It is the art of a tightrope walker: he jumps, walks on air for a moment, yet knows that he will never fly.

Let's return once more to the situation of choice in which the historian finds himself when he looks for pertinent categories for interpreting his object *x* from the past. What really happens here? Something a bit more subtle than a simple choice between categories of the past (the past capital *X* to which object *x* belongs) and categories of the present. Quite often, the historian effectively chooses the *pastest** category available to him (which is to say the one closest to past *X*), so as to avoid struggling with the striking anachronism of a category that is too "present" in his eyes. By doing this, he blinds himself to the narrow anachronism—less keen, certainly, but far more deceptive—into which he henceforth falls. This can lead to misunderstandings. When we read, for example, the already classic text by Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy,* we have the reassuring impression of a period finally considered through its own eyes.[32] This is the "historian's blow" at its most fully realized: we need only interpret Quattrocento paintings in accordance with sixteen categories proposed by "the best of the Quattrocento art critics," Cristoforo Landino, to obtain an exact understanding of the painting of the period.[33] But when we try to apply this conceptual approach to one of the four great artists featured in the book, we

**le plus passée.*

soon realize the limitations of this analytic principle, even its sophism. The thirty-year interval between the death of Fra Angelico and Landino's pronouncements about his work suffice to introduce a screen of anachronism: the analytic categories used by Landino and then by Baxandall—in particular, the categories *vezzoso*[34] and *devoto*—show the extent to which misunderstanding can result from slight shifts in meaning. For between chronological moment *X* (and the unique space attached to it), when Fra Angelico developed his "devout" art, and the moment $X + 30$, when Landino made his judgments, the meaning of the category *devoto,* along with that of other categories fundamental to painting, for example, *figura* and *historia,* changed completely. Thus we can say that, in the narrow space of these thirty years, the historian let himself be trapped by an *anachronistic past,* when he thought only about escaping the trap of the anachronistic present.[35]

So we see how the past itself can screen out the past. Anachronism is not, in history, something that must be absolutely banished—in the end, this is no more than a fantasy or an ideal of equivalence—but rather something that must be negotiated, debated, and perhaps even turned to advantage. If the historian generally chooses straightaway categories from the past (whatever it might be) over categories from the present, that is because he is constitutionally inclined to place truth on the side of the past (whatever it might be) and is wary, no less constitutionally, of anything that might signify "in the present." One has the impression, in the multiple movements of these various "natural" inclinations and suspicions, that theory is being rejected in favor of specifics, that the art historian is only taking literally the very words that designate his own practice, the words *history* and *art.* One has the impression that a (particularly academic) social or discursive identity is being played out through all of these movements—but in the mode of something unthought. And it is because the unthought here controls the whole game, the troubled play of demands and rejections, that *art* and *history,* far from forming a definitive foundation for the practice that conjugates them, are revealed as constituting its principal epistemological impediments . . .

This hypothesis might seem surprising. Nonetheless, it follows log-

ically from the refusal of a discourse of specificity to examine critically the real extent of its field.[36] Taking the words *history* and *art* literally, without questioning the nature of their relation, is tantamount to holding that the two following propositions are axiomatic: first, that *art is a thing of the past,* comprehensible as object insofar as it enters into the point of view of history; second, that *art is a thing of the visible,* a thing that has its own specific identity, its own discernible appearance, its own criteria of demarcation, its own closed field. It is by implicitly assuming such imperatives that the history of art schematizes for itself the limits of its own practice: henceforth, it advances within the gilded cage of its "specificity"—which is to say that it turns in circles.

The two "axioms" themselves turn in circles, as if one were the tail chased by the other, which is in fact its own. So the two propositions are complementary; the reductive operation that they perform together finds its coherence in the paradoxical tie that durably knots together a certain definition of the past and a certain definition of the visible. The extreme form of this tie might, in the end, be articulated as follows: *Art is over, everything is visible.* Everything is finally visible because art is over (art being a thing of the past). Art is finally dead, since everything that it was possible to see has been seen, even not-art . . . Am I in the process of advancing yet another paradox, a hypothetical taking-to-the-limit of some propositions about art? Not only that. For here, with this kind of slogan, I am only giving voice to a double *platitude* of our time. A platitude that surreptitiously conditions the practice of the history of art—a platitude itself conditioned by a more fundamental schematism wherein the history of art has itself, in advance, set the limits of its own practice. All of which will perhaps be clearer at the end of the analysis.

First platitude: art, a thing of the past, is over. It is dead. In an element that supposedly no longer owes anything either to the visible or to the visual (in short, a chaos), in an atmosphere of crumbling empires, all of us speak, sorrowfully or cynically, from the place or, rather, from the era of a death of art. When did this era begin? Who brought it about? The history of art—in the objective genitive sense, which is

to say as a discipline—claims quite simply to find the answer in the history of art in the "subjective" sense, which is to say in the discourse and in the productions of certain artists who supposedly ruined, in the twentieth century (or even the nineteenth), the serene ordering and historical specificity of the Fine Arts. In this sense, the "end of art" is articulated by more or less iconoclastic objects such as Malevitch's *White Square on White Ground,* Rodchenko's *Last Painting* (1921), and Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, or, moving closer to us, by American "bad painting" and the postmodernist ideology . . . But is the understanding of the "end of art" consistent in all this? Doesn't what some call "the end" appear to others as a purified manifestation of what art still could and even should *be?* The ambiguity and sterility of such pronouncements soon become obvious.[37]

"The end of art" is, moreover, a strange expression: with equal aptness, one can readily imagine it serving as a rallying cry for the heralds (or heroes, I don't know which) of postmodernism and as the frantic shout of those who are, overall, horrified by contemporary art . . . It is as if the affectation of a value, positive-inflamed in one sense and negative-frightened in the other, were not enough to reduce the irony of one and the same phrase being brandished by two rival factions: which evokes a dialogue of the deaf (one party yelling: "The end of art!"; to which the other retorts: "Not at all! The end of art!!")—even of an absurd battle in which two armies would hurl themselves at each other while waving the same flag and sounding the same charge.

To be sure, the two armies do not ascribe the same meaning, each in its clamor, to the meaning of the history of art when they brandish the expression "the end of art." However, what confers this same sound of the trumpet upon them both is that, each in "its meaning," yet together, they sing the glory of a *meaning of history*—a meaning of the history of art. Basically, the phrase "the end of art" can be uttered only by someone who has decided or presupposed the following: art has a history and this history has a meaning. The fact that art can be conceptualized as dying implies that it probably has been conceptualized as nascent, which implies that it began and that it developed dialectically to its ultimate point, something that we might call its

auto-teleology. The thought of the "end," in this field as in others, belongs to a thought of "ends," or rather of their definition, of their categorical identification starting from an act of birth and an idea of their development.

So the "modern" notion of the end of art is actually as old as the history of art itself: not the history of art in the genitive subjective sense, for a practice need not be enlightened about its end to be efficacious and to develop in the historical element in general; but I want to discuss this order of discourse constituted in view of giving specific meaning to a set of practices—within the perspective of a meaning of history. Not only does the history of art desire its object to be *past,*[38] the object of a "simple past," so to speak; at the limit, it desires its object to be fixed, extinguished, worn out, withered, finished, and finally discolored: in short, an object that has *passed away.* A strange desire, then, and desolate, this work of mourning carried out by reason in the face of its object, having secretly and in advance assassinated it.

We need only read the very first western text to posit, explicitly and at length, the project of a history of art—only one part of a much larger encyclopedic project—to encounter immediately, from the first lines, this notion of the end of art. I refer, of course, to the celebrated book xxxv of Pliny's *Natural History.* Pliny here announces at the outset its color, so to speak—the color of that which is *past:*

> And first we shall say what remains to be said about painting *[dicemus quae restant de pictura:* alternatively, what "remains" of painting, in the sense that Cicero could write *pauci restant:* little remains, all else is dead], an art that was formerly illustrious, at the time when it was in high demand with kings and nations and when it ennobled others whom it deigned to transmit to posterity *[posteris tradere].* But at the present time it has been entirely ousted *[nunc vero in totum pulsa].*[39]

The conjugation, here, of two apparently contradictory themes already conveys something about the status accorded its object by a history of art in the process of instituting it: it had to be ousted *(pulsa),*

so to speak, from its original world so that, as "remains," it could be passed down to posterity and transmit itself as such *(tradere)* . . . which is to say as *immortal* object. We see that, from the standpoint of a certain history, the most immortal objects are perhaps those that have best realized, best achieved their own death. Fifteen centuries after Pliny, Vasari, considered by all the true founder of the history of art, delivered simultaneously his celebrated "law of the three phases" of the arts of design or drawing *(arti di disegno)* and the assertion that he himself was writing in a time when art in general had already brought its auto-teleology to its end:

> [H]aving made a distinction and division, in order not to make too minute a research, into Three Parts, or we would rather call them ages *[età]*, from the second birth of these arts up to the century wherein we live, by reason of that very manifest difference *[manifestissima differenza]* that is seen between one and another of them. In the first and most ancient age these three arts are seen to have been very distant from their perfection *[queste tre arti essere state molto lontane dalla loro perfezione]*, and, although they had something of the good, to have been accompanied by so much imperfection *[tanta imperfezione]* that they certainly do not merit great praise; although, seeing that they gave a beginning and showed the path and method to the better work that followed later, if for no other reason, we cannot but speak well of them and give them a little more glory than the works themselves have merited, were we to judge them by the perfect standard of art.
>
> Next, in the second, it is manifestly seen that matters were much improved *[si veggono manifesto esser le cose migliorate assai]*, both in the inventions and in the use of more design, better manner, and greater diligence, in their execution; and likewise that the rust of age and the rudeness and disproportion, wherewith the grossness of that time had clothed them, were swept away. But who will be bold enough to say that there was to be found at that time one who was in every

> way perfect *[essersi trovato uno in ogni cosa perfetto],* and who brought his work, whether in invention, or design, or coloring, to the standard of today? The credit *[lode]* of this is certainly due to the third age, wherein it appears to me that I can say surely that art has done everything that it is possible for her, as an imitator of nature, to do, and that she has climbed so high that she has rather to fear a fall to a lower height than to ever hope for more advancement *[e che ella sia salita tanto alto, che più presto si abbia a temere del calare a basso, che sperare oggimai più augmento].*
>
> Having pondered over these things intently in my own mind, I judge that it is the peculiar and particular nature of these arts to go on improving little by little from a humble beginning, and finally to arrive at the height of perfection *[al colmo della perfezione].*[40]

Beginning with Vasari, then, the history of art defined itself[41] as the auto-movement of an *idea* of perfection (we shall return to this term), an *idea* heading toward its full realization. The specific historicity of the "arts of design," their "differences" depending on the period in question, the singularity of each artist, of each work, all of these things were already being measured according to their greater or lesser distance from a unique point whose common name, in our text, is *il colmo della perfezione,* and whose proper name is everywhere in Vasari: *Michelangiolo*—Michelangelo as perfection realized, perfection made manifest.[42] Today, many historians continue to think in accordance with this value schema, which has the double advantage of presenting history as the adventure of an *idea* and of providing an "enlightened" (I would say rather: idealist) basis for valuations in today's art market.

Moreover, we might say, with some irony, that the first great historian of art had already opted, of course unawares (but then most of today's are scarcely more aware of it), for a neo-Hegelian position with regard to historicity.[43] What does this mean? Only three things, which provide an approximation of a system at once more rigorous, more generous, and more imperious than the one that Hegel himself gave us. In short, Hegel reduced (with some distortion, hence my use

of the prefix "neo") to three claims about history. First: the motor of (art) history is "beyond" its singular figures. It is this beyond that, properly speaking, is realized through it, that perfects itself in the *colmo della perfezione.* Vasari often characterizes it as *divino*—the divine that designated and even touched Michelangelo with its finger so as to realize itself. It can also be called Idea, it can also be called Spirit.[44] In question here is the long and hardy tradition of historical idealism.

Second: history is thought *with the death* of its figures or of its singular objects. It is, says Hegel, the "prodigious labor of history" to have incarnated the total content of Spirit in every form, but through a continuous movement of negation and "sublation" *(Aufhebung)* in which every form exhausts itself and dies so as to reveal its own truth to history.[45] Thus some have taken literally Hegel's famous dictum about the end of art,[46] whose implications for art historians amount to an odd amalgam of paradox and cruel common sense: better to wait for the death of one's object—or, at the limit, to have killed it with one's own hands—so as to be sure to produce a history of it that is absolute, complete, and true . . . Third, then: this double work of Spirit and Death provides access to something like *Absolute Knowledge.* One recalls the rise of the theme of *conceived history* in the last two pages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* where Hegel proposes the prodigious metaphorical conceit of Becoming as a "picture gallery" that requires a "withdrawal into itself" of Spirit, which gives rise on the one hand to History, and on the other hand to a "new world"—the ever hoped-for world of Absolute Knowledge:

> But the other side of [Spirit's] Becoming, *History,* is a *conscious* self-*mediating* process . . . This Becoming presents a slow-moving succession of Spirits, a gallery of pictures *[eine Galerie von Bildern],* each of which, endowed with all the riches of Spirit, moves thus slowly just because the Self has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance. As its fulfillment *[Vollendung]* consists in perfectly *knowing* what *it is [vollkommen zu wissen],* in knowing its substance, this knowing is its *withdrawal into itself* in which it abandons its

> being-there *[dasein]* and gives its existential shape over to recollection.[47]

Thus is it that the history of art in the objective genitive sense can entertain some hope of completely incorporating and digesting the history of art in the subjective genitive sense . . . We shall return to this essential compulsion of history, its fundamental and morbid *Zwang* (by no means specific to it, not by a long shot), which posits that a thing must be dead for it to become immortal on the one hand, knowable on the other. I will relentlessly interrogate this paradox, which is indicative of the tyranny, pushed to its most extreme consequences, of *Nachträglichkeit*—of its formidable and sovereign efficacy. Note, too, that it was precisely in the terms of such a paradox that Hegel himself, in some very beautiful lines, situated the truth of the work of art under the gaze of its historian:

> The [Greek] statues are now only stones from which the living soul has flown, just as the hymns are words from which belief has gone. The tables of the gods provide no spiritual food and drink, and in his games and festivals man no longer recovers the joyful consciousness of his unity with the divine. The works of the Muse now lack the power of the Spirit . . . They have become what they are for us now—beautiful fruit already picked from the tree, which a friendly Fate has offered us, as a girl might set the fruit before us. It cannot give us the actual life in which they existed, not the tree that bore them, not the earth and the elements which constituted their substance, not the climate which gave them their peculiar character, nor the cycle of the changing seasons that governed the process of their growth. So Fate does not restore their world to us along with the works of antique art, it gives not the spring and summer of the ethical life in which they blossomed and ripened, but only the veiled recollection of that actual world. Our active enjoyment of them is therefore not an act of divine worship through which our consciousness might come to its perfect truth and fulfillment; it

> is an external activity—the wiping-off of some drops of rain or specks of dust from these fruits, so to speak—one which erects an intricate scaffolding of the dead elements of their outward existence—the language, the historical circumstances, etc., in place of the inner elements of the ethical life which environed, created, and inspired them. And all this we do, not in order to enter into their very life but only to represent them *(vorstellen)* in our imagination. But, just as the girl who offers us the plucked fruits is more than the Nature which directly provides them—a Nature diversified into their conditions and elements, the tree, air, light, and so on—because she sums all this up in a higher mode, in the gleam of her self-conscious eye and in the gesture with which she offers them, so, too, the Spirit of Fate that presents us with those works of art is more than the ethical life and the actual world of that nation, for it is the *inwardizing* in us of the Spirit which in them was still [only] *outwardly* manifested.[48]

This text is admirable, notably because it is, even in its lesser articulations, dialectical in what I would call the *uneasy* sense of the word. Admittedly, it concludes with the idea of a history that has internalized and superceded the world of its object, and thus with the idea that syntheses effected by "self-conscious" historians are "superior" to their past object . . . But this is also a text that does not elide the morbid implications of the *Nachträglichkeit*. It knows that the discourse of history establishes only "an intricate scaffolding of the dead elements" of a past. It knows and says that the advent of the history of art signifies the death of God as much as the death of art. In short, Hegel does not forget the *loss* entailed by all knowledge—a loss of "the affective life of their being there," as he remarks of the immemorial and enigmatic statues of ancient Greece. A loss to which we today can reference the urgency of our questioning of the visual efficacy and anthropological dimension of those visible objects that are the said "works of art": "The admiration we experience on seeing these statues . . . is powerless to make us kneel," Hegel noted in his lectures on aesthetics.[49] If they adhered closely to the teaching of such a text,

art historians would discover the inevitably *open,* split status of their objects: objects henceforth placed *under their gaze,* but deprived of something that we of course no longer want anything to do with: something that has effectively *passed away.* Something, however, that made the whole life of these objects, their function and their efficacy: something that in turn placed everyone *under the gaze of the object* . . . The difficulty being, henceforth, to look at what remains (visible) while summoning up what has disappeared: in short, to scrutinize the visual traces of this disappearance, which I will otherwise call (and without any clinical connotations): its symptoms.[50]

A paradoxical task for the history of art? A task all the more paradoxical because the "neo-Hegelian" tone generally adopted by the discipline shuns a patient rereading of Hegel, or, at any rate, shuns thinking its own position dialectically. It retains only the dream of, the demand for absolute knowledge, and thereby falls simultaneously into two nets,* into two philosophical traps. The first is of a metaphysical nature; we might call it the *quiddity trap,* as this word still evokes a celebrated remark ostensibly made by Solon and reported by Aristotle: we can only advance a truth about someone ("Socrates is happy") *after his death* ("if Socrates had still been alive when I spoke, at any moment he could have become unhappy, in which case what I said would not have been true").[51] So historians might have a fundamentally metaphysical motive for wanting to make their object an object that has passed away: I will tell you what you are, you work of art, when you are dead. Thus I will be certain of speaking the truth about the history of art, when this history is finished . . . Now it is easier to understand why such an end might have, secretly, been desired; why, too, the theme of the "death of art" has managed to *linger* such a long time in the historical and theoretical discourses about painting.

The second philosophical trap is of a positivist order. It thinks it can eradicate all "loss" with regard to the past by answering it with a definitive *victory of knowledge.* It no longer says that art is dead, it says that art is immortal. It "preserves," "catalogues," and "restores" it.

**panneau,* which, in tailoring, can also mean "panel," as in "three-paneled skirt."

Just as the platitude of the end of art is but a caricature of the dialectic, this overconfident knowledge is but a caricature of Hegelian Absolute Knowledge applied to works of art: *everything is visible.*

Second platitude, second trap, then: everything has become visible since art is dead and anatomized. Everything has become visible since art has become a monument that can be visited without respite, without remainder, since it has, by the same token, become immortal and fully illuminated. Today we need only visit a museum or even open a book with quality reproductions to believe that we are strolling through the art of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. We need only slip a coin into one of those church collection boxes of a new kind to see an early Italian altarpiece lit by 250 watts, and think we are getting a better grasp of it than we would by observing it at greater length in the dim light for which it was painted, and in which its gold grounds still sparkle like splotchy summonses. A work of art becomes famous? Everything will be done to make it visible, "audiovisual," still more if possible, and we will all come to see it, a beautiful idol that is immortal, restored, disembodied, protected by bulletproof glass that sends back only our own reflections, as if a group portrait had invaded the solitary image forever.[52]

The tyranny of the visible: such is the *screen,* in every sense that this word can have, of knowledge produced and proposed today about works of art. To be sure, this accumulation of visibility becomes a fascinating image-bank or laboratory. But it also becomes a supermarket that the history of art, however it might feel about this, helps to manage. Through the ever-stronger means allotted it, our beloved discipline thinks it is profiting from this situation of *demand,* as we say. In fact, it is trapped by this demand: constrained to reveal the "secrets of masterpieces" to everyone, constrained to exhibit only certainties, it pronounces expert opinions about thousands of visible objects destined to become *investments,* to move from the illuminated dais of the auction house to locked vaults where no one will ever see them again. In effect, the art historian plays the troubling role of a "Mr. Loyal" who is extremely knowledgeable but perhaps more naive than he knows: he presents and stands surety for a *spectacle;* even if

he remains on the sidelines, he, too, must make a convincing impression, in other words to forever wear the mask of certainty.

The history of art will fail to understand the visual efficacy of images so long as it remains subject to the tyranny of the visible. Because it is a history and because it strives to understand the past, it owes it to itself to take into account—at least where Christian art is concerned—this long reversal: before demand there was *desire,* before the screen there was the *opening,* before investment there was the *place* of images. Before the visible work of art, there was the requirement of an "opening" of the visible world, which delivered not only forms but also visual furors, enacted, written, and even sung; not only iconographic keys but also the symptoms and traces of a mystery. But what happened between the moment when Christian art was a desire, in other words a future, and the definitive victory of a knowledge positing that art must be conjugated in the past tense?

2 Art as Rebirth and the Immortality of the Ideal Man

The Renaissance arrived. A magnificent mythic tide, a golden age of the human spirit, the invented reign of all invention. The word has a magical sound—it is a word that *promises.* It seems to be conjugated in the very special tense of a future in the throes of birth and self-remembrance, foreclosing the shadow of the past and of oblivion, announcing the dawn of all lucidity. It was during the Renaissance in Italy that art, as we still understand the term today—although more and more ill—was perhaps invented and in any case solemnly invested.[1] As if the question of origin, in this domain, could be articulated here only through this word *renaissance,* this word of repeated origin.

One thing is certain, which is that between the origin and the repeated origin, the Quattrocento and then the Cinquecento invented the idea of a phoenix-age, an age when art would be reborn from its ashes. Which was to presuppose that there were ashes, that *art had been dead.* By inventing something like a resurrection of art, the Renaissance delivered, with the same blow, a fantasy of the death of art. Now what happened in the intervals separating the birth from the death, the death from the resurrection of art? Its conceptual history was set in motion. The mythic flux of the Renaissance necessarily bore within itself the invention of a history: *the invention of the history of art.* This connection between the Renaissance and the history of art is even today so constitutive, so preeminent,[2] that it is difficult to say whether the notion of the Renaissance is the fruit of a great discipline named the History of Art, or whether the very possibility and notion of a history of art is but the historical fruit of a great period named (by itself) the Renaissance . . . Each of the hypotheses has its truth value, especially the second, which well explains why, four centuries

after its dawning, the history of art can still place itself under the sign of humanism,[3] or under the implicit constraint of a cruel postulate that might be stated as follows: either art is dead, or art is renascent, and if it is renascent it will only be that much more *immortal* . . .

This postulate in fact pertains to a movement of identification, of self-recognition and triumphant desire. It is my hypothesis that the invention of the history of art—in the objective genitive sense: the discipline that takes art as its object—was invented as a necessary stage in the self-recognition of art by itself, its baptism in some sense. As if, in order to be recognized as a distinct *subject* (and a "distinguished" one, in both senses of the word), Renaissance art were constrained, at a certain moment, to posit itself as an *object* under the gaze of others (in fact, under the gaze of princes): an object that would take on all of its meaning the moment it had a history. The invention of the history of art was, then, the specifically identificatory work of a practice that sought—beyond itself, like its idea or its ideal—to ground itself in the dogmatic and social order. To do this, it had to carry out a *work of scission:* it had to sever the history of art in the objective genitive sense from the history of art in the subjective genitive sense—a practice henceforth reified (by itself, by others), but finally endowed with meaning, *identified.*

The bulk of this work of identification was accomplished in the sixteenth century by an artist skillful and sincere, cultivated and courtly, an artist incredibly dogged in his work, who covered hundreds of square feet with allegorical paintings in Rome, Naples, Venice, Bologna, and above all Florence, who designed several palaces (notably the one that was to become the most prestigious museum of Italian Renaissance painting, the Uffizi), an artist who devised tombs and who oversaw the official funeral of Michelangelo—but whose most celebrated work rightly remains the gigantic historical text in which he recounts *The Lives of the Best Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors from Cimabue to the Present Day.*[4] I refer, of course, to Giorgio Vasari, architect and painter to the duchy of Tuscany in the time of Cosimo de' Medici, friend to humanists, founder of the Accademia, enlightened collector, and, finally, "the veritable patriarch and Father of the Church of the history of art," in the oft-cited characterization

of Julius von Schlosser, who rightly added: "in both the good and the bad senses of the word."[5]

Anyone who wants to study Italian art between Cimabue and the end of the sixteenth century will inevitably walk in the shadow of Vasari. A reassuring shadow, for his text is a treasure-trove of information, an almost day-by-day chronicle, a catalogue, an *inside* view of things: who, better than another Italian artist recounting the *Lives* of his peers, to recount to us in this way the life of art renascent? But it is also a deceitful shadow. Julius von Schlosser's cautionary remark has proved apt, and modern editors of Vasari, beginning with G. Milanesi, teach us to be wary of this text: for it is also a treasure-trove of bad faith, exaggeration, gossip, and untruth. In short, today's art historians have the measure of its inaccuracies.[6]

Is this an adequate assessment of such a text? Clearly not. Vasari's "inaccuracies" cannot be understood solely by correcting them. They are positive strategies of utterance as much as negative, "erroneous" statements. They are integral to a project, a great *will-to-say* that coursed through the thousands of pages blackened by Vasari over the ten years it took him to prepare his book, that coursed still during the eighteen years of revisions necessary for the second edition of the *Lives*—and that, without doubt, continues to course over the pages blackened today by scholars desirous of writing some history of art, Italian or not, under the gaze of a modern edition of the *Lives*. How could such a will-to-say, which entailed from the start the *constitution* (in the temporal sense) of a history of art, fail to obsess and give form to the constitution (in the structural sense) of all art history? Thus it remains pertinent to theoretical issues within the discipline—pertinent to its *ends*. The question effectively poses itself in these terms: To what ends did Vasari invent the history of art? And above all: To what inheritance have these ends condemned us?[7]

Let us open the *Lives*—but only just. Let us remain at the threshold, on the theoretical hunch that ends never find better nesting places than at the edges of long texts.[8] The case of Vasari is exemplary in this regard, for it was indeed a question, in the *Lives,* of designing the *frame* for a new kind of discourse, a new kind of writing, and of lead-

ing its readers to the banks of a new age of knowledge about art. The frame of the *Lives* should be read—and seen—as a complex, layered system of *legitimation* procedures. It is a "working" frame; it is a rite of passage defining a perimeter that we cross when we open the book; it is the definition of a new playing field, a new temple: the history of art. Vasari invites his readers into the *Lives* by presenting them with, by turns, four types of legitimation, whose mere clarification can tell us much about the ends that he set himself, in other words about the great identificatory movement mentioned above. To open the *Lives* is already to pull off the petals* of the subtle dialectic by which a human practice sought its symbolic recognition (to recognize itself and to make itself recognized) by postulating an *auto-teleology:* that it had no ends but itself, and that one could in this sense recount its history, its very specific history . . .

Subtle, this dialectic. It brings to mind one of those strange head movements doubtless current in all sixteenth-century European courts, a movement wherein the head inclines only the better to turn upward. This is the *révérence,* a politesse of power signifying roughly: "I am at your service"; then: "Acknowledge that you cannot do without me"; and finally: "I am my own person, for I am of noble extraction." Vasari proceeded likewise: politely, diplomatically. His first legitimation procedure in writing the *Lives* was to establish a *relation of obedience,* traditional for all that, and to begin by bowing low before the "most illustrious and most excellent Signor Cosimo de' Medici, duke of Florence," whose hands Vasari kisses "most humbly" *(umilissimamente Le bacio le mani)* and to whom he dedicates his work. Thus it is "under your most honored name" *(sotto l'onoratissimo nome Suo)* that he wishes the book "to come to the hands of men"[9]: at the outset, Vasari invokes the immemorial connection that placed the great history of art (in the subjective genitive sense) under the Medici name; in this way, logically, the first history of art (in the objective genitive sense) placed itself under the same majestic aegis. This, moreover, is what is represented in the engraved frontispieces of the two successive editions, both of which are crowned by the celebrated Medici *pale* (Figs. 2 and 4).

**effeuiller,* to pull the petals off; but there is wordplay: *feuille* means "sheet of paper"; *feuilleter* means "to flip through the pages of."

Image not available

FIG 2 Giorgio Vasari, Frontispiece of the first edition of *The Lives of the Best Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors* . . . (Florence: L. Torrentino, 1550). Woodcut.

"Most humble servant" and "most indebted servant" of the Medici:[10] Vasari opens his great work with a double bid of humility and praise. The humility of a courtier and artist-functionary: since he offers the whole of his labor to the prince, "sole father, sole lord, and sole protector of these our arts"; since he reduces his "rough labor" *(rozza fatica)* as official painter to take up the pen, the better to exalt the "the greatness and the truly royal magnificence" of Cosimo's "mind."[11] But in so doing, he opens a rich theater of praise, one in which at the end of the day he will find his role. It exalts the Medici line and Cosimo's "most illustrious ancestors," in whose footsteps Cosimo has followed by protecting the arts *(seguendo in ciò l'orme degli illustrissimi Suoi progenitori).*[12] It also exalts the city, the *Florentia* of mythic origin of which two putti, in the 1550 frontispiece, reveal a stylized view. Now the city of Florence also stands, metonymously, for its inhabitants, in particular the famous ones who had made it splendid: its artists. Shortly before 1400, Filippo Villani already included Cimabue and Giotto in the list of *uomini famosi* in his *Chronicle,* and Landino, in 1482, placed at the head of his monumental edition of the *Divine Comedy* a text praising Florence and its great men. Vasari—himself a Tuscan painter—only gave the usual dedicatory expression of communal pride dimensions worthy of a prodigious book of history.[13]

The second legitimation procedure appears clearly in the 1568 edition, which thanks to the considerable success of the first one was a complete reworking, incorporating, in addition to a series of woodcut artists' portraits, a significant number of new biographies *de' vivi et de morti dall'anno 1550 infino al 1567*[14]—the last of which is none other than the autobiography of the painter-historian himself . . . This return to square one in 1568 tells us much about what was at stake in this edition: for Vasari, it was a question of appealing to the *constitution of a social body,* a social body already ennobled by the historical operation of the book, but also by the creation in 1563 of the Florentine Academy of the *Arti del disegno,* which definitively consecrated the artist's métier as a "liberal art," setting it apart from the medieval guilds and the world of servile craftsmen.[15] In 1568, then, Vasari complemented his dedication to the prince with another dedication *Agli artefici del dis-*

egno, which covers two dense pages and begins with a warm epistolary salutation: "My honorable and beloved craftsmen" *(eccellenti e carissimi artefici miei)*[16] And what does this letter say? It speaks of affection and of multiple talents *(la eccellente virtù vostra).* It repeats how much a history of art should be made to help remind men of the great merit *(tanta virtù)* of artists. It recounts the success of the first edition, "not a volume of which is to be found in bookstores," and the labor that went into the second. Finally, it comes out with the essential thing, namely a veritable hymn to ambition—"to leave the world adorned with works numerous," and see oneself in return covered by it with rewards, esteem, and glory:

> Seeing the nobility and greatness of our art *[vedendo la nobiltà e grandezza dell'arte nostra],* and how much it has always been, by all nations, and particularly by the most noble geniuses and the most powerful lords, both valued and rewarded, to spur and inflame us all to leave the world adorned with works numerous and of most rare excellence; such that, embellished by us, it might ascribe to us that same rank *[grado]* as was held by those ever marvelous and most celebrated spirits. Accept then with a grateful spirit these my labors, brought affectionately to completion by me, for the glory of art and the honor of artists *[per gloria dell'arte e onor degli artefici].*[17]

A few lines later, Vasari does not neglect to point out that he himself participated in this *gloria* of artists—a way of including himself as object in the history that he recounted, and of shutting down to the play of the history of art (the objective genitive encompassing for one last time the subjective genitive sense). So Vasari placed himself "at the end" of his book, at the far end of the frame, conscious of the double meaning, humble and vainglorious, that such a gesture might sustain.

But at the same time, and in the same lines, Vasari *invoked an origin:* how, in effect, could the renascent historian not place himself under the famous ancestry of a strictly "nascent" history, that of Pliny re-

counting *le opere de'piu celebrati artefici antichi?*[18] Such, then, is the third legitimation advanced by this (re)nascent history of art: not content with constituting a social body (a body recognized by the prince or the proper body of a specific class), it henceforth wants to constitute the frame of its temporality. Vasari's *Rinascità* needed a glorious past, and Pliny praising Apelles provided it with one.

To an equal extent, however, the *Rinascità* engages the future, which is to say the idea of a teleology. A fourth procedure of legitimation, then, will complete the frame. It closes the system: to do this, it *invokes an end of time.* So the prodigious coup-de-force realized by Vasari's book—exceeding even its avowed intentions—is its having managed to make us think that the end of time and the aim of the history of art (subjective genitive sense) could be *the time** of the history of art in the objective genitive sense.

But let's backtrack a bit. Let's start over, beginning with the ashes and the name that Vasari first gives them: *oblivione:* oblivion, or the state of having been forgotten—and specifically: the forgetting of names.

> It is clearly seen that the ravening maw of time *[tempo]* has not only diminished by a great amount their own works and the honorable testimonies of others, but has also blotted out and destroyed the names *[ha . . . cancellato e spento i nomi]* of all those who have been kept alive by any other means than by the right vivacious and pious pens of writers.
>
> Pondering over this matter many a time in my own mind, and recognizing, from the example not only of the ancients but of the moderns as well, that the names of very many architects, sculptors, and painters, both old and modern, together with innumerable most beautiful works wrought by them, are going on being forgotten and destroyed little by little *[si vanno dimenticando e consumando a poco a poco],* and in such wise, in truth, that nothing can be foretold for them but a certain and wellnigh immediate death; and wishing to

**temps,* which is also, in grammar, "tense," as in "the tense of the verb."

> defend them as much as in me lies from this second death *[da questa seconda morte],* and to preserve them as long as may be possible in the memory of the living; and having spent much time in seeking them out and used the greatest diligence in discovering the native city, the origin, and the actions of the craftsmen, and having with great labor drawn them from the tales of old men and from various records and writings, left by their heirs a prey to dust and food for worms; and finally, having received from this both profit and pleasure *[e ricevutone finalmente et utile et piacere].*[19]

Thus the artists of the past die not once but twice—as if the forgetting of their names consumed their souls after death had first consumed their bodies and their works had turned to dust. "Time . . . consumes all things," it pleases Vasari to say, but it consumes even more when, the things being dead, there is no longer even a writer to recall the spelling of their titles, of their names . . . For it is writing that remembers: "Since, for lack of writers at that time, [the works of painters, etc.] could not, at least in that way, become known to posterity, their craftsmen as well came to be forgotten."[20] Which is why it was necessary to take up the pen and write a history of art in the first place—a noble reason, in effect. Also why the Middle Ages *(media età)* had been, according to Vasari, nothing but obscurantism: it had forgotten the names of the famous artists of classical antiquity, and with their names it had forgotten their example. When Boccaccio compares Giotto to the painter Apelles, praising his ability to imitate nature, painting itself reclaims its memory, emerges from the shadows, and begins to *come back to life.* Which, finally, is why Vasari had to extend his chronicle to encompass the generation of Michelangelo's students and the great Venetians:

> And I hope, moreover, that if ever (which God forbid) it should happen at any time, through the negligence of men, or through the malice of time, or, finally, through the decree of Heaven, which appears to be unwilling that the things of this earth should exist for long in one form, that she falls

> again into the same chaos of ruin; that these my labors, whatsoever they may be worth (if indeed they may be worthy of a happier fortune), both through what has been already said and through what remains to say, may be able to keep her alive.[21]

Such, then, was the first *disegno,* the first grand design* of Vasari the historian: to save artists from their supposed "second death," to render art unforgettable. In other words: immortal. Immortal through its ever-recurrent names, eternal through its transmitted "reputation," its *fama.* The intention, yet again, is revealed in the book's framing elements. First on the very title page of the first edition (Fig. 2), whose caryatids both assumed an allegorical function: the one on the right, with his lyre and laurel crown—traditional attributes of Apollo—looks toward a female figure whose interpretation now seems more problematic; she holds up a torch, and a spherical object lies at her feet. Study of other allegorical series by Vasari, notably his paintings in the Salone dei 100 in the Pallazzo della Cancelleria in Rome, reveals that what's in question is precisely a personification of *Eternità.*[22]

We find her again, both more dazzling and more ambiguous, in the print on the final page of the Torrentino edition (Fig. 3). She is more dazzling because she occupies the whole upper register of the image, and because her torch—as well as she herself—illuminates its middle space with beams of light that radiate like a glory. Her ambiguity, let's say rather her composite character, is no less interesting and deliberate. First, because the figure is vaguely androgynous and evokes the angel of the Resurrection, with his trumpet waking the dead; but also because it represents (feminine) Renown, *fama* sounding its own trumpet glorifying the three Arts of Design: Sculpture, Architecture, and Painting, figured in the middle space as the Three Fates presiding over the destiny of artists who died for them—poor artists whose bodies are jumbled together in the nether regions of oblivion. So we see that this vignette should be read in the ascendant, and that it is an allegory of historical operation itself, when it saves

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artists from their "second death," brings them into the light, and reminds us of their names, to the greater glory of the mother arts (the word *arte* being feminine in Italian).

The general notion of a historical project, then, condensed the traditional personifications of Resurrection, Eternity, and Glory. *Fama eterna,* "eternal Renown," is a constant of Vasarian thought, one that is also encountered in his painting—in the Camera della Fama in his own house in Arezzo, and in a design for an allegorical decor dating from 1545.[23] However that may be, the history of art invented by Vasari resurrected the names of painters so as to *rename/renown them,** and it did this so that art might become *immortal;* this art became *renascent,* then, and by its rebirth acceded to its definitive double status: immortality recovered from its origin, social glory from its dissemination. That is, the two great types of legitimation set forth in the book's prefaces and dedications. In light of this, we can almost recognize here, in this half-man/half-woman sounding the trumpet and illuminating the Arts, the very figure of the art historian, that erudite angel who resurrects the dead and keeps vigil over their glory, as maternal as an allegory.

Vasari provides a still more precise figuration of all this in the woodcut that doubles as frontispiece and final page in the 1568 Giuntina edition (Fig. 4). Which is already indicative of its importance and its programmatic character. In its general configuration, it is reminiscent of the earlier image—save that between 1550 and 1568 the theme of resurrection has become much more emphatic: in the Torrentino edition, only two or three of the seven or eight figures relegated to the purgatory of oblivion responded vaguely to the trumpet blasts; here, however, we see sixteen explicitly resurrected figures, which is to say clearly emerging from the ground, having crossed the formidable threshold of limbo. As they strain to extract themselves, their bodies trace the graceful curves characteristic of mannerism. Their gestures are no longer withdrawn and melancholy but expressive, ardent: they tense their arms, raise them, or offer thanks to heaven.

What heaven? Not Christian heaven, of course, despite the fact

**pour les renommer.*

Image not available

FIG 3. Giorgio Vasari, final page of the first edition of *The Lives of the Best Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors* . . . (Florence: L. Torrentino, 1550). Woodcut.

Image not available

FIG 4 Giorgio Vasari, frontispiece and final page of the second edition of *The Lives of the Best Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors . . .* (Florence: Giunti, 1568). Woodcut.

that our ambiguous angel—Dame Renown—still brings to mind a Last Judgment. Vasari had suggested that a three-belled trumpet be used as an allegorical motif in the funeral of Michelangelo. We find it again here, drawing men out of the earth in a dramaturgy much more suggestive of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (especially the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha) than of the *Apocalypse* of Saint John, with its imaginary of luminous terrors . . . The men who emerge from the ground are muscular, vigorous, and well pleasured. The bearded figure in the foreground, for example, has faunlike features and strikes a declamatory pose, characteristics that hardly suggest a sojourn in Christianity's harrowing middle realm. There is a decisive departure from Christian iconography of the Resurrection in the group of three ladies personifying the *Arti del disegno,* who preside over the scene as if it were some pagan Last Judgment. They conspicuously take their attributes in hand—attributes that also hang near charming, fleshy putti on each side of the elaborate frame.

Finally, there is the inscription: HAC SOSPITE NVNQVAM / HOS PERIISSE VIROS, VICTOS / AVT MORTE FATEBOR. "This breath [the angel is apparently speaking through his trumpet] will proclaim that these men never perished and never were vanquished by death." This inscription was contrived by the humanist Vincenzo Borghini—Vasari's mentor in all things literary—so as to evoke a passage from the *Aeneid.*[24] It calls for a few preemptive observations. *Hos viros:* "those men there," the ones who, before you and in limited numbers, emerge from oblivion. This is not the "all men" that, according to Christian teaching, will be resurrected en masse. These men constitute a special class, an elite . . . an elite that has never perished *(nunquam periisse).* Strictly speaking, then, the elite is not being resurrected. It was only forgotten in the mental purgatory that was the Middle Ages. Today, at the outset of Vasari's *Lives,* it returns, "brought renown" by the trumpet of *eterna fama* and by the pen of the historian-angel.

Now we understand that this whole system of deviations put in place by Vasari in counterpoint to one of the most loaded themes in Christian iconography—a Resurrection of sensual beings responding to the call of an effeminate and worldly angel, under the gaze of a Trinity of bare-breasted matrons—we understand that all of these

deviations establish a relation rather than a not-relation. They are parodic only despite themselves. Fundamentally, they are quite serious, and we might hazard the suggestion that such a print, placed at both exit and entry of the *Lives,* committed the whole to the question of *ends*—the ends of our own history of art in the process of being invented.[25] In any case, we should not be surprised to find in the print of 1568 the two great types of ideals already posited in what I have called the legitimation procedures of Vasari's text. Note in passing the sophistic character of the whole operation, which presents as legitimizing reasons what are in fact only rationales of desire. . . . Note also how bringing an object to the fore (saving famous artists' names from oblivion) can efficaciously contribute to the new assumption of a subject position (the art historian himself, as new humanist, as scholar of a new and specific kind).

The first desire, then, the first ends invoked: they are *metaphysical ends*. We read them, in the engraved inscription, under the words *nunquam periisse*. We see them under the allegorical figure of our winged and female historian, who is called *eterna fama,* Eternal Renown. We recognize them in all the passages where Vasari appeals to an origin as to a final end. What constitutes itself here is nothing other than a second religion, a religion located in the field designated "Art." It foments its concept of immortality on the foundations of a glorifying use of memory—a memory put to work "bringing artists renown," sheltering them forever under the protective wing of *eterna fama*. Immortality has here its messianic envoy, who weighs souls and pronounces the names of the elect: the art historian, whose era begins with the untimely collapse of an objective genitive into a subjective genitive.

The second ends of this fictive but efficacious era complete the immortality with an aura of glory. *Hos viros,* says the inscription. "The nobility and greatness of our art," says the dedication to the *eccellenti artefici miei*. In short, the religion that Vasari invents is a religion of class—and even a religion of the first class. It concerns only the "finest spirits," it being understood not only that the latter are entitled to postmortem "eternal renown" *(eterna fama)* but that nothing can

"prevent their energies from attaining to the highest rank . . . in order to live in honor" *(pervenire a'sommi gradi . . . per vivere onorati).*[26] Although of humble birth, excellent artists—"brought renown" by historians—will have membership rights in the ideal but concrete *nobiltà,* in other words in princely courts. We mustn't forget the grand-ducal crown and the Medici *pale* that align precisely with the trumpets of Renown. So the second ends of Vasarian history can be described as *courtly ends.*[27]

The history of art, then, will be born or "reborn" by inventing a new human species: an elite, a nobility not of blood but of *virtù*. It will have formed something like an ideal humanity, a Parnassus of resurrected demigods, sharing with the prince the *sommi gradi* of social life—such are its courtly ends[28]—sharing as well with the true God that faculty of invention and formal creation that Vasari called *disegno*—and here we touch upon the specifically metaphysical dimensions of his project. But isn't this a bit exaggerated? Can it really be maintained that *disegno,* drawing,* is a concept with metaphysical overtones? By according such prominence to ends, aren't we missing the main thing, which is quite simply the constitution by Vasari of a new historical knowledge, with its finds and its potential for error, with its methods of enquiry and its specific object?

Today, art historians are reluctant to see in Vasari a systematic thinker, much less a metaphysician. Sometimes they emphasize the superficiality of his thought.[29] Sometimes they question the very existence of a Vasarian doctrine.[30] Some of them insist—rightly—on the lack of closure in his book, conceived over the course of several decades and unstable, its inflections changing from one edition to the other.[31] Erwin Panofsky had already set into relief, pertinently, the internal contradiction of Vasari's conception of historicity, which aims for synthesis but at the same time effectively precludes it. The famous "theory of evolution" or "law of the three stages," the biological metaphor around which the whole of Vasari's text is organized (the three stages are likened to childhood, adolescence, and maturity), a theory heir to a mixture of ancient and Christian dogmas, is "fraught with

**dessin,* which can also mean "design."

inconsistencies,"[32] wrote Panofsky, when it encounters its own objects of application, namely works of art. It clarifies, then, but it distorts the reality of its object. Within it, dogmatism constantly stumbles over pragmatism, and observation over judgment. The kind of *economy of salvation* reinvented by Vasari to account for the meaning of the history of art, this economy also turns out to be an *economy of anxiety:* Panofsky says as much.[33] There is indeed a system in Vasari, but it is a cracked system. We who have inherited this flamboyant history of art and its finally disengaged status, we have also inherited the crack. And that is why we must analyze it.

The problem is not, then, to determine whether Vasari had a complete doctrine or not, whether it is original or not. The problem is to locate in the very flaws and cracks of an unstable doctrine what we might call *the flow of ends:* its rhythm is always duplicitous, for the ends announce themselves in passing desires as much as in passing anxieties. It is this flow that I would describe as metaphysical in Vasari: metaphysical, the dreamt-for triumph of an age of *disegno;* metaphysical, too, the anxiety about a death of art that would reduce all *disegni* to dust. Vasari's method, the method of the history of art in general, must not only be judged from the point of view of its results, accurate or inaccurate; it must also be interrogated from the point of view of its ideals, or its phobias, or its never-realized ends—these ends that no "result" can define, because they issue from a dialectic of desire.

There are, then, two characters in Vasari, which some have thought they could separate in order to simplify things: keep the observation and lose the judgment, for example. But this separation betrays Vasari's work, and above all it hides its crack, this crack whence all of us, all art historians, issue. Let's try for a moment to pin down this notion: what's in question is a *mended crack,* one that is mended constantly because the crack keeps reopening. The teeming contradictions of the *Lives,* which make the book resemble an immense palace whose masonry is out of true, are magically amended in the long prefaces to each of its three parts. Without, synthesis seems to triumph, like an applied decor, but the crack remains within. The building will nonetheless continue to impose its triumphal stature. One

imagines here a gigantic mannerist *Wunderblock,* a magic writing pad completely covered with glorious, completely designed motifs—while within, the wax continues to retain traces of every erasure, of every alteration and rectification.

This crack is, fundamentally, what separates *knowledge* from *truth.*[34] Vasari constituted a treasure-house of knowledge, but he wove all this knowledge together with the thread of *plausibility,* which, it should be clear, has but little in common with truth. Vasari, then, "designed"*—desired and represented to us—a grand plausible history, one that sutured in advance all the cracks and implausibilities of the true history. And that is why we read the *Lives* with so much pleasure: the history of art unfolds there like a family saga in installments, in which the wicked finally die for good (the Middle Ages) and the good are resurrected for real, "for the truth" (the Renaissance) . . . Hence the difficulty of distinguishing events from rhetorical topoi. Hence the perpetual obfuscation of concrete observations by the global idea that guides the unwinding plot lines. Hence the instability of Vasari's lexicon, which constantly plays on several registers at once. It was necessary in any case to construct a narrative that had a meaning, a sense, which is to say a direction and an end—here we reencounter the metaphysical aspect of Vasari's evolutionism—but likewise a narrative that would be readable by (legible to) the prince, that would be efficacious and self-glorifying for all the *artefici del disegno*—and we rediscover the essential rhetorical tenor of this (of our) history of art in the process of being invented.[35]

There was, however, no lack, in the fifteenth century as in the sixteenth, of voices proclaiming high and wide the essential importance of the *realist criterion* in the constitution of historical knowledge. Leonardo Bruni, then Vincenzo Borghini and Giambattista Adriani all proclaimed their hostility to literary fantasy: they firmly distinguished *l'ufficio del Poeta da quel dello Istorico.*[36] Surviving correspondence between Vasari and Vincenzo Borghini attests to this. Covering the years 1546–74, this correspondence makes it possible for us to assess the influence of the "realist" notions of the Florentine scholar on the

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second edition of the *Lives:* if Vasari essentially refused to subscribe to the limits set by Borghini regarding its biographical component, he amply developed the procedures of cataloguing, chronology, and *ekphrasis* of works that the humanist suggested to him.[37] But does this mean, as is widely claimed, that between 1550 and 1568 Vasari passed from the "literary" field to that of the history of art? Not at all. For the problem, yet again, lies elsewhere.

A history can be realistic and accurate in the same way that we say a novel is plausible. Realism and catalogue can tally completely with the *rhetorical* traits of a discourse—but this changes nothing about the problem of the crack between knowledge and truth. Vasari indeed drew up lists, gave dates, researched details. Like historians today, he must have assembled note files. It might even be said that he did not wait for Borghini's suggestions to constitute one of the fundamental tools of his history of art, namely his famous collection of master drawings, his *Libro de' Disegni.*[38] But does that mean that Vasari's ends changed? Nothing could be less certain. For his collection of drawings, far from constituting a call to order from some supposed "real" of history, became on the contrary the most tractable tool imaginable for the *invention of an order,* the invention of a meaning of history. Assembling a collection was not a matter of illustrating history-in-the-making with a rosary of concrete proofs; rather, it was a matter of preconceiving and fabricating the reality of these proofs, which basically comes down to inventing history itself as a rhetorical strategy of the album.[39] It was to choose the order before the proofs, to choose the relations before the terms. And thus to invent outright a reality—in fact: a symbolic order—of history. It was to *frame,* to isolate what it seemed necessary to isolate, and, moreover, to create relations between places, antecedents, analogies, etc; in short, it was to *legislate* over the objects and give them a meaning, a direction.[40] Vasari arranged his *Libro* of drawings like his book of *Lives:* he strung pearls (a way of saying that he accumulated his treasure of *knowledge),* but so as to give form to his necklace (the preconceived form of *ideal* ends) and to create at the same time an object of prestige (in accordance with the social ends of *nobilità).*[41]

Vasari, then, won the day on every front: a realistic and accurate

knowledge, a constructed ideal, an assured prestige. Each helping to deny the crack between knowledge and truth, to redesign them as a unity on the surface of the *Wunderblock.* In this respect, Vasari's "design"* is akin to a magical operation: words are summoned up to mend the opening—the very words that would become, beyond the *Lives,* the totem-notions of the whole of the history of art. Thus do we find *rinascità,* a totem-word reinvented and reinvested to decline the meaning of modern history; thus do we find *disegno,* a totem-word reinvented and reinvested to decline the final, synchronic meaning of artistic activity in general understood as imitation. It is thanks to such a magical operation that the expression "history of art," in its most radical sense, could be pronounced in Vasari: *rinascità del disegno.*[42]

Rinascità, as we saw, is what gives meaning to the institution of an age susceptible of being named the absolute age of the history of art. Convinced that he belonged to an era when the history of art (in the subjective genitive sense) had attained its highest degree of perfection, Vasari invented for us the history of art (in the objective genitive sense) in order to provide a detailed account, retrospectively, of the "progress of its rebirth" *(il progresso della sua rinascità)* as a succession of three ages *(età),* each of which corresponded metaphorically to a stage of human life and commenced roughly with the beginning of a new century. Around 1260 the child was reborn; around 1400 were constituted the vigor of geniuses and the explicit statement of veritable "rules of art"; around 1500 the great masters brought the statement to triumphal action by using the rules with the utmost freedom.[43] It must be repeated here that the history of art (the discipline) was born with the idea of a progress—*progresso* or *augmento,* according to the terms used by Vasari himself—a progress that the history of art (the practice) supposedly demonstrated beginning with that proto-hero of the Renaissance who was the painter Giotto:

> That very obligation which the craftsmen of painting owe to nature, who serves continually as model *[esempio]* to those

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> who are ever wresting the good from her best and most beautiful features and striving to counterfeit and to imitate her *[contraffarla ed imitarla],* should be owed, in my belief, to Giotto, painter of Florence . . . [He] revived the modern and good art of painting, introducing the portraying well from nature of living people *[introducendo il ritrare bene di naturale le persone vive].*[44]

And the example that Vasari cites in stride is none other than the famous portrait of Dante, "a contemporary and his very great friend, and no less famous as a poet than was in the same time Giotto as painter."[45] From the outset, then, everything was in place: the liberal, "poetic," and intellectual prestige of the painter's métier; but also the idea, which would make its way to our own day, of the paradigmatic value of the *portrait* considered as the measure of artistic styles in general, even as the very criterion of their "progress."[46] So we understand that the Renaissance sired by Giotto, then guided by Masaccio and "divinely" realized by Michelangelo—we understand that this Renaissance might have seemed like a recovered golden age of *resemblance.*

It has been said only too often: what was reborn in the Renaissance was the *imitation* of nature. Such is the great totem-notion. Such is the mother-goddess of all the mother-arts, the supreme deity of this second religion that no longer wanted to give itself the absolute Other as essential reference point of desire, but rather a very relative "other," an "other" that would constantly tend toward the "same" that is borne within the word *mimesis.* Art imitates: everyone seems to have agreed about this, without taking much account of the principled criticism to which the concept of imitation, from the beginning, was vulnerable.[47] In Vasari, however, it seems to be taken for granted:

> Our art is all imitation, of nature for the most part, and then, because a man cannot by himself rise so high, of those works that are executed by those whom he judges to be better masters than himself *[l'arte nostra è tutta imitazione della natura*

> *principalmente, e poi, perché da se non può salir tanto alto, delle cose che da quelli che miglior maestri di sè giudica sono condotte].*[48]

But no sooner is the slogan pronounced than it reveals all its fragility. Imitation, to be sure, will impose its law, will govern and perhaps even tyrannize over its subjects. But what is it? What is it, if not the puppet goddess of a simulacrum of a system? In the *imitazione* of the sixteenth century, it is philosophical compromise that presides over the destinies of art, such as they were striven to be written, in histories as in *trattati d'arte.* Nothing is more unshakable than imitation in this "artistic literature" of the Cinquecento, and yet nothing is more elusive—not vague, exactly, but ungraspable, luxuriant, protean. Imitation in the Renaissance is a *credo,* but it is not for all that a unifying principle. It is rather an extraordinarily fecund agent of all sorts of ramifications, of transformations, of compromises. A magic word, a "floating signifier." A large sack open to all winds, a cornucopia upon which Vasari, like many others, drew generously to pull out whatever he wanted.[49]

What was it, then, to imitate? Was it to submit oneself, to equal, or was it to compete with what one imitated in the hope of getting one up on it, even of eclipsing it altogether? The questions are classic ones, but they nonetheless point to two or three contradictory ethics. Vasari, like his contemporaries, never stopped asserting the mimetic "dependence" of the artist on his model—and also the "equality" between them when the illusion is perfect—but also the "supremacy" of the imitative work when *invenzione* or *maniera* was added to it . . . It was basically, since the fifteenth century, a question of improving upon all paintings, in other words of increasing *mimesis* without sacrificing *fantasia*—the imaginative faculty—even if at the beginning the two notions might seem contradictory.[50] It is likewise well known that, to the question "What to imitate?" the Renaissance gave two answers that were very different, yet skillfully intermingled with each other. The first stated that art had managed to be reborn only by remembering and imitating *beautiful art,* in other words the art of antiquity; the second stated that art had managed to be reborn only by observing and imitating *beautiful nature,* without the aid of the

masters. Even if certain authors presented things under this aspect of mutual incompatibility, it was not difficult for others to suggest that they were only two inflections of a single ideal.[51]

And ultimately, they were right. For everything proceeded from *idealism.* Imitating beautiful nature, according to humanists of the Cinquecento, was but another way of reviving the ideals of ancient art and thought; using perspective and playing with it *con licenza* was but another way of obtaining the outcome of the rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian; promoting the realist criterion in the order of the visible was but another way of ensuring the power of Ideas. In short, the tyranny of the visible and the tyranny of the Idea were but two sides of the same coin. On the horizon of each of them was the trap of absolute seeing or knowledge, the trap of quiddity. It is not by chance that Panofsky's famous study of the history of artistic theory in the West is entitled *Idea;* he showed there, in particular, how the "observation of nature" in the Renaissance had managed to be reshuffled without detriment into the "formation of ideas."[52] So one might suggest, paradoxically, that *realism* (not in the medieval sense, of course, but in the aesthetic sense) constitutes the tone, the style, the rhetoric par excellence of metaphysical idealism in the domain of the visual arts. Each helping the other to mend its faults. Each confirming the other in this great triumphalist mania for *adæquatio,* decorum,* and reflection.

We should not be surprised here to see "artistic" realities expressed in terms of the philosophy of knowledge. The term *Idea* alone already lends itself to this, but there is more to it than that. When Vasari used the word, he himself clung to this subtle limit where the history of art (in the subjective genitive sense of its practical value) empties into the history of art henceforth conceived as an activity of knowledge. *Idea* provided the most general means of effecting such a transition: Vasari said that it was within the mind, but also "drawn from reality" *(cavata dalla realtà).*[53] Later, Filippo Baldinucci defined the Idea, in his famous *Vocabulario toscano dell'arte del disegno* (1681), in accordance with the double parameter of "perfect [intellectual] knowledge" and artistic invention:

* *convenance.*

> *Idea,* f. Perfect knowledge of the intelligible object *[perfetta cognizione del'obbietto intelligibile],* acquired and confirmed by doctrine and by usage.—Our artists *[i nostri artefici]* use this word when they want to speak of a work as highly original and inventive *[opera de bel capriccio, e d'invenzione].*[54]

We must take these definitions seriously and, rather than isolating their various levels, try to understand the transition, the displacement that they effect. The history of art was born with such displacements. Even now it often continues to practice them. Its common currency would be, then, this metaphysical coinage that, tossed into the air, glistens with a hundred lights but never tells us who is in charge, the Idea or the visible, each side speaking for the other. Vasari never clearly answered the question: "What does one imitate with?" When he answers: "With the eye," the eye takes its legitimacy from the Idea. When he answers: "With the mind," the mind takes its legitimacy from the visible. This relation of double legitimacy is a metaphysical relation. It, too, has its magic word, a "technical" word capable of handling all conversions, all transitions: it is the word *disegno.**

Disegno, in Vasari, serves first to *constitute art as a single object,* as a wholly independent subject for which it provides, so to speak, the principle of a symbolic identification. "Not having it, one has nothing," writes Vasari; and he specifies, in the opening of his great *Introduzzione alle tre arti del disegno,* that design is the "father to our three arts—architecture, sculpture, and painting": in other words, the principle of their unity, their strictly *generic* principle.[55] It is what informs and fertilizes the mother-goddess—imitation—so as to give life to the three enthroned goddesses presiding over the prints in the *Lives* like three Fates spinning the destiny of a reunified art . . . There was of course no lack, before Vasari, of texts underscoring the fundamental value of *disegno.*[56] But no one before him had affirmed with so much

*The quandary of whether to translate *disegno* (and *dessin)* as "drawing" or as "design" exemplifies the tension described here.

force and solemnity that design might constitute the common denominator of everything that we call "art." So Vasari's operation was tantamount to an act of baptism: henceforth, one no longer said "the arts" but "the arts of drawing." An operation laden with consequences, as should be clear, for it would determine the whole vision of history in Vasari—and, consequently, the whole unity of what the history of art still calls "the fine arts" *(les beaux-arts)*.[57]

It would be artificial to isolate the notion of *disegno* purely and simply within the frame of academic debates about drawing the enemy of color, or about the supposed preeminence of one of the three "major arts" over the two others. Today the word *academic* is used adjectivally and pejoratively, but we must not forget the profound social reality of the academies of art in the Cinquecento, wherein these debates, the *paragoni,* had only an effect value (even if the effect always had consequences). Since it offered itself as common denominator of the three "arts of drawing," *disegno* indeed figured prominently in such debates as a possible criterion of differentiation. But before that, and more fundamentally, it had served to *constitute art as a noble practice,* one that was coherent, intellectual, and "liberal"—in other words, capable of liberating mind from matter—as well as, finally, specific and "disinterested." The *Accademia del Disegno,* founded in Florence in 1563 on the model of the literary academy directed by Benedetto Varchi, can be considered the work of Vasari alone.[58] It was not the only one, for some 2,200 academies were created in Italy between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; but it was doubtless the most famous. It makes a pair with the great enterprise of the *Lives*. It opens definitively the age of the fine arts, in other words the age of the "principal" arts—architecture, sculpture, painting—considered in their social unity and in their shared character as liberal arts.

But the unity of art did not come about without a split, just as the historical immortality of art did not come about without the death of something else. Vasari killed the Middle Ages the better to immortalize the Renaissance; he also sanctioned the split between the *major arts* and the *minor arts*—in other words, he invented or reinvented the distinction between art and craft—to save the aristocracy of the three

arti del disegno. It was in the triumphal intoxication of this academic phenomenon that a painter like Giovanni Battista Paggi could envisage warding off the risk of artistic decadence by forbidding the exercise of painting to anyone not of noble blood.[59]

Beyond such extreme cases, of course isolated, the great thing remained this: the notion of *disegno* would make it possible to justify artistic activity as "liberal," and no longer artisanal, because the word *disegno* was a word of the mind as much as a word of the hand. *Disegno,* then, served to *constitute art as a field of intellectual knowledge*. We must return, to comprehend the amplitude of such a program, to the solemn and convoluted sentences that open the chapter devoted to painting, in the celebrated *Introduzzione alle tre Arti del Disegno:*

> Drawing, the father of our three arts, architecture, sculpture, and painting, proceeding from the intellect *[procedendo dall'intelletto],* derives from many things a universal judgment *[cava di molte cose un giudizio universale]:* as it were a form or idea of all the things in nature *[simile a una forma overo idea di tutte le cose della natura],* which is exceedingly regular in its proportions. Thus it is that drawing, not only in the bodies of humans and animals but also in plants, buildings, sculptures, and paintings, recognizes the proportion of the whole to its parts and of the parts to one another and to the whole *[conosce la proporzione che ha il tutto con le parti, e che hanno le parti infra loro e col tutto insieme]*. And since from this recognition *[cognizione]* there arises a certain concept and judgment *[un certo concetto e giudizio]* that forms in the mind the thing that, later formed by the hand *[poi espressa con le mani],* is called a drawing, one may conclude that this drawing is nothing but a visual expression and clarification of the concept that was in the soul *[una apparente espressione e dichiarazione del concetto, che si ha nell'animo],* imagined in the mind and fabricated in the idea *[nella mente imaginato e fabbricato nell'idea]* . . . However that may be, what drawing requires, when the invention derives from something in the judgment *[quando cava l'invenzione d'una qualche cosa dal giudizio],* is that

> the hand, through many years of study and practice, may be free and able to draw and to express well *[disegnare e esprimere bene],* whether with pen, stylus, charcoal, crayon, or some other means, whatever nature has created. In effect, when the intellect sends forth purified concepts and with judgment *[quando l'intelletto manda fuori i concetti purgati e con giudizio],* the hand that has practiced drawing for so many years is acquainted with the perfection and the excellence of the arts, and at the same time the knowledge of the artist *[il sapere dell'artefici].*[60]

Such a text could clearly give rise to a wide range of philological and theoretical commentary. Let's content ourselves here with underscoring its simultaneously circular and contradictory structure. Circular, because Vasari presents the art of painting to us by proceeding from knowledge to knowledge and intellect to intellect, in short, from drawing as *procedendo dall'intelletto* to drawing conceived as *sapere dell'artefici.* Contradictory, because in the one case drawing is defined as the universalizing derivation of judgment based on natural and sensible things *(cava di molte cose un giudizio universale),* while in the other it is defined as the individuating expression of this same judgment: its specifically sensible and apparent expression *(apparente espressione)* mediated by manual work *(espressa con le mani).* In one case, then, drawing gives us a way to extricate ourselves from the sensible world toward the "purified concepts" *(concetti purgati)* of the understanding; in the other, it gives us a way to extricate ourselves from pure judgment yet "express" it by means of "charcoal" and "crayon" . . .

One can readily imagine Vasari haughtily defending his unstable philosophical position, and invoking the authority of his own practical experience as a painter to reject the existence in painting of any such dualism of the sensible and the intelligible. He might, in this hypothetical, have cut to the quick of a real problem. But he did not do this, being too worried about grounding his notion of drawing in the intellectual categories of his time, too worried about hierarchies that he did want to suppress, only to displace. So he came to terms with the circularity and contradictions of his theses about drawing by elaborat-

ing compromises and "magical" operations within which circularities and contradictions could indeed operate. *Disegno* was effectively a magic word for him, first because it is polysemic, antithetical, infinitely manipulatable. It is almost a floating signifier—and Vasari did not hesitate to use it as such. Of the eighteen long paragraphs accorded analysis of the word today in the *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana,* eight gloss its various "concrete" meanings and ten its "abstract" ones, the whole covering roughly what the French language denotes with the two terms *dessin* and *dessein,* previously identical.[61] Here we have the first element needed to comprehend the prodigious extension of the word *disegno* in Vasarian semantics.

It is a descriptive word and it is a metaphysical word. It is a technical word and it is an ideal word. It is applicable to the hand of man, but also to his imaginative *fantasia,* and also to his *intelleto,* and also to his *anima*—as well as, finally, to God the creator of all things. It comes from the vocabulary of the studio, where it designates the form obtained on a support by the charcoal or crayon of the artist; it also designates the sketch, the work in gestation, the project, the compositional schema, and the layout of lines of force. It speaks the rule that presides over all of this technique, the *buona regola* of the painter, the one that gives rise to the *retta misura,* the *grazia divina* of the line—in short, to the *disegno perfetto* . . . The vocabulary of the *Lives,* subject to the ideal progress of the "three ages of drawing," is constantly obliged to expand, to rise. The rule of art becomes the law of nature. Visible effect becomes intelligible cause. And, always under the authority of the same magic word, the form produced on the support becomes the form of the philosophers, in other words the *Idea* (which is to say the negation of all material support).[62]

On this point, moreover, Vasari subtly—or rather: surreptitiously—reversed the meaning of a passage in the old *Libro dell'Arte,* where Cennini advised his disciple to practice a whole year using lead pencil *(istil di piombo),* after which he could "practice drawing with a pen" *(praticare il disegno con penna),* gradually mastering the depiction of flesh, half-tones, and shadows *(conducendo le tue chiare, mezze chiare e scure, a poco a poco)* . . . all of which was intended to make the disciple an "expert, skillful" practitioner *(sperto, pratico),* one who, thanks to

this training, would be "capable of much drawing within [his] own head" *(capace di molto disegno entro la testa tua)*.[63] The reader will have understood: what was a material practice capable of occupying the painter's whole head in Cennini becomes in Vasari an ideal concept that takes shape in the intellect to invest sensibly, under an *apparente espressione,* the subjectile* of the painter. Vasari, a craftsman himself, never sought to obscure the technical meaning of *disegno*—as is apparent on every page that he devoted to the work of his peers. But he reversed the order of inference, proceeding from the subject to the subjectile and not from the subjectile to the subject, subsuming drawing as practice into drawing as concept . . . never saying clearly where, when, and why he did so. So we no longer know whether Vasari, when it comes to *disegno,* is talking to us about the graphic sign or about the idea; we no longer know whether he is talking about a signifier or a signified, or about something else entirely. We sense only the advent, in the discourse of art, of the equivocations of an old magical idealism.

What's in question, more fundamentally, is the ancient magic called *mimesis*. In effect, Vasari's *disgeno* tallies precisely with the semantic extension of imitation and is tantamount to a specified or instrumental term for it. If the mother-goddess were to have a favorite attribute or emblem, it would be a stylus that knows how to draw. Nothing good can be accomplished in the arts, writes Vasari, unless it comes "from continual practice in copying natural objects, and from the study of pictures by excellent masters and of ancient statues."[64] And all of his critical discussions about the use of color, the rendering of light, and the important criterion of *unione* are, at one point or another, referenced to the sovereign paradigm of *disegno*.[65] For it is indeed as a sovereign paradigm that drawing would, for quite some time, reign in minds: it would confer upon all these practices with crushed pigments, rough-hewn blocks, and masonry walls the prestige of the Idea. Idea-as-principle and Idea-as-end: this was already being said when Vasari was writing his book.[66] It would be said again in the

*A term coined and expounded in Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée* (1985); roughly, what the painter "throws" or projects onto the support.

wake of the *Lives* and of the *Accademie del Disegno,* in whole treatises as in more concise formulations:

> *Disegno,* masculine noun. Expressed form of all intelligible and sensible forms, that gives light to the mind and life to practical operations.[67]

Where are we, then, at the end of this long Vasarian excursus? We are at the point where the discourse about art seems to have succeeded in naming the vital *principle* of its object, by using the philosophical concepts of the intellect and of the form or Idea—magically made instrumental by the term *disegno.* We are, then, at the point where art, in the discourse of its history, seems to have acknowledged its true intent* and formulated its true destiny through the terms of a philosophy of knowledge. But in the meantime something strange happened, perhaps due to the fact that famous artists, gathered in academies, themselves elaborated this new field that would be called the history of art: namely, a recuperation of the object by the subject and of the subject by the object. The discipline sought to arrogate to itself the prestige of its object of study; by grounding it intellectually, it sought to regulate it. As for the *knowledge about art* whose field it opened up, it resolved henceforth to envisage or accept only an *art conceived as knowledge:* as reconciliation of the visible and the Idea, denial of its visual powers, and subjection to the tyranny of *disegno.* Art was acknowledged less as a thinking object—which it had always been—than as an object *of* knowledge, all genitive senses conflated.

A striking and almost excessive symptom of this movement is legible in a text published forty years after the Giuntina edition of Vasari's *Lives.* It was written by Federico Zuccari, brother of the painter Taddeo, under the influence, explicitly avowed, of the *Accademia del Disegno* in Rome.[68] Far from adopting the prudent position of a Paoletti, who, in his definition of the image, had opposed a *concetto interno* to its sensible realization, the *disegno esterno,*[69] Zuccari radicalized the sovereignty of *disegno* itself by deploying a whole theoretical arsenal

***dessein.*

in view of consolidating the notion *"con ordine filosofico."*[70] What falls into place here is a veritable gnosology—and not an aesthetics or a phenomenology. It invokes the authority of Aristotle, promising to explain the "name" of *disegno,* its definition, its properties, its kinds, its necessity. Distinguishing the *disegno esterno* from the *disegno interno,* it justifies the primacy of the second through the criteria of the clear and distinct Idea. Thus *disegno* and *Idea* become completely indistinguishable: "If, in this treatise . . . I do not use the word 'intention' as logicians and philosophers do, or 'model' and 'idea' as theologians do . . . that is because I speak as a painter and address myself primarily to painters, sculptors, and architects, who have need of the knowledge and assistance of *disegno* in order to work properly."[71]

But we must not let this appeal to the painter's craft obscure the radical nature of the concept. *Disegno,* henceforth, no longer means the idea expressed in the hand or the intelligible in the sensible. It means the Idea alone; it *is* that Idea that subsumes both the painter's intentions and his act of painting. Zuccari, then, goes much farther than Vasari. Moreover, he reproaches him for the "serious error" of having spoken of *disegno* as if it were something that could be acquired by practice . . . If drawing *is* the Idea, then it is innate: which means it is to be understood as a faculty of the soul or as an *a priori.* It does not help the artist *(non pur aiuta l'artefice)* because it is the very cause of art as such *(ma è causa dell'arte istessa).*[72] And in this logic of metaphysical slippage, which reveals its many ambiguities on close reading, *disegno* is finally acknowledged to be that which is common to humans, angels, and God: a kind of soul. Then, Zuccari parses the word for us by writing it as "DI-SEGN-O" and reconstituting it as "*segno di Dio,*" sign of God. "It is quite clear by itself," he concludes—adding rather boldly that *disegno* is itself "almost another created divinity" *(quasi . . . un altro nume creato),* created by God the better to signify himself among angels and men.[73] Ten metaphysical attributes complete the system:

> The ten attributes of internal and external *Disegno:* (1) Internal object common to all human intelligences. (2) Ultimate term of all achieved human knowledge. (3) Form expressive

> of all cognitive and sensible forms. (4) Internal model of all concepts and all things produced by art. (5) Almost another divinity, another productive nature, in which live the things produced by art. (6) A burning spark of divinity within us. (7) Internal and external light of the intellect. (8) First internal motive, principle, and end of our operations. (9) Nourishment and life of all science and practice. (10) Increase of all virtue and spur to glory, by which finally are brought to man all the benefits of art and human industry.[74]

The system seems complete, or at least constituted. Nothing is lacking, not even a "spur to glory" and a return to courtly obedience for the figurative arts.[75] But above all something is constituted, in the mythic crucible of the Renaissance: it is the commonplace generally designated by the term Fine Arts, a term formulated at the precise moment—along with its stakes and its consequences—when the discourse of the *history of art* was invented. At once a second religion, a rhetoric of immortality, and the foundation of a knowledge, the history of art constituted its object, *art,* in the same movement whereby it constituted itself as a subject of discourse. A second religion in which the intelligible descended into the sensible and subsumed it through the magical operation of the *disegno;* a rhetoric of immortality in which artists joined the demigods in the heaven of *eterna fama;* finally, the foundation of a knowledge, of this *sapere dell'artefice* that had to be justified, made intelligible, intelligent, "liberal." Thus the history of art created art in its own image—its specific and specified image, triumphant and self-contained.

3

The History of Art Within the Limits of Its Simple Reason

An origin is not only something that happened once and will never happen again. It is every bit as much—and even more exactly—something that in the present comes back to us as from a great distance, touches us most intimately, and, like an insistent but unpredictable work of return, delivers up its sign or its symptom. From time to time, then, but approaching ever closer to our present—a present obligated to, subject to, alienated from memory.[1] Thus we would be mistaken to think of ourselves as definitively liberated, when we do art history today, from the ends inherent in this discourse when this discourse was invented. Vasari, however far he might be from our manifest preoccupations, bequeathed to us *ends,* the ends that he assigned, for reasons good, bad, or irrational, to the knowledge that bears the name the history of art. He bequeathed to us a fascination with the biographical component, a sovereign curiosity about the particular species of "distinguished" individuals—in all senses of the word—to which artists belong, an excessive affection, or conversely a mania for clinical judgment, with regard to their every action and gesture. He bequeathed to us a dialectic of rules and their transgression, a subtle interplay between a *regola* and a *licenza* that can, it all depends, be deemed the worst or the best.

More fundamentally, as we saw, Vasari suggested to us that one day (and this "day" bore the name of Giotto) art managed to *be reborn* from its ashes; that it had thus managed to *die* (in that long night called the Middle Ages); and that it bears within itself, as its essential condition, the constant risking of a new death on the far side of its highest achievements. Between Renaissance and second death, Vasari interposed, to save everything and justify everything, a new problematics of *immortality:* an immortality constructed and loftily proclaimed

by a new angel of the resurrection who christened himself the Historian of Art (Fig. 3). In the angel's hand there shone forth a torch—and through it that concept essential to the whole Vasarian problematic: *eterna fama,* the Eternal Renown that, in its conjunction of two simple words, already stated that collusion of ethical, courtly, and political ideals with metaphysical and gnosological ones that gave foundations to this new knowledge about art.

We are heir to all that. Directly or indirectly. When we contemplate the "history-of-art" phenomenon over the long term, when we question its practice in general, we cannot help but be struck by the continuous and insistent movement of its *ends*. The fascination with its biographical component remains intact; it manifests itself today as an obsession with monographs, and in the fact that the history of art is still massively recounted as a history of artists—works of art being called upon more often as illustrations than as objects of the gaze and of interrogation. The mania for clinical judgment has found a new field of application in the inappropriate use of psychopathology and psychoanalysis. Nor has the binary interplay of rules and transgressions ceased: stylistic reference points are constituted as the discourse unfolds, with *licenza* diverting bad painters downward and geniuses upward. Over the extent of these deviations there reigns a scale of *values* so tangible as to be readily translatable into monetary terms. So the courtly ideals of Vasari's history have not disappeared: they have become ideals—but also realities, "needs," as they say—of a mercantile order. We lack a recent sociology or even ethnology of the population that now, between auction rooms and art galleries, between private prestige and public museums, between the marketplace and the scholarly community, makes art "live."[2] None of which activity prevents the constant ebb and flow of the "death of art" and its "rebirth." Whether one considers them a cause for celebration or a cause for concern, such ideals are integral to the discussions now taking place everywhere about art and culture in general. The ideals have perhaps been inverted; but to invert a metaphysics is not to overthrow it—it even amounts, in a sense, to renewing or extending it.

However, this model of continuity remains quite vague and still

doesn't explain very much. The originary always returns—but it does not return *straightforwardly.* It resorts to detours and dialectics, which have their own histories and strategies. If we interrogate ourselves today about our actions as art historians, if we ask ourselves—and we should do this constantly—*at what cost the history of art that we produce is constituted,* then we should interrogate our own reason, as well as the conditions of its emergence. This would be, I repeat, the task of a *problematized* history of the history of art. We cannot undertake this here, but we can at least sketch a movement. We can at least track, in the guise of a specific symptom, how the inventor himself, Vasari, has been read, imitated, criticized, perhaps inverted, and perhaps righted again by the best of his offspring. It is not a question here of constituting the critical fortune of the first great art historian: that would be to revert too quickly to the naive, fundamentally Vasarian idea that it is men alone, historians of art alone, who make the history of their discipline . . . It is a question, rather, of following the detours of a problem that is otherwise difficult and fundamental: of broaching *the inventive power of a discourse over the object that it purports to describe.* Every field of knowledge constitutes itself by imagining itself fully achieved, by "seeing itself" in possession of the sum of knowledge that it does not yet possess, and for which it is constituted. It constitutes itself, then, by devoting itself to an ideal. But in so doing, it also risks dedicating its object of study to the same ideal: it bends the object to this ideal, imagines it, sees it, or rather foresees it—in short, it informs and invents it in advance. So it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the history of art began, in the sixteenth century, by creating art in its own image, so as to be able to constitute itself as an "objective" discourse.

Has this image changed? Have we gone back to it? And above all: Have we, can we escape from such a process of *specular* invention? To answer this question, we must listen attentively to the *tone* adopted by the history of art—the one that still shapes us—toward its object. The movement that reveals itself in this history is that of a dialectic whereby things are negated or inverted only so as to be subsequently *reissued* into the bosom of a single synthesis, or rather into the bosom of a single abstract process of synthesis, regardless of manifest or ex-

plicit content. For it is the implicit movement of a *simple reason* (not so simple in fact, but maintained spontaneously) that I henceforth propose to interrogate.

It is well-known that Vasari's *Lives* was immensely successful upon publication. This success was not merely fashionable or circumstantial. It was a structural point of transformation, the durable implementation of a type of discourse whose basic premises would be questioned by no one until the eighteenth century, in Spain, Germany, or even Holland. The famous "antithesis" of Italy and the Low Countries, analyzed by Panofsky,[3] exists perhaps in art, in the history *of* art in the subjective genitive sense; it does not exist in the history of art understood in the "objective" sense of discourse about art. Vasari inspired Carel van Mander as well as Francisco Pacheco and Joachim von Sandrart.[4] Even when eighteenth-century French academic circles criticized the narrative component of Vasari's history, this was not in order to radicalize a normative conception straight out of the *Introduzzione alle tre Arti del Disegno* and the humanist conception of art in general: a conception wherein *Mimesis* walked hand-in-hand with *Idea,* wherein the tyranny of the visible—the tyranny of resemblance and of congruent appearance—had managed to express itself perfectly in the abstract terms of an ideational truth or an ideal truth, of a *disegno interno* of Truth or of an ideal of Beauty . . . all of which ultimately comes back to the same thing, namely *Sameness* as shared metaphysical authority.[5]

Such a continuity, such a shared meaning is found again, for example, in the famous little book by Charles Batteux, published in 1747 and entitled *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe*—the latter's being quite clearly enunciated under the authority of imitation, as it was read, too, in all of Vasari's *proemii.*[6] But where Vasari proclaimed, in a tone of practical enthusiasm as much as of shared certainty: "Yes, our art is all imitation," Batteux went farther, on the authority of Aristotle, with regard to the absolute universality of the principle in question. Where Vasari, in response to the question *"What to imitate?"* proposed the two parameters of nature and antiquity, Batteux repeated the refrain of nature exactly and transformed the ancient song

a bit by speaking of a more general "law of taste."[7] But the theoretical value of the *exempla* remained identical. Where Vasari proposed a unity of the "three arts of drawing," Batteux enlarged the same system to encompass music, what he called the "art of gesture," and above all poetry, which was in fact the central paradigm of his whole book. The slogan *ut pictura poesis,* which Vasari had previously made his own by painting in his house in Arezzo an allegory of Poetry along with others of the figurative arts—the four figures flanking a central *Fama,* or Renown—this slogan was repeated in reverse by Batteux: it would be enough for him to develop the theory of poetic imitation over ten chapters and take only three short pages to say that painting does exactly the same thing.[8] Note, finally, that the sovereign position of poetry in this book did not prevent Batteux from renewing the preeminence, dear to Vasari, of *disegno* in the arts: "What then is the function of the arts? It is to transfer the *lines** that are in nature, and to present them in objects in which they are nowise natural."[9]

Such, then, the agreed-upon discourse, the shared and *continued* discourse since Vasari at least. Such, in any case, in our sketch of dialectic, the moment of *thesis*. Art imitates, and by imitating produces a visible congruence paralleled by an ideal congruence—a "True" aesthetic paralleled by a "beautiful" knowledge of the natural world. Doubtless some will say that such principles pertain to a "theory of art"—a theory too often named to the sole end of isolating it within an enclosed field, outside the development, supposedly specific, of history as such. Yet again, the discursive division demonstrates here its arbitrary character: not only were such principles elaborated and disseminated solely because of their extraordinary capacity of extension to other modes of discourse; it is also to them, to a certain point, that the history of art owes its existence. For it is through them that the Vasarian and academic discipline managed to constitute itself by giving itself the authority of *principles* and *ends,* therefore of values and norms.

This movement seems, if not to falter, then at least to invert itself in the second half of the eighteenth century. With the publication of

***traits,* which can also mean "features."

Winckelmann's celebrated *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* in 1764, the premises of Vasarian history seem to have run their course, above all if we remember the self-glorifying agenda—the inscription of the city of Florence on the "pediment" of this history of all the arts (Fig. 2)—that presided over the Medician enterprise of the *Lives*. Beginning with Winckelmann, the history of art will be a bit more conscious that it must reflect upon its point of view, which is to say upon the *limits* of its first principles, and try not to understand Greek art in terms of Renaissance thought or even of Classicism.[10] In short, the history of art began to undergo the test of a real *critique of knowledge*—a philosophically grounded critique, a critique in which the formidable specter of cognitive *specularity* was already active: the art historian would attempt that first acrobatic feat of not inventing his object in his own image as knowing subject. Or at least of knowing the limits of this invention.

The tone is set: it will be the Kantian tone. Kant, as we know, began to produce about this time a grand critical theory whose empire would spread far beyond the strict philosophical community. Kant shaped entire generations of intellectuals and scholars, above all in Germany, which would become, contemporaneously, the true cradle of the "scientific" history of art.[11] Through Kantism, the whole structure of knowledge was shaken to its foundations—this was the decisive moment of *antithesis* produced by the critical philosophy—and then reconstituted itself on firmer foundations, regrounded itself in a magisterial *synthesis*. How could the history art have remained impervious to this great theoretical movement? I would like to propose that post-Vasarian art history—the history of art whence we come and which is still practiced—is partly of Kantian inspiration, or more accurately neo-Kantian . . . even when it does not know this. Such would be the extension, but also the limit, of its cognitive "simple reason."

It is already troubling, for an art historian, to think that a book half of which is devoted to aesthetic judgment could be regarded by its author as the completion of a systematic journey commenced with *The Critique of Pure Reason*.[12] Not only did Kantian philosophy not leave the question of art outside its fundamental inquiry, it made of it an essential exhibit in its analysis of the human faculties as a whole.

The Kantian aesthetic is a veritable treasure-house of thought, one whose internal developments need not be pursued here. Let's make do with locating some radical modifications wrought on the great Vasarian themes, on the great classic themes previously evoked. Note first that taste, in the *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment,* is the faculty of judgment itself: a faculty of knowledge, an extremely broad *subjective* instance—and no longer the normative object of decorum,* the absolute *exemplum* of antiquity to which the academies insisted painters swear unconditional allegiance.[13] Then note the rigor with which Kant uses the term *Idea*—light years away from the manipulations to which earlier academicians resorted to ensure the triumph of a liberal *sapere dell'artefice* over each and every painting.[14] The Idea is still there, but restored to its original, Platonic exactingness:

> Plato made use of the expression *Idea* in such a way that we can readily see that he understood by it something that not only could never be borrowed from the senses, but that even goes far beyond the concepts of the understanding (with which Aristotle occupied himself), since nothing encountered in experience could ever be congruent to it. Ideas for him are archetypes of things themselves, and not, like the categories, merely the key to possible experiences. . . . Whoever would draw the concepts of virtue from experience . . . would make of virtue an ambiguous non-entity *[Unding],* changeable with time and circumstances, useless for any sort of rule. . . . But Plato was right to see *clear proofs of an origin in Ideas* . . . also in regard to nature itself.[15]

For Kant, however, none of this had any "Platonic" repercussions, in the sense of a global condemnation of artistic activity, its outright exclusion from the world of Ideas. On the contrary, he regarded the Idea as a "necessary condition" of aesthetic judgment. Symmetrically, he saw beauty as "the expression of aesthetic Ideas."[16] But the aesthetic Idea was not the end of the matter, was not placidly grounded

**convenance.*

in a single smooth entity. Here again, what I have called the moment of antithesis produced a rigorous and perhaps uneasy statement of the *limits* entailed by any posited notion. Thus Kant initially presented the aesthetic Idea through its *inadequacy to the concept.*

> By an esthetic Idea, however, I mean that representation that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., *concept,* to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.—One readily sees that it is the counterpart (the pendant) of an *Idea of reason,* which is, conversely, a concept to which no *intuition* (representation of the imagination) can be adequate.[17]

The *disegno* of Vasari and, beyond, that of Zuccari—each of whom sought in his own way to suture everything, to promote the unity of intellect and hand, of concept and intuition—this *disegno* of the academicians, then, underwent the trial of a split, of a cut-in-two that opened again. We should not be surprised to discover in Kant an unequivocal critique of mannerism, construed precisely as an abusive but sophisticated use of the Idea.[18] Liberated anew by this split, Kant finally broke down the humanist conjunction of *mimesis* and the aesthetic *Idea,* distinguishing the faculty to know nature from the faculty to judge art, distinguishing the objective universality of pure reason from the subjective universality of works of genius.[19] This means in particular that genius, the "faculty of aesthetic Ideas" capable of "express[ing] what is unnameable in the mental state in the case of a certain representation" and making it "universally communicable," is "entirely opposed to the *spirit of imitation,*" a phrase that Kant spontaneously associates with such unflattering epithets as "aping" and "blockhead."[20]

These citations, although summary and incomplete, suffice to give us a sense of a certain number of essential modifications that, since Kant, have affected the sphere of questions about art, and especially historical questions. Changing its Idea, so to speak, changing its metaphysics, the artistic object could no longer have the same history. And

this history was henceforth recounted in accordance with a legitimation procedure that tallied no longer with the social world of the academies, much less with that of the princely courts, but rather with that of the university. The first decisive book in this context was without doubt that by K. F. von Rumohr, whose *Italianische Forschungen* reconsidered the concept of Renaissance through the critique of primary sources, the methodical comparison of works of art, and the study of patterns of influence.[21] By making itself a legitimate academic discourse, the history of art seemed to accede to the status of a really disinterested and *objective* knowledge: no longer objective only in the grammatical sense of the genitive contained in the expression "history of art," but "objective," too, in the theoretical sense of a veritable epistemology. The word "epistemology" is misplaced, however, for it did not yet belong to the theoretical vocabulary of the sciences in the Germany of the nineteenth century. What must we say, then? We must say: a critical philosophy of knowledge.

It is understandable, in these conditions, that an academic discipline anxious to constitute itself as *knowledge,* and not as normative judgment, should have turned to the Kantism of pure reason rather than to that of the faculty of aesthetic taste. The Kantian tone generally adopted by the history of art perhaps originates in the simple fact that *The Critique of Pure Reason* can seem—notably in the eyes of those who need not tackle it from beginning to end—like a large temple devoted to the profession of a gospel that is the foundation of all true knowledge. When art historians were conscious that their work pertained exclusively to the faculty of knowledge, and not to the faculty of judgment, when they decided to produce a discourse of objective universality *(objective Allgemeinheit,* in Kant's words) and no longer a discourse of subjective norms, then the Kantism of pure reason became a necessary way station for all those who sought to reground their discipline, and to redefine "art" as an "object" of knowledge rather than as a subject of academic squabbles.

Let's not lose sight of the fact that this "all" initially consisted, even in Germany, of only a minority of exacting minds. If a large part of the history of art practiced today has spontaneously adopted this neo-

Kantian tone, that is because the minority in question succeeded in imposing its views, in attracting a following, in propagating itself everywhere—at the risk, moreover, of lending its views to all manner of distortion, and even of distorting them itself to facilitate their comprehension. If this minority managed to constitute itself as a school or law, that is also because a prodigious individual was there to serve as its herald, then as its uncontested head, and ultimately as its father. The individual in question is, of course, Erwin Panofsky. From Hamburg to Princeton, from his philosophical German to his American pedagogy, Panofsky was the definitive incarnation of the authority and prestige of the "iconological" school that issued from another fascinating mind—now somewhat overshadowed by the master of Princeton—Aby Warburg.[22] Panofsky impressed all his readers with the extraordinary range of his work, with the rigor with which he posed problems, with the immensity—now proverbial—of his erudition, and with the authority of the countless responses that he proposed to us in the face of medieval and Renaissance works of art.[23]

Was he, then, Vasari's best offspring? Perhaps. Perhaps even in the sense that Zeus was the best offspring of Kronos—best to the point of taking his place. What is striking about Panofsky's German work, written when he was working closely with Ernst Cassirer and Fritz Saxl at the Warburg Institute, is the intensity of its *theoretical rigor,* on which basis it can be said to constitute a veritable summit in the moment of antithesis (of critique) that we are trying to mark out.[24] Now the essential instrument of this theoretical rigor was none other than the Kantian philosophy of knowledge, which informs every page of the articles published by Panofsky until 1933—the date of his definitive departure for the United States. If there is a methodological principle, almost an ethical one, to which Panofsky always remained faithful, it is indeed that of *consciousness,* not specular (in the sense of captation* by the object) but rather reflexive (in the sense given the word in classical philosophy), which the art historian must revisit constantly, in the humblest as in the noblest operations of his practice. "The 'naive' beholder differs from the art historian in that the latter is conscious of the situation."[25] What does this imply?

**captation,* a Lacanian term; as used here, roughly analogous to "capture."

It implies first of all a sifting of the most common categories of the history of art. What, for example, is "historical time," what are "the modes of time" *(die Modi der Zeit)* in the history of art? Something quite different, certainly, from natural, physical, and even chronological time.[26] What is the exact worth, from the point of view of "methodological-philosophical significance" *(methodisch-philosophischen Bedeutung),* of the notions elaborated by those prestigious elder colleagues Heinrich Wölfflin and Aloïs Riegl? Panofsky answers point by point, demands rigor, asks himself whether art historians "have the right," interrogates the foundations.[27] Wölfflin's famous binaries emerge from this much diminished, notably the basic opposition between the "eye" and the "mind" *(Auge; Gesinnung):* Panofsky shows that there is no "law of nature" in the history of art, and that the anthropology and psychology of vision are inevitably mediated by cultural schemas, by "elaborations of the soul"—nothing, then, that resembles a state of nature. By the same blow, the archetypal character of Wölfflin's oppositions (linear versus painterly, surface versus depth, etc.) lost its value as foundation and *a priori.* It was nothing, in Panofsky's view, but a mental construct:

> Only one answer is possible: the soul *[Seele].* Consequently, this antithesis, initially so convincing in its discursive concision—state of mind here, point of view *[Optik]* there; feeling here, eye there—ceases to be one. Without any doubt, visual perceptions can acquire linear or painterly form only through the active intervention of the mind *[Geist].* It follows that the "optical attitude" *["optische Einstellung"]* is, strictly speaking, a mental attitude toward the optical, and that the "relation of the eye to the world" is in truth a relation of the soul to the world of the eye *[so gewiss ist das "Verhältnis des Auges zur Welt" in Wahrheit ein Verhältnis des Seele zur Welt des Auges].*[28]

Let's read this sentence again. "The 'relation of the eye to the world' is in truth a relation of the soul to the world of the eye." An admirable sentence—perhaps a dangerous sentence. Doesn't it close all doors? Doesn't it enclose the history of art within the most alien-

ated, the most "psychological" specularity there is? Not at all, answers Panofsky, whose distrust of *psychologism,* a visceral distrust, becomes more emphatic and more precise on every page. Thus when he expands upon his "methodological scrutiny" and "critical philosophical spirit," as he puts it, in an analysis of a celebrated concept advanced by Aloïs Riegl, the *Kunstwollen*—sometimes translated as "artistic volition," sometimes as "will-to-form"—Panofsky affirms the *fundamental* worth of this concept only by striking down, one by one, each of its possible psychological meanings. Is the *Kunstwollen* a product of the artist's psychological agency? No, thrice no, answers Panofsky, unless we renounce the very objective *(objectiv)* content at stake in the concept. Does it pertain to a "period psychology"? No again, for we deceive ourselves when we find a "criterion for judging" artistic intentions "objectively" in the way "that contemporaries understood these intentions"—an objection that anticipates the excesses and theoretical innocence of all reception theory. Can our own, present-day *apperception* provide the criterion we seek? Less still, answers Panofsky in two pages castigating what he calls "the modern aesthetic," in which he finds only "an amalgamation of a psychologising aesthetic and a normative aesthetic," in other words an academic one.[29]

In fact, the critical movement would deepen and become more precise until someone put a finger on the more elementary problem of our attitude as knowing subjects in the face of art objects, and more generally in the face of events in the visible world. How does "the relation of the soul to the world of the eye" express what becomes for each of us "the relation of the eye to the world"? This is the basic question. It takes things in their nascent state, it already interrogates the phenomenology of perception from the following angle: *how does the perceived visible acquire meaning for us?* It also broaches things on the level of an elementary semiology of the visible. Panofsky discusses this approach to the problem in two slightly different texts, the first written in German and published in 1932 in the periodical *Logos,*[30] the second written in English as an introduction to his famous *Studies in Iconology,* published in 1939, and subsequently revised twice, in 1955 and 1962.[31] It is, of course, the second, "American" version that art historians generally have in mind when they

want to invoke what they believe to be the charter and founding document of the "new" discipline of the history of art, namely iconology.

Remember that in this American version, everything springs—the history of art itself seems "to spring up anew"—from a very simple example drawn from daily life, "an acquaintance" who "greets [one] on the street by removing his hat."[32] Let's say that the example is not only as pedagogic as one could wish but literally *engaging,* rather as if Panofsky were tipping his own hat to his new, and welcoming, English-speaking public, with the explicit intention of reactivating the gesture's original meaning—for he later tells us that it is a "residue of medieval chivalry: armed men used to remove their helmets to make clear their peaceful intentions and their confidence in the peaceful intentions of others"[33] . . . Quite different, let it be said in passing, from Freud's attitude crossing the Atlantic in the same direction, if we credit the report that he said: "They don't know that I am bringing them the plague." In any case, Panofsky's example, like the attentive pedagogy of his entire text, places us squarely on the level of a proposed and desired *communication*—a communication that wants to persuade the interlocutor by guiding him or her without violence from the simplest (What do I see when someone in the street tips his hat?) to the most complex (What is the iconological interpretation of works of art?). Let's remain for a moment on the most elementary level. Panofsky calls this the *formal level* of vision:

> What I see from a *formal* point of view is nothing but the change of certain details within a configuration forming part of the general pattern of color, lines and volumes which constitutes my world of vision.[34]

From there, Panofsky goes on to infer a whole system constructed in accordance with an order of increasing complexity. "When I identify, as I automatically do,* this configuration as an *object* (gentleman), and the change of detail as an *event* (hat-removing), I have already

*French ed.: *"et je le fais spontanément."*

overstepped the limits of purely formal perception and entered a first sphere of *subject matter* or *meaning,*" which he calls *natural* or *primary.* A second threshold is crossed with *secondary* or *conventional* signification, which comes into play "when I interpret the removal of a hat as a polite greeting." So a consciousness is posited to provide the model for the iconographic level of the interpretation of works of art. A third level, called "intrinsic meaning" or "content," finally brings us toward what Panofsky means by "iconology" in the radical sense: elucidated here are the elements at once the most specific (How, exactly, did this gentleman remove his hat?) and the most fundamental (general, "cultural") of the visual object. Here, then the history of art accedes to its *end:* to see in an individual work or in an entire style the "underlying principles" that condition its very existence, and a fortiori its meaning.[35]

In the German article of 1932, the interpretive vocation or end ascribed to the history of art is no less radical and ambitious, it, too, being directed toward the "ultimate and highest region" of "essential meaning" *(Wesenssinn),* a term that Panofsky borrowed from Karl Mannheim.[36] But to the extent that this project was radical, it was different: uneasy, traversed by a force that, far from being pedagogical, was questioning, almost convulsive . . . and quite authentically philosophical. Tellingly, the opening example here is a thousand miles from the gentleman decorously tipping his hat. It is an example drawn from painting itself, and painting of the most paradoxical, violent, and troubled kind. "If, let's say (to take an example at random), we are faced with the problem of 'describing' the celebrated *Resurrection* by Grünewald . . ."[37] Clearly, the example in question burns with other desires and other meanings. Far from being "engaging" or serene, it is obsessed by the contrast with this body unforgettably lacerated by thorns that Christ displays above and below the *Resurrection*—hanging on the cross and lying in the tomb—in the same altarpiece. Panofsky reminds us, moreover, that the "spectators" at the same spectacle, the ones painted into the picture by Grünewald himself, "crouch as if stupefied . . . or reel, gesturing as if terrified or dazzled."[38] Farther along, intending to underscore how difficult it is *to know what one is seeing* when one looks at "any" painting, Panofsky uses language that

is almost repulsive. And his supplementary example, a painting by Franz Marc, would have been just as discomfiting to academic historians and students searching for a comfortable model.[39]

In 1932, then, Panofsky's gesture is not that of an engaging communication but that of a *question,* a difficult question fairly bristling with philosophical scare quotes—scare quotes of doubt that, for example, surround from the outset the verb "to describe." This undoubtedly makes for a loss, as the text progresses, of serenity and pedagogical generosity. For it is *hollowed out,* from end to end, by a work of antithesis, by incessant critical examinations in which every term, placed under threat, is petrified the better to be broken down. It is no longer even a question of starting with what is simplest, with fundamentals, for from the outset their very existence is called into question. Panofsky indeed sets out from the *formal level* of vision—but only to say immediately that it does not exist, cannot exist. Let's have a look at his argument:

> If, let's say—to take an example at random—we are faced with the problem of "describing" *[beschreiben]* the famous *Resurrection* by Grünewald, we already know from our first attempts that, on closer examination, we cannot retain, in all its rigor, the distinction that is so often made between a purely "formal" description and an "objective" description, at least not in the realm of the plastic arts . . . In a purely formal description, one could not even use words like "stone," "man," and "rock" . . . In effect, even to call the dark patch at the top a "night sky" and the curiously articulated light patches in the middle a "human body," and, above all, to say that this body is situated "in front of" the night sky, would be to relate something that represents to something that is represented, a spatially ambiguous formal element to an unequivocally three-dimensional presentation-content *[Vorstellungsinhalt].* Surely there need be no discussion of the practical impossibility of a formal description in this strict sense. Every description—to some extent, even before it is begun—must change the meaning of purely repre-

> sentational elements into symbols of something that is represented; and by doing so, regardless of how it proceeds, it rises from the purely formal sphere to a realm of meaning *[jede Deskription wird . . . die rein formalen Darstellungsfaktoren bereits zu Symbolen von etwas Dargestelltem umgedeutet haben müssen; und damits wächst sie—gewissermassen noch ehe sie ünerhaupt anfängt—aus einer rein formalen Sphäre schon in ein Sinnregion hinauf].*[40]

This inelegant passage contains critical observations of great significance whose essentials are strangely elided in the revised "American" text published in *Studies in Iconology*—perhaps because these essentials were a bit too burdensome, a bit too effective at preventing historical knowledge from turning in circles, by which I mean from droning on about itself. Note first that the inferential model, operative and even "engaging" in the American version, is here severely limited, even short-circuited in advance. No, there is no simple, "formal" origin—pure sensible forms, results of the relation of the eye to the world—from which issue little by little, or even automatically, a world of meaning and representation organized in quite distinct levels. There is only representation. There is no origin save in the possibility of an *already-representation:* thus, "even before it is begun," writes Panofsky, every description will *already* have overthrown perception—which, strictly speaking, does not exist "in a state of nature"—will already have flowed into a system of signification. Which is to say, too, that we do not cross some supposed threshold or limit separating reality from symbol. The symbolic precedes and invents reality, much as the *Nachträglichkeit* precedes and invents its "origin." Remarking, on the other hand, the widespread, automatic tendency to construe paintings in terms of the relation of "something that represents to something that is represented," Panofsky put his finger on the question of the *pictorial signifier* (but the expression is doubtless ill chosen, in need of clarification), of the "plurivocal given" that, paradoxically, occasions the formulation of an univocal "presentation-content," otherwise known as a representational signified. In any case, what becomes clear—but is obscured in the American version—is that

each "higher" level conditions in advance the status of the "lower" level:

> From the preceding, it follows that the simple description of a work of art (to revise our terminology: the discovery of mere phenomenal meaning) is in truth already an interpretation trafficking in the history of forms, or at least implicitly comprises [such an interpretation] *[dass schon die primitive Deskription eines kunstwerks (um unsern Terminus zu wiederholen: die Aufdeckung des blossen Phänomensinns) in Wahrheit eine gestaltungsgeschichtliche Interpretation ist, oder zum mindesten implizit einschliesst].*[41]

So goes, in 1932, the critical movement that Panofsky proposed to the history of art. An insistent, magisterial, disquieting movement. A movement that is relayed and shifts the problem from place to place: every visible form *already* carries the "presentation-content" of an object or an event; every visible object or phenomenon *already* carries its interpretive consequences. And interpretation? What does it consist of? What is it going to carry or what does it *already* carry within itself? It is not irrelevant that Panofsky, when answering this question in the final section of his text, had to appeal, not directly to Kant, but to a Heiddeggerian concept of interpretation drawn from the famous book *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik,* published three years earlier:

> In Heidegger's book on Kant, there are some remarkable sentences about the nature of interpretation, sentences that at first glance seem to concern only the interpretation of written philosophical texts, but that ultimately characterize very well the general problem of interpretation. "If an interpretation *[Interpretation],*" writes Heidegger, "merely gives back what Kant has said expressly, then from the outset it is not a laying-out *[Auslegung],* insofar as the task of a laying-out remains framed as the making visible in its own right of what Kant had brought to light in his ground-laying over and

> above the explicit formulation. Kant himself, however, was unable to say more about this. But with any philosophical knowledge in general, what is said *expressis verbis* must not be decisive. Instead, what must be decisive is what it sets before our eyes as still unsaid, in and through what has been said. . . . Of course, any interpretation, if it is to wrest what the words want to say from what they actually say, must resort to violence *[Um freilich dem, was die Worte sagen, dasjenige abzuringen, was sie sagen wollen, muss jede Interpretation notwendig Gewalt brauchen].*" We must acknowledge that these sentences also apply to our modest descriptions of paintings and to our interpretations of their content, insofar as these do not remain on the level of mere observation but are already interpretations.[42]

It is readily understandable that, banished from the German university system by the Nazis and given a warm welcome by American academia, Panofsky should have been inclined to leave behind, on the shores of the old world, the different forms of *violence* latent, in various ways, in his Grünewald example: the intransigent severity of his critique and, above all, his appeal to a Heideggerian interpretive model. But once again we cannot leave to one side the question of knowing the cost of Panofsky's having chosen to tip his hat rather than to combat the intuitionism of art historians. Just the same, it is remarkable that in Panofsky's American work—note that after 1934, and until his death, he never again used the German language[43]—the critical tone has been completely subdued, and the destructive "negativism" inverted in the thousand and one "positivities" that the master of Princeton finally bequeathed to us. From Germany to America: it's a bit like the moment when the antithesis dies and the *synthesis*—optimist, positive, even positivist in some respects—takes over. It's a bit like a desire to pose all questions having suddenly been replaced by a desire to give all the answers.

But we must introduce some nuances. First, by insisting on the fact that the critiques of first principles articulated by Panofsky in his

1932 article were not without echo. We come across them again, like distant radio waves, here and there, in the work of historians attentive to the status of their own practice. For example in Ernst Gombrich, who broached the problem of imitation by positing, in typical Kantian fashion, a series of aporias—aporias of object and subject, of truth and falsehood in a painting, of the alienating choice presented to us by illusion: "I cannot have my cake and eat it. I cannot make use of an illusion and watch it," etc.—aporias that he then sought to resolve dialectically.[44] Robert Klein, in an extended discussion of the status of iconography, brought the question back to the point where Panofsky had opened it some twenty years earlier in *Studies in Iconology:* "In the case of art history, in particular, all theoretical problems are reduced . . . to the one and basic question: how to reconcile history, which furnishes its point of view, with art, which furnishes its object."[45] We should also mention, among many others who unwittingly rediscovered the strength of the young Panofsky's formulations,[46] Meyer Schapiro, Pierre Francastel, and, more recently, Michael Baxandall, as well as the highly self-conscious reconsideration of Panofsky's "threshold text" undertaken by Hubert Damisch.[47]

On the other hand, it is a bit precipitous to imagine an "antithetical" Panofsky in Germany as opposed to the "synthetic" Panofsky who succeeded him. The interrogation and the critical thought of our author were not simply tossed overboard during his voyage to America. We would do better to orient our reflections in the other direction: for it quickly becomes apparent that *the synthesis was inscribed within the critical discourse from the outset.* It is so inscribed in Kant's text, where the word "abyss" *(Abgrund)* recurs so often only to nestle into the word "subsumption" and the word "synthesis." The critical philosophy aimed, in effect, for doctrinal stability. The antithetical opening and the play of aporias sought, basically, only their resolution, their transcendental closure. To be sure, the Kantian aesthetic speaks of the "subjective," but only the better to include it in its own *universality,* which is that of the judgment of taste.[48] It is aporetic in one sense, but in another it is devoted to the power of the Idea, to *ends,* to the famous Kantian teleology that guides the whole movement of the third *Critique.*[49] It demolishes trivial problematics of

origin, certainly, but because its quest is for *a priori principles* that might govern the play of the human faculties as well as the organization of philosophical knowledge.[50] It allows the inadequacy of the aesthetic idea to the concept only to facilitate the subsumption of that very inadequacy. Perhaps its only appetite, in the end, is for absorbing the sensible into the intelligible, and the visible into the Idea.[51]

Is there not, in this tension toward synthesis, a curious taste for a return to the thesis? We cannot yet answer this question. First, yet again, we must read Panofsky from what was his own point of view, namely the point of view—laid claim to, rendered automatic or spontaneous, and finally mitigated—of the strain of neo-Kantism extending from Wilhelm Windelband to Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer. We must try to locate the boundary turned passing-gate between a critical use of Kantism (opening, emptying self-evidences, dislodging the heavy rocks of trivial thought) and its specifically doctrinal, metaphysical use, in which I am arguing that its lucidity is lost, is petrified into a new rock, much more imposing and still more immovable. Such, then, is the twofold aspect of the appeal to Kantism in the domain of art history: it enabled *critical operations* of the most salutary kind; but it was at the same time consumed by a *desire for ends* that gave fundament and doctrine, that completed the metaphysical loop and closure of the question of art.

Thus when Panofsky denied to the concept of historical time—in particular, the historicity of art—any "natural" self-evidence, he struck a decisive blow against the ambient positivism,[52] as well as against Wölfflin's "psychological" intuitions about the universal roots of various styles in the plastic arts; but at the same time, he aimed to ground an objective knowledge of artistic phenomena in "metaphysical conditions" defined along Kantian lines. The critical philosophy denied all "natural" causality to history and psychology, but then required more itself: namely, a historicity grounded *metaphysically,* and a psychology of forms constructed *metapsychologically:*

> In the case of such universal cultural phenomena, it will probably never be possible to find a real explanation, which would necessarily entail the exhibition of a causality. . . . But

> if for that reason scientific knowledge is unable to exhibit the historical and psychological causes of universal artistic forms of representation, then it is all the more important that it undertake to investigate the latter's metahistorical and metapsychological meaning *[metahistorischen und metapsychologischen Sinn]:* in other words, to ask what it means—from the perspective of the fundamental metaphysical conditions of artistic creation *[von den metaphysischen Grundbedingungen des Kunstschaffens aus betrachtet]*—to say that a period represents in terms of the linear or the painterly, of planarity or depth.[53]

The tone is again set: the whole critical move will be made in view of "fundamental metaphysical conditions." The notion of *Kunstwollen,* for example, will be almost metaphysically defended against its own creator, Aloïs Riegl, whom Panofsky reproaches for formulations that are "still much too psychological" *(noch vielfach psychologistisch),* in favor of a recourse to *a priori* principles into which all sensible "phenomena" should be subsumed.[54] The tone is set again and the requirement again comes clear: "We must be able to characterize the content of a *Kunstwollen,*" Panofsky will write, "through a concept based not on *generic concepts* obtained by abstraction from characteristic artistic phenomena, but on *fundamental concepts (grundbegriffen)* that expose the inherent root of [the artworks'] essence and reveal their imminent meaning *(ihren immanenten Sinn enthüllt),*" not only in its singularity but also in its "objective" universality. And it is not by chance that, when clarifying this proposition, Panofsky borrows a famous example from Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics.*[55] This last-resort to philosophical prudence only indicates the loftiness, or dizzying depth, of the *ends* being envisioned for the history of art.[56]

The moment of antithesis taught us that all knowledge proceeds from a *choice,* which in many respects seems a scission of the subject, an alienating structure entailing the loss of something in all cases (in accordance with the logical model of the threatening "or," as in: "Your money or your life!"). Neo-Kantism, by contrast, in the idealist stakes of its gnosology, pretended to *resolve the question of loss.* How? Panofsky suggests an answer through an expression that recurs

throughout his work—an expression, need I point out, characteristic of the Kantian tone adopted by him: it is *synthetic intuition* that, paradoxically, took over all the trivial intuitionisms of the history of art.[57] There is here something like a magical operation, whereby all "vicious circles" recover the dignity of "methodological circles" . . . A metaphor taken from the art of tightrope walking arrives at the right moment to complete a reference to the theoretical arguments of Edgar Wind:

> Wind demonstrates that what at first glance resembles a *circulus vitiosus* is, in fact, a *circulus methodicus* that entails a confrontation between "instrument" and "object" in the course of which they mutually secure one another—and then there's the charming old story about the tightrope walker ("Why is it that the tightrope walker doesn't fall?—Because he holds onto his pole.—But why doesn't the pole fall?—Silly child, the dancer holds it tight"), the point of which is that, far from excluding the practical possibility of the art of tightrope walking, this alleged vicious circle is its foundation.[58]

But is it enough to arrange a "mutual confrontation" between the tightrope walker and his balance pole to foreclose the risk of falling? The art of tightrope walking can be considered either an art of danger or an art of its negation, as an art of human frailty in the face of gravity or as an ideal art made for invincible bird-men. It all depends. The *magic* of the tightrope walker will consist precisely in his making us believe in the second of these alternatives. Likewise, the *synthesis* toward which Panofsky aimed, at the risk of stalemate over the problematic of the subject, created the impression that the history of art had been grounded, or could be—grounded in reason, grounded in accordance with its "transcendental-scientific" ends . . . But what, exactly, are the privileged agents of this would-be foundational synthesis? How to extract them from the abundant analyses that the author of *Idea* so gratifyingly left us? Here again, a movement appears: an abracadabrous movement in which the "same"—object of all magic, of all synthesis—vanishes only the better to reappear, trans-

figured, invested with the prestige of Kantian reason. Panofsky, then, lifts his hat (his neo-Kantian hat) by way of greeting the new scholarly community of art historians. Then he places the hat on the table (the Vasarian table) and, in the manner of magicians, he lifts it again: the four doves or four white rabbits of humanist history then reappear, more beautiful and more vibrant than ever. Everyone, dazzled and reassured, applauds. The discipline is saved.

Let's clarify the hypothesis. The Kantian tone adopted by the history of art is merely a "magical" agent of transformation, aiming to redirect, in the mode of an "objectivity" or "transcendental objectivism," the principal *totem-notions* of the humanist history of art—manifestly transfigured by the operation, and yet, in a certain sense, reverting to the *same*. As if the operation had criticized them, inverted them, but also reinforced them by giving them a new reason, simple Kantian reason. The hypothesis, if it has any worth, entails at least two corollaries. First, it presupposes that rigorous concepts operative in one discursive field can be used in another as *floating signifiers,* in other words as tools, no less operative, for another kind of work, the "magical" and closed work of thought.[59] This presupposes that philosophical discourse is a matter of articulation, of pragmatics and "presentation," as much as of positive statements and conceptual representations.[60] This presupposes, finally, that we will find, in the *methodological* vocabulary of Panofskian art history, something of the *magic* words advanced by Vasarian art history to secure its academic legitimation.

In 1959, when Panofsky—who was then working on *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*—authorized the republication, after thirty-five years, of his short book on the history of artistic theory, eloquently entitled *Idea,* he wrote a brief foreword that at first glance seems quite conventional, a text cautioning his readers that the book was "old." Beyond this formulaic warning, Panofsky remarked on the "problem of conscience" with which the book presented him: although over time his conceptions had changed "in many details" (whose correction would entail writing a new book), his intentions remained "fundamentally unchanged."[61] But what were these inten-

tions, these ends? And what about the playful yet urgent warning that concludes the same text: "If books were subject to the same laws and regulations as pharmaceutical products, the dust jacket of every copy would have to bear the label 'Use with Care'—or as it used to say on old medicine containers: *cavtivs*."[62] What is he warning us against here? What was dangerous about reading *Idea*?

Let's suggest the hypothesis—manifestly audacious, violent, interpretive—that Panofsky momentarily saw his own book, *Idea,* as a magic *"pharmakon,"* as a potion of knowledge about art and about images in general: a remedy for all uncertainties, in other words a brew of neo-Kantian synthesis; but also a brew of forgetfulness, the poison of the "ideal" concept instilled into our gazes. Panofsky perhaps dreaded, in republishing in the field of the history of art this little book previously published as an extension of a philosophical lecture given by Ernst Cassirer—he perhaps dreaded that his "Idea," an object of critical and historical study, might be mistaken for a pure object of aesthetic faith and an automatic philosophy for art historians. Perhaps Panofsky dreaded, in this moment when he was again reflecting on the Renaissance, the delayed effects of his own philosophy, constructed or spontaneous.

The question, ultimately, has as much to do with the notion of Idea as with a choice that, little by little and even imperiously, settled on the great *humanist* period of the history of art. In 1924, Panofsky worked as much on Carolingian architecture and thirteenth-century sculpture as on Dürer and the Italian Renaissance.[63] However, the movement specific to *Idea* already required that all the essentials of its analysis be rooted in the Renaissance: the introduction opposed at the outset the doctrine of Plato—*Idée oblige*—to some lines written in the sixteenth century by Melanchthon; then three-fifths of the book are devoted to the Quattrocento and the Cinquecento, leaving only fifty pages for all the rest: antiquity, the Middle Ages, and neoclassicism, which is to say for something like twenty-two centuries of history; a peculiarity of composition taken so far that the last word, after Bellori, after Winckelmann, is given to Michelangelo and Dürer. All of which prompts suspicion that humanism was not simply a privileged *object* of Panofskian knowledge, but even a requirement, a veritable theoret-

ical *end* congruent with his philosophy of knowledge. It is as though the Kantism of pure reason had found in the *Rinascità* its best historical justification.

This hypothesis will surprise. What exactly does renascent humanism have to do with Kantian synthesis? Wouldn't we expect so rigorous a historian as Panofsky to spare us such an anachronism? But we must face up to the facts: obscure ends obliged him boldly to construct an anachronistic relation between Vasari and Kant. Thus did the origin employ the ruse of pure reason, so to speak, to attain the end of its tortuous return.

So Panofsky invented for us a Kantian Vasari: a way, for the son, to be reconciled with the venerable "father" of the history of art, and even positively to combine two different "fathers," those, respectively, of history and of pure knowledge. Also a way to make the whole of his discipline adopt the famous "Kantian tone," and for quite some time. It is at the geometric center of the argument of *Idea* that the figure of Vasari appears. Panofsky opposes it, from the outset, to that of Alberti, in whom, he writes, the artistic Idea found its *abode*—"a mind familiar with nature"—but not yet its *origin*. Now finding the origin of something is nothing other than "deducing" this something from its own foundation: Vasari inaugurates first because, beyond the sensible and "concrete" intuition of Alberti, he—"to use Kant's terminology," Panofsky already writes—"deduced" the Idea of its originary faculty. We should not be surprised to see resurface, and in a lengthy citation, the famous *Introduzione alle tre Arti del Disegno,* in which, it will be remembered, Vasari made drawing "proceed" from the intellect *(procedendo dall'intelletto)* and foregrounded the eminent function of a "universal judgment" *(giudizio universale)* apt, of course, to fascinate all readers of Kant.[64] Henceforth, Panofsky would never cease safeguarding and clarifying this philosophical legitimation of Vasari's work.

That the historian of the *Lives* turned his back on exacting Platonism only justifies the "Kantian" value of his gesture: for he gave to the Idea, Panofsky explains, a "functionalist significance" *(eine Umdeutung im Sinne des Funktionalen).* In short, far from constituting a simple representational content, Vasari's Idea attains the very status of a "fac-

ulty of representation" *(Vorstellungsvermögen).*[65] Here we are close to Giordano Bruno, and before long Panofsky indeed invokes his "almost Kantian statement according to which only the artist creates [the] rules" of his art, just as representations are deduced from their own faculty in the human soul.[66] We gradually realize that Vasari has been presented to us less as the hero of a *rinascità* of the history of art (which he absolutely is), than as the hero of a *rinascità* of the philosophy of knowledge (which he perhaps really isn't). For Panofsky saw in the *Lives* that crucial moment when "the 'subject-object problem' was now ripe for a basic clarification"—which is what we usually learn in philosophy class about Kant.[67]

In some sense, then, there would be two ways of reading Vasari. The first would be to situate his work within what Panofsky calls the "dialectical antinomy" *(dialektische Antinomie)* of idealism versus artistic naturalisms—an antinomy that becomes confused with the history of art itself, or rather with the history of artistic theory, and has "retained its place in the twentieth [century]."[68] The other way, suggested even more strongly by a reading of *Idea,* would be to see in Vasari a precursor of the syntheses established by Kant in philosophy and by Riegl in the history of art: although he did not provide a close "philosophic analysis" of its intuitions, Vasari here becomes the first thinker about art to have questioned the reality of the "thing in itself." Insofar as, according to Panofsky, the term "Idea" designates "every notion that, conceived in the artist's mind, precedes the actual depiction"; insofar as this "functional" notion effects an intimate reconciliation between *disegno* and the concept, between art and knowledge; insofar, finally, as Vasari becomes a man of "abstraction" *(Abzug)* and "intuitive synthesis" *(intuitiver Synthesis)* as opposed to Alberti's "discursive synthesis,"[69] we are led to believe that the *Lives* written by the first art historian fulfilled in advance what is carried out in the very conclusion of Panofsky's book and his great neo-Kantian *disegno:*

> In the theory of knowledge, the presupposition of this "thing in itself" was profoundly shaken by Kant; in art theory, a path to the same insight was first cleared by the efforts of Aloïs Riegl. We believe we have recognized that artistic per-

> ception is no more faced with a "thing in itself" than is the process of cognition *[die künstlerische Anschauung . . . als der erkennende Verstand];* that on the contrary the one as well as the other can be sure of the validity of its judgments precisely because it alone determines the rules of its world (i.e., it has no objects other than those first constituted within itself).[70]

Such would be the essential condition in which all knowledge grounds its objects—including art objects. Such would be, still according to the text of *Idea,* the inaugural achievement of Vasari's book in the domain of the history of art. Not only with Vasari did a "liberalized" métier discover within itself an authority comparable to that of conceptual knowledge (something that Alberti, in his way, had already called for): the moment had really arrived to celebrate the marriage between cognition and the intuition that produces art objects. That *disegno* might proceed from the intellect, this meant squarely that art and science could be congruent. It meant, furthermore, that a science of art was possible, which would be called the History of Art. All things born in the Renaissance, and fit to be declined forever under the term "humanism." In short, *Vasari was already Kantian* because he worked, according to Panofsky, in a way that Kant would have called "objective" or "disinterested," working on the same occasion in a way that was "strictly art-historical."[71] But the reconciliation does not end there: Panofsky goes on to give the counter-subject of this structure, suggesting to us that *Kant himself was still a humanist:*

> Nine days before his death Immanuel Kant was visited by his physician. Old, ill, and nearly blind, he rose from his chair and stood trembling with weakness and muttering unintelligible words. Finally his faithful companion realized that he would not sit down again until the visitor had taken a seat. This he did, and Kant then permitted himself to be helped to his chair and, after having regained some of his strength, said, "*Das Gefühl für Humanität hat mich noch nicht verlassen*"—"the sense of humanity has not yet left me." The two men were moved almost to tears. For, though the word *Humanität* had

> come, in the eighteenth century, to mean little more than politeness or civility, it had, for Kant, a much deeper significance.[72]

This "much deeper significance" is none other than the one in which *humanism* undertook to reformulate, beyond the Middle Ages, the very notion of "humanity." It engaged an ethics and a relation to history, but quite as much an aesthetics and a relation to the beyond: art, science, history, metaphysics, all were mutually encompassed and deduced therein. Panofsky invites us to consider that renascent humanism recovered with the great thought of antiquity the *just measure* of the humanity of man. For it confronted *humanitas* with its beyond *(divinitas),* and also with its underside *(barbaritas):* misery and grandeur coupled. We might say that humanism was born with this "two-fold aspect" (for such was Panofsky's phrase); we might also say that humanism articulated a synthesis of dialectical antinomies.[73] Now if we transpose this very general point of departure to the level of reflection about knowledge, we again encounter the two-fold aspect of sensible intuition and intellectual work; we encounter, says Panofsky, the two spheres of *nature* and *culture:* "From the humanistic point of view, however, it became reasonable, and even inevitable, to distinguish, within the realm of creation, between the sphere of *nature* and the sphere of *culture,* and to define the former with reference to the latter [he might just as well have written: "to deduce the former from the latter"], i.e., nature as the whole world accessible to the senses, except for the *records left by man.*"[74]

So we see that the two aspects of knowledge—sensible, conceptual—were reunited in humanism in the guise of an extreme attention focused precisely on these "records left by man": it is *history* that synthesizes in the domain of art the "sensible" observation of nature and a constant recourse to the cultural traditions of the past. "[The humanist] is, fundamentally, an historian."[75] What does this mean? First, that history was invented or reinvented in the Renaissance: we think again of Vasari as of one of its great heroes. Then that humanist *eruditio,* developing in the element of history, managed to conjugate art with science, the sensible with the intelligible.[76] Finally, that this

conjunction—although itself historical—had for Panofsky a kind of timeless value, ultimately the value of an *ideal program for history:* if Vasari is Kantian and if Kant is a humanist, if humanism reinvents history . . . then history, the history of art, will be humanist in its very structure. Which clarifies the title of the essay whose first lines consist of the anecdote about Kant: "The History of Art *Is* a Humanistic Discipline"[77]—not content with its having been; for it was thus from its origin, in accordance with its Kantian ends.

So in Panofsky's account, the "history of art as a humanistic discipline," after having designated a historical moment (the Renaissance versus the Middle Ages), after having provided a dialectical moment of the exposition (the "humanities" versus the natural sciences), proceeds to become the center and synthesis of an argument as historical as it is dialectical: implicitly, the Renaissance will become law for other periods of history, and humanist knowledge will itself become that *organic situation* henceforth assimilable, for the reader, to an absolute model of knowledge. Initially, Panofsky opposed the natural sciences, capable of *analyzing* their objects of knowledge without subjectivism, to the situation of the historian (or the humanist), who "dealing as he does with human actions and creations, has to engage in a mental process of a synthetic and subjective character: he has mentally to re-enact the actions and to re-create the creations."[78] But from that point forward the "Kantian tone" proceeds to demonstrate its efficacy, its magical powers of conversion: an exposition of (subjective) *limits* becomes within a few sentences the exposition of a self-legitimizing *certainty.*

First, what was "limit" becomes *existence,* and the only one possible for the art object: "It is in fact by this process that the real objects of the humanities come into being."[79] Whatever the mind synthesizes and recreates, then, is—*voilà!*—certain to exist. Second, the *analytic* faculty, at first distinct from the historical domain and providing the criterion of difference from that of the natural sciences, proceeds to reappear in the humanities through what Panofsky calls—without really justifying it—"rational archeological analysis."[80] Is it because archeology works with concrete objects (shards, fragments, pillaged tombs) that it is capable of analysis? Panofsky admits that the "mate-

rial" of archeology is the result of "intuitive aesthetic re-creation." However, he does not hesitate to effect a kind of *over-synthesis* thanks to which the history of art will hook "rational analysis" onto "subjective synthesis" to produce the famous *circulus methodicus,* the "methodological circle" that makes of its own limitations a limitless power, into a synthesis henceforth described as *objective* and *rational.* Significantly, a remark of Leonardo da Vinci's—heard with a Kantian ear—comes along to stand surety:

> Leonardo da Vinci has said: "Two weaknesses leaning against one another add up to one strength." The halves of an arch cannot even stand upright; the whole arch supports a weight. Similarly, archaeological research is blind and empty without aesthetic re-creation, and aesthetic re-creation is irrational and often misguided without archaeological research. But, "leaning against one another," these two can support the "system that makes sense," that is, an historical synopsis.[81]

We are, before such sentences, effectively before what we might, in our turn, call the two-fold aspect of the "Kantian tone" adopted by Panofsky to reflect upon his own discipline. What art historian could resist sentences that have such immense practical *pertinence*? But at the same time, what epistemologist could help but notice in them something like *sufficiency**—I mean precisely a theoretical insufficiency? What kind of sufficiency or insufficiency is in question here? What is its source? And what does it turn aside? When Panofsky constructs his synthetic movement on the second level—meant to synthesize "objectively" a so-called objective description and a so-called subjective synthesis—when he closes the movement with his "intrinsic meaning or content," a kind of noumenon that gives meaning to all phenomena, what, in the end, is he doing? *He is giving consciousness the end word.*† Remember his simple and essential sentence: "The

**suffisance:* wordplay: the primary meaning of *suffisance* is "self-importance" or "self-satisfaction."

†*le mot de la fin:* wordplay with *fin,* "end"; compare the more colloquial expression *le dernier mot,* "the last word."

'naive' beholder differs from the art historian in that the latter is conscious of the situation." And he immediately adds: "He *knows.*"[82] For it stands to reason that there is no science without consciousness. The problem—the sophism—then becomes: If consciousness *creates the very existence* of its scientific object, and if the history of art is a "science of the humanities," then works of art will accept, in themselves, nothing but consciousness. They are like *objects of consciousness,* in all senses ascribable to the genitive "of." So the natural consequence of the "Kantian tone" adopted by the history of art is, then, abruptly, that *the unconscious does not exist in it.*

Before going deeper into this crucial consequence, before interrogating it again from another angle, we must duly note the most obvious meaning that this absolute of consciousness assumes in Panofsky's very text. This "science with conscience* is, needless to say, a matter of the soul, even of ethics. The pages under discussion were published in 1940 by an exile: which gives his praise of humanism, of the *vita contemplativa* and the values that flourished in the Italian Renaissance specific overtones. It is readily understandable that Panofsky should have wanted to include in his gnosological project that of a recovery of knowledge—recovered precisely along the bias of humanist history. So four centuries after Vasari, he again took up the torch of the *ideal man,* at the very moment all of Europe was being consumed by the flames of what Panofsky calls a "satanocracy," and he clarifies: a "Middle Ages in reverse" . . . But against the destruction he invokes History, as if what *had been* took on in memory a stronger consistency than all the ruined presents. Thus, against the "dictates of the subhuman," against death itself, there is the immortality of humanism. The torch of Vasari's *eterna fama* becomes in Panofsky the quite otherwise tragic image of the Promethean fire surviving its tortured inventor:

> If the anthropocentric civilization of the Renaissance is headed, as it seems to be, for a "Middle Ages in reverse"—a

**science avec conscience,* the same phrase rendered in the previous paragraph as "science with consciousness"; wordplay enabled by the bivalence of *conscience* in French (consciousness/conscience), which informs the discussion that follows.

> satanocracy as opposed to the medieval theocracy—not only the humanities but also the natural sciences, as we know them, will disappear, and nothing will be left but what serves the dictates of the subhuman. But even this will not mean the end of humanism. Prometheus could be bound and tortured, but the fire lit by his torch could not be extinguished. . . . The ideal aim of science would seem to be something like mastery, that of the humanities something like wisdom.
>
> Marsilio Ficino wrote to the son of Poggio Bracciolini: "History is necessary, not only to make life agreeable, but also to endow it with a moral significance. What is mortal in itself, achieves immortality through history; what is absent becomes present; old things are rejuvenated; and young men soon equal the maturity of old ones. If a man of seventy is considered wise because of his experience, how much wiser he whose life fills a span of a thousand or three thousand years! For indeed, a man may be said to have *lived* as many millennia as are embraced by the span of his knowledge of history."[83]

In the arc* drawn between Kant's remark nine days before his death and Marsilio Ficino's about immortality, then, the history of art invented for itself a fundamental wisdom. It almost admitted—but would ever be reluctant to admit this outright—that it is not a *science,* but at best something like an ancient *sapience.* "The history of art as a humanistic discipline" finds its end in accents prophetic rather than cognitive, incantatory rather than descriptive. We saw that the word laden with all these aspirations, the word invoked *in the last resort,* was none other than the word "conscious": and in the end, *consciousness* is the instrument on which Panofsky was counting to translate melancholy, or, more generally, anxiety about death (the death of art, of men, and of the "humanities," already present in Vasari), into a positive value of knowledge, hope, and immortality (likewise already proposed by Vasari). So there is indeed here an ultimate *resort to*

**arc,* which can also mean "bow," as in "bow and arrow."

metaphysics, which dreams a world for the "humanities" where studying images would save us from all violence. How could we fail to support such a program, how remain unmoved by the fact that it was articulated precisely when Europe was collapsing? We must, however, take account of the fact that Panofsky here gave rise to another slippage, another denial: he forbade himself—and forbade the history of art—from seeing, or rather from *confronting the moment when images do violence,* are themselves acts of violence. Parts of medieval and even renascent art, however, answer this dark constraint.[84] But to this Panofsky turned his back, ready to risk *disembodying* a part of the objects that he studied. (He likewise turned his back on Nazism's particularly frightening value of presenting itself as a work of art sculpted from the flesh of peoples . . . How could an art historian accept the terrifying power of what was supposed to constitute its "humanity," its beautiful object of study?)

The word "humanism" indeed acts, then, in this great installation of ends, like a magic and pacifying word. It passes triumphantly from the status of object of study to that of theoretical program—congruent with that object, but applied also, surreptitiously, to all others.[85] It behaves like a tightrope walker in the middle of all these antinomies, all these aporias, which it pacifies and subsumes. It makes all these "two-fold aspects" into a single legible surface, like those anamorphic devices that *synthesized* singular dissemblances into a single "universal" resemblance.[86] The history of art, when it calls itself a "humanistic discipline," does nothing but appeal to synthesis, but conjure away all of the violence, deception, and "inhumanity" that images are—and always have been—able to foment. The history of art as a "humanistic discipline" does nothing but trace a magic circle, within which it closes in on itself, pacifies itself, and recreates images in the image of its own thought: its humanistic *Idea* of art.

There was also, in the word *disegno* as Vasari used it, something like a reference to alterity: it was *nature,* the famous nature to which all art was required to conform. By criticizing "the relation of the eye to the world," by panning all natural givens, Panofsky discovered the functional value specific to the "world of the eye." But by immedi-

ately closing off "the relation of the soul to the world of the eye," by tracing the loop of an art where the intellect imitates itself and conforms to itself, Panofsky founded with Kant a *gnosological* notion of art, in which the verb *to see* is conjugated in a finally transparent way with the verb *to know*. The practical resonance still retained by the term *imitation* could henceforth be encompassed and subsumed by that of *iconology*—second magic word (even if it works), second totem-notion. It tells us that art images imitate the invisible as much as the visible. It tells us that the sensible "forms" of painting, sculpture, and architecture are made to translate those, invisible, of concepts or ideas that reason "forms."

Panofsky, as we know, definitively associated his name with the great discipline of iconology.[87] He enshrined it in the title of his famous *Studies in Iconology,* although in the 1939 edition it is primarily a question of "iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense."[88] The programmatic argument of "Iconography and Iconology" dates from 1955, and only then is the suffix "-logy" properly justified: with "logos," Panofsky says in gist, we have absolute reason, whereas the suffix "-graphy" "implies a purely descriptive . . . method of procedure."[89] In short, the term "iconology" is laden with the stakes of a discipline that will no longer offer inventories of artistic phenomena, but their fundamental interpretation, legitimated *in reason*. It is curious, moreover, that at the time Panofsky should have failed to indicate his terminological debt, remaining silent about the origin of the "good old word" that he "propose[d] to revive."[90] For *Iconologia* indeed belonged to the humanist mental landscape: at the end of the Renaissance; a book appeared bearing this title that can be considered a classic of the "science of art," what *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Artemidorus was for the ancient "science of dreams."[91]

What, then, is the value of Panofsky's return to the *Iconologia* of Cesare Ripa? What principal benefits resulted from it? First, without doubt, that of having access to the elaboration, beginning in the Cinquecento, of a common trait* *between the visible and the legible:* we know that *Iconologia* looks at itself, because it consists of a series of

**trait.*

explicated images, but also because it is read and used in the alphabetical order of a dictionary of words. Such is its first operation, its first magical synthesis: that of images for reading. Second, the *Iconologia* formulated, beginning with its preface, the doctrine of a common trait *between the visible and the invisible:* for its object was none other than "images made to signify something different from what the eye sees"—something that was an abstract *concept,* the whole book drawing up a catalogue of them, like a museum of images for thinking.[92] Now thinking has *rules,* they say, that discourse masters: through rhetoric, through dialectic. In a lapidary allusion to Ripa in 1966, Panofsky indicates immediately that his book was "intended not only for painters and sculptors, but for orators, preachers, and poets."[93] This means that the "common traits" envisaged by Cesare Ripa led to something like "rules for the management of images"—universal rules that need only be sought in the *exemplum* of the ancients:

> Images made to signify something different from what is seen with the eye *[le imagini fatte per signifare une diversa cosa da quella che si vede con l'occhio]* have no more certain or more universal rule *[non hanno altra più certa, ne più universale regole]* than imitation of the monuments that are found in books, in medals, and in the marbles carved by the industry of the Latins and the Greeks, and of those still more ancient who were the inventors of this art.[94]

There is here the principle of a *rhetoric,* where today the history of art often still thinks it finds definitive motivations* for the image. There is also here the principle of a *logic,* one that engages in radical fashion the question of being and name, of the name and the visible. Ripa tells us, in effect, about "the reasonings of images" *(ragionamenti d'imagini)* and superposes the visible monstration of the figure above the denominative efficacy of its "declaration" *(dichiarazione).* Why? Because an image "made to signify something different from what is seen with the eye" does not have at its disposition a sensible appear-

**des ressorts définitifs.*

ance that it can imitate directly. So it will imitate "reasonings," intelligible "declarations"; it will follow term-for-term the discourse that *defined* this "thing," this idea. In short, what is ultimately at stake in Ripa's iconology is that "this kind of image reduce easily to similitude with the definition" *(questa sorte d'imagine si riduce facilmente alla similitudine della definitione),* to the point of trying to make every detail of the visible representation correspond to a sequential verbal definition.[95] Thus the whole iconological edifice rested on two axiomatic hypotheses, hypotheses as "classical" as they are groundless: the first requiring that the name designate and describe the being, the second that the name itself make this visible.[96]

A common trait between the visible and the legible, between the visible and the invisible, a possible congruence of sensible image and intelligible definition: one understands all the hopes that a history of art desirous of grounding itself *in reason* might place in the iconology issuing from Ripa. This made it possible to envisage humanist art with the "eye" of a humanist—and furthermore made this possible, without contradiction, with the still more discerning "eye" of a neo-Kantian scholar. The "artistic language" *(Kunstsprache)* discussed by Wölfflin had finally denaturalized itself, in order to devote itself completely to a "universal language" of images and culture, even a generative grammar induced from the Ideas of reason. The passage from iconography to iconology, here again, did not content itself with altering methodological givens; it altered object and method together. It presupposed an object adequate to the method, in other words an art that was not just "iconographical"—an art that made do with imitating visible, describable phenomena—but was also "iconological," which is to say an art that would also imitate noumena, intelligible concepts, subsuming and *giving reason* to the phenomena themselves.*

Now this is indeed what Panofsky's definition of the *iconological content* of artworks tends toward. It aims first to reveal whatever, in an image, belongs to the *sphere of signification*—which, all things considered, is not altogether self-evident: for where, in this sphere, is

**Donnant raison aux phénomènes eux-mêmes,* wordplay on the French idiomatic expressions *avoir raison,* "to be right," and *donner raison à quelqu'un,* "to admit that someone is right."

its center, where its envelope; where are its specific regions, its exact limits?[97] On the other hand, is signification the only parameter to which we might reference the *content* of a work of art, if this notion means anything? Is signification all that works of art contain? Is it really unreasonable to imagine a history of art whose object would be the sphere of all the not-meanings in images? Beyond *subject matter* or the iconographic "subject," Panofsky's iconological *meaning* had other ambitions: it was supposed to constitute the definitive instance of a place that did not content itself with enclosing the significations carried by works of art but that, in addition, aimed to *engender* them— "give meaning even to the formal arrangements and technical procedures employed" in any work of painting, sculpture, or architecture.[98] In short, the ideational content is essential ("it is essential") by opposition to appearance, and intrinsic ("intrinsic meaning") as opposed to conventional. It corresponds to a concept from which the work could be deduced, just as any superstructure is deducible from the "basic principles which underlie the choice and presentation" of the work itself, considered as an expressive phenomenon.[99]

How can knowledge henceforth attain such a principle? Answer: by using the magic bow offered by Apollo to the humanist art historian—the bow of synthesis and analysis combined, mutually confirming, metasynthesized. It is at this precise point of his hypothesis that Panofsky forcefully reintroduces "the rather discredited term *synthetic intuition,*" a term that basically aims at something like a *transcendental synthesis:* iconology, in effect, requires "a method of interpretation which arises as a synthesis rather than as an analysis," and is premised on "the correct analysis of *images, stories,* and *allegories.*"[100] In other words, the iconological essence of an image is deduced simultaneously from a rational analysis carried out only on the iconographic level, and an "intuitive" synthesis based on "a familiarity with specific *themes* or *concepts* as transmitted through literary sources." Panofsky will go even farther, not to be more precise but on the contrary to broaden: "just so, or even more so, has our synthetic intuition to be controlled by an insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, the *general and essential tendencies of the human mind* were expressed by specific *themes* and *concepts.*"[101]

So it is indeed the concept, the mind, signification, and "literary sources" that have the last word when it comes to the knowable intrinsic content of a painting or a sculpture. Along this bias, the history of art in a sense expanded the knowledge of which its object is susceptible (and even requires)—but in another sense it informed its object with its method, its specific form of expression, which is conceptual, never looking for anything but signification, and, accordingly, manipulating "literary sources" endlessly. Thus did the objects of the history of art undergo a kind of ordeal by disembodiment: the colors of painting were required—a requirement that would long remain in force—to say "yes" or "no" with regard to a work's "theme," "concept," or "literary source"; in short, they had to decline themselves in black or white.[102] . . . Iconology, then, delivered up all images to the tyranny of the concept, of definition, and, ultimately, of the nameable and the *legible:* the legible understood as a synthetic, iconological operation, whereby *invisible* "themes," invisible "general and essential tendencies of the human mind"—invisible concepts or Ideas—are "translated" into the realm of the *visible* (the clear and distinct appearance of Panofsky's "primary" and "secondary" meanings).

The operation is massive—I have called it "magical." May I suggest, yet again, that Panofsky had an inkling of this? It remains incontestable, in any case, that the successive changes made in "Iconography and Iconology," especially the addition in 1955 of a long passage on the two respective suffixes, manifest a kind of oscillation as to the *ends* of the new discipline. The text is shot through with hesitations, with a play of advance and retreat, of repulsion and attraction, as to the ultimate consequences that iconology carried within it. It's a bit as though Panofsky interrupted a movement, asked himself all of a sudden: "In the end, am I in the process of bringing them, if not the plague, then at least the madness of magical interpretation, the certainty of the insane?" The gesture of recoil manifests itself first in an uncertainty, a hesitation about *forging ahead:* How far will we, how far will you—you my readers, my disciples—take iconology? It is a question that any inventor worthy of the name ought, at some point, to ask himself. Panofsky indeed put it to himself, by reversing

the meanings, then scarcely established, of the famous suffixes "-graphy" and "-logy":

> "Ethnology," for instance, is defined as a "*science* of human races" by the same *Oxford Dictionary* that defines "ethnography" as a "*description* of human races," and Webster explicitly warns against a confusion of the two terms inasmuch as "ethnography is properly restricted to the purely descriptive treatment of peoples and races while ethnology denotes their comparative study." So I conceive of iconology as an iconography turned interpretive and thus becoming an integral part of the study of art instead of being confined to the role of a preliminary statistical survey. There is, however, admittedly some danger that iconology will behave, not like ethnology as opposed to ethnography, but like astrology as opposed to astrography.[103]

It is significant that, ten years later, Panofsky reworked—pounded out again, as it were—this passage in his preface to the French edition of *Studies in Iconology;* that he proposed to revert, once and for all, to the common term "iconography," said to be "more familiar and less subject to debate"; and finally, that he capped the whole with a renewed *cautius*, asking, even imploring, "to be read with the greatest prudence."[104] But how, exactly, is all this significant? The whole question comes down to knowing what we can and ought to do when confronted by the "riddle of the sphinx" to which Panofsky himself refers:[105] the riddle posed to us ceaselessly by even the most fragmentary works of art. If "iconology" runs the risk of becoming something analogous to "astrology," isn't it because the seeming foundation of its rigor—"logos," in the guise of Kantian reason—is, in its extreme pliability, its polyvalence, and its ability to answer every riddle with other, discursive riddles, akin to "magic"? Such, doubtless, was Panofsky's fear: that the word "iconology" was only a Kantian, theoretical, and logocentric stand-in for *imitation,* that old magic word of classical aesthetics.

So a second gesture of recoil presents itself. He would shuffle the question of ends one last time. He would seem to have reached that weary lucidity of some old men, and in the same moment to have renounced far too many things. Did the herald of theoretical rigor conclude by reducing "logos" to the level of the simplest and most general reason? Did he ultimately turn his back on the German *Kunstphilosophie* of his origins, contenting himself with the positivities offered by the too simple reason of Anglo-Saxon "pragmatism"? We might think so.[106] We might also think that the question has to be more complex, and that we must always, even in the most transparent of pragmatisms, take into account automatic philosophical models or their vestiges, in other words the always masked and transfigured presence of initial schemas and thought choices. All the same, it remains true that Panofsky ended by presenting his iconological project with the embarrassed, hesitant gesture of someone who had gone *too far:* too far in theoretical rigor, too far into reason itself. This attitude is consistent in much of Panofsky's work in the years 1956–66, a decade marked by a surprising, and disappointing, return to iconographic analysis in the narrow sense of the term.[107]

In order to understand such a turn backward, we must doubtless slightly displace—get some perspective on—the theoretical *choice* that presented itself to Panofsky in the prickly environs of all these questions. It is certain, on the one hand, that the requirement of an iconological synthesis transcending the descriptive approach to works of art went *very much farther* than any of the positivist positions (historical or philological) to which the history of art still so often pays allegiance. Before writing the American version of his text, which rather insists on the authority of "literary sources," Panofsky had *already* gone farther in his article of 1932 by underscoring the fact—the essential fact—that works of art are able to foment their signifying constellations, their associations or "highly complicated combinations" (as he says himself about Grünewald), without need of texts.[108] A means whereby the history of art might hope to open a road for itself—royal but delicate, to be sure—outside the tyranny of the legible that already characterized the humanist iconology of Cesare Ripa.

But in another sense, Panofsky's requirement effectively went *much too far*—too far in its wish to ground the history of art not only as a humanist discipline but as an *idealist* one. Perhaps the key to Panofsky's final hesitations can be found by considering as a *trap*—and an alienation—the logic of choice that, from the very beginning, controlled his whole enterprise. This trap, this logic are the selfsame ones of philosophical idealism, which suggests the following hypothesis: that after thinking he had found in art images a privileged object, an "ideal" object of thought, he could not help, proceeding forward, but shut himself up in it, get stuck in it, and lose himself in it. So true is it that the image can devour the Idea at the very moment the Idea thinks it can absorb the image . . . Panofsky's *CAUTIUS* is not only a call for prudence; it is the cry of someone who went too far into the shifting sands of philosophical idealism, and who found only the worst branch—that of positivism, of iconography in a shrunken sense—to prevent his sinking and losing forever the singular truth of art images.

In short, this whole game of theoretical advance and retreat is but an effect of the aporia wherein idealism gets caught when faced with the question of images. However powerful, however useful it might be, the iconological hypothesis was ill formulated from the outset—because it had been formulated with Kant, or with a "neo-Kant." So we must turn backward yet again, upstream of the American "iconography/iconology" argument, to understand the theoretical instruments that made possible Panofsky's articulation of the new discipline.[109] What Panofsky called in 1939 the "invisible" themes and concepts of "intrinsic meaning" expressive of "general and essential tendencies of the human mind" were called ten years earlier, under the immediate philosophical authority of Ernst Cassirer, *symbolic forms*. Here, then, is the third master expression, the third magical formula: the *Idea* of the system.

This Idea, Panofsky described it in 1932 in terms of "essential meaning" *(Wesenssinn)* and "ultimate content" *(letzter wesensmässiger Gehalt)*.[110] It enabled him, in the last resort, to get rid of all equivocations and explain all "highly complicated combinations." It is a "super-instance." The singular phenomena of art are deduced from it as from an a priori beyond. Its sphere of interpretation, Panofsky goes on to

say, corresponds to nothing less than a "General History of Ideas," or rather a "General History of the Mind" or Spirit *(Allgemeine Geistesgeschichte),* whereby "the greatness of an artistic production is ultimately dependent upon the quantity of '*Weltanschauung*-energy' that is incorporated into the worked material and radiates back from it to the spectator,"[111] like an Idea informing the imaging material so as to instill into it its universal, universally accepted, universally grasped truth. It is the very same thing that is called "symbolic form" *(symbolische Form)* in the famous study of perspective, where from the start of the game the philosophical antitheses of singular versus universal and sensible versus intelligible are placed in the foreground only to be transcended and synthesized in an exactly idealist operation that might be called *intelligible subsumption:*

> But if perspective is not a factor of value, it is surely a factor of style. Indeed, it may even be characterized (to extend Ernst Cassirer's felicitous term to the history of art) as one of those "symbolic forms" in which "spiritual meaning is attached to a concrete, material sign and intrinsically given to this sign." This is why it is essential to ask of artistic periods and regions not only whether they have perspective, but also which perspective they have.[112]

What is in question in this "attachment," and in a spiritual meaning's being "intrinsically given" to a sensible sign? What exactly did Panofsky understand by "symbol," a term that is essential to all the human sciences today, and one that Panofsky himself never abandoned?[113] How does a symbol bring into play—or transform—the relation between the sensible and the intelligible? This way of formulating the question, and the system constructed to provide all the answers to it, Panofsky found in the masterpiece of Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen,* whose first volume, devoted to language and to a general introduction to the interpretive structure as a whole, appeared in 1923, which is to say on the threshold of a period of deep theoretical reflection conducted in his own field by author of *Idea.*[114]

Cassirer's "answer" to the general problem of *culture* consisted first, as is well known, of appropriating the essential results of Kant's critical project in the domain of knowledge.[115] The *Critique of Pure Reason* provided the theoretical means for a salutary renunciation, whereby science was required to throw overboard "its aspirations and its claims to an 'immediate' grasp and communication of reality." Which meant, in sum, that every "objectification" of knowledge had never been and would never be anything but a "mediation," an act of the knowing mind.[116] As previously suggested, this lucid putting-into-perspective of acts of knowledge by no means precluded—on the contrary, it came to ground—the establishment of a *synthesis,* whereby science might pretend to the unity of its "own body," so to speak. The multiplicity of mediations, methods, and objects of knowledge, while irreducible, ought not to nullify, as Cassirer says, the "fundamental postulate of unity."[117] For this *unity* is right there, not right before our eyes, exactly, but *in* our eyes—in "the world of the eye" of which Panofsky spoke—which is to say, in the very operation through which the whole game of mediation and objectification unfolds: in short, in knowledge itself considered as a faculty, or, to use Cassirer's term, as a *function*. Here, then, is the great difference that separated Cassirer's neo-Kantism from the answers of classical metaphysics: "This postulate of a purely functional unity replaces the postulate of a unity of substance and origin, which lay at the core of the ancient concept of being."[118]

So the unity of knowledge exists: it is nothing other than the unity of the knowing mind. Its limits are those of the "fundamental proposition" toward which, according to Cassirer, all cognition strives, and which indeed consists in "articulating" a unique content into a multifarious sign, a universal content into a particular sign, an intelligible content into a sensible sign[119] . . . We begin to understand how the whole problematic of the symbol was able to come forth* in Cassirer like a displacement—even an application—of the Kantian philosophy of knowledge toward the world of language, myth, or art. Such, moreover, is the project explicitly announced in the introduction to

**éclore.*

The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: to propose a doctrine that "will accomplish for the *totality* of cultural forms what the transcendental critique has done for pure *cognition,*"[120] which, according to Casssirer, would be a way of completing—of leading to its dreamt-of ends—philosophical *idealism:*

> Thus the critique of reason becomes the critique of culture. It seeks to understand and to show how every content of culture, insofar as it is more than a mere isolated content, insofar as it is grounded in a universal principle of form, presupposes an original act of the human spirit. Herein the basic thesis of idealism finds its true and complete confirmation.[121]

In this way, the *critique of culture* would be able to follow term-for-term the methodological development previously followed by Kant in the domain of pure knowledge. First, all "naive-realistic" views would be beaten in the breach, and a "general concept of the world" would disappear in favor of a "culture" wherein the mind gives itself its own world—which again brings us back to Panofsky's beautiful formulation that the "relation of the eye to the world" is in fact the "relation of the soul to the world of the eye."[122] But from here on out synthetic questions, definitive questions will be posed: Cassirer proposes to consider "symbols" of quite different kinds—those used by language, myth, art, and knowledge in general—otherwise than as "merely" existing "side by side." All symbols, he says, proceed from "the same basic human function," one in which each of them can find its formal reason, its universal and "fundamental proposition."[123] The culmination of idealism, then: every sensible sign, however "unique" and particular it might be, should be able to find its place in the intelligibility and universality of a faculty or function of the human mind.

I must again insist on the double aspect of this grand hypothesis. On the one side, Cassirer promised a *functionalist* understanding of the symbol in general, and thus of linguistic, mythic, and artistic phenomena considered as process. This was to take a great step forward, this was to dodge the traditional metaphysical givens "at the core of

the ancient concept of being," and attached to the very notion of an object of knowledge. Cassirer taught us something essential: that we shouldn't understand the symbol as an isolatable object—a seed that one extracts from the fruit—as an archetype, or as any kind of autonomous entity whatsoever . . . but rather as the bringing into play of a paradigm that exists only because it functions dialectically between subjects and objects. Thus the notion of symbolic form aimed, beyond the isolatable *figures* of art or culture in general (figure-things, we might call them), at the very function of *figuration* that engendered them.[124] Thus it aimed at something like a *general grammar,* even a generative one, "a kind of grammar of the symbolic function as such, which would encompass and generally help to define its special terms and idioms as we encounter them in language and art, in myth and religion."[125]

The other face of this epistemological project emerges in the very expression "general grammar." It presupposes both a law and its generality. It seeks therein a "condition of unity" and universality. It finds this in the concept of *representation,* a "basic function" that, according to Cassirer, is an "essential premise for the structure and formal unity of consciousness."[126] This marks another step forward, perhaps less prospective, perhaps less distant from the ancient metaphysics than Cassirer would have liked. It is the step taken from function to the *unity of the function:* which amounts to saying that anything that functions does so only by authority of the Same, of the One, and of the unwavering rule.* It reconciles the "subjectivized" subject and the "reified" thing in the *unity of being*—be it "functional"—that Cassirer invokes repeatedly as "the end" toward which Idealism "strove."[127] So what was in question, from the outset, was indeed an Idealist operation. In the "unity of consciousness" there is, whatever one might say, the authority of the *Idea,* envisaged as an end or as a functional principle: it is this that, surreptitiously, provides the law of immanence and of the system of "original and autonomous act[s] of consciousness."[128] It is this that opens the various "roads by which the spirit proceeds toward its objectivization, i.e., its self-revelation."[129]

***la règle sans faille;* allusive wordplay: *faille,* which can also mean "flaw" or "fault" (in the geological sense), figures prominently in the next chapter.

That the symbol might thus reveal the spirit to itself, this meant that unity and synthesis had been presupposed from the outset, even as the abstract "One" of traditional metaphysics was felled by Cassirer's neo-Kantian critique. Everything was contrived such that, at a given moment, the manifold could *just the same* come to coil in the One, and "each particular cultural energy" contribute "in its particular way" toward the establishment of a "new synthesis of 'I' and 'world'."[130] This meant that the symbolic forms of art were destined to gather the *sensible* diversity of signs into the fold of a so-called general spiritual "meaning"—a meaning at the end of the day *intelligible,* stateable as such in the discourse of knowledge.[131] Not only did the sensible seek out the intelligible to attach itself to it; its way of "articulating" with it—as is repeated by both Cassirer and Panofsky—finally permitted it the ultimate conversion: to become intelligible. Art consequently became intelligible in its generality as in its singularity, it became the Intelligible itself expressed in the accidental forms of the sensible.

Grounding a knowledge of art *in reason,* then, required—first in Cassirer, then in Panofsky—finding, at whatever cost, a congruence and even a *subsumption,* whereby the sensible manifold of figural phenomena might find, in order to be wholly encompassed by it, a frame, a mold, a general grammar of intelligibility. This was an act of synthesis and even, in the Kantian sense, an act of *synthetic unity.* There is, within the expression "symbolic form," the heavily laden notion, philosophically speaking, of *form*—which immediately brings to mind that of Idea. Like Kantian ideas, the symbolic forms of Cassirer and Panofsky would have been apprehended within an optic of regulating principles that "systematize syntheses"; like Ideas, they would have been apprehended first from the point of view of subjectivity—as acts of the world of culture and not of the world per se—but then re-objectivized, so to speak, in their regulatory authority and in their commitment to the "*ultimate unity*" of things.[132] We might even risk the hypothesis that Panofsky's famous tripartite "synoptical table" or schema—in 1932, it will be recalled, he made us pass from the "phenomenal meaning" to the "signifying meaning," then to the "essential

meaning"; in the American version, he shows us, after the "natural subject matter," the "conventional subject matter," and finally the " 'symbolical' content"—we might risk the hypothesis that this table, meant to set forth the *categories* usable by the historian of art, did nothing, in sum, but adhere spontaneously to Kant's schema of synthetic unity expounded in the *Critique of Pure Reason.*

Let's recall the three great moments of this famous text, which sets out to do nothing less than reveal the very conditions of "a priori knowledge of all objects": first comes the "manifold of pure intuition," a matter of events in the world as these brusquely present themselves to us, in accordance with the most elementary "conditions of the receptivity of our mind, under which alone it can receive representations of objects."[133] It would be easy to imagine Kant citing here the example of a man removing his hat: recognizing this simple event as effectively being premised on space, time, and still other "conditions of receptivity." We are on the level of Panofsky's "primary subject matter," we are on the level of the sensible *manifold:* it will give place to a cognition only after having been "gone through" *(durchgegangen)*—and synthesized. Second moment, then: it falls to the *imagination* to begin the going-through. "Blind though indispensable," writes Kant, the imagination "collects the elements for cognitions and unifies them into a certain content": an action that is called a *synthesis,* in the most general sense of the term.[134] The third moment will provide a *synthetic unity,* what I referred to earlier as an "over-synthesis": which henceforth rests on the pure understanding, and thus definitively grounds the act of cognition.[135] Panofsky's "essential meaning" is thus attained: it is a concept.

As goes the knowledge of art, so goes all knowledge: it will proceed from intuition to image, and above all *from image to concept.* I say "above all" because it is the second translation that is the crucial moment, the one that, as in Kant, would justify the considerable prestige of the grand word *knowledge.* But the "science of art," *Kunstwissenschaft,* would not make only this one requirement concerning its form. One more time, it required of its object a symmetrical form, such that the "circle"—methodical or vicious—could suitably loop the object to the subject. Here we are moving toward an utterly radical

definition of art, and thus of "symbolic form"—but let's not say *definition,* let's say rather *end,* wish for ends, a wish shared by Cassirer and Panofsky concerning the ends of the history of art. To require of artistic forms themselves a kind of reciprocity congruent with the form of knowledge, this was to require of symbolic forms that they realize, in their essence, the movement *from concept to image.* If this wish should become reality, the whole history of art of which Panofsky dreamed would reach its promised land: to articulate in truth the concept *of* art images—objective genitive and subjective genitive senses henceforth fused, their mutual confusion justified.

The "simple"—but tricky,* as we saw—reason of the history of art culminates, then, in a fourth magical operation. It is the *disegno* of the system. It is the invented line, the traced line whereby an image can make itself recognized under the very profile of a concept. Now this operation indeed exists, it is legible at the exact center of gravity of Kant's text: it is the mysterious and sovereign operation, in a sense already magical for Kant himself, of the *Schematismus der reinen Verstandsbegriffe,* the "schematism of the pure understanding." Without this magical operation, the concept of "symbolic form" would have been destined to stalemate; with it, by contrast, everything became possible—which is to say that the most heterogeneous orders of reality discovered in one another a common design or purpose† . . . under the lofty scepter of the concept.

Kant—in whose writing, even according to Heidegger, "as in [that of] no other thinker, one has the immediate certainty that he does not cheat"[136]—Kant started with a seemingly intractable situation: for a given object to be *subsumed* under a concept, its representation must be homogeneous *(gleichartig)* with that of the concept; but Kant himself admits that the "pure concepts of the understanding, however, in comparison with empirical (indeed, in general sensible) intuitions, are entirely unhomogeneous, and can never be encountered in any intuition."[137] So are the concepts of the understanding quite simply inapplicable to the objects of our experience? Perhaps. If the sensible *is opposed to* the intelligible, how can the intelligible *subsume* the sensible?

**retorse;* also "twisted"; "crafty."

†*se découvraient un dessin ou un dessein commun.*

There is a way, writes Kant; it's the one that makes possible the "transcendental doctrine of the power of judgment" that he is in the process of working out. To the *transcendental,* then, will fall the role of passing over the head of all heterogeneity, by inventing "a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other, and makes possible the application of the former to the latter."[138] Kant calls this "third thing" the "transcendental schema" *(transzendentales Schema).*

What's in question is a *representation*—the key word of the whole business—that Kant requires be on the one hand "pure," in other words emptied of all the empirical element, and on the other hand "sensible," in other words homogeneous with the empirical element. It would provide, then, the ideal intermediary principle between the perceptions of experience—or images—and the categories of the understanding. The "schematism," then, designates the successful though mediated operation of *subsuming* the sensible under (or through) the intelligible. Or, conversely, of the *sensible conversion* of concept into image. The trick is played, the line is traced, the circle is again closed: a science of the manifold, of the sensible, a science of the image is possible. So now we understand the status of this prodigious term that was Kant's schema. It provided a "formal and pure condition of sensibility," and at the same time it "realized the categories" in experience or in the image; it was a "product of the imagination" (not being in itself a pure concept), but unlike the image, which is always inadequate to the concept, it provided a "a rule of synthesis" homogeneous to the requisites of the pure understanding; so it ended up being quite distinct from the image itself.[139] In short, it provided a rule of conversion wherein the converted terms were not at all reciprocal: because "unchangeable and lasting," because it provided a means for the concept to become "the rule of the object," and more generally because it posited itself as the very condition of all *signification,*[140] the schema clearly played the hand of the concept against that of the image. It placed the terms in a dialectical relation only to consume one of them, all the while pretending to *comprehend* it:

> From this it is clear that the schematism of the understanding through the transcendental synthesis of imagination comes

> down to nothing other than the unity of all the manifold of intuition in inner sense, and thus indirectly to the unity of apperception, as the function that corresponds to inner sense (to a receptivity). Thus the schemata of the concepts of pure understanding are the true and sole conditions for providing them with a relation to objects, and thus with *significance,* and hence the categories are in the end of none but a possible empirical use, since they merely serve to subject appearances to general rules of synthesis through grounds of an *a priori* necessary unity . . . and thereby to make them fit for thoroughgoing connection in one experience.[141]

One sees instantly what such a tool of thought might offer Panofsky's "science of art." It is through the magic of the schematism that the hat could be lowered over artistic images and, upon being lifted again, reveal a unitary and synthetic concept. The notion of "symbolic form" plays entirely on the theoretical possibility of this procedure. Perhaps in the beginning it was but a "poor substitute" for the Kantian schema itself.[142] Perhaps it deliberately ignored Kant's opposition of schema and symbol.[143] Perhaps it ended by ossifying, within the field of the history of art, Kant's ideas of relation and function.[144] Perhaps it even forgot Kant's postulate that the understanding legislates only the *form* of phenomena, nothing more—and the slippage effected here should be clear, for in the history of art, observed phenomena are themselves defined (and considered legitimate solely) as *forms*. Perhaps, finally, it wanted to make Kant's truth into a truth of decision, certainty, and *adequacy*—something that it most definitely is not, if read for itself.[145] But the important thing for us is not the accuracy or inaccuracy with which Kant was applied; it is, as has already been said, the elevation of the *tone* adopted since then by the history of art, a tone sometimes rigorous but destined as well to promote itself as *a priori* certainty. The important thing is the fact that one day an art historian could invoke the authority of Kant's schematism to justify a whole argument about art and style understood as *"stereotypes,"* phenomena of a "vocabulary" or of "formulas or schemata"

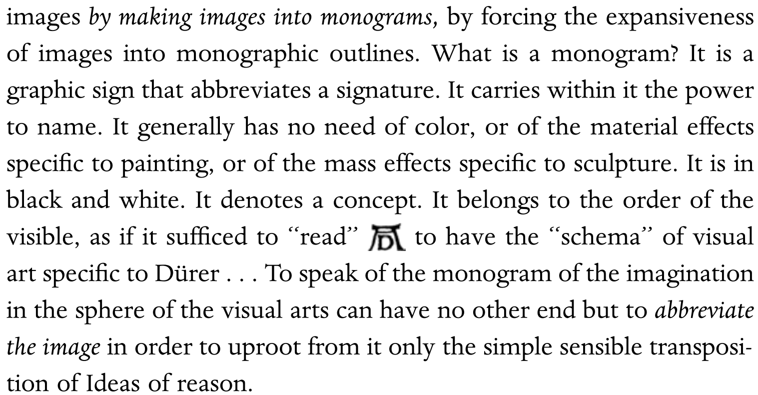
that would encompass, like portmanteau universal models, the diversity of singular works from a given period:[146]

> The schematism by which our understanding deals with the phenomenal world . . . is a skill so deeply hidden in the human soul that we shall hardly guess the secret trick that Nature here employs.[147]

This sentence has everything to seduce the historian of art: a magic formula is uttered, capable of multiple effects, including that of grounding a certainty. It speaks of the "mystery" of the way phenomenal mysteries become subservient to the not-mystery of schema turned "stereotype." It affirms the mystery (of the given) and its solution (in the concept). What's more, it contains some simple and famous words to which the whole of aesthetic thought since antiquity supposedly was dedicated: the words "art" *(Kunst,* in Kant's very text), "soul" *(Seele),* and "nature" *(Natur)*. Finally, it anticipates or implicitly presupposes the celebrated concluding formulation, wherein the whole transcendental doctrine of judgment qualifies the notion of schema:

> We can only say this much: the *image* is a product of the empirical faculty of reproductive imagination, the *schema* of sensible concepts (such as figures in space) is a product and as it were a monogram of pure *a priori* imagination *[gleichsam ein Monogramm der reinen Einbildungskraft "a priori"],* through which and in accordance with which the images first become possible, but which must be connected with the concept, to which they are in themselves never fully congruent, only by means of the schema that they designate.[148]

Transposed into the terms of an implicit program for the history of art, Kant's formulation takes on a strange resonance: what's at issue, basically, is passing from the image to the monogram—since the monogram pertains to the schema, is adequate to the concept, and is open to science—what's at issue, then, is making a history of

images *by making images into monograms,* by forcing the expansiveness of images into monographic outlines. What is a monogram? It is a graphic sign that abbreviates a signature. It carries within it the power to name. It generally has no need of color, or of the material effects specific to painting, or of the mass effects specific to sculpture. It is in black and white. It denotes a concept. It belongs to the order of the visible, as if it sufficed to "read"  to have the "schema" of visual art specific to Dürer . . . To speak of the monogram of the imagination in the sphere of the visual arts can have no other end but to *abbreviate the image* in order to uproot from it only the simple sensible transposition of Ideas of reason.

In his book on Kant, read and then forgotten by Panofsky, Heidegger saw very well that the problem of the "making-sensible" *(Versinnlichung)* of the image in a concept by way of the schematism constituted the absolute center, the absolute core of Kant's whole project: it is in the crucible of the schematism that human finitude—linked in a certain way to the very status of the image—acceded to the unity of *transcendence.*[149] The whole Idealist enterprise was concentrated here, then, since the question posed came down to this: What *Idea* do images deliver to us? What in the sensible do they transpose? "How is the *look* of the immediately represented being related to what is represented of it *in concepts?* In what sense is this *look* an image of the concept?"[150] In short, the notion of schematism gave to every sensible image a "represent[ation] of [its] rule of presentation," its transcendental rule. In this rule, the image was made subservient in one sense, made explicit in the other—*subsumed* in any case, and dedicated to the permanence of a reason.[151] Its own unfolding being henceforth crammed into a synthesis, that omnipresent synthesis required by the category, making initially separate elements into a kind of *box:* "The Veritative Synthesis, then, is that which not only dovetails the elements joined *(einfugt)* at these seams *(Fugen),* but is rather what 'fits' them together *(zusammenfugen)* in the first place."[152]

A box—be it capacious, be it Pandora's—will thus have been designed* in advance so as to put into it *as synthesis* the infinite unfolding

**dessiné.*

of singular images. Always sticking closely to Kant's text, Heidegger specifies: "This synthesis is neither a matter of intuition nor of thinking. Mediating 'between' both, so to speak, it is related to both. Thus in general it must share the basic character of the two elements, i.e., it must be a representing."[153] Now we understand: this box is just the philosophical notion of representation taken to its logical conclusion (but whose pertinence to what we call "representations" when we look at works of art is questionable). This box aimed at a process—a packaging process that Heidegger aptly calls, after Kant, a *representing unifying*.[154] Now in this unifying, the image can exist only as a "pure image": an image emptied of the irrational economy to which its sensible singularity nonetheless destines it.[155] But the "transcendental subjectivity" has nothing to do with such irrationalities. From that point forward it controls the whole game, for it alone is made capable of synthetic a priori knowledge, it alone can formulate the "groundlaying" and the "essential determination."[156]

Has the ground been laid, the essence totally determined? And afterward? What conclusion are we to draw from these results? Perhaps this: that the history of art, by adopting the schema or more loosely the tone of the Kantian doctrine, made itself directly subservient to the two constraints that Heidegger, as early as 1927, recognized at the heart of Kantism. On the one hand, its metaphysical character: thus did the history of art become married without knowing it (rather: actively denying it) to a movement, a method aiming to reground metaphysics, and more exactly to make metaphysics into a science.[157] By doing this, the history of art made its own desire to become a science subservient to the neo-Kantian formula of a *science spontaneously conceived as metaphysics*. On the other hand, Heidegger articulated very well the *logical limit* of this whole system: a limit in accordance with which Kant, likewise spontaneously, reshuffled his transcendental logic into the customary procedures of simple formal logic.[158] Adhering to such a system, the history of art did without understanding its objects from a phenomenological or anthropological point of view. Kant, to quote Heidegger again, posited that "this manner of investigating the mind and the human being is *not an empirical* discussion. The only opposite he knew was *rational* discussion. But

rational discussion is *logical*. Hence, if this discussion of the subject, the mind, the faculties and fundamental sources cannot be psychological, then it must be shifted to a transcendental *logic*"[159]—a logic insufficient to understand what is at stake in those human productions that we call art images. Can we *open* this logic, open simple reason, and proceed farther in our question posed to images?

4

The Image as Rend and the Death of God Incarnate

To open? To break something, then. At the very least to make an incision, to rend. What exactly is in question? To *struggle** within the trap that all knowledge imposes, and seek to render to the very gesture of this struggle†—a gesture at bottom painful, endless—a kind of untimely, or better yet *incisive* value. That the simple question might, at some moment, take on this incisive and critical value: such will be the first wish.

Kant, pertinently, spoke to us of limits. He drew, as from within, the contours of a net—a strange, opaque net whose every mesh is made only of mirrors. It is a device of enclosure, extendable as nets sometimes are, certainly, but as closed as a box: the *box of representation* within which every subject will throw himself at the walls as at reflections of himself. Here, then, is the subject of knowledge: it is speculative and specular at the same time, and the recovering of the speculative by the specular‡—of intellectual reflection by imaginary self-captation—is precisely wherein lies this *magical* character of the box, its character as resolvent closure, as self-satisfying suture. How then to get out of this magic circle, this box of mirrors, when this circle defines our own limits as knowing subjects?

We must keep struggling and, contra Kant, sound the walls, shake them, find their flaw.§ We must try to break through this reflecting zone where specular and speculative compete to invent the object of knowledge as a *simple image* of the discourse that pronounces it and judges it. Clearly such a gesture might, eventually, become tor-

**se débattre.*
†*ce débat.*
‡*le recouvrement du spéculaire sur le spéculatif.*
§*faille.*

mented—a torment endured as much as enacted, as can be read in the German texts of Panofsky himself—even suicidal. For by refusing the prisoner's misery as much as the maniac's triumph, anyone who breaks through even a patch of the wall already runs the risk of death for the subject of knowledge. Which is to say that he runs the risk of not-knowledge. But this risk will be suicidal only to him for whom knowledge is the whole of life.

We find ourselves yet again in the situation of the alienating choice. Let's give it a radical, if not exaggerated formulation: *to know without seeing* or *to see without knowing.* There is loss in either case. He who chooses only *to know* will have gained, of course, the unity of the synthesis and the self-evidence of simple reason; but he will lose the real of the object, in the symbolic closure of the discourse that reinvents the object in its own image, or rather in its own representation. By contrast, he who desires *to see,* or rather to look, will lose the unity of an enclosed world to find himself in the uncomfortable opening of a universe henceforth suspended, subject to all the winds of meaning; it is here that synthesis will become fragile to the point of collapse; and that the object of sight, eventually touched by a bit of the real,[1] will dismantle the subject of knowledge, dooming simple reason to something like a rend.* *Rend,* then, will be the first word, the first approximation with which to renounce the magic words of the history of art. This will be the first way of challenging Panofsky's notion that "the 'naive' beholder differs from the art historian in that the latter is conscious of the situation."[2]† There is indeed the naïveté of the spectator who knows nothing, but facing it there is also the double naïveté of he who folds‡ knowledge completely into truth, and who believes moreover that it makes sense to pronounce a sentence such as: "I am conscious of *everything* I do when I see an art image, because I *know* it."

**déchirure.*

†The French translation of this phrase reads: *conscient de ce qu'il fait,* "conscious of what he does."

‡*rabattre,* which figures in many idiomatic expressions pertaining to sewing but can also mean "to pull down," "to shut down," "to close"; hitherto rendered as "to collapse (into)."

Let's also remember that other—and so beautiful—statement by Panofsky: " 'The relation of the eye to the world' is in truth a relation of the soul to the world of the eye."[3] Let's remember its irreplaceable critical value—the positivist hope of grasping the real here being rent right through—but let's rend it in our turn, as one would rend the synthetic unity and the transcendental schematism inherited from Kant. For the "relation of the soul to the world of the eye" is none other than the *not-synthesis* of an insistence* that is itself torn between consciousness and the unconscious, and of a "world" that coheres only up to a point, beyond which logic reveals its flaw, its constitutional flaw. If we want to *open* the "box of representation," then we must make a double split: split the simple notion of *image,* and split the simple notion of *logic.* For the two constantly agree to give the history of art the specific self-evidence of its simple reason. To split the notion of the image would be, first, to return to an inflection of the word that speaks neither of imagery, nor of reproduction, nor of iconography, nor even of "figurative" appearance. It would be to return to a questioning of the image that does not *yet* presuppose the "figured figure"—by which I mean the figure fixed as representational object—but only the *figuring figure,* namely the process, the path, the question in action, made colors, made volume: to the still-open question of knowing just what, on a given painted surface or in a given recess in stone, might *become visible.* We must, by opening the box, open its eye to the dimension of an expectant gaze: wait until the visible "takes," and in this waiting try to put our finger on the *virtual* value of what we are trying to apprehend under the term *visual.* Will it then be *with passing time* that we might reopen the question of the image? And wouldn't this be a way of returning to the precious injunction previously formulated by Merleau-Ponty?

> The word "image" is in ill repute because we have thoughtlessly believed that a drawing† was a tracing, a copy, a second thing, and that the mental image was such a drawing in

**instance.*
†dessin.

> our private bric-a-brac. But if in fact it is nothing of the kind, then neither the drawing nor the painting belongs to the in-itself any more than the image does. They are the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which is possible because of a duplicity of awareness,* and without which we would never understand the quasi-presence and imminent visibility that make up the whole problem of the imaginary.[4]

We can understand, then, how thinking about the image might require something like *opening up a logic*. The objection Heidegger formulated against "science" and Kant's metaphysics can shed more light on our topic. For the world of images—if we can call it a world; let's say instead: the unfolding, the rain of stars of singular images—never offers its objects to us as terms in a logic susceptible of being expressed as propositions, true or false, correct or incorrect. It would be presumptuous to affirm the strictly *rational* character of images, as it would be incomplete to affirm their simple *empirical* character. In fact, it is the very opposition of empirical versus rational that doesn't work here, that fails to "apply" to artistic images. What does this mean? That everything eludes us? Not at all. Even a rain of stars has its structure. But the structure we are talking about is *open,* not in the sense Umberto Eco used the word "opening"—foregrounding a work's communicative and interpretive potential[5]—but in the sense that the structure will be rent, breached, ruined at its center as at the crucial point of its unfolding. The "world" of images does not reject the world of logic, quite the contrary. But it *plays* with it, which is to say, among other things, that it creates spaces there—in the sense that we speak of "play" between the parts of a machine—spaces from which it draws its power, which offers itself there as the *power of the negative.*[6]

Which is why we must try, before the image, to think the negative force within it. A question less topographical, perhaps, than dynamic or economic. A question of intensity more than of extension, level, or locale. There is a *work* of the negative in the image, a "dark" efficacy

**du sentir.*

that, so to speak, eats away at the visible (the order of represented appearances) and murders the legible (the order of signifying configurations). From a certain point of view, moreover, this work or constraint can be envisaged as a *regression,* since it brings us, with ever-startling force, toward a this-side-of,* toward something that the symbolic elaboration of artworks has covered over or remodeled. There is here a kind of *anadyomene* movement, a movement whereby something that has plunged into the water momentarily reemerges, is born before quickly plunging in again: it is the *materia informis* when it shows through† form, it is the presentation when it shows through representation, it is opacity when it shows through transparency, it is the visual when it shows through the visible.

I am not sure, to be frank, whether "negative" is the right word here. It would be so only on condition that it not be understood as privation pure and simple. That is why, in this optic, we are using the *visual* and not the invisible as the element of this constraint of negativity within which images are caught, catch us. That is also why the negative here has no nihilist or simply "negativist" connotations, any more than it aims at a nostalgia or at any general philosophy of negativity whatever. It is not a matter of establishing in aesthetics a dubious generality of the unrepresentable. It is not a matter of appealing to a poetics of unreason, of the drive-driven, or to an ethics of mute contemplation, or even to an apologia for ignorance before the image. It is just a matter of looking intently at the paradox, the kind of learned ignorance to which images constrain us. Our dilemma, our alienating choice was described a few lines back in rather crude terms; we must specify, reiterate that this choice is constitutively a *constraint,* and thus is not at all a matter of choosing one piece, of cutting through‡—knowing *or* seeing: the "or" here being simply exclusionary, not reflective of an alienation—but of knowing how to remain in the dilemma, *between knowing and seeing,* between knowing something and not seeing another thing in any case, but seeing something in any case and not-knowing some other thing . . . In no case is it a matter

***vers un en-deçà.*

†*affleurer,* which can also mean, in geology, "to outcrop."

‡*trancher,* as in "cutting through a dilemma" or "cutting through the gordian knot."

of replacing the tyranny of a thesis with that of its antithesis. It's a matter only of proceeding dialectically: of thinking the thesis *with* its antithesis, the architecture with its flaws, the rule with its transgression, the discourse with its slips of the tongue, the function with its dysfunction (beyond Cassirer, then), and the fabric with its rend . . .

To think the fabric (the fabric of representation) *with its rend,* to think the function (the symbolic function) *with its interruption* or its constitutional dysfunction: as it happens, this had been taken on almost forty years before Panofsky's iconology, and more than twenty years before Cassirer's "symbolic forms." This had been courageously begun by a thinker and a practitioner, a man very attentive to the phenomenology of a visible of which he was nonetheless wary, a scientist extraordinarily quick to question the certainties of the very science that he practiced, an individual who, with rare resolve, pursued the dangerous adventure of grounding a nonspecular knowledge, a knowledge capable of thinking the work of not-knowledge within him. That individual was Freud. Remember that his great book *The Interpretation of Dreams,* published in 1900, is devoted to the *anadyomene* movement of a plunge into the nether regions that produces the surge of nocturnal images.[7] Remember that after being confronted by the all too visible enigma of hysterical symptoms, he set off on the disquieting and unstable road of dreams as on a "royal road to knowledge *(Kenntnis,* and not *Wissenschaft)* of the unconscious."[8] Remember that the road in question would take him to a more decisive and new understanding of the notion of symptom. A decisive and new way of *seeing:* which is why we must come to a halt here when the image catches us in the play of not-knowledge.

It is with the dream and the symptom that Freud smashed the box of representation. And with them that he opened, which is to say rent and liberated, the notion of image. Far from comparing the dream with a painting or a figurative drawing, he insisted on its value as distortion *(Enstellung)* and on the play of logical ruptures by which the "spectacle" of the dream is often breached, as by a perforating rain. The metaphor of the rebus often comes up in his writing so as to

liberate, from the outset, our understanding of the dream from all figurative bias—a famous passage:

> Suppose I have a picture-puzzle *[Bilderrätsel],* a rebus, in front of me. It depicts a house with a boat on its roof, a single letter of the alphabet, the figure of a running man whose head has been conjured away, and so on. Now I might be misled into raising objections and declaring that the picture as a whole and its component parts are nonsensical *[unsinnig].* A boat has no business being on the roof of a house, and a headless man cannot run.[9] Moreover, the man is bigger than the house; and if the whole picture is intended to represent a landscape, letters of the alphabet are out of place in it since such objects do not occur in nature. But obviously we can only form a proper judgment of the rebus if we put aside criticisms such as these of the whole composition and its parts and if, instead, we try to replace each separate image by a syllable or word that can be presented by that image *[durch das Bild darstellbar ist*—and not *vorstellbar ist]* in some way or other. The words which are put together in this way are no longer nonsensical but may form a poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance. A dream is a picture-puzzle of this sort and our predecessors in the field of dream-interpretation have made the mistake of treating the rebus as a graphic composition *[zeichnerische Komposition].*[10]

We are here at the beginning of a movement that will never stop deepening and radicalizing its blow against, its rend through the classic concept of representation: something, right there, presents itself visually, but it is not a drawing—rather a paradoxical organization that throws off track both the meaning of the discourse that we expected to read in it (this is the *unsinnig* in our passage) and the representational transparency of the elements figured the one with the other (this is the *Bilderrätsel,* inexplicable to anyone who looks at it as a mimetic work of art). From the outset, then, Freud proposed a

visual model that cannot be accounted for either by the classic notion of *disegno,* with its mimetic transparency, or by that of the image-monogram (Kant's schema), with its synthetic homogeneity. Freud's example, moreover, presents itself less as an example of a closed object, the result of a work, than as a paradigm of the work itself. It opens, in effect, the chapter in *The Interpretation of Dreams* devoted to "the dream-work" *(Traumarbeit).* It therefore provides the structural paradigm of a functioning—a very strange functioning in which the rend, after having breached the too-stable, idealist entities of a drawing or schema, will invest* the very idea of *function* as Cassirer could understand it after Kant.[11]

A function that is rent—that includes the power of the negative within it—presides, then, as *work,* over the intense or evanescent visuality of dream images. How are we to understand such work? Even beyond the metaphor proposed in the paradigm of the rebus, Freud warns us against making "a plastic representation *(plastische Vorstellung)* of the psychical conditions during the dream-formation."[12] If a topography of some kind is at work in dream-formation—and in unconscious processes generally—it cannot be folded into either the empiricism of our sensible space, in other words that of our "lived space," or into the Kantian idea of an *a priori,* of an ideal category issuing from some transcendental aesthetic.[13] The problem can be envisaged only on the basis of what, more modestly, *presents itself*—and it is not by chance that Freud begins to problematize the notion of the dream-work by insisting on the so often fragmentary presentation of dreams, on their character as *shreds put together.*† What presents itself crudely at first, what presents itself and refuses the idea, is the rend. It is an outside-subject image, an image that is all dream-image. It will impose itself here only by dint of the omission *(Auslassung)* or retrenchment of which it is, strictly speaking, the *vestige:* the sole survival, simultaneously a sovereign remainder and the trace of an erasure. A visual agent of disappearance. Which makes it possible for Freud to conclude in stride that a dream is no more a translation

**investira,* which can also mean "will besiege."
†*lambeaux mis ensemble.*

aiming at "legibility" than it is a figurative drawing aiming at "visibility."[14]

This is not the place to detail the many inferences, always rigorous but always audacious, through which Freud guides us toward this *metapsychological* understanding of the dream-work. It will suffice to recall how the simple phenomenology of omission in the dream comes to be seen as a "work of condensation" *(Verdichtungsarbeit),* and how the simple phenomenology of the dream riddle comes to be seen as another kind of "work," called displacement *(Verschiebungsarbeit).* This makes us understand better what it is about dreams that prohibits functional synthesis, in the strict sense of the term: "The dream is . . . *differently centered,*" Freud tells us, and this *differently* breaches elements of meaning, objects, figures, but also intensities, values.[15] This *differently* never stops acting and traveling. It invests everything.* It gives a paradoxical law—a constraint, rather—that is a law of lability, a law of not-rule. The law of the insistent exception, the law or *sovereignty of that which excepts itself*† in the visible as well as in the legible and in propositional logic.

That is why Freud's analysis of the "means of presentation" or "figuration" in dreams *(Darstellungsmittel des Traums)* will unfold as a theoretical work of opening logic as much as opening the image. It is, in effect, from the angle of "dreams hav[ing] no means at their disposal for presenting . . . logical relations between the dream-thoughts" that dream figuration is put into play from the outset.[16] But here again, the negativity that emerges from this assertion has nothing to do with the idea of a privation pure and simple. The negativity becomes work—the work of "presentation," of the *Darstellung.* Incapable of representing temporal relations—of signifying them, of making them visible and legible as such—the dream-work will make do with *presenting* together, visually, elements that a representational discourse (or discursive representation) would normally have differentiated or inferred from one another. Causal relations will yield to *copresentation.*[17]‡ "Frequency" will become multiplicity, and temporal

**Il investit tout;* alternatively, "It besieges everything."

†*de ce qui s'excepte.*

‡*coprésence;* SE: "collocation"; Crick: "combinations"; German: *zuzammenstellung.* (Re abbreviations, see head of endnotes.)

relations will generally become spatial ones.[18] Likewise, writes Freud, "The dream has no way at all of expressing the alternative 'either . . . or.' It usually takes up the two options into one context as if they had equal rights"—in other words, again, as if they were co-presented or collocated: it will present all of the alternative possibilities together, despite their being "almost mutually exclusive" from the logical point of view.[19] Finally:

> The dream has a very striking way of dealing with the category of *opposites* and *contradictions*. This is simply disregarded. To the dream "No" does not seem to exist. In particular, it prefers to draw opposites together into a unity or to present them as one *[in einem dargestellt]*. Indeed, it also takes the liberty of presenting some random element by its wished-for opposite, so that at first one cannot tell which of the possible poles is meant positively or negatively in the dream-thoughts.[20]

So the ground of certainty crumbles. Anything becomes possible: co-presentation can mean agreement *and* disagreement, simple presentation can mean the thing *and* its opposite. And simple presentation can itself be an effect of co-presentation (through the process of *identification),* even an effect of antithetical and unnatural co-presentation (through the process of *composite formation)*. Along with certainty, then, there crumbles another section* of mimesis: "The possibility of creating composite images *[Mischbildungen]*† stands foremost among the characteristics that so often lend dreams a fantastic aspect, for it introduces into the dream-content elements that could never have been objects of actual perception."[21] All contrasts and all differences will be crystallized in the substance of a single image, whereas the same substance will ruin all philosophical quiddity in the splitting up of its subject. Such are the disconcerting poetics of dreams: time is overthrown in them, rent, and logic along with it. Not only do conse-

**pan.*

†SE: "composite structures." *Bild* can accommodate both renderings.

quences anticipate their causes, they *are* their causes—and their negation as well. "Reversal, or turning a thing into its opposite *[Umkehrung, Verwandlung ins Gegenteil],* is one of the means of presentation most favored by the dream-work," notes Freud, who goes so far as to observe the same kind of work on the level of the *affects* attached to dream-images.[22] Thus will the representation effectively be split from itself, and the affect from the representation, and the affect from itself: as if the dream-work were driven by the paradoxical stakes of a visuality that simultaneously *imposes itself,* troubles us, insists, and pursues us—precisely insofar as *we do not know* what about it troubles us, what kind of trouble is in question, and just what it might mean . . .

Even this very brief overview of Freud's problematic makes us see how the visual "logic"—if the term "logic" still makes any sense—of the image here contravenes the serene certainties of a thought that wants to express itself in the classic terms of *disegno,* or in those, Kantian, of the schema and the monogram. We would of course have to track more precisely how Freud managed to account, in the dream-work, for all the play of displacement, oriented *and* disoriented; how the use of "ready-made symbols" is interwoven *with* the invention of unprecedented symbolic values, of singular traits that it would have been impossible to predict; how linguistic structures are elaborated, *but* whose grammar and code have no law save to disappear as such; how the extraordinary exchange between verbal forms and the forms of objects is produced along chains of association; how absurdity comes therein to rhyme with calculation and close reasoning; how all this work, all these requirements, all these selections aim *at the same time* only to make the image into an agent of attraction and "regression," in the technical sense—a sense that is topographical, formal, and temporal—introduced by Freud.[23] We would, finally, in order to grasp fully this rend introduced into the classic notion of the image, have to take note of the disconcerting moves displayed by the dream-work with regard to what we usually call resemblance.

For the dream draws an essential part of its visual power from resemblance. Everything, in the dream, resembles or seems to bear the enigmatic stamp of a resemblance. But how? What resemblance

is in question? Everything lies here. Aristotle had indeed warned, at the beginning of his *Poetics,* that the essential meaning of imitation and resemblance can vary in accordance with changes in *means, objects,* and *modes*[24]—but we are frequently tempted (and more than ever since Vasari) to fold all resemblance into the model of the mimetic drawing of the Renaissance (or rather, into the model of our post-Vasari idea of drawing and of the Renaissance). It bears repeating that the dream-work offers itself as a work of resemblance that has little to do with a *zeichnerische Komposition,* a graphic composition, a Vasarian *disegno.* Resemblance *works* in the dream—even before showing itself, like wood before it splits—in accordance with an efficacy, Freud warns us from the outset, that operates "in multifarious ways" *(mit mannigfachen Mitteln).*[25] Thus the resemblances offer simultaneously "the first foundations for the construction of a dream" and the most singular ramifications to which each element of the dream is susceptible, for "no inconsiderable part of the dream-work consists in creating fresh parallels where those which are already present cannot find their way into the dream owing to the censorship imposed by resistance."[26]

Good sense told us that an act of resembling consisted in exhibiting the ideal and *formal unity* of two objects, two persons, or two separated material substrata; the dream-work, by contrast, provides Freud with an occasion to insist on the vector of *contact,* material and not formal *(Berührung),* that generates processes or paths of resemblance in dream imagery.[27] To resemble no longer means, then, a settled state but a *process,* an active figuration that, little by little or all of a sudden, makes two elements touch that previously were separated (or separated according to the order of discourse). Resemblance is henceforth no longer an intelligible characteristic, but a mute movement that propagates itself and invents sovereign contact like an infection, a collision, or even a fire. Good sense also told us, on the other hand, that the act of resembling presupposed that there were *two:* two separate subjects between which the resemblance will construct an ideal juncture, like the delicate span of a bridge suspended between two mountains; the dream-work demonstrates to us, by contrast, that resemblance here can take leaps, make *knots* or conglomerations; that it knows how to destroy delicate dualities and ruin all possibility of

comparing, hence of representing to oneself, hence of knowing distinctly something of the resemblance that, simply, right there, presents itself. Such will be the consequence imposed in the dream by the "tendency toward condensation" that Freud invokes to explain the fact that "the common element that justifies, or rather causes, the combination of the two persons may be represented in the dream or may be omitted from it":

> As a rule the identification or construction of a composite person takes place for the very purpose of avoiding the representation of the common element. Instead of saying: "A has hostile feelings towards me and so has B," I make a composite figure out of A and B in the dream, or I imagine A performing an act of some other kind which is characteristic of B. The dream-figure thus constructed appears in the dream in some quite new connection, and the circumstance that it represents both A and B justifies me in inserting at the appropriate point in the interpretation the element which is common to both of them, namely a hostile attitude towards me. It is often possible in this way to achieve quite a remarkable amount of condensation in the content of a dream; I do not need to make a direct representation of a complicated set of circumstances relating to a person, if I have found someone else to associate with him who has the same claim on some of those circumstances. It is easy to see, too, how well this method of presentation by means of identification *[Darstellung durch Identifizierung]* can serve to circumvent the censorship set up by resistance, which imposes such severe conditions on the dream-work.[28]

Good sense told us, finally, that resemblance was meant to establish between two terms something like a reconciliation of the *same;* the dream-work will rend the serenity of such reconciliations from within. When this *same* is represented, Freud tells us, "it is usually a hint for us to look for another, concealed common element whose figuration has been made impossible by the censorship. A displace-

ment *(Verschiebung)* in regard to the common element has been made in order, as it were, to facilitate its figuration."[29] What does this imply? That mimetic sameness is constantly ruined by the work of displacement, to the same extent that the duality of the poles of resemblance is constantly ruined by the work of condensation. So resemblance no longer exhibits the Same, but is infected with alterity, whereas the resembling terms bang together in a chaos—the *"Mischbildung"*—that renders impossible their actual recognition as terms. So there are no longer any worthwhile "terms," only knotted relations, transitions that crystallize. Now this kind of *altered compression* of resemblance has a decisive implication for our topic, which is the implacable interweaving of *formation into distortion.** When Freud insists on the not-realism of composite images, and on the fact that they no longer correspond at all to our habitual objects of visible perception—despite, or rather because of their specific visual intensity—he steers us toward a notion of resemblance that will accept as its ultimate consequence "reversal, or turning a thing into its opposite *[die Umkehrung, Verwandlung ins Gegenteil]*."[30]

Thus the "processes of dream-figuration"—for such is the subheading under which Freud introduced us to all these paradoxes†—manage to split, along with resemblance, what we usually understand by "figurative representation." The dream makes use of resemblance only to produce "a mass of distortion *[ein Mass von Enstellung]* in the material which is to be represented, and this has a positively paralyzing effect, to begin with, on any attempt at understanding the dream."[31] Here's what seems to distance, definitively, the *figurability* operative in the dream-work—which every night pursues us alone—from the cultural world of painted and sculpted *figurations*—which every Sunday we go to admire, *en famille,* on the walls of some art museum . . . But all this is not as simple or clear-cut as it might seem, and Freud would not stop there. Some thirty pages after having invoked, against the metaphor of *disegno,* that of the rebus, he returns, oddly, to the same visual-arts paradigm. But why do this? To elaborate

**l'entrelacement indéfectible de la "formation dans la déformation."*

†SE and Crick: "The Means of Representation." German: *Die Darstellungensmittel des Traums.*

a homology of representations? To excavate an irrevocable difference? Nothing of the kind. Freud advances the pictorial paradigm only so as to effect a transition, paradoxically, from a *rend* to a *disfiguration.* It is effectively from the angle of a flaw, an incapacity—an "incapacity to express" logical relations *(diese Ausdrucksfähigkeit abgeht)*—that the plastic arts are invoked here in relation to figurability in dreams; and it is not without interest to find under Freud's pen the lapidary but so accurate indication that "the reason for their incapacity lies in the nature of the material *[in dem Material],*" just as this "incapacity to express [logical relations] must lie in the nature of the psychical material *[am psychischen Materiel]* out of which dreams are made."[32] And the famous passage that ensues, evoking the medieval use of phylacteries, or text-scrolls, to indicate statements made by painted figures, is included only to underscore the *defective paradigm* of the visual arts, the discourse or words *(die Rede)* that painters—Freud lets himself imagine—"despaired of representing pictorially."[33]

Freud thus broached the question of the figurable from the angle of a constitutive rend or incapacity. But far from finding here an argument for ineffability or for something like a neo-Romantic philosophy of the unfigurable, immediately thereafter he moved on to the almost "experimental" conception of a *work* of figuration envisaged *with its rend*—its rend at work. Here we are at the exemplary and tangible place of a radical difference from what Cassirer would understand, some years later, by "symbolic function" as well as by "function" in general. Freud effectively proposes to understand the dream's "inability to express" in terms other than those of privation pure and simple, which means in plain language that logical relations, incapable of being represented in the dream as such, will be *figured just the same . . . by means of an appropriate disfiguration:* "dreams can take into account some of the logical relations between the dream-thoughts by making an appropriate modification in the method of figuration characteristic of dreams."[34]

So we understand that the incapacity or rend functions in dreams as the very motor of something that will be between a desire and a constraint—the constraining desire to figure. To figure despite everything, thus to force, thus to rend. And in this constraining movement,

the rend opens the figure, in all of this verb's many senses. It becomes something like the very principle and energy—incited by the effect of the rending, namely the absence—of the work of figurability. By hollowing out the representation, it *calls forth* the figure and its presentation *(Darstellung),* it triggers the infinite process of the tangent that is a fundamental characteristic of the very notion of figure. *Tropos* and *figura* have always yielded, we know, the notion of turn and detour.[35]* They are detour made presentation, and when we look into the dream's ways of figuration, we understand better why it proves pointless to try to distinguish what belongs to language from what belongs to the visible: for the truth is that the problem lies elsewhere, that the figure thus understood foils in its rhetorical proliferation the pure and simple legibility of a discourse, and that it foils just as much, in its power of presentation, the pure and simple visibility of a "figurative" representation in the academic sense of the term.

We will perhaps never exhaust the consequences of such a *figural play*—one whereby the rend takes a detour so that the detour comes to present itself visually. In this sense, the rend opens just as much to the elaborative complexity of the dream-work as to the tenacious opacity of its "regressive" character. It incites the motley proliferation of figures, it nonetheless imposes the blank sovereignty of its vacant opening.† It *opens,* I said; in short, it generates incessant constellations, incessant visual productions that do not stop the "incapacity" but, on the contrary, clinch and underscore it. This persistence—or better: insistence—of the negative corresponds, in a certain way, to the paradox of resemblance with which Freud was confronted before the dream and the symptom. A paradox whereby resembling would equal dissembling, and *figuring would equal disfiguring,* since figuring "just the same" and taking relations inexpressible as such "into account" was indeed equivalent to "making an appropriate modification in the method of figuration characteristic of dreams."[36]

Pertaining to this paradox, which Freud will never abandon when he has to account for an *unconscious formation*—for example when

***du tour et détour;* the sense of *tour* here is related to *tournure,* "turn of phrase," and that of *détour* to *un discours plein de détours,* "a roundabout way of speaking."

†*la blanche souveraineté de son ouverture à vide.*

he insists on the distortion *(Entstellung)* involved in every symptom-formation *(Symptombildung)*—we find at the end of his chapter on the dream-work a famous turn of phrase whose apparent simplicity should not obscure its profound theoretical import. "It does not think, calculate, or judge in any way at all" *(urteilt überhaupt nicht),* which already takes us poles apart from the *Urteilskraft,* the power of judgment that still resonated through the whole of Kant's philosophy. So for judgment and its "function" will be substituted a "work"—a work much less synthetic and much less abyssal than all the functions in the world . . . a work that "restricts itself to giving things a new form."[37] A verb that here says to us both formation *and* distortion—a loss of "form" (in the sense of the *Idea)* in any case, a failure of intelligible subsumption. in any case.

But just how does this evocation of the dream-work bear on our question? Didn't Freud warn us from the outset against all "artistic" understanding of the dream-work, drawing an emphatic distinction between the rebus, posited as the paradigm for dreams, and the pervasive notion of dreams as graphic compositions? He did indeed, and simply listing the "artistic" examples in Freud's text clearly won't suffice to elucidate the profound value of such examples. The question of the Freudian aesthetic, the question of what Freud thought about art, and how he hoped to provide a psychoanalytic account of artistic creativity—all these questions remain dubious in their very formulation, but in any case they don't come into our present topic. The problem here is quite different: it's a matter only—this will already be a quite a lot—of understanding how Freud's notion of *figurability,* if as we said it "opens" the classic concept of representation, might concern or breach our gaze when we look at art images. In short, how the representation that "is opened" can show us something more in what we usually call the representations of painting.

We are not *before** painted or sculpted images in the same way that we are before, or rather *in* the visual images of our dreams. The former present themselves as tangible objects; they are manipulable

* *devant.*

and amenable to collection, classification, and preservation. The latter disappear very quickly as definite objects and gradually melt into simple moments—unintelligible moments—of ourselves, vestiges of our destinies, unclassifiable bundles of our "subjective" being. Art images circulate in the human community, and to a certain extent we can say that they are made to be understood; at the very least, they are addressed to, shared among, acquired by others. Whereas our dream images do not ask to be acquired or understood by anyone.[38] But the greatest difference doubtless comes down to our being awake when we are before art images—in the waking state that makes for the lucidity, the force of our *seeing*—whereas we are asleep in dream images, or rather we are sealed off in them by sleep—from the shared isolation* that perhaps makes for the force of our *gaze.*

Paintings are of course not dreams. We see them with open eyes, but this may be what hinders us and makes us miss something in them. Lacan aptly noted that "in the so-called waking state, there is elision of the gaze, and an elision of the fact that not only does it look, *it* also *shows.*"[39]† "It shows" in dreams because "it presents itself"—with all the force that the verb *darstellen* has in Freud—and "it looks" by very reason of the visual presence of what is presented . . . Our hypothesis is at base quite banal and quite simple: in a figurative painting, "it represents" and "it sees itself"—but something, just the same, shows itself there, too, looks at itself there, looks at us there. The whole problem of course being to discern the economy of this *just the same* and to think the status of this *something.*

How to name this? How to broach it? This *something,* this *just the same* are in place of an opening and a scission: vision is here rent between seeing and looking; the image is rent between representing and self-presenting. In this rend, then, something is at work that I cannot grasp—or that cannot grasp me wholly, lastingly—because I am not dreaming, but that nonetheless breaches me in the visibility of the painting like an event of the gaze, ephemeral and partial. If it is true that every night dreams occasion an absolutely deployed visu-

**isolement partenaire.*

†*non seulement ça regarde, mais "ça montre";* note that *ça* ("it") is the standard French translation of Freud's *Es,* rendered in the SE as "Id."

ality and an absolutely sovereign reign of the gaze—if that is true, then I can broach this *something* of the painting only by way of a paradigm, not of the dream as such (what is a dream as such? No one knows), but of the *dream-forgetting* (every morning we know what that is, by which I mean that we experience it). In other words: the visual event of the painting happens only starting from this rend that, before us, separates what is represented as remembered from *everything that presents itself as forgotten.* So the most beautiful aesthetics—the most desperate, too, since they are generally doomed to stalemate or madness—will be those aesthetics that, in order to open themselves completely to the dimension of the visual, want us to close our eyes before the image, so as no longer to see it but only to look at it, and no longer forget what Blanchot called "the *other* night," the night of Orpheus.[40] Such aesthetics are always singular, strip themselves bare in not-knowledge, and never hesitate to call *vision* that which no waking person can see.[41] But for us historians and art historians, we who awaken every morning with the sense of a *sovereign but forgotten* dream visuality, writing and speech are all that are left to us to make this oblivion into an eventual support for our knowledge, its vanishing point above all, its vanishing point toward not-knowledge.

Perhaps now we will better understand the importance of the paradigm of the dream. What above all makes it a paradigm? Not so much for the object of interpretation—namely the work of art that we might want to "compare" to the dream—as for the *solicitation to interpret,* to use an expression advanced by Pierre Fédida in the field of psychoanalysis itself: "What theory uncovers is directly dependent on a *Traumdeutung* as dream-practice. Here the theory receives its original meaning only from the status acquired by the speech *[parole]* of the interpretation and as such is solicited by the dream."[42] Dream-forgetting plays an absolutely crucial role in this solicitation, since by gathering so to speak the "material of sleep," it proposes to interpretation the very opacity of its "vanishing point":

> What remains of a dream upon waking is destined to be fragmentary, and that is how psychoanalysis understands it. Destined to fall apart, it has no vocation as symbolic synthe-

> sis or as totalizing interpretation. The dream-forgetting is no more relative to a defect of memory or judgment than the memory of it is beholden to intellectual performance. Like the doubt affecting a dream-memory, the forgetting is relative to the thought disturbances known as already-seen, already-told, false recognition, etc. So the dream-forgetting gathers *the material of sleep* in which it is made and is also the sensibility of its speech. The forgetting is, so to speak, that from which and toward which is delineated the *umbilical cord* of the dream—just as it is the vanishing point of the interpretation.[43]

Although evanescent, the vanishing point indeed exists. It is there, before us—even stamped by oblivion. It is there as a trace, a remainder. Let's imagine ourselves before the painting as in a situation symmetrical (and thus not identical) to that of the dream: the regime of representation would then function only on a bed of *nocturnal remains,* forgotten as such but making up *material for the gaze.* Which is to say making us reconnect, for the space of a remainder—or the time of a remainder—with the essential visuality of the image, with its gaze-power:* its power to at once be looked at and look at us, to cut us off, to implicate us. Here doubtless is that modality of *just the same* that we sought to envisage: in the lucid waking state presupposed by our customary relation to the visible, in the ideal completeness proposed by the configurations of representation, something—a remainder, then, a stamp of oblivion—comes or comes again *just the same* bearing its nocturnal trouble, its virtual power. Something that alters the world of represented forms like a material will come to alter the formal perfection of a line. Something that must indeed be called a *symptom,* to the extent that it is true that there are no symptoms—in Freud's sense—without some work of forgetting.

It is obvious that the simple fact of taking such a dimension into account, when we pose our gaze to art images, singularly modifies the conditions of our knowledge, its practice as well as its theoretical

**son pouvoir de regard.*

limits. *What is a knowledge of the visual symptom,* if the symptom comes to coil in our very eyes, strips us bare, rends us, places us in question, interrogates our own capacity to forget? We should answer this question in at least two ways: first by searching history for the figures of such a knowledge, since it would be absurd to imagine some limited "modernity" of the symptom—and since we have always given ourselves up to the symptom, in our own eyes as elsewhere.[44] Then by trying to draw the methodological and critical consequences for us of the ones elaborated by Freud in his own field, in his own standoff with the symptom. Concerning this last point, the situation seems as clear as it is fragile: the symptom prohibits, to repeat the above-cited terms of Pierre Fédida, all "symbolic synthesis" and all "totalizing interpretation."[45] Like the dream-work and the remainder-work, the symptom offers itself only through the rend and the partial disfiguration that it inflicts wherever it appears. And again like the dream, the symptom envisaged as an "unconscious formation" prohibited from the outset Freud's taking the road of an idealist, transcendental, or metaphysical metapsychology, in other words the road of a knowledge unified in, or *by,* its grounding principle. The prefix "-meta" in "metapsychology," then, should be understood in a way opposite to the way we understand it in the word "metaphysics." And first of all because Freud's metapsychology developed as an insistent assertion of the *flimsiness of syntheses*—beginning with the very notions "ego"* and "consciousness"—which makes it an epistemic attitude of "resistance to the temptation of synthesis."[46]

The consequences of such an attitude would make any self-respecting positivist researcher turn pale. Here we come face-to-face with the symptom as with a kind of constraint to unreason, where facts can no longer be distinguished from fictions, where facts are essentially fictive and fictions efficacious. On the other hand, psychoanalytic interpretation often does nothing other—the only possible attitude in face of the dream-work and the work of the symptom—than "strip words of their meaning," advancing them only "literally to rip [them] from the dictionary and from language," a way of "de-meaning"

**moi.*

them.[47] When Freud was dealing with a relatively coherent dream scenario, far from resting content with such a haven of intelligibility, he smashed everything into pieces and started over with what was left, convinced that in such cases a "secondary revision" *(sekundäre Bearbeitung)* was screening the dream-work as such.[48] When, about the Schreber case, for example, he advanced the term "rationalization" *(Rationalisierung),* introduced in 1908 by Ernest Jones, this was only to evoke a defensive compulsion or reaction formation that had donned the mask of reason—and for that very reason verged on madness.[49] Freud, finally, dared to advocate as an interpretive method something that, in the jargon of historians, often takes on the aspect of a grave insult: namely "over-interpretation" *(Überdeutung)*—a response that was, however, methodologically inevitable to the "over-determination" *(Überdeterminierung)* of the phenomena under consideration:[50]

> The most difficult thing is to persuade the beginner in dream interpretation that his task is not at an end when he has a complete interpretation in his hands, one that is meaningful and coherent, and throws light upon every element of the dream-content. For the same dream may perhaps have another interpretation as well, an "over-interpretation," that has escaped him. Indeed, it is not easy to form any conception of the abundance of the unconscious trains of thought, all striving to find expression, that are active in ours minds. Nor is it easy to credit the skill shown by the dream-work in always hitting upon forms of expression that can bear several meanings, rather like the Little Tailor in the fairy tale who hit seven flies at one blow. Readers will always be inclined to accuse this author of excessive ingenuity, but a little experience would teach them better.[51]

Thus does psychoanalysis confront not-knowledge as the very exuberance of thought (of associative thought). Recognition of the paradoxical nature of the processes at work in dreams and symptoms requires a like recognition that this paradox *breaches knowledge**—this

**atteint le savoir.*

knowledge that we nonetheless strive to retain yet a while, even to ground. Lacan came up with some resounding formulations of this situation, noting of the "sinthom"* (a spelling that itself mimics overdetermination) that it made him "as uneasy as an apple would a fish," that he got tangled up in it as if faced with an enigma "such as can nowise be analyzed" to the end—and that the analyst could enter into this tangle "only to recognize in his knowledge the symptom of his ignorance"; a way of addressing to the psychoanalyst the paradoxical injunction of his ethic: "What you must know: ignore what you know."[52] Here's how psychoanalysis can play the role of a critical tool within the "human sciences" generally—as their symptom, perhaps, which is to say as the return of a repressed in them—now that the mastery of knowledge is attaining, even in the so-called conjectural sciences, prodigious degrees of efficacy. Knowing† something about the symptom does not require further knowledge,‡ a knowledge that is more finely equipped: since it isn't *notable* as such, it more radically requires modifying once again—after the one Kant asked us to make—the *position of the subject* of knowledge.[53]§

Historians of art have sometimes tried to think critically, in a Kantian or neo-Kantian mode, about the extension and limits of their own discipline. But they have in every kind of way—and always in a neo-Kantian mode—placed themselves in the command center of the knowledge** that they produced. They have certainly sharpened their eyes, given their practice "consciousness" (and "conscience"),†† refuted all that is naive, or let's say: almost everything. In art images they have looked for signs, symbols, and the manifestation of stylistic noumena, but only very rarely have they looked at the symptom, because to look at the symptom would be to risk their eyes in the central rend of images, in its quite troubled efficacy. That would have been to accept the constraint of a not-knowledge, and thus to dislodge

**sinthome.*
†*connaître.*
‡*savoir.*
§*connaissance.*
***savoir.*
††*conscience,* whose two meanings I have unpacked above—trans.

themselves from a central and advantageous position, the powerful position of the *subject who knows.* Historians of art have been wary of the symptom, because they identified it with illness—a notion too disagreeable for so beautiful a thing as art. Or indeed, to the contrary, they advanced the specter of the symptom to disqualify forms of art that do not enter into their schemas, all the deviations, degenerations, and other clinical connotations of words that speak of art we don't like . . . But in both cases they turned their backs on the very concept of the symptom, which Freud, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis,* took great pains to distinguish from the illness per se.[54] They wanted to *know art,** invented art in the sutured image of their knowledge. They did not want *their knowledge to be rent* in the image of that which, in the image, rends the image itself.

Why, finally, call this power of the rend *symptom?* Just what are we to understand by this? *Symptom* speaks to us of the infernal scansion, the *anadyomene* movement of the visual in the visible and of presence in representation.[55] It speaks to us of the insistence and return of the singular in the regular, it speaks to us of the fabric that rends itself, of the rupture of equilibrium and of a new equilibrium, an unprecedented equilibrium that soon will break itself again. And what it tells us is untranslatable but interpretable, and interprets itself endlessly. It places us before its visual power as before the emergence of the very process of figurability.[56] It teaches us in this sense—in the brief space of a symptom, then—what figuring is, bearing within itself its own theoretical force. But this is a theory that is active, made flesh, so to speak, a theory whose power happens, paradoxically, when the unity of forms, their ideal synthesis, breaks apart, and this breaking apart gushes a material's strangeness. So *symptom* will be the second not-magic word, the second approximation for renouncing the idealism of the history of art—its vocation to Vasari's *idea* as much as to the philosophical "form" given new currency by Panofsky.

This very last point might seem surprising. Didn't Panofsky quote the long and beautiful phrase of Heidegger, in which the problem of

**savoir,* and likewise to the end of the paragraph.

interpretation was evoked in the guise not of a reiteration of the "explicitly said"—namely, as Freud would say, of the "manifest content"—but of something like a revelation of the "latent" or *unexpressed* content that the interpreter, said Heidegger, "sets before our eyes as still unsaid"?[57] . . . But we saw how Panofsky implicitly repudiated the hypothesis of interpretive violence that this passage ultimately supported. Let's go farther, however, and persist in objecting: from Germany to America, Panofsky never stopped telling us about figurative *symptoms,* even the *unconscious,* and even *metapsychology.* The discretion of the references does not get us out of taking them into consideration. For the stakes here are important: they touch upon the very status of what Panofsky really understood by *symbolic form.* They touch upon the way Panofsky envisaged the "intrinsic"—and not manifest—content of works of art. The expression "symbolic form" indeed indicates to us that here, in any case, Panofsky touched upon the so important and current problem of the *symbol,* that it's a matter of the problem of *the* symbolic—the essential and everyday material with which all iconographers work—or a matter *of* the symbolic, in the sense of a function that is even more basic, governing the figurability and the meaning of art images. But we still don't know how Panofsky understood this material or this function, how he situated the ideas of symptom and symbol with respect to each other.

Here we must go back to some essential texts in which Panofsky introduced this theoretical constellation. First there is his early article on the problem of style, which closes with a call for a "scientific knowledge" *(wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis)* capable of broaching artistic phenomena "from the point of view of fundamental metaphysical conditions" *(von den metaphysischen Grundbedingungen).* Now to qualify in more concrete terms the act of going-beyond that is a presupposition of access to such fundamental conditions, Panofsky introduced two very strong—and, in a sense, inspired*—theoretical requirements, which consisted in revealing the "metahistorical and metapsychological" *(metahistorischen und metapsychologischen)* sense of the

**géniales.*

phenomena under study.[58] There was something, of course, in this ambitious double qualification, of a thinker trying to rid himself of the classic historiography, and of the conceptual and "psychological" grip of Wölfflin's work. But there was also more there, precisely in the sense that this double exigency, formulated in 1915, left an empty space, a space of theoretical desire that the notion of the "symbolic form" refined by Ernst Cassirer some ten years earlier would finally fill.

It is all the same troubling to note that it was precisely in 1915 that Freud, through the very term *metapsychology,* finished advocating for the ultimate theoretical dimension of the practice invented by him fifteen years earlier: psychoanalysis.[59] The formulation had come a long way, for as early as March 1898 Freud had asked Fliess if he found it suitable as a designation for the interpretive path he was then elaborating.[60] It is easy to think that in 1915 Panofsky could easily have missed a theoretical field taking shape far from the University proper, and thus far from the specific domain of the history of art. But the psychoanalytic field was well constituted by then, and had spread far beyond the clinical framework of psychopathology; as is indicated by the very title of the Freudian periodical *Imago,* created in 1912—a title capable, one imagines at least, of attracting the attention of an art historian working in the German language.

But the crux of the problem lies elsewhere. It resides in the fact that Panofsky, on the one hand, inherited his conceptual field from the neo-Kantian philosophy of the faculties, and, beyond that, from the notion—absolutely central in Cassirer—of *function.* Whereas, on the other hand, Freud elaborated an approach to the unconscious from the angle of something that said neither "faculty of the soul" nor "function" in the synthetic sense, but that would be expressed in terms of *work:* the dream-work, unconscious formations and distortions . . . To the end, Panofsky would have envisaged his own "metapsychology" of symbolic forms as the uncovering of a function that he was not afraid to call *metaphysical* because Kant, before him, had precisely set himself the task of grounding metaphysics as a "science." To the end, he regarded psychoanalysis—sumptuously absent from the book on melancholy, for example[61]—as the equivalent of what

astrology may have been in the princely courts of the sixteenth century: an intellectual fashion, a cultural symptom. Conversely, Freud proposed his "metapsychology" of the depths against all "magical" and romantic uses of the unconscious; more basically, he proposed it as an alternative to metaphysics (associated more or less with a magical operation), and even as a *conversion of metaphysics* understood—to paraphrase Panofsky himself—as analogous to the conversion of astrology into astrography.[62]

The difference between these theoretical stakes permits a better understanding of what Panofsky could have hoped for or aimed for when he used expressions such as "unconscious" and "symptom." We will quickly go astray if we try to discern here some kind of "Freudian" coherence or tone. For in Panofsky, "unconscious" and "symptom" aim only at a world of "fundamental principles" susceptible by definition to a knowledge, perhaps metaphysical (or decidedly metaphysical). The "unconscious" in Panofsky is expressed through the German adjective *unbewusst:* that which is not presently in consciousness but which a more lucid consciousness, that of the historian, should be able to uncover, to make explicit, to *know*. Whereas the Freudian unconscious is expressed by the noun *das Unbewusste,* which suggests not inattention but repression or foreclosure, and which strictly speaking *is not an object for knowledge,* including the knowledge of the analyst . . . But let's try to characterize Panofsky's position more precisely. Let's recall first the pivotal text of 1932, where he proposed a knowledge* of the "ultimate content" of the image—contents of knowledge† expressed in terms not of repression, but precisely of knowledge, which is to say of a "worldview" (Weltanschauung).

> It seems to me that artistic productions, on a much deeper and more general level of meaning, beyond their phenomenal and signified meaning, are based on an ultimate, more essential content: the involuntary and unconscious self-dis-

**connaissance.*
†savoir.

> closure *[ungewollte und ungewusste Selbstoffenbarung]* of a fundamental attitude towards the world, characteristic to a like extent of each individual creator, each individual period, each individual people, each individual cultural community; and since the greatness of an artistic achievement ultimately depends upon the amount of "*Weltanschauung*-energy" incorporated into the shaped material and radiating from it to the spectator (in this sense, a still life by Cézanne is not only as "good" but also as "full of content" as a Madonna by Raphael), the utmost task of interpretation is to penetrate this ultimate stratum of "essential meaning" *[in jene letzte Schicht des "Wesensinnes" einzudringen].*[63]

The conclusion of this somewhat muddled passage clarifies, in its very duplicity, the real meaning of Panofsky's theoretical project. It was a question, on the one hand, of giving art history access to a *questioning of the symptom* capable of going beyond factual inquiry—the "phenomenal meaning" of images—as well as traditional iconographic inquiry—the "signified meaning," based for its part on the literary sources of works of art. It was Panofsky's genius to affirm forcefully here the inadequacy of iconography: taking as his example a work that he knew better than anyone, Dürer's *Melancholia I,* he affirmed that all of the texts casting light on its meaning still told us nothing about its "document-meaning" *(Dokumentsinn),* in other words, about its intrinsic content. This was to take another, decisive step beyond the "consciousness of the artist" himself—a decisive step, indeed, toward a notion of the symptom. Emphasized, what's more, by the sudden, unexpected appearance of the famous theme of the man lifting his hat:

> If Dürer himself had expressly stated his ultimate intentions in this work (as later artists often tried to do), it would soon become apparent that his statement missed by far the sheet's true essential meaning *(wahren Wesenssinn),* and that, instead of providing us with a definitive interpretation, it would itself require considerable interpretation. For just as a man greet-

> ing another man can be aware of whether and just how politely he wants to lift his hat, but not of what this reveals about his innermost essence, an artist knows (to quote a witty American) only "what he parades," not "what he betrays."[64]

Here, then, we are on the level of the symptom. But in these same lines a second theme is interwoven, one whose function—whose effect at any rate—is precisely to hinder the questioning, to "trap" the symptom in the net of philosophical knowledge, and thereby to begin a veritable process of *denial of the symptom* as such . . . Since for Panofsky, what the artist "betrays" is nothing other than a set of meanings that function here "as 'documents' of a homogeneous *Weltanschauung*-meaning." What does this mean? That knowledge of the symptom, in such cases, is reduced to a "general intellectual history" *(allgemeine Geistesgeschichte)* "by which the interpretation of a work of art is now elevated to the level of the interpretation of a philosophical system."[65] And thus was the truth of the symptom according to Panofsky referenced to the triple gnosological authority of a "homogeneous meaning," a "general history," and a "philosophical system"—whereas the symptom that Freud scrutinized in his domain and had theorized for more than thirty years was made precisely to impose on meaning the heterogeneity of its mode of existence; on all chronology of the "general" the singularity of its event; and on all systems of thought the unthinkable of its unexpected.

The symptom according to Panofsky can still be translated as a mode of being *more* fundamental than appearance, and that nonetheless (like an Idea, perhaps) manifests itself *less*. It is in this sense that the 1932 text introduced the passage from Heidegger about the "unsaid."[66] This, doubtless, is how the term "symptom" is still understood—supposing that it is pronounced there at all—in the domain of the history of art: as a pure and simple dialectic of the *visible* and the *less visible*. A "simple reason" that amounts to making the symptom hypothetically, or rather by way of a basic premise, into an *accessible reality,* accessible in any case to knowledge, on condition that it refine itself. By settling definitively on the "accessible" example of the man

lifting his hat, Panofsky ultimately proposed, in his two great methodological texts of 1939 and 1940, the synthetic idea of a symptom conceived as "intrinsic meaning or content" situated, of course, "above the sphere of conscious volition," but in a beyond that he called "the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion—all this unconsciously qualified by one personality, and condensed into one work."[67]

If we must at all costs look for an "unconscious" in Panofsky's problematic, then we will find something like a reality on a higher level, the result of a hierarchy expressed either in terms of "base" and "foundation," or in terms of "above" and "generality." It is this that Pierre Bourdieu has called an "objective intention," a "system of schemes of thought," a "shared unconscious"—in short, something that might be likened to the "primitive forms of classification" previously defined by Mauss and Durkheim . . . and that would have the advantage, he says, of making us "enter into the game of structural interpretation" of a given culture.[68] Is this a Freudian unconscious? Of course not. It's a question rather of a transcendental unconscious, something like a metamorphosis of the *Kunstwollen* expressed in term of the philosophy of knowledge. So Panofsky's "unconscious," too, expresses itself in neo-Kantian terms: it is invoked only to define the air of a "knowledge of the essential," a meta-individual and metaphysical knowledge. It is opposed to the obscure unconscious of the Romantics only by way of requiring the *overconsciousness* of the iconologist, his brand of the historian's pure reason. Thus consciousness is not incongruous in him; quite the contrary, since its absolute exercise is what makes his knowledge possible. So there is no such thing as a Panofskian unconscious.[69]

There is no unconscious in Panofsky—only a *symbolic function* that goes beyond the specific intentions of each fabricator of symbols: a meta-individual and "objective" function. A function that, to quote Pierre Bourdieu again, certainly goes beyond intuitionism "in its haste to reach a principle unifying different aspects of the social whole," and beyond positivism insofar as the latter limits itself to the "face value of phenomena."[70] But it is a function that, as I have already suggested, would have been conceived *to function without remainder*. It

aims at a general and generative grammar of forms, capable of "generating *all* of a culture's characteristic thoughts, perceptions, and actions"[71]—in short, it is the functional form capable of generating all forms. So it must be greatly indebted to the "formal unity" of Cassirer's *function.*[72] Which is to say, in the end, that it is an object of reason, that it has all the characteristics of the Idea, and that it subjects the world of individual phenomena to its transcendental law. Now it is quite obvious that Freud's elaboration constituted its metapsychology of *work* and of "unconscious formations" precisely against the grain of such a model. It focused on the symptom as on something that breaks up all discursive unity, as on what intrudes upon and smashes the order of the Idea, opens systems and imposes something unthinkable. The work of the Freudian unconscious is not envisaged through a consciousness that sharpens itself or looks for *a priori* principles—it requires another *position* vis-à-vis consciousness and knowledge, the always unstable position that psychoanalytic technique broaches during sessions in the guise of the play of the transference.

So Panofsky, in his notion of "symbolic form," was looking for the unity of a function. What was in question was nothing less than *giving form to the forms* themselves: taking into account the plurality of forms through the unity of a single formal function, of a single Idea of reason inexpressible in intelligible terms and even in terms of knowledge. It was a question, to use terms employed before him by Cassirer, of finding an "explanation and justification of the concept of representation," and in it, the principle of a knowledge* aiming "to subject the multiplicity of phenomena to the unity of a 'fundamental proposition.'"[73] Such, then, were the stakes of the general concept of *symbol.* That it had been envisaged from the angle of the primacy of relation over terms and of function over objects (or substance) indicates the importance of the road traveled, the full interest of the project undertaken by Cassirer and then by Panofsky. Today there are so many historians who ignore the methodological implications of this way of broaching art images that it is necessary to insist again on their pertinence from the outset. But Cassirer and then Panofsky were deceived

**connaissance.*

in their belief that, thanks to such a principle, they had definitively gone beyond the traditional givens of metaphysics.

And it would be abusive today to see in it the fundamental principle of a structuralism. If, in the structuralist hypothesis that posits the preeminence of relations over terms, we understand by *relation* only the "synthetic unity" of the terms, then structuralism is either very incomplete or very idealist. If, on the other hand, we seek to give an account of a relation that does not omit—or absorb into some transcendental Idea—the existence of *symptoms,* namely intrusions, disparities, local catastrophes, then we will better understand the critical interest of Freudian concepts. For the model of "unconscious formations" places us face-to-face with *open structures,* with something like the nets of fishermen who would like to know* not only well-formed fish (figured figures, representations) but the sea itself. When we draw the net toward us (toward our desire for knowledge),† we cannot help but notice that the sea for its part has withdrawn. It flows everywhere, it flees, although we can still make out a bit of it around the knots of the net, while formless algae signify it before drying out on our shore. We understand, reading Freud, that it is the psychoanalyst's business to recognize that when he draws the net toward him, the essential has still disappeared. The fish are indeed there (figures, details, fantasies such as art historians also love to collect), but the sea that makes them possible has kept its mystery, present only in the damp glow of a few algae stuck to the edges. If a thought of the unconscious has any meaning at all, then it must be reconcilable with structures full of holes, of knots, of extensions impossible to situate, of distortions and rips in the net.

Panofsky's attempt, like Cassirer's, pertained then to what might be called "pre-Freudian reason."[74] It was loath to think the *over-determination* of objects save under the logical—and typically Kantian—form of a *deduction.*[75] There is a particularly striking example of this in the famous interpretation of Dürer's *Melancholia I.* Panofsky here evokes,

***connaître.*
†*savoir.*

it will be remembered, two heterogeneous iconographic series—on the one hand, a physiological tradition pertaining to the theory of the four humors, in particular the "Typus Melancholicus," on the other hand an allegorical tradition of the mechanical arts and the liberal arts, in particular the "Typus Geometriae"—heterogeneous series that are, he says, perfectly synthesized in Dürer's engraving:

> Thus Dürer's engraving represents a fusion of two iconographic formulae hitherto distinct: the "Melancholici" of popular Calendars and "Complexbuchlein," and that of the "Typus Geometriae" of philosophical treatises and encyclopedic decorations. The result was an intellectualization of melancholy on the one hand, and a humanization of geometry on the other . . . He [Dürer] depicted a Geometry gone melancholy or, to put it the other way, a Melancholy gifted with all that is implied in the word geometry—in short, a "Melancholia artificialis" or Artist's Melancholy.[76]

Starting from this synthetic principle, Panofsky's analysis unfolds in impressive and exemplary fashion—exemplary already because it is, to the very end, a true delight for the mind. The synthesis invoked provides, in effect, a principle of interpretation that, in itself—in other words, in its generality—*satisfies the mind,* without neglecting to explain a great many iconographic details of the engraving.[77] As an interpretation, then, it is strong and persuasive, even incontestable. It provides a comforting feeling of closure, of something settled, of something locked up; it impresses upon us the idea of a definitive advance in Dürer studies. A model of completeness, then, in whose schema an iconographic transformation has been *deduced,* two heterogeneous series having been the object of a kind of summation whose result is right before our eyes in the clarified figure of Melancholy. And the synthetic vision proposed by Panofsky seems all the more powerful because it effects a veritable *oriented synthesis,* bringing to light an extremely rigorous historical determinism: Melancholy and Geometry effectively collaborate in Dürer's work in defining a new field that is none other than that of art itself, art as the *auto-teleology*

of its own synthetic operation. It is art as humanism, and Dürer himself as an immortalized, self-referential figure of the melancholy artist that finally provides the key to this interpretation:

> Thus Dürer's most perplexing engraving is, at the same time, the objective statement of a general philosophy and the subjective confession of an individual man. It fuses, and transforms, two great representational and literary traditions, that of Melancholy as one of the four humors and that of Geometry as one of the Seven Liberal Arts. It typifies the artist of the Renaissance who respects practical skill, but longs all the more fervently for mathematical theory—who feels "inspired" by celestial influences and eternal ideas, but suffers all the more deeply from his human frailty and intellectual finiteness. It epitomizes the Neo-Platonic theory of Saturnian genius as revised by Arippa of Nettesheim. But in doing all this it is in a sense a spiritual self-portrait of Albrecht Dürer.[78]

Panofsky's construction ends there, and with it the chapter devoted to this famous engraving. The synthesis, which set the tone and meaning of the whole construction, will be crystallized then in the formation of a "type" or, better, of a symbol—the *Oxford Dictionary* defining the verb "to typify" as follows: "to represent or express by a type or symbol"—in which the subjective finally blends with the objective, hand with intellect, art with science. The system of interpretation, as much theoretical as historical, is closed: it is the "artist-scientist-genius" system of the Renaissance.[79] A clarifying system, a powerful and indubitable system *up to the point* where one perceives that its "will to synthesis," its will to leave no remainder, entails precisely leaving a certain number of things in the lurch . . . or in the shadow of a paradoxical *I don't want to know anything about it*. Such is the effective tyranny of the system, when the system gives *over-determinations* of its objects the pure and simple form of *deductions*. To express things in terms of over-determination entails, it must be admitted, the disadvantage—unsatisfying for the Idea—of leaving everything on a single plane of existence, and thus in a sense of suspend-

ing interpretation. Let it be noted in passing that such a suspension is precisely one of the golden rules of psychoanalytic listening.[80] As for the deduction, it brings the advantage of an interpretation that, like Athena, will emerge fully armed from the head of its Olympian—or neo-Kantian—progenitor. The deduction opens only to close again. On the one hand, it gives meaning, it anticipates the movement of closure, and automatically produces something like an *already-history**—in any case, a temporalized direction of interpretation. On the other hand, the deduction closes itself to other possible links, to other virtual associations whose historical direction or finality has perhaps *not yet* been grasped, but that nonetheless impose their vagabond symptomatic insistence. Panofskian interpretation, so as to satisfy the needs of its synthesis, has too often worked to deny the self-evidence of such "links" and "strokes of good luck."†

What then is this "remainder" or this symptom that the beautiful analysis of *Melancholia I* wanted to know nothing about? Let's spell it out quickly[81]: it's the fact that Dürer's art *also* articulates a religious paradigm, the imitation-of-Christ paradigm, in which melancholy found a field of application as paradoxical as it was sovereign. Dürer's self-portrait as a melancholy artist referenced,‡ I think, a figurative practice of the *imitatio Christi*—which basically presupposes that Christ could *also* have provided the ultimate example of a melancholy *in whose image* men modeled theirs . . . The hypothesis in itself is not astounding or even audacious, since an iconography of the melancholy Christ indeed exists, especially in the Germany of Dürer's day: an iconography that expounds the theology of the *derelictio Christi* in terms of a gestural melancholy, which yields representations of Christ seated, pensive, with a somber expression and his head in his hand: sad, forsaken, hieratic variations on Christ mocked or as the Man of Sorrows.[82] The astonishing thing is that Panofsky refused a transverse articulation that everything (even his own interpretation) summoned forth—but that once summoned would have overthrown or at least

**une histoire déjà.*
†*racrocs.*
‡*faisait systême avec.*

singularly complicated his synthetic vision of *Melancholia I,* of Dürer, and perhaps even of the Renaissance generally.

The astonishing thing and the symptomatic fact stem, more precisely, from this: on the one hand, Panofsky scrutinized with peerless precision the iconography of *melancholy* (so as to offer us the great classical *summa* that is the Saturn book) and discovered the value as *self-portraiture* that such an iconography could take on for Dürer; on the other hand, his study of the artist of Nüremberg led him to cast into relief the formidable connection of Dürer's self-portraits with the iconography of the Man of Sorrows, also known as the "Derelict Christ" (a word understood here in the broad sense).[83] Why didn't he secure the complementary connection between melancholy and the Man of Sorrows, thereby intensifying his interpretation of Dürer's work? Why did he never talk about Christology when discussing melancholy, and never about melancholy when discussing the Man of Sorrows—when the very illustrations of his books carry the trace of such a connection?[84] Clarification of the neo-Kantian premises of iconology, their vocation to "synthetic unity," makes it possible for us to answer as follows: the introduction of such a transverse connection—a bearer of over-determination, and thus susceptible of admitting equivocal, even antithetical meanings—would have complicated, and doubtless partly ruined, the clarity of the deductive model that Panofsky ardently wished for. It would have complicated the idea, making for a melancholy that was diabolical in one sense and divine in another, feminine in one sense and masculine in another, pagan or Saturnian in one sense and Christian, even Christlike in another, etc. It would have complicated the idea, making for a Dürer who was grappling with art, science, *and religion*—a problem not broached by Panofsky in all its complexity. Finally, it would have complicated the historical schema that constituted the framework for the whole interpretation, introducing an element *out of sync** with history—the auto-teleological history of humanist art—something like a medieval symptom, into one of the most emblematic works of the entire Renaissance.

**à contretemps.*

Such, then, was Panofsky's choice with regard to melancholy: he kept the synthesis and rejected the symptom. Which implied strange blindnesses, or "scotomizations." Which implied, for example, a denial of all connection between *Melancholia I* and the *Saint Jerome,* engraved the very same year and almost as part of the same mental gesture;[85] which implied a rejection from the Dürer corpus of the quite explicitly melancholic *Man of Sorrows* in Karlsruhe.[86] And not looking at all at the one in the *Small Passion* of 1509–11, where Christ is like a statue, like a crystal of melancholy, crumpled by the depth of his dereliction[87] (Fig. 5). An image exemplary and troubling: for it knows how to *gaze at* the viewer without recourse to anything in the way of eye contact. Dürer effectively forsakes his Christ on a tiny, arid, island-like base lost in the white of the page, as if the Christian God set himself apart,* withdrawn into silence, from the space of humanity, from the space of human history. But it is precisely this *presentation of withdrawal*† that manages to grip the viewer in a veritable captation of his gaze. It is a rosary of intensities that flow back and take hold of us: first in the sharp, almost spiky rays of the nimbus, then in the crown of thorns that likewise hurls its lines, facing us (whereas that which ought to face us, the *facies Christi,* remains averted, despondent). And again in the central hollow where the two knees come together, supporting the mass of the conjugated arm and head, and through which flow the folds of what we already imagine to be a shroud. Finally, in the insistent frontality of the two stigmata on the feet—the only "eyes," so to speak, in the face of which the staunch believer is henceforth obliged to situate himself, to kneel mentally, in fantasy, before perusing the illustrated *carmina* of the engraved Passion.

One cannot, before this—before this play of insistences that are discreet yet carry a terrible violence—keep the synthesis and reject the symptom. We are here besieged‡ by the dimension of the symptom, to the very extent that the body of Christ withdraws into itself *before us* in a kind of refusal to remain visible. It's like looking intently

**s'exceptait.*
†*présentation de repli.*
‡*investis.*

Image not available

FIG 5 Albrecht Dürer, *Man of Sorrows,* 1509–10. Frontispiece of the *Small Passion,* 1511. Woodcut.

at a contracting fist: a hand has closed, convulsively, and because it closes it delivers nothing but the symptom of its withdrawal, whose secret will remain concealed in the hollow of the palm. Now if we pose our gaze to this obfuscated* *facies* that refuses to face up to us, we suddenly experience that the melancholy of the Christlike gesture also fixes a stupefied gaze:† for the gaze of God turns away from men (his executioners, the subjects of his tenderness) only to become lost in, to plunge into an infinite contemplation of his own secret—which is not an Idea, but the hollow of his palm, in other words the *opening* of his own flesh, his stigmatum, the symptom of his mortification. Symptom of a flesh delivered up to the unhappy autoscopia of its own wounds, its own suffering whose depths will remain inaccessible to us: for the pain of Christ must be unfathomable. It was necessary (faith required) that his flesh be a flesh of the symptom, raised, sad, and beset with holes—a flesh summoning the dimension of the *visual* more than that of the visible, a flesh presented, open, and withdrawn, like an immense fist that has been wounded.

We understand better now, perhaps, the great distance that separates the ideal model of the *deduction* from that, symptomal, of *overdetermination.* The first cut the image short so as to give it meaning, and polarized it over the unity of a synthesis; it saw in the symbol a kind of intelligible unity or schema between the general rule and the singular event. The second does not deny the symbol, it simply specifies that the symptom delivers its symbolicity "in the sand of the flesh."[88] Which clearly changes everything about the way we think about the symbol itself. Panofsky thought of it as a function that could be taken into account, at last resort, in terms of its *meaning,* which is to say its signified content,‡ even its *Wesenssinn* or "essential meaning." The symptom, by contrast, is thought in psychoanalysis as a work that we are constrained to take into account, at last resort, in the crude and material terms of the *signifier,*§ which has multiple effects:

**obombré,* from the Latin *obumbrare,* "to obscure," "to obfuscate"; and *umbra,* "shadow."

†*un regard médusé.*

‡*contenu de signification.*

§*signifiant.*

the "ascending ramification" of associative meanings, but also the juxtaposition of equivocal knots and the conjugation of symbolic treasure with markers of not-meaning.[89] In short, the "content" disperses as it flourishes, swarming everywhere, and the "essence" has no hook* save the *nonsensical* material of the signifier. Which prohibits cutting the image short, or keeping it in a box of any kind whatever. For an image kept in a box—that of the Idea, for example—becomes like dead water, water deprived of its power to stream forth.†

If we consider, on the other hand, the model of temporality presupposed by the iconological operation developed as a deduction, we perceive that it always requires a *direction,* in other words a temporal progress. So what is surprising about the idealist history of art having first turned toward the age in which the ideal of artistic progress was first thematized, namely the Renaissance? What is surprising about the history of art, in these conditions, having itself been a product of the Renaissance?[90] The temporal constraint of the symptom is quite other. There is nothing in it that disappears to make way for something else that will follow it or mark it with the triumph of a progress. There is only the troubled play of advance and regression all at once; there is only mute permanence and unexpected accident at the same time. In fact, over-determination *opens the time* of the symptom. It gives access to the present only through the element of a conflict or equivocation, which themselves reference other conflicts and other equivocations, past yet persistent, mnemic elements that come to distort the present of the subject by giving form to its symptom[91] . . . In short, the symptom exists—insists—only when a synthetic deduction, in the pacifying sense of the term, does not come into being. For what makes possible such a deduction (such a logical reduction) is a state of *permanent conflict,* never wholly resolved or pacified, that issues to the symptom its requirement to always reappear, even and above all where we do not expect it. Freud explained the kind of "resistance" of the symptom by the fact that it is situated precisely at the "frontier-station" between two opposing forces—and that struggling against the symptom always strengthens this resistance.[92]

**accroche.*
†*déferler.*

As to knowing how symbol and symptom manage to find their aptest articulation, their common element, that really isn't something that can be broached by asking ourselves "what thing symbolizes a symptom." The symptom symbolizes, to be sure, but it does not symbolize in the way that a lion symbolizes strength—even if we are aware that a bull can *also* symbolize it.[93] The Panofskian identification of symbolization with *meaning*—that is, with "intrinsic" meaning, linked to the famous "essential tendencies of the human mind"—here deserves to be left behind. The eminent symbolicity of the symptom is not understood in Freudian theory as a relation between one term and another, but as an open set of relations between sets of terms that can themselves be opened . . . each term assuming "the minimum of overdetermination constituted by a double meaning."[94] What, then, does a symptom "symbolize"? It symbolizes events that have taken place and also events that have not taken place.[95] It symbolizes each thing and also its contrary, being "an ingeniously chosen piece of ambiguity with two meanings in complete mutual contradiction,"[96] as Freud wrote. And by symbolizing it represents, but it represents in a way that distorts. It bears within it the three fundamental conditions of a *withdrawal,* a presented *return* of this withdrawal, and a *fraught equivocation** between the withdrawal and its presentation: such, perhaps, would be its elementary rhythm.[97]

Panofsky himself, as we know, identified symbol with symptom, and both with "the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, the general and essential tendencies of the human mind [are] expressed by specific themes and concepts"—iconology basically coming down to transcribing the reason of these "themes" and "concepts" from the perspective of a "history of cultural symptoms—or 'symbols' in Ernst Cassirer's sense—in general."[98] In all likelihood, the history of art will not be able to jettison the methodological weight that immobilizes it unless it undertakes to criticize the semiological foundations of this assimilation. It's not so much a question of trying to redistinguish the two concepts in the guise of a confrontation between the symptom of an artwork's aesthetic emotions and the symbol, for

**équivoque tendue.*

its part, considered as its "theoretical" equivalent, and thus theorizable.[99] The question comes down, yet again, to accounting for the moment in which knowledge of the symbol is traumatized and interrupts itself in the face of the not-knowledge of the symptom, which in return opens and propels its symbolicity into an exponential spurt of all the conditions of meaning operative in an image.

Perhaps Panofsky wanted to help us, we historians of art, and to simplify our lives by making us believe for a moment (but this moment goes on, the inaugural example of *Iconography and Iconology* having been taken literally) that posing our gaze to a work of art is equivalent to meeting a man in the street who lifts his hat. The famous opening pages of his introduction to the science of iconology unfold a semiological fable in which we start out from a certainty—"When I identify, as I automatically do, this configuration as an *object* (gentleman), and the change of detail as an *event* (hat-removing)"—to arrive, in the end, at another certainty—that of the imminent symbol of the gesture of lifting one's hat, that of the "cultural symptom"—a certainty that it would have been impossible to attain without the permanence and stability of the first one, in other words without the *identification,* never called into question, of a man lifting his hat.[100] . . . The opposite happens when I look (without encountering it by chance, which is to say for a long time) at a painting: the progressive deduction of a general symbol is never wholly possible, insofar as the image often proposes to me only thresholds to shatter, certainties to lose, identifications to, at a blow, call into question.[101]

Such is the efficacy of the symptom, its syncopic temporality, that *it pulverizes the identification of symbols* in order to disperse them in worrying fashion. It is perhaps useful to recall here that, in the immense Freudian corpus devoted to the symbolic, there is a short text that focuses, precisely, on a hat by way of broaching the nature of the "connection between a symbol and a symptom."[102] It begins however with a term-for-term identification, "sufficiently well established" through "the analysis of dreams": the hat symbolizes the genitals—"most frequently of the male organ," but not exclusively.[103] Nonetheless, this door opened onto the evidence for a symbolic system would immediately be closed: "It cannot be said, however, that this symbol

is at all an intelligible one," writes Freud, thereby indicating how the evidence, even attested, for a symbolic code quickly becomes inoperative when it broaches the "work" itself, by which I mean the way it operates in a fantasy or a symptom. Then there commences in Freud's text a whole economy of trajectories along which the hat will become a head ("a prolonged, though detachable head"), a ball or a pillow, then a pillow-organ, etc. A fantasy economy in which we pass not from one certainty to another, but from one *symbolic displacement* to another, and endlessly:

> When they [obsessive neurotics] are in the street they are constantly on the lookout to see whether some acquaintance will greet them first by taking off his hat, or whether he seems to be waiting for their salutation; and they give up a number of their acquaintances after discovering that they no longer greet them or do not return their own salutation properly. There is *no end* to their difficulties in this connection; they find them everywhere as their mood and fancy dictate.[104]

The theoretical lesson of Freud's little text is quite clear: the farther one goes in observing a symptom, the less clear its resolution will seem. As for the reference to the castration complex (which subtends his argument here), it indeed provides a paradigm for the interpretation, but it is not a paradigm that resolves, synthesizes, or fixes the terms among themselves: for it requires *that the symbolized be thought with its disappearance,* with its being torn to pieces, with its incessantly repeated rending. Thus the psychoanalyst will fail if he tries to make an iconology—in Panofsky's sense—of the symptom presented to him. By lifting their hats, Freud's obsessive neurotics no longer perform clear and distinct acts of courtesy. Rather, they set disquieting doll-symptoms within (pseudo)familiar doll-symbols . . .

So an *economy of doubt* is put into place with the thought of the symptom. The symptom effectively requires of me that I be uncertain about my knowledge of what I see and what I think I grasp. Descartes, looking through his window at the hats and coats passing by, already

asked himself if they didn't conceal "automatons."[105] What, then, if I pose my gaze to the nonsensical expanse of crimson paint* atop the head of the small *Girl with a Red Hat* by Vermeer (Fig. 18)? Vermeer disencumbered† his painted hat of all definitive—or definitional—identification without, for all that, our being able to say that what the painted lady has on her head is anything but a hat. So Vermeer proposed this crimson hat as a "hat something else,"‡ a strange and disquieting hat that, before being a hat, will impose itself on my gaze as a symptom of painting. Contrary to the optimistic progression within which Panofsky's parable situates us, what is happening now answers to a less triumphal constraint: *the more I look, the less I know*—and the less I know, the more I need to know (to know about Vermeer and his period, in particular), knowing quite well all the while that the answer to this need to know *will never resolve* completely what this very modest hat holds up as phenomenal object for the history of art, as phenomenal symptom of Vermeer's painting.

Likewise contrary to an iconological ideal that pretends to define the conditions of what will be *thinkable* in a work of art, for an artist, or for a whole period (maintaining, for example, that fifteenth-century Italian painting can be thought only through the representation of space in three dimensions, and that what is unthinkable for an artistic period does not exist in this art), the opening to the symptom gives us access to something like an *unthinkable* that comes before our very eyes to traverse images. The residue of a conflict the sum total of whose ins and outs we will never know, the return of a repressed whose every name we will never be able to decline with exactitude, at once formation and distortion, a work simultaneously of memory and of expectation, the symptom causes to pass before our gaze the event of an encounter in which the *constructed share* of the work staggers under the shock and violation of a *cursed share* that is central to it. It is here that the fabric will have encountered the event of its rending.[106]

***déraisonable expansion de peinture incarnate.*

†*désenclavait.*

‡*chapeau d'autre chose.*

We will not, then, look at an art image the same way we look at an old friend we happen to meet in the street and who, already identified, will courteously tip his hat to us. Many historians since Vasari, however, have done this, do it, or pretend to do it. They place themselves before the image as before the reassuring portrait of someone whose name they want already to know, and of which they implicitly require that it "cut a proper figure," in other words that it display the minimum of figurative decorum needed to suggest a hat correctly placed on a head. But the world of images has never been constituted to the sole end of behaving properly to facilitate the self-constitution of a history or a knowledge. Quite a few images—even those we think of as having been "familiar" for centuries—behave like the enigma in Freud's discussion of the work of figurability: they run frantically, hats flying, and sometimes they even run without a head . . . For the work of the symptom is such that it often resorts to decapitating the Idea or simple reason by way of making an image.

But is this sufficient to conclude a book, to conclude at least our question posed to the history of art? Not really. The stakes and the movement were by nature *critical.* It was a question of formulating, albeit playfully, something like prolegomena to a more extensive critique (itself historical) of the spontaneous metaphysics and the tone of certainty too often adopted by the academic discipline called the history of art. It was a question, in sum, of radicalizing the call to attention, the call to *CAUTIUS* already found in Panofsky, and thus of formulating some questions about our own will to knowledge concerning art images. It was less a question of articulating new answers than of suggesting new requirements. For the ordinary model of visibility to which historians sacrifice most spontaneously, we have tried to substitute a requirement by its nature more anthropological, a requirement that we broach through the term *visual.* Against the ordinary model of legibility, we have proposed that of an interpretation whose constraints and opening are envisaged through results—or rather a problematic—inherited from Freudian metapsychology. For the unitary model of the schematism and the historical reduction, we have substituted the theoretical paradigms of *figurability* and the *symptom,* which we think might formulate more pertinently the ever-

to-be reposed question of the profound "symbolic" efficacy of images. But it is starting from this register, where the *theoretical*—fatally generalizing—dimension of our stakes has been able to open out and make itself explicit to a certain point, that their specifically *historical* dimension now asks to be, if not developed,[107] then at least indicated as the very motivation for the question with which we began.

This "question posed" was effectively prompted by a tenacious impression that the *efficacy of Christian images*—their anthropological efficacy over the long term—could not be understood fully in the simple terms of the "schematism," the "symbolic form," and the iconographism developed by a humanist history of art having inherited its fundamental notions—its totem-notions, we said—from Vasari on the one hand (as regards the position of its object) and from neo-Kantism on the other (as regards the position of its acts of knowledge).* It's not so much that we must purely and simply renounce a conceptual world endowed with a long history and, in many respects, with an indisputable pertinence. What is at stake, rather, is criticizing, in other words proceeding dialectically, putting things in perspective. It is quite obvious that the *fabric* in which the history of Christian art is woven can be envisaged globally under the authority of mimetic representation, of the *imitation* inherited from the Greco-Roman world. Such notions become magical and totalitarian only when they pretend to legislate absolutely, to occupy all of the terrain, in other words to ignore their own limitations by blocking access to their own symptoms, crises, and *rends*. That is why it is urgent to think representation *with* its opacity,[108] and imitation *with* what is capable of ruining it, partially or even totally. Our basic hypothesis comes down to situating the power of such a rend under the complex and open word *incarnation*.

When we cast an eye on the previously discussed Dürer woodcut (Fig. 5), what do we see at first? We see *a body,* admirably represented by an artist whose intense interest in the problems of bodily movement, the rules of proportion, etc. is now well known—thanks largely to Panofsky. Some ten years after having engraved this block, which

**connaissance.*

already indicates an extreme attention to the depiction of musculature, for example, Dürer published his famous *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion* (Four books on human proportion), which Panofsky regarded as nothing less than "a climax which the theory of proportions had never reached before nor was to reach ever after."[109] All this is indisputable, but insufficient: for the body here represented by Dürer indicates by its withdrawal alone that it is not simply "making a show" of itself.* The image that Dürer gives us is, so to speak, sucked into its center by the opening—again, the wound—into which Christ's gaze has definitively plunged. What does this mean? That the body in question is presented to us in a way that indicates *a flesh* in it, be it wounded. Dürer's Christ loses himself† in the opening of his flesh to the end of making present to the pious viewer that opening and death were the lot—even the radical meaning—of the Incarnation of the divine Word among men. Thus is the beautiful body seen to be breached in its flesh by the very meaning of the divine "made flesh." Thus is flesh made *symptom* in the body, to the point of discreetly altering its posture: we need only see how concentrating on the two stigmata in the feet—such that the two *puncta* make for a gaze-effect‡—required a kind of torsion in the body itself, in the visible representation of the figure's feet.

In sum, this corresponds exactly to the first definition that Freud gave of the symptom: it replaces, he said, an impossible "change in the external world"—understand, in the Christological context of Dürer's print: the human world of original sin—with a "change in the subject's own body" *(eine Körperveränderung)*—understand here the simple word *stigma* in the most paradigmatic sense that might be given it, that of a mark, stain, or prick introduced into flesh.[110] But never, in the whole Christian tradition, has the Incarnation of the Word been thought otherwise than as the *sacrificial alteration* of a single body in view of saving all others from destruction, fire, and eternal torment. Which entailed, just the same, altering all of them a bit, by requiring of them, no longer the Hebraic ordeal of circumci-

***qu'il n'est pas simplement "en représentation."*

†*s'abîme.*

‡*fassent lien, séquence, effet de regard.*

sion, but the no less categorical imperative to *imitate the disfiguring ordeal* into which Christ had first plunged.

We see better now how the two terms "incarnation" and "imitation" must be situated with respect to each other: the first presupposes a symptomization of the second, which makes of the second—henceforth altered—a vocation to the symptom of the body as much as to the body itself. Saint Francis of Assisi *imitated* Christ, not through the appearance of his body, but through the symptomatic disfiguration that his body agreed to receive or to incorporate. Our hypothesis, in its most extreme form, would consist quite simply in presupposing that Christian visual art sought *also* to imitate the body of Christ in the same terms that a given saint might have: in other words by imitating, beyond the *appearances* of the body, the *process* or "virtue" of opening effected once and for all in the flesh of the divine Word.

Thus the Incarnation—as the major imperative of Christianity, as its central mystery, its crux of belief, the response to a determined phenomenology and fantasy—permitted and required of images a *double economy* whose inventive power was extraordinary: first it gave them access to the body (something that art history has always seen and analyzed quite well): then it asked them to change the bodies (something that art history has examined much less closely). The Incarnation of the Word was the access of the divine to the visibility of a body, so it was an *opening to* the world of classical imitation, the possibility of making bodies consequential* in images of religious art. But it was just as much a sacrificial and threatening economy bearing upon bodies, and thus an *opening in* the world of imitation, an opening of the flesh effected in the envelope or mass of bodies. Such would be the elementary dialectic activated with the Christian invention of the theme† of the Incarnation: something that, in a sense, would line the great fabric‡ of classical imitation in which images display themselves; something that, in another sense, would introduce a rend at the center of the same fabric. Perhaps the aptest metaphor, in the end,

**de faire jouer les corps.*

†*motif.*

‡*tissu,* whose other meaning as organic "tissue" henceforth comes into play.

is the Lacanian metaphor of the "button tie":* it holds the fabric in place—its structural vocation is eminent—for the very reason that it pricks and perforates it—a way here of indicating its no less eminent vocation as symptom.

The term "incarnation," in the full extent of its signifying spectrum, would then provide the third approximation for renouncing the theoretical magic of the *imitazione* and even of the *iconologia* inherited from humanism. Against the tyranny of the visible presupposed by a totalizing use of imitation, against the tyranny of the legible ultimately presupposed by a certain conception of iconology modeled after Ripa and Panofsky, taking into consideration, in the visual arts of Christianity, the theme of the Incarnation would make it possible to *open* the visible to the work of the visual, and legibility to the work of exegesis and of the over-determined proliferation of meanings. From the Byzantine East to the Tridentine West, the incarnational requirement managed to bring forth in images a double power of visual immediacy and authentically exegetical elaboration.[111] Such is the theoretical—even heuristic—power of the symptom. Such is its power of opening and of germination. The symptom, called forth, desired by the incarnational economy, marks in images that prodigiously fecund, efficacious connection between event and virtuality. The event will disturb the codified order of iconographic symbols; the virtuality, for its part, will disturb the "natural" order of visible imitation. All this in a dynamic that itself uses an immense spectrum of possibilities, and that can be as discreet or as explosive as possible.

Comparing the theme of the Incarnation to a system of "button ties," situated here and there across the great fabric of Western mimesis, suggests to us something like a "counter-history" of art, not an oppositional history, but a history that would proceed dialectically and give *counter-subjects*—to use a musical term—to the great mimetic theme of figurative representation. Now it is striking to note that the principal "prototypical" images of Christianity were on the one hand massively devoted to the theme of the Incarnation—to which they generally pretended to bear direct witness—and on the other

**point de capiton.* Cf. Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter* (Minneapolis, 2004), 113.

hand were images in which mimesis always endured the disfiguring ordeal of a veritable symptom, of a *visual* mark or trace of disfiguration. As if the flesh of the Word here came to act against the body itself.

I call "prototypical" those rare, exceptional images for which Christianity, eastern and then western, first laid claim to cult status, which presupposed two things at least: first, that these images touched the region of greatest desire, a region impossible to all other images, a region where the image, "miraculously," made itself *virtus* and power of incarnation . . . These images from elsewhere,* these rare images, *by touching limits, indicated ends*—be they untenable—for all other art images. And that is why a history of them should be written, a history in which we would try to understand by what work—psychic and material—such limit-images managed to appear in the eyes of their spectators as *critical images* (in all senses of the adjective) and just as much as what I'd like to call *desire-images:* images bearing ends (here again, in all senses of the word) for the image.

The most striking examples, as is well known, are the Mandylion or Holy Towel of Edessa—the earliest explicit mention of which, as a venerated image, dates from the mid-sixth century—Veronica's Veil, and the Holy Shroud of Turin, before which today's Christians still kneel on the very solemn occasions of its ostension. Of these *"achiropoiètes"* images, in other words images "not made by human hands," one retains above all the structural connections, extremely elaborated, that here conjoin the element of legend (bearer of the "ends" dreamed for the image in rite and discourse) with concrete procedures of presentation or "presentability." What strikes one immediately, to get right to the point,[112] is the triviality, the extreme humility, of the objects themselves, which have nothing to show but the tatters of their material.† Old linen handkerchiefs or calcinated shrouds, in the end they display only the supposed—but exorbitant—privilege of having been touched by divinity. They are relics as much as icons. That is why a capacity to *reveal* has so long been attributed to them, articles

**images d'autre part.*
†que le haillon de leur matière.

that generally present themselves as simple cloths. That is why a capacity for *apparition* has been attributed to them, articles that offer an appearance that is literally as *effaced* as possible . . . But it was precisely a question of fulfilling this paradox: it was a question of fulfilling the contract, the sacrificial hurt, the "circumcision of the visible" evoked at the beginning of this book. That the appearance be "effaced" and the external aspect sacrificed, that's what corresponded exactly to the economy of humility evidenced by the Word itself's becoming incarnate. We should not be surprised, then, to learn that such images were envisaged in the Middle Ages as veritable "Christophanies." Everyone attributed to them some great miracle, often the repetition of one of those thought to have been performed by Jesus himself, for example restoring sight to the blind.

By declaring such images "divine productions," "not made by human hands"—according to an adjectival form, *acheïropoïètos,* introduced by Saint Paul precisely to characterize the "spiritual circumcision" of Christians, the divine covenant and sanctuary[113]—their too human inventors basically tried to realize *in an image* something like a squaring of the circle: that is, an image that no longer would veil (as appearance) but would rather reveal (as apparition), that no longer would need to represent but would efficaciously make present the divine Word, to the point of actualizing the whole power of the miracle.[114] But this denial of the pictorial in favor of an incarnational demand* had but one end, which was to offer itself as the absolute paradigm of all iconicity, and thus of all painting activity.[115] A way of positing *in painting itself,* or in the history of art if one prefers, an absolute object of desire for all religious iconography: *an impossible object* of the pictorial desire for incarnation.

So we are before these rare, before these eminent icons as before the extreme form of a desire, *made image,* to bring the image outside itself . . . in view of a flesh that it glorifies and in sense would like to continue. The paradoxical structure of such a requirement largely conditions the antithetical aspect of the vocabulary used to describe these images. It is a vocabulary that already evokes the avalanches of

**revendication incarnationelle.*

chiasma and oxymorons that will characterize all negative theology and the syntax of mystics. Thus the Mandylion, from the beginning, was qualified as "graphic-agraphic"[116]: a way of combining in a single object heterogeneous semiotic models; a way of imagining semiotic miracles, so to speak. Now the astonishing thing is the fact that the *presentation* of concrete objects should have succeeded in bringing off such a fiction. The relative—and desired—effacement of these icons resulted, notably, in a foregrounding of their *indexical character,* their character as traces, as vestiges of a contact, and thus their character as "relics." When Alfonso Paleotti wrote his "explication" of the Holy Shroud of Turin at the end of the sixteenth century, he produced what is only, at best, the paradoxical system of a description of bloody traces in which—a supplementary yet fundamental paradox—it is the opening of the body and not the body itself, the *rent body* and not the form of the body, that guides the whole descriptive and exegetical argument.[117]

So the "prototypical" images of Christianity are nothing but pure symptoms: *shown traces of the divine,* and shown as such to the end of constructing a mystery, magical efficacy, veneration. That is why the affirmation of such a contact—that of the living face of Christ with the Mandylion, of the suffering face of Christ with Veronica's Veil, of the body of the dead Christ with the Holy Shroud—wouldn't work without the operation of procedures requiring something reciprocal, namely the *non-contact of humans.* What has touched the god often becomes untouchable par excellence: it withdraws into the shadow of the mystery (and is constituted forever as an object of desire). Thus the Mandylion was draped with the imperial purple and borne in solemn procession; thus did it occupy a royal throne, and serve as a *palladium,* namely an apotropaic image, in Byzantine military expeditions. Georges Pisidès would compare its effect on the enemy to that of a petrifying Gorgon who knows how to keep at a distance anyone who dared look upon it.[118]

Veronica's Veil also served as a *palladium:* it protected Rome, they say, from all pestilence[119]—which did not prevent it from suffering, in 1527,* a fate analogous to that of the Mandylion, which was stolen

*An allusion to the sack of Rome.

during the sack of Constantinople in 1204. But Veronica's Veil reappeared and in 1606 was the object of a solemn translation. It was placed inside one of the four monumental pillars of Saint Peter's Basilica, where even today it seems to support, opposite the wood of the Cross, the very edifice of Christianity. It is sometimes shown to the faithful, but from such a height that *only its frame shines forth,* a frame made of crystal, gold, and precious stones, a frame that designates as much as conceals it. To say this is not only to put a finger on the objective irony of an ostentatory procedure. For the "irony," like the procedure, is an integral part of the notion of image that here tries to elaborate itself. Dante already sensed this, he who compared a pilgrim come from afar to contemplate the relic to someone who can "never sate his hunger"—we understand his hunger for visibility, his hunger for appearance—before something that he nonetheless knows to be a *vera icona* of his God.[120] For the "true" *portrait*—true through its contact, a truth not apparent through its appearance—required the implementation of its *withdrawal,* according to a dialectic that Walter Benjamin doubtless would have called the "aura," and Maurice Blanchot "fascination."[121] Let's make do here with insisting on the requirement of such a dialectic of "presentability": it grounded for everyone the *virtuality* of the image, and so its transitory, hazardous, symptomal capacity to make appearance.* It permitted the image-object, that isolable, accidental, palpable, and destructible reality, to be constituted as an *image-paradigm,* namely a matrix of relations in which the human tried to think itself as image of its god.

That the human should be *in the image,*[122] this literally meant that it belonged to the image, that it was its subject. So it wasn't necessary that anyone exactly *see* the "true image" of his god, in the shadowy light of a basilica in Constantinople or Rome. It was necessary rather that while looking at it they feel subject to the image,† *subjectus* in its proper sense—"thrown under . . ."—and thus that he feel himself *under the gaze of the image.* What was necessary was that the spectator of the image be at once dispossessed of all mastery over it and pos-

**faire apparence.*

†*qu'il se sente en la regardant sujet de l'image.*

sessed by it in accordance with a relation that, despite any taboo against touching the object that might remain in force, expressed itself most often in terms of an imprint: in other words in terms of the divine *character,* a Greek word that signifies at once the agent and the result of an imprint, of an engraving. The miraculous icon itself was nothing other than the "*character* of the divine flesh" of the Word:[123] it thus had the efficacy to transmit its imprint power* to those who venerated it, and thus in some sense it continued the work of the Incarnation through a process thought before all else in terms of the liturgical *sacrament.*[124]

It must be repeated here how this efficacy didn't work without the implementation of a work of "presentability" or *figure-making*† of the images themselves. The "Holy Faces" that some churches still offer to the devotion of the faithful (Fig. 6) vary infinitely the procedures of bedazzlement and begleaming—since some frames, besides precious stones and gilding, are inset with pieces of mirror—and thus repeat not only the obligatory withdrawal of the *vera icona* behind the event of its exposed appearance, but also the *dazzling face-to-face* of divinized visages, that of Moses before the Hebrews and that of Christ looking down on his disciples on Mount Tabor, during the apotheosis of his Transfiguration.[125] We must remember, before these great icons of Christianity, that from the outset their injunction was situated within the legendary element of a face that normal vision had been unable to bear—the icons themselves being considered the sacred remains of such an unbearable.[126] Now how to broach the implementation of such an unbearable, if not by remarking that a *visual* event—the very one that gives, repeats, or transforms the dazzling face-to-face—here comes to take the place of the visible grasp normally expected from all image exhibitions, and especially from a "portrait"?

That is why we must attempt a history of images that goes beyond the strict framework of the history of art inherited from Vasari. That is why we must confront the visuality of images—in accordance with a phenomenological movement—prepared to leave behind for a mo-

***pouvoir d'empreinte.*

†*faire-figure.* Wordplay: *figure* also means "face."

Image not available

FIG 6 Anonymous (Italian), *The Holy Face,* 1621–23. Copy on canvas of Veronica's veil, commissioned by Pope Gregory XV for the Duchess of Sforza. Rome, Gesù.

ment the exactitude of their visibility, required from the start by all iconological approaches. The images we have just discussed are not analyzable solely through description and through statements of what they imitate; they can also be analyzed in terms of the particular way that they prevent all exact description, the particular procedures that they implement to touch a region with which "art"—in the humanist and academic sense of the word—no longer has anything to do, giving way to something that pertains rather to an anthropology of gazes. Such images are generally excluded from the corpus of the history of art, since they are first of all relics, and do everything to obliterate the "manner" or simply the craftsmanship—fatally clandestine, so to speak, and doubtless impossible to recover today—that gave birth to them: how could we "attribute" something like the Holy Veil, since

the individual who made it in the fourteenth century did everything he could to efface the trace of his own hands, and of course all trace of human "art"? A history of images, it should be clear, cannot be the same thing as a history of artists—something with which the history of art still identifies itself much too often. Neither can it rest content with iconographic solutions, insofar as the importance and the genius—social, religious, aesthetic—of an image can very well deviate from formal invention, so as to propose to the gaze only the efficacy and the *mystery of forms undone* giving the trace of considerable events dreamt by men as signs of their destiny. The history of art too often does only the history of successful and possible objects, susceptible of a progress, glorifying appearances; we must also think a history of impossible objects and unthinkable forms, bearers of a destiny, critiquing appearances.

Is this to turn our backs on art images? Is incarnation a requirement incommensurate with the means of which painting and sculpture show themselves capable, committed as they are, at least in the West, to the so much more "visible" imperative of imitation? I don't think so. If from the start the imposing dogma of the Incarnation turns out to constitute something like a *drama of the image,* or at least a knotty question in the fabric of the figurable, then we can suppose that the history of "possible" objects, the history of art in the usual sense, will itself be traversed—and thoroughly—by the energetics of drama and desire that the Incarnation imperiously unfolds. I imagine a history of imperious and sovereign exceptions that would develop the countersubject of the visual in a melody of the visible, a *history of symptomatic intensities*—"button ties," moments fecund with powerful fantasy—in which the expanse of the great mimetic fabric is partially rent. This would be a history of the limits of representation, and perhaps at the same time of the representation of these limits by artists themselves, known and unknown. This would be a history of symptoms in which representation shows what it is made of, at the very moment that it agrees to strip itself bare, to suspend itself and exhibit its flaw.

These symptoms have yet to be mapped, having been obliterated

by the kind of winners' list to which Vasarian history has long since accustomed us. A rather trivial example—but interesting in relation to our theme, and what's more, taken from Vasari himself—might help us to get some traction on the question. It is a particularly unattractive, or at least bizarre work painted in Rome by a rather obscure artist, Ugo dei Conti da Panico, known as Ugo da Carpi (Fig. 7). The painting, which the curators of the Vatican Museums felt no obligation to keep in their public collections, was made between 1524 and 1527 for the altar of Saint Veronica in the old Saint Peter's Basilica. Art historians have uncovered the compositional—but not stylistic—original in a superb drawing of the same subject by Parmigianino in the Uffizi[127] (Fig. 8). But one senses at a glance that, despite their close relation in terms of artistic *invenzione,* the two works and fundamentally discordant.* Parmigianino's drawing, squared for transfer, openly proclaims its stylistic power; it shows Veronica exhibiting a veil on which Christ's face stands out clearly, disproportionately large but without doubt a real head, in any case a *portrait* shaded to create the illusion of three-dimensionality.

Drawing close to the painting by Ugo da Carpi, one discovers by contrast a rather static and awkward way of proceeding, very far from the extreme virtuosity displayed by Parmigianino in his drawing. One notices above all that what the Saint Veronica displays is not really a "portrait" of Christ but rather a *receding*† of the face that "sinks" and distances itself behind an arbitrary contour reminiscent of a Byzantine frame. The face, if it is there, does not emerge from the darkness but disappears into it. And moreover it isn't there. For what the represented saint, in the end, only presents on her veil is a "portrait" not of Christ but of *Veronica's Veil* itself, the actual relic venerated in Saint Peter's in Rome. The kind of primitivism of the style is more readily explained by this intention to stick with the scarcely "living" appearance of a relic, by contrast with the more "humanist" intention to invent a living face for the Christ of the Passion. But that's not all. Ugo da Carpi himself in a sense justified the rather crude appearance

**n'ont fondamentalement rien "à voir."*

†*retrait:* wordplay with *portrait* and *trait,* "line" or "feature."

Image not available

FIG 7 Ugo da Carpi, *Veronica Between Saints Peter and Paul,* c. 1524–27. Tempera and charcoal on canvas. Vatican, Basilica of Saint Peter.

of his painting by inscribing between the feet of Saint Paul the *poetic* rule—in the original sense of the word—that he gave himself for this particular work: PER VGO / DA CARPI INTAIATORE / FATA SENZA / PENELLO . . . Which signifies two things: that the painted work is the work of an engraver; and that it was executed without the aid of any brush whatever.

What does this mean? That the image was produced by the sole application of cloth soaked with paint, without the intervention of fingers or brushes, and that the shadows were simply gone over with the powder of *carboncino,* or charcoal. Such a procedure—in any case,

Image not available

FIG 8 Parmigianino, *Veronica Between Saints Peter and Paul,* c. 1524–27. Drawing on paper. Florence, Uffizi.

the way it detours around conventional pictorial practice—evokes the pious recipes that must have presided over the confection of many "Holy Shrouds" medieval and modern.[128] It was very exactly a question of turning away from mimetic and "artistic" techniques to the end of transposing the gesture of imitation to the pious register of process, of contact, of the *achiropoïèse:* in sum, it was a question of realizing—of "ficting" and in a sense faking—a veritable "image not made by human hand." Ugo da Carpi thought he was doing good, in the religious sense of a pious act, by turning away here from the aesthetic ideology of his time and from the technique of his peers—in short, by refusing the hand as "invention," in other words, *disegno.* We note just the same that his quality as engraver, which he himself

underscores in the inscription on the painting, doubtless had led him into his strange pictorial choice. The Vatican *Saint Veronica* is moreover the artist's only known painting on canvas (on veil, one is tempted to say). Vasari himself tells us, in his life of Marcantonio Raimondi, that Ugo da Carpi invented a technique of woodcut engraving using several blocks for a single image (for example, one block was engraved only with the dark tones, another only with half tones, and another only with light tones), a procedure that had the effect of unlayering, even in a sense "dismembering" figuration in accordance with parameters of form, light, and texture: the representational and "legible" image thus appeared only after the final printing.[129]

Vasari's indication regarding Ugo da Carpi's activity as an engraver would be of little importance were it not followed immediately by an eloquent account—eloquent because it says much about the history of art then in the process of being invented—of the very painting that concerns us:

> Now since, as I have said, he was a painter, I must not omit to tell that he painted in oils, without using a brush, but with his fingers, and partly with other bizarre instruments of his own *[senza adoperare pennello, ma con le dita, eparte con suoi altri instrumenti capricciosi],* an altar-piece which is on the altar of the Holy Veil in Rome. Upon this altar-piece, being one morning with Michelangelo at that altar to hear Mass, I saw an inscription saying that Ugo da Carpi had painted it without a brush; and laughing *[ridendo]* I showed the inscription to Michelangelo, who answered, laughing also *[ridendo anch'esso],* that it would have been better if he had used a brush, for then he might have done it in a better manner *[di miglior maniera].*[130]

These two conjoined laughs—that of the "divine" artist answering that of the great historian—teach us many things. Whether the story is true or not (it certainly seems unlikely: one's nose must be up against Ugo's picture to make out the inscription, a position scarcely compatible, surely, with participation in a mass at Saint Peter's before

the very altar where the painting served as a *pala)* matters little in the end. The two laughs are paradigmatic: they represent to us first a mocking exchange between two artists, their discussion of craft, and their final joke, in the middle of a rite that spoke of divine sacrifice, that made present* the *Corpus Christi* in the consecration of the Host, that repeated obsessively the cycle of sin, death, and the question of salvation. These two laughs, then, although naturally winning our sympathy, manifest straightaway something like a refusal to understand what was in question, not only in the grave Eucharistic rite that was being celebrated before them, but also in the very work—the "not-work," rather—by Ugo da Carpi. Vasari imagines that if one doesn't paint with brushes, one can paint only with one's fingers: so he is miles away from understanding *where* the minor artist had tried to situate his imitative act. As for Michelangelo's response, it only mocks a *maniera*—which is just what the painting by Ugo tried to jettison by reenacting† (awkwardly, to be sure) the originary and legendary *"poïèse"* of Veronica's Veil.

From the start of the game, then, the work *fata senza penello* excluded itself from great art, or in any case from what is so called. Its awkwardness and its stalemate obviously resulted from its in-between position, where nothing that it attempted had been carried out to the end. It was a failed *work* because it was situated too far from "manner," from style, and from the aesthetic detours expected of what we call "art"; but it was also a failed "not-work," insofar as it had remained much too designative, demonstrative, and "iconographic," insofar as it escaped the visual mystery of contact, expected of everything that we call a relic, an object of *religion*. Too far from manner in one sense, and too far from matter in another. The anonymous artisans of medieval holy shrouds were never so naive or so narcissistic as to inscribe their signature—be it accompanied by the assertion *"fata senza penello"*—in a corner of the "sacred" fabric. They took their pious industry to the limit, while Ugo da Carpi, for his part, remained within the narrow confines of a double denial: despite

***présentifiait.*

†*rejouant.*

everything, he wanted to make a work of art, namely an image-object, whereas his project remained that of an image-trace and an image-mystery whose humble secret he could not keep to himself.

Stripping the image bare, "undressing the figures"*—something required in all religious fervor by the sublime theology of the pseudo-Dionysius,[131] something required, basically, by any work devoted to the mystery of the Incarnation: was that ultimately to turn away from "great art," by which I mean the art retained by our historians as bearing genius? The example of Ugo da Carpi might make us think so, and suggest the view that the incarnational requirement finally concerns only "popular art," "popular devotion"—all the more since the implicit ends of such images are often directed toward miracle and legend (images that open and close their eyes, images that speak, images that bleed, etc.). All the more since the paradigm of the *living image* seems operative above all in a realm we like to call archaic.[132] But this judgment is in fact too hasty. The "living image" belongs to systems as learned and complex as can be the theology of Nicolas of Cusa, for example.[133] Why wouldn't it also have some bearing—like the obscure pulsation that gazes at us, more than like the clear appearance that we know how to grasp—on "great painting," on learned painting? The inquiry has yet to be pursued among the galaxy of famous artists on whom the theological or at least devotional element might have come to bear. The case of Ugo da Carpi is exemplary in one sense, and very poor in another: for this artist was unable to produce a *visual symptom* of his *"archiropoïèse."* Neither the compromise nor the tension found issue in either figure or disfiguration, and that is why his painting has never made an impression on anyone, neither on tasteless believers nor on non-believing aesthetes.

If by contrast we again turn to the much more famous example of Fra Angelico, we find in his works a truly impressive series of visual symptoms that play on the mimetic economy of the image in a relationship of perpetual disquiet, a disquiet that I would describe as fecund as much as *critical,* which is to say, in particular, crisis-laden and rich in effects. Fra Angelico felt compelled, on a large expanse of wall

**dévêtir les figures.*

a meter and a half high by three meters wide, to *cast from a distance** a rain of colored spots, thereby providing a counterpoint of gesturality and *dissemblance* to the skillfully imitated faces of a *Sacra Conversazione*—that's what situates us before the image as before the inspired,† the double requirement to make present‡ as much as to represent[134] (Fig. 9). Fra Angelico treated the large base of his *Sacra Conversazione* from a point of view that was not only formal and visible, but also mystical and liturgical in its origins. This base supported the "figurative" group of the Virgin with saints as an altar supports its altarpiece, and thus the visual symptom produced—the aspersion of pure color on the section§ of wall—became immensely rich in exegetical and contemplative potential.

So Angelico found in this gesture of aspersion a level of liturgical imitation that ruined at a blow, or in any case "rent," the level of aspectual imitation that the art of his time, of course, made its profession. To refuse for a moment—for a symptom—the Albertian construction, to produce at a blow the absolute archaism of paint merely thrown against its support, this was to lay claim at once to an origin, an originary pictorial gesture, and to the whole humility of the pigment-vestiges of an object—divine, unattainable—that nonetheless incited the whole of his desire to paint. The attitude here is not "popular" but quite learned. It is that of a negative theology. It requires that one strip oneself bare so as to strip the image bare, the most difficult thing henceforth being to reach the lowest level and, like Christ himself, humiliate oneself in the dissemination of pure material events, in order to give oneself the chance of apprehending the unique aspirational, *anagogic* force of the desire to go as high as possible . . . To throw raw paint onto the front of this monastery wall, then, was to risk the ordeal of a *catharsis*. It was to perform a pious act, even a mystical one. Let's look again: this stream of colored spots doesn't resemble very much from the point of view of appearance;

**projeter,* which also means "to project"; like its English counterpart, a psychoanalytic term (e.g., "fanstasy projection").

†*géniale.*

‡*à présentifier.*

§*pan.*

Image not available

FIG 9. Fra Angelico, lower panel of *Madonna of the Shadows* (detail), c. 1440–50. Fresco. Florence, Monastery of San Marco, north corridor. H: 1.50 m.

conversely, it resembles quite precisely a process—a *gesture of unction,* even of consecration, that it reenacts (in other words reactualizes, makes concrete again) more than it imitates.

To anoint is to cast a liquid—oil, scent, tears, even paint—onto something that one wants to sanctify, or, more generally, whose symbolic status one wants to modify. It is a rite of passage: one anoints newborn babes to baptize them, one anoints the dead to send them to some "habitable" beyond. One also anoints altars to consecrate them, and one asperses icons with holy water to render them efficacious.[135] All of this, yet again, exists solely on the foundation of the incarnational given: it presupposes that the word can be incarnated, and that its abstract power knows how to become—in a becoming called mystery, miracle, or sacrament—palpable as flesh or pigment. The blood of Christ on the "stone of unction," it was still recounted in Fra Angelico's day, had anointed the stone in return, had made it, it was said, permanently red; and it was also recounted that the tears cast by the Virgin over his dead body had "imprinted" white constellations on the patch* of darkened stone . . . Doubtless there is something of all this in the strange pictorial choice of the Dominican artist; something that would have aimed to project† the iconic surface itself toward the more sacred regions where in one sense the relic operates, and in another sense the sacrament does. At about the same time that Fra Angelico realized his frescos in San Marco, some believers in Bohemia did not hesitate to "consecrate" certain Marian icons *with paint:* they freely traced, with two large brush strokes, a sign of the cross that in some sort "crossed out" the representation of faux-marbre—the latter already fragile as representation, devoted to the blotch rather than to appearance—that covered their backs[136] (Fig. 10).

So there is an old painting practice that knows how to break with the quest for appearance, since at a certain moment its imitative gesture desires rather to bear on a *process,* on the more immediate given of an intimate liturgy, on the radical requirement of an act aiming to reenact a mystery of Incarnation. This is what happened in the East-

**pan.*
†projeter.

Image not available

FIG 10 Anonymous (Czech), *The Madonna of Vyšší Brod* (verso), c. 1420. Tempera on panel. Prague, National Gallery.

ern liturgy of the Eucharist, where the priest himself reenacted the gesture of the soldier Longinus piercing the "side" of the consecrated Host with the aid of a miniature "holy spear," known exactly as the *agia longchè*.[137] This is also what happened—but on a completely different level, of course—when a Gothic painter wasn't satisfied with applying threads of red paint to represent the blood of Christ spurting from his side, but used some blunt instrument to *wound the surface* of the gilded sheet, and make the crimson undercoating of Armenian bole surge forth again . . . Such a way of proceeding doubled* the appearance of a process, and constituted the icon—in the religious sense as well as the semiotic sense of the term—through an act by its nature indexical: an act in which the violent relation to the subjectile (that is, to the support) went far beyond the reproduction of a wound. For it was indeed the *production* of a wound in the image, an injury to the image, that was then in question. The opening and the cutting became concrete, and the actual wound *presented itself frontally,* cut directly facing us into the gold sheet—even if, as is often the case, the wound in the picture is *represented in profile.*

One last example merits discussion, so much does its power—immediate as much as virtual—manifest the incarnational requirement that we are trying to sketch in the world of images. It is an isolated sheet from the Schnütgen Museum in Cologne, painted in the first half of the fourteenth century in a Cistercian milieu[138] (Fig. 11). Here the representation comes to identify with its own crisis effect in an utterly radical way, as if consumed by the partial effect of its bloody effusion. The artist—a monk, I imagine, and why not a nun?—first drew a body, a body of Christ with its head slumped so far onto its chest that the silhouette almost suggests the idea of a headless god. A sharp angle oddly bars the top of the torso, as if the result of a large energetic incision. And at the foot of the cross two religious figures are kneeling, Saint Bernard and a nun, rapidly but less violently circumscribed by the artist—an artist doubtless in a hurry to get to what was essential.

Here, then, is what was essential: to invade this body by the event

***doublait.*

Image not available

FIG 11 Anonymous (German), *Crucifixion with Saint Bernard and a Monk,* 1300–1350. Cologne, Snütgen Museum.

of the open flesh, in other words by the effusion of red liquid—paint, certainly, but as disfiguring as blood. The operation is invasive insofar as the only thing about this body that henceforth matters is its breached part. For here the whole body—the whole image—becomes wound. What does this imply? It implies a paradoxical work of *presentability* in the image: it is there, before us, much too far away or much too close. It gives (quite badly, moreover) the appearance of the body of Christ that would be seen from a reasonable distance, whereas its major visual event—the intense red paint—suddenly creates a distance that is irrational and captating, an irrationally proximate distance that makes the small painted sheet the visual place of a quasi-embrace, like that of Saint Bernard at the foot of the crucifix.

Perhaps this image was produced to the end of making the devout person close his eyes under so much violence, and to let his "heart bleed" within him, in accordance with the demands of so many fourteenth-century mystics. This image, in any case, manifests in the bluntest possible way the *requirement of limits* addressed by the Christian faith to the visible world of our bodies: since we are condemned to the earthly purgatory of our own bodies, let us at least *transform them* by imitating the incarnate Word, in other words, Christ sacrificing his body for the future redemption of all sins. Let us mimic the sacrifice of the body to the fullest extent that we can. This was neither more nor less than an *appeal to the symptom:* to require of the body that it be breached, afflicted, disintegrated, almost annihilated . . . in the name and in imitation of a mystery that spoke of the divine Word and of the flesh of this Word. The simple folio sheet in the Schnütgen Museum places us before the preposterous choice—the challenge, almost—of an artist having disfigured his drawing by throwing pure color onto it "blind,"* in other words, just so, without prejudging the mimetic success or even the mimetic effect that would result. The artist here took the risk of the unthinkable: how can you make a stain by thinking it in advance, by prejudging it as you would construct a vanishing point? The stain, it is made, *it makes itself by itself,* and so quickly that elaborative thought has no time to construct anything

**au jugé.*

representational at all in the image. The stain will be here, on the level of a simple, hastily painted folio sheet, like the figural equivalent of the appeal to the symptom that the Incarnation required of, obsessively, Christian bodies.

A simple stain of color, then, to conclude. An act of painting where appearance, split, rushes to its ruin. A gesture fatally irrational at the time of its production: the opposite, then, of Vasari's *disegno*. And would iconography be in all of this? Iconography demands attributes, whereas the color here—like the visual white of the *Annunciation* evoked at the beginning of this book—is a *color-subject:* it is what supports the whole event of the image. It neither names nor describes (it refuses to describe even so as to be able fully to exist, to come forth). But it invokes. It desires. It even implores. That's why it has not the arbitrariness of a pure happenstance but the over-determined power of a symptom formation. It is a knot of tension, but at the same time it manifests a whole *work* of figurability in which the "omission" of the described body (a kind of Freudian *Auslassung)* indicates the force of an intense condensation, and leaves in the color a *displaced* vestige of flesh. It is also the color of an astonishing compromise, in which the alternative—either the body, or its wound—is left behind in favor of something that *covers* (pigment used just the way Leonardo recommended, *per via di porre)** and *opens* at the same time. Here, color all at once covers and spurts.

But what does it invoke? Here is the mystery of its figurability. Here, at the same time, is the place of its most immediate presented self-evidence. For a single name sufficed in the fourteenth century to say the "whole" of this pictorial and pious gesture. It was the name *Christus,* the proper name of the incarnate Word, the object of piety par excellence, the name bearing all mysteries, all hopes, all anxieties, and all ends. But the genius of this image resides also in the fact that this immense spectrum of virtualities had need of but one *act*—throwing a thick red liquid at a parchment surface—to be realized, there, as elective symptom of the great desire that was at work. This

**per via di porre,* "by means of addition" (as in painting), as opposed to *per via di levare,* "by means of subtraction" (as in carved sculpture).

act is, once again, an act of unction. An unction whose very name—whose common name—was called *christos* (the anointed one) and thus rearticulated, admirably, the immediate gesture of the painter on the absent object of his religious desire.

This example makes it easier to understand how a single, simple, even reckless act of painting could have managed to manifest all the mystery and all the virtuality of a given of belief, even of exegesis. For there was an act of exegesis in this presentation of a Christ not represented exactly, but simply anointed *(christos,* then) with color. There was here simple event *and* virtuality, absolute risk of the hand *and* thought of a mystery, there was here visual shock *and* exegetical flow.[139] In short, there was symptom, and thus there was *disfiguration,* violence done to the classic iconography and imitation of a body suspended on a cross. It must be repeated once more how much the symptom, knot of the event and of the virtual structure, answers fully here to the paradox stated by Freud about figurability in general: namely that figuring consists not in producing or inventing figures, but in *modifying figures,* and thus in carrying out the insistent work of a disfiguration in the visible.[140] But it must likewise be said that history here converges with* the theoretical or metapsychological statement, for in the same period in which the image in the Schnütgen Museum was realized, a Dominican in the north of Italy composed a dictionary, one that was famous and read everywhere in Europe until the sixteenth century, in which the definition of the verb *to figure* expounded Freud's statement almost word-for-word: namely, that "to figure"—in the exegetical sense—was in fact equivalent to the verb "to disfigure," because it consisted precisely in "transposing to another figure" *(in aliam figuram mutare)* the very given of the meaning "to be figured."[141] Which places us one more time before figures as before the disquieting power of something to over-determine itself, to constantly *estrange itself.*†

We are before the image, then, as before that which continuously "estrange itself." What does this mean? Are we in the process of losing

**vient à la rencontre de.*

†*s'étranger.*

everything, I mean losing this aspectual minimum that makes us, before an old work of art, use the word "figurative" in a trivial, non-paradoxical sense? Not at all. The Christ-stain from the Schnütgen Museum is not only a stain, it is also a Christ—it is a stain here precisely because it is a Christ. So there's nothing "abstract" in it. There's only a thought resemblance, not in its success—namely the idea of a Same that would be breached* and stabilized through the production of its image—but in its crisis or its symptom. The fourteenth-century German artist plunged, so to speak, Christlike resemblance into the central ordeal of its disfiguration, a way of rattling, even convulsing, the permanence of its appearance. Just as a man having convulsions never completely ceases to be a man—despite our inability to engage with him in the civilized way of Panofsky's hat-tipping "gentleman"—so does the Christ-stain remain the god, the immovable rock of the West, who here, in the image, engages with his pious viewers in a way that is anything but "civilized" or polite. The image henceforth no longer "speaks" to us in the conventional element of an iconographic code, *it makes a symptom,*† in other words, a cry or even a mutism in the supposedly speaking image.[142]

What is in play in this symptom-making is—still according to Freud—neither more nor less than an irruption, a kind of singular spurt, of the *truth* . . . at the risk, then, of undoing for a moment all representational plausibility.[143] What happens here is that the radiance‡ of a fundamental truth of Christianity came to breach and rend the imitation of the crucified body that was the "norm." The truth of the Incarnation has rent the plausibility of the imitation, the event of the flesh has rent the ideal appearance of the body. But what is this event? It is death, *the death of God* required by his very Incarnation. That's exactly what the little folio sheet from the Schnütgen Museum brings to the fore, *presents,* chromatically. That the divine Word—the eternal Word, the all-creating Word, if we are to believe Saint John—chose to become flesh, this meant, this required that at a certain moment he be unmade and die, that he shed blood and be no longer

**atteint.*
†elle fait symptôme.
‡éclat.

either recognizable "or healthy from the soles of his feet to the top of his head."[144] The hypothesis of the Incarnation had from the start altered the Same, the sameness of the transcendent God. Here is the great operation. Here is what would give Christian images the categorical imperative—rather: the fantasy imperative—always to *alter the Same.*

Now we can better grasp how the Incarnation required an "opening" of imitation, as Longinus in the legend had opened the beautiful body of Christ. *To open imitation:* this was not to exclude resemblance; this was to think and to make resemblance work as a *drama*—and not as the simple successful effect of a mimetic technique. The great tradition of biblical anthropology bears the most massive testimony to this, having constructed its famous models of origin, its famous "economy of Salvation," wholly through a drama of image and resemblance, divine as much as human. Everyone knows at least its general schema: at the beginning of history *(in principio),* God created man in his image and after his appearance; just a few verses of *Genesis* will suffice for one to see the devil tempt man, man fall into sin, and be—for quite some time, almost forever—"rejected from the face of God"; in the middle of history, the Son of God, his "perfect image," is made flesh and sacrificed for the Salvation of humankind; his three-day death will have provided the surety for Salvation, and the first chance for man to regain his original lost status of *being in the image;* at the end of history; the Last Judgment definitively separates those souls who remain dissemblant from their Father, and from those who regain the perfection of their resemblance. Then the "saved" again become the first and true sons of God their creator. And in this moment all eyes see: no further need to imitate, everything is perfect.

So it is not surprising that a number of church fathers and medieval theologians should have formulated this immense saga in terms of a *drama of resemblance.* It would be said, for example, that at the start Adam, in the image of God, was in a relation of "humble resemblance"; that Satan proposed the infernal temptation of an "equal resemblance"—a prerogative of the only divine Son—that hid, in reality, the mad ambition of a "resemblance of contrariness" or rivalry, which the Father had every reason, one understands, to find gravely

offensive.[145] It would be said that the episode of the Crucifixion provided the central event in which the "equal resemblance" submits itself to the ordeal of an ignominious disfiguration. It would further be said that resemblance to God remains for human beings the object of a desire that will not be satisfied until the end of time: until then, men will only search within themselves for fragments, for vestiges *(vestigia)* of the resemblance ruined in time past by the sin of the first earthly son. Until then, men will only wander in a "region of dissemblance" *(regio dissimilitudinis),* a region—our own—regarding which a furious Father still refuses the gift of his face.[146]

How could religious painters have managed to hold themselves apart from such an anthropology, which situated resemblance as the impossible object par excellence, the ungraspable object (at least for the living), and the sensible world, the world of bodies to be imitated, as an *emporium* of dissemblances, at best a universe marked with vestiges, with "traces of the soul" before which one had to purify oneself, strip oneself, in order to apprehend them? Christian anthropology and the bundle of great theological traditions oblige us, then, to ask ourselves how religious painters, like other Christians, sought resemblance (to God) in order to save their souls, and how in order to do this they sought to "open" (sensible, aspectual) resemblances in their paintings to the point of altering them—of *intentionally altering them.* On this side of this question, which again engages the radical understanding of the word *figura* in the Middle Ages, we can find out from the great pre-Vasarian pictorial treatises how the stakes of an artistic practice could be envisaged within the anxiety-causing framework of this "drama of resemblance," this drama that turned relentlessly around the death of the god-image, around death per se and the question: will we be saved?

So let's also open, barely, one or two of these painters' treatises, a few fine examples of which have survived from the Middle Ages.[147] Let's open, for example, the manual by Theophilus, which probably dates from the twelfth century, and the *Libro dell'arte* by Cennino Cennini.[148] What's the first thing we find there? As in Vasari, we find there the putting into place—and the "framing"—of certain procedures of legitimation. It might even be said that the schema in Cen-

nini's book is wholly analogous . . . except that the meaning is completely inversed. Let's try to summarize its principal aspects. Where Vasari made his *révérence* to the prince (even to the pope), in the mannerist gesture of a head that bows only to look upward, here the necks remain bent in the definitive humility of the relationship of *obedience* to which they lay claim with regard to God and his saints. Theophilus, for example, presents himself from the outset as "a humble priest, a servant of the servants of God, unworthy of the name and profession of monk"; he does not hesitate to describe himself as a "wretched and almost nameless man . . . fearing to incur the terrible judgment" meted out to anyone who might appear in God's eyes a poor servant of the Gospel.[149] So it is with regard to the *sacred text* that the relationship of obedience is finally formulated. As for Cennini, no more than Theophilus does he write under the gaze of princes, but under that, otherwise disquieting, of a divine throne and a learned gathering of saints:

> Here begins the craftsman's handbook, made and composed by Cennino of Colle, in the reverence of God, and of the Virgin Mary, and of Saint Eustace, Saint Francis, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Anthony of Padua, and in general of the saints of God.[150]

After this first and essential legitimation comes that, more concrete, of the constitution of a *social body* of the figurative arts. But where Vasari invoked the glory *(fama)* of a conquering and already self-legitimizing elite, Theophilus expounded the slow progression of the apprentice toward mastery—a mastery immediately detached from its human subject so as to be attributed solely to divine good will: "Those who will possess [the art] should not glory in it as in a good of their own, and which they have not received; let them humbly give thanks unto the Lord, from whom and by whom all things come, and without whom nothing exists."[151] Cennini, in his turn, legitimized his own mastery only in terms of a relation of filiation and tradition expressed by the *riverenza* due the master (in his case, Agnolo Gaddi), then to the master of the master (Taddeo Gaddi, Agnolo's father), then to the master of the master of the master (Giotto him-

self).[152] . . . All this in a retrograde movement that seemed to carry the question of *origin* to the most radical level of legitimation accordable to the figurative arts.

That is indeed what is in question. But it's not a question of appealing to the *piu celebrati artefici antichi* of whose exploits Pliny sang, and who would be taken up again by Vasari as paradigms of "birth" for his Renaissance-to-be-founded.* It is not a question of Apelles here, but of Adam. Adam, his nature as *imago dei,* and the drama of the sin in which the *imago* was smashed. Adam "created in the image," but who transmitted to us only the loss of the image and the drama of a resemblance ever sought, never obtained. Thus Theophilus makes his declaration of indignity, of contrite humility, follow the story of Genesis and the Fall.[153] Thus Cennini unfolds the same story, from a perspective in which the verb *to paint,* which brings the passage to a close, is very far from designating the triumphalist activity of an art desirous of its own self-recognition. The stakes lay elsewhere, between divine punishment and the search for the salvation of human souls:

> In the beginning *[nel principio],* when almighty God created heaven and earth, above all animals and foods he created man and woman in his own image *[alla sua propria immagine],* endowing them with every virtue. Then, because of the misfortune which fell upon Adam, through envy, from Lucifer, who by his malice and cunning beguiled him—or rather, Eve, and then Eve, Adam—into sin against the Lord's command: because of this, therefore, God became angry with Adam, and had him driven, him and his companion, forth out of Paradise, saying to them: "Inasmuch as you have disobeyed the command which God gave you, by your struggles and exertions *[fatiche ed esercizii]* you shall carry on your lives." And so Adam, recognizing the error which he had committed, after being so royally endowed by God as the source, beginning, and father of us all, found out through his science the need to find some means of living by his hands

***pour sa Renaissance à fonder.*

> *[rinvenne di sua scienza di bisogno era trovare modo da vivere manualmente].* And so he started with the spade, and Eve, with spinning. Man afterward pursued many useful skills *[molte arti bisognevoli],* differing from each other; and some were, and are, more scientific *[di maggiore scienza]* than others; they could not all be alike, since science is the most worthy. Close to that, man pursued some related to the one which calls for a basis of that, coupled with skill of hand: and this is an occupation known as painting.[154]

The traditional, even "ordinary" character of this opening does not, however, give us warrant to neglect it.[155] We must take note of the fact that a book where the author was to provide an "explanation of light" *(ragione della luce),* "the manner and order of drawing" *(el modo e l'ordine del disegnare),* and even a "way to copy the substance of a good figure" *(in che modo ritrarre la sustanza di una buona figura),*[156] we must take note of the fact that all this was established on the silt of Adam's fault and the lost image. Cennini specified this by saying that the loss of the image ought to correspond to the birth of "need" *(bisogno),* and the loss of science—that innate science that made Adam a being cognizant of his God—ought to correspond to manual labor *("operazione di mano").* So the existence of different "skills" *(molte arti)* was, from the outset, thought as an effect of need, thus of sin and of the lack of "science." We understand then that the word *scienza,* as used in this context of a biblical narrative of origins, does not make do with referring to the canonical distinction between the "liberal arts" and the "mechanical arts"; it also evokes everything that theologians might say about it—and everything that the faithful might be given to understand about it by church sermons—namely the reconquest, even partial, of suprasensible *resemblance.*[157]

It is from this point forward that the legitimization of pictorial art, even its claim to the status of a "liberal art," will pass from uneasy management of an original fall and a dereliction—for painting figures would never amount to removing oneself from the "region of dissemblance" in which all sinners are caught—to hope for an ascendant movement, to hope for a chance at salvation. Painting demands the hands, the sign of a punishment, but is not subject to the law of need.

So painting elevates the hands and demands, *desires science:* there was here the sketch of an *anagogical* theory of painting, in accordance with the idea at base Dionysian, relayed to the East by the Venetian-Byzantine tradition, and to the West by Abbot Suger and the whole Gothic aesthetic, of a *materialis manuductio,* in other words, a movement wherein the humiliation in the material and the humility of the material proceed a bit like the incarnation of the divine Word itself: it is beginning from the lowest point that a rise is most powerful.[158] So we should not be surprised to see one of the three principal manuscripts of the *Libro dell'arte* end with a "Hymn to God and the Blessed Mary eternally Virgin," a hymn in which the words "God," "desire," and "pain" rhyme with one another, as well as with, finally, the paradigmatic Christian *unction* that, decidedly, seems to harbor great riches:

> Concordia il tuo voler con quel Dio,
> E verratti compiuto ogni disio:
> Se povertà ti stringe o doglia senti,
> Va' in su la croce a Cristo per unguenti.[159]

Here we are perfectly in step with the fourth and last legitimation within which the project of the *Trattato* was framed. With the return to the cross, unction, and the divine will, we are already in the *wait for ends* (I insist in saying that ends are not here separated from their intermingled expectation, anguish, and desire). The golden age of Vasari, for its part, had already taken place, and the artists of his very pagan resurrection, from Apelles to Michelangelo, had been immortal from the outset (this is the *nunquam periisse* of the frontispiece to the *Lives);* the final heaven where their memory was sung was certainly called "glorious," but in the sense of *fama,* and was obtained at the end of the Judgment of history, if not of the historian. In Theophilus and Cennini, by contrast, the Judgment is none other than the shared Judgment of mortals under the eye of God; it is identified with the end of time—in other words with a negation of history—holds social *fama* in contempt, and accordingly has another value that is otherwise definitive, otherwise disquieting. This is what happens in the closing lines of Cennini's treatise, where the reader is associated with the author himself in the uneasy hope of a quasi-liturgical formula evok-

ing "glory on high for ever and ever, Amen" *(e finalmente nell'altro [mondo] per gloria, per infinita secula seculorum—Amen).*[160] This is what happens earlier in the last lines of the prologue, wherein Theophilus impugns in advance all "temporal reward" for his art, and speaks of a glory that was neither *fama* nor that of his own name, but indeed *gloria,* the glory of the divine name alone:

> When you have read and reread these things many times, and have engraved them in your memory, as reward for the instruction that you have drawn from my writing, each time that my work has been useful to you, pray on my behalf to merciful and almighty God, who knows that I did not write this book from love for human praise, nor from a desire for temporal reward, that I have hidden nothing precious or rare from a feeling of jealousy, or to keep secrets for myself alone, but that, to increase the honor and glory of His name, I have wanted to satisfy needs and aid the progress of a great many men.[161]

We could, facing these lines and their Vasarian counterpoint, sum things up in a comfortable way: on the one side would be the religious Middle Ages, and on the other the humanist Renaissance; a "black cesspool of hellish notions" on the one hand,"[162] and on the other the lucid visibility of perspectival, constructed, "natural," Albertian paintings; a time that is sacred, static, and hierarchical on the one side, a dynamic and liberal human progress on the other . . . But this would be precisely to renew all the lines of division on which Vasari based his sense of history and his ideal of artistic progress. This would be, in particular, to forget that the manuscript of Cennino Cennini was recopied throughout the fifteenth century, and that the four pious verses from the Riccardiano manuscript quoted above were copied right in the middle of the sixteenth century. This would be to forget the "black cesspool of hellish notions" that, as late as 1511, still accompanied the desperately medieval Christ of Dürer. Moreover, the Middle Ages were no more "dark" and self-mourning than the Renaissance was "lucid" and self-satisfied. Vasari wanted to make us believe this—and first of all to make his patron, Cosimo de' Medici,

believe it—but for that he had to *invent* his history of art, in all senses of the term: invent the fable of a progress and a teleology, invent a Giotto "subordinate to nature" in order to forget the Giotto of Christian mysteries and medieval allegories, invent a Fra Angelico immersed in the fourteenth century in order to forget that the great scholastic *ars memorandi* of the frescos in San Marco were painted some twenty years after the death of Masaccio . . .

If it is true that he enters into the work specific to images whereby they constantly *estrange themselves,* then the history of images cannot function according to the neo-Vasarian, even neo-Hegelian model of a simple progress of painting reason. Here history makes meaning only by making a kind of *meaning imbroglio.** In other words an inextricable braid of anachronisms and open conflicts, a dialectic without synthesis of what is invented or "advances" and what lasts or "regresses." All this traversed by the insistent play of the symptom. Fra Angelico indeed painted admirable Albertian perspectives, but he throws historians off track (Vasari above all) for the simple reason that he uses Quattrocento stylistic "modernities" to ends that are diametrically opposed to the ones that Alberti gave to the same "modernities" (in particular, the preeminence of the *historia*): in short, he thought them and used them—so already transformed them—through *other* categories, inherited directly from Albert the Great, Dante, and even Cennino Cennini. This famous Renaissance is no more that of "pagan mysteries" than the "survival of ancient gods" is the Renaissance of Italian humanism alone.[163] In the end, perhaps all the history of art has to do is decline itself as a history of effects that are literally *perverse,* in other words, directed *toward*† one thing in order to go *toward something else*—a way, then, of perpetually "estranging themselves."

But for this history to be neither perverse nor strange nor disquieting, one would have to become convinced with Vasari about certain lines of division that are really nothing but lines of exclusion, even executions. One would thus have to kill the Middle Ages in order to guarantee not only the concept of Renaissance as the preferential or

**sens d'imbroglio.*
†*vers.*

referential category of the history of art, but even the very existence of this history of art as a "humanistic" discipline.[164] One would also have to kill the image in order to guarantee the self-referential concept of Art. *To kill the image,* in other words, to mend it or close it up, to deny the violence in it, its essential dissemblance, even its inhumanity—everything that Grünewald, among others, had so magisterially put to work—in order to revive and reassert the value of an example that Panofsky ultimately chose to put aside. The history of art would have to kill the image so that its object, *art,* might try to escape the extreme dissemination imposed upon us by images—from the ones that haunt our dreams and float by in clouds to the ones, "popular," horribly ugly, or excessive, before which five thousand of the faithful willingly kneel as one. To kill the image, this was to want to extract from a *subject* that is always rent, contradictory, unconscious, in a sense "stupid," the harmonious, intelligent, conscious, and immortal *humanity* of man. But there is a world of difference between the Man of humanism, that ideal, and the human subject: the former aims only for unity, whereas the latter thinks itself only as divided, rent, fated to die.[165] We can understand images—and their rending efficacy—only by calling into question the "humanism" that Vasarian and then Panofskian art history clearly made its alibi.

Now killing the image was for Vasari nothing other than a new way—more radical, perhaps more ideal—of *killing death.* With its galaxy of elect artists "having never perished," the history of art invented for itself a Parnassus of demigods whose principal quality was their having all been heroes, champions of resemblance. What the uneasy prologues by Theophilus and Cennini tell us, by contrast, is that, basically, no artistic image can be anything but a mourning for resemblance, a vestige of the loss of the divine image brought about by Adam's transgression. And if resemblance, from a Christian point of view, is thinkable only as an immense drama, that is first because through his transgression and the loss of his "being in the image of," Adam did nothing other than *invent death* for us. Not to resemble (God), that's another way of saying: we are all going to die. So we understand how the desire to recover the (divine) image superimposes

itself precisely on the desire to recover the native immortality in which God is supposed to have created us all. It is perhaps the fundamental dialectic of incarnational images to carry within themselves this double, contradictory movement (contradictory of the very contradiction into which the divine Word had already agreed to plunge): *to carry death* within them, to proceed to something like a perpetual "putting to death"—a sacrifice, then—to the end of managing religiously the common desire for the death of death . . . For a foreigner who suddenly discovered the world of western Christian images, in particular those covering the walls of churches and monasteries, the first astonishment would doubtless go right to this very point: what comfort with regard to death can Christians have derived from a god perpetually in the image of dying on a cross?

By advancing the triumphal term *rinascita,* Vasari of course turned his back on this double efficacy of images, on this economy of obsession and anxiety. The word "Renaissance" speaks and wants to speak only of *life,* and it is rather moving to think that the first great history of art ever written had as its first word the word *Lives,* as if its basic intention had been to prolong life, to make it multiply, to extend it infinitely without any trial other than that of historical "judgment" itself . . . The "renascent" artist is seen only, after all is said and done, as an artist who "restores life," not only to art itself but to the things and to the living and dead beings that it represents mimetically. Vasari's vocabulary of the living—*vivo, vivace, vivezza, vivacitá*—is almost limitless in its extent; it invades every page of his book, it becomes more emphatic from artist to artist, maintaining here that "it could not be more alive" *("piu vivo far non si può")* and there that "only the voice is lacking."[166]

All of this begins, of course, with Giotto, whose life written by Vasari effectively activates the whole process of "rebirth" to follow. From the first line, Giotto is placed by Vasari "under obligation . . . to nature" *(obbligo . . . alla natura),* and, as if to leave no room for anything "supernatural" that might prove more demanding still, or more timeless, Vasari promotes this obligation to nature to the status of a something truly eternal *(la quale serve continuament . . . sempre).*[167] A few words will suffice to introduce the notion of a rebirth of the

arts whose "good methods," he says, had been forgotten long ago (read: during the Middle Ages). Giotto, then, "resurrects" the good, the true painting *(i modi delle buone pitture . . . risuscitò),* in accordance with a terminology that would consistently mimic the very vocabulary that it denies, namely, religious vocabulary. So the return to nature will be qualified as a "gift of God" *(per dono di Dio)* and as "miraculous" *(e veramente fu miracolo grandissimo),* precisely in the sense that *disegno,* the famous king-concept of Vasarian *disegno,* was here described as "restored completely to life" through the intermediary—the mediation, the intercession, we might say—of the elect chosen artist *(mediante lui ritornasse del tutto in vita).*[168] Things become still more precise, a few lines on, where "life" as a metaphor for resurrected beautiful art is folded into "life" as the very object of this art devoted to natural resemblance:

> [Giotto] became so good an imitator of nature *[divenne così buono imitatore della natura]* that he banished completely that rude Greek manner and revived the modern and good art of painting, introducing the portraying well from nature of living people *[introducendo il ritarre bene di naturale le persone vive].*[169]

And it is here that the famous example of the portrait of Dante comes conveniently to hand, for Vasari, to justify his concept of *ritrarre bene di naturale,* had to invent the notion of the poet's having been a "very great friend" of Giotto *(coetaneo ed amico suo grandissimo).*[170] But what happened in these few lines? What happened was this: a commonplace was, if not invented, then at least firmly anchored for quite some time in all our minds, we who look first as "humanists" at the great Western art of portraiture. This commonplace is that of the identification of the terms "resemblance," "natural," and "living." It heavily conditions the vision that we can have, after Vasari, of the prodigious feats of imitation, in both painting and sculpture, bequeathed to us by the Renaissance. Such a commonplace is of course not without pertinence, for it finds precise and detailed expression everywhere. But it denies, even represses, as much as it affirms. Let's say, to get on with it, that it denies death as much as it wants to

affirm life. Again, then, it kills death—and to do this it kills within itself, it represses the part of the image that is incarnational and medieval, which nonetheless (and until the end of the sixteenth century) profoundly conditions it.[171]

Let's try to be a bit more precise, or at least to illustrate through example. When we go to Florence to admire the masterpieces of the Quattrocento, we often remain stupefied, even gaping, before such works as the bust believed to be a portrait of Niccolò da Uzzano, executed in terra cotta (and what's more painted) by the great Donatello. And when we find our voices, it is words like these that come to us automatically: "That's the height of realism."[172] For it's all here, as the saying goes: the texture of the skin, the wrinkles, the wart on the left cheek, the projecting cheekbone of a man whom old age is beginning to emaciate, etc. But for this very reason we see "life" in it, and we review in our minds—in authentically Vasarian fashion—the *progress in resemblance* realized since the fourteenth century, and in this work brought to a perfection that we don't hesitate, from that point forward, to call "humanist." Here, then, an exemplary object in and around which the aesthetic equivalence of the terms "lifelike," "natural," "alive," "renascent," and "humanist" is fully functional.

Now things didn't happen quite the way Vasarian history wants us to think they did. The "height of realism," visually, existed long before Donatello made what remains, nonetheless, a masterpiece of sculpture. The "height of realism" existed in hundreds, even thousands of objects that encumbered, notably, the Florentine church of the Santissima Annunziata. But they were not works of art. They were *ex-votos,* quite simply, or *bòti* as they were known in Florence: in short, objects of a medieval religious piety that gradually disappeared, dooming these "hyperrealistic" portraits to total destruction.[173] No museum wanted to retain a trace of these objects, nonetheless extraordinary. No history of art includes them in the great movement of figurative styles. But the archives, for their part, have preserved the memory of an intense activity whose professionals were known as *fallimagini,* or "image-makers." People visited their shops in the Via dei Servi—that is, of the *serviti* of the Santissima Annunziata—to have molds taken of their face and hands. From these, positive wax castings

were made, which were painted and completed, in some cases, by the addition of artificial hair. These elements were then mounted on life-size wood and plaster mannequins, which were decked out by the donors—simultaneously the portrait subjects and the executors of a pious vow, a contract with God—in some of their own clothing.[174] Then the objects were added to a numerous and celebrated company (including wax effigies of Isabella d'Este, Frederick II of Aragon, Leo X, Clement VII, cardinals, and other *uomini famosi)* of silent worshipers of the Virgin.[175]

Why have such objects never entered the "great" history of art? Why has no one followed up on the brilliant intuition of the first person to draw attention to them, Aby Warburg, the most anthropological of art historians?[176] Not only did these figures have the aspect of "renascent" works in the middle of the fourteenth century; they also—to make matters even worse—did not want to be, and indeed were not, "works of art." Their operational model was by nature essentially indexical—based on an imprint, on *character*—and demanded a kind of artisanal technique and know-how that humanist notions of *invenzione* and *maniera* had very little to do with. Nonetheless, this operative model, described very precisely, occasioned some of Cennini's last chapters, notably one in which he declared "how useful a thing is making imprints from nature" *(come sia cosa utile l'improntare di naturale)*.[177] But Cennini was not about to relegate the craft of the *fallimagini* into the shadows of a clandestine history.

For that, it is Vasari who must take the credit. Vasari, who definitely was familiar with the ex-votos of the Santissima Annunziata (they still crowded the church during his long sojourns in Florence). Vasari, who in his *Lives* took denial so far as to invert exactly the order of inference in which we must think about such objects: he effectively invented the fable of a Verrocchio who was "one of the first" (that is: in the second half of the fifteenth century) to use this technique of molds and positive wax castings, a Verrocchio who showed a famous artisan, Orsino—a great representative of the preeminent family of *fallimagini,* the Benintendi—how to "become excellent" in the realism of his images *(incominciò a mostrare come potesse in quella farsi eccellente)*.[178] Obviously what happened was just the opposite, namely, that

the "great artists" of the fifteenth century—including Verrocchio, of course, but also Donatello before him—integrated the artisanal know-how of these obscure ex-voto suppliers into their aesthetic stakes. Vasari's having so carefully obscured the meaning* of this episode, a major one in the history of resemblance, indicates that an important move was in play here: it was effectively a question of releasing resemblance from the drama within which Christianity continued to think it. It was a question of making it into an artistic aim, a vector of success and *humanitas*. To do this, it was necessary to kill the image, and kill with it the activity that produced images in accordance with the more modest ends of what we call an artisanal culture.

Thus it was not solely to the end—the most obvious, certainly—of constituting painting, sculpture, and architecture as "major" or "liberal" arts that Vasari excluded the craft of the *fallimagini* from the ideal schema of his history of art. It was also a question, and in the same movement, of *saving resemblance:* of making it into an artists' project, a conquest of the "natural," of life, and of constituting it as an authentically "humanist" category. So it was necessary to forget that the resemblance of the *bòti* had not been an end in itself, but a partial clause in a great contract executed with God, between desire and promise, prayer and active grace.[179] It was necessary to forget that the resemblance of the *bòti* had not been thought in isolation as a search for an adequate aspect, but that it belonged to a symbolic system that offered other possible ways of unfolding: for example *bòti* that were only a mass of unformed wax, but with exactly the same weight—the parameter of resemblance in such cases—as the donor . . .

Vasari, finally, tried to forget that these indexical techniques of "trait-for-trait" resemblance had been preeminently *mortuary techniques*. It is not by chance that Cennini never, not once, uses the adjective *vivo* when writing about imprints *di naturale* (whereas Vasari ultimately conflates the two notions). To make an imprint of a still-living face—which demanded an adaptation, the invention of means whereby the subject could continue to breath—this was to use the

***sens*, which can also mean "direction."

age-old technique of the *imago,* or mortuary effigy, transformed symbolically to serve the magic of a "vow" that connected the Florentine merchant to the Great Manager of his death-to-come.[180] The admirable statue of Niccolò da Uzzano would be in this connection at the place of perfect equilibrium: it speaks to us of life because the head turns upward, as if animated by a desire, and through the painted gaze with which Donatello so wonderfully endowed it. But its nature—beginning with its mode of operation—continues to pay its tribute to the mortifying essence of the *imago.* We understand this completely when looking at another statue, one nearby in the same room of the Museo di Bargello: it is the bust of a woman—long attributed to Donatello, moreover—that likewise pays death the tribute of its too exact resemblance (Fig. 12). The subtle weakening of the teguments under the weight of the drying plaster, the cadaverous rigidity, the closed eyes, all this obliges the affecting face henceforth to resemble only its most exact, impersonal, and dramatic resemblance—its *resemblance to being dead.*[181]

To the Vasari who dreamt of a resemblance conceived as *gain,* as art, as life, the images of the Florentine fifteenth century persisted in opposing a resemblance conceived as a *gift* offered to God, as surety for a supernatural contract and as sign of an impending death. To offer an ex-voto to the church of the Santissima Annunziata or to have one's portrait sculpted for placement opposite an *imago pietatis* in the church of Santa Croce, this was doubtless to affirm something—a symbolic power—to the citizens of Florence, but it was also to deprive oneself of something, to make a sacrificial gift of one's natural resemblance in view of *another resemblance,* that, supernatural, of "another life" in the heavens—of death, in short. That's why the "resembling" images, the "accurate" or realist images of the Quattrocento do not always have the optimism, even triumphalism that Vasari wanted to project onto all of them. Although resembling, it also knows how to impose upon us the disconcerting strangeness, the secret disfiguration of its mode of presentation. Through the light but insistent traces of its contact with death, through the invasive visual index of its face drowned in a bronze as black as a veil of mourning, the statue in the Bargello, too, *estranges itself.* As must have seemed strange—even

Image not available

FIG 12 Anonymous (Florentine), *Bust of a Woman,* 15th century. Bronze. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello. Photo: Giraudon.

frightening to some—all these *bòti* too exact because too motionless, all fixed in their devout face-to-face with the miraculous image of the Santissima Annunziata . . . Such, perhaps, is the tip of truth* before which all of these figurative symptoms place us despite ourselves: the immobility of these images (their principal symptom of all,† we might note with some irony) obliges us to experience in them something like a managing of death.

*_bout de vérité._
†_à toutes._

Death as their *brace,** so to speak. Their major paradigm. Why? Because Christianity placed death at the center of all its imaginary operations. That was its major risk, or its principal ruse—or rather both at once: to thematize death as rend, *and* to project death as a means of mending all rends, of replacing all losses. A way of including dialectically (such is the ruse) its own negation, by making death into a rite of passage, a mediation toward the absence of all death. A way also of opening itself (such is the risk) to the somber insistence of an always-returning negativity. But the height of the risk and of the ruse will have been, from the outset, to delegate onto the person of God the very ordeal of this insistent death. The Christian economy of salvation as much as the mystery of the Incarnation succeeded in advance in setting these two extraordinary paradoxes the one into the other: the first made die what is by definition immortal; the second made death itself die. Thus did men imagine killing their own death by giving themselves the central image of a God who agrees to die for them (in other words, to die in order to save them from death).

But to do this, it was necessary to *let death insist in the image.* To open the image to the symptom of death. For just as anyone who says "I don't love you" nonetheless pronounces the word of love, so anyone who talks of resurrection lets the work of death insist within him. Christians—Saint Bernard at the foot of his crucifix, the believer contemplating the engraved melancholy of his God, and the old Florentine woman fixed in her own cast—have all lived in the double desire to kill death and to imitate death at the same time: in other words, to identify with the death of their God in an *imitatio Christi,* so as to believe that they have killed their own death, always in the image of their resurrected God. Adam was born in the image of, but the immense weight of his sin constrained all others to the obligation to die, to *die in the image of,* to reenact constantly the sacrificial death of the incarnate Word, guarantor of their resurrection, even in their own act of being born. We need only recall the terrible sentences with which Saint Paul introduces Christian baptism in order to understand the degree to which death functioned here as the motor of all religious desire, of all ritual *catharsis,* of all transformation, and hence of all figurability.[182] It was necessary to die in order to be able to resemble.

**portant.*

Now this heavy constraint also breached the world of images, what we call the images of Christian art, the image-objects that have been such a focus of the discipline of the history of art. It affected them integrally, structurally—in ways that extend far beyond its mere iconographic implementation, for example. Beyond the "theme" or "concept" of death, a constant work of oscillation—of ebb and flow—has agitated the Western image: between ruse and risk, between a dialectical operation and the symptom of a rend, between a figuration always posed and a disfiguration that always interposes. It is a complex interplay of imitation and incarnation. Before the first we grasp worlds, we see. The image is posed before us, it is stable, susceptible to having ever more knowledge drawn from it.* It excites our curiosity endlessly through its representational configurations, its details, its iconological riches. It will almost ask us to go "behind the image"[183] to see whether some key to the enigma might not still be hidden there.

Before the second, the ground collapses. Because there exists a place, a rhythm of the image in which the image seeks something like its own collapse. Then we are before the image as before a gaping limit, a disintegrating place.[184] Here fascination becomes exasperated, reverses itself. It is like an endless movement, alternately virtual and actual, powerful in any case. The frontality where the image placed us suddenly rends, but the rend in its turn becomes frontality; a frontality that holds us in suspense, motionless, we who, for an instant, no longer know what to see under the gaze of this image. Then we are before the image as before the unintelligible exuberance of a visual event. We are before the image as before an obstacle and its endless hollowing. We are before the image as before a treasure of simplicity, for example a color, and we are there-before—to quote the beautiful phrase of Henri Michaux—as if facing something that conceals itself.[185]

The whole difficulty consisting in being afraid neither of knowing, nor of not-knowing.

***susceptible d'un savoir à tirer d'elle toujours plus avant.*

APPENDIX: THE DETAIL AND THE *PAN*

The Aporia of the Detail

It is a fact of experience endlessly repeated, inexhaustible, piercing: painting, which has no offstage, which shows everything, all at once and on a single surface—painting is endowed with a strange and formidable capacity for dissimulation. It will never stop being there, before us, like a distance or a power, never altogether like an act. Why is this so? As much, doubtless, because of its material status—the paint material—as because of its temporal, ontological position; also, indivisibly, because of the ever defective modality of our gaze. The number of things that we do not make out in painting is confounding.

We can never know, heuristically speaking, how to *look at* a painting. That's because knowing and looking absolutely don't have the same mode of being. Thus, faced with a risk that the entire cognitive discipline of art is collapsing, the historian and the semiotician will tend implicitly to evade the question: about this painting, whose integral meaning ceaselessly eludes him, he will say: "I haven't seen it enough; to know something more about it, now I ought to see it in detail . . ." See it, and not look at it: for *seeing* knows better how to approach, anticipate, and even mimic the act, supposed to be sovereign, of knowledge. So to see *in detail* will be the little organon of any science of art. Doesn't that seem obvious? I will however suggest a line of questioning: What can rightfully be meant by detailed knowledge of a painting?

This text is a longer version of a paper presented at the International Center of Semiotics and Linguistics in Urbino, Italy, in July 1985, at the colloquium "Fragment/Fragmentaire" chaired by Louis Marin. It was first published in the periodical *La Part de L'Oeil,* no. 2 (1986): 102–19, with the title "L'Art de ne pas décrire, Une aporie du détail chez Vermeer." [Previous translation by A. C. Pugh of a shorter version, "The Art of Not Describing. Vermeer: The Detail and the Patch," *History of the Human Sciences* 2 (1989): 135–69. Newly translated for the present volume.]

In common-sense philosophy, the detail seems to encompass three operations, more or less self-evident. First that of *getting closer:* one "enters into the details" as one penetrates the rarefied air of epistemic intimacy. But this intimacy entails some violence, perverse without any doubt; one gets close only to *cut up,* to break down, to take apart. Such is the basic meaning of the French word *découper,* its etymological tenor—a pruning or cutting—and the first definition of it in Littré: "the separation of a thing into several parts, into pieces," which opens up an entire semantic constellation on the side of profit and exchange, of detail commerce.* Finally, through an extension no less perverse, the detail designates an exactly symmetrical, even opposite operation, one that consists in gathering all the pieces together, or at least *accounting for them* in full: "to detail" is to enumerate all the parts of a whole, as if the "cutting up" had served only to make possible a complete accounting, without remainder—a sum. So a triply paradoxical operation is in play here, one that gets closer the better to cut up, and cuts up the better to make whole. As if "whole" existed only in bits, provided these can be added up.

Such a paradox, however, defines something like an ideal. The detail—with its three operations: proximity, partition, addition—would be the fragment as invested with an ideal of knowledge and of totality. This ideal of knowledge is *exhaustive description.* Contrary to the fragment whose relationship to the whole only puts it into question, posits it as an absence or enigma or lost memory, the detail in this sense *imposes the whole,* its legitimate presence, its value as response and point of reference, even as hegemony.

The great favor currently enjoyed by the detail in interpretations of works of art does not result solely from the "common-sense philosophy" whereby, to know a thing well, one must know it "in detail." Its presuppositions are certainly more complex, more strategic. I make no pretense of analyzing them here—that would entail a veritable history of the history of art—but I will suggest that this methodological favor perhaps derives from the serene connivance of what we might call an "understood" positivism and a Freudism that is, let's

***commerce de détails. Vente au détail* means "retail," as opposed to *en gros,* "wholesale."

say, "badly understood." The "understood" positivism comes to us from faraway, it postulates that the whole visible can be described, cut up into its components (like the words of a sentence or the letters of a word), and wholly accounted for; that to describe means to see well, and that to see well means to see truly, in other words, to know well. Since everything can be seen, exhaustively described, everything will be known, verified, legitimized. This being a way of formulating a willed, even willful, optimism that will carry within it an experimental method applied to the visible.

As for the "badly understood" Freudism, it draws support from the royal road opened, of course, by the *Traumdeutung:* the interpretation should proceed *"en detail,"* wrote Freud, not *"en masse."* [1] And the two great rules of the classic analytic contract are, as we know, to *say everything*—particularly and especially the details—and to *interpret everything*—particularly and especially the details.[2] But there is a misunderstanding here, because while Freud interpreted the detail as part of a signifying chain, sequence, or *thread* (as I would say), the iconographic method, by contrast, is pleased to look for the *last word* of a work of art, for its signified. It will try, for example, to find an attribute that says everything about the "subject": a key will become the key that exhausts the meaning of everything painted around it, in other words, about the body that we will call, *clef oblige,* "Saint Peter." Or indeed, at the extreme, one will look for a supposed self-portrait of the painter between the two panels of a door reflected in a carafe of water relegated to a picture's darkest corner, and then ask what moment the self-portrait represents in the painter's life, what word he is addressing to another figure outside the painting whose presence in the artist's studio and whose "humanism" (and thus his quality as author of the painting's "program") is attested by a contemporary archival document, and at the very moment the painting was probably painted, and so forth . . . The quest, always *en abyme,* for the "last word" here making the painting into a veritable roman à clef—a genre from which Freud explicitly distanced himself at the beginning of the case-history of Dora.[3] The picture is always considered as a coded text, and the code, like hidden treasure or a body in the closet, is always waiting there, somehow *behind the painting*—and not within

its thickness—to be found: this will be the "solution" of the painting, its "motive" and its "confession." It will most often be an emblem, a portrait, or something garnered from history; in short, it is a symbol, or perhaps a referent that prompts a historian to "make the painting confess."[4] It is to act as if the work of painting had committed a crime, and one crime only (whereas a work of painting, good as gold, doesn't commit any, or cunning as all aspectual black magic, can commit a hundred).

Furthermore, while Freud understood details to be observational *discards,** the ideal describer conceives of the detail as resulting from a simple *acuity* of observation. An acuity supposed to make possible, as if inductively, the very discovery of the treasure, the treasure of meaning. But what is meant, in the end, by "acuity of observation"? If we turn to the conceptual field that provided the model for such an acuity, we discover that the problem is much less simple than it seems.

The conceptual field in question is the one known precisely as the observational sciences. Bachelard discussed the status of the detail in a famous thesis published in 1927.[5] He showed that the epistemological status of the detail—even in the physical sciences, the sciences of measurement—is that of a division, a disjunction of the subject of science, of an "intimate conflict that it can never wholly pacify."[6] It is a conflict—let's say as a first approximation—between the minutia of the descriptive detail and the clarity of the interpretive set-up.

The first reason comes down to the phenomenological status of the object of knowledge itself: "Nothing is harder to analyze," writes Bachelard, "than a phenomenon that can be known in two different orders of magnitude."[7] When the object of knowledge suddenly gets close, for example, a threshold is crossed, abruptly, and one must shift *to another order of thought* that has to be implemented if one doesn't want all thought to be rent or to collapse. Getting back to painting: it is in accordance with not two but multiple orders of magnitude that it lets us apprehend it. A commonplace in the *Kunstliteratur* is based

**rebuts.*

on the givens of this elementary phenomenology, celebrating the enigma or "wonder" of a painting's *not showing the same thing* from a distance and from close up. The whole critical fortune of Titian, for example, revolves around the disjunction between the effects produced by his work when viewed from a distance—the "inimitable perfection" of flesh and fabric—and when viewed at close range—the imperfection, even aberration, likewise inimitable, of the "broad and even coarse sweeps of the brush" with which he covered his canvases: "insomuch that from near little can be seen [i.e., in the way of figures], but from a distance they appear perfect," to quote a celebrated passage by Vasari; and no less celebrated are the pages that Diderot devoted to the same problem, before the paintings of Chardin.[8] In short, the detail poses one question above all others: *where to look from?* And it is not perception that is in question here, but rather the dwelling* (or place) of the *subject:* there whence painting is thought.

Bachelard stated the problem in terms that are doubtless "raw": advances in detailed knowledge generally go exactly against the grain of systematic knowledge, because the one moves "from the Objective to the Personal," whereas the other moves "from the Personal to the Objective."[9] He nonetheless indicated the essential thing about it, namely, a *division* of the subject of close-up knowledge. It's as if the describing subject, by dint of cutting something local out of something global, came to disassociate his very act of knowledge, his observation, never seeing the very "something local" within the very "something global" that he thinks he is taking stock of. Worse: it's as if the describing subject, in the very "tearing-to-pieces" movement that constitutes the operation of the detail, instead of proceeding to the serene reciprocity of a totalization, redirected despite himself and *onto himself* the first, violent act of disintegration. A cognitive subject cutting up the visible the better to totalize, but undergoing himself the effect of such a scission. Let's imagine a man for whom the whole world is a puzzle: he will end up experiencing the fragility—the potential mobility, in other words the loss—of his own limbs.

When Bachelard discusses the detail he is basically telling us about

**aître,* homonymous with *être,* "being," "to be."

a rent consciousness. It evokes in the epistemological order what Balzac recounted, in the order of pictorial creation, about *The Unknown Masterpiece:* figurelessness* will be the lot of anyone who stalks the thing itself in his representations. It also evokes what Lacan calls, in the order of subject formation, an alienation: this is a logical choice, an alternative in which *we are constrained to lose something* in any case. An operation that might be exemplified by a threat of the type: "Your money or your life!" where the money of the victim will be lost regardless of his decision.[10] I will suggest here that every painting threatens us with: "The painting or the detail!"—the paint being lost regardless.† Lost, and yet there, right in front of us—and therein lies the whole drama.

In Bachelard's formulation, this drama of the detail is stated in accordance with the most classic dividing lines: reality *versus* thought, description *versus* category, matter *versus* form:

> In order to describe the detail that escapes the category, it is necessary to judge the perturbations of the material underneath the form. Suddenly, the determinations oscillate. The first [not proximate] description was clear: it was qualitative, it developed itself in the discontinuity of numbered predicates. Quantity brings its riches, but [also] its uncertainty. With delicate determinations intervene deeply irrational perturbations. . . . On the level of the detail, Thought and Reality seem to come undone, and we might say that by distancing itself from the order of magnitude in which we think, Reality somehow loses its solidity, its constancy, its substance. To sum up, Reality and Thought founder together in the same Nothingness, in the same metaphysical Erebus, sons of Chaos and Night.[11]

Now what Bachelard says in the field of the so-called exact sciences[12] will be said *a fortiori* in the fields of history and semiology. For

**le sans-figure.*

†Wordplay: *peinture* means both "painting" and "paint."

history, even more than the observational sciences, lacks the capacity—which must be incessant—of "rectifying thought before the real," thanks to which a knowledge will have some chance of constructing itself in the very hollow of the most "delicate" perturbations.[13] And what is said about the phenomena of experimental physics (transformable in accordance with regulated criteria, thereby making possible the induction of a law) will be said *a fortiori* about a painting, which lets itself be manipulated very little, "varying" only with changing light, for example, or according to its differentiation within an abstract series wherein it is made to figure.

In any case, Bachelard's appeal to chaos and night is not without interest for those of us who, when looking at a painting from close up, have felt as though thought and reality, form and matter, were coming undone. For it isn't so much the minutia of the detail that calls into question the hermeneutic of the pictorial whole (and even the possibility of describing it); it is first of all its essential *chaotic vocation.* We could restate this in Aristotelian terms: close-up knowledge of a painting loosens its formal cause from its material cause.

In absolute terms—and even if this sounds paradoxical—the painting offers nothing of its formal cause for seeing: its quiddity, its algorhythm in a sense, its *eidos:* in short, no definition, in the strict sense, of *what* a painting represents; of what it *takes the place* of. The painting does not offer its formal cause for seeing, it offers it to us for interpretation. Proof: no one agrees about this formal definition. And still less, let it be said in passing, about the final cause, *that in view of which* a painting represents this like this, instead of that like that. What the painting shows is, primordially, on the order of a *like this:* traces or indices of its efficient cause (Aristotle understands this to mean anything on the order of a decision, whether voluntary or involuntary, in the sense that the father is the cause of the child).[14] But above all, *what painting shows is its material cause, which is to say paint.* It is not by chance that Aristotle's two most prominent examples of material cause are "material [as] the cause of manufactured articles," in the sense that bronze is the cause of the statue, and "parts [as] causes of the whole," in other words the materiality of the fragment[15] . . .

So the material cause would have a certain primacy in what paint-

ing gives us to look at. A major consequence follows from this primacy: we ought to look at the material, says Aristotle, *as a mother;* for it pertains above all to desire—Aristotle here uses the verb *éphièmi,* which means in this context: to let oneself, unawares, and no less imperiously, go toward . . . In other words that *it does not pertain to a logic of contraries,* which is the logic of form:

> Then, if we were to think of "existence" *[ón]* . . . we might think of shortage [i.e., lack of form] as the evil contradiction of this good but of matter as a something the very nature of which is to desire and yearn towards *[éphiestaï]* the actually existent . . . But how can either form or shortage really desire form? Not form itself, because it has no lack of it; and not shortage, which is the antithesis of form, because the terms of antithesis, being mutually destructive, cannot desire each other. So that if (to borrow their own metaphors) we are to regard matter as the female desiring the male . . .[16]

Such would be in this sense the aporia of the detail, the aporia of all close knowledge of painting: even as it aims for a more precise form, the close-up gaze manages only to undo matter and form, and, doing this, despite itself, it condemns itself to a veritable tyranny of the material. A tyranny that also comes to ruin the descriptive ideal tied to the ordinary notion of the detail: the close-up gaze produces nothing more here than interference, obstacle, "contaminated space."[17] So the operation of partition becomes impossible or artificial; that of the exhaustive addition of parts verges on pure theoretical delusion. Instead of the visible being cut up into signifying units, what falls to us in the close-up gaze is—still according to Aristotle's terms—a material, namely something not defined, a simple protension, a desire. Exit the logic of contraries, exit definition, exit the clear and distinct object of a representation. It might be supposed then that to any hermeneutic that tries to delimit or discern it in its form, in its definition, painting never stops opposing its indistinct material, precisely in counterpoint to its figurative and mimetic vocation.

Painting or Depicting

The whole problem comes down to this "counterpoint," of course. So far I have only stated the obvious, something that's perfectly banal. By saying: "What painting shows is its material cause, in other words, paint," all I have produced so far is a kind of tautology, which must now be worked, gone beyond, filled out. I stress this for one reason only: the history of art ignores its effects more or less constantly. This is the very tactical negligence of a knowledge that tries or pretends to constitute itself as a science, "clear and distinct": it would very much like its object, painting, to be clear and distinct, too, as distinct (divisible) as the words of a sentence, the letters of a word. When looking at paintings, the art historian generally detests letting himself be troubled by effects of the paint; or indeed talks about them as a "connoisseur," evoking the "hand," the "impasto," the "manner," the "style" . . . It is not a philosophical happenstance that the whole literature of art continues to use the word *subject* for its contrary, in other words, the object of the *mimesis,* the "motif," the represented. This makes it possible, precisely, to ignore both the effects of *enunciation* (in short, of fantasy, of the subject position) and the effects of gush, of *subjectility* (in short, of material), with which painting, eminently, works—and raises questions.[18]

Panofsky, in his famous methodological introduction to *Studies on Iconology,* implies that the question has been settled. The word *description* appears in his three-level schema only to designate simple pre-iconographic recognition, the so-called primary or natural subject matter, the least problematic one: as if, in all cases, this recognition could pertain to a binary logic of identity, between "it is" and "it is not," as if the question of the *quasi,* for example, should not be posed, or required its resolution, its dissolution in advance. "It is obvious," writes Panofsky, "that a correct iconographical analysis in the narrower sense presupposes a correct identification of the motifs. If the knife that enables us to *identify* a St. Bartholomew *is not* a knife but a cork-screw, the figure *is not* a St. Bartholomew."[19]

I am not in the process of suggesting that painting is a pure material chaos, and that we must consider nil the figurative meanings un-

covered by iconology. There obviously are "reasonable" distances at which details do not collapse, do not crumble into a pure colored morass. There are very numerous and pertinent knives and corkscrews, clearly identifiable in very numerous figurative paintings.[20] But it is also necessary constantly to problematize the *dichiarazione,* to use Ripa's word, of painted figures. It is necessary to pose to each declarative assertion (it is / it is not) the question of the *quasi.*

For every detail in painting is over-determined. Let's take the celebrated example of Brueghel's *Fall of Icarus* (Fig. 13): the detail par excellence here would be the little feathers that we see fluttering down, falling all around the engulfed body—but not completely engulfed, for if it were, how could we see that it *is* engulfed? There must indeed be a *quasi* here to make the signified act visible. In any case, these feathers seem indicative of the most refined descriptive care: to paint a fall of Icarus, *and even* the famous feathers unglued by the sun's heat, feathers here made to resemble a discreetly meticulous rain, falling more slowly than the body, designating to the gaze the zone of the fall. If the body had disappeared completely, the fall still would have been "described" by these feathers, by this descriptive supplement. But at the same time, the little feathers in Brueghel's painting are indications, perhaps the only ones, of the *historia,* of the narrativity: it is only the concomitance of a body falling into the sea (like some "man overboard") and these modest feathers that liberate the signification "Icarus." In this regard, the feathers are an iconographic attribute necessary for the representation of the mythological scene.

Now if we look at the *as-if,* the *quasi;* if we attend to the material, we note that the details called "feathers" have no distinctive features that "separate" them completely from the foam produced, in the sea, by the falling body: they are whitish accents of paint, surface scansions on top of the "background" (the water) and around the "figure" (the two ends of a human body disappearing into the water). They are like the foam, and yet not like it, not completely. But then nothing here is "completely." Everything is *not-quitely.* That's neither descriptive nor narrative; it's the in-between, purely pictorial, pale, of a signified "feather" and a signified "foam"; in other words, it is not a semiotically stable entity. But then why do we see feathers *anyway?* Because

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FIG 13 Pieter Brueghel, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (detail), c. 1555. Oil on canvas. Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts.

the same accents are repeated, form a constellation, detach themselves from a background other than the sea, there where we can no longer say: it's foam. We see it singularize itself "in front of" a boat. So it's the difference of the background (sea/boat) that "makes the difference," that decides the figure. *Decidedly,* these accents of white paint have led us to read "falling feathers" rather than "surging foam."

But for all that, do we recover descriptive evidence, figurative stability? No, precisely. For what here enables us to decide "feather"—namely the differential play of the background and the paint accents—is produced through a kind of panic, a kind of figural vertigo, but a vertigo that effectively flattens the painting. Look at this painted feather—falling—near the sailor who clings to the rigging: a feather utterly preposterous, completely out of scale, immense, the size of the man. One tries to evoke an illusion of depth here, one scarcely succeeds—it is indeed difficult to "legitimize" an isolated feather in atmospheric perspective. Moreover, Brueghel's whole picture functions, in its very rigor, like an extravagant bending of space. In short,

the distinctive feature of the detail answers, here, to a plurality of functions: it falls short of any univocal *dichiarazione*.

Panofsky's knife and corkscrew example indeed indicates his limits: it presupposes not only (by contrast with the indeterminacy of the material constituent of painting) that the pictorial signifiers are discrete, let themselves be cut away, isolated, like the letters of a word, the words of a sentence. But further, and by contrast with the overdetermination entailed by the notions of subject and meaning, it presupposes that all pictorial signifiers represent a "subject"—a motif, a signified—for itself, as if every picture functioned like a text, and as if every text were legible, wholly decipherable. In sum, the notion of the detail in painting is meaningful, for a history of art based on this kind of iconography, only if *the mimetic transparency of the iconic sign is presupposed.*

Now this transparency is always running up against the opaque materiality of paint. There is something other than iconic details in paintings, even figurative ones, even Flemish and Dutch ones. In a book received as both thought-provoking, the latest thing in art historical methodology, and as an implementation of precepts nonetheless old and redolent of the mastery and paternity of Ernst Gombrich,[21] Svetlana Alpers relativized the import of iconographic analysis insofar as it is connected to the Panofskian inheritance and, specifically, to the study of Italian art. Alpers called into question the notion that painting is based, universally, on semantic and narrative reflection: there are paintings that tell no story, she declares—quite rightly. And it could be said that the whole force of the book's conviction comes from this single proposition.

These paintings that don't tell a story are Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century. For example the *View of Delft* by Vermeer: it's not the iconography or the emblem of anything; it refers to no narrative program, no preexisting text whose supposed historical or anecdotal or mythological or metaphorical value the image was charged to compose visually . . . None of that. The *View of Delft* is just a *view*. The pertinence of Alpers's argument here is that she forcefully demonstrates the limits of the *ut pictura poesis* tradition: there is more

to western figurative painting than the Albertian ideal and the prevalence of narrativity, of *historia.*[22] *Painting is not made for writing*—writing stories, histories—by means other than writing. Certainly.

What, then, is it made for? It is made, says Alpers, *to describe.* Painting—Dutch painting—is made to make manifest "the world staining the surface with color and light, impressing itself upon it": something of which we might take "the *View of Delft* as the consummate example. Delft is hardly grasped, or taken in—it is just there for the looking," Alpers goes on to say.[23] So that's it: painting's vocation is understood to be the *view:* the perceived world *deposits itself** as such—such as it is perceived—in pigments on a picture.

Now this indicates a singularly restrictive conception, both of the view (I mean here the phenomenological relation between the eye and the gaze) and of the "deposit" (by which I mean the relationship, no less complex, between gush, project, and subject,† between vision and brush, between pigment and support, etc.). We perceive that Alpers's argument amounts to substituting for the myth of pure *semantic reflection* the myth of pure perceptual or *visual reflection,* whereof Dutch painting, with the aid of "technical skill," is a locus, an instrumentalization, and a socialization. Such is indeed the book's central message: *ut pictura ita visio.* The *ut-ita,* unlike the *quasi,* aiming to reconstruct a new logic of identity: what is painted on Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century *is* what was seen in the so-called visual culture of the time (the term is borrowed from Baxandall);[24] *it is* what was seen, seen exactly, through techniques of description and scientific measurement of the perceptible world. Such a logic of identity being possible, of course, only by reducing all the work of indeterminacy, of opacity, entailed by any change in the order of perceptual magnitude—as when one moves from the seen world to the measured world and from the measured world to the painted world. The instrument of this reduction resides in the argument of exactitude: the proverbial "technical skill" of Dutch painters, their "sincere hand and faithful eye."[25] And so it is that "the world," the visible world, comes

* *de dépose.*

†*jet/projet/sujet:* used here as expounded by Didi-Huberman in *La Peinture incarnée* (1985).

to function here as absolute model and origin: the primacy of the signified gives way, henceforth, to primacy of the referent.

That seventeenth-century Dutch painting had an epistemic aim, that it participated in structures of knowledge, is no longer debatable; and it is no longer debatable because of the existence of Alpers's book, which reveals to us in this sense an important part of what might be called the "final cause" of an artistic period. But the aim does not say all there is to say about either "vision" or the view, much less about painting. The methodological flaw consists in having folded, immediately, the idea of final cause into formal cause, on the one hand (the *eidos* of Dutch seventeenth-century painting is the *episteme* of the seventeenth-century; pictorial cutting-up is the scientific dismemberment of the visible world, its exhaustive description); and into material cause on the other hand. As if paint, an opaque material, "rendered" the visible with as much transparency as a well-polished lens. As if painting were a technique of exactitude—which it has never been, in the epistemological sense of the term: painting is rigorous or accurate, it is never exact.

Basically, Alpers's argument comes down, even in the book's title, to prejudging painting in these terms: *painting equals depicting.* Hence the extremely high value ascribed to what Alpers calls "descriptive surfaces."[26] As if the visible world were a surface. As if paint had no thickness. As if a flow of a pigment had the legitimacy of a topographical projection—and such is the hidden ideal underlying the notion of technical skill: that the hand itself could be transformed into a "faithful eye," in other words, an organ without subject. As if the only thinkable thickness was the absolutely diaphanous one of the lens in a pair of glasses, or of an ideal retina.

But above all, Alpers's argument foregrounds two instruments of visibility whose historical role—whose seventeenth-century *usage*—is reinforced by a paradigmatic value wherein is stated a *meaning,* a global interpretation of Dutch painting: one of these instruments is the camera obscura, the other the geographical map. The one, theoretically informed by the contemporary prestige of photography, seems to guarantee the exactitude, or better, the authenticity of the referent projected onto the picture.[27] The other seems to guarantee

us that every discrepancy between the "surface of the world" and the "surface of representation" is the fruit of a transformation that is controlled, and thus epistemologically legitimate: hence exact, hence authentic.[28]

In this sense, Alpers will say that Vermeer's *View of Delft* is "like a map," that the painting takes as its paradigm the non-pictorial *genre* of urban topographical views; and that in the last analysis, the things in the painting are exactly the same things that were in the minds of seventeenth-century geographers.[29] The poet and art enthusiast will of course object to this epistemocentric view, arguing from "painting per se" or from the famous "vibrant colors" specific to Vermeer's painting. But from the outset Alpers counters this with two arguments, by their nature heterogeneous. As regards *color,* she offers another epistemological argument: geographical maps of the seventeenth century are colored, and painters—*métier oblige*—were even hired to color them; and moreover, the maps represented in Vermeer's paintings—*cartes oblige* or *peinture oblige?*—are themselves "colored."[30] The indubitably pictorial conception of seventeenth-century maps would thus suggest the exact opposite of a "geographic" concept—and thus, colored or not, a *graphic* concept—of painting. As regards *vibrancy* in the present, which is to say the formidable supplement whereby we conceive of Vermeer not as a cartographer pure and simple but as an incomparable genius of painting, Alpers oddly goes on to adduce an argument that, this time, pertains to what we might call an ordinary, even trivial, metaphysics: everything that is "common" to both the *View of Delft* and the "the mapping enterprise," namely its sense of community and social banality, is endowed with "an uncommonly seen and felt presence"; for all of this "suggests the intimacy of human habitation" in general, to the extent that in the *View of Delft,* Alpers finally writes, "mapping itself becomes a mode of praise": a paean, a celebration of the World.[31]

So the supposed equivalence of painting and depicting has here brought together two contrasting arguments: a epistemocentric argument, which postulates painting as a graphic description of the world, the *View of Delft* being understood here as a map, an observation, a *detail* of the town of Delft; and a metaphysical argument, which pos-

tulates painting as a celebration of the world—the same world, but one presently endowed, for its glorification, with a vague supplement of "human experience" and "affective tones." The first argument—technical *exactitude*—amounts to thinking the subject of painting as foreclosed. The second argument—metaphysical *authenticity*—amounts to thinking the subject of the painting as transcendental. But the contrast between them is illusory, for both arguments are actually extreme ways of affirming the primacy of the referent, which here acts from end to end as absolute model and origin. The critique of Panofskian *iconology* (the semantic bias) here turns into something that is not its contrary but its other side: an affirmation of the all-powerful role of the *iconic,* its perceptual transparency (what I would call a referential bias), and an implicit rejection of the material element par excellence of painting, which is colored pigment.

The Accident: Material Radiance

It is not by chance that, when discussing the *View of Delft* and exploring the possibility of Vermeer's having used a camera obscura, Svetlana Alpers found herself, almost as a matter of course, quoting a famous passage by Paul Claudel, a text in which the two extreme forms of referential bias—technical exactitude and metaphysical authenticity—are clearly invoked and associated, or rather related to a refusal to question painting in accordance with the work of color and of the subjectile:

> But it is not colors that I want to discuss here, despite their quality and the play between them so exact and so frigid that it seems less obtained by the brush than realized by the intelligence. What fascinates me is the gaze—pure, plain, sterilized; cleansed of all matter; so candid as to be almost mathematical or angelic, or let's just say photographic, but what photography! with which this painter, secluded in his lens, captures the external world. The result can be compared only to the delicate wonders of the camera obscura

> and to the first appearances on the daguerreotype plate of figures drawn by a surer and sharper pencil than Holbein's, by which I mean a ray of sunlight. The canvas brings to bear on its line a kind of intellectual silver, a magic retina. Through this purification, through this stilling of time that is an act of the glass and the tain, an arrangement external to us is introduced even unto the paradise of necessity.[32]

So Claudel speaks to us, about this painting, of pencils and sharp lines (of graphics, then), he speaks of delicacy (of detail, then), a delicacy "cleansed of all matter," purified likewise of all temporality: Vermeer's painting offers itself to vision as a "stilling of time," rather as we speak of a still from a movie. And finally, there's the reference to a "paradise of necessity," in other words, something that evokes in sovereign fashion the metaphysical exigency of an *eidos* of the visible world. In a certain sense, Alpers again takes up the thread of this ideality when she presupposes a Vermeerian "subject" of the gaze that is absolute, non-human: what is in play, she repeats, still about the *View of Delft,* "is the eye, not a human observer."[33] As if the eye were "pure"—organ without drive. And as if the "purity" of the gaze signified the act of observing everything, capturing everything, retracing everything: in other words, *detailing* the visible, describing and depicting it, making of it an aspectual sum without remainder.

Now it is perhaps likewise not by chance that the author Alpers never cites—despite his preeminence in the critical fortune of Vermeer, and especially as regards the *View of Delft*—is Marcel Proust. For Proust was very far from looking for some pseudo-"photographic time-still" in the visible; he sought there on the contrary a trembling duration, what Blanchot called ecstasies—the "ecstasies of time."[34] Correlatively, Proust did not seek in the visible the arguments of *description;* he rather sought there a fulguration of *relations:* "In a description, one can make the objects that figured in a place being described succeed one another indefinitely," he said, "but truth will begin only when the writer takes two different objects, sets out their relation."[35] . . . Both Proust's statement and his practice teach us the extent to which writing is the opposite of describing. And no less

readily apparent, in the celebrated passage in *La Prisonnière* about Vermeer's picture, is the extent to which *painting is the contrary of describing.* The *View of Delft* is presented there neither as a description of the world as it was in the seventeenth century—its topographical or photographic capture, its "descriptive surface," to quote Alpers—nor as a metaphysical celebration of some visible "paradise of necessity." On the contrary, it is a question of "material" and "layers of color," on the one hand: and here we are led back to the bedrock of colors from which every painted representation draws its background or its ground, as one prefers; of upheaval and mortal tremors, on the other hand—something that might be called a trauma, a shock, a *volley of color.* Let's reread:

> Finally, he was before the Vermeer . . . finally, the precious material of the tiny yellow patch of wall *[pan de mur jaune].* His dizziness increased; he fixed his gaze, like a child on a yellow butterfly he wants to grasp, upon the precious little patch of wall. "That's how I ought to have written," he said. "My last books are too dry, I ought to have gone over them with several layers of color, made my sentences precious in themselves, like this little yellow patch of wall." Meanwhile, the gravity of his dizziness did not escape him. . . . He repeated to himself: "Little yellow patch of wall with a sloping roof, little yellow patch of wall." Meanwhile, he collapsed onto a circular sofa. . . . He was dead.[36]

"Petit pan de mur jaune" (Fig. 14): one might well ask oneself—and I can imagine a translator hesitating over this—which noun the adjective *jaune* qualifies. But the equivocal nature of such a relation introduces us precisely to a real conceptual distinction that the whole text, in its very dramaturgy, brings forth; and this distinction touches the very core of our problematic—what I have called "close-up knowledge" of a painting. For someone who *sees* the painting by Vermeer, in other words, someone who apprehends what is represented in accordance with a phenomenology of recognition and identification; someone who might go to Delft to see "if it's the same," or who, like

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FIG 14 Jan Vermeer, *View of Delft* (detail), c. 1658–60. Oil on canvas. The Hague, Mauritshuis.

Svetlana Alpers, might search through all the topographical views of Delft dating from the years 1658–60 in order to make comparisons, to identify the exact point of view, on the canal bank, in order to recover the referent: for such a person, *jaune* refers to the wall. It's the world, it's the wall that was yellow under the eye of the painter Vermeer, that particular day, probably between 1658 and 1660, from the canal bank. And at present, in the painting, the yellow continues to refer to a wall from a "stilled" time; it speaks to us of seventeenth-century Delft, and so in a sense is "cleansed of all pictorial material," is outside the canvas; it is "delicate," as Claudel says, it is exact. For such a person, then, it is the wall that is yellow, and in its capacity as wall *it is a detail,* a circumscribed piece of a much larger topographical ensemble called Delft.[37]

For someone, by contrast, who *looks* at the painting, for example someone who, like Bergotte, might "fix" his gaze upon it to the point of becoming mesmerized—until dying from it, as Proust imagined—for such a person it is the *pan* that is yellow: a *particolare* of the painting, quite simply, but efficacious, electively and enigmatically efficacious; not "cleansed of all matter" but, conversely, envisioned as "precious matter," as a "layer"; not incited by a "photographic still" of time past, but inciting a tremor in time present, something that acts all of a sudden, and that "breaks down" the body of the viewer, Bergotte. For such a person, the yellow in the painting by Vermeer, as color, *is a whack,** a distressing zone of paint, of paint considered as "precious" and traumatic material cause.

Literary as it may be, the distinction suggested by this passage from *À la Recherche du temps perdu* is imbued with a profound intellectual rigor. A fiction as regards the efficacy of painting, certainly: it is rare for a painting to watch its watcher die† . . . But the position of the *relation* in this fiction, in this coincidence, is itself informed by an incontestable truth effect, for such an efficacy—this dramatic outcome, this kind of negative miracle—indicates the existence of something very real at *work* in painting: a work of bedazzlement, in some sense, at once self-evident, luminous, perceptible, and obscure, enigmatic, difficult to analyze, notably in semantic or iconic terms; for it is a work or an effect of painting as colored material, not as descriptive sign. Thus I will borrow from the *Recherche* the sublime and simple word *pan* and try to polish its meaning (as mirrors must be polished before they reflect clearly), to render its conceptual rigor more precise, notably as regards its differentiation from the category of the *detail.*[38] For now, we'll continue with Vermeer, specifically with a painting that is quite well-known, excessively simple, even "ordinary" in his production: in the banality of its "subject," an intimate "genre" scene; in the obviousness of its lighting, which as so often comes from the right; in the sameness, or quasi-sameness, of this woman, who elsewhere reads a letter but here quite simply does her lacework.

**pan:* an alternative, colloquial meaning of the word.
†*qu'un tableau regard mourir qui le regarde.*

Image not available

FIG 15 Jan Vermeer, *The Lacemaker,* c. 1665. Oil on canvas. Paris, Louvre.

It is *The Lacemaker* in the Louvre (Fig. 15), a work that can be said to exemplify our problem perfectly, if only because its dimensions (21 x 24 cm) not only permit close-up knowledge but require it. There is something "obvious" about the picture, first because the motif is clear, "without history": it doesn't oblige us to undo an iconographic tangle of some sort (it would seem). The painting is "obvious" also because the eye doesn't even have to sweep the visual field, so narrow is it; and recognition of the motif—the said pre-iconographic recognition—seems unproblematic: there is a woman and there is thread, fabric, and lace, from which it follows that the woman is a lacemaker. We might expect, faced with so clear and distinct a picture, and moreover one that's so small, we might expect that it gratifyingly provide us, on its "descriptive surface," with nothing but *details* that are no less clear and distinct. But such is absolutely not the case.

Claudel, who was as sharp-eyed as they come, what did he see here? He saw details, and his deictic—"Look!"—only inspires confidence in the precision and authenticity of his observations:

> Look at the lacemaker (in the Louvre) tending to her tambour, where everything—the shoulders, the head, the hands with their double workshop of fingers—directs us toward the point of the needle: or the pupil in the center of a blue eye that is the convergence of a whole face, a whole being, a kind of spiritual coordinate, a flash loosed by the soul.[39]

If we look closer—if we search the painting for the things discussed in the text—we discover that Claudel's *ekphrasis* carries to an extreme what I have called the aporia of the detail (Fig. 16). In effect, if we look for the referents of the description, what do we find? A tambour, yes; shoulders, a head, two hands "with their double workshop of fingers," without a doubt. But I, for my part, don't see what, according to Claudel, "everything directs us" toward: I don't see any pupil in the center of any blue eye: when it comes to the eyes of the lacemaker, I see only eyelids that, strictly speaking, prevent me from declaring them either open or closed . . . Likewise, I don't see the tip of the needle that Claudel mentions: however closely I look, I don't see

anything between the lacemaker's fingers but two white lines—less than half a millimeter wide—white lines that everything supports my construing as two iconic signs, details of two threads being unwound from two small wooden bobbins on either side of the bent index finger. Did Claudel see a needle where I see thread, and the "pupil of a blue eye" where I see two almost closed eyelids? There could be no better expression of the precariousness of every "delicate" visible recognition. Unless we were to read Claudel's text on a completely different level, apart from all photographic delicacy, apart from all exactitude, and far from the visible "paradise of necessity" that he nonetheless ascribes to Vermeer's painting: then we would have to understand his "Look!" as an injunction to *imagine* a needle behind the four closed fingers of the lacemaker,[40] and to *metaphorically conjure up* an eye, its pupil, and its blueness in the surface, colored, moving, of the "fabric" on which the same hand rests. In any event, both of the two readings put the detail as such, with its descriptive vocation, into aporia: either it is highly debatable, or it is proposed as invisible.

To avoid remaining in a purely aporetic mode, however, the following would have to be conceded: whether it's a matter of "looking for a needle" in the picture-cum-haystack or of "finding the thread" in the labyrinth of shapes, it is still a *detail* that is being sought and that will be found, not only because the visible element in question is tenuous, delicate, but also because such delicacy is there to resolve a difficulty, to *decide on a meaning* in the visible. It's how every detail is connected, intimately or distantly, to an act of *line,* which is the act that constitutes stable differences, the act of graphic decision, of distinction, thus of mimetic recognition, thus of signification. It is generally through operations of line—threads, needles, even knives or corkscrews—that images are made signs, and that signs are made iconic.

There is, in the little painting by Vermeer, an area that is closer and more *salient* than all these found (or findable) details between the lacemaker's fingers (Fig. 17). Claudel did not look at this zone, did not remark it. Nonetheless, it creates a burst of color in the foreground of the work; it occupies so remarkable and so large an area there that

Image not available

FIG 16 Jan Vermeer, *The Lacemaker* (detail), c. 1665. Oil on canvas. Paris, Louvre.

one is tempted to ascribe to it some strange power to bedazzle, to blind. Furthermore, it is more difficult to speak about this zone than about a detail, for the detail is conducive to discourse: it helps to tell a story, to describe an object. And while the detail allows itself to be contained in its delicacy, within its outline, such a zone by contrast expands brusquely, creates within the picture the equivalent of an explosion. While we can conceive of a detail as "cleansed of all material," such a zone by contrast proposes, against the grain of representational function, a blaze of substance, color without a fully controlled limit: and it opposes its material opacity—which is dizzying—to all *mimesis* thinkable as an "act of the lens." Finally, it is something like an accident: it will never be able to introduce us to Claudel's "paradise of necessity." It is an accident, troubling and infernal in that sense—but a *sovereign accident*.

What, exactly, does it consist of? In this case, a flow of red paint. Joined here by another one that is white, less convoluted but no less

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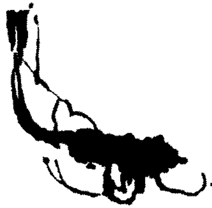
FIG 17 Jan Vermeer, *The Lacemaker (pan),* c. 1665. Oil on canvas. Paris, Louvre.

stupefying. It gushes forth from the cushion at the lacemaker's left. It unravels madly *before us,* like a sudden affirmation, without apparent calculation, of the picture's vertical and frontal existence. Its outline seems to wander; its very schema makes a stain:



The impastos (subtle as they are), the modulations of value, everything seems to be the result of chance: liquid paint somehow left to its own devices; the erratic play of a brush that seems, at times, to have left the surface, a brush that has lost its capacity for precision, for formal control (as in the detail "facing" it: the two threads between the lacemaker's fingers). So this pictorial "moment," in its character as colored intrusion, presents us with a stain and an index rather than with a mimetic or iconic form in Peirce's sense. With a material and accidental cause rather than with a formal and final cause. With a radiance of scarlet, applied, almost thrown down, all but blindly, and which the painting presents to us frontally, insistently: it is a *pan* of paint.

To be sure, the general economy of an oeuvre like Vermeer's is a mimetic economy. Insofar as this zone of the picture is made visible to us, *we indeed see* that there is nothing there to see but a thread, a mad unraveling of paint—material paint—but *nonetheless* we see something, we construe this material, thanks to the mimetic context from which it surges forth.[41] In this way, despite everything, we think we see it clearly: we recognize, almost without reflection, some red thread spilling out of a sewing basket. It is nonetheless true that Vermeer himself puts visual recognition, the attribution of mimetic meaning, if not into aporia, then at least into crisis and antithesis: for he shows us, in the same little picture, two antithetical threads. First, a mimetically "legitimized" thread, as thin in the painting—less that

half a millimeter wide—as a thread would be in visible reality; a thread delineated with the finest of brushes; a *precise* thread, then, held taut between the lacemaker's fingers, a thread that holds up to us the painter's competence in what is usually called the *rendering of detail;* in short, a "successful" thread. And then, facing this, there's another thread, one that imitates nothing, except, perhaps, an accident: as though Vermeer had been interested only in process—in the unraveling, the flow—and not in aspect; from the point of view of aspect or description, then, a thread that is *imprecise,* that presents the painting only with an occasion to *make surge forth* a *pan* of vermilion. Here we have crisis, even aporia—but not failure—insofar as the existence of the first thread, the precise and detailed thread, imperils us if we want to recognize "the same thing" in the second thread, the thread that is imprecise and colored. Then this vermilion thread becomes, strictly speaking, *unidentifiable,* save as painting-in-action; its form is dominated by its material, and its status as representation by the *quasi,* in which dimension it is precarious, neither distinct nor clear: it is perhaps "thread-like," but it is not painted "like thread"; it is painted like paint.

What does Svetlana Alpers see in this part of the painting? She sees thread, of course, but thread that is poorly described, "confused." She writes of "small globules of paint," and tries to find in them, beyond the simple dialectic articulated before her by Lawrence Gowing ("life surprises us with the face of optical abstractions"), a more instrumental justification.[42] She likens the stain effect, or, to use her language, the effect of confusion, to "the circles of confusion, diffused circles of light, that form around unfocused specular highlights in the camera obscura image."[43] An accident of focus, an "act of the lens," and thus no longer an act of the material, the filet of vermilion in *The Lacemaker,* like all of the "specular" stains in the painting, is, here again, referenced to a purely optical and instrumental procedure. Even though Alpers ultimately concedes that Vermeer's use of a camera obscura is quite debatable,[44] the optical and referential character of her interpretation subsists: this filet of vermilion signifies at the very least the decline of an art—of the "art of describing": in other words, a flaw or failure, an accident of description.[45]

It is, nonetheless, I repeat, a sovereign accident. This should be understood in two senses: first, syntagmatically, on the level of the painting itself, in which this *pan* of red paint unsettles, even tyrannizes, the representation. For it is imbued, this *pan,* with a singular capacity for expansion and diffusion: it *infects,* we might even say affects—fantasmatically, through an effect of the Freudian uncanny in action—the entire picture. And one by one, the mimetic self-evidences begin to crumble: the green carpet, with its scattering of droplets, liquefies; the tassel at left turns diaphanous; the gray "bouquet"—the other tassel—resting on the clear small box threatens us with its uncertainty; finally—an extreme hypothesis—it might be said that, had Vermeer wanted to paint some kind of black bird clasping the lacemaker's neck with its wings, he would not have proceeded otherwise than he did, with the large, enigmatic blotch of anthracitic gray that so audaciously invades his "subject" . . .

The accident is also sovereign because, paradoxically, it flourishes throughout Vermeer's oeuvre: an oeuvre that is constantly dealing with such radiances, with such moments of intrusive color. They are *partial intensities* in which the customary relation between the local and the global is upset: the local can no longer "isolate itself" from the global, as in the case of the detail; on the contrary, it invests it, infects it. If we take as our sole paradigm the color red in Vermeer's oeuvre, we find a number of examples straightaway.

And first of all, minimally, in zones of *accentuation,* of little flicks and discreet but loose "threads" of paint often noticeable along the edges of his figures: in *Young Woman Standing at a Virginal* (London, National Gallery), a network of red loops, knots, and reticulations seems progressively to penetrate the figure, adhering to it, clinging close to the arm, even merging completely with the mass of the chignon, like some veined material. In *Cavalier and Young Woman* (New York, Frick Collection), the intensity of the red "supplement" to the man's dark hat captivates and disappoints the eye, because it goes well beyond what is "necessary" to depict a ribbon; it is so intense as to become something else entirely, a fictional object, an invented material, a pure clearing, insolent and incandescent, of bloody petals.[46] Even the famous map in *The Art of Painting* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches

Museum) presents—exactly below the word "description"—an archipelago of spaced carmine strokes whose precise mimetic function it would be difficult to specify.[47]

Often in Vermeer, zones of *folds,* gatherings, and crinkles occasion intense representational vacuities of this kind: details of fabric are clouded, metamorphosed—a *quasi* state—to the point of becoming "de-perspectivized," of existing only in the flatness of their function as pure color. For example the red stockings, scarcely modulated, worn by the artist in *The Art of Painting;* or the folds of the robes in *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha.* In other paintings, gowns with ermine trim part to reveal, discreetly, the bellies of pregnant women (as in *Woman with a Balance* in Washington); and at the precise point where the material is gathered a veritable "channel" of red paint spreads, applied in all its liquidity, as if never meant to dry; this effect is particularly fascinating on the young woman in the Frick Collection; and no less intense, in its very flow, than the meander of blood snaking across the veined marble floor in the *Allegory of Faith.*[48] Finally, in the same order of association between fold and liquidity, we cannot resist thinking of the lips in Vermeer, all those lips that are so many reddish auras, that dilute and literally imbibe the contours of their cavities; the *Girl with a Red Hat,* the *Girl with a Flute,* both in Washington, and, especially, the *Girl with a Pearl Earring* in the Mauritshuis.[49]

In a general way, moreover, Vermeer's treatment of what the Italians call *panni,* stuffs, occasions fulgurating *self-presentations* of paint itself (with a single exception, all of Vermeer's works are painted on canvas). Still limiting ourselves to the color red, we remember all of the gowns, for example those in *The Procuress,* in *The Glass of Wine,* and in *The Music Lesson* in Buckingham Palace; we remember the large mass of red, in the Frick *Young Woman Interrupted at Music,* opposite the glass of wine.[50] As well as all of the tablecloths, carpets, and drapes in the Dresden pictures, and above all in the extraordinary *Maid Asleep* in New York, where the opacity and the *mass* of the reds again tend to "move forward," to tyrannize the represented space.[51]

Doubtless it is in *Girl with a Red Hat* (Fig. 18) that the expansive force of the local in the global produces the most remarkable effects:

Image not available

FIG 18 Jan Vermeer, *Girl with a Red Hat,* c. 1665. Oil on canvas. Washington, D.C., The National Gallery of Art.

no one, of course, will doubt that the mass of vermilion looming over the young woman's face is a hat.[52] As such, it might be understood as a detail. But its delineation—since every detail should be separable, "detailable" out of the whole*—its delimitation is eminently problematic: within, it tends to merge with the mass of the hair and, above all, *becomes shadow;* toward the exterior, its outline is so tremulous as to produce an effect of materiality partaking at once of fleece, sparks, and liquid projection.† It is singularly modeled and centripetal at left, singularly frontal and centrifugal at right. It is highly modulated, to the point of including within its radiant mass a few lactescent moments. And its pictorial intensity thus tends to undermine its mimetic coherence; then it "resembles" not a hat, exactly, but rather something like an immense lip, or perhaps a wing, or more simply a colored flood covering several square inches of canvas oriented vertically, before us.

Shadow, fleece, flame, or milk; lip or liquid projection: in themselves, and taken separately, none of these images amounts to anything; with regard to this "hat," they have no descriptive pertinence, much less an interpretive one; each of them pertains to what we might call a "suspended" visibility (as we speak of suspended attention in the psychoanalytic situation); and in this sense, the choice of one over another speaks only of the viewer. Nonetheless, the aporia engendered by their co-presentation tends to *problematize the pictorial object,* and thus to create the possibility of grasping something about the picture through the very question, the very antithesis. When painting suggests a comparison ("it is like . . ."), in short order it generally suggests another that contradicts it ("but it is also like . . ."): so it's not the system of comparisons or "resemblances" themselves, but rather the system of differences, of clashes and contrasts that will have some chance of talking about the painting, of getting across how the detail becomes a *pan* and imposes itself, in the picture, like an accident of representation—of representation delivered up to the risk of the material paint. It is in this sense that the *"pan" of paint* imposes

**devrait pouvoir s'isoler, se dé-tailler de l'ensemble.*

†*projection liquide.* Cf. G. Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée* (1985), 9–13.

itself in the picture, simultaneously as accident of representation *(Vorstellung)* and sovereignty of presentation *(Darstellung)*.

The Symptom: A Deposit of Meaning

A sovereign accident is called, strictly speaking, a *symptom:* a word understood here to have all the extension and semiological rigor that Freud bestowed on it. A symptom—let's take a case of figuration* that involves, from end to end, the domain that interests us, that of visibility—is, for example, the moment, the unpredictable and immediate *passage* of a body into the aberrant, critical state of hysterical convulsions, of extravagance in every movement and posture: gestures have suddenly lost their "representativity," their code; the extremities become contorted and entangled; the face horripilates and becomes distorted; relaxation and contraction radically intermingle; no "message," no "communication" can any longer emanate from such a body; in short, such a body *no longer resembles itself,* or no longer resembles; it is nothing but a resounding, paroxysmal mask, a mask in Bataille's sense: a "chaos become flesh."[53] In the gnosological field of hysteria, the classical alienists, Charcot included, referred to this as a "cynicism" of the body, as "*clownisme,*" "illogical movement," and even "demoniacal crisis," thereby underscoring the disfigured, deformed, and above all *meaningless* character that such bodily accidents present to the eye—to observation and to clinical description.[54]

By contrast, Freud, faced with such culminating moments in attacks of hysteria, presupposed that the *accident*—a senseless, unformed, incomprehensible, "non-iconic" gesture—was *sovereign:* and not only syntagmatically sovereign, so to speak, namely, that in such a moment the accident dominates everything and tyrannizes the whole body; but also "paradigmatically" sovereign, namely, that such a moment conveys meaning, engages a destiny, an originary fantasy, and thus puts a structure to work. But it is a *dissimulated* structure. Such

**cas de figure.*

is the figurative paradox that Freud admirably elucidates when, confronted by a hysterical woman agitated by incomprehensible, contradictory movements, he manages to untangle their very articulation, and with it the meaning of this antithetical image:

> In one case which I observed, for instance, the patient pressed her dress up against her body with one hand (as the woman) while she tried to tear it off with the other (as the man). This simultaneity of contradictory actions serves to a large extent to obscure the situation, which is otherwise so plastically portrayed in the attack, and it is thus well suited to conceal the unconscious fantasy that is at work.[55]

This one sentence takes us right to the quick of the problem, for it makes the semiotic specificity of the concept of symptom readily understandable: the symptom is a critical event, a singularity, an intrusion, but it is at the same time the implementation of a signifying structure, of a system that the event is charged with making surge forth, but *partially, contradictorily,* in such fashion that the meaning is expressed only as an enigma or as the *"appearance 'of something,'"*[56] not as a stable set of meanings. That is why the symptom is characterized simultaneously by its visual intensity, its value as radiance, and by what Freud calls here its suitability to "conceal" the "unconscious fantasy that is at work." The symptom is, then, a two-faced semiotic entity: between radiance and dissimulation, between accident and sovereignty, between event and structure. That is why it presents itself above all as something that "obscures the situation," to quote Freud again, although it is "plastically portrayed," although its visual existence imposes itself with such radiance, such self-evidence, even violence. This is what a sovereign accident is.

And the notion of *pan* finds here a preliminary formulation: *a "pan" is a symptom of paint within the picture,* "paint" understood here in the sense of a material cause, and "material" understood in the sense ascribed to it by Aristotle—something that pertains not to a logic of contraries, but to a logic of desire and protension (the *éphiestaï* of Aristotle's *Physics).* At the extreme, we might say that in the *pan*

painting becomes hysterical, whereas in the detail it is fetishized. But borrowing from the conceptual universe of psychoanalysis—this must be specified as regards a history of art that, even today, sometimes shortsightedly denies and rejects, sometimes blindly "uses" psychoanalysis in its most adulterated form, namely psychobiography—such conceptual borrowing is meaningful only with regard to a theory of *figurability* such as Freud never ceased elaborating, from the dream-image and the hysterical conversion to the metapsychological model of unconscious fantasy.

Thus to speak of the "symptom" within the field of the history of painting is not to look for illnesses, or for more or less conscious motifs, or for repressed desires somewhere behind a painting, for some supposed explanatory "key" to the image, in the sense we once spoke of explanatory keys to the meaning of dreams; it is more simply to strive to take the measure of a work of figurability, its being understood that every pictorial figure presupposes "figuration," just as every poetic statement presupposes enunciation. Now it turns out that the relation between the figure and its own "figuration" is never simple: this relation, this work, is but a skein of paradoxes. It's here, moreover, that Aristotle's sublogic of the "material cause" meets up with, to a certain extent, Freud's sublogic of the fantasy as "unconscious cause."[57] I speak of *sublogic* because, in both cases, the relation of contradiction, and thus of identity, has been definitively subverted: the image effectively knows how to represent both the thing *and* its contrary; it is *impervious to contradiction,** and we must always come back to this.[58] Likewise, the example of the hysterical symptom demonstrates the extent to which what connects event and structure, radiance and dissimulation, accident and system of meaning is precisely the *paradox of visibility* presupposed by such a "simultaneity of contradictory actions . . . so plastically portrayed."

It is perhaps when images are most intensely contradictory that they are most authentically symptomatic. As with the red thread and indeed the red hat in Vermeer: binding together as they do, paradoxically—but closely—the work of mimesis and that of not-mimesis. As

**insensible à la contradiction.*

for the word *pan,* note that, analogously, it belongs to the select category of so-called antithetical words, for it can denote both outside and inside, a section of fabric as well as part of a wall, and above all the local as well as the global (or rather the encompassing):* for it is simultaneously a word of the shred and a word of the thread, thus all at once a word of structure and of its rending, or of its partial collapse.[59]

The methodological interest of expressing this pictorial notion of the *pan* in terms of the symptom resides above all in the fact that the concept of symptom is two-faced, being situated precisely on the boundary between two theoretical fields: a *phenomenological* field and a *semiological* field. The whole problem of a theory of art lies in the articulation of these two fields, or of these two points of view: confinement within the one entails the risk of a definitive self-silencing, through effusiveness before that which is beautiful; one would henceforth speak only in "affective tones" or to "celebrate the world"; one would run the risk of losing oneself in immanence—in an empathic singularity—of becoming inspired and mute, or indeed stupid. Implementing only the other one would entail the risk of talking too much, and of silencing everything not strictly within its purview; then one would think higher than painting; one would run the risk of becoming lost in the transcendence of an eidetic model—a universal abstracted from sense—no less constraining than the ideal of the referential model. One of the most obvious theoretical problems posed by painting is that the treasure of the signifier is neither truly universal nor truly extant prior to speech, as is the case with language and writing. The minimal unities here are not *given* but *produced,* and moreover, not being truly discreet, like the letters of a word, for example, they pertain neither to a syntax nor to a vocabulary in the strict sense. And yet there are here treasures, structures, meanings. So it is necessary to propose a phenomenology, not only of the relation to the visible world as empathic milieu, but of the relation to meaning as structure and specific work (which presupposes a semiology). And thus be able

**globant / englobant.*

to propose a semiology, not only of symbolic configurations, but also of events, or accidents, or singularities of the pictorial image (which presupposes a phenomenology). That's what an aesthetic of the symptom, in other words, an aesthetic of the sovereign accidents in painting, would tend toward.

In order to make all of these borderlines clearer, we might reference the notion of *pan* to two other notions rather close to it—and on which its very existence depends—but from which it separates itself, precisely because it risks playing on the two pictures, so to speak, on the two faces where the symptom in Freud's sense finds its theoretical pertinence and its efficacy. Close to the *pan,* first, would be the *punctum,* the admirable theoretical "point" that Barthes directed toward the visible. The reader will recall that he did so dedicating the whole of his attempt to Sartre's *Imaginaire,* which manifests with maximal clarity the phenomenological exigency to which any analysis of the visible must pay heed; and that is why Barthes did not hesitate to adopt the point of view of a phenomenology, however "vague," however "casual"—because "understood with the affect," he said, and in any case expressible in terms not of structure, but indeed of *existence.*[60]

Basically, the theoretical difference between the *pan* and the *punctum* does not reside in the fact that one of the two notions originates in painting and the other in photography; any more than in the difference between the semantic constellations borne by the two words, the one tending toward the frontal zone and frontal expansion, the other toward the point and "on point" focus. Nor did Barthes neglect to speak of the "power of expansion" of the *punctum.*[61] The problem is that the notion of *punctum* seems to lose in semiological pertinence what it gains in phenomenological pertinence: one indeed seized here the sovereignty of the *visible accident,* its dimension as event—but at the price of both "affective tone" and "celebration of the world." Again, the world reverts to depositing itself on the image, through the mediation of its *detail*—this is the term used by Barthes—and of its worldly *temporality:* "It is not I who seek it out"; it "shoots out of [the scene] like an arrow, and pierces me."[62] Then there is no more imaging substance to interrogate, only a relation between a detail of

the scene of the world and the affect that receives it "like an arrow." In this sense, the *punctum* should be construed not as a symptom of the image, but as a symptom of the world itself, in other words as a symptom of time and of the presence of the referent: "that-has-been"—"the thing was there"—"absolutely, irrefutably present."[63]

Perhaps it could be said that *Camera Lucida* is the book of the rent consciousness of semiology: through the very choice of its object, photography, it is a book in which the theoretically *intractable,*[64] which is basically to say the object of thought about the visible, is wholly folded into the referent and the affect. Whereas the image—even photographic—knows how to make an event and "point" us beyond any *that-has-been:* as in blurring and aura effects due to "accidents," intentional or not, of photographic revelation; or the fictive highlights—"scratched" with black pencil on the paper negative—in certain calotypes by Victor Régnault, for example. And if *Camera Lucida* reads like the text of a rent consciousness, that is perhaps because Barthes, at base, did not dare or want to leave behind the semiological alternative of the coded and the non-coded (remember his definition of the photographic image as a "message without a code"). Now this alternative is, in a sense, trivial: and notably it is not in terms of code or not-code that the symptom, in a body, in an image, will make sense or not-sense. A semiology of images, of their material causes and their sovereign accidents will exist only to slip between "the world," without code, dominated by empathy, and "signification" dominated by a narrow understanding of the code.

The other concept in relation to which the *pan* should doubtless be situated is that of the "non-mimetic elements of the image-sign," as defined by Meyer Schapiro in a celebrated and important article.[65] I will note simply that the term "field" is used there quite generally to designate a parameter, in the last resort geometric, within which the very organization of the image can be thought. Field, frame, "smooth or prepared" ground, orientation, format: all of these things facilitate understanding of the structural regularities of the image, fundamental articulations. But precisely as regularities, these mimetic elements of the image-sign are envisaged from the side of the *least accidental,* so to speak. And when Schapiro speaks of the "image sub-

stance"—which is to say "inked or painted lines and spots"[66]—he is suggesting a change of gnosological perspective rather than an accident or a material singularity exhibited by the work itself.[67] In short, he here takes up only the universality of parameters that vary with modification of the perceptual point of view, with the degree of viewer discrimination and sensitivity.

Now the *pan* in painting does not designate the picture seen from another angle, from close up, for example; it really designates, as symptom, *another state of painting* within the representative system of the picture: a precarious, partial, accidental state, which is why I will again speak of *passage* from one state to another. The *pan* is not a global parameter; it is a singularity that nonetheless has paradigmatic, even programmatic value. It is an accident; it surprises us through its essential intrusive capacity; it insists in the picture; but it likewise insists about its being an accident that repeats itself, that passes from painting to painting, that makes itself paradigmatic as trouble, as symptom: an insistence—a sovereignty—that itself bears meaning, or rather as if by chance makes surge forth surface radiances that are, here and there, like zones of outcropping—and thus faults—of a seam, of a deposit (a metaphor premised on the thickness, the material depth of paint).

So the *pan* is to be defined as the part of painting that interrupts ostensibly, from place to place, like a crisis or a symptom, the continuity of the picture's representational system. It is the accidental and sovereign outcropping of a deposit, of a colored seam: it makes meaning, with violence and equivocation, as a wound on white skin gives meaning—gives gushing-forth—to the blood that pulses below. It self-presents its material cause and its accidental cause, namely the very gesture, the *touch,* the intrusion of the paint. An event too singular to propose a stability of signification, the pictorial *pan* makes meaning as a symptom does, and symptoms never have a transparent infrastructure, which is why they extravagate on bodies, disappear here to resurface there, where one did not expect them, and constitute in this respect an enigma of place and of trajectory as much as an enigma of meaning. An accident or singularity *in praesentia,* the *pan* is, then, not only the "appearance 'of'" a dissimulated paradigm *in absentia,* but

also the "appearance 'of'" a labile, *unstable paradigm.* That is why the order of reason is in some sense subtracted from it twice over.

I note in passing that, in his way, Proust articulates a like "unstable sovereignty" when, in a passage about the music of Vinteuil, he evokes its "unperceived phrases, obscure larvae at first indistinct," but suddenly "dazzling architectural structures": not architecture whose columns can be counted, but, he says, "sensations of light, clear rumblings"—and transfiguring ones.[68] Specifically, Proust articulates at once the *insistence* of these singularities and their pure value as fugitive *"radiances":* they "promenaded before my imagination with insistence, but too rapidly to be apprehended, something that I might compare to the silky scent of a geranium"[69] . . . What crop out, he continues on the same page, are "disjointed fragments, radiances with scarlet fissures," and they are fragments not of a whole in action, but of a force, something that he calls "an unknown and colorful fête."[70] Now at this point Vermeer of course crops up again: Vermeer, whose paintings are "fragments of a single world," he says—but not a reference-world, a reality-world: it is, on the contrary, "the same new and unique beauty, an enigma in this period when nothing either resembles or explains it, if one doesn't try to sort it out by subject, but to release the particular impression that the color produces." This world is strictly "a certain color of fabrics and of places," Proust writes: which is to say, in a sense, paint itself, applied to canvas to produce its own place, its deposit of color and meaning.[71]

Beyond the Detail Principle

Let's attempt a short recapitulation. Concerning the relation between part and whole, let's say that in the detail the part is severable from the whole, whereas in the *pan* the part consumes the whole. The detail: it is, for example, a thread, in other words an easily located circumscription of the figurative space; it has *extension* (however minimal), a well-defined size; it pertains to a measurable space. The *pan,* by contrast, presents itself as a zone of colored *intensity;* as such, it has an "inordinate," not measurable, capacity of *expansion*—not ex-

tension—in the picture; this would be not a detail of colored thread, but, to continue with our example, a filet of red paint, in other words, an event more than an object. A detail is definable: its contour delimits a represented object, something that has a place, or rather has *its place,* in the mimetic space; its topographical existence is thus specifiable, readily located, like an *inclusion.* A *pan,* by contrast, does not so much delimit an object as produce a potential: something *happens,* gets through, extravagates in the space of representation, and resists "inclusion" in the picture because it makes a detonation or *intrusion* in it.

This phenomenology already wholly engages, through *Nachträglichkeit,* the semiotic status of these two categories. The detail is discernible, therefore divisible from the "remainder," and, as such, nameable: thread, needle, knife, corkscrew, navel . . . It pertains to descriptive finesse, which parses and names the visible. The discovery of a detail comes down to *seeing* something that is hidden because minuscule, and to *naming* what one sees. By contrast, the *pan* does not require being seen; it only requires *looking at:* looking at something "hidden" because self-evident, there before us, dazzling but difficult to name. A *pan* does not "detach itself," strictly speaking, like a detail; it stains. A detail admits identification*—this *is* a needle—and thus allows itself to be mastered, as a pervert knows how to master a fetish object (which indicates just how great is the fantasy content of the detail). The *pan* is related to Barthes's *intractable;* it is what tyrannizes eye and signification, just as a symptom tyrannizes and invests a body, or a fire a city. One looks for a detail in order to find it; whereas one comes upon a *pan* haphazardly, unexpectedly. A detail is a piece of the visible that hid itself, and that, once discovered, exhibits itself discreetly and allows itself to be definitively identified (in the ideal): thus the detail is envisaged as the *last word* of the visible. The *pan,* by contrast, *leaps into view,* most often in a picture's foreground, frontally, assertively; but it still does not permit of identification or closure; once discovered, it remains problematic.

The seeker after details is a man who sees the least thing, and a

**admet la déclaration.*

man with answers: he thinks that the enigmas of the visible have a solution, one that might come down to the "least thing," a thread, for example, or a knife; he cleans his glasses, he takes himself to be Sherlock Holmes. A person fond of *pans,* by contrast, is someone who looks in a way consistent with a purposely suspended visibility. He does not expect, from the visible, a logical solution (rather, he senses how the visible dissolves all logic); like Dupin in Poe's "The Purloined Letter," he will put on dark glasses and let what he is looking for come to him; and when he finds it, it is not the end of a series—a last word understood as answer—but one specific word in an endless sequence, a ferreting out of questions. The man of the detail, then, writes romans à clefs in which the questions posed at the beginning are answered at the end. If the man of the *pan* were permitted to do likewise, he would write *ekphrases* that are endless, reticulate, aporetic.

So the detail is a semiotic object tending toward stability and closure, while the *pan,* by contrast, is semiotically labile and open. The detail presupposes a logic of identity whereby one thing will definitively be the opposite of another (either knife, or corkscrew): which presupposes, fundamentally, a transparence of the iconic sign, which presupposes in turn an active, *figured figure,* a certainty of existential judgment regarding things seen. But the *pan* reveals only *figurability* itself, in other words, a process, a power, a not-yet (the Latin for this is *præsens),* an uncertainty, a "quasi"-existence of the figure. Now it is precisely because it shows figurability at work—in other words, incomplete: the figure figuring, even, we might say, the "pre-figure"—that a *pan* disturbs the picture, like a relative *disfiguration;* such is the paradoxical nature of the potential figure. While the detail permits of description and attribution that is univocal, or that aspires to be such ("this is a white thread"), the *pan* summons forth only disquieting tautologies ("this is . . . a filet of red paint") or no less disquieting contradictions ("this is . . . a filet of ecru threads . . . but that are like blood . . . but that flow from a cushion . . . but that turn back on themselves . . . but that fall again like rain . . . but that make a stain or a landscape" and so forth). So we might also say that interpretation of the detail tends toward something like a secondary elaboration of

the image, in other words, toward a work of stoppage that enables the assignment of definitive meanings and a logical organization of the phases of a *historia;* whereas a *pan* is an index of a moment that is more latent—a potential figure—and more metaphorical.

All of this, of course, is not without its effect on the very situation of the iconic sign relative to these two figural "objects" that are the detail and the *pan.* In a way, the detail is the limit-state of the iconic sign, in the sense that it offers understanding its minimal, most discreet, most tenuous visibility: it should be clear that the thread might constitute the detail's very excellence. For this thread, held as it is between the fingers of the lacemaker, is much more than a line of paint: it represents an object in reality; it is a form quite detached from its ground; its existence in the picture is wholly *optical;* it participates fully in a mimetic configuration; it can readily be situated in the picture's illusionist depth; it tends toward the *exactitude* of appearance; it seems painted only to possess an *aspect.* The *pan,* by contrast, should be envisaged as the limit-state of the iconic sign in the sense that it constitutes its catastrophe or syncope: simultaneously "supplementary trait" and "indicator of lack"[72] in the mimetic configuration. It does not represent univocally an object in reality; although "figurative," it imposes itself first as non-iconic *index* of an act of paint; in this capacity, it is neither precise nor aspectual; it is painted . . . like nothing; we might call it a deficient sign, a sign dispossessed; it implies not illusion but the collapse of illusionist representation, something that might be called *delusion.*[73] Its existence in perception has more to do with what Riegl called "haptic" space—supposing the collapse of planes and a quasi-touching—than with a purely optical existence. The *pan* collapses the spatial coordinates of the detail: it literally makes a *front* in the picture;* thus Vermeer's filet presents itself above all as a passage, in the picture, in which painting no longer pretends—pretends to lie about its material existence; hence it "faces up."† The *pan* tends to *ruin the aspect,* by means of auras, or liquifaction, or the weight of a color that imposes itself, that consumes and infects

***il fait littéralement front:* wordplay with *faire front,* "to close ranks."
†*fait front.*

everything; here, form *is* ground, because it represents much less than it self-presents, as colored material, as a colored surging-forth.

The detail is useful: it can have descriptive value (this is the thread of Vermeer's daughter, who is making lace) or iconological value (one can imagine an art historian trying to prove that, the painter having read Ovid in 1665, *The Lacemaker* is a personification of Arachne). In either case, the logical relation is transparent: *ut-ita*. Conversely, the *pan* tends to bog down the hermeneutic, because it proposes only *quasi*s, hence displacements, metonymies, hence metamorphoses (and if this red filet is really meant to evoke Arachne, this would only be to suggest to us its very body in the midst of *disfiguration)*. The *pan* in this sense is a risk for thought, but the self-same risk that painting proposes when it comes forward, when it makes a front: for when the material of representation comes forward, everything represented is at risk of collapse. And interpretation owes it to itself to take this risk into account, so as to take its measure, to indicate—if only to indicate—the "intractable" that constitutes its object.

Now it should be clear how the object of the *pan* is not the object of the detail. The object of the detail is an object of representation of the visible world; even elevated to the level of a symbol, it presupposes, in the final analysis, an *object of reality,* one that it strives to delineate and render legible. Conversely, the object of the *pan,* as intrusion—presence—of the pictorial in the representational system of the picture, is a *real object of paint / of painting,** in the sense that Lacan situated the "real object" of the gaze as a "pulsatile, dazzling, and spread-out function" in the picture itself: a function connected to "unexpected arrival," to trouble, to encounter, to trauma, and the drive.[74] In this *"objet"* (object) we must first hear the word *jet* (gush), and the prefix that indicates the act of placing *there before* us, the act of what presents a front to us—of what looks at us—when we look. In this object, simultaneously intense and partial, insistent although accidental, in this contradictory *objet* we must understand the fragile moment of a disfiguration that nonetheless teaches us what figuring is.

**objet réel de la peinture.*

NOTES

Abbreviations of Frequently Cited Sources

Aufsätze	Erwin Panofsky, *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft,* ed. Hariolf Oberer and Egon Verheyen (2d rev. ed.; Berlin: Hessling, 1974).
Crick	Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* trans. Joyce Crick, intro. and notes Ritchie Robertson (1900 ed., without subsequent additions; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
CPJ	Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
CPR	Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
Écrits	Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966).
Fink	Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection,* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).
Interpretation	Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* trans. James Strachey, SE [see below], vols. 4 and 5.
Lives	Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects,* trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, intro. and notes David Ekserdjian, 2 vols. (translation first published 1912; New York: Knopf, 1996).
Meaning	Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers on Art History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955).
PSF	Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* trans. Ralph Manheim, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).
SE	*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. from the German Under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud,* 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–73).
Vite	Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de'piu eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori,* ed. G. Milanesi, 9 vols. (1550 [1st ed.] and 1568 [2d ed.]; Florence: Sansoni, 1878–85; reissued Florence, 1973).

Author's Preface: The Exorcist

1. Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art" (1939), *Meaning,* 29.

2. Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1953; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 131–48, esp. 140–44 (on the concept of "disguised symbolism"), and 164–67 (on the Mérode Altarpiece and the interpretation of Meyer Schapiro). See also Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

3. Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie* (Berlin: Wissenschaftsverlag Volker Spiess, 1993), ii (preface to 1959 ed.).

4. See Martin Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven,* trans. Ludwig Lewisohn (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946); Buber, *Tales of the Hassidim: The Early Masters,* trans. Olga Marx (New York: Schocken Books, c. 1947); Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, c. 1995); Scholem, "Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hassidism" (1961), in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality,* trans. Michael A. Meyer et al. (New York: Schocken Books: [1971]), 227–50; Meyer, "The Neutralization of the Messianic Element in Early Hassidism" (1970), in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 176–202.

5. Moses Cordovero, *La douce Lumière: "Or Né'érab,"* trans. Schmouel Ouziel (Lagrass, France; Verdier, c. 1997), 93 [English: Ira Robinson, *Moses Cordovero's Introduction to Kaballah: An Annotated Translation of His Or Ne'erav* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1994)]. Others forbade approaching the cabala before the age of forty.

6. For a recent English translation of Ansky's play, see *The Dybbuk and the Yiddish Imagination: A Haunted Reader,* ed. and trans. from Yiddish by Joachim Neugroschel (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 3–52.

7. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration,* trans. Jane Marie Todd (1990; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

8. Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Minuit, 2002).

9. Aby Warburg, "Sandro Botticellis *Geburt der Venus* and *Frühling:* Eine Untersuchung über die Vorstellungen von der Antike in der Italienischen Frührenaissance" (1893), in *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen,* ed. D. Wuttke (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1980), 11–64; ["Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Spring,"* in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 89–156 and 405–31 (addenda)].

10. Aby Warburg, "Bildniskunst und florentinisches Bürgertum: Domenico Ghirlandajo in Santa Trinita: Die Bildnisse des Lorenzo de' Medici und Seiner Angehörigen" (1902), in *Ausgewählte Schriften,* 65–102 ["The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity,* 185–222 and 435–50 (addenda)].

11. Aby Warburg, Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoia zu Ferrara" (1912), in *Ausgewählte Schriften,* 173–98 ["The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity,* 563–92 and 732–58]. See William S. Heckscher, "The Genesis of Iconology" (1967), in Heckscher, *Art and Literature: Studies in Relationship,* ed. Egon Verheyen (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 253–80 [reprinted in E. Panofsky, *Three Essays on Style,* ed. Irving Lavin (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 167–95].

12. Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne,* ed. Martin Warnke and Claudia Brink (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000).

13. Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne: Grundbegriffe,* 2 vols. (1928–29). London: Warburg Institute Archive, vol. III, 102.3–4.

14. Heckscher, "Erwin Panofsky: A Curriculum Vitae" (1969), in *Art and Literature,* 341.

15. Warburg, "Seminarübungen über Jacob Burckhardt" (1927), *Idea: Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle,* ed. B. Roeck, 10 (1991): 86–89 ["Texte de cloture du séminaire sur Burckhardt," trans. D. Meur, *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'Art moderne,* no. 68 (1999): 21–23, and my introduction, ibid., 5–20].

16. Deuteronomy 11:22.

17. Scholem, "*Devekut,* or Communion with God" (1949–50), in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism,* 203–26. In Jewish philosophy of the medieval period, dybbuk and *devekut* designated the "conjunction with the agent intellect." See M.-R. Hayoun, "*Dibbuq* ou *devéqut* (conjonction avec l'intellect agent)," in *Encyclopédie philosophique uanverselle,* II: Les Notions *philosophiques,* ed. S. Auroux (Paris: PUF, 1990), 643–44.

18. Warburg, *Mnemosyne: Grundbegriffe,* 2:3 (note dated July 2, 1929).

19. See Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante*.

20. Georges Didi-Huberman, "Pour une anthropologie des singularités formelles: Remarque sur l'invention warburgienne," *Genèses: Sciences sociales et histoire,* no. 24 (1996): 145–63.

21. Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist's Notebook,* trans. Martin Brady (1946; London and New Brunswick, N.J.; Athlone Press and Transaction, 2000).

22. E. Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst" (1932), in *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft* (Berlin: Wissenschaftsverlag Volker Spiess, 1998), 85–97.

23. Jan Bialostocki, "Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968): Thinker, Historian, Human Being," *Semiolus* 4, no. 2 (1970): 70.

24. Heckscher, "Erwin Panofsky: A Curriculum Vitae," in Heckscher, 350 n. 11.

25. Panofsky, "Three Decades of Art History in the United States: Impressions of a Transplanted European" (1953), in *Meaning,* 329–30. On Panofsky's first years in the United States, see Colin Eisler, "Kunstgeschichte American Style: A Study in Migration," in *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–1960,* ed. D. Fleming and B. Bailyn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 544–629; K. Michels, in *The Art Historian: National Traditions and Institutional Practices,* ed. M. F. Zimmermann (Williamstown, Mass.: Clark Art Institute, 2003).

26. Warburg, *Mnemosyne: Grundbegriffe,* 2:8 (note dated June 8, 1929).

Question Posed

1. See Georges Didi-Huberman, "La Couleur de chair ou le paradoxe de Tertullien," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* 35 (1987): 9–49.

2. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration,* trans. Jane Marie Todd (French ed. 1990; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Didi-Huberman, *L'Image ouverte: Motifs de l'incarnation dans les art visuels,* forthcoming.

3. Two parts of the book have been published previously: one in *Mort de Dieu: Fin de*

l'art (Strasbourg: C.E.R.I.T., 1990), the proceedings of a conference held in Strasbourg in 1988; the other in *Cahiers du Musée national d'Art moderne,* no. 30 (December 1989): 41–58.

Chapter 1

1. "I call a sign *(segno)* anything which exists on a surface so that it is visible to the eye. No one will deny that things which are not visible do not concern the painter, for he strives to represent only the things that are seen *(fingiero quello se vede).*" Leon Battista Alberti, *De pictura* [On painting] 1:2, trans. Cecil Grayson, intro. Martin Kemp (1435; London and New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 37].

2. "Composition *(composizione)* is the procedure in painting *(ragione di dipignere)* whereby the parts are composed together in the picture. The great work of the painter *(grandissima opera del pittore)* is not a colossus but a 'historia' *(istoria),* for there is far more merit in a 'historia' than in a colossus. Parts of the 'historia' are the bodies, part of the body is the member, and part of the member is the surface." Alberti, *De pictura* 2:35, 71.

3. "The first thing that gives pleasure in a 'historia' (*voluttà nella istoria)* is a plentiful variety *(copia e varietà delle cose].*" Alberti, *De pictura* 2:40, 75.

4. I previously introduced the two linked theoretical notions of the *visual* and the pictorial *pan [patch]* in *La Peinture incarnée* (Paris: Minuit, 1985) and in "L'Art de ne pas décrire: Une aporie du détail chez Vermeer," *La Part de l'oeil,* no. 2 (1986): 102–19, which is reprinted as an appendix to the present volume.

5. "Those painters who use white immoderately and black carelessly should be strongly condemned." Alberti, *De pictura* 2:47, [On painting], 84.

6. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia:1, 5.

7. Among the many autograph and apocryphal texts of Albertus Magnus, see esp. *Mariale sive quaestiones super Evangelium: Missus est Angelus Gabriel . . . ,* ed. A. and E. Borgnet, *Opera Omnia,* vol. 37 (Paris: Vivès, 1898), 1–362.

8. Luke 1:31.

9. Isaiah 7:14: *Ecce, virgo concipiet et pariet filium, et vocabit eius.*

10. That is why Saint Antoninus vehemently prohibited painters from representing the infant Jesus—the "term" or resolution of the announcement—in depictions of the Annunciation. See Antoninus of Florence, *Summa Theologiae,* IIIa, 8, 4, 11 (Verona ed., republished in Graz, 1959), 3:307–23.

11. Fra Angelico must have been familiar with this basic idea, which informed many exegeses, notably those found in the *Exposition of the Angelic Salutation* by Thomas Aquinas (III and X), in the *Catena Aurea,* and in works by Albertus Magnus.

12. See the *Tractatus de Approbatione Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum* (c. 1260–70), ed. Thomas Käppeli, and *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 6 (1936): 140–60, esp. 149–51.

13. For a more extended discussion, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration,* trans. Jane Marie Todd (1990; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

14. From an iconographic perspective, as well as according to the "modern" academic (hence anachronistic) definition of art, one would have to say that in the Paleo-Christian era *Christian art did not exist:* "If an art is defined in terms of a style peculiar to it and content specific to it, then there is no more a Christian art than there is a Herculean or a Dionysian art; there is not even an art of Christians, for the latter remained men of antiquity, whose artistic language they retained." F. Monfrin, "La Bible dans l'iconogra-

phie chrétienne d'Occident," in *Le Monde latin antique et la Bible,* ed. Jacques Fontaine and Charles Pietri (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), 207. Clearly this assertion has no bearing on the period under discussion. On the other hand, it is clear that the specific efficacy of the *visual* in the early Christian era must be approached from a broader, anthropological perspective. Such an approach is implemented, to salutary effect, in the work of Peter Brown. See *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977).

15. Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8.

16. Apart from the remarkable work of Ernst Kitzinger and Kurt Weitzmann, it seems likely that the as yet unpublished book by Hans Belting on the icon will do justice to these questions, addressing from the perspective of a *history of images* and not one of "*art.*" [Since published and translated: Hans Belting, *Image and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art,* trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).] See also Hans Belting, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter—Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion* (Berlin: G. Mann, 1981). The most important work to date on the "visual field," broadly construed (encompassing everything from dreams to relics by way of rituals and even images), has adopted the methodology of historical anthropology. See esp. Jacques Le Goff, *L'Imaginaire médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985). Michel Pastoureau, *Figures et couleurs: Études sur la symbolique et la sensibilité médiévales* (Paris: Le Léopard d'or, 1986). J. C. Schmitt, *Religione, folklore e società nell'Occidente medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1988). Schmitt, *La Raison des gestes: Pour une histoire des gestes en Occident,* IIIe–XIIIe siècle (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

17. See, for example, Albertus Magnus, *Enarrationes in Evangelium Lucae* 1:35 *Opera Omnia,* vol. 22 (A. Borgnet ed.; Paris: Vivès, 1894), 100–102; Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea* (Luke), 1 (Turin: Marietti, 1894), 2:16. These two texts gloss the incarnation of the Word at the moment of the Annunciation using the metaphor of an encounter between the body and light (even mentioning the shadow cast by its passage).

18. This question and this link were earlier formulated by Robert Klein, "Thoughts on Iconography," in *Form and Meaning: Essays on Renaissance and Modern Art,* trans. Madeline Jay and Leon Wieseltier (1960; New York: Viking Press, 1979), 147–48, 155–60.

19. We still lack a history of the history of art, an analysis of the discipline from the perspective of its true *foundations,* in Husserl's sense of the word. Quite different questions are addressed by books such as Germain Bazin, *Histoire de l'histoire de l'art, de Vasari à nos jours* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986).

20. With regard to France, I need only note that almost all large museum exhibitions of noncontemporary art are monographic and point to the preoccupations of the "official" periodicals of the discipline, *La Revue de l'art* and *Histoire de l'art* (the former published by the C.N.R.S., the latter by the Institut national d'Histoire de l'Art). Some readers will protest that there are notable exceptions—rightly, for there is no lack of scholars whose outlook is more skeptical and critical. But it must be conceded that they are a minority. My remarks concern the mainstream of the discipline, its tendency, as a social organism, to foster intellectual complacency. As a notable example, I cite the objections of André Chastel to "the recent intellectualization" and "semiological tenor" of the human sciences, to which he opposed "the material and historical aspects of works [of art]." André Chastel, *Fables, formes, figures* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), 1:45.

21. Such was the drift of the critique of "detailed knowledge," under certain conditions of physical experience, articulated early on by Gaston Bachelard in *Essai sur la con-*

naissance approchéé (Paris: Vrin, 1927). Today, advanced disciplines such as the morphogenetic geometry of disasters strive not so much for models of precise description as for ones that will facilitate the affirmation, as a process unfolds in time, that a form is *becoming significant*. See René Thom, *Semio Physics: A Sketch,* trans. Vendla Meyer (Redwood, Calif.: Addison-Wesley, Advanced Book Program, 1970), 9.

22. In a way consistent with the logical formulation "Your money or your life!" as discussed by Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book* XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), chap. 16, "The Subject and the Other: Alienation," 203–15. Note that the artist in Balzac's admirable "philosophical tale," *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu,* finds himself confronting precisely this alienation quandary. See Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 47–49.

23. *"Die Zeit des Weltbildes,"* in the words of Martin Heidegger. See "The Age of the World Picture," in Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* trans. William Levitt (1938; New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 115–54.

24. This is one conclusion drawn by Derrida in the course of his analysis of the Schapiro-Heidegger debate, an analysis that construes both authors' "desire for attribution" as a "desire for appropriation." See Jacques Derrida, "Restitutions," in *The Truth in Painting,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 255–382. For Schapiro's text, "The Still-Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh," see Meyer Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), 135–42. (This collection also includes Schapiro's later ruminations about the debate: "Further Notes on Heidegger and Van Gogh" [1994], 143–52.)

25. When it was established in 1968, the *Revue de l'art* (see note 20 above) described its program as one of encouraging a "discipline that would take complete charge of the original 'products' called works of art"—a discipline vaguely yet radically distinct from anthropology, psychology, sociology, and aesthetics (André Chastel, *L'Histoire de l'art, fins et moyens* [Paris: Flammarion, 1980]). Curiously, after this birth under the aegis of self-isolation—and of totalization: "take *complete* charge"—the second issue of the periodical opened with a lament about the very real "intellectual isolation" (*cloisonnement intellectuel)* of art historians (ibid., 20). But such a state of affairs was fostered by the journal's very program. Note also the case, again made by André Chastel, for the history of art as an independent discipline in the entry "L'Histoire de l'art" in the *Encyclopédie Universalis,* 2 (Paris: E.U., 1968), 506–7.

26. Any attempt to impose order, however much rooted in common sense, entails a set of logical, epistemological, and rhetorical choices; it is these that shape the specific character of any catalogue. For an almost Lévi-Straussian examination of the Cinquecento along these lines, see P. Falguières, *Invention et mémoire: Recherches sur les origines du musée au* XVIe siècle, forthcoming.

27. See, for example, Bazin, *Histoire de l'histoire de l'art,* 322ff.

28. It is worth quoting the beautiful opening lines of George Duby's *L'Europe au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984): "Let us imagine. That is what historians always must do. Their role is to assemble the remains and traces left behind by men of the past, to establish and critique the evidence scrupulously. But these traces, especially those left by the poor, by everyday life, are scarce, discontinuous. For remote periods such as the one in question here, they are extremely rare. A framework can be erected from them, but it is very fragile. Between its widely spaced supports is a gaping uncertainty. Thus when it comes to Europe in the year 1000, we must use our imaginations" (13).

29. See the remarkable article, suggestive in ways that transcend its specific subject, by Pierre Fédida, "Passé anachronique et présent reminiscent: Epos et puissance mémoriale du language," *L'Écrit du temps* 10 (1985): 23–45. Another, equally suggestive discussion of the complex relationship between past and present is woven through the recent book by Marie Moscovici, *Il est arrivé quelque chose: Approches de l'événement psychique* (Paris: Ramsay, 1989).

30. See the fine book by P. Alféri, *Guillaume d'Ockham: Le singulier* (Paris: Minuit, 1989).

31. Hubert Damisch's analysis of *Las Meninas* benefits greatly from his having considered, as crucially informative, the series of canvases painted by Picasso in the last five months of 1957. See Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective,* trans. John Goodman (1987; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 432–47. I myself made a startling discovery about Fra Angelico (of an unpublished portion, about 4.5 meters square, perfectly visible to all visitors yet never "seen," nor taken into account in the measurements of supposedly "complete" catalogues of the artist's work) on the basis of an "aesthetic" attention shaped by my familiarity with contemporary art. See Georges Didi-Huberman, "La Dissemblance des figures selon Fra Angelico," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome/Moyen Âge—Temps Modernes* 98, no. 2 (1986): 709–802; republished in Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*. That the history of art in the "objective" genitive sense (the discipline) is crucially constitutive of the history of art in the "subjective" genitive sense (of contemporary art, for example) is forcefully demonstrated in Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* trans. Christopher S. Wood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Finally, I emphasize that the "encounter" in question cannot function as a general model; it exemplifies only how a constraint (one imposed by the present) can be turned to *advantage.*

32. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). The conceit of a period "looking at itself through its own eyes" is emphasized in the title of the French-language edition: *L'Oeil du Quattrocento: L'Usage de la peinture dans l'Italie de la Renaissance,* trans. Y. Delsaut (Paris: Gallimard, 1985). In the preface, Baxandall himself writes that the fifth chapter of the book "assembles a basic fifteenth-century equipment for looking at fifteenth-century pictures" (unpaginated).

33. Ibid., 110.

34. "*Vezzoso,* wanton, mignard, full of wantonesse, quaint, blithe, buckesome, gamesome, flattring, nice, coy, squeamish, pert, pleasant, full of affectation." John Florio in the first Italian-English dictionary (1598 and 1611), 147.

35. Ibid., 147–51. For a more fully developed argument contesting the applicability of Landino's categories to Fra Angelico, see Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico,* 23–26.

36. Robert Klein was fully aware of this when he wrote: "In the case of art history, in particular, all theoretical problems . . . are reduced to the one and basic question: how to reconcile history, which furnishes its point of view, with art, which furnishes its object." *Form and Meaning,* 160.

37. The literature on this question is vast. On Alexander Rodchenko, see N. Taraboukine, *Le dernier Tableau,* trans. A. B. Nakov and M. Pétris (Paris: Champ libre, 1972), esp. 40–42. On Marcel Duchamp and the pronouncement "this is art," see Thierry de Duve, *Au Nom de l'art: Pour une archéologie de la modernité* (Paris: Minuit, 1988). On postmodernism, see Yves-Alain Blois, "Modernisme et postmodernisme," *Encyclopédie Universalis: Symposium* (Paris: E.U., 1988), 187–96.

38. For a critique of the *past* in the history of art, for which he substitutes the two

theoretical terms *paradigm* and *origin,* see H. Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective,* 12–17, 37–52, 79–89 [English ed., xix–xxiv, 23–40, 75–86].

39. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History,* xxxv.1.2; Loeb Classical Library (1952), 9:260–61.

40. *Vite* 2:95–96 [*Lives* 1:246–47 ("Preface to the Second Part")].

41. Rather, the history of art in the objective genitive sense has defined the history of art in the subjective genitive sense—the interesting thing in this context being that the rift between the two was operative in the work of this painter who decided to take up the pen . . .

42. Whose own "life" is the climax of Vasari's work. *Vite* 7:135–404 [*Lives* 2:642–769].

43. And regarding historicity only. We will see that, in their implicit philosophy of knowledge, most art historians are neo-Kantian—and unknowingly so. For a discussion of this question of *implicit philosophy,* of its specific role in the practice that concerns us here and its difference from a pure and simple "world picture," see Louis Althusser, *Philosophie et philosophie spontanée des savants* (1967; Paris: Maspero, 1974), esp. 98–116.

44. Hegel specifies: "Universal history . . . is then, generally speaking, an exteriorization of Spirit *(Geist)* in time, as Idea exteriorizes itself in space." G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 72 [translation altered]. First published in German in 1837.

45. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (1807; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19, 492.

46. For a rigorous analysis of Hegel's conception of the *end of art* (in which "end" signifies neither conclusion nor death), see Pierre-Jean Labarrière, "Deus redivivus: Quand l'intelligible prend sens," in *Mort de Dieu: Fin de l'art,* proceedings of a conference held in Strasbourg in 1988 (Strasbourg: C.E.R.I.T., 1990), 245–55.

47. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit,* 492 [translation altered].

48. Ibid., 455–56 [translation altered].

49. *Hegel's Aesthetics,* trans. T. M. Knox (London: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1:103.

50. In Greek, *symptôma* designates that which chooses or falls with: a fortuitous encounter, a coincidence, or an event that disturbs the order of things—in accordance with the invisible but sovereign law of *tuché.*

51. On this fundamental notion of the "revelatory death" and the Aristotelian *to ti èn aï* (designated in the Latin tradition by the term *quidditas),* see Pierre Aubenque, *Le Problème de l'être chez Aristote* (3d ed.; Paris: P.U.F., 1972), 460–76.

52. Visit the Louvre and stand in front of the *Mona Lisa,* if what you want to contemplate is the reflection of a crowd. Is this another visual effect associated with the cult of images?

Chapter 2

1. "The villain of the piece, I mean the Renaissance, invented the notion of art on which we still live, although less and less well. It conferred on the production of objects—which has always been the acknowledged raison d'être of the artistic profession—that solemn investiture of which we may rid it only by ridding ourselves of the object at the same blow." Robert Klein, "The Eclipse of the Work of Art" (1967), in *Form and Meaning: Essays on Renaissance and Modern Art,* trans. Madeline Jay and Leon Wieseltier (New York: Viking Press [1979], 180.

2. It is no accident that the most *famous* art historians—from Heinrich Wölfflin and Aby Warburg to Bernard Berenson, Erwin Panofsky, Edgar Wind, E. H. Gombrich, Frederick Harrt, and André Chastel—were interested primarily in the Italian Renaissance.

3. See the famous article by Erwin Panofsky (to which we will return): "The History

of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Meaning*, 1–25. First published (as "Introductory") in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 3–31.

4. Note the full title of the first edition of Vasari's *Lives: Le vite de più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue infino a' tempi nostri: descritte in lingua toscana da Giorgio Vasari, pittore aretino—Con una sua utile et necessaria introduzione a le arti loro,* 2 quarto vols. (Florence: L. Torrentino, 1550). Eighteen years later, he published a new and expanded edition, illustrated with woodcut artists' portraits, under a variant title in which painters are listed first: *Le vite de più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori, scritte e di nuovo ampliate da Giorgio Vasari con i ritratti loro e con l'aggiunta delle vite de' vivi et de' morti dall'anno 1550 infino al 1567,* 3 quarto vols. (Florence: Giunti, 1568). On the evolution of Vasari's text between the two editions, see R. Bettarini, "Vasari scrittore: come la Torrentiana diventò Giuntina," in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista—Atti del Congresso internazionale nel* IV centenario della morte [1974] (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976), 485–500.

5. Julius von Schlosser, *La Littérature artistique,* trans. J. Chavy (first German ed. 1924; Paris: Flammarion, 1984), 341. Vasari occupies the precise center of this classic critical anthology: book 5, entitled "Vasari," which is preceded by other books that refer to him as to a fundamental pole of attraction, for example, book 3, entitled "Artistic Historiography Before Vasari." The notion of Vasari as inventor of the history of art is discussed by Erwin Panofsky in "The First Page of Giorgio Vasari's 'Libro': A Study on the Gothic Style in the Judgment of the Italian Renaissance," in *Meaning:* 169–225, esp. 138 ("marks the beginning of a strictly art-historical approach"). See also Jean Rouchette, *La Renaissance que nous a léguée Vasari* (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1959), 113–406 ("La première histoire de l'art renaissant"); Einar Rud, *Vasari's Life and Lives: The First Art Historian,* trans. from Danish by Reginald Spink (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963).

6. The principal modern editions of the *Vite* are those of G. Milanesi (9 vols.; Florence: Sansoni, 1878–85; new ed. 1973); C. L. Ragghianti (4 vols.; Milan: Rizzoli, 1942–50; new ed. 1971–74); P. della Pergola, L. Grassi, and G. Previtali (7 vols.; Milan: Club del Libro, 1962); and, above all, the variorum edition with commentary, incorporating both the 1550 and 1568 texts, ed. R. Bettarini and P. Barocchi (Florence: Sansoni, 1966–87). Note also the French translation of the *Vite* overseen by André Chastel (11 vols.; Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1981–88).

7. In the copious literature on Vasari, the first of these questions is sometimes addressed, the second almost never. Nonetheless, I note the standard secondary sources: W. Kallab, *Vasaristudien* (Vienna: Grasser, 1908); Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450–1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 86–102; *Studi vasariani: Atti del convegno internazionale per il* IV centenario della prima edizione delle "Vite" di Vasari [1950] (Florence: Sansoni, 1952); T. S. R. Boase, *Giorgio Vasari: The Man and the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); *Il Vasari storiografo e artista*; *Giorgio Vasari—Principi, letterati et artisti nelle carte di G. Vasari* (Florence: Edam, 1981); Paola Barocchi, *Studi vasariani* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984); *Giorgio Vasari tra decorazione ambientale e storiografia artistica* [1981] (Florence: Olschki, 1985); dossier "Autour de Vasari," *Revue de l'Art* 80 (1988): 26–75; Roland Le Mollé, *Georges Vasari et le vocabulaire de la critique d'art dans les "Vite"* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 1988).

8. In reality, this "hunch" benefits from the important and well-known theoretical elaborations on the work of the *parergon*. See Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 15–147; on *paratext*, see Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation,* trans. Jane E. Lewin

(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and on textual and pictorial *framing*, see Louis Marin, "Du cadre au décor ou la question de l'ornement dans la peinture," *Rivista di Estetica* 22, no. 12 (1982): 16–25.

9. *Vite* 1:1–4 [*Lives* 1:3–5].

10. Ibid., 1:4 and 7 [*Lives,* 1:5 and 9]; from, respectively, the first and second dedications to Cosimo (1550 and 1568). Note that in the Torrentiniana edition, Vasari also invokes the protection of Pope Julius III.

11. Ibid. [*Lives* 1:5, 8–9].

12. Ibid., 1:1 [*Lives* 1:3]. On Vasari as court writer and painter, see H. T. van Veen, *Letteratura artistica e arte di corte nella Firenze granducale* (Florence: Istituto Universitario Olandese di Storia dell'Arte, 1986).

13. Hence "the history of art was born of the pride of the Florentines," in the apt phrase of G. Bazin, *Histoire de l'histoire de l'art, de Vasari à nos jours* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986), 15.

14. The title of the Giuntina edition (see note 4 above).

15. See S. Rossi, *Dalle botteghe alle accademie: Realtà sociale e teorie artistiche a Firenze dal* XIV al XVI secolo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980).

16. *Vite* 1:9. This dedicatory text is absent from *Lives* (the de Vere translation), not corresponding to the dedication published in its 2:1065–67.

17. Ibid., 1:11–12.

18. Ibid. Vasari recounts these "lives of the most famous artists of antiquity" in a "Lettera di Messer Giovambattista Adriani," published in the 1568 ed. (1:15–90 [absent from *Lives*]), as well as in the preface to Part II (2:94–97 [*Lives,* 1:247–48]).

19. Ibid., 1:91–92 [*Lives,* 1:13–14]. This is a recurrent theme in Vasari: see esp. ibid., 1:2 and 9 [*Lives,* 1:4; the second reference is to a passage in the dedication *Agli artefici del disegno,* absent from *Lives* (the de Vere translation)].

20. Ibid., 1:222–23 [*Lives,* 1:32–33]. There is an admirable discussion of how various factors "erase the memory of things," in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy,* ed. and trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (1513–20; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 167–69 (book II, discourse 5).

21. *Vite* 1:243 [*Lives* 1:46–47].

22. See J. Kliemann, "Le Xilografie delle 'Vite' del Vasari nelle edizioni del 1550 e del 1568," in *Giorgio Vasari: Principi, letterati e artisti,* 238.

23. Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto del disegni, 1618E. See Kliemann, "Le Xilografie," 238–39. Kliemann, "Su alcuni concetti umanistici del pensiero e del mondo figurativo vasariani," *Giorgio Vasari tra decorazione,* 73–77, which discusses the theme of the three Fates and the role of a text by Ariosto (*Orlando Furioso,* XXXIII) in the constitution of this allegorical motif.

24. Virgil, *Aeneid,* 8:470–71. See Kliemann, "Le Xilografie," 239.

25. On the "prehistory" of this invention, see J. von Schlosser, *La Littérature artistique,* 221–303 (book IV, "Les Précurseurs de Vasari"). Richard Krautheimer, "Die Anfänge des Kunstgeschichtsschreibung in Italien," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 50 (1929): 49–63. G. Tanturli, "Le biografie d'artisti prima Vasari," in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista,* 275–98.

26. *Vite* 1:91 [*Lives* 1:13].

27. See H. T. van Veen, *Letteratura artistica e arte di corte*. For an introductory history to the princely courts of the Renaissance, see S. Bertelli, F. Cardini, and E. Garbero Zorzi, *Le corti italiane del Rinascimento* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1985).

28. In his frescoes in the Cancelleria in Rome, Vasari celebrated the patronage of Pope Paul III with personifications of *Fama* and *Eternità*—and he named the composition *La Rimunerazione della Vertù* . . . proof that the eternity of History has need of a prince's remuneration. J. Kliemann ("Su alcuni concetti," 80) has aptly remarked that Vasari here combined two a priori heterogeneous conceptions of *virtù:* one humanist, the other courtly.

29. "Giorgio Vasari was not a profound or original thinker": such is the beginning of Boase, *Giorgio Vasari.*

30. According to André Chastel, Vasari produced "a history that is calmly ordered, and conceived in accordance with a grand doctrine" (introduction to the eleven-volume French translation of Vasari overseen by Chastel [Paris: Berger-Lebrault, 1981–88), 1:13). By contrast, R. Le Mollé asks: "Did he even have a doctrine?" (100).

31. See Zygmunt Wazbinski, "L'Idée de l'histoire dans la première et la seconde édition des *Vies* de Vasari," in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista,* 1.

32. Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 33.

33. Erwin Panofsky, "The First Page of Vasari's 'Libro,'" 205–20, where Vasari is ultimately characterized as "the typical representative of a period which, though outwardly self-confident, was deeply insecure and often close to despair" (220).

34. See *Écrits,* 855–77 ("La science et la vérité").

35. This double nature, totalizing and rhetorical, was remarkably analyzed by Julius von Schlosser, *La Littérature artistique,* 319–25. Bazin retained the gist of this reading, writing that "the patriarch of art history created in his mother tongue not a new science, but a new literary genre . . . Vasari wrote not the history of art but the novel of the history of art" (Bazin, *Histoire de l'histoire de l'art,* 45–46). André Chastel attempted a salvage operation, using language that fudges the distinction between science and literature: "Thus Vasari invented a new literary discipline: the history of art" (intro., French ed. of the *Lives,* 1:16). On Vasari's style, see also M. Capucci, "Forme della biografia nel Vasari," in *Il Vasari storiografo et artista,* 299–320.

36. Vincenzio Borghini, cited by Zygmunt Wazbinski, "L'Idée de l'histoire," 8. See also William Nelson, *Fact or Fiction: The Dilemma of the Renaissance Storyteller* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 38–55.

37. See Karl Frey, *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris,* 2 vols. (Munich: F. Müller, 1923–30). Wazbinski, "L'Idée de l'histoire," 10–21. See also Svetlana Alpers, "*Ekphrasis* and Aesthetic Attitudes in Vasari's *Lives,*" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23(1960): 190–215.

38. See Licia Collobi Ragghianti, *Il Libro de' Disegni del Vasari,* 2 vols. (Florence: Vallecchi, 1974).

39. See Paola Barocchi, "Storiografia e collezionismo dal Vasari al Lanzi," in *Storia dell'arte italiana,* vol. 2: *L'artista e il pubblico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), 3–82. Unfortunately, the Rome-Florence axis does not figure in the fine book by Krystof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800,* trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

40. It is worth recalling here Panofsky's admirable analysis of the framing of the initial page of Vasari's *Libro,* which closes with his assertion that it "marks the beginning of a strictly art-historical approach." Panofsky, "The First Page of Vasari's 'Libro,'" 224.

41. The *Lives* and the *Libro* are also linked by the set of framed artists' portraits that serve as frontispieces to each biography in the 1568 ed. This "museum of faces" is known

to be directly related to the collection of portraits of great men constituted by Paolo Giovio in his villa on Lake Como. See Wolfgang Prinz, *Vasari Sammlung von Kunstlerbildnissen: Mit einem kritischen Verzeichnis des 144 Vitenbildnisse in der Zweiten Ausgabe des Lebensbeschreibungen von 1568,* supplement to *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 13 (1966). Charles Hope, "Historical Portraits in the *Lives* and in the Frescoes of Giorgio Vasari," in *Giorgio Vasari tra decorazione,* 321–38.

42. Obviously there are many other "totem-notions" in Vasari that probably conditioned the entire subsequent development of the discipline—for example, *composizione, fantasia, giudizio, grazia, invenzione, maniera, moderno, natura, regola.* All of them are listed but unfortunately not examined critically in any depth, by R. Le Mollé, *Georges Vasari.*

43. *Vite* 4:7–15 ("Proemio alla Parte Terza") [*Lives* 1:617–23]. See Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences,* 31–32.

44. *Vite* 1:369, 372 [*Lives* 1:96–97]. Recognizable here is the classic thesis according to which "without the idea of One Art progressing through the centuries there would be no history of art": E. H. Gombrich, "The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and Its Consequences" (1952), in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1966), 1:10. See also Gombrich, *Ideas of Progress and Their Impact on Art* (New York: Cooper Union School of Art and Architecture, 1971). Eugenio Garin has relativized this notion by demonstrating the roots of Vasari's *Rinascità* in medieval culture: E. Garin, "Giorgio Vasari e il tema della Rinascità," in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista,* 259–66.

45. *Vite* 1:372 [*Lives* 1:97]. See André Chastel, "Giotto coetaneo di Dante" (1963), in *Fables, formes, figures* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), 1:377–86. But above all, see E. H. Gombrich, "Giotto's Portrait of Dante?" *Burlington Magazine* 121 (1979): 471–83.

46. A remark of Hegel's epitomizes this state of mind: "The advances made by painting . . . have consisted precisely in its working its way toward portraiture." *Hegel's Aesthetics,* trans. T. M. Knox (London: Clarendon Press, 1975), 2:865 [translation altered].

47. It is much too perfunctory to view the Platonic theory of *mimesis* as a rejection, pure and simple, of artistic activity in general. See Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Image et apparence dans la théorie plantonicienne de la Mimésis" (1975), in *Religions, histoires, raisons* (Paris: Maspero, 1979), 105–37. One also thinks of the theory of *two contradictory resemblances* in Plotinus (*Enneads,* 1.2.1–2) and of the famous theory of "*dissembling* imitation" in Pseudo-Dionysius. For a contemporary critique of the concept of imitation, see esp. Jacques Derrida, "Economimèsis," in *Mimesis des articulations,* ed. Sylviane Agacinski et al. (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 55–93. English trans. R. Klein in *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 3–25. P. Lacoue-Labarthe, "Typographie," in *Mimesis des articulations,* 165–270; Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'Imitation des modernes (Typographies 2)* (Paris: Galilée, 1986).

48. *Vite* 1:222 [*Lives* 1:32].

49. See J. von Schlosser, *La Littérature artistique,* 336–37, who remarks regarding Vasari's concept of imitation: "The 'esthetic' of our author is uncertain and tends toward compromise." See also Rouchette, *La Renaissance que nous a léguée Vasari,* 73–97. R. Le Mollé, *Georges Vasari,* 99–152.

50. See Martin Kemp, "From *Mimesis* to *Fantasia:* The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation: Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1977): 347–98.

51. See Ferrucio Ulivi, *L'imitazione nella poetica del Rinascimento* (Milan: Marzorati, 1959), 62–74. On the origins of this double sense of imitation, see Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 34, 70–75, 97, 118.

52. Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory,* trans. Joseph J. S. Peake (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 67. In the same passage, Panofsky denies that the sphere thus defined remains a metaphysical one.

53. See Le Mollé, *Georges Vasari,* 114–16.

54. Filippo Baldinucci, *Vocabulario toscano dell'arte del disegno* (Florence: SPES, 1975), 72.

55. *Vite* 1:168, 213 [*Vasari on Technique, Being the Introduction to the Three Arts of Design, Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, Prefixed to the Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects,* trans. Louisa S. Maclehose, intro. and notes G. Baldwin Brown (1907; New York: Dover), 205 and 284. [N.B.: Although still the only rendering into English of the "Introduzionne alle tre arti del disegno" (absent from all English-language eds. of Vasari's *Lives*), the Maclehose translation is abusively free; the renderings from the "Introduzionne" are my own, but I provide page references to Maclehose for convenience—trans.]

56. See Leon Battista Alberti, *De pictura* (1435), 2:31 [*On Painting,* trans. Cecil Grayson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 65–67]. L. Ghiberti, cited by P. Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento* (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1971–77), 2:1899: "Il disegno è il fondamento e teorica di queste due arti [i.e., painting and sculpture]".

57. Consider, for example, this passage by E. Panofsky: "[Vasari] also established what we are apt to take for granted: the inner unity of what we call the visual arts, or, even more concisely, the Fine Arts. . . . He never wavered in his conviction that all the Fine Arts are based on the same creative principle and, therefore, subject to a parallel development" ("The First Page of Giorgio Vasari's 'Libro,'" 214). See also Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 496–27 [also available in Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 163–227]. On the *topos* of design as principle of all the arts, see Paola Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte . . .*), 2:1897–2118, who cites texts by Anton Francesco Doni, Francesco de Hollanda, Benvenuto Cellini, Alessandro Allori, Raffaele Borghini, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, Giovan Battista Aremnini, Romano Alberti, Federico Zuccari. See also Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento* (Bari: Laterza, 1960–62), 1:44–48 (Benedetto Varchi) and 127–29 (Paolo Pino). Finally, see *Firenze e la Toscana dei Medici nell'europa del'500: Il primato del Disegno,* exh. cat. (Florence: Edizioni Medicee, 1983), where Luciano Berti discusses *disegno* as an "archetype" (38).

58. See Nicolas Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 42–55. André Chastel, *Art et humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique: Études sur la Renaissance et l'humanisme platonicien* (2d ed.; Paris: PUF, 1961), 514–21, who rightly associates the age of academies with the "feeling" that a "history" had been "completed" (521n.)—in other words, with a sense that the age of the History of Art was beginning. A. Nocentini, *Cenni storici sull'Accademia delle Arti del Disegno* (Florence: ITF, 1963). A. Hughes, "An Academy of Doing, 1: The Accademia del Disegno, the Guilds, and the Principates in Sixteenth-Century Florence," *Oxford Art Journal* 9, no. 1 (1986): 3–10. Rossi, *Dalle botteghe alle accademie,* 146, 162–81. On Vasari's relations with the Accademia Fiorentina, see M. D. Davis, "Vasari e il mondo dell'Accademia fiorentina," in *Giorgio Vasari. Principi, letterati, e artisti,* 190–94.

59. See Bazin, *Histoire de l'histoire de l'art,* 181.

60. *Vite* 1:168–69 [*Vasari on Technique,* 205–6 (translation altered)].

61. See Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (Turin: UTET, 1966), 4:653–55.

62. See Rouchette, *La Renaissance que nous a léguée Vasari,* 79–97. G. De Angelis d'Os-

sat, "*Disegno* e *invenzione* nel pensiero e nelle architetture del Vasari," in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista,* 773–82. Le Mollé, *Georges Vasari,* 184–85, 193.

63. Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura,* ed. F. Tempesti (Milan: Longanesi, 1984), 36 (section 13) [*The Craftsman's Handbook: The Italian "Il Libro dell'Arte,"* trans. Daniel V. Thompson Jr. (c. 1954; New York: Dover, 1960), 8 (translation altered)]. Symptomatically, at this point in the recent French ed. (*Le Livre de l'art,* trans. V. Mottez [Paris: De Nobele, 1982], 10–11), the translator errs in a way that might be described as post-Vasarian; this rendering has the drawing "emerging from the [disciple's] head" *(sortir de la tête),* which is precisely the opposite of what Cennini wrote. [N.B.: The cited English translation also elides this point: "capable of much drawing out of your head."]

64. *Vite* 1:172 [*Vasari on Technique,* 210].

65. See Le Mollé, *Georges Vasari,* esp. 28, 43–60, 106.

66. See, for example, this well-known sentence of Benedetto Varchi: "Today everyone allows that both arts [painting and sculpture] have a common end, namely, the artful imitation of nature, and also that they share one and the same principle, namely *disegno.*" Cited by Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte . . . ,* 2:1899. Note, too, that *Il Disegno* by A. Francesco Doni was published in Venice in 1549.

67. *"DISEGNO, m. Forma espressa di tutte le forme intelligibili e sensibili, che dà luce all'inteletto e vita alle operazioni pratiche."* R. Alberti, *Origini e progresso dell'Accademia del Disegno de'Pittori, scultori et architetti di Roma* (1604), cited by Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte . . . ,* 2:2056. See also Baldinucci, *Vocabulario toscano dell'arte del disegno,* 51.

68. Federico Zuccari, *L'idea de' pittori, scultori, et architetti* (1607), in *Scritti d'arte di Federico Zuccaro,* ed. Detlef Heikamp (Florence: Olschki, 1961), as cited by Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte . . .*), 2:2062. See S. Rossi, "Idea e accademia. Studio sulle teorie artistiche di Federico Zuccari, I: Disegno interno e disegno esterno," *Storia dell'Arte* 20 (1974): 37–56.

69. G. Paoletti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), publ. and ed. Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento,* 2:132–49 ("*Che cosa noi intendiamo per questa voce 'imagine'* ").

70. Zuccari, *Idea de' pittori,* 2063–64.

71. Ibid., 2065. Further on, he argues for the equivalence of *disegnare* and *intendere* (2066). This passage is discussed by Panofsky, *Idea,* 85–86.

72. Zuccari, *Idea de' pittori,* 2074, 2080–81.

73. Ibid., 2068–70, 2107–18.

74. This text reprinted in Alberti, *Origini e progresso dell'Accademia del Disegno . . . ,* 2060–61.

75. Rossi, "Idea e accademia" (55), aptly notes how, at the end of this grandiose development, Zuccari restores the figurative arts to the bosom of the Church, the state, and even the army.

Chapter 3

1. Again (see chapter 1, note 29), I cite the beautiful phrase of Pierre Fédida, "Passé anachronique et présent réminiscent," *L'Écrit du temps,* no. 10 (1985): 23–45.

2. See, however, Raymonde Moulin, *Le Marché de la peinture en France* (Paris: Minuit, 1967; new ed. 1989). Pierre Bourdieu, "Le Marché des biens symboliques," *L'Année sociologique* 22 (1971): 49–126. H. S. Becker, *Les Mondes de l'art,* trans. J. Bouniort (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), which contains chapters devoted to "aestheticians" and "critics," but not one devoted to art historians.

3. See Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 1:1–20.

4. Carel van Mander, *The Lives of The Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters, from the First Edition of the "Schilder-boek" (1603–1604),* 6 vols., bilingual ed. ed. and trans. Hessel Miedema (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1994–99). Francisco Pacheco, *Arte de la Pintura* (1649), 2 vols., ed. F. J. Sánchez Canton from the original manuscript completed January 24, 1638 (Madrid: Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, 1956). Joachim von Sandrart, *L'Academia todesca della architectura, scultura e pittura,* 2 vols. (Nuremberg: J. P. Miltenberger, 1675–79).

5. See the following now-classic studies: Erwin Panofsky, *Idea,* trans. Joseph J. S. Peake (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 45–111. Denis Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory* (London: Warburg Institute, 1947). Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 496–27 (reprint: Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965], 163–227). Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967).

6. Charles Batteux, *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe* (Paris: Durand, 1747).

7. Ibid., 78–102.

8. Ibid., 156–99, 256–58: "ON PAINTING. This section will be very short, for, as we have already discussed the principle of imitation of beautiful Nature with regard to Poetry, its application to Painting will almost be self-evident. The two arts are so consistent with one another that, to derive the discussion of one from that of the other, one need only substitute *Painting, Drawing,* and *Coloring* for *Poetry, Fable,* and *Versification*" (256).

9. Ibid. (my emphasis).

10. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764). Note that in the first Italian translation of this, its title was changed so as to make it consistent with Vasarian norms: *Storie delle arti del Disegno presso gli Antichi* (Milan: San Ambrogio Maggiore, 1779).

11. See W. Waestzoldt, *Deutsche Kunsthistoriker vom Sandrart bis Rumohr* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1921). Udo Kultermann, *Geschichte des Kunstgeschichte: Der Weg einer Wissenschaft* (Vienna and Düsseldorf: Econ, 1966).

12. "Thus with this I bring my entire critical enterprise to an end." CPJ: 58 (Preface to 1st ed., 1790).

13. "Taste is the faculty for judging an object or a kind of representation through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction *without any interest.*" CPJ: 96.

14. Panofsky, *Idea,* tracks all of these manipulations.

15. CPR: 395–97 (my emphasis).

16. CPJ: 122 (§ 20) and 197 (§ 51).

17. CPJ: 192 (§ 49). See also § 57, Remark I: "Now I believe that one could call the aesthetic idea an *inexponable* representation of the imagination, the idea of reason, however, an *indemonstrable* concept of reason" (218).

18. CPJ: 196 (§ 49, end).

19. CPJ: 79–80 (Intro., VIII).

20. CPJ: 187 (§ 47), 195–96 (§ 49, end), 219 (§ 59, Remark I, end).

21. K. F. von Rumohr, *Italianische Forschungen,* ed. Julius von Schlosser (1827–31; Frankfurt: Frankfurter Verlags-Unstalt U.G., 1920). The first part treats general issues (the division between north and south, etc.); the second discusses painting from Duccio to the "new art"; the third is wholly devoted to Raphael.

22. Warburg's mind was so idiosyncratic (he drew his philosophical inspiration, for example, more from Nietzsche than from Kant) that it is difficult to situate him within

the mainstream of contemporary art history. The few texts by this man, ultimately a rather solitary figure, have been collected and edited by Gertrud Bing: Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften,* 2 vols. (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1932). On Warburg, see especially the article by Edgar Wind, "Warburg's Concept of *Kulturwissenschaft* and Its Meaning for Aesthetics" (1930–31), in *The Eloquence of Symbols: Studies in Humanist Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 21–35. See also E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Warburg Institute, 1970). Note that, when Warburg died, it was Panofsky who was asked to write his obituary: "Aby Warburg," *Hamburger Fremdenblatt,* October 28, 1929, reprinted in *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 51 (1930): 1–4.

23. For a bibliography of his publications, see the Festschrift edited by Millard Meiss, *De Artibus Opuscula,* XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky (New York: New York University Press, 1961), XIII–XXI, as well as the appendix to the French edition of Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism,* trans. Pierre Bourdieu as *Architecture gothique et pensée scolastique* (Paris: Minuit, 1967). On Panofsky, see also S. Ferretti, *Il demone della memoria: Simbolo e tempo storico in Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky* (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1984). *Pour un temps: Erwin Panofsky* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou / Pandora, 1983).

24. The unsettling quality of this theoretical exigency retained its force forty years later, when French-language editions of *Studies in Iconology* (trans. Bernard Teyssèdre) and *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (trans. Pierre Bourdieu) appeared. André Chastel (*Le Monde,* February 28, 1968), for example, deplored their excessively "philosophical" tenor and wrote that "the rich and sometimes confused German thought" of Panofsky's early work was later "sifted by 'Anglo-Saxon' naïveté." Another sign of the distrust of Panofsky's German phase is the relative inaccessibility of his early writings, which were not republished until four years before his death: See *Aufsätze* (first published in 1964). I have used the 1974 revised edition as the basis for my discussion of Panofsky's German texts dating 1915–32.

25. Erwin Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," *Meaning,* 17. Pierre Bourdieu has compared this remark to one made a few decades earlier by Ferdinand de Saussure, who wrote that he wanted to "show linguists what they were doing" (see Bourdieu's Afterword to his French translation of Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism,* 167).

26. Erwin Panofsky, "Zum Problem der historischen Zeit," *Aufsätze* (1931), 77–83.

27. Erwin Panofsky, "Das Problem des Stils in der Bildenden Kunst," *Aufsätze* (1915), 20.

28. Ibid., 22.

29. Erwin Panofsky, "Der Begriff des Kunstwollens," *Aufsätze* (1920), 29–35 and 41–42 n. 9 ["The Concept of Artistic Volition," trans. K. J. Northcott and J. Snyder, *Critical Inquiry* 8 (fall 1981): 19–26 [translation altered] and 24–25 n. 8]. The principal target of this attack is Theodore Lipps.

30. Erwin Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der Bildenden Kunst," *Logos* 21 (1932): 103–19. Reprinted in *Aufsätze,* 85–97. Subsequent citations refer to this reprint.

31. Erwin Panofsky, "Introductory," *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 3–31.

32. Ibid., 3.

33. Ibid., 4.

34. Ibid., 3.

35. Ibid., 3–17. This discussion culminates in a famous "synoptical table" that purports to summarize the various ends and means of art history (14–15), and that is worth recalling here:

Object of Interpretation	Act of Interpretation	Equipment for Interpretation	Controlling Principle of Interpretation
I—*Primary* or *natural* subject matter—(A) factual, (B) expressional—constituting the world of artistic motifs.	*Pre-iconographical description* (and pseudo-formal analysis).	*Practical experience* (familiarity with *objects* and *events*).	History of *style* (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, *objects* and *events* were expressed by *forms*).
II—*Secondary* or *conventional* subject matter, constituting the world of *images, stories,* and *allegories.*	*Iconographical analysis* in the narrower sense of the word.	*Knowledge of literary sources* (familiarity with specific *themes* and *concepts*).	History of *types* (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, specific *themes* or *concepts* were expressed by *objects* and *events*).
III—*Intrinsic meaning* or *content,* constituting the world of "symbolical" values.	*Iconographical interpretation* in a deeper sense (*Iconographical synthesis*).	Synthetic *intuition* (familiarity with the *essential tendencies of the human mind*), conditioned by personal psychology and "*Weltanschauung.*	"History of *cultural symptoms* or "*symbols*" in general (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, *essential tendencies of the human mind* were expressed by specific *themes* and *concepts*).

36. Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung . . . ," in *Aufsätze,* 93.
37. Ibid., 86.
38. Ibid., 87.
39. Ibid., 87–88.
40. Ibid., 86.
41. Ibid., 89.
42. Ibid., 92. The quoted passage is from Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929), trans. Richard Taft (from the slightly revised text of 1973) (1929; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 140–41 (translation altered). In the French translation by A. de Waelhens and W. Biemel (*Kant et le problème de la métaphysique* [Paris: Gallimard, 1953; new ed. 1981]), it is rendered as: "Il est vrai que, pour saisir au-delà des mots ce que ces mots veulent dire, une interprétation doit fatalement user de violence" (256).
43. There are a few rare exceptions. See the Panofsky bibliographies cited in note 23 above. On the transition from Germany to the United States, see Panofsky, "The History of Art," in *The Cultural Migration: The European Scholar in America,* ed. W. R. Crawford

(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), 82–111. It is significant that many art historians associate the German language with a supposed "lack of precision" in philosophical writing: "The transition from German to English, a necessity for all the German emigrés, helped most of them to write in a way that was more succinct and precise. Panofsky is a particularly brilliant example. Pächt is another." Carl Nordenfalk, "Otto Pächt, in Memoriam" *Revue de l'art,* no. 82 (1988): 82.

44. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 6, 8–9, 66–74, passim.

45. Robert Klein, "Thoughts on Iconography," in *Form and Meaning: Essays on Renaissance and Modern Art,* trans. Madeline Jay and Leon Wieseltier (New York: Viking Press, [1979]), 160. This is an implicit echo of Panofsky, "Der Begriff des Kunstwollens," *Aufsätze,* 29 (passage cited above as an epigraph to this book) [Panofsky, "The Concept of Artistic Volition," 18–19].

46. See Meyer Schapiro, *Selected Papers,* 4 vols. (New York: George Braziller, 1977–94). Pierre Francastel, *La Figure et le lieu: L'Ordre visuel au Quattrocento* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 7–23, 55, passim. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 1–11, where the author reiterates that all description is "partially interpretive," being not a "representation of seeing the picture" but a "representation of thinking about having seen the picture" (11).

47. See Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective,* trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), chap. 1, "At the Crossroads," 3–20. This entire book is a demonstration that critical inquiry—hence skeptical, even "impatient," as Damisch writes in his preface—is necessary for the very production of knowledge about art. The "textual threshold" in question is, of course, Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (English trans. Christopher S. Wood [Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1991]).

48. See CPJ: 167–68 (§ 35).

49. CPJ: 68–80 (Intro., V–VIII), 221–25 (§ 58), etc.

50. "I am now at work on the critique of taste, and I have discovered a new sort of *a priori* principles, different from those heretofore observed. For there are three faculties of the mind: the faculty of cognition, the faculty of feeling pleasure and displeasure, and the faculty of desire. In the *Critique of Pure* (theoretical) *Reason,* I found *a priori* principles for the first of these, and in the *Critique of Practical Reason a priori* principles for the third. I tried to find them for the second as well, and although I thought it impossible to find such principles, the analysis of the previously mentioned faculties of the human mind allowed me to discover something systematic, which has given me ample material at which to marvel and if possible to explore, sufficient to last me for the rest of my life, and has put me on the path now to recognize three parts of philosophy, each of which has its *a priori* principles, which can be enumerated and for which one can precisely determine the scope of knowledge that is possible through them—theoretical philosophy, teleology, and practical philosophy." Kant to Karl Leonhard Reinhold, December 1787, as cited in editor's introduction to CPJ, xiv.

51. See, for example, CPJ: 192–93 (§ 49). Elsewhere, Kant calls the visual (pictorial) arts "those of the expression of ideas in *sensible intuition*" (CPJ: 199 [§ 51]).

52. See the assessment of Pierre Bourdieu: "*Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* is indubitably one of the most beautiful challenges ever posed to positivism." Afterword to his French translation, 135.

53. Panofsky, "Das Problem des Stils," 25–26. I will have more to say below about the term "metapsychological."

54. "Artistic volition *[Kunstwollen],* which must be distinguished from both the artist's volition *[Wollen des Künstlers]* and the volition of his time *[Wollen seiner Zeit]* . . . can only

be grasped by an interpretation of phenomena that proceeds from *a priori* categories." Panofsky, "Der Begriff des Kunstwollens," 38 [English, 31 (translations altered)]. Panofsky's critique of certain of Riegl's formulations: 43 n. 19 [English: 30 n. 18].

55. Ibid., 34–36 [English: 26–27 (translation altered)].

56. Ibid., 37 [English: 28–29 (translation altered)]: "The present essay aims not to undertake the deduction and systematization of such transcendental-esthetic categories, but merely to secure the concept of *Kunstwollen* in a purely critical manner against mistaken interpretations, in order to clarify the methodological assumptions of an activity meant [not] . . . as genetic explanations or philosophical subsumptions, but rather aiming for the elucidation of a meaning that is imminent in artistic phenomena *[sondern auf die Klarstellung eines den Künstlerischen Erscheinungen immanenten Sinnes]*." Panofsky would return to the problem of the "fundamental concept" five years later: Panofsky, "Über das Verhältnis der Kunstgeschichte zur Kunsttheorie: Ein Beitrag zu der Erörterung über die Möglichkeit 'Kunstwissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe,'" in *Aufsätze* (1925), 49–75. See S. Ferretti, *Il demone della memoria . . . ,* 29.

57. See, for example, Panofsky, *Studies on Iconology,* 29.

58. Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung . . . ," in *Aufsätze,* 96 n. 12.

59. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, introduction ("Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss") to M. Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 1950), xli–lii. Lévi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols," in *Structural Anthropology,* trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967), 181–201.

60. As J.-L. Nancy has astutely observed with regard to Kant. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Discours de la syncope, Vol. 1: Logodeadalus* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1976). Nancy, *L'Impératif catégorique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983).

61. Panofsky, *Idea,* v.

62. Ibid., vii.

63. See, for example, Panofsky, *Die deutsche Plastik des elften bis dreizehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Wolff, 1924) and his reviews of books on Carolingian art, Romanesque sculpture, and Giotto (1923–24).

64. Panofsky, *Idea,* 61. See above, pages 78–79. [In the English edition of *Idea, abgezogen* is rendered as "abstracted," a viable but less specifically Kantian choice than "deduced," which is used in the French edition *(déduit)*.]

65. Ibid., 62. [In the English-language edition of *Idea,* the Kantian language of the German original is occluded: "not only the content of artistic imagination but also the capacity for artistic imagination."]

66. Ibid., 67.

67. Ibid., 63.

68. Ibid., 126.

69. Ibid., 61–62, 65–66.

70. Ibid., 126 [translation altered]. Note that Panofsky, significantly, asserts that the "realm" of Vasari's Idea was "no longer that of metaphysics" (ibid., 67); but he does so, precisely, by way of advancing his case for its implicit Kantism. He sees the latter's "transcendental-scientific" character clearly, but not its profound metaphysical tendencies—which, however, Heidegger had elucidated in his book of 1929, cited by Panofsky (see above, pages 101–2). Note also that at the same moment, Julius von Schlosser evoked (so as to refute it) this supposed relation between Vasarian history and "neo-Kantian" science. See Julius von Schlosser, *La Littérature artistique,* trans. J. Chavy (1924; Paris: Flammarion, 1984), 332.

71. This regarding a famous frame drawn by Vasari around a medieval drawing, formerly attributed to Cimabue (and now given to Spinello Aretino), in his own collection: "Vasari's frame marks the beginning of a strictly art-historical approach, which . . . proceeds, to borrow Kant's phrase, in 'disinterested' manner." Panofsky, "The First Page of Giorgio Vasari's 'Libro': A Study on the Gothic Style in the Judgment of the Italian Renaissance," in *Meaning,* 224.

72. Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Meaning,* 1.

73. Ibid., 2.

74. Ibid., 4–5 (emphasis in original).

75. Ibid., 5.

76. See Panofsky, "Artist, Scientist, Genius: Notes on the 'Renaissance-*Dämmerung,*'" in *The Renaissance: A Symposium* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1953), 77–93. See also, among many other publications of this genre, D. Koenigsberger, *Renaissance Man and Creative Thinking: A History of Concepts of Harmony, 1400–1700* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979).

77. Such is the title given the article by its French translators ("L'Histoire de l'art est une discipline humaniste," in *Essais d'iconologie: Thèmes humanistes dans l'art de la Renaissance,* trans. C. Herbette and Bernard Teyssèdre [Paris: Gallimard, 1967]), but the original English readily lends itself to wordplay along these lines: "The History of art *as* . . . the History of Art *Is* . . . a Humanistic Discipline."

78. Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Meaning:* 14 (my emphasis).

79. Ibid., 14.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., 19. Note also this earlier passage (16): "Not only does the re-creative synthesis serve as a basis for the archaeological investigation, the archaeological investigation in turn serves as a basis for the re-creative process; both mutually qualify and rectify one another."

82. Ibid., 17 (emphasis in original).

83. Ibid., 25.

84. If only in so-called *infamantes* (defamatory) images of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. See G. Ortalli, *La pittura infamante nei secoli,* xiii–xvi (Rome: Jouvence, 1979). Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution During the Florentine Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

85. For a related discussion of the "Albertian" bias that has privileged *historia* in our responses to painting, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xix–xxv.

86. See Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphoses ou magie artificielle des effets merveilleux* (Paris: Perrin, 1969), 157. *Anamorphoses,* exh. cat. (Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 1976), fig. 31.

87. This despite Warburg's having been responsible for reintroducing the term into the methodological vocabulary of the history of art. See Aby Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara" (1912), in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance* (1932), ed. Gertrud Bing with F. Rougemont, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Center for The History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 563–92. S. Trottein, "La Naissance de l'iconologie," in *Symboles de la Renaissance* (Paris: P.E.N.S., 1982), 2:53–57.

88. Panofsky, "Introductory," *Studies in Iconology,* 8 and 14.

89. Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in *Meaning:* 31–32, bracketed interpellation. Note also that the phrase "icono-

logical interpretation" does not figure in the famous synoptical table until the 1955 revision of the essay (ibid., 40). In the *princeps* version of 1939 (republished without alteration in all subsequent editions of *Studies in Iconology*), the language used in both the text and the table is "iconography in a deeper sense" and "iconographical synthesis" (*Studies in Iconology,* 8–15).

90. "Iconography and Iconology," *Meaning:* 32, bracketed interpellation. Panofsky "acknowledges" his debt to Cesare Ripa and Aby Warburg in his preface to the 1967 French edition, 3–4.

91. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia overo Descrittione dell'Imagini unversali cavate dall'Antichità e da altri luoghi . . . per rappresentare le virtù, vitii, affetti, e passioni humane* (Padua: P. P. Tozzi, 1611). This is the second, illustrated edition (the first edition appeared in 1593), which has recently been republished (New York: Garland, 1976). For the Italian text of the *proemio* accompanied by the original illustrations as well as by a (collaborative) French translation, all presented by Hubert Damisch, see *Critique,* nos. 315–16 (August–September 1973): 804–19.

92. Ibid. (in the collective translation overseen by Damisch, 805).

93. Panofsky, "Préface à l'édition française," in *Essais d'iconologie,* 3–4.

94. Ripa, *Iconologia* (French translation, 805); a few lines down, the passage continues: "Putting aside the images used by orators, which Aristotle discusses in the third book of his *Rhetoric,* I will speak only of those specific to painters, which is to say those that, by means of colors or some other visible thing, can represent things that are different from the latter, but are consistent with the former. Because, just as the second often persuades by means of the eye *[persuade molte volte per mezzo dell'occhio],* so the first, by means of words, stirs the will *[per mezzo delle parole muove la volontà].*"

95. Ibid. (French translation, 811). This aspect of iconology has been discussed by Hubert Damisch, *Théorie du nuage: Pour une histoire de la peinture* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1972), 79–90. [*A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting,* trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 51–61].

96. Ripa's language: "*Vederi i nomi.*" See the discussion of this phrase by Damisch, *Théorie du nuage*, 85. The "name that confers being" is discussed at length by Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses: Une Archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), "Parler," 92–136 *[The Order of Things,* trans. uncredited (New York: Random House, 1970), "Speaking," 78–124]. Note, however, that this problematic does not exhaust the rich array of meanings encompassed by the phrase *icones symbolicae* as understood by Renaissance humanism. On this subject, see E. H. Gombrich, "*Icones Symbolicae:* Philosophies of Symbolism and Their Bearing on Art," in *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 2:123–98.

97. Questions raised by Robert Klein, "Thoughts on the Foundations of Iconography," in *Form and Meaning,* 143–60. For an opposing point of view, see Bernard Teyssèdre, "Iconologie: Réflexions sur un concept d'Erwin Panofsky," *Revue Philosophique* 154 (1964): 321–40.

98. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology,* 14.

99. Ibid., 5, 7, 14.

100. Ibid., 14, 8.

101. Ibid, 16.

102. One need only read Panofsky's celebrated interpretation of Titian's *Allegory of Prudence* (and most later interpretations of the same picture by others) to understand that he was (they were) looking not at the painting itself—with its dark, evenly colored focal mass—but rather at a black and white photograph of it, which makes it resemble a print

from Ripa's manual much more closely than does the actual canvas. See Panofsky, "Titian's *Allegory of Prudence:* A Postscript," in *Meaning,* 146–68.

103. Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology . . . ," 32.

104. "Plus familier et moins sujet à discussion"; "d'être lu avec la plus extrême prudence." Panofsky, in *Essais d'iconologie: Thèmes humanistes dans l'art de la Renaissance,* trans. C. Herbette and Bernard Teyssèdre (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 3–5.

105. Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology . . . ," 32.

106. See, for example, A. Roger, "Le Schème et le symbole dans l'oeuvre de Panofsky," in *Erwin Panofsky,* ed. Jacques Bonnet (Paris: Cahiers pour un temps, 1983), 49–59, who writes that "the pivotal question is that of Panofsky's relation to Kant" (49).

107. See, in particular, Dora Panofsky and Erwin Panofsky, *Pandora's Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol* (London and New York: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 1956. Panofsky and Panofsky, "The Iconography of the Galerie François Ier at Fontainebleau," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 52 (1958): 113–90. Panofsky, *The Iconography of Correggio's Camera di San Paolo* (London: Warburg Institute, 1961). Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (New York: New York University Press, 1969).

108. Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung . . . ," in *Aufsätze,* 91–92.

109. It is worth recalling here that Warburg took a very different tack.

110. Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung . . . ," in *Aufsätze,* 93.

111. Ibid., 93 and 95 (synoptic table).

112. Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form,* trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 40–41.

113. See Panofsky, "Introductory," *Studies in Iconology,* 8 ("'symbolical' values"), 15 ("symbols"), and 16 ("'symbols' in Ernst Cassirer's sense").

114. Cassirer, PSF (orig. German ed. 1923–29; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).

115. For a survey of neo-Kantism, see T. E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978).

116. PSF 1:76.

117. Ibid., 77.

118. Ibid. Cassirer had developed this thesis at length in an earlier book, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* (1910); English ed.: *Substance and Function,* trans. W. C. Swabey and M. C. Swabey (Chicago and London: Open Court, 1923).

119. "All cognition, much as it may vary in method and orientation, aims ultimately to subject the multiplicity of phenomena to the unity of a 'fundamental proposition.' . . . Essentially cognition is always oriented toward this essential aim, the articulation of the particular into a universal law and order." PSF 1:77.

120. Ibid., 84.

121. Ibid., 80.

122. Ibid., 80. See above, page 000.

123. Ibid., 77 (my emphasis).

124. Ibid., 110–12. See also 98: "This dialectic of metaphysical ontology can be avoided only if, from the very start, 'content' and 'form,' 'element' and 'relation' are conceived not as terms independent of one another, but as concurrent and mutually determining one another."

125. Ibid., 86.

126. Ibid., 99–100, 105–6.

127. Ibid., 76–77.

128. Ibid., 89–90.

129. Ibid., 78 [translation altered].

130. Ibid., 94, 99–100, 105–7.

131. Ibid., 93.

132. "Final end," a Kantian phrase discussed at length (as "l'unité finale") in Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1984), 70 [translation altered].

133. CPR: 210.

134. Ibid., 210–11.

135. Ibid., 211.

136. Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason,"* trans. Kenneth Maly and Parvis Emad (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 293.

137. CPR: 271.

138. Ibid., 272. To preclude confusion, I note that Kant did not pretend to have "contrived" this third thing himself. The quoted sentence begins: "Now it is clear that there must be . . ."

139. Ibid., 272–73, 276–77.

140. Ibid., 273–76.

141. Ibid., 185–86.

142. I take this expression from A. Roger, "Le Schème et le symbole dans l'oeuvre de Panofsky," 53.

143. See CPJ: 225–26 (§ 59). For a useful discussion of this passage, see François Marty, *La Naissance de la métaphysique chez Kant: Une Ètude sur la notion kantienne d'analogie* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980), 342–45.

144. See Peter Schulthess, *Relation und Funktion: Eine systematische und entwicklungsgeschichte Untersuchung zur theroetischen Philosophie Kants* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1981).

145. See J.-L. Nancy, *Le Discours de la syncope,* 9–15. Nancy, *L'Impératif catégorique,* 87–112.

146. The art historian in question is E. H. Gombrich. See Gombrich, *Art and Illusion,* chap. 2, "Truth and the Stereotype," 63–90.

147. As cited by Gombrich in *Art and Illusion*, 63. Gombrich's translation is freer than that of Guyer and Wood, which reads: "This schematism of our understanding with regard to appearances and their mere form . . . is a hidden art in the depths of the human soul, whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty" (CPR: 273).

148. CPR: 273–74.

149. See Heidegger, *Kant . . . ,* 63 ("These eleven pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason* must constitute the central core of the whole voluminous work.") and 89–173.

150. Ibid., 66 and 68 (my emphasis). See also 41–43.

151. Ibid., 68–71.

152. Ibid., 43.

153. Ibid., 44. See also the extended discussions in the lecture course given by Heidegger in 1927–28, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason,* 179–98, 221–62.

154. Heidegger, *Kant . . . ,* 44 (and in general, 43–46).

155. Ibid., 73.

156. Ibid., 80–88. See also Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation . . .*, 262–73 ("General Character of Transcendental Subjectivity as The Original Dimension of Synthetic *A Priori* Knowledge").

157. Ibid., 27–77.

158. Ibid., 292: "Kant succumbs to the external schema of the division of logic." See also 140, 150–51, 196, 291–93.

159. Ibid., 216 [translation altered].

Chapter 4

1. In accordance with a usage of the word "real" referenced to the notion of *tuché* (= encounter) in Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book,* XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 53–55.

2. Erwin Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Meaning,* 17.

3. Panofsky, "Das Problem des Stils in der Bildenden Kunst" (1915), in *Aufsätze,* 22. See above, page 000.

4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind,* trans. Carleton Dallery, in Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 164 [translation altered].

5. See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work,* trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1–23.

6. Interestingly, a recent book by J. Wirth, *L'Image médiévale: Naissance et développement (*VIe–XVe siècle) (Paris: Klincksieck, 1989), 47–107, shows how the question of images was rooted in the "medieval logical universe." But likewise its limit, when he suggests a direct inferential relationship from the latter to the former.

7. *"Flectere si nequeo Superos/Acheronta movebo,"* citation from Virgil used by Freud as the epigraph to *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). The citation also figures in the body of the text, *Interpretation,* 608. See the beautiful commentary by Jean Starobinski, "Acheronta movebo," *L'Écrit du temps* 11 (1986): 3–14.

8. *Interpretation,* 608. This phrase directly follows the two lines from Virgil.

9. It could be objected that such things might occur—but only as the exceptional *symptom* of some catastrophe, flood, or massacre of innocents . . .

10. *Interpretation,* 277 [translation altered].

11. In other words, like the "functional unity" of cognition answering to a "fundamental postulate of unity" between objects, but that the objects themselves are incapable of manifesting. See PSF 1:76–78.

12. *Interpretation,* 281 [translation altered; cf. Crick, 214].

13. There is a path to be laid out between the previous Freud citation and this note dating from August 2, 1939, near the end of his life: "Space might be a projective extension of the psychic apparatus. Probably no other derivation. Instead of the a priori conditions of the psychic apparatus according to Kant. Psyche is extended; knows nothing of this." SE 23, p. 300 [translation altered]. Thinking the enigma of this "extension" is doubtless one of the most arduous tasks of Freudian metapsychology. This is evidenced, for example, by Lacan's protracted attempt to pass from *topography* to *topology.* See also the recent work of P. Fédida, summarized in "Théorie des lieux," *Psychanalyse à l'université* 14, no. 53 (1989): 3–14; and no. 56, 3–18.

14. *Interpretation,* 281.

15. Ibid., 305.

16. Ibid., 312 [translation altered], and in general 310–38.

17. Ibid., 314.

18. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933), in SE 22: 26 (Lecture XXIX, "Revision of the Theory of Dreams").

19. *Interpretation,* 317 [translation altered; cf. Crick, 241].

20. Ibid., 318 [translation altered; cf. Crick, 243].

21. Ibid., 324 [translation altered; cf. Crick, 247].

22. Ibid., 327 and 460.

23. Ibid., 339–40, 344–45, 350–404, 405–25, and 533–49. Freud, "Revision of the Theory of Dreams," in *New Introductory Lectures . . . ,* in SE 22: 19–20. Freud, "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams" (1917), in SE 14: 217–36.

24. According to Aristotle, the mimetic arts "differ from one another in three respects: namely, by producing mimesis in different media, of different objects, or in different modes." *Poetics* 1, 1447a, in Aristotle, *Poetics,* ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 29.

25. *Interpretation,* 320 [translation altered].

26. Ibid. [cf. Crick, 244].

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 321 [translation altered; cf. Crick, 245].

29. Ibid., 322 [cf. Crick, 245].

30. Ibid., 324, 327.

31. Ibid., 327.

32. Ibid., 312 [translation altered; cf. Crick, 238].

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., 313–14 [translation altered; cf. Crick, 239]: *"So hat sich auch für den Traum die Möglichkeit ergeben, einzelnen der logischen Relationen zwischen seinem Traumgedanken durch eine zugehörige Modifikation der eigentümlichen Traumdarstellung Rücksicht zuzuwenden."*

35. Hence the pertinence of translating *Darstellbarkeit* as "figurability": in addition to encompassing the secular tradition of Greek and Latin "tropology," under the authority of the words *tropos* and *figura,* it indicates the quality of "presence" and efficacy borne by its effects—the figures themselves In SE, *Darstellbarkeit* is rendered as "representability."

36. *Interpretation:* 314 [translation altered; cf. Crick, 239].

37. Ibid., 507 [cf. Crick, 329].

38. "It is fair to say that the dream-work presentation *[die Darstellung der Traumarbeit] . . . is not made with the intention of being understood"* (emphasis in original). Ibid., 341 [translation altered].

39. J. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts . . . ,* 75.

40. See M. Blanchot, "Le Regard d'Orphée," in *L'Espace littéraire* (1955; Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 227–34.

41. In which regard the *mystic* subject, in history, perhaps does nothing save develop in the name of the Other (his god) an experimental, experienced, and written aesthetic. But this dimension of the *sleeper's gaze* is already operative, on a far less extravagant scale, in the two hours spent by Dora, "rapt in silent admiration," in front of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna. . . .* See Georges Didi-Huberman, "Une ravissante Blancheur," in *Un Siècle de recherches freudiennes en France* (Toulouse: Erès, 1986), 71–83.

42. P. Fédida, "La Sollicitation à interpréter," *L'Écrit du temps* 4 (1983): 6.

43. Ibid., 13. On forgetting dreams, see *Interpretation,* 43–47, 512–32.

44. In an important text, Carlo Ginzberg tries to understand the "evidential paradigm" and the symptom in a way that is simultaneously historical and theoretical. As I disagree

with his conclusions, and especially with his image of Freud as a "criminal investigator" avid for details, as a kind of Sherlock Holmes, I take the liberty of referring readers interested in this discussion to Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm" (1979), in Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method,* trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 96–125.

45. P. Fédida, "La Sollicitation à interpréter," 13.

46. Fédida, "Technique psychanalytique et métapsychologie," in *Métapsychologie et philosophie,* proceedings of the third Rencontre psychanalytique d'Aix-en-Provence, 1984 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1985), 46.

47. N. Abraham and M. Torok, *L'É*corcé et le noyau (1978; Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 209–11; here the notion of "psychoanalysis as antisemantic" is elaborated.

48. See *Interpretation,* 488–506.

49. Freud, "Psycho-analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)," in SE 12: 49.

50. It is only with regard to a criterion of certainty—and, ultimately, to the positivist criterion of *one* object corresponding to *one* truth—that "overinterpretation" can appear to be an unacceptable principle. Nonetheless, we must not hesitate to enter into the dangerous world of interpretation. The whole problem then becomes finding and implementing procedures of *verification* that are capable of guiding, inflecting, and stopping the interpretive movement. This is an abiding problem for historians.

51. *Interpretation,* 523 [translation altered; cf. Crick, 340].

52. *"Ce que vous devez savoir: ignorer ce que vous savez."* And he concluded, with lucid self-derision: "Psychoanalysis, that's what it is, it's the answer to an enigma, and an answer, it must indeed be said, quite particularly stupid" *[tout à fait spécialement conne:* note that *con* also means, not incidentally, "cunt"]. J. Lacan, "Séminaire sur le sinthome," *Ornicar?* no. 7 (1977): 16–17, and no. 9 (1977): 38. See *Écrits,* 358.

53. *Écrits,* 689, 855–77 [Fink, 274–75; second citation not in this selection].

54. "For laymen the symptoms constitute the essence of a disease, and its cure consists in the removal of the symptoms. Physicians attach importance to distinguishing the symptoms from the disease and declare that getting rid of the symptoms does not amount to curing the disease." Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916–17), in SE 16: 358.

55. It is worth noting here that the epigraph to *The Interpretation of Dreams* from Virgil—*"Flectere si nequeo Superos/Acheronta movebo"*—had earlier been intended to introduce a text on "symptom formation." See Freud, letter to Wilhelm Fliess dated December 4, 1896 (*The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887–1904,* trans. and ed. Jeffrey Moussaief Masson [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985], 206–7). This indicates the degree to which Freud's conception of figurability in dreams was determined by another "royal road," namely, the hysterical symptom. My own approach has been to follow the same path, proceeding from the figurative symptom to the figure conceived in its symptom. See Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'hystérie—Charcot et l'Iconographie photographique de la Salptêtrière* (Paris: Macula, 1982). On several occasions, Freud stated clearly that hysteria might be a "royal road" leading to understanding of the symptom: "The wisest plan will be to start from the symptoms produced by the hysterical neurosis." Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (1926), in SE 20: 100. See also Freud, *Introductory Lectures . . . ,* in SE 16: 359.

56. "We must further remember that the same processes belonging to the unconscious play a part in the formation of symptoms *(bei der Symptom-bildung)* as in the formation of dreams *(bei der Traumbilding)." Introductory Lectures . . . ,* in SE 16:366.

57. Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der Bildenden Kunst" (1932), in *Aufsätze,* 92.

58. Panofsky, "Das Problem des Stils in der Bildenden Kunst" (1915), in *Aufsätze,* 25–26.

59. In March 1915, Freud began work on a collection, provisionally titled *Zur Vorbereitung einer Metapsychologie* (preliminary to a metapsychology), which he completed the following August. It consisted of twelve articles, five of which were finally retained and published under the simple title *Metapsychologie* (*Papers on Metaspychology*). In one of them, entitled "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams," Freud presented the notion of metapsychology as an attempt—essentially "uncertain and tentative"—"to clarify and carry deeper the theoretical assumptions on which a psycho-analytic system could be founded." SE 14: 222 n. 1 and 234 n. 2.

60. "I am going to ask you seriously, by the way, whether I may use the name metapsychology for my psychology that leads behind consciousness." Freud, letter to W. Fliess dated March 10, 1898, *Complete Letters . . . ,* 301–2.

61. Although E. Kraepelin is cited on its first page. See R. Kilbansky, E. Panofsky, and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy* (London: Nelson, 1964), 1.

62. Significantly, this remark of Freud's concludes a passage on the roots of superstition *(Aberglaube):* "I assume that this conscious ignorance and unconscious knowledge *(bewusste Unkenntnis und unbewusste Kenntnis)* of the motivation of accidental psychical events is one of the psychical roots of superstition. *Because* the superstitious person knows nothing of the motivation of his own chance actions, and *because* the fact of this motivation presses for a place in his field of recognition, he is forced to allocate it, by displacement to the external world. . . . I believe that a large part of the mythological view of the world, which extends a long way into the most modern religions, *is nothing but psychology projected into the external world.* The obscure recognition *(die dunkle Erkenntnis)* (the endopsychic perception, as it were) of psychical factors and relations in the unconscious is mirrored—it is difficult to express it in other terms, and here the analogy with paranoia must come to our aid—in the construction of a *supernatural reality (übersinnlichen Realität),* which is destined to be changed back once more by science into the *psychology of the unconscious.* One could venture to explain *(aufzulösen)* in this way the myths of paradise and the fall of man, of God, of good and evil, of immortality, and so on, and to transform *metaphysics* into *metapsychology (die Metaphysik in Metapsychologie umzusetzen).*" Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1904), in SE 6: 258–59.

63. Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der Bildenden Kunst" (1932), *Aufsätze,* 93.

64. Ibid., 94.

65. Ibid., 94.

66. Ibid., 92. See above, pages 101–2.

67. Panofsky, "Introductory," *Studies in Iconology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 5; Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Meaning,* 14, it is revealed that the "witty American" is none other than C. S. Peirce.

68. P. Bourdieu in the "Postface" to his French translation of Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism,* published as *Architecture gothique et pensée scolastique* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 142–48, 151–52, 162.

69. On Panofsky's expression "artistic consciousness" (central to his work), see S. Ferretti, *Il demone della memoria: Simbolo e tempo storico in Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky* (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1984), 177–206. See also, above, pages 94 and 114–15.

70. Bourdieu, "Postface" to Panofsky, *Architecture gothique . . . ,* 136–37.

71. Ibid., 152 (my emphasis).

72. PSF 1:76–77, 91–93, 98–105, etc.

73. Ibid., 77 and 105.

74. This is the title of a pertinent—and anonymous—review of Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* published in *Scilicet* 6–7 (1976): 295–325. I also cite, in a more humorous vein, a remark by Lacan: "The Kantian brush itself needs its alkali." *Écrits,* 43.

75. "It's as though chronological order were somehow deducible from logical order, history being merely the place where the system's tendency to self-completion reached fulfillment." Bourdieu, "Postface" to Panofsky, *Architecture gothique . . . ,* 164.

76. Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 162, and, more generally, 156–62. The same analysis, *grosso modo,* figures in the great book by R. Klibansky, F. Saxl, and E. Panofsky, *Saturn and Melancholy,* 284–373.

77. Such as the plants in the wreath, the book, the compass, the "dejected" dog, the bat, Melancholia's "swarthy" complexion *(facies nigra),* her head-on-hand posture, her purse and bunch of keys. . . . See Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer,* 156–64.

78. Ibid., 171.

79. Erwin Panofsky, "Artist, Scientist, Genius: Notes on the 'Renaissance-*Dämmerung,*' " in *The Renaissance: A Symposium* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1953), 77–93, where Dürer is invoked not only generally but in particular through his engraving *Melancholia.* Remember that Panofsky's Dürer monograph ends with a chapter entitled "Dürer as a Theorist of Art" (*The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer,* 242–84).

80. See, among other texts, Lacan, "La Direction de la cure et les principes de son pouvoir" (1958), *Écrits,* 585–645 [Fink, 215–70].

81. These brief remarks summarize a seminar on Dürer's self-portraits held in 1988–89 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, soon to be published.

82. See, for instance, the admirable wood sculpture in Braunschweig Cathedral. The iconography of the melancholy Christ recurs, for example, in works from the same period by Jan Gossaert (known as Mabuse), Nicolas Hogenberg, and Hans Baldung Grien.

83. See Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer,* 43, xxx, 241. Also pertinent to this discussion is another "classic" by Panofsky devoted precisely to this iconography: "*Imago Pietatis:* Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des Schmerzensmannes und der *Maria Mediatrix,*" in *Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1927), 261–308.

84. Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer,* fig. 103. Panofsky, *Saturn and Melancholy,* figs. 98, 105–6, 108, 145. Note that in the latter book, Panofsky provides two clues to this connection, the first very much in passing (287) and the other pointedly—Panofsky often withheld the essential core or "vanishing point" of his interpretations until the closing lines of his chapters—before leaving the subject (372–73).

85. Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer,* 156.

86. See J. E. von Borries, *Albrecht Dürer: Christus als Schmerzensmann* (Karlsruhe: Bildhefte der Staatlichen Kunsthalle, 1972).

87. See W. L. Strauss, *Albrecht Dürer: Woodcuts and Wood Blocks* (New York: Abaris, 1980), 445–48 (with bibliography).

88. *Écrits,* 280 [Fink, 68].

89. *Écrits,* 269 [Fink, 58].

90. Remember that "without the idea of One Art progressing through the centuries there would be no history of art"—an idea glorified in the Renaissance. E. H. Gombrich, "The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and Its Consequences" (1952), in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1966), 1:10.

91. See *Écrits,* 447. Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety,* in SE 20: 93.

92. See Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety,* 98–99. Freud, *Introductory Lectures . . . ,* in SE 16: 358–59: "The two forces which have fallen out meet once again in the

symptom and are reconciled, as it were, by the compromise of the system that has been constructed. It is for that reason, too, that the symptom is so resistant: it is supported from both sides."

93. See Hegel's preliminary remarks re "symbolic art": G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics,* trans. T. M. Knox (London and Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1:305–6.

94. *Écrits,* 269 [Sheridan, 59].

95. See Freud, *Introductory Lectures . . . ,* in SE 16: 367.

96. Ibid., 360.

97. See *Écrits,* 358: "The symptom is the return of the repressed in the compromise." Note again the paradoxical equivalence, repeatedly underscored by Lacan, of *repression* and *return of the repressed* in the symptom. This could be the starting point for a deeper reading of the seminar on the "*sinthome*" of 1975–76, where Lacan broached the question of art through that of the symptom. Another paradoxical equivalence is intimated there, one according to which, with art and equivocation—both deeply implicated in the symptom—"we have only id *[ca]* as weapon against the symptom." . . . Another way of saying that the work of art "makes use of" and "plays with" the symptom as much as it "thwarts" it. See Lacan, "Séminaire sur le sinthome," *Ornicar?* no. 6 (1977): 6–10.

98. "Just so, or even more so, has our synthetic intuition to be controlled by an insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, the *general and essential tendencies of the human mind* were expressed by specific *themes* and *concepts.* This means what may be called a history of *cultural symptoms*—or *'symbols'* in Ernst Cassirer's sense—in general." Panofsky, "Introductory," in *Studies in Iconology,* 16 (emphasis in original).

99. As suggested by B. Teyssèdre, "Iconologie: Réflexions sur un concept d'Erwin Panofsky," *Revue Philosophique,* no. 154 (1964): 328–30.

100. See Panofsky, "Introductory," in *Studies in Iconology,* 3–5, where the verb is indeed "identify."

101. It is in this sense that Daniel Arasse proposed the problems of iconographic identification be not wholly *resolved,* but rather thought *iconographically:* "There also exists a possible iconography of *associations of ideas,* and not only of clear and distinct ideas." D. Arasse, "Après Panofsky: Piero di Cosimo, peintre," in *Erwin Panofsky,* ed. Jacques Bonnet (Paris: Cahiers pour un temps, 1983), 141–42.

102. Freud, "A Connection Between a Symbol and a Symptom" (1916), in SE 14: 339.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid., 340 (my emphasis).

105. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy,* trans. John Cottingham, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 2:21.

106. "An analogy with which we have long been familiar compared a symptom to a foreign body *[als einem Fremdkörper]* which was keeping up a constant succession of stimuli and reactions in the tissue *[in dem Gewebe]* in which it was embedded." Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety,* in SE 20: 98.

107. As I have already indicated (above, pages 26–28), the question posed here is meant to challenge historical research to justify itself, and to judge itself fully, only in its own concrete expansion.

108. As I write these lines, there has appeared a collection by Louis Marin, *Opacité de la peinture: Essais sur la représentation au Quattrocento* (Florence and Paris: Usher, 1989), in which the concept of representation—admittedly, inflected by a contemporary pragmatic—is exposed in its double capacity to produce *both* transparency *and* opacity.

109. Panofsky, "The History of the Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection of the History of Styles," in *Meaning,* 103–4.

110. In the same sentence, Freud concludes that the symptom has two aspects, "adaptation" and "regression." Freud, *Introductory Lectures . . .*, in SE 16: 366.

111. See Georges Didi-Huberman, "Puissances de la figure: Exégèse et visualité dans l'art chrétien," in *Encyclopœdia Universalis—Symposium* (Paris: Encyclopœdia Universalis, 1990), 596–609.

112. The pertinent bibliography is large. I will mention only, regarding the critique of sources, the indispensable book by E. von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder—Untersuchungen zur Christlichen Legende,* 2 vols. (Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1899), as well as the classic and more general study by E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 83–150.

113. Colossians 2:11–13; 2 Corinthians 4:15 and 4:2; Hebrews 9:24.

114. This comparison was used in the seventh century, regarding the Mandylion of Edessa, in George the Pisidian, *Expeditio Persica,* 1:140–44, as edited by A. Petrusi, *Panegirici epici* (Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag, 1959), 91.

115. At the other end of this story, Giambattista Marino reties the knot by devoting the second part of his *Dicerie Sacre* (1614), entitled "On Painting," to the Holy Shroud of Turin. G. B. Marino, *Dicerie Sacre,* ed. G. Pozzi (Turin: Einaudi, 1960), 73–201. See, on this subject, M. Fumaroli, "Muta Eloquentia," *Bulletin de la Societé de l'histoire de l'art français* (année 1982), (1984): 29–48.

116. George the Pisidian, *Expeditio Persica,* 1:140, 91.

117. A. Paleotti, *Esplicatione del sacro Lenzuolo ove fu involto il Signore, et delle Piaghe in esso impresse col suo pretioso Sangue . . .* (Bologna: G. Rossi, 1598–99).

118. George the Pisidian, *Expeditio Persica,* 1:139–53, 91.

119. See H. Pfeiffer, "L'immagine simbolica del pellegrinaggio a Roma: La Veronica e il volto di Cristo," in *Roma 1300–1875: L'arte degli anni santi* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1984), 106–19.

120. Dante, *Divina Comedia,* Paradiso XXXI, 103–5: "Qual è colui forse di Croazia / viene a veder la Veronica nostra, / che per l'antica fame non sen sazia."

121. See Walter Benjamin, "A Little History of Photography" (1931), trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings vol. 2, 1927–1934,* ed. Michael W. Jennings, Harriet Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 507–30. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217–52. M. Blanchot, "Essential Solitude," in *L'Espace littéraire,* 22–27: "Fascination is fundamentally connected to a neutral, impersonal presence, an indeterminate One, an immense, faceless Someone. It is a relation sustained by the gaze, a relation that is itself neutral and impersonal, with the depth without gaze and without contour, an absence that one sees because it is blinding" (27).

122. Obviously, in accordance with Genesis 1:27: "God created man in the image of himself, / in the image of God he created him."

123. For the precise expression found in a tropiary, or collection of liturgical chants, honoring the Mandylion, and cited by Leo of Chalcedony as authority in his letter to Nicolas of Andrinople against iconoclasm, see V. Grumel, "Léon de Chalcédoine et le canon de la fête du saint Mandilion," *Analecta Bollandiana* 69 (1950): 136–37.

124. Because "character," throughout the Christian tradition, is a notion central to the sacrament. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* IIIa.63.1–6.

125. "And when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, the skin on his face shone so much that they would not venture near him." Exodus 34:30. "Meanwhile the eleven

disciples set our for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. And when they say him they fell down before him." Matthew 28:16–17.

126. In different versions of the legend of the Mandylion, the dazzling character of the face is attributed sometimes to Christ, sometimes to its envoy Thaddeus, sometimes to the image itself. One can at least compare the old version of Eusebius of Ceasearea, *The Ecclesiastical History,* I, 13, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992–94), 1:85–97, to the later versions that "invent" the image absent in the early version of the story. See E. von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder—Untersuchungen zur Christlichen Legende,* 1:102–96 and 158–249. See also C. Bertelli, "Storia e vicende dell-immagine edessena," *Paragone* 9, nos. 217/37 (1968): 3–33.

127. See R. Harprath, entry no. 123 in the exh. cat. *Raffaello in Vaticano* (Milan: Electa, 1984), 324–25. Different authors ascribe different dates to the two works, but this problem is of no concern to us here.

128. Especially noteworthy are the shrouds in Lierre, Belgium, in Besançon, in the Spanish monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos (near Burgos), in Cadouin or Enxobregas, Portugal, and so on. It should be remembered that the first polemics against the photographic-miraculous "rediscovery" of the Shroud of Turin, in 1898, came from French Bollandist and archeological circles. See U. Chevalier, *Étude critique sur l'origine du saint Suaire de Liery-Chambéry-Turin* (Paris: Picard, 1900), and F. de Mély, *Le saint Suaire de Turin est- il authentique?* (Paris: Poussielgue, 1902), which lists no fewer than forty-two shrouds in addition to that of Turin. In most of these forty-two documented cases, the technical stakes indeed entailed avoidance of the brush, hence production of the image in some indexical way (pouncing, mark, projection, imprint) intended to render credible the *contact of the subjectile*—the shroud—with the body of Christ.

129. See *Lives,* 2:88. We now know that it was not Ugo da Carpi who invented chiaroscuro wood-block printing, as Vasari maintains in this passage, but Northern artists (for instance, Cranach, H. Baldung Grien).

130. Ibid., 2:89 [translation altered].

131. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Letters,* IX, I 1104B.

132. "A 'living' image does not resemble its model; it aims not to render the appearance, but the thing. To reproduce the appearance of reality is to renounce life, to confine oneself to a view of reality that sees nothing but appearance, to transform the world into a shadow. Plato recounts that the ancients chained the statues of Daedalus, fearing he might take wing; and they were archaic works." Robert Klein, "Notes on the End of the Image," in *Form and Meaning: Writings on the Renaissance and Modern Art,* trans. Madeleine Jay and Leon Wiesletier (1962; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 170. It is worth recalling, regarding this subject, the now-classic publications of J.-P. Vernant, notably "Figuration de l'invisible et catégorie psychologique du double: Le Colossos," in *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris: Maspero, 1974), 2:65–78; "Images et apparance dans la théorie platoncienne de la Mimêsis," in *Religions, histoires, raisons* (1975; Paris: Maspero, 1979), 105–37.

133. "If a painter made two images, one of which, dead, seemed in action to resemble him more, while the other one, less like, would be living . . ." Cited and discussed by Agnès Minazzoli in her preface to Nicholas of Cusa, *Le Tableau ou la vision de Dieu* (1453), trans. A. Minazzoli (Paris: Le Cerf, 1986), 17.

134. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration,* trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

135. This last rite is still used in the Orthodox Church. The accompanying benediction includes a prayer that the icon receive the same *virtus* or *dynamis* possessed by the proto-

typical image of the Mandylion. See C. von Schönborn, "Les Icônes qui ne sont pas faites de main d'homme," in *Image et signification* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux [La Documentation française], 1983), 206.

136. See H. Hlaváčková and H. Seifertová, "La Madonne de Most: Imitation et symbole," *Revue de l'art* 67 (1985): 58–65, a shorter version of an article published in Czech in the journal *Umění* 33 (1985): 44–57.

137. "The priest, in effect, inscribes the cross on the bread, and thereby signifies the way the sacrifice was accomplished, namely by the cross. Then he pierces the bread on the right side, showing by this wound in the bread the wound in the side (of the Lord). This is why he calls the iron object used to strike a lance; it is made in the shape of a lance, so as to evoke the lance (of Longinus)." Nicolas Cabasilas, *Explication de la divine liturgie* (14th century), VIII, 3, ed. and trans. S. Salaville (Paris: Le Cerf [Sources chrétiennes no. 4 bis], 1967), 89.

138. Included in *Die Zisterzienser: Ordensleben zwischen Ideal und Wirlichkeit,* exh. cat., Aachen, Cologne, and Bonn 1980, no. F 31, p. 571. See also F. O. Büttner, *Imago Pietatis: Motive der Christlich en Ikonographie als Modelle zur Verähnlichung* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1983), 150.

139. See Didi-Huberman, "Puissances de la figure."

140. *Interpretation,* 313–14.

141. Giovanni di Genova (Giovanni Balbi), *Catholicon* (14th century) (Venice: Liechtestein, 1497), fol. 142v. I discuss this definition in my *Fra Angelico*.

142. Just as the symptom in psychoanalysis is defined as a cry or "silence in the supposed speaking subject." Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts,* 11.

143. See *Écrits,* 255–56 [Fink, 47], à propos the "birth of truth" in the "hysterical revelation."

144. "There was no longer anything healthy in him, from the soles of his feet to the top of his head." Jacobus de Voragine, *La Légende dorée,* trans. J. B. M. Roze (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), 1:260. See Georges Didi-Huberman, "Un Sang d'images," *Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse* 32 (1985): 129–31.

145. See Hugo of Saint-Victor, *Miscellanea,* CV, P.L., CLXXVII, col. 804 ("De triplici similitudine"). And, in general, R. Javelet, *Image et ressemblance au* XIIe siècle de saint Anselme à Alain de Lille, 2 vols. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1967).

146. See A. E. Taylor, "Regio dissimilitudinis," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littérraire du Moyen Age* 9 (1934): 305–6. P. Courcelle, "Tradition néo-platonicienne et traditions chrétiennes de la région de dissemblance," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littérraire du Moyen Age* 32 (1957): 5–23, followed by a "Répertoire des textes relatifs à la région de dissemblance jusqu'au XIVe siècle," 24–34.

147. On the *Kunstliteratur* of the entire period, see J. von Schlosser, *La littérature artistique,* trans. J. Chavy (1924; Paris: Flammarion, 1984), 41–132.

148. Theophilus, *De diversis artibus schedula,* trans. J. J. Bourassé, in *Essai sur divers arts* (Paris: Picard, 1980). This is an old, very inaccurate translation (first published in the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie* by Migne). The oldest manuscript copy of this treatise dates from early in the thirteenth century. Previously, the original text was thought to date from the fourteenth century, but now it is dated to the twelfth century. It has also been conjectured, on the basis of an annotation on the one of the surviving manuscripts ("*Theopulius qui est Rogerus . . .*"), that the pseudonym "Theophylus" hides the identity of a celebrated goldsmith of the early twelfth century named Roger de Helmarshausen, who signed a portable altar now in the treasury of Paderborn Cathedral. C. Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura,* ed. F. Tempesti (Milan: Longanesi, 1984), the oldest—nonautograph—

manuscript of which dates from 1437; the text was probably written around 1390. See J. von Schlosser, *La Littérature artistique,* 126–32 [*The Craftsman's Handbook: The Italian "Il Libro dell'Arte,* trans. Daniel V. Thompson Jr. (c. 1954; New York: Dover, 1960)]. Note that the bibliography on Cennini is very small compared with that concerning Vasari. Cennini's painted oeuvre is all but unknown; some art historians think of him, for this reason or that, before anonymous frescoes, most of them badly damaged. As a recent example, see the exh. cat. *Da Giotto al tardogotico: Dipinti dei Musei civici di Paadova del Trecento e della prima metà del Quattrocento* (Rome: De Luca, 1989), no. 62 by E. Cozzi, 84–85.

149. Theophilus, *Essai sur divers arts,* 15–16.

150. Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura,* 1 (there is more in the same tone on p. 2). But the first lines of the handbook are answered near the end: "Praying that God All-Highest, Our Lady, Saint John, Saint Luke, the Evangelist and painter, Saint Eustace, Saint Francis, and Saint Anthony of Padua will grant us grace and courage to sustain and bear in peace the burdens and struggles of this world" (131).

151. Theophilus, *Essai sur divers arts,* 16.

152. Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura,* 1 and 2.

153. Theophilus, *Essai sur divers arts,* 15.

154. Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura,* 1 [translation altered].

155. As André Chastel does in his 1977 article "Le *dictum Horatii quidlibet audendi potestas* et les artistes (XIIIe–XVIe siècle)," in *Fables, formes, figures* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), 1:363, where his gloss on the entire passage consists of: "Nothing more commonplace." But nothing in Cennini's text—or in fourteenth-century painting—authorizes what follows: "We must not conclude from this a particularly pious attitude." In reality, the problem here is that of articulating the tendency toward the autonomy of pictorial art, present even in Cennini (and his famous formula *si come gli piace,* which Chastel rightly emphasizes), with the religious context of all of his thought. Here we see a neo-Vasarian art historian discounting the second element to safeguard the first, whereas what is needed is a *dialectical* understanding of their relationship to each other. In a classic study first published in 1961 (and tellingly not mentioned by Chastel), Ernst Kantorowicz showed the way toward such a dialectical analysis. See E. Kantorowicz, "The Sovereignty of the Artist: A Note on Legal Maxims and Renaissance Theories of Art," in *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* (New York: Millard Meiss, 1961), 267–79; reprinted in Kantorowicz, *Selected Studies* (J. J. Augustin: Locust Valley, N.Y., 1965), 352–65.

156. Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura,* chaps. 9, 10, 23 [translation altered].

157. For instance, Saint Thomas Aquinas defined science as "the assimilation of the intellect with the thing through an intelligible guise that is 'the resemblance of the thing understood.'" *Summa Theologiae,* Ia.14.2. Furthermore, "science" was thought to be one of seven gifts of the Holy Spirit emanating directly from God (ibid., Ia–IIae.68.4). And in the end all of this of course returned to the given of faith: "The gifts of the intellect and of science correspond to faith" (ibid., IIa–IIae.1.2).

158. On the *materialis manuductio* before Suger, see J. Pepin, "Aspects théoriques du symbolisme dans la tradition dionysienne: Antécédents et nouveautés," in *Simboli e simbologia nell'alto medioevo* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1976), 1:33–66. On Abbot Suger, see Panofsky, "Abbot Suger of St.-Denis," in *Meaning* (1946), 108–45.

159. "Accord your will with that of God / And your every desire will be realized. / If poverty constrains you or if you feel pain, / Then seek Christ's succor at the Cross." These four verses from the manuscript *Ricciardiano* 2190 were omitted from the French translation as well as from the English translation.

160. Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura,* 131.

161. Theophilus, *Essai sur divers arts,* 18.

162. I take this expression from J. Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages,* trans. Rodney Payton and Ulrich Mammitesch (1919; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 233.

163. I allude to two classic books that address these problems: J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) [first published in French, 1940; first English translation 1953], which challenges the idea of a "rebirth" of pagan Antiquity in the fifteenth century. E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (1958; London: Oxford University Press, 1980), to which might be contrasted, for example, the work of T. Verdon, in *Christian City and The Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento,* ed. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

164. One could write an entire history of the conception of the Middle Ages as the "weak link" in the history of art, from Vasari to Panofsky. See, on Vasari: A. Thiery, "Il Medioevo nell'Introduzione e nel Proemio delle *Vite,*" in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista—Atti del Congresso internazionale nel* IV centenario della morte [1974] (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976), 351–82; I. Danilova, "La peinture du Moyen Age vue par Vasari," in ibid., 637–42. On Panofsky: J.-C. Bonne, "Fond, surfaces, support (Panofsky et l'art roman)," in *Erwin Panofsky,* ed. Jacques Bonnet (Paris: Cahiers pour un temps, 1983), 117–34.

165. To cite only two texts that, despite their differences, converge on this great question: M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970), 303–87; and "La Science et la vérité," in *Écrits,* 857–59: "One thing is certain: if the subject is indeed there, at the knot of difference, all humanist references to it become superfluous, for it cuts them short. . . . There is no science of man, which is tantamount to saying that there are no little economies. There is no science of man, because the man of science does not exist, only his subject does." See also, in the field of psychoanalysis, P. Fédida, "La Psychanalyse n'est pas un humanisme," *L'Écrit du temps* 19 (1988): 37–42.

166. See R. Le Mollé, *Giorges Vasari e le vocabulaire de la critique d'art dans les "Vite"* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 1988), 102–31.

167. *Vite* 1:369 [*Lives* 1:96].

168. Ibid.

169. Ibid., 1:372 [*Lives* 1:97].

170. Ibid. E. H. Gombrich has exposed the myth as spurious: Gombrich, "Giotto's Portrait of Dante?" *Burlington Magazine* 121 (1979): 471–83.

171. We are here very far from the notion of the "long" Middle Ages formulated by J. Le Goff, *L'Imaginaire médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), viii–xiii, 7–13.

172. C. Avery, *L'invenzione dell'uomo: Introduzione a Donatello* (Florence: Usher, 1986), 39.

173. The *bòti,* which had accumulated in the church from c. 1260–80, were moved to the cloister in 1665 and completely destroyed in 1785. See O. Andreucci, *Il fiorentino istruito nella Chiesa della Nunziata di Firenze: Memoria storica* (Florence: Cellini, 1857), 86–88.

174. Lorenzo de' Medici placed his bloodied clothes on his *bòto* after surviving the Pazzi plot of 1478.

175. For a history of this phenomenon, which merits further study, see G. Mazzoni, *I bòti della SS. Annunziata in Firenze: Curiosità storica* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1923).

176. See Aby Warburg, "The Art of Portraiture and The Florentine Bourgeoisie" (1902) and "Francesco Sassetti's Last Injunctions to His Sons" (1907), in *The Renewal of*

Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance, ed. Gertrud Bing with F. Rougemont (1932), trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Center for The History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 184–221 and 222–62.

177. Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura,* chaps. clxxxi–clxxxvi, pp. 123–29.

178. *Vite* 3:373 [*Lives* 1:556].

179. *Votum est promissio Deo facta,* etc. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* IIa–IIae.88.1–2. On the extension of the concept of "votum," see P. Séjourné, "Voeu," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique,* xv–2 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1950), cols. 3182–234.

180. Aby Warburg, "The Art of Portraiture . . . ," proposed that Florentine portraiture had three aspects: religious, pagan, and magical. The historical question broached here is vast, extending from Roman *imagines* and Etruscan tombs to the royal effigies studied by Ernst Kantorowicz (*The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957]) and R. E. Giesey (*The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France* [1960; Geneva, 1983]).

181. "And if the cadaver is so like, that is because it is, at a certain moment, likeness par excellence, altogether like, and it is nothing more. It is likeness, likeness to an absolute degree, upsetting and marvelous. But what does it resemble?" M. Blanchot, "Les deux Versions de l'imaginaire," in *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 351.

182. "You have been taught that when we were baptized in Jesus Christ we were baptized in his death *(in mortem ipsius baptizati sumus);* in other words, when we were baptized we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life." Romans 6:3–4.

183. As maintained by, for instance, Federico Zeri. See F. Zeri, *Behind the Image: The Art of Reading Painting,* trans. Nina Rootes (1987; London: Heinemann, 1990).

184. On the fundamental notions of the gap and the dislocating limit of the imaginary, see again *Écrits,* 552 [Fink, 186], and, above, all, Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book* II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli with notes by John Forrester (1954–55; New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 146–78.

185. H. Michaux, *Face à ce qui se dérobe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

Appendix

1. *Interpretation,* 104 (in French in the original).

2. See N. Schor, "Le Détail chez Freud," *Littérature* 37 (1980): 3–14.

3. Sigmund Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1901/05), in SE 7, p. 9.

4. We know that the paradigm of the treasure subtends Panofsky's interpretation of Titian's *Allegory of Prudence* (see *Meaning,* 146–68). More recently, Carlo Ginzburg has conferred a new legitimacy on the iconographic *roman à clef,* arguing that paintings can "reveal the secret" of their "commission." See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Enigma of Piero,* trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (London: Verso, 1985).

5. Gaston Bachelard, *Essai sur la connaissance approchée* (Paris: Vrin, 1927). See also chapter 11 of the same author's *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique* (Paris: Vrin, 1980 [11th ed.]), 211–37.

6. Bachelard, *Essai sur la connaissance approchée,* 9.

7. Ibid., 95.

8. *Lives,* 2:794. Diderot's remarks about Chardin begin as follows: "Approach, everything becomes muddled, grows flat, and disappears; move away, everything recreates and

reproduces itself." *Oeuvres esthétiques* (Paris: Garnier, 1968), 484. That this "magic" of painting should have preeminently manifested itself in representations of flesh, of the incarnate, already points to the crux of the problem: between body (its supposed depth) and color (its supposed surface). See Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 20–62.

9. Bachelard, *Essai sur la connaissance approchée,* 255.

10. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book* XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 212–13.

11. Bachelard, *Essai sur la connaissance approchée,* 253, 257.

12. These views are echoed, although on the basis of very different premises, in a recent article by René Thom articulating a critique of sorts of descriptive and experimental reason: R. Thom, "La Méthode expérimental: Un Mythe des épistémologues (et des savants?)," *Le Débat* 34 (March 1985): 11–20.

13. Bachelard, *Essai sur la connaissance approchée,* 16.

14. Aristotle, *Physics,* II.3.194b [trans.: *The Physics,* with English trans. by Philip H. Wickstead and Francis M. Cornford (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957)].

15. Ibid., 194b–195a. Furthermore, it is perhaps not by chance that Littré's definition of the detail in painting focuses on "material effects," all of which are related to problems of surface and texture: "Said, in painting, with regard to hair, small accidents of the skin, embroidery, the leaves of trees" *(Il se dit, en peinture, des poils, des petits accidents de la peau, des draperies, des broderies, des feuilles des arbres).*

16. Aristotle, *Physics,* I.9.192a.

17. I take this phrase from the beautiful pages that Ernst Bloch devoted to the "close-up gaze." See *Experimentum mundi: Question, catégories de l'élaboration, praxis,* trans. G. Raulet (Paris: Payot, 1981), 14–15, 67, etc.

18. On the *jet,* the *sujet,* and the *subjectile,* see Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée,* 37–39. [N.B.: A set of terms extrapolated from the Latin *subiectio* to expound a radically interactive, psychoanalytically inflected account of the relation between the viewer and (the surface of a) painting–trans.].

19. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 7 (my emphasis).

20. Such as the troubling "corkscrew" in the *Nativity* by Lorenzo Lotto now in Siena, astutely analyzed by Daniel Arasse: "The new-born child retains his umbilical cord, attached to his belly and clearly knotted." Daniel Arasse shows that the iconographic *unicum* here takes its meaning from three series: event-based (the sack of Rome), cult-based (the holy Umbilical Cord of Jesus), and theological (the notion of virginity). See "Lorenzo Lotto dans ses bizarreries: le peintre et l'iconographe," in *Lorenzo Lotto, Atti del convegno internzionale di studi per il* V centenario della nascita (Asolo, 1981), 365–82.

21. Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xvi.

22. Ibid., xix–xx.

23. Ibid., 27.

24. Ibid., xxv.

25. Ibid., 72–118.

26. Ibid., xxiv.

27. Ibid., 11–13, 27–33, 50–61, 73–74, 239–41.

28. Ibid., 119–68.

29. Ibid., 152–59, 222–23.

30. Ibid., 156.

31. Ibid., 156–58.

32. Paul Claudel, *L'Oeil écoute* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 32. The passage actually concerns *Soldier and Laughing Girl* (c. 1657) in the Frick Collection, New York. It is quoted [in part] by Alpers, *The Art of Describing,* 30 [translation altered].

33. Alpers, *The Art of Describing.*

34. Maurice Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 23.

35. Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–22; Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 3:889.

36. Ibid., 187.

37. To my knowledge, no one except a painter, Martin Barré, has noticed that the famous yellow "wall" is not a wall at all, but a roof: another example to add to the list of *aporia*s of the detail. But if we have seen a "wall" there instead of the inclined plane of a roof, perhaps this is precisely because the color yellow—as *pan*—tends to "go frontal" in the picture: in other words, to obfuscate the iconic transparency of the representational inclined "plane."

38. A differentiation broached previously in Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée,* esp. 43–61, 92–93.

39. Claudel, *L'Oeil écoute,* 34.

40. This in reference to the technique for making what is known as bobbin lace or pillow lace *(dentelle au fuseau),* in which the threads, placed on little bobbins, are unrolled onto a "pillow" where they cross and interweave in a rotating motion controlled by the lacemaker, who pins each stitch with needles, which she moves as the work proceeds.

41. That the visible is the elective air of the process of denial (Freud's *Verleugnung),* this is what we are taught, beyond Claudel, by the profusion of texts, always contradictory, to which the history of painting has given rise. On the visual logic of the *Verleugnung,* see O. Mannoni, "Je sais bien, mais quand même," in *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire, ou l'Autre Scène* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 9–33.

42. See Lawrence Gowing, *Vermeer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 56; Alpers, *The Art of Describing,* 31.

43. Alpers, *The Art of Describing,* 31–32.

44. Ibid. The hypothesis that Vermeer used a camera obscura was supported by Daniel A. Fink, "Vermeer's Use of the Camera Obscura: A Comparative Study," *Art Bulletin* 53 (December 1971): 493–505; and contested by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Perspective, Optics, and Delft Artists Around 1650* (New York: Garland, 1977), 283–92 (regarding *The Lacemaker,* 291–92).

45. Alpers, *The Art of Describing.*

46. See P. Bianconi and G. Ungaretti, *L'opera completa di Vermeer* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1967), nos. 40 (pl. LX) and 9 (pl. VII–IX).

47. Ibid., no. 30 (pl. L).

48. Ibid., nos. 24 (pl. XXXIX), 33 (pl. LV), and 42 (pl. LXI).

49. Ibid., nos. 21 (pl. XXXV), 31 (pl. XLI), and 32 (pl. XL).

50. Ibid., nos 14 (pl. XIX–XXI), 15 (pl. XXII), 18 (pl. XI–XII), and 20 (pl. XXIII).

51. Ibid., nos. 5 (pl. V–VI), 7 (pl. XIII), and 8 (pl. X).

52. Ibid., nos. 32 (pl. XL).

53. Georges Bataille, "Masque," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970–79), 2:403–4. On hysterical paroxysm and the hysterical fit, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'hystérie: Charcot et l'Iconographie photographique de la Salpétrière* (Paris: Macula, 1982), 150–68, 253–59.

54. See J. M. Charcot and P. Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'art* (1887; Paris: Macula, 1984), 150–68, 253–59.

55. Sigmund Freud, "Hysterical Phantasies and Their Relation to Bisexuality" (1908), in SE 9:166.

56. "What is meant by this are occurrences in the body that show themselves and in this self-showing as such 'indicate' something that does *not* show itself. When such occurrences emerge, their self-showing coincides with the objective presence *[Vorhandensein]* of disturbances that do not show themselves. Appearance, as the appearance 'of something,' thus precisely does *not* mean that something shows itself; rather, it means that something makes itself known which does not show itself. It makes itself known through something that does show itself. Appearing is a *not showing itself.* But this 'not' must by no means be confused with the privative not which determines the structure of semblance." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (1927; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 25–26.

57. I recall, briefly, that "cause" is not to be confused with "motive," nor with "repressed desire." The cause, said Lacan, "is what's off" *("c'est ce qui cloche")* and that of which the *objet a* manifests the pregnance, as "object-cause" of desire.

58. See, notably, *Interpretation,* 313–14, 340–44.

59. *"Pan,* masculine noun. 1. Large part of a dress, cloak, or dress coat. *'D'un des pans de sa robe il couvre son visage / A son mauvais destin en aveugle obéit.'* . . . 2. Hunting term. A snare made of cord that one sets in a forest. *Pan de rets,* a snare used to catch large animals . . . 7. *Á pan, tout à pan,* phrase used in some French provinces meaning "full up to the brim" (Littré)." The etymological origin of the word is not *pagina,* as Furetière thought, but *pannus,* which means a torn or tattered part of a surface.

60. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), dedication page and 20–21, 23.

61. Ibid., 45.

62. Ibid., 26.

63. Ibid., 76–77 [translation altered].

64. Ibid., 77.

65. Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs" (1969), in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), 1–32.

66. Ibid., 26.

67. In a recent book, Jean-Claude Bonne greatly extends the scope of the "nonmimetic elements of the iconic sign" and at the same time considerably increases their analytic precision, showing, using the example of the tympanum at Conques, how they function—and how they "establish parameters" for the smallest units of a figurative ensemble. See Jean-Claude Bonne, *L'Art roman de face et de profil: Le Tympan de Conques* (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1984).

68. Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu,* 3:33:73–74.

69. Ibid., 375.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., 377–78.

72. I owe these two phrases *("trait supplémentaire"; "indicateur de manque")* to Louis Marin (discussion at the colloquium in Urbino).

73. See Hubert Damisch, *Théorie du nuage: Pour une histoire de la peinture* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1972), 186.

74. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts,* 89 and, more generally, 67–119.