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Art History as Ethnography and as Social Analysis: A Review Essay

**ART HISTORY AS ETHNOGRAPHY
AND AS SOCIAL ANALYSIS:
A REVIEW ESSAY**

LARRY GROSS

A review essay of *Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy*. Michael Baxandall. Oxford University Press, 1972. 165 pp., illus. \$11.95 (cloth), \$3.50 (paper).

It is a reasonable proposition that anthropologists (and, certainly, the readers of this journal) need hardly be instructed by the truism that the study of a culture and of its art are mutually enriching enterprises. The history of ethnographic description and analysis is a continual reminder of the fact that an understanding of the artistic products of a culture can only arise on the basis of insight into the contexts and conditions which govern the articulation and interpretation of symbolic objects and events in that culture. Also well known (in theory if not as often in practice), is the corollary truth that an understanding of the artistic styles and patterns that characterize a given culture offers one of the clearest avenues to an understanding of the material and spiritual basis of that culture.

Granting this proposition, this review essay is motivated by two related considerations. The first is, quite simply, to expose to an audience that is mostly likely unfamiliar with it, a particularly fine example of what might be termed art historical ethnography. The second, more complex intention, is to suggest the necessity of such historical studies for the understanding of our own culture. Here, I am afraid, one can not be sanguine about the intuitive sophistication of anthropologists nor even, alas, of the readership of this journal. In fact, and this is an occasion for hope rather than lamentation, the birth of this journal is a reflection of the growing awareness on the part of many students of culture and communications that there are vital lessons to be learned through the careful investigation and elucidation of the infinite varieties of the human symbolic experience.

I will begin, however, with the first, and simpler task. One rather nice definition of the artistic process suggests that artists succeed in evoking appropriate responses by actions in which they:

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(1) employ symbols that have established emotional associations; (2) depict emotion-arousing events, persons, or supernatural entities; (3) enlist the spectator's vicarious participation in the artist's solution of his problems of design and technical execution; (4) employ particular combinations of line, mass, color, etc., that seem capable of arousing emotions in themselves [Stout 1971].

In listing these distinct, but not mutually exclusive procedures, Stout points out that anthropologists have rightly understood the importance of focusing on the first three as practically and theoretically prior to any attempt to deal with the fourth. As he also points out, an understanding of the first two requires a knowledge of the belief and value systems of a culture and the third requires a knowledge of its technical and material resources and limitations. These are cautions which few anthropologists have ignored. The history of art criticism and aesthetics, however, is replete with the work of those who took as their mission the delineation of the ways in which artists of many periods and persuasions can be molded to the Procrustean demands of various formalistic definitions of absolute aesthetic value. Needless to say, such efforts leave as their most valuable residue their exemplification of the values and beliefs of the historians' and critics' own time and place. Baxandall's more sophisticated endeavor represents precisely the sort of investigation advocated by Stout and embodied in the work of anthropologists from Boas (1927) onward.

Baxandall prefaces his work with the statement that the style of pictures is a proper material of social history:

"Social facts . . . lead to the development of distinctive skills and habits; and these visual skills and habits become identifiable elements in the painter's style."¹ The contribution of the book is in the demonstration of this thesis through the description and analysis of the economic, technical, and aesthetic contexts of fifteenth century Italian painting.

Baxandall begins by establishing a social and economic framework for an understanding of the period. ". . . In the 15th century painting was still too important to be left to the painters." This was a period in which artists and clients operated within institutions and conventions which were mutually understood and accepted much more than is the case in modern society. "The better sort of 15th century painting was made on a bespoke basis, the client asking for a manufacture after his own specifications."

This relationship between artist and client is ingeniously illustrated by Baxandall through a singularly interesting institution—contracts that were drawn up to signify the mutual obligations of the participants in these social exchanges:

Wednesday 3 August 1485:

At the chapel at S. Spirito seventy-eight florins fifteen soldi in payment of seventy-five florins in gold, paid to Sandro Botticelli on his reckoning, as follows—two florins for ultramarine, thirty-eight florins for gold and preparation of the panel, and thirty-five florins for his brush.

The two primary concerns of such contracts are represented here—the quality of the materials (in particular the gold leaf and the expensive blue pigments) and the skill and labor of the artist. Central to Baxandall's argument is the fact that during the course of the fifteenth century the second ingredient, that of the skill of the artist, came to be the dominant focus of the agreement. There are three inter-

related elements involved in this shift of emphasis but Baxandall chooses to discuss only two of these. The three elements I am referring to are (1) a "general shift away from gilt splendour" and the replacement of material conspicuous consumption by "an equally conspicuous consumption of something else—skill"; (2) a growing insistence upon obtaining this skill—embodied explicitly in the recognition of "the very great relative difference, in any manufacture, in the value of the master's and the assistants' time within each workshop," (e.g., "no painter shall put his hand to the brush other than Piero [della Francesca] himself."); and (3) a gradual alteration in the image and role of the painter from that of a craftsman and guild member to that of an original creative artist, an alteration "which corresponds to the desire of artists at this time to shake themselves free from the accusation of being merely craftsmen, manual labor being considered in the society of the Renaissance as ignoble as it had been in the Middle Ages" (Blunt 1940:54).

As a non-specialist I am unable to decide whether Baxandall's lack of attention to the third element referred to above represents a choice dictated by his interest in explicating "the customer's participation" in fifteenth century painting or if, in fact, as he occasionally suggests, he is rejecting what seems to be an accepted view of the changing role of the artist. In either case, however, it seems to me that the basic thrust of this "accepted view" provides relevant support for Baxandall's arguments in that it explicates the shift from an emphasis upon materials *and* labor to an emphasis upon the *special skill* of the artist.

In their discussion of the relationship between the Renaissance artist and his patron the Wittkowers note that a kind of stigma marked artists

as long as they, like craftsmen or journeymen, received daily or weekly wages or as long as their earnings depended on extraneous matters such as the amount of gold and azure used, the numbers of figures represented, the size of the work, and the time spent on it When people began to take cognizance of the difference between craftsmen and artists the old terms of regulating payments slowly broke down. There are clear indications to this effect in fifteenth century Florence A reflection of such discussions is to be found as early as the middle of the fifteenth century in the following passage from the pen of Archbishop St. Antonio of Florence (1389-1459): "Painters claim, more or less reasonably, to be paid for their art not only according to the amount of work involved, but rather according to the degree of their application and experience" [Wittkower and Wittkower 1963:22ff].

By the end of the fifteenth century the increased valuation of the artist's skill has gradually strengthened his hand in negotiating with clients and patrons: "The other obligations binding on the artist are defined more and more loosely and vaguely in the contracts" (Hauser 1957:59). As the Wittkowers put it, there was a *volte-face* in the relation between artist and patron, "and the patron then approached the artist as petitioner." The social and economic consequences of this turn of events is evidenced by the increasing importance of the best known and appreciated artists who could pick and choose their assignments to a much greater extent than had been previously possible,² and whose ability to command high fees soon raised their material and social standing well above the level of their less successful colleagues. "For the first time, there began to be

real differences in the payments made to artists" (Hauser 1957:61).

The emerging freedom of the important artist to choose his own tasks is a critical feature of the shift in focus from the *art* to the *artist* who creates works of "genius":

The fundamentally new element in the Renaissance conception of art is the discovery of the concept of genius, and the idea that the work of art is the creation of an autocratic personality, that this personality transcends tradition, theory and rules, even the work itself . . . (Hauser 1957:69).

We shall return to this point later. For the moment it will serve to underscore the centrality of the issue with which Baxandall is concerned—the ability of the fifteenth century viewer to respond sensitively to the skill of the artist as it is revealed in his work—for the increased appreciation for the skill of a master is based in the perception, discrimination and evaluation of the elements of skill in the performance of the artist.

In emphasizing the shift of concern from the material value of the gold leaf and other pigments to the less tangible value of the artist's skill Baxandall lands smack in the middle of his central thesis. For he argues that

a 15th century man looking at a picture was curiously on his mettle. He was aware that the good picture embodied skill and he was frequently assured that it was the part of the cultivated beholder to make discriminations about that skill, and sometimes to do so verbally.

In raising this issue Baxandall evokes a view of the aesthetic response to which I am particularly sympathetic, having claimed that "the most quintessentially human form of pleasure is that which derives from the exercise of creative and appreciative skills" (Gross 1973a). Moreover, his further analysis of the bases for the appreciative skill of the fifteenth century viewer provides comforting support for my contention that

Full appreciation of artistic performances involves sufficient knowledge of the code and the style to be able to infer correctly the implied meanings *and* to perceive and evaluate the skill of the artist in choosing, transforming and ordering elements in order to articulate and convey these meanings and emotions [Gross 1973b].

Beyond providing aid and comfort for my views, however, Baxandall succeeds in demonstrating a number of more important points.

First, he argues convincingly that the skills which were exercised and appreciated through the work of fifteenth century painters can be seen as natural extensions of the everyday technical and social skills of that society.³ Second, he raises the important caution that the continuities between Renaissance and modern Western visual cultures may blind us to many of the very aspects he is dealing with by making it "difficult to realize how much of our comprehension depends on what we bring to the picture." Third, he reminds us of the ever more critical discontinuities that separate us from the detailed iconographic and thematic sophistication which the fifteenth century artist could take for granted: "(Piero della Francesca) could depend on the beholder to recognize the Annunciation subject promptly enough for him to accent, vary and adjust it in rather advanced ways."⁴

The richness, variety and detail of Baxandall's analysis of the foundations of artistic style and skill in the visual habits

of the fifteenth century defy the constraints of this essay and tempt one to endless quotations. I will, therefore, limit myself to three examples of the ways in which he establishes the points I have mentioned:

(1) In addition to the rich and detailed iconography of themes and symbols alluded to above, the fifteenth century painter drew upon a shared knowledge of the meanings of movements and gestures drawn, in part, from dance and from the practices of preachers and orators. Many of these gestures were codified and formalized in contemporary documents ("whan thou spekest of a solempne mater to stand up ryghte with lytell mevyng of thy body, but poyntyng it with thy fore fynger," from an English source of the 1520s) and Baxandall shows how they were utilized by painters to articulate the figures in their work.

A relatively accessible instance is the secular gesture of invitation—the palm of the right hand is "slightly raised and the fingers are allowed to fan slightly downwards." This gesture can be clearly seen in Botticelli's *Primavera*: "The central figure of Venus is not beating time to the dance of the Graces but inviting us with hand and glance into her kingdom. We miss the point of the picture if we mistake the gesture."

(2) The second example more clearly illustrates the inter-penetration of the everyday visual skills and the artists' special skills. Here Baxandall brings in the mathematical and geometric skills that were central to fifteenth century commercial life: "It is an important fact of art history that commodities have come regularly in standard-sized containers only since the 19th century." Prior to that point it was a requirement of commercial transactions that one be able to gauge the volume of various containers with speed and accuracy, and the Italians did this "with geometry and *phi*."⁵ As Baxandall demonstrates, Quattrocento education laid particular emphasis on the training of certain mathematical and geometric skills that were suited to this task, and "this specialization constituted a disposition to address visual experience, in or out of pictures, in special ways; to attend to the structure of complex forms as combinations of regular geometrical bodies and as intervals comprehensible in series." The fact that the painter Piero della Francesca was the author of a mathematical handbook for merchants is only one of the facts Baxandall gives to support his view that "there is a continuity between the mathematical skills used by commercial people and those used by the painter to produce the pictorial proportionality and lucid solidity that strike us as so remarkable now."

(3) The two examples just given—the "language" of gestures and the visual assessment of shapes and volumes—are the sort of cultural conventions and skills that anthropologists are used to dealing with in their attempts to delineate the contexts and codes that underlie the artistic practices of preliterate cultures. Baxandall, however, is dealing with a highly literate society; one which was in the process of developing a body of critical terms and evaluative criteria for the description and assessment of the achievements of its artists. The last third of the book is devoted, therefore, to a discussion and analysis of these terms and of the meanings they held for Quattrocento artists and viewers. Many of these terms are still used in contemporary aesthetic analysis; however, as his discussion clearly establishes, we

cannot therefore assume a simple continuity of meaning—"Quattrocento intentions happened in Quattrocento terms, not in ours."

The value for us in understanding these terms is twofold. They have

the advantage of embodying in themselves the unity between the pictures and the society they emerged from. Some (of the terms) relate the public experience of pictures to what craftsmen were thinking about in the workshops: "perspective" or "design". Others relate public experience of pictures to experience of other sides of Quattrocento life: "devoutness" or "graciousness". And still others point to a force which was quietly changing the literate consciousness at this time.

The force that Baxandall is referring to raises the second point—the emergence of the classical system of literary criticism. This process, he notes, was "an important part of the lasting classicization of European culture in the Renaissance . . . experience was being re-categorized—through systems of words dividing it up in new ways—and so re-organized."

The primary vehicle Baxandall uses in this discussion of fifteenth century art criticism is the writings of Cristoforo Landino, "the best of the Quattrocento art critics—as opposed to art theorists." Landino was a scholar and a philosopher, a lecturer in poetry and rhetoric; and he was a friend of Alberti (the leading art theorist of the Quattrocento) and the translator of Pliny's *Natural History* which "includes . . . the fullest critical history of classical art to survive from antiquity." Landino's critical analyses reflect these influences.

He used not Pliny's terms, with their reference to a general culture very different from that of Florence in 1480, but the *method* of Pliny's terms. Like Pliny he used metaphors, whether of his own coinage or of his own culture, referring aspects of the pictorial style of his time to the social or literary style of his time—"prompt", "devout" and "ornate", for instance. Like Pliny too he uses terms from the artists' workshop, not so technical as to be unknown by the general reader, but yet carrying the painter's own authority—"design", "perspective" and "relief", for instance. These are the two methods of Landino's criticism.⁶

It is relevant to our earlier discussion of the emergence of the artist as an individual creator to note that the critical analyses cited by Baxandall tend to be in the form of evaluative descriptions of the work of specifically identified artists. The text from which Baxandall derives his examples of Landino's critical method and terminology is a short, patriotic introduction to his commentary on Dante, in which Landino praises and characterizes four Florentine painters (Masaccio, Filippo Lippi, Andrea del Castagno, Fra Angelico) *ad maiorem civitas gloriam*, as it were.

This last point brings me back to my opening statement of intentions. The first, that of suggesting the potential fascination of art historical ethnography, will have been amply realized if I have succeeded in conveying enough of the character of Baxandall's work to motivate the reader to discover how little justice I have done to its charm and richness.⁷ The second intention, as stated, was to suggest the importance of such studies for the understanding of our own culture. By this I mean more than the fact, important in itself, that Baxandall provides an example which might fruitfully be followed in describing and analyzing contemporary visual habits and artistic practices and styles.

Rather, I am concerned with the importance of understanding the artistic, epistemological, social, and psychological revolutions that characterize the shift in Western culture from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance as a critical step in achieving an understanding of the dynamics of modern industrial culture. Here I mean something more than the fairly obvious fact that history helps us to understand the present, for this isn't just any point in history, but in many ways a crucial turning point.

In a fascinating discussion of art and culture, Lévi-Strauss tries to bring his experience as an anthropologist to bear upon the relationship of art to Western culture:

An anthropologist would feel perfectly at ease, and on familiar ground, with Greek art before the 5th century B. C. and even with Italian painting, at least up to the time of the school of Siena. Where we might feel on less safe ground and might get an impression of strangeness would be with 5th century Greek art and Italian painting from the Quattrocento onwards . . . (It seems to me that the difference is related to facts of two quite different kinds: on the one hand, what might be called the individualization of artistic output and, on the other, its increasingly figurative or representational character . . . It seems to me that, in the so-called primitive arts, owing to the rather rudimentary technological skills of the people concerned, there is always a disparity between the technical means at the artist's disposal and the resistance of the materials he has to master, and this prevents him, as it were, even if his conscious intention were different—and more often than not it isn't—from turning the work of art into a straightforward copy. He can not, or does not wish to, reproduce his model in its entirety, and he is therefore obliged to suggest its *sign-value*. His art instead of being representational, is a system of signs. Yet on reflection, it seems quite clear that the two phenomena—the individualization of art on the one hand and the disappearance or diminution of the function of the work as a sign system on the other are functionally linked, and the reason for this is simple: for language to exist, there must be a group [quoted in Charbonnier 1969:57ff].

We have already noted the emergence of the artist as an individual aesthetic entrepreneur. It is important to see, however, that there is also a shift in the cultural notions of aesthetic achievement. The increasing emphasis on the skill of the artist which Baxandall documents did more than allow the more successful artists to become stars and to outshine their less skilled contemporaries as they cast a reflected glory on their age. It also focused the attention of the artists and of the public upon the role of the artist as formal innovator. "The change in the Renaissance attitude to classical art and literature is to be ascribed . . . to the transference of interest from the material content to the formal elements of representation" (Hauser 1957:74).

The goal of the artist is to observe nature and to represent it "objectively"—for the fifteenth century thought it possessed the means to apply the objectivity of science to the task of visual representation—"In the early Renaissance the truth of art is made dependent upon scientific criteria . . ." (Hauser 1957:75). The achievements in perspective, relief, coloring, etc., are seen as advances which allow artists to come closer to conformity with God's design as it is revealed in nature. Dürer writes:

Therefore observe (nature) industriously, conform to it, and do not deviate from it, thinking that you know how to find it better by yourself, for then you are misled. For truly art is in nature; whoever can distill it therefrom has it . . . Therefore never imagine that you could or should create something better than

God has given His created nature power to effect . . . For if it is against nature, then it is evil . . ." [Quoted in Huizinga 1959].

One of the consequences of this notion that artists should learn from science and nature is the notion that they have less to learn from other artists. In the sixteenth century Paggi claims that "art can very well be learned without a master because the foremost requirement for its study is a knowledge of theory, based on mathematics, geometry, arithmetic, philosophy and other noble sciences which can be gleaned from books" (Wittkower and Wittkower 1963:11). Leonardo asserted that artists must study nature, not art, lest they be the grandchildren rather than the children of nature.

Here we have the two elements that Lévi-Strauss identified as characterizing much of Western art since the Renaissance—the individualization of the artist and the definition of his goal as that of achieving an objective representation of nature.

A prime corollary of this view, however, is the loss of the symbolic role of art:

By freeing art from the chains of convention and harnessing it to the bandwagon of science, Western culture lost the means by which it could maintain the integrity of the iconic mode, and abdicated responsibility for the cultivation of one of the most important symbolic modes . . . The identification of art with objective truth carried with it the peculiar Western concept of progress and cumulative cultural evolution; a concept which legitimates innovation and change as inherently valuable, in contrast with cultures in which the new and non-traditional is illegitimate by definition. The justification for this alteration in the basis of aesthetic evaluation lay in the assumption that the task of the artist was to obey the laws of nature and that, as with science and technology, the arts would come steadily closer to perfect truth. Change, therefore, was the essential embodiment of progress. To require art to obey past or even existing conventions would be to doom it to stagnation and failure [Gross 1974].

The artist comes to be seen, like the scientist, as a lone explorer going up against nature and prying out the secret hidden in her deepest recesses. But then, to the extent that he succeeds he does so by overcoming and rejecting the errors of the past. So that, even when artists abandoned the goal of mimetic fidelity in favor of other concepts of the true insight into the nature of artistic vision and its representation, the culture was left with a fixed belief in the innovative originality of the creative genius. The conditions that characterize the relationship of the modern artist to his culture are those of inevitable dislocation and alienation as he attempts to overcome what he has been told, in effect, to view as the limitations of the past.

Paggi's views are echoed 350 years later by Courbet in his opposition to the teaching of art in the academy:

I cannot teach my art, nor the art of any school, since I deny that art can be taught, or as I maintain, in other words, that art is strictly individual and is for each artist precisely the talent resulting from his own inspiration and from his own studies of tradition [Gauss 1949].

The modern artist expects to be misunderstood by his culture, it is the proof of his success in going beyond the achievements of the past and the present. Stendhal was perhaps prototypical in his correct prediction in 1830 that his work would not be read before 1880 nor appreciated before 1935. But this is a heavy price to pay.

We would never manage to understand each other if, within our society, we formed a series of coteries, each one of which had

its own particular language, or if we allowed constant changes and revolutions to take place in language, like those that we have been able to observe now for a number of years in the fine arts . . . [We] are left with nothing but a system of signs, but "outside language" since the sign-system is created by a single individual, and he is liable to change his own system fairly frequently [Lévi-Strauss, in Charbonnier 1969].

Whatever the valuable and positive consequences of these (and other) shifts in Western epistemology—and there are many undeniable spiritual, social and material benefits that have derived from them—it is, I believe, equally clear that they have played a major role in laying the foundations for the growing alienation of modern culture from the symbolic skills which enrich and nourish the arts and which used to bind the artist and his audience in a net of shared meanings and evaluative criteria.

Clearly, this is not an appropriate context for the full elaboration or substantiation of such a broad and possibly controversial generalization. In part I have attempted this elsewhere (Gross 1974). I would like to conclude this essay by suggesting that the line of reasoning that I am proposing is one which argues that the very sort of common understanding and shared knowledge of skills, conventions and meanings that Baxandall so delightfully describes as characterizing the relationship between the Quattrocento painter and his audience is precisely the kind of cultural richness and spiritual satisfaction that is unavailable to the members of our modern industrial societies. The effort to understand, investigate and describe the reasons for this is, I believe, a central moral obligation for those of us who are concerned with the potential and the realities of human symbolic skills and achievements. This effort can be crucially aided by detailed analyses of the richness and complexity represented in Baxandall's book; but we will be fulfilling that obligation only when we can bring such knowledge and such analytic skills to bear upon our own culture.

NOTES

¹Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from Baxandall.

²In the memoirs of a contemporary of Cosimo de Medici it is noted that Cosimo appreciated the work of Donatello and, "as it seemed to him, that there was little work available for the latter and as he was sorry that Donatello should remain inactive, he entrusted him with the pulpits and doors of the sacristy in San Lorenzo" (quoted in Hauser 1957:44). In 1438 Domenico Veneziano wrote to Cosimo's son, Piero: "I have just heard that Cosimo has resolved to commission . . . an altarpiece, and that he desires a magnificent work. This pleases me much, and it would please me even more if it would, with your help be possible for me to paint it" (quoted in Wittkower and Wittkower 1963:34). In 1501, the Marchioness Isabella d'Este, an important collector, wrote to the Carmelite Vicar-General of Florence: "Your Reverence might find out if (Leonardo) would undertake to paint a picture for our studio. If he consents, we would leave the subject and the time to him; but if he declines, you might at least induce him to paint a little picture of the Madonna, as sweet and holy as his own nature" (Wittkower and Wittkower 1963:35). She never got her picture.

³This is a point which holds considerable relevance to and support for Lomax' recent discussion of the relationship between the work and social organization patterns and the styles of song and dance in many cultures (1959, 1962, 1972). It is also an approach which is clearly resonate with Boas' pioneering studies of primitive art: "The very fact that the manufactures of man in each and every part of the world have pronounced style proves that a feeling for form develops with technical activities. There is nothing to show that the mere

contemplation of nature or of natural objects develops a sense of fixed form . . . Without stability of form of objects, manufactured or in common use, there is no style; and stability of form depends upon the development of a high technique . . . The manufactures of man the world over prove that the ideal forms are based essentially on standards developed by expert technicians." (1927:11f) Boas states his belief that "there is a close connection between the development of skill in an industry and artistic activity. Ornamental art has developed in those industries in which the greatest skill is attained. Artistic productivity and skill are closely correlated. Productive artists are found among those who have mastered a technique . . . aside from all adventitious form elements, the product of an experienced worker in any handicraft has an artistic value" (1927:19).

The difference between the approaches of Baxandall and Boas, and it is not unimportant, lies in the fact that Boas was mainly concerned with the tendency for aesthetic considerations to become central to the manufacture of utilitarian implements, whereas Baxandall is discussing the generalization or spill-over of technical and commercial skills into the creation and appreciation of specifically artistic products. This is not to imply that Boas was unaware of the existence of "non-utilitarian" art objects, nor even that he fails to discuss their manufacture, but rather to suggest the complementarity as well as the parallel aspects of Baxandall's analysis.

⁴... if one did not know about the Annunciation it would be difficult to know quite what was happening in Piero's painting; as a critic once pointed out, if all Christian knowledge were lost, a person could well suppose that both figures, the Angel Gabriel and Mary, were directing their attention to the column . . . In this case, Mary's stance frontal to us serves various purposes: first, it is a device Piero uses to induce participation by the beholder; second, it counters on this occasion the fact that its position in the chapel at Arezzo causes the beholder to see the fresco rather from the right; third, it helps to register a particular moment in Mary's story, a moment of reserve towards the Angel previous to her final submission to her destiny. For fifteenth-century people differentiated more sharply than us between successive stages of the Annunciation, and the sort of nuance we now miss in Quattrocento representations is one of the things that will have to engage us later."

⁵From a mathematical handbook for merchants by Piero della Francesca: "There is a barrel, each of its ends being 2 bracci in diameter; the diameter at its bung is $2\frac{1}{4}$ bracci and halfway between bung and end is $2\frac{2}{9}$ bracci. The barrel is 2 bracci long. What is the cubic measure? This is like a pair of truncated cones. Square the diameter at the ends: $2 \times 2 = 4$. Then square the median diameter $2\frac{2}{9} \times 2\frac{2}{9} = 4\frac{76}{81}$. Add them together: $8\frac{76}{81}$. Multiply $2 \times 2\frac{2}{9} = 4\frac{4}{9}$. Add this to $8\frac{76}{81} = 13\frac{31}{81}$. Divide by $3 = 4\frac{112}{243}$ Now square $2\frac{1}{4} = 2\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4} = 5\frac{1}{16}$. Add it to the square of the median diameter: $5\frac{1}{16} + 4\frac{76}{81} = 10\frac{1}{129}$. Multiply $2\frac{2}{9} \times 2\frac{1}{4} = 5$. Add this to the previous sum: $15\frac{1}{129}$. Divide by 3: $5\frac{1}{3888}$. Add it to the first result: $4\frac{112}{243} + 5\frac{1}{3888} = 9\frac{1792}{3888}$. Multiply this by 11 and then divide by 14 (i.e., multiply by *phi*): the final result is $7\frac{23600}{54432}$. This is the cubic measure of the barrel." "To the commercial man almost anything was reducible to geometrical figures underlying any surface irregularities—the pile of grain reduced to a cone, the barrel to a cylinder or to a compound of truncated cones . . . and so on. This habit of analysis is very close to the painter's analysis of appearances. As a man gauged a bale, a painter surveyed a figure. In both cases there is a conscious reduction of irregular masses and voids to combinations of manageable geometric bodies. A painter who left traces of such analysis in his painting was leaving cues his public was well equipped to pick up."

⁶An interesting example is Landino's use of the term composition: "Composition, in the sense of a systematic harmonization of every element in a picture towards one total desired effect, was invented by Alberti in 1435: it is from him that Landino takes the concept. Alberti found his model in the classic literary criticism of the humanists, for whom *compositio* was the way in which a sentence was made up, with a hierarchy of four levels: (word/phrase/clause/sentence). Alberti transferred the word and model to painting: (plane/member/body/picture). Pictures are composed of bodies, which are composed of parts, which are composed of plane surfaces: planes are composed into members, members into bodies, bodies into pictures. With this notion the Quattrocento could analyse the

make-up of a picture very thoroughly, scrutinizing its articulation, rejecting the superfluous, relating formal means to narrative ends."

⁷For readers with an appetite for primary source "ethnographic" data, some good sources are: D. S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance*, University of South Carolina Press, 1971 (available in paperback and probably the best available source in English); C. Seymour, Jr., *Michelangelo's David*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967 (extensive documentation dealing primarily with the dealings of Donatello and Michelangelo with the Opera of the Duomo of Florence, and a fascinating record of public hearings on the question of where the David should be displayed); for those with access to more extensive libraries than those of the University of Pennsylvania, two studies I have been unable to locate seem to be unusually interesting—M. Wackernagel, *Der Lebensraum des Kunstlers in der Florentinischen Renaissance*, Leipzig, 1938; and H. Lerner-Lehkmuhl, *Zur Struktur und Geschichte des Florentinischen Kunstmarktes*, Wattenscheid, 1936.

For readers with an interest in the philosophical and epistemological currents of the period, particularly as they relate to aesthetic practices and criteria, I would strongly recommend Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (Random House, 1965) and Cassirer's *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (Harper Torchbooks, 1964), as well as many of Gombrich's papers on the Renaissance (e.g., *Norm and Form*, Phaidon, 1966).

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