

This is the Seminar, excerpted from *Renaissance Theory*, vol. 5 of the *Art Seminar* series, edited by James Elkins. More information [here](#).

This conversation was held April 3, 2006, at the University College Cork, Ireland. The participants were: Stephen Campbell (The Johns Hopkins University), Michael Cole (University of Pennsylvania), James Elkins (University College Cork / School of the Art Institute of Chicago), Claire Farago (University of Colorado), Fredrika Jacobs (Virginia Commonwealth University), Matt Kavalier (University of Toronto), and Robert Williams (University of California at Santa Barbara).

James Elkins: Bob and I thought we would divide today's conversation into two topics. In this morning's session, we will be talking about sources of coherence or disarray within Renaissance studies; and in the afternoon we'll address the apparently larger topic of relations between Renaissance studies and studies of modernism and postmodernism — and especially the strange fact that the Renaissance seems at once tremendously important, pivotal, or indispensable in art history as a whole, and at the same time sunken into a kind of neglect or “oblivion,” to use Leo Steinberg's term.

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To start, then, with the apparently smaller — but in some ways much more difficult — issue of what might count as optimal ways of conceptualizing the Renaissance. I have an interest in observing, as an outsider, various specialties within art history, and I will risk conjuring some in order to suggest that specialties have their own “cultures,” by which I mean their own *kinds* of disagreement, their own sources of harmony.

For example, fifteen or twenty years ago, seventeenth-century Dutch studies was riven by a controversy when Svetlana Alpers's *Art of Describing* challenged the field and the state of scholarship in an interesting way.<sup>1</sup> That book caused a division that was widely watched within art history — the question being, Should there be a new paradigm for ways of looking at seventeenth-century Dutch art, or should it follow the studies of emblemata and literary sources that were prevalent in Dutch scholarship?

Nineteenth-century French studies is another specialty that people tend to watch in order to see the state of art history in general; it is more or less filled with people who do social art history (for example Tim Clark and Tom Crow), but there are interesting exceptions to that. There is a new interest in gender studies (for example Darcy Grigsby's work), and there is also work that follows on from books written by Michael Fried; that work is more or less engaged with phenomenology, and so more or less opposed to social art histories.

I'll just mention two other specialties, which are perhaps closer to home in terms of their internal structures. In Chinese art history, there are very interesting divisions that still run in some measure down national lines, between scholars who work in China and Taiwan and do a kind of aesthetics mixed with art history, and scholars who work in Western universities and practice a number of interpretive methods including postcolonial theory. That division is a known issue in the field, but it runs so deep that it is not always even noticed as a division *within* a single field.<sup>2</sup>

Last, I'll mention modernism, which will form part of our conversation this afternoon. Modernism is a very interesting case: it is deeply divided in many ways, and there are scholars who differ widely from one another. On the other hand the book *Art Since 1900* will, I think, more or less set the standard for conversations on pedagogy; it more or less represents what has become a consensus view in North American and western European scholarship of modernism.<sup>3</sup> Despite the many complaints and criticisms it has already gotten, I think the book will unify the field in ways that may be less than fortunate — I see Donald Preziosi in the audience, shaking his head! — but there doesn't seem to be an alternate on the horizon.

So I am conjuring these specialties briefly, to open the question of the state of Renaissance scholarship, and the mainstreams and divisions within it.

Robert Williams: When we were talking yesterday, there seemed to me to be a shared sense of Renaissance art studies having lost not only the privileged position they once occupied in art history as a whole, but even their fundamental identity and coherence; at very least, there was a sense of that identity being subject to radical contestation. It is tempting to use the negative word "crisis" to describe this situation, and there certainly are negative aspects to it: we spent a good deal of time yesterday complaining about the downsizing of humanities faculties at American universities and the kinds of gratuitous disciplinary anxiety it tends to generate. On the other hand, this sense of disarray or fragmentation might also signal a wholly positive process of redefinition, a moment of unusual fecundity, of a productive proliferation of new possibilities.

In either case, the current situation calls for — seems to me to demand — an especially energetic, searching, substantive dialogue among scholars in the field, no matter how awkward such exchange may be to initiate. I noticed yesterday that we were traversing common points of interest but from different directions and on different trajectories, so to speak, crossing each other's path in passing; perhaps that characterization might serve as a starting point for discussion.

Stephen Campbell: One question to consider might be: What is wrong with disarray? Is our job to impose order and tidiness on a very multi-centered field of study? I think the Italian Renaissance field never went through a kind of polemical phase, like seventeenth-century Dutch, or northern European art did, twenty years ago. It's a very non-polemical field, and in some ways a collaborative field. People don't polemicize against each other, at least not overtly, and this is not necessarily a good thing.<sup>4</sup> This lack of dissent or polemic is also manifest in a tendency to repress dissident or challenging ideas rather than to engage with them. A routine and cursory citation takes the place of real debate.

Michael Cole: That's true, though in some ways the situation is not that different from the one Jim associated with the study of Chinese art, if you compare what's happening in Italian scholarship with what's happening elsewhere. I note that all of the panelists here work in North American institutions — that suggests something about who could even participate in the kind of conversation we're expected to have today. I'm not sure that is because there was once a moment of coherence that has subsequently been lost. I can't imagine Roberto Longhi and Erwin Panofsky, fifty years ago, having a more productive discussion of "Renaissance Theory" than we might have with our Italian counterparts today. The questions are different.

Claire Farago: I think we could enlarge that a thousand-fold if we consider the Renaissance as a global phenomenon of exchange, entry, and re-entry into Europe during the early modern period. So it is relevant to ask: Do we mean "Renaissance" as a concept? A time period? A place? A subset of stylistic situations? In each case, the answer can't be provided by any three or four people from any one place. Part of the collaborative nature that Stephen just brought up is that we need to understand what an enormous topic we are dealing with.

Fredrika Jacobs: I see the disarray Stephen mentioned as a positive. While we all recognize certain canonical works as representative of the Renaissance, the "disarray" has attempted — with varying degrees of success — to revisit the canon without displacing it. Even if we don't go as

far as Claire, and study the global Renaissance — even if we stay within the geographical confines of the Italian peninsula — we find “disarray” in a variety of voices and perspectives and in an assortment of styles and media that reflect myriad influences and interests. Recent scholarship has dealt with some of this in constructive ways. One can argue that the result has enabled us to better situate masterworks within the culture.

The problem is that if you’re going to consider the Renaissance as a field, if you are going to attempt to teach it, write about it, grasp it, or otherwise define it, some sort of *system* needs to be in place. Bob’s paper on systematicity offers a viable approach.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, “systems” are problematic: Do we use style? Do we use periods? Do we use phases? To what extent do we follow the models established by Renaissance authors like Vasari? And how do we proceed beyond Italy’s borders? How do we, for example, include Matt Kavalier’s study on the representations of constructed errors and other forms of ornament in Northern Renaissance architecture?<sup>6</sup> His work points to some of the obstacles we need to overcome if we are to understand what constitutes the discipline.

Ethan Matt Kavalier: As the token northern Renaissance person, I notice quite a difference in the way the subject is handled here, and among my colleagues. Disarray, or rather polemical opposition, is nothing new to the study of northern European art, particularly since Alpers’s book. There are a number of differences between Italian and northern Renaissance art. One of them is that northern art is bereft of the plethora of texts dealing with art in the sixteenth century, at least texts dealing with painting. The first major statement regarding northern art is Karel Van Mander’s *Schilder-Boeck*, published in 1604. So there isn’t the tradition of writers discussing painting in the North, as there is in the South. Hence there are few models for the relation between art and rhetoric. There is also a divide between European and North American scholars, as Jim has implied. North American scholars tend to focus on a few conceptual issues and tend to do so with reference to the art of different periods. These concerns are, in particular, issues of realism and naturalism, and the epistemological force of painting. European scholars tend not to refer to as many theoretical debates; they generally have a wider sense of the monuments of the period. They refer not only to what we might think of as the canonical paintings of the northern Renaissance, but to sculpture, architecture, and stained glass — objects we might think of as charting the national patrimony of each scholar’s region. Thus, they are not as restricted to collectable artifacts preserved in modern museums. These are some of the differences I see

between my agenda, that normally stipulated to be that of my colleagues in Europe, and that of the other panelists here today.

SC: I would say that Matt's comments apply equally well to the study of Renaissance art in Italy. Given the sheer quantity of material and primary sources to work on, the notion of "Renaissance" seems very tangible and self-evident there — it's apparently not something that gives rise to methodological debates about periodization; Renaissance art appears as something real that requires to be mapped out and described in all its complexity. Another observation about Matt though: it is ironic that our token Northern Renaissance person is also the only person here working on architecture. That has become a kind of sect unto itself.

MC: Stephen, what do you mean by that? I find that architectural historians tend to have much broader interests than, say, historians of painting. That Matt is also working on sculpture comes as less of a surprise than it would if someone else at this table announced that his or her next book was going to be on, say, Bramante.

SC: I agree. Some of the most important and intellectually challenging work in the Renaissance is by architectural historians: Manfredo Tafuri, Marvin Trachtenberg, Christine Smith, and this panel does not represent that fact. Historians of painting seem increasingly to have less training or intellectual investment in history of architecture (of course there are exceptions) and I wonder if that's not because architectural historians have their own conferences and publications, and you tend to encounter them in architecture programs rather than in history of art.

MC: Maybe it has to do as well with the mobility of most paintings, and even — getting back to what Matt was saying -- with the experience of the modern museum. Historians of painting imagine their objects to be autonomous, removable from the settings for which they were made and studiable as independent works, while historians of architecture can't but be sensitive to the fact that every important Renaissance building also included works in different media, probably as part of its fabric. And in many cases, of course, the major architects came to the practice from painting or sculpture or goldsmithery or some other figurative art.

JE: I am a little wary of worrying too directly about what we mean by "the Renaissance," even though it's proper and inevitable. I'm wary mainly because the various possible definitions always appear entangled with one another. Some years ago there was a conference on the inception of perspective, at the Dibner Center at MIT, organized by Jehane Kuhn. Sam Edgerton gave a paper there, with some of his material about sixteenth-century paintings in Latin American churches,

which were done under the direction of Spanish priests, but executed by indigenous artists. It was understood that all the papers in that conference would be published, but Jehane told Sam his wasn't appropriate because it wasn't Italian, and perspective started in Italy.<sup>7</sup> Jehane's criterion was geographical and political, but it was also entangled with questions of chronology (his work was slightly later than what she wanted to focus on), and with question of style (it didn't exemplify the styles she wanted), and with questions of theory (it didn't have the right theoretical apparatus, because there weren't texts to be adduced). That's why I wonder how far you get if you address the question of what "the Renaissance" is too directly.

CF: Well, Sam Edgerton's work was excluded for all of the wrong reasons.

JE: Yes.

CF: I wonder how my colleagues here would feel about my saying that.

JE: And I didn't mean the criteria were all potentially apposite; I meant they were all wrong, all together.

CF: I'll go further and say they were all wrong in their entanglement. If we judge what counts as Renaissance as Jehane Kuhn did, in geographical, political, and chronological terms that exclude the production of art and architecture in "Renaissance styles" because they occur at the wrong place, time, or in the wrong political circumstances, we then repeat and reproduce existing biases — taking what is "Renaissance" as a premise whereas it is the subject to be investigated — without being aware of the fact that we're controlling the field by doing so. I am talking about the necessarily, unavoidably empirical nature of historical investigation. I think we should look at all the processes that answer to the name "Renaissance." Maybe the question of disarray should be theorized further: a disarray assumes there is an array, and if there was never an array, then who is to put themselves in the position of being the judge to decide what is excluded and what isn't?

JE: I thought that a way of not having to be too specific about *one* center, or to try to think through "the Renaissance," would be to make an informal survey of some of the scholars who are taken to be somehow off to one side of the field. Claire, I hope you won't mind if we talk a little about your work in that context.

One of my favorite metaphors for the idea of being "inside" or "outside" a field is what statisticians call an *outlier*: a point that is somewhere off on the thin tail of the bell curve, outside normative cut-off points. ("Standard distributions," in statistics.) In that model, Claire, your work

could be imagined as being *way* out there: it would have very radical consequences for the field of Renaissance studies if it were taken seriously by the majority of, say, pedagogic practices. In other words there are practices that are not only on the slopes of the bell curve, and contribute to or enrich the center, but also practices that belong to other configurations, and could do without the center altogether.

CF: I would say my work could be a test case for the center. Any outlying work could be examined, and perhaps excluded. But the question is, Do we want to exclude that kind of work, or is it exactly where we want to pay attention? I think of chaos theory, which grew out of paying attention to anomalies, and led to new insights that strengthened what was at the center.

JE: There is also the question of how anxious people at the center are to police that exclusion.

Sometimes the center massively ignores the margins, and other times it shows its anxiety by looking to the margins and wondering about them, which is part of what we're doing here.

SC: The center being people who work in a kind of mainstream?

JE: Yes — it's a delicate question, what the center is. You're not going to get anyone to say they're in the center — certainly not any of us! Just for conversation's sake, and politely avoiding the present company, I'll put a few names on the table: Charles Dempsey, Elizabeth Cropper, Chris Wood, Alex Nagel. They are central in terms of scholarship in ways I will refuse to define, and they also work in central institutions.

MC: I'm not sure those four would understand themselves to represent the same mainstream — except perhaps in the sense that all are very conscious of a substantial early twentieth-century literature on the Renaissance which helps establish a kind of “state of the question.”

JE: Yes, I didn't mean there is a single, unified center, but there is a clustered center — I wanted to avoid implying there is nothing but a more-or-less collegial aggregate of scholars orbited by some outlying voices.

MC: I just meant that your list brought to mind another thing that sets Renaissance studies apart from nineteenth-century studies, or even from studies of seventeenth-century Dutch painting: that those other fields lack that largely German canon of writing that underlies what we do, challenging us to think about a much longer historiographic arc as we pose our questions.

SC: I wonder if it wouldn't make more sense to think about “the center” in terms of certain enshrined or canonical topics: say, Florence, Michelangelo, Dürer etc. rather than in terms of who may or may not be more central in the profession. It also happens that the people Jim mentions have

worked on canonical artists, although often working to change the state of the questions about those artists. And then you have a figure like Joseph Leo Koerner who might be unorthodox in terms of the kind of intellectual profile he brings to the field, but he wrote a book on Dürer which is “central” in the sense that everyone else in the field now has to deal with it, even if they’d rather not.

Scholarship in Italy has its own way of conceptualizing the center in terms of a dialectic of domination and resistance between “center” and “periphery” — I refer here to the well-known article by Carlo Ginzburg and Enrico Castelnuovo, which argues that local or provincial artistic cultures need not be seen as passively reflecting the influences trickling from the center, but as resisting or critiquing or transforming the art of the center.<sup>8</sup> That kind of approach is called to mind by Claire’s work as well. When myself and Stephen Milner undertook our edited volume *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City*, we were responding to Ginzburg and Castelnuovo, and to Claire’s edited collection *Reframing the Renaissance*. The central argument is that you don’t have to cross the globe to find the critical dialogue with the center. Italy is not the nation state it tried to become in the nineteenth century: it was and is a mosaic of local dialects and allegiances, sometimes highly contentious in their interaction. Morten Steen Hansen showed that for a painter in sixteenth century Ancona or Bologna, you can respond to Michelangelo with an ironic distance that might be less possible in Rome.<sup>9</sup> And I have been trying to demonstrate for a long time that dealing seriously with the art of a small center like Ferrara utterly transforms the questions we ask when looking again at a major center like Florence. Perhaps what is different in Claire’s analysis is the colonial dimension, the operation of power.

MC: But isn’t a similar kind of critical dialogue possible even for those who work on the traditional centers? The writing on Florence, for example, has been so dominated by the study of Medici patronage that even recovering different voices — those of academic poets, for example, whose interests were sometimes at odds with their rulers’ — transforms the questions.<sup>10</sup> Tracking the way that disempowered viewers or “minor” artists responded to or ignored the big public commissions can constitute its own challenge to the center. It undermines the idea that art is explained by describing the programmatic intentions of its sponsors, and ultimately, it points to the limits of a certain variety of iconographical method. There are also scholars who, likewise staying in major centers, nevertheless look at works that the literature on the people in power has

ignored, or who complicate our understanding of what power looks like in the Renaissance, or who even focus on conflict as such – I think, for example, of Helen Hills’s book on conventual architecture in Naples.<sup>11</sup>

SC: We have to attend to the differences within Florence as well as between Florence and other centers.

Both Bronzino and Cellini, as you well know, are good representatives of an artistic program that consciously does not align with the academic and official one of Vasari. But what is different in Claire's analysis is that the colonial dimension means that we have to think differently about the operations of power.

CF: In my own research, I am simultaneously working on things central to the field as traditionally defined — I have been publishing on Leonardo da Vinci for fifteen years and my current Leonardo project studies the historical reception of his Treatise on Painting in a cross-cultural setting in which the political dimensions of this influential text’s reception can be charted concretely. I would say that such a project – which is a collaborative effort involving over twenty scholars - is also testing what constitutes that traditionally centered field. So it’s not a matter of choosing the baby or the bathwater (I think I used that terrible analogy yesterday), but of trying to keep both in play, of considering “Renaissance” an open-ended system always under investigation. Power operates everywhere. I am moreover concerned with the ethical dimensions of what we produce as scholars: what do we pass on to future generations? What kinds of political implications are there to the knowledge we produce? Our work can seem a-political when we produce it, but at the same time it excludes other work from taking place, or relegates that work to the margins.

Maybe that’s more where I feel the field of early modern art should be: it should include everything — Chinese Renaissance art, Bolivian, Japanese, anything. Objects made in the Renaissance style were exported all over the planet, as were artists working in that style. Why should the fate of these objects and artists *not* be the concern of Renaissance art historians? And why not think about every micro-study as something that can engage with the same issues of what constitutes the Renaissance or the center of a field of studies defined in whatever traditional manner? What happens to Renaissance style and humanist ideas in Latin America? Gauvin Bailey, for example, is writing about the Jesuits in Latin America and China.<sup>12</sup> Jeanette Peterson a Mesoamericanist as well as Sam Edgerton have written about the hybrid artistic productions of colonial artists working under the direction of missionaries during the early contact period.<sup>13</sup>

Such studies, sensitive to both sides of the cultural and political interaction, should be encouraged. After all, there is no pure “Renaissance” identity, and once we start thinking of things from this broader perspective, we can see the inherited paradigms structuring our contemporary practices in fresh ways. The most fundamentally flawed aspect of our inherited practices, which we’re still trying to come to terms with, is the legacy of a progressive or evolutionist theory of art in its vast and multiple ramifications. Sometimes we avoid noticing those ramifications by doing micro-studies.

SC: Where do you see this evolutionary virus operating? I can see that to teach freshman classes, you might have to order things schematically and diachronically —

CF: Stephen, let me interrupt you here for just a minute. Do we have to teach freshman classes schematically and diachronically? What if freshman were taught the history of the concept of the Renaissance along with the monuments? Or what if the initial survey of Italian Renaissance introduced monuments from around the world? If the course is a world survey, why should Chinese art exclude colonial building built in the Renaissance style, for example. As Bailey’s research, for one, makes absolutely clear, there are major artistic and architectural monuments constructed in hybrids of Italianate Renaissance and local, indigenous styles pretty much all over the world during the period we identify as the Renaissance. We could talk about the clash, export, interaction of cultures in an entirely different manner, and it would be historically valid, more valid in fact than using vague astrological terms like the “influence.” And I am not too sure that chronology at the introductory survey level should be treated as unproblematic either. Of course, these objections are not new. What Jim referred to as the culture of a specialty, with its own kinds of disagreements and harmony, is somehow at work when we as a discipline can go through years of debate over the best way to organize the introductory survey, and then go on with basically the same old survey of monuments drawn from canonical, ethnocentric texts that change only a few monuments every few years to force everyone to buy the latest edition of the textbook. I don’t think we do have to teach freshman classes quite as schematically and diachronically as these textbooks would like us to.

SC: But to turn to scholarship, where do we see the legacy of a progressive or evolutionist theory of art manifesting itself? The evolutionary logic you critique in your work would certainly be part of the scholarship we inherit, and the foundation of art history, and of the Renaissance (Wölfflin, Riegl, this kind of thing, going back to Vasari), but where is that now? It seems to me there are

any number of practices under the umbrella of Renaissance studies that are in a certain way realizing the kind of study you're calling for. The study of print culture, for instance, has led historians of the Renaissance around the world, following the Jesuits' didactic and propagandistic uses of prints.

CF: You're absolutely right. And although I'm not going to start naming names, I can think of a number of other topics, not organized in terms of individual artistic identities, that put into practice the kinds of work I was calling for a decade ago. Studies of collecting practices are another case in point, as your own most current work exemplifies. Case studies, strategically defined, are less numerous among Renaissance specialists, but excellent work is coming out of Latin Americanist scholarship – here I must mention a few names – Carolyn Dean, Dana Leibsohn, Barbara Mundy, Serge Gruzinski, Cecelia Klein, Tom Cummins – the list goes on. Most of us here, on this panel, do multi-evidentiary kinds of studies, and we don't rely just on texts. We're putting things together in different ways, so as to undercut the force of progressive or evolutionary theories. That also deserves to be mentioned.

But when we get six of us together, and none of us is a Latin Americanist, per se (I'm an ersatz, stretching out into unknown regions), then that's how the evolutionary logic gets reproduced.

MC: I took Stephen's point to be in part that we should be cautious about defining "centers" exclusively in terms of geography. There are a number of scholars who work primarily on Italian material — not just on prints but on domestic arts, or on cult images — who could certainly argue that what they do has political dimensions, and even a polemical edge, going against the mainstream of the field.

SC: Of course often that polemical edge is not theorized, and it becomes part of a museum-like taxonomy of objects without any real critical purchase.

EMK: Although there is a strain in northern Renaissance studies that emphasizes ties with the Middle Ages, another one of those problematic periods, most of us who study the Renaissance have an idea of Italy as central, and that is one of the subversive things about Claire's works, and her statements this morning. Also, Italian culture is usually considered to have initiated many of the traditions of the modern world, and that is one of the reasons why the substitution of "early Modern" for "Renaissance" doesn't really revise the situation; "early Modern" denotes even more forcefully the earliest stages of modernity. This alternate expression continues the tradition

of Burckhardt, with Renaissance Italy as the birthplace of the modern world. That's really a heritage that we have not successfully come to terms with.

MC: Of course, many people who favor the term "early Modern" don't intend it to carry so much weight. They just want to include fourteenth- or seventeenth-century material in their discussions, or to assume that the cultures of Renaissance Italy are continuous with those in other places, and they find the traditional boundaries implied by the term "Renaissance" too constrictive.

CF: One thing to do is not just settle on one term, but keep the alternates in play.

JE: This metaphor that you were half-recalling from yesterday, about the baby and the bathwater — what you actually said yesterday was that we can keep the baby *and* its dirty bathwater. That suggests that a critique of the field might result in a slightly unpleasant chaos. I'd like to mark the difference between a critique that works "from the outside," and addresses and retains what it identifies as the "center"; and a critique that creates a new configuration. If your work were to become, magically, 80% of the work that is done in the field, not only would curricula completely change, but the center would be radically disrupted. It would not just be interrogated, diminished, or unpredictably altered. Your critique, I think, is not just a matter of adding from the outside, but undermining from the outside —

CF: Or maybe undermining from the inside.

JE: Okay, but with the potential of creating a wholly different cartography from what would result if any of the rest of us on this panel would produce if we were to be magically given 80% of the discipline.

CF: I think about the issues that interest me, working on the formation of new collective identities in different places. Perhaps one of the things that could come out of this would be a sense of what unifies our practice right now, that has nothing to do with periodization per se, or even with style, but rather with the complexity of the work of art and its ability to be a communicative tool. How does visual culture signify? A number of people I think we will be discussing — Georges Didi-Huberman, Aby Warburg — have been fundamentally concerned with the complexity of being faced with a work of art from another time. How do you understand it? There is always going to be a gap, and just thinking about that brings together a number of possible common points in contemporary approaches.

JE: So, Claire, another person whose work has been considered as an outlier is David Freedberg, whose *Power of Images* appeared sometime in the late 1980's...

CF, FJ, EMK: 1989.

JE: In that book, Freedberg was addressing what he saw as a limitation of Renaissance studies, and by implication art history in general — its debt to Kantian aesthetics, and its exclusion of images that have sexual, political, or religious power.<sup>14</sup> I find that *Power of Images* is being cited more and more often, but often in the same context: people say, Here's a really interesting thing that could really shake up the field, but it didn't quite fit, so let's hope someone writes something better. Several of us are engaged in projects that seek to undermine that same Kantian wall between aesthetic appreciation and the wider powers and uses of images. That's especially true, I suppose, of your work, Fredrika, because your work on *boti* concerns images that have power in Freedberg's sense: and yet it seems hard to speak about them in the same way, in the same voice, as you can speak about aesthetic objects.<sup>15</sup>

FJ: Of the "Starting Points" essays, I think everyone's except mine can relate to Bob's essay on systematicity. When I first noticed that, I wondered what it meant. My project got started, in part, thanks to Freedberg's book; he has a chapter on the power of votive offerings. But the objects I study do not fit into the "center," whatever that might be; these objects cannot be assessed in the usual ways; many of them were painted or fabricated anonymously —

JE: They're not masterpieces.

FJ: Yes, and so they are shunted aside. The challenge for me has been to try and find a way to talk about these objects *within* the discipline. I am beginning to develop some ideas but I have yet to find a solution that would effectively challenge the tendency to discard these works as "popular" or "low." Some recent studies, and here I'm thinking of Jane Garnett's and Gervase Rosser's essay on miraculous cult images in Liguria, have moved in very interesting theoretical directions with respect to issues of copies, the translatability of the miraculous image, and efforts by both church and state to legislate control of reproduction.<sup>16</sup>

JE: You're like an asteroid, feeling the pull of two different planets. One would be art history, and the other anthropology. If you fell into that orbit you'd become a distant object, as Freedberg's book sometimes seems to be.

SC: Fredrika, does art history have something to contribute here that anthropology does not?

FJ: That's the big question, but I think it might if we consider these images in ways that may have their basis in anthropological studies yet have been applied to canonical works. One of the sessions at the most recent meeting of the Renaissance Society of America was "Gifting Art and Artful Gifts." Each of the papers delivered in that session was informed by Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*, which is as the author states an anthropological study. Because the practice of votive images is one of giving a gift for grace received this might be one way to cross the divide between disciplines.<sup>17</sup>

RW: The first sentence of Freedberg's book was: "This book is not about the history of art." That is, he emphatically distinguished his enterprise from what he understood to be art history, and he did so in order to advance an alternative study of "images." That gesture was typical of its moment, but also very consequential: it contributed to a division of the art historical community between those who saw their primary object of inquiry as art, and those who see their primary object of inquiry as images.

EMK: Or objects.

RW: Right, art on the one hand and images or objects on the other. They are often assumed to denote the same thing, but they don't. Freedberg's gesture was part of a larger trend in the 1980's, a displacement, even a suppression, of the category "art," motivated by a desire to get around all the value-loaded assumptions associated with that word. Even what we've been saying here about center and periphery has to do with an implicit distinction between art and other kinds of visual production or visual interest. Fredrika, I think you follow Freedberg — and Jim, too, and the majority of progressively-inclined scholars — in insisting on the primacy of the image, while I would hold out for the primacy of art.

FJ: You're right, I would like to insist on "images" even though I am quite probably in the minority. As Hugo van der Velden so aptly noted in his study on Medici votive *boti* and *imagini*, the "popular" aspect of these works have prompted their classification as "imagery rather than art."<sup>18</sup>

One of the texts crucial to me at the beginning of my career was Vasari. It's hard to be more in the center than that. I've also written on Michelangelo: that too is in the center. But I also try to keep in mind the name of our discipline; *art history*. It has two components; art and history. If you read the expression *art history* in one way, it should include all sorts of things that are now peripheral; but if you read those two words as Vasari did, then you need to keep to a narrative

that leads to a pinnacle of perfection, to fine art. Should we limit the history of art to Vasari's model, complete with all the biases that inhere within it?<sup>19</sup>

RW: But to concentrate on art and what makes it different from other kinds of productive activity — even to distinguish it from the production of other kinds of images or objects — is not necessarily to accept Vasari and all his biases. The emergence of art as an idea is an historical phenomenon of the greatest importance, yet its significance is still far from being fully appreciated or understood.

EMK: I think that's one of the subjects, not just the object, of our discussion. Or rather, we're interested in what it became in the Renaissance. In our period, art migrated to a distinct class of object and activity, and became the practice of a specific type of performer. The degree to which we are able to look back reflectively and appropriately apply post-Kantian ideas of aesthetics to the Renaissance is one of the themes we're all dealing with.

MC: I wonder whether your reminder that Renaissance art so frequently has to do with different kinds of performance doesn't help get us past the sense that we have to choose between images and objects. What if we talked about "artifacts" or "artworks" — that is, objects that have been worked, usually so as to embody or mediate images — instead of simply pictures or things?<sup>20</sup> Of course, this still puts us in territory quite different from Freedberg's, whose book is not primarily about objects or images or artifacts, but rather about responses to them.

SC: True, but then art historians already interested in response — especially the erotic dimensions of beholder engagement and its mediation through historically specific codes, such as Petrarchism — might have found those areas of *Power of Images* to be disappointing; Freedberg's book was thus not something that they felt the need to engage with in their subsequent work.<sup>21</sup>

The notion of art is fundamental to what you're talking about, Fredrika. You're studying late examples of miraculous Madonnas, not the Or' San Michele, Black Death, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century examples. The works you study arose in part in response to the category called *art*; at that time the sacred image, the devotional image, was in a way no longer functioning, so it was necessary to have an enlarged image practice. It was about getting *around* the privilege associated with, say, Guido Reni altarpieces in churches. We need something more than metonymic associations, something closer to us, something not provided by the stately donor images.

RW: "We" being modern art historians.

SC: Actually, I meant to refer to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christian beholders and their specific needs, but I can see that “we” might also apply to historians and their own needs as well.

CF: The Getty theme for 2007 is “Religion and Ritual,” so it’s not only “we art historians” but also something at the institutional level that is reshaping the field, and in that sense the field is in a moment of enlargement.

JE: Possibly: I hope so.<sup>22</sup> But it is also a ritual concern *of* art history: there’s a lot of talk about religious and ritual meanings, first after Freedberg’s book, and again, I think, beginning at the *fin-de-millennium*, but it remains an outlying subject.

CF: Yes; I think the institutional critique we’ll address in the afternoon session will be helpful here, because this sense of what subjects are valid and important to investigate and what subjects are optional or outlying (to use your good terminology) happens at the level of institutions.

FJ: This discussion of “art” and “history” has to go back, at least for us, to Vasari. (Matt, you might say Vasari and Van Mander.) Who was he writing for? Who were his collaborators, and whom were they associated with in the Medici court? What was the program, the motivation, that we’ve all now adopted? We might question Vasari’s intent and point out the inaccuracies in his text, but it seems to remain in place. This goes to your question, Jim, about what counts as the *art* in art history. The votive images I study are ignored in Vasari’s *Lives*, except in one place where he notes some ex-votos that were made as effigies; but his only interest in them is their technology, not their potential status as art. There are *other* texts, however, that we can use — Bocchi, for example.

JE: As you can tell, I’m pessimistic about this.

FJ: I can tell.

JE: Every field has its Others, its outliers, that it needs to have out there, and to keep at arm’s length. Every field makes welcoming gestures to its outliers, and then rejects them.

FJ: Well, you know, I did the same thing with women artists in the Renaissance. When I went to college, at an all-women’s institution, not a single female artist was talked about in any of my art history classes with the sole exception of Angelica Kaufmann. That is certainly not the case any longer; I have written on Renaissance women artists, and I could have said, “I am pessimistic about this having any sort of effect.” Well, guess what? It wasn’t a *great* effect, but now there is some representation of women artists in the basic art history Renaissance textbooks. When I embarked on that project I had to go into, and practically *underneath*, the bowels of storage in

museums in Italy. Now they hang on the walls of museums like the Brera. More to the point, my objective was not to argue that sixteenth-century women artists produced paintings and sculptures comparable to those of the “masters” but rather to draw attention to the critical language that was used to characterize their works as distinctly “feminine”. The way language operates in art criticism and art history needs to be attended to. Indeed, it goes back to the issue I noted earlier concerning the distinction between imagery and art.

JE: That’s a weird metaphor, “underneath the bowels of storage.”

FJ: It is odd, but it gets across the essence of the challenge I faced at that time.

JE: I’d be happy to say my skepticism about this *is* bottomless. I don’t see there was a huge difference made by the inclusion of women artists in Renaissance studies. The new works and artists aren’t tokenism: it’s not that kind of problem. It’s that the fundamental narratives that structure and motivate the field itself remain completely intact. I find these kinds of inclusion to be superficial: not always, but often.

FJ: That would be quite discouraging.

MC: But Fredrika, is it any less discouraging to see the marginally larger number of pictures by women artists that now hang in Renaissance galleries as the real success story? It seems to me that the fundamental narratives, to use Jim’s expression, have changed, and that writings motivated by feminist interests have been a major reason for this, but that the changes have less to do with the practices of women artists than with other things. This is to say, of course, that your own work on the virtuosa is somewhat exceptional, if only because there’s just not that much material to study. Even where the canon is concerned, I would say that the biggest recent transformations have to do with the new and truly widespread attention to women patrons, to “gendered” spaces, and to the so-called “minor arts,” rather than with the identification of underappreciated women painters. On the other hand, these kinds of contributions, many of which come from men, don’t always present themselves as “feminist” — maybe the assumption is that this is implicit.

What do you think: Is the feminist history of Renaissance art as vibrant as it was in the 1990s, and if so, what does it look like today? One might think about your own trajectory as a case in point.

CF: Let’s talk for a moment about what it means to theorize or not theorize a subject of study. I think Steve and now Matt’s point is crucial to our discussion of how a specialization maintains its stranglehold on interpretation: Joan Kelly’s famous question, did women have a Renaissance?

(which she answered with an emphatic no), like Linda Nochlin's famous question a few years earlier, why have there been no great women artists?, were important for their theoretical contributions to a patriarchal discourse. Here, by theoretical, I only mean that these two feminist scholars analyzed the structure of society to come up with their questions, and their answers. They did not limit their investigations to the study of women, as most scholars do today who add positive knowledge to the field — what Steve termed a “museumlike taxonomy” — by enlarging the canon of women artists or of women patrons or of the so-called decorative arts. Studying women does not necessarily make you a feminist.

The debate on this is now quite dated: you can't in fact understand how society is gendered without studying the context in which women lived. And that includes our histories about them. Whitney Chadwick, writing in an excellent undergrad survey text on women artists and society, notes that over the centuries since Vasari, women's names have been added and dropped from the lives of the artists literature with what she calls “astonishing arbitrariness,” thus maintaining a patriarchal status quo.<sup>23</sup> Jim, you mentioned this textbook, *Art Since 1900*: there's another example of a group of art historians who started by questioning the status quo; but what they seem to have done is overturn the status quo, and then they have assumed the position of a new canonical authority. Their book offers an extremely narrow perspective on art since 1900. If you give it that credence, and say that it will achieve a canonical status, then it will: but let me quickly add: this book has already received a number of negative reviews.

JE: That's right. It was also received more or less negatively at two of its launches, in Bristol and at the Tate Modern. (The latter is archived on the Internet.<sup>24</sup>)

RW: Maybe it's the Vasari of the twenty-first century!

CF: But Vasari was the Vasari of the nineteenth century, in a way.

JE: Yes. That's nicely said.

CF: The preeminence that we accord Vasari in the field found its institutional form only with the professionalization of the discipline in the nineteenth century. It didn't have that status when it was a new book.

RW: I'm not sure I agree with that. It was in the nineteenth century that Vasari's authority, which had been solid for several centuries, began to collapse. Only with Ruskin is Vasari's account of Renaissance art finally overthrown, replaced with one which privileges the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries over the sixteenth.

CF: But that didn't start in 1550. Vasari's *Lives* as the foundation of art history, like the term Renaissance itself, is a foundational myth that depended on art history becoming a subject studied in schools as universities, as Wallace Ferguson argued with extensive evidence many years ago.<sup>25</sup> It took many generations for Vasari's *Lives* to achieve canonical status — although we could discuss the exact chronology.

SC: Earlier, the resistances are striking. The Carracci write all over it, saying things like “Vile liar Vasari!” “This is not the case!”<sup>26</sup>

MC: El Greco, too.<sup>27</sup> And Alessandro Lamo, writing his own set of artists' lives in Cremona around the same time, attacks Vasari as an uninformed chauvinist.

EMK: The fact that people have to inscribe their opposition on the text of Vasari is significant in itself.

MC: It shows how seductive the book was, even where it was opposed.

RW: There certainly were resistances — rather predictable objections to his regional bias, as in Dolce and the Carracci, and a more interesting objection to his whole notion of the progress of art in Armenini — but the immediate reaction was overwhelmingly positive. Van Mander offers perhaps the most impressive indication of the authority Vasari's model had acquired within a generation, and he was a Northerner, someone from whom one might have expected even stronger resistance than from among the Italians!

MC: But there's debate about that, too, isn't there? Walter Melion takes Van Mander to have recognized Vasari's hegemonic motives and to have consequently reframed the Italian *Lives* in his own text in a way that qualifies their authority: running them up against historical schemes that compete with Vasari's framework, inflecting Vasari's conception of artistic virtuosity, and generally establishing Vasari's “contingency.”<sup>28</sup>

RW: Melion was a student of Alpers, and his book was obviously intended to support the idea of a distinctive Northern orientation toward art advanced in her work. His argument is overdrawn, and suppresses the fact that Van Mander's orientation is overwhelmingly Italianate.

EMK: The two editions of Vasari's book were widely disseminated, distributed among many northern European humanists. It became a model for discussions of art history before the nineteenth century. It circumscribed what art was, and it gave primacy to painting. It had a profound effect.<sup>29</sup>

CF: I agree; I was saying it wasn't instant.

MK: It developed over centuries.

CF: And nuancing that development is a legitimate object of study, rather than just assuming it is canonical from the start.

EMK: I think the professionalized discipline of art history took the textual tradition that was based on Vasari, and gave it a kind of university credence that it had not had before.

CF: And I hope it's worth noting that Vasari does not have that authority now. Who wrote Vasari's *Lives* has been the subject of investigation since the beginning of the twentieth century, and the current hypothesis that several humanists collaborated and framed his authorial identity is not just a matter of accuracy in source criticism, but a matter of how we deal now with the cult of personality taking shape in and through his very influential text.

JE: I wonder if we can continue our discussion of outliers — after Claire and David Freedberg, although it's interesting how Vasari got in there as the original outlier — by bringing back a person whose name always elicits sighs, and that is Svetlana Alpers. There is a sense in which *The Art of Describing* is an asked-and-answered question in art history. But I was surprised yesterday when one of us said that the effect of that book was to *narrow* Renaissance art history; I had never thought of it that way. But the book, *Art of Describing*, was written with the intention of creating an opposing voice, of being an outlier: she wanted to construct an alternate discourse to set alongside the one that, from that moment, became the “dominant” one. That was the initial gambit of the book. It has worked in ways she couldn't have expected, but it is interesting that it now seems like something from the discipline's past, even though it continues to have reverberations in present practice. I wonder if that is partly because it is not just a strong alternate model, an independent critical voice not beholden to the “center,” but because it has in fact operated according to the logic of Orientalism: as an entrancing and suggestive Other, offering an apparently unlimited freedom, but ultimately ineffective and beholden to the center itself.

SC: It had its moment. It was a powerful innovation in the 1980s and 1990s, and it sustained a lot of interesting work. Now, I think we have come to the moment where scholars want to keep the book as a model of how we might work between the history of science and the history of art, but where its most problematic claims have to be revised. The way it reifies differences between North and South as “description” and “narration” (and a whole set of other oppositions) has been critiqued for a long time. They are dangerously easy to assimilate, especially in the classroom.<sup>30</sup>

EMK: Instead of paradigms of Italian artists as textually engaged, and northern artists textually detached, it vastly opened up the discussion of northern Art, and removed it, as Jim said, from a

suffocating association with emblem literature, which had become a fashion in the late 1970s and 1980s.

But it was restrictive in another way. It emphasized a so-called indigenous aspect of northern art as opposed to an indigenous aspect of Italian art. In so doing, it reified late-nineteenth century ethnicist studies by Hippolyte Taine and others, who had written, almost racially, of qualities that lay in the “blood and soil” of different countries.<sup>31</sup> Alpers tends, for different reasons, to endorse that tradition, and it has been picked up by many of her pupils: Walter Melion, Celeste Brusati, Mark Meadow. It has become one of the unfortunate consequences of a book that otherwise opened up the field.

CF: I think that is very important: it shows the effect of the evolutionary model even today, of not having understood the structure of the paradigm enough to understand how this structure keeps getting reproduced in other forms in our writing of history. One of the most productive critiques that postcolonial theorists made of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is that it maintains a binary opposition, a base-superstructure opposition, where the actual historical situation can only be explained in much more complex terms. Postcolonial theory elucidates processes like mimicry<sup>32</sup> — trying to take on the semblance of the dominant member of the binary opposition — and that is exactly what Svetlana Alpers did, at the metacritical level. She took on the position of the dominant voice, in order to write a subaltern study.

RW: But I don’t think it is a subaltern study; it masquerades as one. The values she associates with Italian art had long been in eclipse; the qualities of Dutch art that she emphasizes had been well-established features of modernism since at least the time of Courbet. I think she set up Italian art as a straw target so that she could appropriate for the support of Dutch art a whole array of long-accepted, thoroughly institutionalized modernist values.

JE: One reason I wanted to bring Svetlana’s book into the discussion is because it’s a different *kind* of outlier than Freedberg’s book, or than your own work, Claire. A lot of Freedberg’s book, for example, can be assigned to anthropology, or religious studies if you’d rather, but this is different. The hope was that the best way to shake up a field was to create an independent voice starting from the elements of the field itself, which of course creates an unequal dichotomy, from which it seems the author can’t escape. Some of Alpers’s rhetorical moves — announcing a change of subject, proposing new terms, trying for discursive independence — also occur in different forms in your essay, Matt.

MC: It's these features you're describing that gave Alpers's book its magnetism. But they also contributed to what we were talking about yesterday, the way the book ended up narrowing Renaissance art history, in part simply by making the study of northern Europe seem exciting, and the Italian Renaissance seem stale. Surely we can't link a single publication to the shrinking representation of Italian art history at universities across the U.S., but *The Art of Describing* did reinforce the impression, growing through the 80s, that the action was elsewhere. Thinking about the reshaping of the field in this period, I wonder whether it's useful to expand the discussion of "outliers" to encompass institutions as well as individuals. I'm tempted to suggest that there was, in the 1980s and 90s, a "Berkeley school," one that included not just Alpers but also Michael Baxandall (in his *Limewood Sculptors* days) and perhaps Joseph Koerner, not to mention the journal *Representations*. It was at Berkeley that Stephen Greenblatt wrote *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, a book that's had at least as big an impact on Renaissance art history than any other one we've mentioned. What the Italianists were doing there was also groundbreaking – think of the two books that Loren Partridge and Randolph Starn co-authored – but I can only imagine that, if this panel were taking place fifteen years ago, it would have had to include more Northern Renaissance scholars, and more Californians.

RW: I think that the most important reason Alpers's book had the effect it did was that it made Northern art seem like a direct anticipation of modern art. Italian art, based on literary, humanistic, rationalistic ideas, is old-fashioned; Northern art, based on direct encounters with the real, is somehow closer to the truth of things. Dutch art is linked to the emergence of the new natural sciences — to Enlightenment science, essentially — while at the same time the suggestion is advanced that the displacement of narrative and other literary structures — the pursuit of a kind of immediacy — anticipates modern phenomenology.

CF: It's unavoidable that we write history backwards, retrospectively. One of the healthiest trends in current discussions of historical methodology concerns anachronistic forms of telling time. Of course, interwar critical theorists like Walter Benjamin and French *Annales* School historians like Marc Bloch framed the discussion along ago, but I think that their experimental and politically engaged forms of history writing are highly relevant now. I think you could say the same about the vibrancy of colonial studies: they have the possibility of producing new knowledge through the study of new sources and new configurations in the historical record. Postcolonial studies could seed the field of Renaissance art with new students, looking at new

objects in new ways. This is something different from using the past to anticipate the present, as Bob says Alpers did to reconfigure seventeenth-century Dutch art history. I'm not sure where I am going with this, except to open up our discussion of methodology.

MC: I find it ironic that our last two examples of outliers — *The Art of Describing* and *The Power of Images* — are two of the most widely-read books in the field.

RW: Exactly. Jim has said that he thinks all this experimentation in the last twenty years has not had its intended effect —

JE: I didn't say *all* the experimentation: I was talking about women artists, and about anthropology.

RW: Okay, much of it hasn't had the effect its advocates would like to see; it hasn't moved the mountain, so to speak. And yet, Michael is right: this is precisely the kind of work that students and younger scholars read, admire, and try to emulate. On the one hand, it seems not have accomplished what it set out to do; on the other, it has succeeded too well, become a kind of orthodoxy of its own. To me that suggests that something is still missing, that the strategies on which it is based need to be rethought and revised. Much of what passes for progressive in fact plays back into and serves to perpetuate wholly conventional assumptions and values.

JE: This is what is so interesting: the field is transforming, but when you look at individual models, it's hard to know how that happens. I don't want to make Claire a representative of something she might not want to represent, so take our other two models, Freedberg and Alpers: they both function as attractive but problematic models, ones that are by now almost traditionally inassimilable.

SC: But *The Art of Describing* worked. You could make that kind of intervention in northern art; I am not sure Italian Renaissance art is organized that way. It is interesting that David Freedberg has written one of the strongest implicit contestations of Alpers, in his latest book *The Eye of the Lynx*, which deals with the visual culture of art and science in Rome in the 1600s.<sup>33</sup> That book might stir things up as a response to *The Art of Describing*, but it will not be seen as controversial in Italian Renaissance and Baroque studies.

MC: So far, we also seem to be suggesting that the most transformative books in our field have been written in other places.

SC: Medieval studies.

MC: I was thinking especially of Hans Belting, but also of Michael Fried — certainly it was his work, as much as anything written by Renaissance scholars, that compelled many of us to reflect on the

act of artmaking, and about the beholder of the image. But I was more curious about the broader phenomenon. It's hard to imagine a panel of modernists agreeing the most transformative books for their field have been written by art historians working on other periods.

JE: That's interesting. Hans Belting was going to be my next example, but I wasn't thinking of mentioning Michael Fried in this context. Let's consider Belting: there is someone who was at the center of medieval studies, and now, since he's been writing about modernism, he has become an outlier of a particular sort, different from our first three examples. For Renaissance studies, the important distinction would be the one he makes between *Bild* (art, in the Renaissance and later the Kantian sense) and *Kult* (objects meant for devotion, which have a wider range of meanings and uses).<sup>34</sup> I'm not clear what kind of reception that has within Renaissance studies: we can talk about that. Within modernism, our subject for this afternoon, it has had a somewhat negative effect; Belting has been negatively reviewed for example by Charles Harrison, and it does not seem to me that his interventions are having an effect, at least not yet. People are skeptical of his claim that the wider uses objects had before the Renaissance can be seen as returning in recent art.

RW: And yet Belting has been influential, both in Germany — one thinks of Gerhard Wolf and Klaus Krueger — and in America: Alex Nagel and Chris Wood, for instance, both studied with him.

CF: Within the field, it's always more complex. We know that the processes he names *Bild* and *Kult* both continue during the Renaissance. Fredrika's work deals with that split, not just with cultic practices, and so do I in a book I have coming out.<sup>35</sup> So *Bild und Kult* is like Alpers's book in a way: it makes a big claim, and shakes the field up, and then along come the historians who try to make it more accurate, to revise it and resist it, without rejecting it. (A rejection would just put the same values in place, but inverted.)

JE: Would Belting's book then be an outlier *mainly* because it makes a strong distinction?

SC: It would have to be that, in its problematic distinction between the "era of the image" and the "era of art." Because otherwise I find Belting's two books on "the image" to be ubiquitous in Renaissance studies, which is not really what one would expect from an outlier. It has shaped the work of so many of us: Alex Nagel, Chris Wood, Klaus Krueger, Victor Stoichita, Megan Holmes, Jeffrey Hamburger, Peter Parshall, even as these scholars dissent from some of Belting's views.

RW: Again, like Freedberg, he sees himself as studying images rather than art. He calls his practice *Bild-Anthropologie* — “Image Anthropology.”<sup>36</sup>

JE: Well, I think *Athropologie* there means something very different from what it means to Freedberg: it’s more a Continental sense of philosophic anthropology that’s at stake. I agree with you, but I would not compare the two books.

RW: Yet they are widely perceived as similar and mutually supporting. The original version of *Bild und Kult* came out in 1990, at the same moment as Freedberg’s: I still remember how excited some people were about the way the two overlapped and seemed to map out a new kind of art history.

JE: *Bild und Kult* and *The Power of Images*, yes: I meant that *Bild-Anthropologie* is a different project, and relies on a different sense of anthropology.

MC: Coming back to Claire’s remark about what Renaissance scholars have resisted and revised in Belting: It’s not that we don’t have a sense that something called “art” is invented in the Renaissance — Bob has tracked what happens to that idea.<sup>37</sup> What seems incorrect about Belting’s account is the idea that at the moment of the Renaissance, artworks suddenly cease to have cult value, that Raphael’s altarpieces are no longer altarpieces. That is the more controversial claim.

RW: What bothers me most about it is the implication that the invention of art as an idea, including its elaboration in theoretical writing, is simply a kind of rationalistic overlay that works to suppress deeper, more instinctive, more interesting responses to images. Again, the modernist prejudice behind this point of view emerges clearly in his writings on modern art; in modernism, he says, the rationalistic tradition is overthrown, returning us to a more direct, more authentic mode of engagement with images, one that in essential ways resembles that of the Middle Ages. He creates a genealogy of modernism that circumvents the Renaissance altogether.

JE: Bob, thanks: you’ve very usefully introduced yourself as another outlier. I have a kind of covert agenda here, exploring different kinds of outliers. Claire, your work is definitely one, and we’ve talked a bit about Freedberg, Alpers, and Belting (with an odd detour into Vasari — but we can reopen that can of worms anytime). Bob and I were thinking of a fifth model, which could be exemplified in your work, and now I think is a good time to bring it in. It would be a distinction between scholars who are mainly interested in the rational structures of Renaissance art (and that

would include your work), and those who are interested in what I'll provisionally call irrational qualities or properties of Renaissance art.

SC: I would qualify that a little by saying that *humanism* has become an outlier in Renaissance studies. It has been stigmatized by Panofsky's formulation of iconology as a humanist project, entailing a subordination of the work of art to literary traditions, a position to which few of us (including those who work on art and literature) would want to revert.<sup>38</sup> Another problem that has beset the fortunes of Renaissance Latin humanism is the rise of nationalist ideologies in the nineteenth century, which Claire addresses as a problem in conceiving the Renaissance as a whole. In his recent book *The Lost Italian Renaissance* Chris Celenza has done an excavation of how national cultures excluded the humanists from their canons of national literatures.<sup>39</sup> The Italian humanists wrote in Latin rather than Italian: they didn't fit with models of nationalism. And this is itself a recognition of the fact that humanism is an interesting example of a vibrant trans-national culture. Erasmus is more important in Italy in the sixteenth century than any corresponding Italian.

CF: And Erasmus was certainly known in the Spanish Americas among the governing state officials and ecclesiastics who have never have been considered a subject of study for Renaissance art historians. Like Stephen, I am talking about studying humanism as a historical phenomenon that has the potential to revise our understanding of both the past and the present.

SC: There is a sense of humanism as elitist, as a betrayal —

RW: Right. And much of modern thought — the whole tradition of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault — is emphatically, militantly anti-humanistic.

SC: I agree, but those thinkers were targeting a different version of humanism.

RW: Yet this intellectual climate conditions the way in which we approach the subject: it exerts tremendous pull on all work being done in the fields of cultural history and makes it almost impossible to approach humanism or rationalism in any positive way. I think that is another indication of how our investment in certain modernist values blinds us to the reality of the past — even, I would say, to the modernity of the past.

I should add, by the way, that there is also an emphatic anti-humanism at work in some mainstream empirical scholarship: I'm thinking of Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath, for example, who consistently minimize the connections between art and humanism.<sup>40</sup> Humanism is under attack from both sides.

SC: Exactly. We have to *alienate* humanism, and cut it off from the later baggage it had accumulated by the time Heidegger was doing his critique of humanism. That was a different model, centered in the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and characterized also for better or worse in Foucault's account of the "human sciences." Earlier humanism is not defined by any concern it might have with "the human" or the "Nature of Man," although Burckhardt, Kristeller and their followers have tried to make it be about that. In the fifteenth century, humanism was a project of intellectual self-definition centered on the study of language and on rhetoric. It was an epistemological project, but I think that aspect trails off in the sixteenth century.

RW: I don't know if it trails off, exactly: it gets institutionalized in the later sixteenth century; it survives the collapse of the city-state culture that nurtured it and could be said to thrive under absolutism — though whether one understands that process as one of evolution and fulfilment or as a denaturing and betrayal will depend on one's point of view. It would be an interesting thing to discuss here, not at all irrelevant to our theme, but perhaps the more urgent point, the point I feel it is most important to make, is that the notion that humanism somehow contaminated art with rationalism — and that we have to undo the process — is a pervasive, almost irresistible force in modern scholarship: it's the shared assumption underlying Alpers, Freedberg, and Belting. It's a straightforward projection of modernist values, yet as an interpretative strategy it is incomplete -- I would say flawed -- which is perhaps why it hasn't proved entirely effective.

JE: This does seem to me to be one of the most interesting ways of dividing the field of Renaissance studies right now. It is treacherous because of these words "rationality," "rationalism," "irrationality," and "irrationalism," but I would like to keep using them for a while, and not fret about them too much. They are serviceable, as tags.

Bob, I think your brave listing of people in the "irrational" camp, in your essay, is very apposite. (Brave because it includes two people at this table, Michael and Stephen!)

RW: Well, but let me say that both Michael and Stephen address humanism and the rational content of art with truly exquisite subtlety in their work; indeed, their engagement with it seems to me to pick up in the most productive way from where Baxandall left off in *Giotto and the Orators*.

JE: An initial problem I would have with your position, Bob, is the genealogy of the irrationalism. The claim is that twentieth-century scholars have become interested in recovering non-rational elements in artworks, but I wonder where those interests come from. For my part, I'd like to assign them to Fichte and Schelling: I'd like to go back to first- and second-generation

Romantics. I know you have mentioned they can be assigned to Symbolism, though I think that among recent precedents the interest in the irrational owes more to Surrealism. There would be a link between the “irrationalist” Renaissance scholars you mention and the *October* circle.

These are important choices, but at the moment I want just to note that the desire to explore sources other than rational ones is clear, but the intellectual indebtedness is not.

RW: You’re absolutely right about Romanticism, though I think we could even go back beyond the Romantics to Kant, to the notion of the aesthetic as “conceptless.” That is the point of departure for Romantic speculation about the arts, which in turn became the point of reference for the Symbolists and Surrealists. Perhaps that’s the basic problem: we have to recover the idea of art – and the modernity of that idea – without having recourse to the idea of the aesthetic.

CF: One of the richest aspects of Renaissance humanist discussions of art concerns the ways that sub-rational processes come into play. I think we all share in that interest; I am not sure how that fits into the trajectory you want to pose, Jim, or into the polemical pair of rationalism and irrationalism. Humanist texts that discuss the sub-rational processes involved in artmaking — primarily the *fantasia* and the productive imagination — and religious texts that discuss the viewer’s response, are very similar in a fundamental respect: they are both grounded in the same neo-Aristotelian theory of cognition. By neo-Aristotelian I mean that the language derives from Aristotle, but the ideas themselves incorporate additional ideas — including Platonist ideas about images, for example. Current discussions of Bild und Kult would benefit greatly from recognizing these continuities. To the extent that they don’t recognize these deeper continuities, I think it supports Bob’s claim that modernist values are projected unconsciously on the historical material.

JE: I think the polarity is dangerously seductive, or to put it optimistically, potentially very fruitful. It could include people like Freedberg as outliers, but also even Alpers, because the terms she chooses — like the idea that the world “stains” the canvas instead of being optically projected onto it — are deliberately distinct from rational Italian models.

SC: It’s seductive because of the allure of what might be called magical thinking, when words and things become the same, when the represented can be controlled through its representation. And that’s what we *love* — some of us. Not always including me. The magical or “irrational” is also part of the appeal of Belting’s work on “the image.” Didi-Huberman and others resurrect this dimension to subvert an alleged hegemony of humanist rationalism.

But in the terms of sixteenth century humanism, the possibility of links between sign and referent, while not held by everybody, may not be so irrational after all. You don't subvert anything by appealing to a distinction between rationalists and irrationalists, because the distinction is fairly hard to sustain in the intellectual history of the sixteenth century. Reason in the sixteenth century is not the reason of the Enlightenment.

RW: I would agree that the distinction creates problems when applied to the historical material; my point is that modern scholarship has created the distinction, that the emphasis on the irrational to the exclusion of the rational has led to a situation in which we must now work with such terms to correct the balance.

JE: Bob, I think it's important to say that you are in a tiny minority in taking seriously the rational component of Italian Renaissance artmaking. Most of the rest of us at this table, and also in the discipline, are less convinced of it —

SC: Although we take it seriously. Others, I think, resist it.

JE: — and “irrationalism,” under whatever name, is pervasive in historical research in general. It is usually assigned to a revival of what are understood as medieval values (as you say about Belting, Bob), or to a rejection of Enlightenment values. What I think matters much more than what is ostensibly being revived is the proximate sources of people's interest — Romanticism, Surrealism. One problem with the tag “irrationalism” is that it misses those nuances; it sounds transhistorical.

I think that to make any headway on this issue we need to acknowledge, as a starting point, that this problem, under whatever name (irrationalism, return to the premodern, rejection of the Enlightenment) is a larger, deeper question than art history.<sup>41</sup> We are just a tributary of wide currents of thought — Blumenberg, Habermas, Gadamer — and so if *art history* or even just *Renaissance art history* are going to be places where this issue is rethought, it will have to be by virtue of the exemplarity of the visual.

RW: I like your use of the term “exemplarity”: it seems to me to open onto the way in which the visual works in relation to the non-visual, in which it models knowledge, for instance, but perhaps that's another discussion altogether. As for being in the minority, I'm happy to be there — for the time being — yet I see myself as part of the larger critical project in which we're all engaged; I see myself as trying to move the mountain too, trying to get beyond a set of deeply embedded assumptions that hold us all back.

But to return to something that was said a minute ago: Claire, when you describe the ways in which Renaissance theory makes a place for irrationality, you're right, but it seems to me that that place is carefully circumscribed, confined pretty much to the ways in which visual perceptions lead to abstract thought, that it is limited to what might be called the mechanics of sense perception. What happens later, perhaps in the eighteenth century or with the Romantics, is that art comes to be understood as irrational in a far deeper, more comprehensive way. Renaissance accounts of either the rationality or irrationality of art are unlikely to satisfy post-Enlightenment readers.

CF: "Irrationalism" is not an early modern word, and it doesn't make sense in a Renaissance context. The mental processes of cognition, and the series of events that leads to a rational thought, is seen as a continuum, not an opposition.

RW: In Aristoteleanism, right. But even if leading theorists — Leonardo or Zuccaro — subscribe to it, wouldn't we be mistaken to assume that Aristotelian perceptual theory offers an adequate description of what is going on in Renaissance art? There are so many things it does not explain: all that is implied, I would say, by the idea of *ut pictura poesis* — signification, engagement with literary and abstract philosophical content, the mobilization of social codes. And more importantly, Aristotle is ultimately a rigorous rationalist: for him, art is "a state of capacity to make that reasons truly", and a logos — an "order" — in the working process. The question for modernists is whether Renaissance art theory isn't fundamentally misguided, or even dishonest. That's how Didi-Huberman sees it, for example, but it seems to me that many modernists are committed to an orientation that makes it impossible for them to take Renaissance thought about art seriously — except as a symptom of repression.

CF: It is in this period that projection of irrationality on to *other people* begins to appear as a discourse.

RW: As you have shown in your own work.

CF: Discussions of *grotteschi*, for example, document emerging racist views about people expressed in terms of the kinds of art, or styles of art, they make.<sup>42</sup> The implication is that those who depict things according to the imagination, without correspondence to things in the actual world and without proper proportions, are deluded and lacking rationality. Four hundred years later, the Surrealists embraced this association of the irrational with the abject.

MC: I'm still thinking about your remark that "irrationalism" doesn't make sense in a Renaissance context. For myself, I can't say that I find the polarity "rationalist / irrationalist" a terribly helpful

way to divide the field. Where does that leave the work of, say, Charles Dempsey, who writes on love and nightmares and other seemingly Romantic, seemingly non-rational experiences, but who is especially interested in the way these experiences were conceived, even invented, by the most systematic and modern philologists and artists? And what should we make of the fact that topics like alchemy and astrology have primarily attracted scholars who are looking for the proto-scientific aspects of the Renaissance? I wonder whether we can be true rationalists and really be interested in the Renaissance at all.

JE: Well, I would see this as a matter of desire. Just in relation to Renaissance alchemy: the scholars attracted to it tend to be either strictly “rational” historians of chemistry, or indulgently “irrational” practitioners. In Freudian terms, the choice is cathected for twentieth-century scholarship: both poles are intensified, even fetishized. That’s an overly metaphoric way of saying I think the fundamental phenomenon here is a deep attraction to the “irrational.”<sup>43</sup>

MC: Okay, the point about the history of alchemy is well taken. Maybe the study of Renaissance astrology is a better illustration of what I’m getting at: most of the people who write on this are really trying to understand the “system,” whether that system is ultimately a cosmology or a way of ordering mythological knowledge or a regimen of propaganda or something else. To slightly rephrase Stephen, the distinction between the rational and the irrational is fairly hard to sustain.

EMK: A word that we might consider along with “rationality” is “self-reflection” or “self-awareness.” “Rationality” is used by certain German historians to talk about the early Modern period; what they seem to be talking about is what we would call self-awareness, the artist’s sense of himself or herself, and in the mental processes, together with a *deliberateness* in the choices of materials and references.<sup>44</sup>

JE: Would this be a useful place to bring Vasari back into the discussion? There is a way to think of Vasari as a precipitation of ideas about art, self-reflexivity, and rational historical structures. And can I also bring in Michael Baxandall’s now-famous line about Vasari, that everything in art history is already in Vasari? In a sense it’s a throwaway line, and when I’ve seen it cited I have the impression it is very hard to elaborate; but it implies something crucial for our conversation, namely that there is something systematic and rationalizing in Vasari that is carried on in what we now recognize as art history. We would all be necessarily partly on the side of that structure — despite whatever anti-rationalist uses we may be trying to put that structure to.

MC: It's interesting, from this point of view, that Baxandall's line is a variation on the famous remark by the logician Alfred North Whitehead, that the history of Western philosophy consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. The interventionist Vasari a number of us were talking about earlier would not seem so all-encompassing.

RW: Of course Didi-Huberman thinks that Vasari's rationalism is the original sin of art history: it is precisely what must be overthrown if we are ever to get at the real complexity of images. But I think Vasari's investment in the rational has a lot to do with the fact that Renaissance artists in general were invested in the rational: it is not an idiosyncratic projection on his part but an insight of great documentary value into the real workings of history. And I should add — since we skipped quickly from rationalism to humanism earlier — that this investment does not just come from humanism: even from a narrowly technical, artisanal point of view, materials and processes might be thought to imply, require, or exemplify a kind of reason.

FJ: What about the way that Vasari talks about the irrational elements in drawings, *schizzi*? And his ideas about the artist being divine?

RW: But he also says that drawing is the direct projection of the mind, the most immediate manifestation of the artist's idea.

MC: One can also trace the migration of terms like *concetto* and *modello* from designating drawings to designating ideas.

FJ: But when he talks about splotches, how it's hard to tell one thing from another, and when he juxtaposes that to the more rational process of translating the splotches into art.

RW: He actually begins by saying drawing is the union of the three arts —

FJ: But it's a paradox —

RW: This is typical of our difference of approach: you emphasize the disorderly, the chaotic —

JE: You see, Fredrika, you're a typical twenty-first century art historian, excavating the rational for traces of the irrational. It is exactly what Bob once accused me of doing.<sup>45</sup>

FJ: What about the "epidemic of paradox," which runs through all of sixteenth-century writing, including Leonardo's discussion of the point? I recently heard a lecture by Frank Fehrenbach in which he addressed this topic, arguing that Leonardo viewed the point as something that is simultaneously nothing and a thing, as both absent and present.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps the penchant for masking can fit here as well. In much of this the appearance of irrationality is in play. The intent is to confuse, confound, and perplex. In sixteenth-century literature this takes the form of

masquerading and problematizing identity. A perfect example is Castiglione's tale of a goatherd masquerading as a courtier, who then masquerades as a goatherd. The paradox here, it seems to me, is that the behavior is at once rational and irrational. There are instances where Vasari characterizes artists and/or the creative process in equally complex ways. Raphael, for example, is so susceptible to human sexual urges that it causes his demise yet because he is also blessed with creative divinity he rise above his mortality.<sup>47</sup>

RW: Vasari's book is extremely complex, full of errors, contradictions, unresolved tensions; still, it is one of the greatest books ever written about art, arguably the greatest, certainly the most influential: I think that's what Baxandall meant. Vasari is certainly mindful of the messiness of the creative process, but he also insists on its susceptibility to rational instrumentalization.

FJ: In favor of your argument, of course, is Vasari's account of Piero di Cosimo's life, and how he walks the streets looking at stains in the sidewalk —

RW: That comes straight out of Leonardo, of course.

SC: Vasari systematizes madness and eccentricity. He wants to put order on the whole of artistic behavior. He is trying to contain a tradition of writing about artists.

RW: Or perhaps trying to fashion a better way to write about artists, one which does a better job of addressing what he thinks is most important — even if it results in an exclusivity that we find objectionable. He certainly was trying to fashion a master narrative — unabashedly! — yet in doing so he was trying to excavate, to illuminate and preserve in written form something he thought was implicit in the historical phenomena he was surveying, something he thought desperately precious and important to articulate, a confluence of motives and interests that led to a series of transformative events, an ongoing dialogue, a common work. Why would it have been so important for him to insist on what we consider the rationalistic aspects of art in doing so?

JE: Or for you? Why is it important for you to insist on these aspects of Vasari?

RW: I'm just trying to recover what's at stake in the intellectual investments we no longer share (or seem to share) in what we have chosen to ignore, in what, for one reason or another, we need to ignore. As far as *disegno* is concerned, for instance, it seems to me to involve a more complex process than our notions of irrationality allow. Didi-Huberman says some perceptive things about Vasari's concept of *disegno*, but in the end he uses it as a foil to set up his own post-rationalist, Freudian approach to images: he characterizes *disegno* as both mimetic and

idealistic, and contrasts it to the dream-work, yet I would say that the kinds of transformative, even negative powers attributed to the dream-work are implicit in *disegno*.

Vasari's rationalism also extends to other authors — to Lomazzo and Zuccaro, for example — so that it must be indicative of larger historical forces. We mentioned the idea of progress a minute ago — certainly one of Vasari's most problematic ideas, from our point of view. Yet I think that that the idea of progress was his way of making more fundamental points: that art involves a critical process, first of all. Indeed, the argument for the rational nature of art, pervasive in Renaissance theory, is ultimately an argument for the critical nature of art. The emphasis on progress, too, is a way of saying something else, expressing a deeper insight: that art has a history, and that its historicity — its embeddedness in time and its development over time — is essential to what makes it interesting, meaningful, important. That he had recourse to a simple biological metaphor — infancy, youth, maturity — is an almost reflexively rhetorical way of thinking, typical of humanism.

I should say that I don't think the rationalism of these writers is ultimately motivated by an investment in rationalism per se — that they were instinctively more rationalistic or idealistic than we are, even though their language often suggests that they were — so much as by a deeper sense that life in a complex culture demands some form of rationality, that there is no avoiding it, and that engaging the pressures created by such a situation is the specific and urgent challenge of a modern art. To put it in other words, the modern world was felt to require an art in which reason was thematized in some important, even essential way.

JE: See, Bob, to me what's interesting in this project of yours is that you're speaking against the grain of vast amounts of philosophy and scholarship in the twentieth and twenty-first century by openly admitting that you're interested in the rational. That seems to me an exemplary polemic, and can have all sorts of consequences in ordinary inquiries that require adjustment to various mixtures and complexities.

But at the same time I wonder how far the discipline as a whole can get from Vasari. I'm saying this now because of the way you've just characterized Vasari: that his work is driven by ideas of structures of history, that historical unfolding is part of what demonstrates art's importance as an activity. Is there any distance between those formulations and the unavoidable self-description of any activity that could be recognizable as art history?

RW: Well, if we can recognize the specifically critical element in Vasari's rationalism, if we can detach his insight about historicity from his idea of progress, we have already begun to establish a certain distance: we begin to glimpse an account of Renaissance art that salvages the strengths of Vasari's account without committing us to sharing them completely or reproducing them as stated.

JE: But can you return to something that is already constitutive of the discipline?

RW: Well, to go back to the distinction between art and images that I brought up at the beginning: perhaps art is not a kind of object, but rather a kind of work, a particularly complex, highly-structured, demanding kind of work. In that case, Vasari's book might be seen as an attempt to describe how that work — the work of being an artist — had evolved over the three hundred years leading up to his own time. That's why the biographical format is so essential: it isn't a celebration of "genius" — which is how modernist critics always dismiss it — so much as an affirmation of the meaning of human productivity. His book is about a process of redefining art as a culturally significant kind of labor. To think of art as labor might provide a point of contact between Fredrika's orientation and mine, between a concern with images or objects usually thought of as marginal to the history of art, and a preoccupation with high art and theory.

I should say that other theoretical texts of the period can also be read this way and be seen to stress slightly different aspects of the labor involved; aspects of this redefinition are also visible in practice. Michael's book on Cellini, for instance, with its emphasis on sculpture as an act, makes this point beautifully.

MC: This is one instance where you can get pretty far even without Vasari. Vasari, perhaps, situates ideas about performance into a historical scheme, but the notion that art is, as you put it, a culturally significant kind of labor is widely shared. One need only look at the ways that Venetian writers on painting link *sprezzatura* to technique; or at Michelangelo's poems on marble carving.

CF: To make things a little schematic for the sake of bringing these ideas into play with contemporary ideas of the irrational: it seems we need to interject an awareness of how art as a form of knowledge was then historically imposed on other people, in other cultures. It was the interplay of rational and sub-rational processes that made art a form of knowledge for Vasari, Leonardo, and others. The problems began when other cultures were thought to have only sub-rational or irrational practices: that is when the dichotomy emerged. Twentieth-century theorists such as

feminists and Surrealists embraced *that* irrationality, but still retained a critical, rational system in place. That is one area where Renaissance scholarship can contribute to the discussion, because there is an amazing amnesia about anything that happened before Kant or before the late nineteenth century.

JE: You could also connect that with the beginning of our conversation this morning, because those missing art historians on this panel — the ones from Italy, for example — might also have different ways of drawing the distinction. I imagine the tide of this irrationalism doesn't sweep evenly over all of Europe!

CF: This distinction we're talking about is rooted in Renaissance humanism and its debt to classical sources. So you *have* to have an understanding of that history of see how it was skewed, reworked, and imposed in other places.

RW: The effects of rationality — since that's what you're dealing with in Aristotle — are also evident in the system of the genres developed in the West, and that then get extended and adapted to classify non-Western art.

SC: The hierarchy of the genres reveals an ideological dimension to the rationality of art that many scholars you are addressing might want to resist. The portrait of the King is at the top of the hierarchy, and it legitimizes and rationalizes all other forms. I would add there's another side, too: the competing models of artistic reason, ones that are made by artists themselves in practice. We lose sight of that if we stress Vasari too much. His book is a competitive intervention, positioned against a series of art practices, many of them non-Florentine, that he wants to close down on. He wants to have the last word. It is verbal: it's a logocentric endeavor. Artists, sometimes taking on a subaltern role, could speak for art, and that is not irrational: we can see such artists as being rational themselves, in their own ways.

MC: Yes, and what those ways are, and what's distinctive about them, is still a real question.<sup>48</sup> The topic is starting to interest historians of science as well — there's that recent book by Pamela Smith, *The Body of the Artisan*.<sup>49</sup>

CF: I think Matt's material is just right for this theme. The forms you study are geometry, and that's rational, but it can be reconfigured as flowery organic growth that may, or may not, speak to the rational power of art as defined in sixteenth-century logocentric terms. And Steve, it's more than logocentric, because it also privileges proportion and anatomy, and so the rational is defined according to a kind of Euclidean geometry, because that's at the height of human knowledge.

Number, geometry is where metaphysics meets human knowledge, and the *same* ideas in different form are embodied in so-called Gothic traceries and building patterns that your work, Matt, is concerned with.

EMK: It is interesting that geometry becomes a reference for a number of projects. On the one hand, it can lead to the inscription of transcendence in religious building. On the other hand, it can serve as a self-conscious enterprise, an emblem of identity, or a kind of signature. Ornamental devices, which are basically configured geometric shapes, serve as a kind of supplementary signature of the designer in the early sixteenth century.

A related issue is the relation between craft and art in our period. These ornamental devices can serve as signatures through their relation to older mason's marks, geometric designs used to identify those responsible for stone cutting, a far less prestigious labor. Mason's marks then became the charge on escutcheons: they were placed as a new-fangled kind of armorial device. When architecture becomes a more noble occupation, the geometric designs migrate from charges on coats of arms to freestanding signs of identity. That has to be read in conjunction with the rise in status of the architect or designer, from anonymous craftsman to publicly acknowledged identity as artist. I think that figures much of our discussion today, when we talk about identity and self-reflexivity in the arts.

JE: So: luckily there is no way to complete a catalog of dissensions within the field, and I am not going to add any more names. Actually, I think that given the usual fumbly way people have when they try to speak extemporaneously, and given the limitations of time and space, we made quite a good survey of differing approaches in the field. It is strange how seldom art history tends to do this to itself.

One last comment, which I'd like to leave hanging in the air: it was a direct and simple matter to address Claire's work, David Freedberg's, Svetlana Alpers's, Hans Belting's, and Bob's, as different kinds of "outliers": but I notice no one wanted to go near my little list of people at the "center." If the margins are politically sensitive, the center is exquisitely so.

This may be a good place to break for questions.

Clare Guest [*question from the audience*]: An observation and two questions.

First, on the question of ornament: it would seem to possess both geometric configuration and, in its physiognomy, have the character of metaphoric embodiment.

Then, concerning discussion of Vasari, I wonder to what degree the question is one of Vasari's text and to what extent it concerns the ontology of form — the metaphysics, part Platonic, part Thomistic-Aristotelian — that constitutes a description of reality in Vasari's period.

Finally, regarding the opening point, about the fecundity of approaches: I wonder to what extent that reflects the material that has been studied in the period? Given the proliferation of texts in the sixteenth century, the immense preoccupation with a non-systematic encyclopedism, is it not inevitable that one ends up with a fecundity of approaches, or something that may be seen as a disarray? I find it hard to see how one manages to escape that.

JE: If by "one" you mean art history, it did manage to escape it for a long time! I think I might be unhappy with that line of reasoning because methods have seldom been determined by the historical material. We've been talking about late twentieth-century interests, not approaches governed by the material. We have been seeing what we have desired to see, not what has desired to see us. The disarray doesn't model the terrain, it models our interests.

MC: I would go back to Stephen's comment from the beginning, about whether we should *try* to escape it.

CF: Is disarray a bad thing?

CG: No; in humanist writing, it is almost celebrated at certain points.

CF: The genre of dialogue, as Michael said yesterday, allows for multiple points of view, without subsuming them, as they are in a treatise, to a conclusion.

MC: And the dialogue, more than the treatise, is the preferred form for writing about the arts, at least through the sixteenth century.

CG: And one could go much further in the dialogic model, as in for example Rabelaisian discussions of *copia*.

JE: Hmm, I wonder if we aren't flattering ourselves a bit by assuming our disarray is the result of an increasing sensitivity to the material. I think I'd see what goes on in Renaissance scholarship as more a matter of concerns that don't always go back more than a hundred years or so. That's not an argument about their truth value, but it's a reason to wonder if we see what we expect to find at least as often as we're surprised by what we find. For me, the disarrays (in the plural) in Renaissance scholarship, are often assignable to people from Burckhardt onward, and they'd be there even if the material were stubbornly unified.

John Paul McMahon [*question from the audience*]: This is a question for Bob Williams, about the functionality of your concept of systematicity. I wonder if you can speak a bit about how you see it working. I see it as so all-encompassing that it ends up doing nothing. So I just question the functionality of that concept. Do you see it as a grand narrative that conditions the period of the Renaissance? Also, how is it different from other approaches to the Renaissance? The way I read it, I see it as encircling previous accounts of the Renaissance, but not doing much more than that. Also your denigration of social art history's role in Renaissance studies in your paper makes the concept of systematicity doubly flawed.

RW: Well, I certainly don't denigrate social art history; I attempt to critique it. I say quite explicitly at the end of the first section of the essay that the history of art cannot *not* be social historical. Yet I also think that social historical approaches have tended to deflect attention away from a whole array of crucial issues, specifically — as I said earlier this morning — to displace and suppress the category “art.”

As far as systematicity being simply an encircling of other accounts: it certainly does attempt to assimilate what is most valuable about other accounts (it wouldn't be worth much if it didn't), but it also significantly re-orders them and restructures our understanding of the various phenomena they address. When I say, for instance, that decorum is cultural perspective, I'm pretty sure I'm saying something no one else has said; I'm making what I think is an historically accurate and critically useful point about the ways in which categories overlap. Because art was redefined so comprehensively and profoundly in the Renaissance, I think it's essential to try to understand such overlapping and the kinds of analogies or correspondences between things that strike us as different. If that makes systematicity useless for you —

JPM: I didn't say it was useless altogether, but at the end of your paper, when you started talking about modern systematicities, I began to wonder. I thought if you had contained it in the Renaissance, it would have worked —

RW: Well, okay, that's another issue. I do suggest, rather casually, at the end of the article, that modern art, while apparently a reaction against systematicity, in fact perpetuates it in certain ways. That's obviously not an idea that could be proved without writing a very extensive book about modern art, yet it does seem to me to be necessary to suggest. In the book I am writing now, on Raphael, I go a little further and propose that systematicity anticipates the modern category of the aesthetic, that since, for the Renaissance, what is distinctive and proper to art is a concern

with the specifically systematic features of representation, systematicity is the specifically “aesthetic” feature of representation.

Catherine Campbell [*question from the audience*]: Prior to this conversation, my perception of the Renaissance would have been Italian-based; Claire’s work opened that up for me, and made me think of the Renaissance in Latin America, and so forth. My question is whether the panel has inadvertently fallen into the same trap: all the experts here come from a similar geographic location.

JE: Let me just say something as co-organizer, and then we can all talk about it. It’s a very interesting, but very sensitive, question. Volume 3 in this series, called *Is Art History Global?*, involved people from nearly forty countries, and we had a similar openness in mind here; but when Bob and I sat down to think about people with whom we might have the kind of conversation *we* thought would be interesting, we couldn’t think of many outside North American institutions.

RW: And we knew Claire could represent her position very ably.

CF: I have tried my best to deflect any presumption that I am speaking for others, above all those who are not represented here! I am advocating that others be here with us.

JE: It’s a good feature of the dialogic nature of these books that what we say here will be followed by thirty or so Assessments. I want to make a prediction about what may happen, based on what happened in volumes 3 and 4: some of the people writing Assessments will want to change the subjects of the conversation. The terms will change, and our voices may be lost in a larger conversation.

All right: we meet back here this afternoon to discuss whether we’re relevant at all.

2

JE: Welcome back everyone. The topic this afternoon is the possibly larger question of the relation between writing on the Renaissance and writing on modernism. There are some interesting paradoxes in the air regarding the relation of Renaissance studies and art history as a whole. One would be that the Renaissance is foundational to the discipline, even in a very deep sense, that it provides the discipline with its sense of history and of history’s structure. The Renaissance was the time when ideas such as art, criticism, and history, were articulated, and that it continues to perform that foundational role. Some people, like Steve Melville, would say that the

Renaissance's sense of perspective and history encompass or comprise our own thoughts on it.<sup>50</sup> That would be an extreme way of putting something that is, I think, commonly acknowledged in more muted forms.

On the other hand, and the reason I say this is a paradox, it is also commonly acknowledged that the Renaissance is sunken into a kind of second-, third-, or fourth-rate status, when it comes to such things as competing for students or jobs, but also conceptually: we have gone beyond some important break in Western art history, and we are now in a different realm. If this view were taken to its extreme, it would entail the notion that the Renaissance is not relevant, in some, many, or perhaps even all ways. This paradoxical choice, between the potential over-valuation of the Renaissance and its perhaps precipitous under-valuation, is structural to art history: it's the way that people talk about Western art. Because it is structural, I don't expect to make any headway on it at all, but I'd like to talk around and about it this afternoon.

Bob and I had a couple of things planned. I thought to get the conversation started, I would mention something I think is a curious litmus test of this paradox, and that is by counting citations — by which I mean how frequently art historians who are modernists cite artworks or texts from the Renaissance. I could make a long list of prominent modernist art historians who basically never think to connect their observations with Renaissance studies: Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, Yve-Alain Bois, Pamela Lee, Joan Copjec, Anne Wagner... I could go on and on. This is not, obviously!, a way of finding fault: it is a way of noticing a fault line in our common understanding of Western art history. If only busy scholars, or younger scholars, didn't cite the Renaissance, that would be down to the pressures of the job market or institutional configurations: but virtually no modernists cite Renaissance precedents, and to me that points to the existence of a shared understanding of historical structure.

The big question is where the cut-off point is. If you're talking about someone like Tim Clark, that moment is emblemized by the year Jacques-Louis David painted the *Death of Marat*, crystallizing the idea he calls *contingency* and changing the terms in which painting could be discussed.<sup>51</sup> If you talk to Michael Fried, the cut-off point is the late eighteenth century, and has to do with a nexus of problems that arose in painting and, again, changed the terms under which it was understood. (Even though Tim Clark is now writing about Poussin and Michael Fried is writing about Caravaggio — in the latter case, Michael has adjusted his genealogy somewhat.) Someone like Barbara Stafford would locate such a point in the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, around issues of natural history, the emergence of the sciences, and ideographic art. The clearest example, I think, is Robert Rosenblum, whose PhD dissertation was on the International Style in 1800, and he has almost never said anything about the sometimes obvious parallels between post-1800 art and art made before that point.

My distinct, unquantifiable sense of this is that Renaissance art historians tend to know more about modernism than modernists know about the Renaissance, and that the inequality points to a structural problem in the discipline.

SC: I think it's true that for someone like myself, in graduate school in the 1980s, the nineteenth century, and the work done by T.J. Clark and others, seemed like the main viable model for how you did the social history of art. I read Richard Shiff to learn about semiotics, and Michael Fried for many other things, such as ways of conceiving the author-function in painting, and the question of the beholder. This was all happening around nineteenth-century scholarship then. I think nineteenth-century scholarship since is not as vital; it had its moment in an interesting way.

EMK: In terms of method, I agree, but I think it's natural that Renaissance art historians should be engaged with modern art: it's the art of our time and easily engages our interests. It is also understandable that modern art historians would *not* be interested in the Renaissance; they don't have the same purchase on the Renaissance that we have on the modern period. There are many ways of dealing with modern art that do not require Renaissance art as a point of reference. I don't find it as obligatory an enterprise. I think it's perhaps surprising that there aren't more people who do it. But I don't see it as necessary for people who study twentieth-century art.

JE: For me, the reason modernists don't cite the Renaissance is due to more than our institutional habits — or to put it the other way around, our institutions would have grown up around those fault lines. The phenomenon also raises the possibility that Renaissance and modernism trade unequally. From modernism, Renaissance scholars may take critical discourse and methods (as Stephen mentioned), but modernist historians may take something much broader from the Renaissance: they make take their idea of what Western art and art history were. That makes it even odder that they don't cite Renaissance scholarship or works.

CF: The lack of citation seems unacknowledged, so it is undigested, and that is where the space of discussion comes in. The foundational concepts of art history, based on the centrality of the

Renaissance as developed by Burckhardt, still underpin the field, and they are the reason why modernist art historians don't feel the Renaissance is relevant.

Periodization, very simply put, keeps people thinking that they can just divide history up into chronological periods, and that there is no strategy of time involved in doing that. Some of the most interesting discussions going on now about the writing of history have to do with thinking things through using something other than a chronological structure. Hayden White famously wrote in the 1970s about the strategies involved in constructing history as chronological sequences, as if that were objective; I think the problematic of how historians structure time is only now being taken up by art historians. Whether modernists will ever recognize that problematic in their own amnesiac constructions of time as the exclusive present remains to be seen.

JE: There are certainly any number of concepts at work in modernist art history that are easily, demonstrably dependent on concepts articulated in and for the Renaissance. And yet there is a lack of feeling of responsibility for addressing them.

CF: Yes. It is a little hard to get Renaissance experts to talk about this, because we're dealing with a different period of history in our research, and because when we're critiquing this modernist construct, we're using it to rethink our own field, not modernism.

JE: As if it's their problem, not ours.

CF: Yes, but I feel it is my problem, too. The work I am doing now is increasingly diachronic in its structure, as a way of encompassing the present. My own position as an historian is part of the same continuum, so I feel increasingly aware of the need to place myself in that continuum, and not separate from my area of study as if I could narrate it from the outside.

RW: Jim is right about the simultaneous dependence of modernist art history on concepts developed for the Renaissance and the unwillingness to interrogate that dependence. The Renaissance is made to serve both as a starting point for the modern and as something against which modernism reacts: in my essay on systematicity, I describe this construction as a "choke-hold." What seems to me to be at stake in the whole chronology issue is genealogy, hence, legitimation: the aim is to help us explain how we got to where we are. Modernism needs that legitimation, yet it also seems to require repressing some aspects of how we got to where we are.

JE: There are a couple of things at stake, aren't there? There's the repression; there are institutional habits, which I do not think are a particularly interesting way of looking at it; there is a sense of

the structure of the intervening centuries (if those centuries harbor an abyss, then there is no point in trying to cross it); and then there are ways people conventionally write, so that those historians who try to cross the abyss, like Hans Belting or Mieke Bal, almost *necessarily* begin to appear as outliers.

SC: I am thinking, Bob, about what you said about the project of legitimation. I wonder if the various recent texts on Caravaggio function as a kind of legitimation. That is not necessarily what is going on in Frank Stella, because he sees something in Caravaggio that may elude the rest of us<sup>52</sup>

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JE: I hope it does!

SC: It began with his book, and now it's Mieke Bal, Michael Fried... who else?<sup>53</sup>

MC: Leo Bersani — and then there's Derek Jarman, whose film came out the same year as Stella's book.<sup>54</sup>

JE: Yes, and that's the strangest list of people we have had all day long.

SC: Many of us find it exasperating to hear that Western representation is about the Albertian window, which came into being in the fifteenth century. That is how a great deal of modernism constructs the Renaissance.

At the same time it is worth reflecting that there is something about prominent interventions in the field in the last twenty years that lets down other art historians who might be interested. The drive to the social history of art, which I mentioned earlier, has led to a turn to the archive, and also to a tremendous effort directed at works of art that did not survive. In that way the visual and material component slips away. Many Renaissance art historians — including some of the most able and interesting people in the field — do not write about art.<sup>55</sup>

RW: But just because one isn't writing about images doesn't mean that one isn't writing about art.

JE: You know, this disappointment that may be felt by some modernist art historians, whether it's due to the turn from images to archives, or to an unexpected encounter with methodologies that a modernist might recognize as coming from their own field, may be the obverse of the problem that modernists *need* the Renaissance to exist, in order to imagine that something has happened against which they reacted. And because that something is now invisible, the paradox I opened with is even bigger. The need of modernism for the Renaissance is greater, and it is no longer answered by anything.

CF: So if we're writing about the Renaissance, we are functioning the way the medieval period functioned for the Renaissance humanists who wanted to bury *it*, and we are reproducing that structure. That would be another way that a structure which began in the Renaissance continues to drive writing on contemporary art and practice.

It is interesting to talk about this, because when we're doing our micro-studies we're not thinking about this at all.

JE: It is very tempting to elaborate on that, and risk going off into a flight of fancy... but it does strike me that it is the modernist moment that would have perceived a structure in the past analogous to the one that the Renaissance perceived in its past. In Joseph Koerner's account, for example, the modernist sense of the past is a perpetual belatedness, and an irretrievable distance from a fragmented and incomplete inheritance, while the Renaissance sense of the past was of an ideal not limited by historical context. But in this model, both modernists and people in the Renaissance felt the past as a founding moment, one that places demands on the present but is divided from it by a fault-line or rupture, so that the past stands in need of a *quieting* or even a repression. The *postmodern* moment would be something different: it would be some recalibration, or denial, of that —

CF: — of that rupture. But even the postmodernists in practice do not feel they have to go back to the past.

JE: Or they do, but as appropriation, as apparently random forays into equally distant "pasts."

In this context, that list of contemporary scholars who refer back to Caravaggio is even more bizarre. Stella's book reads Caravaggio, Bronzino, and Rubens, but only for their "negative spaces" (and I can never resist mentioning that no one knows the history of that term, but I think it is no older than the 1880s).<sup>56</sup> Stella's book serves his own artistic project, but it is psychologically beholden to art history — it is very careful about its sources and assertions. Michael Fried's book hasn't appeared yet, even though it was begun around 1995; but at the least it's a surprising extension of ideas that had been applied explicitly to the period after the mid-eighteenth century. Mieke Bal's book is open to a reading that would deny the possibility of art history, as that activity is understood by a large number of art historians (although she has written since then about how she did not intend it in quite that way).<sup>57</sup>

SC: Odd in the sense that they are not part of a modernist mainstream, or that modernism is not part of their project?

JE: I meant odd in the sense that they do not form a coherent group, as in the revivals of Vermeer, or Ter Borch, or Piero. At those moments there were consistent aesthetics and politics.

SC: There is a relation to psychoanalysis in at least two of them. There is also phenomenology.

CF: They are united by models of time that are not based on chronology, but on notions of repression. The work of Walter Benjamin is also relevant here...

JE: Yes. This may — or may not be — the time to bring in the last of the outliers we did not get a chance to talk about this morning, Georges Didi-Huberman, because his is also a psychoanalytic reading of history that seeks to disrupt chronology for many reasons. If it were taken on board, it would involve a radical reorganization of chronological art history in the name of certain psychic processes: so it's an equally outlying project.

Maybe what we're looking at here is that these strange bridges (I mean Stella's, Bal's, and Bersani's, but also Didi-Huberman's), which seem impassable, are a sign that the terrain itself is broken.

CF: Or maybe we're becoming more aware of ruptures that are always present. There is no other way to proceed to the Otherness. It is probably an important aspect of why people become historians: they become fascinated with the Otherness of past times.

JE: It's true that there would have had to be a kind of naïveté to say, with Berenson, that Picasso is like Piero.

CF: Maybe, or he was just trying to see what Piero was like. We start from what we know. I think that's where Mieke Bal's work takes off from — that kind of thinking about the Otherness of history, and ways of configuring time other than sequence. Why is it that certain things are appealing to us now? And why was Piero appealing at the end of the nineteenth century, and not before?

JE: Exactly.

CF: It's always like that, but we lose sight of it.

JE: The sense of history that you are inside of is the one that is hardest to see. If what we were calling "irrationalism" is an indirect borrowing from Romanticism, but a direct borrowing from Surrealism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and other currents of thought around the 1920s and 1930s, then what we're doing now, in 2006, is really following ideas from the 1920s. And those of us, like Bob, who want to work in some measure against that irrationalism have yet to ask themselves what (other than the Renaissance!) they are following, and how "lost" in time they might be.

RW: Not “lost” in time, perhaps just “untimely.” If what I’ve said about the Renaissance is true, then I have succeeded as a historian whether I fit into current trends or not, but also, and just as importantly, I think that insights which challenge modern assumptions have a critical value.

CF: Some ideas about the irrational come from the 1920s, but before them were the 1910s, and so forth: there is a long history of the irrational and the subrational. What we are talking about is a radical act of recuperation by the Surrealists; but it is also a responsible act of recuperation by historians, to be thinking in these terms.

JE: I worry about Georges Didi-Huberman, because there is interesting material there that is *almost* unusable by, in, or as art history. Aside from problems that arise from particular claims he makes, or from the rhetorical and narrative forms he chooses, there is also the question of the structure that would be left — that would be recognizable by art historians — if we were to take everything that he says seriously.

MC: Jim, you started the discussion by tracking whom modernists cite (or, more often, don’t cite). Another way to look at this question would be to consider who writes on the Renaissance but aims to reach an audience of modernists. This is probably more common in Europe than in the United States, but one prominent example is Leo Steinberg, who may or may not be an “outlier,” but who has published on Renaissance topics in *Art in America*, *October*, and *Critical Inquiry*. That’s unusual; one doesn’t really imagine the editors of those journals welcoming submissions from others in our field.

JE: “The Sexuality of Christ” was in *October* in 1983, and *Leonardo’s Incessant Last Supper* was Jonathan Crary’s choice as editor of the Zone Books imprint in 2001.

SC: His book was published, as you point out, Jim, by MIT Press — an unusual venue for Renaissance art, and essentially in with the *October* people.

JE: To me this is very interesting: why has Steinberg been their choice, intermittently but consistently, for almost twenty years? What was he doing for them that other Renaissance scholars couldn’t?

RW: It had a lot to do with his activity as a critic in the 1960s and 1970s; he was one of the critics who helped bring an end to Greenbergian orthodoxy and usher in postmodernism.

JE: Yes, that could be it. I would hope there is something else involved, though.

RW: I think he was an important influence on Rosalind Krauss. What he did with Renaissance art was in some ways an extension of his criticism, so could be seen as both establishing the modernity or — post-modernity — of Renaissance art and a genealogy of contemporary art.

JE: I don't think those reasons are the whole story. I would still want to know why the *October* circle took an interest in having *any* representative of the Renaissance at that point.

SC: It is hard to see what he gave them. *The Sexuality of Christ?* A straightforward, even conservative iconographical project, insisting on a traditional historicist basis: "Here are the texts, and I will only see in the images what the texts tell me to see."

JE: Stephen, that's a strange thing to say. It's true, but surely the texts didn't lead him to those ideas. He saw in ways no one had, and *then* he let the iconographic régime dictate his exposition — but it's only a façade, a kind of travesty of old text-based iconography, and maybe that perversion also had something to do with *October's* interest.

SC: Not only is it a strange thing to say, it's also unfair, especially since I admire that book very much. However, I don't think it's a travesty of iconography at all. He's not trying to be outrageous, and his arguments are verifiable and convincing. But there are wild things happening in those images. The book's title promises a study of sexuality — and we might expect a discussion of highly eroticized images of Christ like that by Rosso at the MFA in Boston. But instead the book was about the iconography of male genitals in Christian imagery.

JE: So maybe the book was of interest to *October* because of things it *didn't* have. It wasn't parroting back various theories that the editors in question may have felt they knew better. But it must have answered to some need to have a new, unexpected *form* of the Renaissance, which in turn would seem to indicate that the Renaissance as it was presented was buried even more deeply than I was thinking.

RW: Only superficially unexpected, though. The argument about the *Last Supper* not being not a narrative painting, not being assimilable to an Albertian approach, but something more complex, charged with symbolic significance and multivalent, does fit the modernist pattern, even the kind of anti-rationalism we discussed earlier.

JE: Well, it's an odd candidate for anti-rationalism. I'd rather see it as hypertrophied rationalism: it is far more dense in rational argument than any book any of us has written, or is likely to write.<sup>58</sup>

RW: True. Yet he dismisses the picture's links to established forms of Renaissance rationalism in order to insist on his own. He shows no interest at all in Leonardo's theoretical writings; indeed, he implies that they are simplistic, written for unintelligent students, and of no use whatever in understanding the pictures.

CF: It's a very modernist reading in a postmodern framework, and for someone who is actually an historian, it's like the borrowings Stephen was mentioning, which take the Albertian window and central-point perspective to represent the Renaissance. Not that Leo Steinberg is that simple-minded; but there's such a theatricality to the reading, such showmanship, that it becomes interesting to a contemporary public. People would think, "Oh, now I can become interested in this historical issue."

SC: I would also mention Whitney Davis, who is working on representations of the Apocalypse in medieval and Renaissance images. That is again about problems of time and space.

RW: He has been working on perspective and perspectivism in Western thinking.

MC: Steinberg is also interested in the undecidable, where to interpret the work one way is already to misunderstand it.

JE: And the *way* he does that in the *Last Supper* book, out-Empsoning Empson, and at the same time sounding like Thomas Aquinas! I can see how it was refreshing, but what was it refreshing *from*? What was the writing on offer that *Zone* wouldn't have wanted?

These examples point to an interesting misapprehension, a miscognition about the Renaissance. All of us at this table are buried deeper than I had thought twenty minutes ago. There doesn't seem to be a single normative or acceptable account that addresses both Renaissance and modernism: maybe Michael Baxandall would be the exception that proves that rule.

CF: But see, that's exactly what happens: someone who is not trained in Renaissance art goes to Baxandall, reads his conclusion, doesn't hear the background, abstracts from it, puts it into a Lacanian analysis, let's say, of perspective — there you have it, you're off and running. But it creates so much dissonance in the field that no one else picks it up. Yet that's not true of Didi-Huberman's reading of the Fra Angelico frescoes. That was a really wonderful opening up of the field, by thinking very deeply about the non-representational fictive marble panels as harboring the figuration of the formless. That insight into the cultural history of formlessness has been the basis for Didi-Huberman's subsequent theorizing, some of which, lacking the same solid historical foundation as his study of the theology of mystical knowledge regarding the frescoes, seems rather thin.

JE: The Fra Angelico book is also a precedent for the practice, which I think is now standard art historical practice, of citing Didi-Huberman and then putting him in a footnote.<sup>59</sup> The reliance of some of his more recent writing on the *Fra Angelico* book is a blessing for people who want to

put him in a footnote. But the tradition of citing-but-not-arguing continues in other instances: for example, in the book *Formless* he gets to be in a footnote, even though he had written an entire book on the subject, because his concept of representation is said to be too naturalistic.<sup>60</sup>

CF: And so the same process of flirting with, but ultimately rejecting, innovation continues.

JE: We have been talking about how the Renaissance appears to modernists. I thought it might be good to change perspectives on this question by talking about institutions, before we return to return to the problem of citation from the other side, and look at how modernism appears to Renaissance specialists.

I think the subject of institutions is at one and the same time completely foundational — you can't make foundational critiques without taking into account politics, institutions, and forms of knowledge — and, on the other hand, too crowded with incidental detail about what happens to take place in particular institutions. Those local stories tend to obscure institutional configurations that have real purchase on knowledge.

I wonder, Claire, if you'd like to open the question of institutions...

CF: Yes, thanks. Jim asked me, after the morning session, if I could make my differences more clear. I am committed to not setting up oppositional camps; but on the other hand I do not want to blend into the crowd. So the kind of art historical practice I would like to see in Renaissance studies goes all over the world, and deals with all kinds of practices, representational systems, cultural conditions; not at the level of social history, but at deeper epistemological levels, studying what happens when new identities are formed, when new communication occurs, when representational practices that have never been in contact before are suddenly in collision and contention, when the readability of the art changes because of contact, when people's ability to live changes because of their altered material culture.

If those kinds of questions came to be of overriding importance in the field, if they were encouraged at the institutional level, we could have an entirely different kind of art history. It would look genuinely different. We would not just be looking at the canon of old masters in Europe. We would be looking at colonial productions. We would be looking at print culture. We would be looking at things made by artists without training. And we wouldn't be spending our time on taxonomies of that material. We would be examining the interesting processes that occur, maybe in terms of the Renaissance definition of art as work, as process: maybe that would be part of what we would be doing.

A number of people are working on these issues, but mostly outside of the areas that are familiar to us. I think it is important for people with Europeanist training to be engaged, and not just people we brand as colonialists or Latin American specialists. But it depends on institutions to support this. There's the question of the individual, and what kind of work she does, and then there's the question of the institution, and what kind of historian is hired, and what you put together at the level of undergraduate education... In many cases, we would be collaborating more. I would love to collaborate with a Byzantinist, and collaborate on mixtures of Renaissance styles in the Mediterranean —

JE: How would you describe in political terms the resistance that an imaginary “typical” art historian might feel to this? By that question I mean: Would you imagine the resistance would be finally a matter of nationalism or regionalism, or would you imagine it would be mainly a matter of entrenched habits? Or fear of losing jobs, or students?

CF: Here's how I imagine it. People are trained in a set of texts and images, and a body of historiography, and as they work they learn how much more there is. With every book and article you discover how little you know, and you become an expert in a micro-field. So I think a lot of the resistance is against being in uncharted territory.

SC: But you need a wide range of cultural literacy: you're an Italianist, then you learn Spanish, then Nahuatl, other languages, hieroglyphs... it does require becoming a multidisciplinarian. There is a tremendous anxiety now about the loss of disciplinarity, which is being watered down as administrators issue calls for watering down departments.

CF: I think about that quite a lot. Bill Readings, Sam Weber, and others have thought about exactly what you've brought up.<sup>61</sup> On the one hand, looking at our nineteenth-century foundations and trying to critique them drives us toward a more interdisciplinary practice. But on the other hand, we play into the downsizing “opportunities” that corporate administrators offer to the humanities, in order to get rid of specific disciplines and replace them with vague things like cultural studies that are not grounded anywhere. So in trying to fix it, we make it worse.

JE: So one aspect of the resistance of a hypothetical “typical” art historian would be the potential loss of disciplinarity. But wouldn't another be a form of nationalism? Take a country at random, say Romania, and its art historians. If you were to try to make changes of the sort you've described, in a country which has no tradition of it, wouldn't most of the resistance come from the

conviction that Romanian art historical research and teaching should properly remain central to the discipline?

MC: Isn't the opposite happening in North America? Most universities and even most departments, I suspect, would welcome an expansion or reconfiguration of Renaissance Studies to include Latin America.

JE: I think that describes the situation mainly in relatively large North American and UK universities. I don't see that kind of reasoning in smaller countries. I might even go as far as to say that we are open, in the US, to the study of other cultures: we can be generous because we *own* those cultures, or we will.

MC: Well, administrators — and faculty members, too — are also responding to the presence of Latino students in the community and in the university. It's not just that we own those cultures but that we *are* those cultures. It's not accidental that Claire, our strongest advocate for this ideal, teaches in the Southwestern United States.

JE: Yes, in the case of Latino students in the US. But again I think that is a limited example. I don't find that rhetoric in other places. Here in Ireland, for example, the western European tradition and Irish art history are taken to be the proper focus *regardless* of student demographics. I am just trying to find a reason other than lack of specialization to explain why people resist the kind of expanded Renaissance studies Claire is advocating.

MC: Couldn't it also have to do with the questions that seem productive or unproductive in relation to certain kinds of material? If a scholar is drawn to study the Renaissance not just because he or she loves working in Italy, or Europe, but rather because he or she is interested in particular kinds of topics – humanism, say, or artists' biographies -- what's the responsibility of this scholar to dwell on a geographical area where the material to pursue those topics doesn't seem as rich? Now, maybe my hypothetical scholar would find, if he or she looked, that the Latin American material relating to these topics just hasn't been examined. But the suggestion that a scholar should work on a particular region can also be a way of saying that that scholar should be doing a certain kind of art history, should be asking certain kinds of questions. Can't the decision not to engage in a geographically expanded Renaissance reflect commitment as much as resistance?

CF: I agree with Michael that circumscribing a historian's field of investigation geographically may not make any sense and, furthermore, that commitment and resistance are not exactly the same thing.

However, I resist the idea of hiring a Latin Americanist to address the commitment to a global vision of the Renaissance because Latin Americanists have to be grounded in something like national identity. A Renaissance specialist has to be grounded in the culture of Italy or France; similarly, a Latin Americanist has to be grounded in language and place. It's not necessarily the kind of cross-disciplinary work that I am suggesting, which goes beyond nation-state identities to interrogate the categories and identities we impose on the historical material as such. To implement the model I have in mind may well mean doing more collaborative work, a model that is under-developed in the humanities for reasons I don't really understand. And yes, of course, some the most culturally chauvinistic practices are among art historians, and not just in Romania

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JE: Thanks for adding that!

CF: So it's a matter of deeply rethinking our identities. We are talking about resisting a change that would involve reworking one's identity: but what a wonderful challenge it would be, to rethink the world in terms that privilege interaction and the unknown over national culture and pride in the familiar.

JE: When we were talking about Renaissance and modern Western art history, there was already enough of a problem for people who tried to bridge the gap. But here, where we're talking about something that is literally global, it seems as if the evaporation of specialties, identities, and national senses of identity might cause more euphoria than trouble.

Let's go back to the narrower, actually existing case, with the institutional status as it is now. In North America, Europe, and parts of South America, in average universities, there is always going to be someone doing Italian Renaissance. It is not dispensable. It can't be integrated or dispersed, because it has to be there. It has an anchoring function.

MC: That's true. In the last fifteen years, Italian Baroque has been rapidly disappearing from American art history departments, but most larger universities still have a Renaissance specialist.

CF: But the misconception is that the anchor-function has to look like Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael, or Petrarch and Boccaccio. Why can't it look like a world of cultural interactions?

JE: Like Matt's work, or like Fredrika's.

FJ: My university has started a Mediterranean studies program, done in consortium with the university of Messina, and the university of Cordova, but it takes in the Balkans. The School of the Arts also has a campus in Doha, Qatar. Pennsylvania State also has a program like that, very well

situated. Maybe this is how it starts. It was required by EU laws that Messina had to have a non-EU partner, so it could be that initiatives are already in place, where we won't need to think of the Renaissance in the traditionally defined way but rather as an era rich in the exchange of ideas and the meeting of cultures. Rosamond Mack's *Bazaar to Piazza* illustrates this in interesting ways that include, among other things, the appropriation of eastern forms like kufic script and the patterns of Anatolian prayer rugs into western art and architecture.<sup>62</sup>

JE: I feel like putting on my pessimist's cap again.

JF: Not again!

JE: I think there's a parallel to be made between Renaissance studies and Classics. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Latin was known by everyone in educated circles. Now Classics is still felt to be needed in many universities, but only as a background, something against which you can define your cultural identity without having to know too much about it. Renaissance studies may be like that.

FJ: The initiative in our university is not just art history, but literature, theater, performance, film, history, communication and graphic design — they're looking at what's happening now.

EMK: I think the conservative drag that institutions exert on discourses is often a good thing. It allows creative impulses to react *against* a tradition, while still having the tradition present: it gives the rebellion a structure. I think that is the problem with renaming art history departments visual or cultural studies departments, which as Claire says have only very uncertain traditions to react with or against.

Speaking of classics, there is a tendency of departments to divest themselves of what were previously considered essentials. At the University of Toronto, we were considering not hiring art historians specializing in ancient art, divesting ourselves of these fields. Regardless of one's personal interest in ancient art, it seemed to many of us a strange proposal.

JE: You still have a classics department, at least?

EMK: Yes, but to allow ancient art to go to the classics department, away from art history, and not be included in the institutional discussions, seemed strange. Similarly, a number of history departments (not art history departments) are not re-hiring Italian Renaissance historians. As Claire says, the notion of the Renaissance should be broadened; but Italian Renaissance history is one of the bedrocks of traditional history, and it is hard to see an entire department operating without someone in this area.

CF: But even beyond providing the whipping post for more contemporary disciplines, our sub-discipline deserves to be rethought and not treated as something static. The downsizing in universities that think they can do away with ancient art, or medieval art, or even pre-modern art (a number of institutions are doing away with pre-modern art), completely misunderstands the dynamics of the field. Sam Weber writes that the episteme that informs these decisions is based on an Enlightenment model in which the value of the new is decided by comparison with the pre-existing, which is the same kind of ethnocentric attitude that got us into the problem in the first place — the idea of looking at other cultures using the barometer of Europe.

JE: We are developing two fairly depressing models of the Renaissance. In one, it is the anchor that needs to be there, but doesn't need to be lifted off the ocean floor (you don't need to know much about it). In the other, which is even more depressing, universities can get rid of the Renaissance altogether, because it is decathected: we don't even worry about it. We think about the Renaissance the way Epicurus worried about the gods, which is we don't. We don't even care.

FJ: That assumes we let the Renaissance continue to appear static.

SC: And it also assumes that the model is to be defined in terms of the apathy of other art historians and the “innovations” of university administrators. One major problem has been that the Renaissance cannot obviously be defended according to the same moral and liberal imperatives that are used to mandate the increasing inclusion of some non-Western or non-European fields. But we could make the argument that the Renaissance is an “other” culture, that it is remote from the present and from twenty-first century concerns, and that it requires the same kind of empathy with difference as areas of study called for by proponents of multiculturalism. That would also mean taking a stand against the essentialism of identity politics in university education, where students are expected to identify with certain specializations as being more “about themselves,” especially when those areas of specialization are non-European.

JE: Or it assumes that innovations can be made to appear *as* innovations. From a modernist art historian's standpoint, what happens in Renaissance scholarship can appear as the return of familiar methods and concerns, or their reappearance in new contexts. That only strengthens the hunch that the Renaissance is the same under its new theory veneer. My dissertation supervisor, Earl Rosenthal, once said that the Renaissance was like a close-cropped field. From his point of view, nearly everything possible had been done. He wasn't thinking of the new methods and objects we've been talking about, but I can see now, twenty years later, that modernist historians

might still see that same field when they look past the new methods and objects. (And by the way, I always loved the implicit comparison of art historians and sheep.)

RW: Claire, I agree with you about the importance of encouraging work from non-European perspectives, yet I also think that interest in such perspectives has become fashionable now, and that the effects of that fashion are not entirely positive. On the one hand, its advocates create the impression that any work not done from such a perspective cannot be truly progressive, truly critical. On the other, not all work done from that perspective is necessarily critical: I know people who claim to be doing post-colonial art history, yet whose work simply extends all sorts of commonplace art-historical strategies to new material and is thus just colonialism by other means. So emphasizing the “non-Western” can also function as a kind of evasion — a repressive desublimation. There still seems to me to be plenty of room within the study of European art for significantly — urgently — critical intervention: even the kinds of issues that interest you — the ways in which, say, slavery, structures of domination, and so forth are legible in art — are also present in European art, and need to be addressed there with perhaps even greater energy and acuity.

MC: Yes — Carl Strehle recently gave a talk on slavery in Renaissance painters’ workshops, and along the way noted that the scholars who have been studying “domestic arts” have not really paid attention to this. A few of those people were in his audience, and they took him to task because slaves — though the most valuable property a person could own — do not appear in inventories. I think they felt he was accusing them of not doing their homework, but what he was demonstrating that the kind of relationships we automatically look for when studying colonial interactions remain to be explored in the major Italian centers.

CF: I think you need both. One only needs to look at the studies mentioned before, such as Stephen’s co-edited anthology, that have been published in the last decade to see that the cultural interactions that are taking place in Ferrara, across the street as it were, can be quite radical if they are looked at the right way, if their implications are fully analyzed. However, extra-European studies have lagged far behind, despite the obvious fact that cultural inequalities that exist today are often the result of imperialistic practices that developed in the period we study. So by continuing to work within the nationalistic, subdisciplinary formations we have inherited from the heyday of nation-state formation, we reproduce the same hegemonic schemes, don’t we? The irony is that in today’s world of weakened nation-states, the study of national culture is

worth less and less – and that is ultimately why art history departments are not held in higher prestige at our universities. This goes for all of the humanities. What is my responsibility as an intellectual to society? This question deserves to be driving our research agendas. We'd be doing everyone a big favor by attending to such questions as the history of cultural interactions or slavery or racial thinking on a global scale. There are so many projects waiting to happen.

JE: There is a parallel to be drawn here with visual studies, which also wants to do something with existing art history; visual studies would fragment existing practice, or disperse it and let it find itself in new places. In order to work with visual studies, you have to take its founding assumption on board: that in contemporary culture there is no longer any critical force to the distinction between fine art and mass or popular art. Once you do that, you are free to study the range of images. The price you pay, from the point of view of people who don't like visual studies, is that you lose the ability to talk about fine art in the ways that have been developed for it.<sup>63</sup>

In the same way, an internationalist, multicultural view of the Renaissance could be seen to be risking that. It would not just be an expansion of the Renaissance, but an activity made possible by a kind of revaluation of values — a devaluation of some, in particular.

Now your project, Claire, is a minority in Renaissance studies, so I don't know if it would make sense to apply this to what you do. But visual studies is not a rare thing in comparison to modernist art history, so I can say with confidence that despite many people's wishes, it does not co-exist with modernist art history as an organic extension or expansion. It depends, fundamentally, on overwriting certain values of the pre-existing discipline, especially including its "canon."

It's hard to speak against visual studies in this context, because you don't want to sound like a reactionary: in Renaissance terms, you wouldn't want to be caught saying, "No, I need to have my Michelangelo the way Charles De Tolnay gave him to me!"

CF: I think so much of what keeps more exciting work from happening is really at the level of institutional power, and not at the level of personal choice. When institutions hire their subdisciplinary specialist, they are hiring for certain purposes. Maybe it happens more at the most elite institutions; maybe those are the ones most resistant to change. The exciting initiative that Fredrika describes is being developed at a public institution, so we could get into a more concentrated discussion of which institutions keep the status quo in place more, without getting

ourselves to ad hominem arguments. We could ask how traditional disciplinary constructs and problematic values are passed on by administrators who are not trained to be thinking the kinds of thoughts that we're exploring here today.

MC: This institutional question also bears on where we do our research. The libraries and archives alone make it so much more convenient to work in Venice, Florence, and Rome than elsewhere. That shows in the literature, in the difference between what is produced in Turin, say, as opposed to Florence.

CF: It is also easier to do research where some has already been done, so there are pockets of research to draw upon, and familiar objects.

JE: This is why it's good to talk about prominent scholars, because then such restrictions shouldn't matter. For someone like Hans Belting, there is no limitation on the range of scholarship he could do if he wanted: hence his choices are more likely to be indicative of issues in the discipline itself. I'm more interested in cases like that, than in institutions. I agree institutions hamper many people in many ways, but the most active scholars are not so limited, and the fact that only few of them work outside the traditionally conceived Renaissance is important.

CF: Belting speaks in an institutionally sanctioned voice: they picked him, he makes them. He has research funding, students, time to work, while art historians outside the few elite private and state research institutions are teaching more, receiving less support for their research, and therefore generally competing less successfully for a voice in the field through their publications and papers. And if you factor in gender and race, you will see that the conservative force of educational institutions is even more visible: very few women occupy important positions in art history at leading research universities and there are practically no people of color working in Renaissance art history studies at all. I don't know how anyone could claim that institutions are irrelevant to the question of making the field of Renaissance art history more open and diverse.

EMK: Institutions in all fields tend to attract authority to themselves, and respect authority, and authority is a very conservative force. It is not only a problem of administrators, but of colleagues too, in judging and appreciating their fellow colleagues outside their field. This makes it more difficult to engage in subversive conversations. For example, I first wrote on Pieter Bruegel, who stands at the center of the canon; now, with tenure, I feel I can engage in a project like the one sampled in the "Starting Points" essay, that does not immediately elicit recognition among my colleagues.

JE: Or even come to events like this.

EMK: Yes, even events like this. A fellow scholar of Gothic architecture, Peter Murray, told me that he had first considered working on the very late French Gothic around the year 1500 but was uniformly advised not to do so, because he would not readily find an audience. In fact he chose to work on the High Gothic of Beauvais, Troyes, and Amiens. I don't think this is restricted to academia; we all have to contend with the conservative drag of institutions. One thing academia does allow, once one is placed, is expanding the margins of discourse. That is one of the benefits of tenure.

SC: It's also a question of research money. We can't fund our students to do field work for more than two years. The pool of money for graduate PhD preparation is evaporating.

JE: And that is from the position of a large North American university. Here, in a medium-sized university in a smaller European country, we're lucky to fund the very small fees that EU students have to pay (about €3,000 per year). Departments in Ireland usually can't fund non-EU students at all (even though they only have about €8,000 in fees), and no one expects to fund field work. Obviously funding of any sort at all is out of the question in most of the rest of the world.

EMK: I think it is always easier to win approval if one works in the center of any field. But academia allows for survival outside the center, and many fields do not.

SC: For the moment.

CF: Yes, for the moment. The state legislature where I work, in Colorado, is discussing getting rid of tenure.

JE: Well, again, to keep the world outside US academia in view, I'll just say that History of Art at this university is not quite an independent department, and may well shrink back into the History department. Many universities are lucky to have art history, let alone art history — but just to bring the discussion back to the question at hand, I have yet to see an art history department of more than three people where the Italian Renaissance is not taught at all. (This is aside from whether or not there is a Renaissance specialist: that's a luxury of affluent departments, universities, and countries.) On the other hand there are many places where modernism isn't taught.

Let's try to complete the circle of this afternoon's conversation by returning to the place we started, looking at the fault lines between Renaissance and modernism. This time, however, let's

look from the other side, and consider Renaissance scholars who do not look forward, for various reasons.

Some of the foundational names in Renaissance studies would place the decisive break or abyss in history *before* their period; that is different from all the modernists I mentioned at the beginning, whose relative lack of citations of Renaissance art points to a sense that the abyss is *between* them and the Renaissance. I think for example of Panofsky and the idea of the expanded Renaissance, an idea that puts his own field of study at the beginning of a sequence that leads onward to modernism — and such things as motion pictures and Rolls-Royce grilles. More contentiously, there is Hans Belting, who puts most of what we study (excepting Matt’s material) *after* the divide between *Kult* and *Bild*.

To the extent that this is the case, and Renaissance specialists write as if from the inception of a tradition, there is *even less* excuse not to cite twentieth-century examples than there is for the modernists, for whom the break is somewhere between their field of study and the Renaissance.

MC: That’s right: scholars of the “Renaissance” and of the “early modern” both assume the kind of divide you’re pointing to; it’s one thing we all tend to take for granted, regardless of what we call our period. Do we, then, use the middle ages much the way you’re saying that modernists use the Renaissance? I was struck, for example, how insistent Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood were in their recent *Art Bulletin* piece that there is a Renaissance conception of time that is fundamentally distinct from what one would find in the late middle ages. They close Belting’s divide then insist on retaining it. And this from two scholars who know a great deal about medieval art: it’s probably even more common among Renaissance scholars not to think much about the middle ages at all. Our ignorance of what happened before Giotto is not that much different from the modernist’s ignorance of what we study. We’re drawn to look for beginnings rather than for endings.

CF: Burckhardt was less driven by the disciplinary divisions we now practice under. We might, after tenure, study a range of objects from the medieval to the contemporary period; but Burckhardt could look at modernity because its fabric wasn’t as institutionalized as the one we now experience.

JE: Who would be contemporary Renaissance specialists whose work might imply the idea of a break *after* the Renaissance? Or is theorizing the renaissance a condition of conceiving of the Renaissance?

MC: Well, such a break is certainly structural in our teaching, if not in our writing. There's still a widely assumed distinction between Renaissance and Baroque, at least where the Italian material is concerned. It's reflected in textbooks, in individual specializations, and in the curricula at most universities.

JE: If you take up Panofsky's model, you end up being the custodian of a very broad swath of history.

EMK: Panofsky defines the Renaissance awfully broadly. At the beginning of *Renaissance and Resuscitations*, he starts by talking about the Renaissance as a limited cultural phenomenon. After a coda, he continues with the words, "From the fourteenth through the sixteenth century, then, and from one end of Europe to the other, the men of the Renaissance were convinced that the period in which they lived was a 'new age' as sharply different from the mediaeval past as the mediaeval past had been from classical antiquity and marked by a concerted effort to revive the culture of the latter." Panofsky thus homogenizes all of Europe over a period of three centuries. That's as extensive as the period between 1600 and 1900! What remarkable, dramatic events don't occur over a span of three hundred years? In order to make his point, he ultimately expands the domain of the Renaissance until it's much less useful a concept.

SC: Arnold Hauser as well, when Mannerism gets expanded, colossally, to last four hundred years.

EMK: The cyclical interpretations of Mannerism are a similar case.<sup>64</sup>

SC: He didn't reach the postmodern moment himself, but he was predicting it, in a certain way. And he influenced some of the critical work from the 1980s that attempted to characterize Postmodernism in terms of Mannerism.<sup>65</sup>

CF: Or there is Ernst Curtius's "long middle ages," which would also weaken periodization.

JE: Broadening, or weakening, might be different from what happens with the modernists. All those I named identify more or less explicit beginning points for modernism. Belting, among historians who write about the Renaissance, may be the closest analogy.

SC: I think maybe people are thinking more in political categories, like absolutism, pre-absolutism, post-absolutism, pre-nation-state, post-nation-state. That has become the dominant form of historical thought, rather than stylistic or Wölfflinian models of Renaissance and Baroque.

RW: Right, and that relates to the issue we raised this morning about what happens to humanism in the course of the sixteenth century.

JE: So your construal of the histories of colonialism, or imperialism, would determine whether or not you felt obligated to be connected to another period such as modernism.

- MC: There are also the periodizations that track religious formations. For Northern Europe, “Reformation” has long seemed a more useful category than “Renaissance,” and scholars are increasingly testing this against the Italian material as well.
- CF: I suspect that the pre-modern period, with its large dynastic formations and religious institutions, is becoming much more interesting to look at in this period of the decline of the nation state and the rise of transnational corporate capitalism. The kinds of loyalties and identity formations have analogs in that period. They may be driving our interest in rethinking periods.
- RW: Of course, there is the whole tendency to identify the crucial break as occurring between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Some older historians saw the Renaissance coming to an end in the trial and suppression of Galileo; Foucault — unlike the older historians as he was — still argued for the emergence of a radically new episteme at exactly the same moment, in the writings of Descartes.
- JE: There is at least one other sense in which the decisive break has been said to come after the Renaissance, and that is the old chestnut of the North-South division, and how northern European art can be figured as modern, as more like our cultural situation.
- RW: There have been attempts to relate the modernism of northern Renaissance art to the emergence of certain capitalistic structures, such as the stock market.
- EMK: And the market as a whole, in fact.
- RW: I’m thinking of Matt’s own book on Bruegel, also the work of people like Elizabeth Honig and Charlotte Houghton.<sup>66</sup>
- MC: Some Italianists, meanwhile, are now trying to qualify the idea that it’s the role of the market that most usefully distinguishes the North from the South. There was a big conference five or six years ago on the art market in Renaissance Italy, and the topic is a significant part of the “Material Renaissance” project on which Sussex and other universities are collaborating.
- EMK: The markets in the North are really in vogue now. I am thinking of Filip Vermeulen’s work on Antwerp market in the sixteenth century, and Hans Van Migroet’s work on seventeenth-century aspects, in particular.<sup>67</sup>
- JE: Well, I think this may be a good time to stop, considering that these are all imponderable questions. At least it’s good that we aired large-scale questions regarding the Renaissance, which, possibly for important reasons, don’t usually get discussed. It may seem to other people that there are ways forward with this. I think that the more we subtract away contingencies, the more we end

up with pervasive structures of our understanding of history. It may be impossible to understand them, but it's also impossible to evade them.

John Paul McMahon [*question from the audience*]: Again, to the fact that there are no Italian scholars present. I want to ask the panel: Why do you think *normative* Renaissance historians have a fear of critical theory, postcolonial theory, poststructuralism? I see it as a fear; as a student, I encountered that. There's an opposition to any critical theory; if you put it into an essay on the Renaissance, you'll be marked off for it.

EMK: One answer is that theory subverts the centrality that they enjoy, and feel they should enjoy, and which is already under challenge.

SC: If it's a kind of historian who has done very hard-won, empirical research, they often feel that people who bring in critical strategies are just going for short cuts. "You haven't really done your homework," they'll think, or "You haven't really paid your dues."

EMK: It also has to do with institutional traditions; there are different ways of doing Renaissance studies. At many universities in Europe — the University of Ghent is famous for this — archival studies are a major part of writing a history dissertation. Now, to do archival studies in the Renaissance you have to invest a tremendous amount of time in learning the archive, learning to read the handwriting of the period, learning the language. It's not that these people are somehow lazy: they have just invested their intellectual activity in a very different enterprise, which requires a great deal of training and understanding. Younger scholars can feel quite put-upon with the need to learn a new discipline, a new set of ideas.

JPM: I think critical theory has its own archive as well.

EMK: That is exactly what I am saying.

JPM: There are archives in modernism, but they're different: the archive is the privileged possession of the Renaissance, and I think that's problematic.

SC: I don't think anyone would say that, do you?

MC: I suspect that most scholars who work in archives believe that what they are doing has an enduring value, and fear that theoretically-informed research will inevitably be ephemeral: as if questions will change but the facts will not. And as Stephen says, if you've paid your dues and learned to write things that people will read in thirty years, you don't want to give it up.

EMK: At least there's the illusion that people will. But I think it also has to do with a sense of empowerment. Critical theory tends to relativize, to call into question, many of the empowering concepts. You tend to find this resentment or reluctance to engage in critical theory mostly among people who are active in the center of a discipline. In a way critical theory subverts the centrality of their work.

MC: You could say that scholars who choose one or the other path are pursuing different kinds of power. Critical theory is empowering, but so is knowing information that other people don't. The archive also lets you undermine other scholars' assumptions and conclusions.

JE: I notice all these things we're saying are true of other fields within art history, but one of the things more particular to Renaissance studies, although not unique to it, is the absence on this panel of people from the countries of origin of the works under study. None of us — Matt and Claire included — comes from the part of the world that we study.

EMK: I referred to that obliquely when I said there was a kind of national interest in charting one's regional patrimony. North American scholars have very little of that to deal with.

JE: How disappointing. But really, of course, it's the hunger of the US for cultural patrimony, together with its economic capacity to find that patrimony (I mean that as a euphemism for imperialism), that accounts for the level of scholarship in the US. (We owe our good scholarship to imperialism.)

CF: At the base of this, there's a kind of either-or thinking: *either* I do archival work, *or* I engage in critical theory.

JPM: That's sad, that they can't work together.

CF: I agree; there should be more engagement so there's more openness and less fear.

JE: Stephen, you were saying something?

SC: Fredrika and I were just saying we think that it does happen.

FJ: It does, but not always, and it's not usually as bleak as the situation you're in. I can't imagine someone would mark you down for that.

JPM: I just think this is something that needs to be addressed in the book as a whole: there should be people who do only archival work, and people who mix it with critical interpretations, and people who work in museums. Those people have to be in the book if it's to be seen as a document that *does* question the Renaissance.

JE: It will. I'll just add that the composition of our panel today is to some degree luck, since it changed according to who could come and who couldn't. I hope that, as in other books in this series, we can be wholly inclusive. It's the shape of the whole field that interests me, not any one part.

Clare Guest [*question from the audience*]: There is also the question of the degree to which the question about the role and function of tradition in art history arises from questions about the role and function of tradition in the humanities in general. I would like to add that another possible reason for the antipathy to theory is that many of the questions identified with critical theory have appeared at other times in history, from the Sophists onward, or in late Scholasticism, and there is an awareness — or suspicion — that this historical awareness within some critical theory may be somewhat shallow.

JE: May I mention an acquaintance of mine, who died, as a great example? Michael Camille — his last book, *Master of Death*, has epigraphs that set medieval scholastic writers alongside Derrida and Blanchot. He was a wonderful person, and I should have mentioned him with Michael Baxandall as someone who bridged the gap without seeming — at least to many readers — to be an outlier.

CF: The question addresses very thoughtfully the question you raised, Jim, at the beginning of the afternoon, about the amnesia among historians of contemporary art. It should be taken up by people like Michael Camille as part of the tradition, as epistemological continuities.

JE: I think we may have reached a good place to end: a moment of reasonable optimism, open to the future, and also remembering someone from the past.

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<sup>1</sup> Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Needless to say this is just to telegraph a complex issue. See *Discovering Chinese Painting: Dialogues with Art Historians*, edited by Jason Kuo, with an Afterword by James Elkins (Dubuque IO: Kendall/Hunt, 2006). (First edition, 2000.)

<sup>3</sup> Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, Yve-Alain Bois, and Hal Foster, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> One example of a polemical figure in the field of Italian Renaissance would be Charles Hope, who is sometimes taken (especially by historians as distinct from art historians) as an

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example of a skeptical positivist challenge to received (or “Vasarian”) ideas as well as to the claims of theory and interpretation. Hope’s challenges tend to be limited to matters of fact (archival data, philology, and the technical analysis of works of art), and he generally refuses to engage with the philosophical grounding of much recent work in art history, the product of more than thirty years of intense reexamination of the status of interpretation in the humanities and social sciences which have closed down the possibility of a simple “appeal to the facts.” As a result Hope could be said to have marginalized himself as a critical voice, even while his scholarship (on Venetian painting, Mantegna, and Vasari) is exemplary, and central.

<sup>5</sup> Reprinted in this volume as one of the “Starting Points” essays.

<sup>6</sup> See Kavalier’s “Starting Points” essay in this volume.

<sup>7</sup> The material was eventually published as Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> For an English edition, see Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, “Centre and Periphery,” in *History of Italian Art*, edited by E. Bianchini and C. Dorey, translated by E. Bianchini, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), II, 29-113.

<sup>9</sup> Morton Steen Hansen, “ “, *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City* (Stephen Campbell, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) .

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Michael Cole, “Cellini’s Blood,” *Art Bulletin* 81 (1999 ): 216-35, and Stephen J. Campbell, “Bronzino’s *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence*: Counter Reformation Polemic and Mannerist Counter-Aesthetics,” *RES* 46 (2004): 99-121.

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- <sup>11</sup> Helen Hills, *Invisible City: The Architecture of Aristocratic Convents in Baroque Naples*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- <sup>12</sup> Gauvin Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America* (Toronto- Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999); and more recently, his textbook, *Art of Colonial Latin America* (London-New York: Phaidon, 2005).
- <sup>13</sup> Jeanette Peterson, *The Garden Paradise Murals of Malinalco: Utopia and Empire in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001).
- <sup>14</sup> Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
- <sup>15</sup> The essay is included in the “Starting Points” section in this volume.
- <sup>16</sup> Garnett and Rosser, “Translations of the Miraculous: Cult Images and their Representations in Early Modern Liguria,” in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, edited by Erik Thuno and Gerhard Wolf (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2004), 205-222.
- <sup>17</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Society*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990).
- <sup>18</sup> Hugo van der Velden, “Medici Votive Images and the Scope and Limits of Likeness” in *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, eds. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 126-37.
- <sup>19</sup> The establishment of the Accademia del Disegno and the stylistic perfection it sought to develop is obviously tied to this. See Karen-edis Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Discipline of Disegno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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- <sup>20</sup> For arguments to the effect that Renaissance thinkers understood even some of the most immaterial of images to have a “medium,” see Michael Cole, “The Demonic Arts and the Origin of the Medium,” *Art Bulletin* 84 (2002): 621-640.
- <sup>21</sup> I am thinking of Elizabeth Cropper, and her account of erotic response in “The Place of Beauty in the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art,” in *Place and Displacement in the Renaissance*, edited by A. Vos (Binghamton NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), which discusses an important area of “modern oblivion” that very much expands on what Freedberg (or indeed Steinberg) give us with regard to formations of sexuality and the erotic in works of art.
- <sup>22</sup> Elkins, *The Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- <sup>23</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, third edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 37.
- <sup>24</sup> [www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/artsince1900/](http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/artsince1900/).
- <sup>25</sup> Wallace Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948).
- <sup>26</sup> Mario Fanti, “Le postille carracesche alle Vite del Vasari: il testo originale,” *Il Carrobbio* 5 (1979): 148-64.
- <sup>27</sup> Xavier de Salas and Fernando Marias, *El Greco y el arte de su tiempo: las notas de El Greco a Vasari* (Madrid: Iberdrola, 1992).
- <sup>28</sup> See Walter S. Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander’s Schilder-Boeck* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), esp. xxi and 95-125. This reading of Van Mander was not uncontroversial: see the rather bitter review of Melion by Hessel Miedema in *Oud Holland* 107 (1993): 152-159.

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- <sup>29</sup> See Walter S. Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander's Schilder-Boeck* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991, 95-134, 143-59).
- <sup>30</sup> For some early revisionist responses, see *Documentary Culture: Florence and Rome from Grand-Duke Ferdinand I to Pope Alexander VII*; papers from a colloquium held at the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1990, edited by Elizabeth Cropper, Giovanna Perini, and Francesco Solinas (Bologna, 1992).
- <sup>31</sup> On this trend, see Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), especially 52-57, 68-88. The reference is to the German phrase, *Blut und Boden*, coined by Oswald Spengler.
- <sup>32</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). For a recent critique, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- <sup>33</sup> *Eye of the Lynx: Galileo, His Friends, and the Beginnings of Modern Natural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- <sup>34</sup> Belting, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1990), translated as *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- <sup>35</sup> Claire Farago and Donna Pierce, with additional contributions, *Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos in Between Worlds* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).
- <sup>36</sup> Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, second edition (Munich: W. Fink, 2002 [2001]).
- <sup>37</sup> Robert Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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- <sup>38</sup> Shortly after this roundtable, my book *The Cabinet of Eros* received a review (*Times Literary Supplement*, April 28, 2006) in which I was congratulated by a fellow art historian for reading through “heroic” quantities of “turgid Renaissance humanism.” The humanism being referred to was the work of Angelo Poliziano, Gian Gioviano Pontano and Baptista Mantuanus. If I were working in another field, and the review had applied the adjective “turgid” to, say, nineteenth century salon criticism, or to medieval theologians, or to any form of non western writing whatsoever, there would have been open warfare in the pages of the *TLS*. Latin humanism is still perceived as so institutionally enfranchised that we can openly vent our prejudices against it and expect broad agreement.
- <sup>39</sup> Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin’s Legacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
- <sup>40</sup> Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath, “Artists and Humanists”, *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (J. Kraye, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 161-88.
- <sup>41</sup> Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), argues that French poststructuralism is indebted to medieval studies and medieval ideas. A review by Bettina Bildhauer (*Times Literary Supplement*, April 14, 2006, p. 26), stresses the fact that Bataille in particular was influenced by Angela of Foligno as well as Aquinas.
- <sup>42</sup> See my brief discussion in my Introduction, “Reframing the Renaissance,” in *Reframing the Renaissance*, 9–12; and an excellent book that deserves to be better known, by Frances S. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics, 1725–1900* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).
- <sup>43</sup> Plenty on both sides in my *What Painting Is* (New York: Routledge, 1998), and “Four Ways of Measuring the Distance Between Alchemy and Contemporary Art,” *Hyle* 9 no. 1 (2003): 105–18.

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- <sup>44</sup> See, for instance, Hubertus Günther, “Die ersten Schritte in die Neuzeit: Gedanken zum Beginn der Renaissance nördlich der Alpen,” in *Wege zur Renaissance: Beobachtungen zu den Anfängen neuzeitlicher Kunstauffassung im Rheinland und den Nachbargebieten um 1500*, edited by Norbert Nussbaum, Claudia Euskirchen, and Stephan Hoppe (Cologne: SH-Verlag, 2003), 31-87, especially 49-60.
- <sup>45</sup> Williams, “Sticky Goo,” *Oxford Art Journal* 25 no. 1 (2002): 102.
- <sup>46</sup> Frank Fehrenbach, “Leonardo’s Point,” a lecture at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, May 28, 2006.
- <sup>47</sup> For a general discussion of paradox in the Renaissance, see Rosalie L. Colie, “*Paradoxia Epidemica*”: *The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966).
- <sup>48</sup> For a sampling of ways recent writers have approached the topic, see Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall, *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Thomas Crow, *The Intelligence of Art* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); James Elkins, *What Painting Is: How to Think about Oil Painting, Using the Language of Alchemy* (New York : Routledge, 1999); and Michael Cole, “Salt, Composition and the Goldsmith’s Intelligence,” in *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15-42.
- <sup>49</sup> Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); see also the interesting book by Pamela O. Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship: Technical Arts and the Culture of Knowledge from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

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- <sup>50</sup> Melville, "The Temptation of New Perspectives," *October* 52 (spring 1990): 3-15.
- <sup>51</sup> Clark, *Farewell to An Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). This and the following examples are discussed at length in my *Master Narratives and Their Discontents*, vol. 1 of *Theories of Modernism and Postmodernism in the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- <sup>52</sup> Stella, *Working Space* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).
- <sup>53</sup> Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- <sup>54</sup> Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1998).
- <sup>55</sup> On a "Renaissance art history without images," here's a list of significant books on Renaissance art from the past twenty years in which surviving works of art are not (or, are only very peripherally) discussed; and some of these books are not illustrated. In terms of authors this also could be described as a strange list of people: Karin-edis Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State. The Discipline of Disegno* (Cambridge, 2000); Richard Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300-1600* (Baltimore, 1993); Catherine Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis, 1997); David Summers, *The Judgement of Sense. Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge, 1987); Thomas Tuohy, *Herculean Ferrara. Ercole d'Este (1471-1505) and the Invention of a Ducal Capital* (Cambridge, 1996); Robert Williams, *Art, Theory and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy. From Techne to Metatechne* (Cambridge, 1997); Louis A. Waldmann, *Baccio Bandinelli and Art at the Medici Court: A Corpus of Early Modern Sources* (Philadelphia, 2004); Evelyn S. Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan* (New Haven and London, 1995). The disappearance of Renaissance

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art in scholarship ironically coincides with its disappearance from the public sphere, or rather its eclipsing by the ever more marketable figures of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Caravaggio. For instance, the Brooklyn Museum of Art owns an important collection of Renaissance paintings, but you will be lucky to see them if you go there. The new Gemäldegalerie in Berlin — a collection of Renaissance and baroque art equal in importance with the Louvre and the National gallery, London — is threatened with a very short life span. Currently more than 2,000 works are on display, but plans are afoot to put all but 200 “masterpieces” in storage, and to move these 200 to an area with more high density tourist traffic.

<sup>56</sup> Stella’s book is discussed in my “Abstraction’s Sense of History: Frank Stella’s *Working Space* Revisited,” *American Art* 7 no. 1 (winter 1993): 28–39.

<sup>57</sup> Bal, “Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture”, *Journal of Visual Culture* 2 no. 2 (2003) 5-31.

<sup>58</sup> I claim this in my *Why Art Our Pictures Puzzles? On the Modern Origins of Pictorial Complexity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Stephen’s paper in this book is one of the rare exceptions, although what Stephen goes on to do does not at all follow on from Didi-Huberman.

<sup>60</sup> Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997). On Didi-Huberman see my “Einige Gedanken über der Unbestimmtheit der Darstellung,” in *Das unendliche Kunstwerk: Von der Bestimmtheit des Unbestimmten in der ästhetischen Erfahrung*, edited by Gerhard Gramm and Eva Schürmann, forthcoming (2007).

<sup>61</sup> Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Sam Weber, *Institution and Interpretation*, expanded ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

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- 62 Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
- 63 My *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
- 64 See, for instance, Gustav René Hocke, *Die Welt als Labyrinth: Manier und Manie in der europäische Kunst von 1520-1650 und der Gegenwart* (Hamburg : Rohwolt, 1968).
- 65 See, for example, Philip Drew, *The Architecture of Arata Isozaki* (New York, 1982).
- 66 Kavalier, *Pieter Bruegel: Parables of Order and Enterprise* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1999); Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Houghton, “This was Tomorrow: Pieter Aertsen’s Meat Stall as Contemporary Art,” *Art Bulletin* 86 (2004): 277-300.
- 67 Filip Vermeulen, *Painting for the Market: Commercialization of Art in Antwerp’s Golden Age*, *Studies in European Urban History (1100-1800)* 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003); Neil de Marchi and Hans J. van Miegroet, “Art, Value, and Market Practices in the Netherlands in the Seventeenth Century,” *The Art Bulletin* 76 (1994), 451-64.