PAINTING AND EXPERIENCE IN FIFTEENTH CENTURY ITALY

A primer in the social history of pictorial style

SECOND EDITION

Michael Baxandall
Preface to the Second Edition

The main change in this edition is that the original Italian or Latin of passages previously given only in English translation has been included under Texts and References. Such errors as I am aware of have been corrected, and among those to whom I am grateful for pointing out errors are Maria Pia and Piergiorgio Dragone, the translators and editors of the augmented Italian edition (Einaudi, Turin, 1978), who scrutinised references and transcriptions; Michael Bury, who spotted a bad reading in the Italian of Giovanni Santi's poem; Martin Kemp, who objected to there being turkeys—as opposed to guinea-fowl—in Mantua well before the discovery of America; John White, who noted that the top of Niccolò da Tolentino's hat in Plate 49 is properly read as rectangular rather than polygonal; and Richard Wollheim, who found no ultramarine where I had in the old Plate 4, which is now replaced. In a few cases I have updated bibliographical references.

Preface to the First Edition

This essay grew out of some lectures given in the history school of the University of London. The lectures were meant to show how the style of pictures is a proper material of social history. Social facts, I argued, lead to the development of distinctive visual skills and habits: and these visual skills and habits become identifiable elements in the painter's style. With some complications the same argument underlies this book. It is therefore addressed to people with a general historical curiosity about the Renaissance rather than to people interested just in Renaissance painting, who might well find it insensitive and frightly by turns. This is not a way of saying I think it vacuous as art history.

The first chapter looks at the structure of the fifteenth-century picture trade—through contracts, letters and accounts—to find an economic basis for the cult of pictorial skill. The second chapter explains how the visual skills evolved in the daily life of a society become a determining part in the painter's style, and it finds examples of these vernacular visual skills uniting the pictures and the social, religious and commercial life of the time. This involves relating the style of painting to experience of such activities as preaching, dancing and gauging barrels. The third chapter assembles a basic fifteenth-century equipment for looking at fifteenth-century pictures: it examines and illustrates sixteen concepts used by the best lay critic of painting in the period, Cristoforo Landino, in his description of Masaccio, Filippo Lippi, Andrea del Castagno and Fra Angelico. The book ends by pointing out that social history and art history are continuous, each offering necessary insights into the other.
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I. Conditions of trade

1. A FIFTEENTH-CENTURY painting is the deposit of a social relationship. On one side there was a painter who made the picture, or at least supervised its making. On the other side there was somebody else who asked him to make it, provided funds for him to make it and, after he had made it, reckoned on using it in some way or other. Both parties worked within institutions and conventions—commercial, religious, perceptual, in the widest sense social—that were different from ours and influenced the forms of what they together made.

The man who asked for, paid for, and found a use for the painting might be called the patron, except that this is a term that carries many overtones from other and rather different situations. This second party is an active, determining and not necessarily benevolent agent in the transaction of which the painting is the result: we can fairly call him a client. The better sort of fifteenth-century painting was made on a bespoke basis, the client asking for a manufacture after his own specifications. Ready-made pictures were limited to such things as run-of-the-mill Madonnas and marriage chests painted by the less sought after artists in slack periods; the altar-pieces and frescoes that most interest us were done to order, and the client and the artist commonly entered into a legal agreement in which the latter committed himself to delivering what the former, with a greater or lesser amount of detail, had laid down.

The client paid for the work, then as now, but he allotted his funds in a fifteenth-century way and this could affect the character of the paintings. The relationship of which the painting is the deposit was among other things a commercial relationship, and some of the economic practices of the period are quite concretely embodied in the paintings. Money is very important in the history of art. It acts on painting not only in the matter of a client being willing to spend money on a work, but in the details of how he hands it over. A client like Borso d'Este, the Duke of Ferrara, who makes a point of paying for his paintings by the square foot—for the frescoes in the Palazzo Schifanoia Borso's rate was ten Bolognese lire for the square pede—will tend to get a different
sort of painting from a commercially more refined man like the Florentine merchant Giovanni de' Bardi who pays the painter for his materials and his time. Fifteenth-century modes of costing manufactures, and fifteenth-century differential payments of masters and journeymen, are both deeply involved in the style of the paintings as we see them now: paintings are among other things fossils of economic life.

And again, pictures were designed for the client's use. It is not very profitable to speculate about individual clients' motives in commissioning pictures: each man's motives are mixed and the mixture is a little different in each case. One active employer of painters, the Florentine merchant Giovanni Rucellai, noted he had in his house works by Domenico Veneziano, Filippo Lippi, Verrocchio, Pollaiuolo, Andrea del Castagno and Paolo Uccello—along with those of a number of goldsmiths and sculptors—the best masters there have been for a long time not only in Florence but in Italy. His satisfaction about personally owning what is good is obvious. Elsewhere, speaking now more of his very large expenditure on building and decorating churches and houses, Rucellai suggests three more motives: these things give him 'the greatest contentment and the greatest pleasure because they serve the glory of God, the honour of the city, and the commemoration of myself.' In varying degrees these must have been powerful motives in many painting commissions; an altarpiece in a church or a fresco cycle in a chapel certainly served all three. And then Rucellai introduces a fifth motive: buying such things is an outlet for the pleasure and virtue of spending money well, a pleasure greater than the admittedly substantial one of making money: it is a less whimsical remark than it seems at first. For a conspicuously wealthy man, particularly someone like Rucellai who had made money by charging interest, by usury indeed, spending money on such public amenities as churches and works of art was a necessary virtue and pleasure, an expected repayment to society, something between a charitable donation and the payment of taxes or church dues. As such gestures went, one is bound to say, a painting had the advantage of being both noticeable and cheap: bells, marble paving, brocade hangings or other such gifts to a church were more expensive. Finally, there is a sixth motive which Rucellai—a man whose descriptions of things and whose record as a builder are not those of a visually insensitive person—does not mention but which one is ready to attribute to him, an element of enjoyment in looking at good paintings; in another context he might not have been shy of speaking about this.

The pleasure of possession, an active piety, civic consciousness of one or another kind, self-commemoration and perhaps self-advertisement, the rich man's necessary virtue and pleasure of reparation, a taste for pictures: in fact, the client need not analyse his own motives much because he generally worked through institutional forms—the altarpiece, the frescoed family chapel, the Madonna in the bedroom, the cultured wall-furniture in the study—which implicitly rationalised his motives for him, usually in quite flattering ways, and also went far towards briefing the painter on what was needed. And anyway for our purpose it is usually enough to know the obvious, that the primary use of the picture was for looking at: they were designed for the client and people he esteemed to look at, with a view to receiving pleasing and memorable and even profitable stimulations.

These are all points this book will return to. For the moment, the one general point to be insisted on is that in the fifteenth century painting was still too important to be left to the painters. The picture trade was a quite different thing from that in our own late romantic condition, in which painters paint what they think best and then look round for a buyer. We buy our pictures ready-made now; this need not be a matter of our having more respect for the artist's individual talent than fifteenth-century people like Giovanni Rucellai did, so much as of our living in a different sort of commercial society. The pattern of the picture trade tends to assimilate itself to that of more substantial manufactures: post-romantic is also post-Industrial Revolution, and most of us now buy our furniture ready-made too. The fifteenth century was a period of bespoke painting, however, and this book is about the customer's participation in it.

2. In 1457 Filippo Lippi painted a triptych for Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici; it was intended as a gift to King Alfonso V of Naples, a minor ploy in Medici diplomacy. Filippo Lippi worked in Florence, Giovanni was sometimes out of the city, and Filippo tried to keep in touch by letter:

I have done what you told me on the painting, and applied myself scrupulously to each thing. The figure of St. Michael is now so near finishing that, since his armour is to be of silver and gold and his other garments too, I have been to see Bartolommeo Montelli; he said that Filippo tried to keep in touch by letter:

I have done what you told me on the painting, and applied myself scrupulously to each thing. The figure of St. Michael is now so near finishing that, since his armour is to be of silver and gold and his other garments too, I have been to see Bartolommeo Montelli; he said that I should do exactly what you wish. And he chided me, making out that I should do exactly what you wish. And he chided me, making out that I should have wronged you.
Now, Giovanni, I am altogether your servant here, and shall be so in deed. I have had fourteen florins from you, and I wrote to you that my expenses would come to thirty florins, and it comes to that much because the picture is rich in its ornament. I beg you to arrange with Martelli to be your agent in this work, and if I need something to speed the work along, I may go to him and it will be seen to.

If you agree to give me sixty florins to include materials, gold, gilding and painting, with Bartolomeo acting as I suggest, I will for my part, so as to cause you less trouble, have the picture finished completely by 20 August, with Bartolomeo as my guarantor. And to keep you informed, I send a drawing of how the triptych is made of wood, with its height and breadth. Out of friendship to you I do not want to take more than the labour costs of 100 florins for this: I ask no more. I beg you to reply, because I am languishing here and want to leave Florence when I am finished. If I have presumed too much in writing to you, forgive me; I shall always do what you want in every respect, great and small.

Valcute. 20 July 1457.
Fra Filippo the painter, in Florence.

Underneath the letter Filippo Lippi provided a sketch of the triptych as planned (plate 1). Left to right, he sketched a St. Bernard, an Adoration of the Child, and a St. Michael; the frame of the altarpiece, the point about which he is particularly asking approval, is drawn in a more finished way.

A distinction between 'public' and 'private' does not fit the functions of fifteenth-century painting very well. Private men's commissions often had very public roles, often in public places: an altarpiece or a fresco cycle in the side-chapel of a church is not private in any useful sense. A more relevant distinction is between commissions controlled by large corporate institutions like the offices of cathedral works and commissions from individual men or small groups of people: collective or communal undertakings on the one hand, personal initiatives on the other. The painter was typically, though not invariably, employed and controlled by an individual or small group.

It is important that this should have been so, because it means that he was usually exposed to a fairly direct relationship with a lay client—a private citizen, or the prior of a confraternity or monastery, or a prince, or a prince's officer; even in the most complex cases the painter normally worked for somebody identifiable, who had initiated the work, chosen an artist, had an end in view, and saw the picture through to completion. In this he differed from the sculptor, who often worked for large communal enterprises—as Donatello worked so long for the Wool Guild's administration of the Cathedral works in Florence—where lay control was less personal and probably very much less complete. The painter was more exposed than the sculptor, though in the nature of things clients' day-to-day interference is not usually recorded; Filippo Lippi's letter to Giovanni de' Medici is one of rather few cases where one can clearly sense the weight of the client's hand. But in what areas of the art did the client directly intervene?

There is a class of formal documents recording the bare bones of the relationship from which a painting came, written agreements about the main contractual obligations of each party. Several hundred of these survive, though the greater part refer to paintings that are now lost. Some are full-dress contracts drawn up by a notary, others are less elaborate ricordi, memoranda to be held by each side: the latter have less notarial rhetoric but still had some contractual weight. Both tended to the same range of clauses.

There are no completely typical contracts because there was no fixed form, even within one town. One agreement less untypical than many was between the Florentine painter, Domenico
Ghirlandaio, and the Prior of the Spedale degli Innocenti at Florence; it is the contract for the *Adoration of the Magi* (1488) still at the Spedale (plate 2):

Be it known and manifest to whoever sees or reads this document that, at the request of the reverend Messer Francesco di Giovanni Tesori, presently Prior of the Spedale degli Innocenti at Florence, and of Domenico di Tomaso di Curado (Ghirlandaio), painter, I, Fra Bernardino di Francesco of Florence, Jesuit Brother, have drawn up this document with my own hand as agreement contract and commission for an altar panel to go in the church of the above said Spedale degli Innocenti with the agreements and stipulations stated below, namely:

That this day 23 October 1485 the said Francesco commits and entrusts to the said Domenico the painting of a panel which the said Francesco has had made and has provided; the which panel the said Domenico is to make good, that is, pay for; and he is to colour and paint the said panel all with his own hand in the manner shown in a drawing on paper with those figures and in that manner shown in it, in every particular according to what I, Fra Bernardino, think best; not departing from the manner and composition of the said drawing; and he must colour the panel at his own expense with good colours and with powdered gold on such ornaments as demand it; with any other expense incurred on the same panel, and the blue must be ultramarine of the value about four florins the ounce; and he must have made and delivered complete the said panel within thirty months from today; and he must receive as the price of the panel as here described (made at his, that is, the said Domenico’s expense throughout) 115 large florins if it seems to me, the above said Fra Bernardino, that it is worth it; and I can go to whoever I think best for an opinion on its value or workmanship, and if it does not seem to me worth the stated price, he shall receive as much less as I, Fra Bernardino, think right; and he must within the terms of the agreement paint the predella of the said panel as I, Fra Bernardino, think good; and he shall receive payment as follows—the said Messer Francesco must give the above said Domenico three large florins every month, starting from 1 November 1485 and continuing after as is stated, every month three large florins.

And if Domenico has not delivered the panel within the above said period of time, he will be liable to a penalty of fifteen large florins; and correspondingly if Messer Francesco does not keep to the above said monthly payments he will be liable to a penalty of the whole amount, that is, once the panel is finished he will have to pay complete and in full the balance of the sum due.

Both parties sign the agreement.

This contract contains the three main themes of such agreements: (i) it specifies what the painter is to paint, in this case through his commitment to an agreed drawing; (ii) it is explicit
about how and when the client is to pay, and when the painter
is to deliver; (iii) it insists on the painter using a good quality of
colours, specially gold and ultramarine. Details and exactness
varied from contract to contract.

Instructions about the subject of a picture do not often go
into great detail. A few contracts enumerate the individual
figures to be represented, but the commitment to a drawing is
more usual and was clearly more effective: words do not lend
themselves to very clear indication of the sorts of figure wanted.
The commitment was usually a serious one. Fra Angelico's
altarpiece of 1433 for the Linen-maker's Guild at Florence was
of this kind (plate 3); in view of the sanctity of his life the
matter of price was exceptionally entrusted to his conscience—
190 florins or however much less he considers proper—but,
sainthood only trusted so far, he is bound not to deviate from
his drawing. Around the drawing there would have been dis-
cussion between the two sides. In 1469 Pietro Calzetta contracted
to paint frescoes in the Gattamelata chapel of S. Antonio at
Padua, and the stages by which agreement would be reached are
clearly stated in the contract. The donor's representative,
Antonfrancesco de' Dotti, is to state the subjects to be painted;
Calzetta will agree to these subjects; he will produce a design
(designum cum fantasia seu historia) and give it to Antonfrancesco;
on the basis of this Antonfrancesco will give further instructions
on the painting and finally decide whether the finished product
is acceptable. If there was difficulty in describing the sort of
finish wanted, this could often be done by reference to another
picture: for example, Neri di Bicci of Florence undertook in
1454 to colour and finish an altarpiece in S. Trinità after the
same fashion as the altarpiece he had made for a Carlo Benzi in
S. Felicita in 1453.

Payment was usually in the form of one inclusive sum paid in
instalments, as in Ghirlandaiò's case, but sometimes the painter's
expenses were distinguished from his labour. A client might
provide the costlier pigments and pay the painter for his time
and skill: when Filippino Lippi painted the life of St. Thomas in
S. Maria sopra Minerva at Rome (1488-93) Cardinal Caraffa
gave him 2,000 ducats for his personal part and paid for his
assistants and the ultramarine separately. In any case the two
headings of expenses and of the painter's labour were the basis
for calculating payment: as Neri de Bicci noted, he was paid 'for
gold and for applying it and for colours and for my workman-
ship.' The sum agreed in a contract was not quite inflexible, and
if a painter found himself making a loss on a contract he could usually renegotiate. In the event Ghirlandaio, who had undertaken to provide a predella for the Innocenti altarpiece under the original 115 florins, got a supplementary seven florins for this. If the painter and client could not agree on the final sum, professional painters could act as arbitrators, but usually matters did not come to this point.

Ghirlandaio's contract insists on the painter using a good quality of colours and particularly of ultramarine. The contracts' general anxiety about the quality of blue pigment as well as of gold was reasonable. After gold and silver, ultramarine was the most expensive and difficult colour the painter used. There were cheap and dear grades and there were even cheaper substitutes, generally referred to as German blue. (Ultramarine was made from powdered lapis lazuli expensively imported from the Levant; the powder was soaked several times to draw off the colour and the first yield—a rich violet blue—was the best and most expensive. German blue was just carbonate of copper; it was less splendid in its colour and, much more seriously, unstable in use, particularly in fresco.) To avoid being let down about blues, clients specified ultramarine; more prudent clients stipulated a particular grade—ultramarine at one or two or four florins an ounce. The painters and their public were alert to all this and the exotic and dangerous character of ultramarine was a means of accent that we, for whom dark blue is probably no more striking than scarlet or vermilion, are liable to miss. We can follow when it is used simply to pick out the principal figure of Christ or Mary in a biblical scene, but the interesting uses are more subtle than this. In Sassettas panel of St. Francis Giving his Cloak to a Poor Soldier (plate 4) the gown St. Francis gives away is an ultramarine gown. In Masaccio's expensively pigmented Crucifixion, the vital narrative gesture of St. John's right arm is an ultramarine gesture. And so on. Even beyond this the contracts point to a sophistication about blues, a capacity to discriminate between one and another, with which our own culture does not equip us. In 1408 Gherardo Starnina contracted to paint in S. Stefano at Empoli frescoes, now lost, of the Life of the Virgin. The contract is meticulous about blue: the ultramarine used for Mary is to be of the quality of two florins to the ounce, while for the rest of the picture ultramarine at one florin to the ounce will do. Importance is registered with a violet tinge.

Of course, not all artists worked within institutions of this kind; in particular, some artists worked for princes who paid them a
salary. Mantegna, who worked from 1460 until his death in 1506 for the Gonzaga Marquises of Mantua, is well-documented case and Lodovico Gonzaga’s offer to him in April 1498 is very clear: ‘I intend to give you fifteen ducats monthly as salary, to provide lodgings where you can live comfortably with your family, to give you enough grain each year to cover generously the feeding of six mouths, and also the firewood you need for your own use...’ Mantegna, after much hesitation, accepted and in return for his salary not only painted frescoes and panels for the Gonzagas (plate 5), but filled other functions as well. 

Lodovico Gonzaga to Mantegna, 1498:

I desire that you see to drawing two guinea-fowl from the life, one cock and one hen, and send them to me here, since I want to have them woven by my tapestries: you can have a look at the guinea-fowl in the garden at Mantua.

Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga to Lodovico Gonzaga, 1472:

I beg you to order Andrea Mantegna...to come and stay with me (at Foligno). With him I shall entertain myself by showing him my engraved gems, figures of bronze and other fine antiques; we will study and discuss them together.

Duke of Milan to Federico Gonzaga, 1480:

I am sending you some designs for pictures which I beg you to have painted by your Andrea Mantegna, the famous painter...

Federico Gonzaga to Duke of Milan, 1480:

I received the design you sent and urged Andrea Mantegna to turn it into a finished form. He says it is more a book illuminator’s job than his, because he is not used to painting little figures. He would do much better a Madonna or something, a foot or a foot and half long, say, if you are willing...

Lancillotto de Andreas to Federico Gonzaga, 1483:

I have bargained with the goldsmith Gian Marco Cavalli about making the bowls and beakers after Andrea Mantegna’s design. Gian Marco asks three lire, ten soldi for the bowls and one and a half lire for the beakers...I am sending you the design made by Mantegna for the flask, so that you can judge the shape before it is begun.

In practice Mantegna’s position was not quite as tidy as Gonzaga’s offer proposed. His salary was not always regularly paid; on the other hand, he was given occasional privileges and gifts of land...
or money, and fees from outside patrons. But Mantegna's position was unusual among the great Quattrocento painters; even those who produced paintings for princes were more commonly paid for a piece of work than as permanent salaried retainers. It was the commercial practice expounded in the contracts, and seen at its clearest in Florence, that set the tone of Quattrocento patronage.

To return to the contracts, though one can generalize this far about them, their details vary a great deal from case to case; and, what is more interesting, there are gradual changes of emphasis in the course of the century. What was very important in 1410 was sometimes less important in 1490: what 1410 had not specially concerned itself with sometimes demanded an explicit commitment in 1490. Two of these shifts of emphasis—one towards less insistence, the other towards more—are very important, and one of the keys to the Quattrocento lies in recognizing that they are associated in an inverse relationship. While precious pigments become less prominent, a demand for pictorial skill becomes more so.

3. As the century progressed contracts became less eloquent than before about gold and ultramarine. They are still commonly mentioned and the grade of ultramarine may even be specified in terms of florins to the ounce—nobody could want the blue to flake off their picture—but they are less and less the centre of attention and the gold is increasingly intended for the frame. Starina's undertaking of 1408 about different grades of blue for different parts of the picture is very much of his moment: there is nothing quite like it in the second half of the century. This lessening preoccupation with the precious pigments is quite consistent with the paintings as we see them now. It seems that clients were becoming less anxious to flaunt sheer opulence of material before the public than they had previously been.

It would be futile to try to account for this sort of development simply within the history of art. The diminishing role of gold in paintings is part of a general movement in western Europe at this time towards a kind of selective inhibition about display, and this shows itself in many other kinds of behaviour too. It was just as conspicuous in the client's clothes, for instance, which were abandoning gilt fabrics and gaudy hues for the restrained black of Burgundy. This was a fashion with elusive moral overtones; the atmosphere of the mid-century is caught very well in an anecdote told about King Alfonso of Naples by the Florentine bookseller Vespasiano da Bisticci:

There was a Sienese ambassador at Naples who was, as the Sienese tended to be, very grand. Now King Alfonso usually dressed in black, with just a buckle in his cap and a gold chain round his neck; he did not use brocades or silk clothes much. This ambassador however dressed in gold brocade, very rich, and when he came to see the King he always wore this gold brocade. Among his own people the King often made fun of these brocade clothes. One day he said, laughing to one of his gentlemen, 'I think we should change the colour of that brocade.' So he arranged to give audience one day in a mean little room, summoned all the ambassadors, and also arranged with some of his own people that in the throng everyone should jostle against the Sienese ambassador and rub against his brocade. And on the day it was so handled and rubbed, not just by the other ambassadors, but by the King himself, that when they came out of the room no-one could help laughing when they saw the brocade, because it was crimson now, with the pile all crushed and the gold fallen off it, just yellow silk left: it looked the ugliest rag in the world. When he saw him go out of the room with his brocade all ruined and messed, the King could not stop laughing...

The general shift away from gilt splendour must have had very complex and discrete sources indeed—a frightening social mobility with its problem of dissociating oneself from the flashy new rich; the acute physical shortage of gold in the fifteenth century; a classical distaste for sensuous licence now seeping out from neo-Ciceronian humanism, reinforcing the more accessible sorts of Christian asceticism; in the case of dress, obscure technical reasons for the best qualities of Dutch cloth being black anyway; above all, perhaps, the sheer rhythm of fashionable reaction. Many such factors must have coincided here. And the inhibition is not part of a comprehensive shift away from public opulence: it was selective. Philippe le Bon of Burgundy and Alfonso of Naples were as lush as ever—if not more so—in many other facets of their public lives. Even within the limitation of black costume one could be as conspicuously expensive as before, cutting the finest Netherlands fabrics wastefully on the cross. The orientation of display shifted—one direction inhibited, another developed—and display itself went on.

The case of painting was similar. As the conspicuous consumption of gold and ultramarine became less important in the contracts, its place was filled by references to an equally conspicuous consumption of something else—skill. To see how this was so—how skill could be the natural alternative to precious pigment, and how skill could be clearly understood as a conspicuous index of consumption—one must return to the money of painting.

A distinction between the value of precious material on the
one hand and the value of skilful working of materials on the other is now rather critical to the argument. It is a distinction that is not alien to us, is indeed fully comprehensible, though it is not usually central to our own thinking about pictures. In the early Renaissance, however, it was the centre. The dichotomy between quality of material and quality of skill was the most consistently and prominently recurring motif in everybody's discussion of painting and sculpture, and this is true whether the discussion is ascetic, deploring public enjoyment of works of art, or affirmative, as in texts of art theory. At one extreme one finds the figure of Reason urging it to condemn the effect on us of works of art in Petrarch's dialogue Physic against Fortune: 'it is the preciousness, as I suppose, and not the art that pleases you.'

At the other extreme Alberti uses it in his treatise On painting to argue for the painter representing even golden objects not with gold itself but through a skilful application of yellow and white pigments:

There are painters who use much gold in their pictures (plate 6), because they think it gives them majesty: I do not praise this. Even if you were painting Virgil's Dido—with her gold quiver, her golden hair fastened with a gold clasp, purple dress with a gold girdle, the reins and all her horse's trappings of gold—even then I would not want you to use any gold, because to represent the glitter of gold with plain colours brings the craftsman more admiration and praise.

One could multiply instances almost indefinitely, the most heterogeneous opinions being united only by their dependence on the same dichotomy between material and skill.

But intellectual concepts are one thing and crass practice is something else: the action of one on the other is usually difficult to demonstrate because it is not likely to be direct or simple. What gave Petrarch's and Alberti's distinction its special charge and geared it immediately into the dimension of practical business was that the same distinction was the whole basis of costing a picture, as indeed any manufacture. One paid for a picture under these same two headings, matter and skill, material and labour, as Giovanni d'Agnolo de' Bardi paid Botticelli for an altarpiece (plate 7) to go in the family chapel at S. Spirito:

Wednesday 3 August 1485:
At the chapel at S. Spirito seventy-eight florins fifteen soldi in payment of seventy-five gold 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 (pel suo pennell). There was a neat and unusual equivalence between the values of the theoretical and the practical. On the one hand, ultramarine, gold for painting with and for the frame, timber for the panel (material); on the other Botticelli's brush (labour and skill).

4. There were various ways for the discerning client to switch his funds from gold to 'brush'. For example, behind the figures in his picture he could specify landscapes instead of gilding:

The painter also undertakes to paint in the empty part of the pictures (plate 8)—or more precisely on the ground behind the figures—landscapes and skies [pace et aere] and all other grounds too where colour is put: except for the frames, to which gold is to be applied....

(Pinturicchio at S. Maria de' Fiore, Perugin. 1495)

A contract might even itemize what the client had in mind for his landscapes. When Ghirlandaio contracted in 1485 to paint frescoes for Giovanni Tornabuoni in the choir of S. Maria
Novella at Florence he agreed to include figures, buildings, castles, cities, mountains, hills, plains, rocks, costumes, animals, birds, and beasts of every kind. Such a demand ensured an expenditure of labour, if not skill.

There was another and more sure means of becoming an expensive purchaser of skill, already gaining ground in the middle of the century: this was the very great relative difference,

in any manufacture, in the value of the master's and the assistants' time within each workshop. We can see that with the painters this difference was substantial. For instance, in 1447 Fra Angelico was in Rome painting frescoes for the new Pope Nicholas V. His work was paid for not with the comprehensive figure usual in commissions from private men or small secular groups but on the basis of his and three assistants' time, materials being provided. An entry from the Vatican accounts will show the four men's respective rates:

23 May 1447.
To Fra Giovanni di Pietro of the Dominican Order, painter working on the chapel of St. Peter, on 23 May, forty-three ducats twenty-seven soldi, towards his allowance of 200 ducats per annum, for the period 13 March to the end of May...

43 florins 27 soldi
To Benozzo da Lese, painter of Florence working in the above-said chapel, on the same day eighteen florins twelve soldi towards his allowance of seven florins the month for the period 13 March to the end of May...

18 florins 12 soldi
To Giovanni d'Antonio della Checha, painter in the same chapel, on the same day two ducats forty-two soldi, towards two and two-fifths

months at one florin the month, for the period up to the end of May...

to Jacomo d'Antonio da Poli, painter in the same chapel, on 25 May, three florins, his allowance for three months to run up to the end of May at the rate of one florin the month...

The annual rate for each of the four, keep excluded, would therefore be:

- Fra Angelico: 200 florins
- Benozzo Gozzoli: 84 florins
- Giovanni della Checha: 12 florins
- Jacomo da Poli: 12 florins

When the team moved to Orvieto later in the year they got the same rates, except for Giovanni della Checha whose pay doubled from one to two florins the month. Clearly much money could be spent on skill if a disproportionate amount of a painting—disproportionate not by our standards but by theirs—were done by the master of a shop in place of his assistants.

It was this that happened. The contract for Piero della Francesca's *Madonna della Misericordia* (plate 9):

*11 June 1445:*

Piero di Luca, Prior, ... [and seven others] in the behalf and name of the Fraternity and Members of S. Maria della Misericordia have committed to Piero di Benedetto, painter, the making and painting of a panel in the oratory and church of the said Fraternity, of the same form as the panel which is there now, with all the material for it and all the costs and expenses of the complete furnishing and preparation of its painting assembly and erection in the said oratory: with those images figures and ornaments stated and agreed with the abovesaid Prior and advisor or their successors in office and with the other abovesaid officers of the Fraternity; to be gilded with fine gold and coloured with fine colours, and specially with ultramarine blue: with this condition, that the said Piero should be bound to make good any defect the said panel shall develop or show with the passing of time through failure of material or of Piero himself, up to a limit of ten years. For all this they have agreed to pay 150 florins, at the rate of five lire five soldi the florin. Of which they have undertaken to give him on demand fifty florins now and the balance when the panel is finished. And the said Piero has undertaken to make paint decorate and assemble the said panel in the same breadth height and shape as the wooden panel there at present, and to deliver it complete assembled and set in place within the next three years; and that no painter may put his hand to the brush other than Piero himself.

This was a panel painting; for large scale fresco commissions the demand could be softened. When Filippino Lippi contracted in
1487 to paint frescoes in the Strozzi chapel of S. Maria Novella he undertook that the work should be '... all from his own hand, and particularly the figures' (tutto di sua mano, e massime le figure): the clause may be a little illogical, but the implication is obvious—that the figures, more important and difficult than architectural backgrounds, should have a relatively large component of


Filippino's personal handiwork in them. There is a precise and realistic clause in Signorelli's contract of 1499 for frescoes in Orvieto Cathedral (plate 10):

The said master Luca is bound and promises to paint [1] all the figures to be done on the said vault, and [2] especially the faces and all the parts of the figures from the middle of each figure upwards; and [3] that no painting should be done on it without Luca himself being present. . . . And it is agreed [4] that all the mixing of colours should be done by the said master Luca himself.

This was one interpretation of how far a master should personally intervene in the carrying out of his designs, on a very large-scale fresco undertaking. And in general the intention of the later contracts is clear: the client will confer lustre on his picture not with gold but with mastery, the hand of the master himself.

By the middle of the century the expensiveness of pictorial skill was very well known. When St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence, discussed in his Summa Theologiae the art of goldsmiths and their proper payment, he used the painters as an example of payment relative to individual skill: 'The goldsmith who endows his works with better skill should be paid more. As is the case in the art of painting, where a great master will demand much more pay—two or three times more—than an unskilled man for making the same type of figure.'

The fifteenth-century client seems to have made his opulent gestures more and more by becoming a conspicuous buyer of skill. Not all clients did so: the pattern described here is a perceptible drift in fifteenth-century contracts, not a norm with which they all comply. Borso d'Este was not the only princely primitive out of touch with the decent commercial practice of Florence and Siena. But there were enough enlightened buyers of skill, spurred on by an increasingly articulate sense of the artists' individuality, to make the public attitude to painters very different in 1490 from what it had been in 1410.

5. We have come this far with the documents: There were various ways of diverting funds from material to skill; one might direct that a panel have representational rather than gilt backgrounds; more radically, one could demand and pay for a relatively high proportion of the great master's expensive personal attention. For the picture still to make a handsome impression this expensive skill must manifest itself clearly to the beholder. In what specific characters it did this, what were recognized as hallmarks
Arezzo (Colour Plate I) as an example. In the first place, understanding the picture depends on acknowledging a representational convention, of which the central part is that a man is disposing pigments on a two-dimensional ground in order to refer to something that is three-dimensional: one must enter into the spirit of the game, which is not the groundplan game but something Boccaccio described very well:

The painter exerts himself to make any figure he paints—actually just a little colour applied with skill to a panel—similar in its action to a figure which is the product of Nature and naturally has that action: so that it can deceive the eyes of the beholder, either partly or completely, making itself be taken for what it really is not.

In fact, since our vision is stereoscopic, one is not normally long deceived by such a picture to the point of completely supposing it real. Leonardo da Vinci pointed this out:

It is not possible for a painting, even if it is done with the greatest perfection of outline, shadow, light and colour, to appear in the same relief as the natural model, unless that natural model were looked at from a great distance and with only one eye.

He adds a drawing (plate 16) to demonstrate why this is so:

A and B are our eyes, C the object seen, E-F space behind it, D-G the area screened by a painted object, but in real life seen. But the convention was that the painter made his flat surface very suggestive of a three-dimensional world and was given credit for doing so. Looking at such representations was a fifteenth-century Italian institution, and involved in the institution were certain expectations; these varied according to the

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of the skilled brush, the contracts do not tell us. There is no reason why they should, of course.

And at this point it would be convenient to turn to the records of public response to painting, if only these were not so dismally thin. The difficulty is that it is at any time eccentric to set down on paper a verbal response to the complex non-verbal stimulations paintings are designed to provide: the very fact of


doing so must make a man untypical. There are some fifteenth-century descriptions of the quality of painters, but there are very few indeed one can confidently see as representative of some fairly broad collective view. Some, like Ghiberti’s Commentaries, are ineligible because they are written by men who are really artists; some are the work of learned men imitating the ancient art criticism of writers like the elder Pliny. Most of them, because they limit themselves to saying a picture is ‘good’ or ‘skillful’, are representative enough but from our point of view unhelpful.

An innocent account of paintings—the everyday vernacular way of talking about their qualities and differences happening to be put down on paper—is obviously something that would only occur under unusual circumstances. There is one specially good example. In about 1490 the Duke of Milan had it in mind
to employ some painters at the Certosa di Pavia and his agent in Florence sent in a memorandum about four painters known there—Botticelli (plate 7), Filippino Lippi (plate 11), Perugino (plate 12), Ghirlandaio (plate 2):


Sandro Botticelli, an excellent painter both on panel and on wall. His things have a virile air and are done with the best method and complete proportion.

Filippino, son of the very good painter Fra Filippo Lippi: a pupil of the above-mentioned Botticelli and son of the most outstanding master of his time. His things have a sweeter air than Botticelli’s; I do not think they have as much skill.

Perugino, an exceptional master, and particularly on walls. His things have an angelic air, and very sweet.

Domenico Ghirlandaio, a good master on panels and even more so on walls. His things have a good air, and he is an expeditious man and one who gets through much work.

All these masters have made proof of themselves in the chapel of Pope Sixtus IV, except Filippino. All of them later also in the Spedaleto of Lorenzo il Magnifico, and the palm of victory is pretty much in doubt.

The chapel of Pope Sixtus IV refers to the frescoes on the wall of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican; the frescoes at Lorenzo de’ Medici’s villa of Spedaleto near Volterra have not survived.

A few obvious things emerge clearly: that the distinction between fresco and panel painting is sharp; that the painters are seen very much as individuals in competition; and, more subtly, that there are discriminations to be made not only about one artist being simply better than another, but also about one artist being different in character from another. But though the report is obviously a genuine attempt to inform, to convey to Milan the differing qualities of each artist, it is curiously baffling. How much and what does the writer actually know about the painter’s method or ragione? What does manly or virile air mean in relation to the painting of Botticelli? In what form is proportion perceived in Botticelli? Is it some vague sense of rightness, or did the writer have the equipment to distinguish proportional relationships? What does sweet air mean in the context of Filippino, and how is it affected by a relative lack of skill? Is Perugino’s angelic air some identifiable religious quality or a matter of general sentiment? When he speaks of Ghirlandaio’s good air is this just unspecific praise, or does it refer to some particular stylistic idiom? The problem of virile and sweet and air having different nuances for him than for us, but there is also the difficulty that he saw the pictures differently from us.

And this is the problem next in order. Both the painter and his public, both Botticelli and the Milanese agent, belonged to a culture very unlike ours, and some areas of their visual activity had been much conditioned by it. This is something rather distinct from the matter we have so far been looking at, the general expectations of painting involved in the Quattrocento painter-client relationship. The first chapter has been concerned with more or less conscious responses by the painter to the conditions of the picture trade; and it has not isolated particular kinds of pictorial interest. The next chapter will have to enter the deeper water of how Quattrocento people, painters and public, attended to visual experience in distinctively Quattrocento ways, and how the quality of this attention became a part of their pictorial style.
II. The period eye

1. An object reflects a pattern of light on to the eye. The light enters the eye through the pupil, is gathered by the lens, and thrown on the screen at the back of the eye, the retina. On the retina is a network of nerve fibres which pass the light through a system of cells to several millions of receptors, the cones. The cones are sensitive both to light and to colour, and they respond by carrying information about light and colour to the brain.

It is at this point that human equipment for visual perception ceases to be uniform, from one man to the next. The brain must interpret the raw data about light and colour that it receives from the cones and it does this with innate skills and those developed out of experience. It tries out relevant items from its stock of patterns, categories, habits of inference and analogy—‘round’, ‘grey’, ‘smooth’, ‘pebble’ would be verbalized examples—and these lend the fantastically complex ocular data a structure and therefore a meaning. This is done at the cost of a certain simplification and distortion: the relative aptness of the category ‘round’ overlays a more complex reality. But each of us has had different experience, and so each of us has slightly different knowledge and skills of interpretation. Everyone, in fact, processes the data from the eye with different equipment. In practice these differences are quite small, since most experience is common to us all: we all recognize our own species and its limbs, judge distance and elevation, infer and assess movement, and many other things. Yet in some circumstances the otherwise marginal differences between one man and another can take on a curious prominence.

Suppose a man is shown the configuration in plate 13, a configuration that can be apprehended in various ways. One way would be primarily as a round thing with a pair of elongated L-shaped projections on each side. Another way would be primarily as a circular form superimposed on a broken rectangular form. There are many other ways of perceiving it as well. That which we tend toward will depend on many things—particularly on the context of the configuration, which is suppressed here for the moment—but not least on the interpreting
skills one happens to possess, the categories, the model patterns and the habits of inference and analogy: in short, what we may call one’s cognitive style. Suppose the man looking at plate 13 is well equipped with patterns and concepts of shape like those in plate 14 and is practised in using them. (In fact, most of the people plate 13 was originally made for were proud of being so equipped.) This man will be disposed to the second of the ways of perceiving the configuration. He will be less likely to see it just as a round thing with projections, and more likely to see it primarily as a circle superimposed on a rectangle: he possesses these categories and is practised at distinguishing such patterns in complicated shapes. To this extent he will see plate 13 differently from a man without resources of this kind.

Let us now add a context to plate 13. It occurs in a description of the Holy Land printed in Milan in 1481 and it has the caption: ‘Questo e la forma del sancto sepulchro de meser iesu christo.’ (This is the shape of the Holy Sepulchre of Our Lord Jesus Christ). The context adds two particularly important factors to the perception of the configuration. First, one now knows that it has been made with the purpose of representing something: the man looking at it refers to his experience of representational conventions and is likely to decide that it belongs to the ground-plan convention—lines representing the course walls would follow on the ground if one were looking vertically down at a structure. The groundplan is a relatively abstract and analytical convention for representing things, and unless it is within his culture—as it is within ours—the man may be puzzled as to how to interpret the figure. Second, one has been cued to the fact that prior experience of buildings is relevant here, and one will make inferences accordingly. A man used to fifteenth-century Italian architecture might well infer that the circle is a circular building, with a cupola perhaps, and that the rectangular wings are halls. But a fifteenth-century Chinese, once he had learned the ground-plan convention, might infer a circular central court on the lines of the new Temple of Heaven at Peking.

So here are three variable and indeed culturally relative kinds of thing the mind brings to interpreting the pattern of light
placing of the picture—church or salon—but one expectation was constant: the beholder expected skill, as we have seen. Quite what sort of skill he expected will occupy us presently, but the point to be noticed now is that a fifteenth-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 even to do so verbally. The most popular fifteenth-century treatise on education, for example, Pier Paolo Vergerio’s On noble behaviour of 1404, reminded him: The beauty and grace of objects, both natural ones and those made by man’s art, are things it is proper for men of distinction to be able to discuss with each other and appreciate. Looking at Piero’s painting, a man with intellectual self-respect was in no position to remain quite passive; he was obliged to discriminate.

This brings us to the second point, which is that the picture is sensitive to the kinds of interpretative skill—patterns, categories, inferences, analogies—the mind brings to it. A man’s capacity to distinguish a certain kind of form or relationship of forms will have consequences for the attention with which he addresses a picture. For instance, if he is skilled in noting proportional relationships, or if he is practiced in reducing complex forms to compounds of simple forms, or if he has a rich set of categories for different kinds of red and brown, these skills may well lead him to order his experience of Piero della Francesca’s Annunciation differently from people without these skills, and much more sharply than people whose experience has not given them many skills relevant to the picture. For it is clear that some perceptual skills are more relevant to any one picture than others: a virtuosity in classifying the ductus of flexing lines—a skill many Germans, for instance, possessed in this period—or a functional knowledge of the surface musculature of the human body would not find much scope on the Annunciation. Much of what we call ‘taste’ lies in this, the conformity between discriminations demanded by a painting and skills of discrimination possessed by the beholder. We enjoy our own exercise of skill, and we particularly enjoy the playful exercise of skills which we use in normal life very earnestly. If a painting gives us opportunity for exercising a valued skill and rewards our virtuosity with a sense of worthwhile insights about that painting’s organization, we tend to enjoy it: it is to our taste. The negative of this is the man without the sorts of skill in terms of which the painting is ordered: a German calligrapher confronted by a Piero della Francesca, perhaps.

Thirdly again, one brings to the picture a mass of information and assumptions drawn from general experience. Our own culture is close enough to the Quattrocento for us to take a lot of the same things for granted and not to have a strong sense of misunderstanding the pictures; we are closer to the Quattrocento mind than to the Byzantine, for instance. This can make it difficult to realize how much of our comprehension depends on what we bring to the picture. To take two contrasting kinds of such knowledge, if one could remove from one’s perception of Piero della Francesca’s Annunciation both (a) the assumption that the building units are likely to be rectangular and regular, and (b) knowledge of the Annunciation story, one would have difficulty in making it out. For the first, in spite of Piero’s rigorous perspective construction—itself a mode of representation the fifteenth-century Chinese would have had problems with—the logic of the picture depends heavily on our assumption that the loggia projects at a right angle from the back wall: suppress this assumption and one is thrown into uncertainty about the whole spatial layout of the scene. Perhaps the loggia is shallower than one thought, its ceiling sloping down backwards and its corner thrusting out towards the left in an acute angle, then the tiles of the pavement will be lozenges, not oblongs... and so on. A clearer case: remove the assumption of regularity and rectangularity from the loggia architecture of Domenico Veneziano’s Annunciation (plate 17)—refuse to take for granted either that the loggia projects at a right angle from the back wall: suppress this assumption and one is thrown into uncertainty about the whole spatial layout of the scene. Perhaps the loggia is shallower than one thought, its ceiling sloping down backwards and its corner thrusting out towards the left in an acute angle, then the tiles of the pavement will be lozenges, not oblongs... and so on. A clearer case: remove the assumption of regularity and rectangularity from the loggia architecture of Domenico Veneziano’s Annunciation (plate 17)—refuse to take for granted either that the loggia projects at a right angle from the back wall: suppress this assumption and one is thrown into uncertainty about the whole spatial layout of the scene. Perhaps the loggia is shallower than one thought, its ceiling sloping down backwards and its corner thrusting out towards the left in an acute angle, then the tiles of the pavement will be lozenges, not oblongs... and so on. A clearer case: remove the assumption of regularity and rectangularity from the loggia architecture of Domenico Veneziano’s Annunciation (plate 17)—refuse to take for granted either that

walls of the courtyard meet at right angles or that the fore-
shortened rows of columns are spaced at the same intervals as the
row seen face on—and the picture space abruptly telescopes into
a shallow little area.

Regarding knowledge of the story, 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 some
sort of devout attention to the column. This does not mean
that Piero was telling his story badly; it means he could depend
on the beholder to recognize the Annunciation subject promptly
enough for him to accent, vary and adjust it in rather advanced
ways. 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 of the Annunciation
is one of the things that will have to engage us later.

3. Renaissance people were, as has been said, on their mettle
before a picture, because of an expectation that cultivated people
should be able to make discriminations about the interest of
pictures. These very often took the form of a preoccupation with
the painter’s skill, and we have seen too that this preoccupation
was something firmly anchored in certain economic and intellec-
tual conventions and assumptions. But the only practical way
of publicly making discriminations is verbally: the Renaissance
beholder was a man under some pressure to have words that
fitted the interest of the object. The occasion might be one when
actual enunciation of words was appropriate, or it might be one
when internal possession of suitable categories assured him of his
own competence in relation to the picture. In any case, at some
fairly high level of consciousness the Renaissance man was one
who matched concepts with pictorial style.

This is one of the things that makes the kind of culturally
relative pressures on perception we have been discussing so very
important for Renaissance perception of pictures. In our own
culture there is a class of over-cultivated person who, though he is
not a painter himself, has learned quite an extensive range of
specialized categories of pictorial interest, a set of words and
concepts specific to the quality of paintings: he can talk of
‘tactile values’, or of ‘diversified images’. In the fifteenth century
there were some such people, but they had relatively few special
concepts, if only because there was then such a small literature
of art. Most of the people the painter catered for had half-a-
dozen or so such categories for the quality of pictures—fore-
shortening’, ‘ultramarine at two florins an ounce’, ‘drapery’
perhaps, and a few others we shall be meeting—and then were
thrown back on their more general resources.

Like most of us now, his real training in consciously precise
and complex visual assessment of objects, ‘both natural ones and
those made by man’s art’, was not on paintings but on things
more immediate to his well-being and social survival:

The beauty of the horse is to be recognized above all in its having a body
so broad and long that its members correspond in a regular fashion with
its breadth and length (plates 18–19). The head of the horse should
be proportionately slender, thin and long. The mouth wide and sharply
cut; the nostrils broad and distended. The eyes should not be hollowed
nor deeply recessed; the ears should be small and carried like spears; the
neck long and rather slender towards the head, the jaw quite slender and
thin, the mane sparse and straight. The chest should be broad and
fairly round, the thighs not tapering but rather straight and even, the
croup short and quite flat, the loins round and rather thick, the ribs and
other like parts also thick, the haunches long and even, the crupper long
and wide. . . . The horse should be taller before than behind, to the same
degree a deer is, and should carry its head high, and the thickness of its
neck should be proportionable with its chest. Anyone who wants to be
a judge of horses’ beauty must consider all the parts of the horse
discussed above as parts related in proportion to the height and breadth of
the horse. . . .

But there is a distinction to be made between the general run of
visual skills and a preferred class of skills specially relevant to the
perception of works of art. The skills we are most aware of are
not the ones we have absorbed like everyone else in infancy, but
those we have learned formally, with conscious effort: those
which we have been taught. And here in turn there is a cor-
relation with skills that can be talked about. Taught skills com-
monly have rules and categories, a terminology and stated
standards, which are the medium through which they are teach-
able. These two things—the confidence in a relatively advanced
members of confraternities or as individuals, princes and their courtiers, the senior members of religious houses. The peasants and the urban poor play a very small part in the Renaissance culture that most interests us now, which may be deplorable but is a fact that must be accepted. Yet among the patronizing classes there were variations, not just the inevitable variation from man to man, but variation by groups. So a certain profession, for instance, leads a man to discriminate particularly efficiently in identifiable areas. Fifteenth-century medicine trained a physician to observe the relations of member to member of the human body as a means to diagnosis, and a doctor was alert and equipped to notice matters of proportion in painting too. But while it is clear that among the painter’s public there were many

and valued skill, and the availability of verbal resources associated with them—make such skills particularly susceptible to transfer in situations such as that of a man in front of a picture.

This raises a problem. We have been moving towards a notion of a Quattrocento cognitive style. By this one would mean the equipment that the fifteenth-century painter’s public brought to complex visual stimulations like pictures. One is talking not about all fifteenth-century people, but about those whose response to works of art was important to the artist—the patronizing classes, one might say. In effect this means rather a small proportion of the population: mercantile and professional men, acting as


subgroups with special visual skills and habits—the painters themselves were one such subgroup—this book will be concerned with more generally accessible styles of discrimination. A Quattrocento man handled affairs, went to church, led a social life; from all of these activities he acquired skills relevant to his observation of painting. It is true that one man would be stronger on business skills, another on pious skills, another on polite skills; but every man had something of each of these, whatever the individual balance, and it is the highest common factor of skill in his public that the painter consistently catered for.

To sum up: some of the mental equipment a man orders his visual experience with is variable, and much of this variable equipment is culturally relative, in the sense of being determined by the society which has influenced his experience. Among these variables are categories with which he classifies his visual stimuli; the knowledge he will use to supplement what his immediate vision gives him, and the attitude he will adopt to the kind of artificial object seen. The beholder must use on the painting such visual skills as he has, very few of which are normally special to painting, and he is likely to use those skills his society esteems highly. The painter responds to this; his public's visual capacity must be his medium. Whatever his own specialized professional skills, he is himself a member of the society he works for and shares its visual experience and habits.

We are concerned here with Quattrocento cognitive style as it relates to Quattrocento pictorial style. This chapter must now exemplify the kinds of visual skill a Quattrocento person was distinctively equipped with, and try to show how these were relevant to painting.

4. Most fifteenth-century pictures are religious pictures. This is self-evident, in one sense, but 'religious pictures' refers to more than just a certain range of subject matter; it means that the pictures existed to meet institutional ends, to help with specific intellectual and spiritual activities. It also means that the pictures came within the jurisdiction of a mature body of ecclesiastical theory about images. There is no sign of the more academic elaborations of this theory being active in many people's minds during the fifteenth century, though they were quite often rehearsed by the theologians, but a few of the basic principles still set standards for the pictures much more real for the public mind than some of the artistic theory we make so much of now.

What was the religious function of religious pictures? In the Church's view the purpose of images was threefold. John of Gaza's late thirteenth-century Catholicon, still a standard dictionary of the period, summarized them in this way:

Know that there were three reasons for the institution of images in churches. First, for the instruction of simple people, because they are instructed by them as if by books. Second, so that the mystery of the incarnation and the examples of the Saints may be the more active in our memory through being presented daily to our eyes. Third, to excite feelings of devotion, these being aroused more effectively by things seen than by things heard.

In a sermon published in 1492 the Dominican Fra Michele da Carcano gives an orthodox Quattrocento expansion of this:

... images of the Virgin and the Saints were introduced for three reasons. First, on account of the ignorance of simple people, so that those who are not able to read the scriptures can yet learn by seeing the sacraments of our salvation and faith in pictures. It is written: 'I have learned that, inflamed by unconsidered zeal, you have been destroying the images of the saints on the grounds that they should not be adored. And we praise you wholeheartedly for not allowing them to be adored, but we blame you for breaking them ... For it is one thing to adore a painting, but it is quite another to learn from a painted narrative what to adore. What a book is to those who can read, a picture is to the ignorant people who look at it. Because in a picture even the unlearned may see what example they should follow; in a picture they who know no letters may yet read.' St. Gregory the Great wrote these words to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles. Second, images were introduced on account of our emotional sluggishness; so that men who are not aroused to devotion when they hear about the histories of the Saints may at least be moved when they see them, as if actually present, in pictures. For our feelings are aroused by things seen more than by things heard. Third, they were introduced on account of our unreliable memories.... Images were introduced because many people cannot retain in their memories what they hear, but they do remember if they see images.

If you commute these three reasons for images into instructions for the beholder, it amounts to using pictures as respectively lucid, vivid and readily accessible stimuli to meditation on the Bible and the lives of Saints. If you convert them into a brief for the painter, they carry an expectation that the picture should tell its story in a clear way for the simple and in an eye-catching and memorable way for the forgetful, and with full use of all the emotional resources of the sense of sight, the most powerful as well as the most precise of the senses.

Of course, the matter could not always be as simple and as
rational as this; there were abuses both in people's responses to pictures and in the way the pictures themselves were made. Idolatry was a standing preoccupation of theology: it was fully realized that simple people could easily confuse the image of divinity or sanctity with divinity or sanctity itself, and worship it. There were widely reported phenomena that tended to go with irrational responses to the images; a story in Sismondo Polentone's *Life of St. Anthony of Padua* printed in 1476:

Pope Boniface VIII...had the old and ruinous Basilica of St. John Lateran at Rome rebuilt and redecorated with much care and expense, and he listed by name which saints were to be depicted in it. The painters of the Order of Minor Friars were preeminent in this art and there were two particularly good masters from this Order. When these two had painted up all the saints the Pope had ordered, on their own initiative they added in a blank space pictures of St. Francis and Anthony. When the Pope heard about this he was angered by their disrespect of his orders. 'I can tolerate the St. Francis,' he said, 'as it is now done. But I insist on the St. Anthony being removed completely.' However all the people sent by the Pope to carry out this command were thrown down to the ground, fiercely knocked about and driven away by a terrible, resounding, gigantic spirit. When the Pope heard of this, he said: 'Let the St. Anthony alone, then, since we can see he wants to stay; in conflict with him, we can only lose more than we gain.'

But idolatry never became as publicly scandalous and pressing a problem as it did in Germany; it was an abuse on which theologians regularly discoursed, but in a stereotype way and rather unhelpful way. Lay opinion usually felt able to dismiss it as an abuse of pictures that did not constitute a condemnation of the institution of images itself, as the humanist Chancellor of Florence Coluccio Salutati had described it:

I think [an ancient Roman's] feelings about their religious images were no different from what we in the full rectitude of our faith feel now about the painted or carved memorials of our Saints and Martyrs. For we perceive these not as Saints and as Gods but rather as images of God and the Saints. It may indeed be that the ignorant vulgar think more and otherwise of them than they should. But one enters into understanding and knowledge of spiritual things through the medium of sensible things, and so if pagan people made images of Fortune with a cornucopia and a rudder—as distributing wealth and controlling human affairs—they did not deviate very much from the truth. So too, when our own artists represent Fortune as a queen turning with her hands a revolving wheel, so long as we apprehend that picture as something made by a man's hand, not something itself divine but a similitude of divine providence, direction and order—and representing indeed not

its essential character but rather the winding and turning of mundane affairs—who can reasonably complain?

The abuse was agreed to exist in some measure but did not stimulate churchmen to new thoughts or action on the problem.

As for the pictures themselves, the Church realized there were sometimes faults against theology and good taste in their conception, St. Antonino, Archbishop of Florence, sums up the three main errors:

Painters are to be blamed when they paint things contrary to our Faith—when they represent the Trinity as one person with three heads, a monster; or, in the Annunciation, an already formed infant, Jesus, being sent into the Virgin's womb, as if the body he took on were not of her substance; or when they paint the infant Jesus with a hornbook, even though he never learned from man. But they are not to be praised either when they paint apocryphal matter, like midwives at the Nativity, or the Virgin Mary in her Assumption handing down her girdle to St. Thomas on account of his doubt (plate 20), and so on. Also, to paint curiosities into the stories of Saints and in churches, things that do not serve to avert devotion but laughter and vain thoughts—monkeys, and dogs chasing hares and so on, or gratuitously elaborate costumes—this I think unnecessary and vain.

Subjects with heretical implications, apocryphal subjects, subjects obscured by a frivolous and indecorous treatment. Again, all three of these faults did exist. Christ was erroneously shown looking to read in many paintings. The apocryphal story of St. Thomas and the Virgin's girdle was the largest sculptured decoration on S. Antonino's own cathedral church at Florence, the Porta della Mandorla, and appears in numerous paintings. Gentile da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* (plate 21), painted for the Florentine merchant and humanist Palla Strozzi in 1423, has the monkeys, dogs and elaborate costumes. S. Antonino considered unnecessary and vain. But, also again, the complaint is not new or particularly of its time; it is just a Quattrocento version of a stock theologian's complaint, voiced continually from St. Bernard to the Council of Trent. When S. Antonino looked at the painting of his time he might well have felt that, on the whole, the Church's three functions for painting were fulfilled: that most pictures were (1) clear, (2) attractive and memorable, (3) stirring registrations of the holy stories. If he had not, he was certainly the man to say so.

So the first question—What was the religious function of religious paintings?—can be reformulated, or at least replaced by a new question: What sort of painting would the religious
public for pictures have found lucid, vividly memorable, and emotionally moving?

5. The painter was a professional visualizer of the holy stories. What we now easily forget is that each of his pious public was liable to be an amateur in the same line, practised in spiritual exercises that demanded a high level of visualization of, at least, the central episodes of the lives of Christ and Mary. To adapt a theological distinction, the painter's were exterior visualizations, the public's interior visualizations. The public mind was not a blank tablet on which the painters' representations of a story or person could impress themselves; it was an active institution of interior visualization with which every painter had to get along. In this respect the fifteenth-century experience of a painting was not the painting we see now so much as a marriage between the painting and the beholder's previous visualizing activity on the same matter.
So it is important before all else to know roughly what sort of activity this was. One handbook that is usefully explicit is the *Zardino de Oration*, the *Garden of Prayer*, written for young girls in the 1450s and later printed in Venice. The book explains the need for internal representations and their place in the process of prayer:

The better to impress the story of the Passion on your mind, and to memorise each action of it more easily, it is helpful and necessary to fix the places and people in your mind: a city, for example, which will be the city of Jerusalem—taking for this purpose a city that is well known to you. In this city find the principal places in which all the episodes of the Passion would have taken place—for instance, a palace with the supper-room where Christ had the Last Supper with the Disciples, and the house of Anne, and that of Caiaphas, with the place where Jesus was taken in the night, and the room where He was brought before Caiaphas and mocked and beaten. Also the residence of Pilate where he spoke with the Jews, and in it the room where Jesus was put on the Cross; and other like places.

And then too you must shape in your mind some people, people well-known to you, to represent for you the people involved in the Passion—the person of Jesus Himself, of the Virgin, Saint Peter, Saint John the Evangelist, Saint Mary Magdalen, Anne, Caiaphas, Pilate, Judas and the others, every one of whom you will fashion in your mind.

When you have done all this, putting all your imagination into it, then go into your chamber. Alone and solitary, excluding every external thought from your mind, start thinking of the beginning of the Passion, starting with how Jesus entered Jerusalem on the ass. Moving slowly from episode to episode, meditate on each one, dwelling on each single stage and step of the story. And if at any point you feel a sensation of piety, stop: do not pass on as long as that sweet and devout sentiment lasts.

This sort of experience, a visualizing meditation on the stories particularized to the point of perhaps setting them in one's own city and casting them from one's own acquaintance, is something most of us now lack. It gave the painter's exterior visualizations a curious function.

The painter could not compete with the particularity of the private representation. When beholders might approach his painting with preconceived interior pictures of such detail, each person's different, the painter did not as a rule try to give detailed characterizations of people and places: it would have been an interference with the individual's private visualization if he had. Painters specially popular in pious circles, like Perugino (plate 22), painted people who are general, unperticularized, inter-

changeable types. They provided a base—firmly concrete and very evocative in its patterns of people—on which the pious beholder could impose his personal detail, more particular but less structured than what the painter offered.

It was not only a painter like Perugino that worked within conditions of this kind, though his response to them was much appreciated. A great deal of the quality of the most central experiences of Quattrocento painting—let us say, of Masaccio's *Tribute Money* (plate 65) or Bellini's *Transfiguration* (Colour Plate II)—derives from the same situation. Bellini does not offer the detail of persons and places the public provided for itself. He complements the beholder's interior vision. His persons and places
are generalized and yet massively concrete, and they are marshalled in patterns of strong narrative suggestion. Neither of these qualities, the concrete and the patterned, are what the beholder provided for himself since you cannot provide these qualities in mental images, as a little introspection shows; neither could come fully into play before the physical sense of sight was actually resorted to. The painting is the relic of a cooperation between Bellini and his public: the fifteenth-century experience of the Transfiguration was an interaction between the painting, the configuration on the wall, and the visualizing activity of the public mind—a public mind with different furniture and dispositions from ours. We enjoy the Transfiguration, the painter's part in all this, because we are stimulated by its imbalance, its hypertrophy of the weightily concrete and eloquently patterned at the permissible expense of the particular, which Bellini could count on being contributed by the other side. We should only deceive ourselves if we thought we could have the experience of the Transfiguration Bellini designed, or that it expresses in any simple way a spirit or a state of mind. The best paintings often express their culture not just directly but complementarily, because it is by complementing it that they are best designed to serve public needs: the public does not need what it has already got.

What the Zardillo de Oratio describes are private exercises in imaginative intensity and sharpness. The painter was addressing people who were publicly exercised in the same matter too, and in more formal and analytical ways. The best guide we now have to the public exercises is the sermon. Sermons were a very important part of the painter's circumstances: preacher and picture were both part of the apparatus of a church, and each took notice of the other. The fifteenth century was the last fling of the medieval type of popular preacher: the Fifth Lateran Council of 1512-17 took measures to suppress them. It is one of the underlying cultural differences between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy. The popular preachers were no doubt tasteless and inflammatory sometimes, but they filled their teaching function irreplaceably; certainly they drilled their congregations in a set of interpretative skills right at the centre of the fifteenth-century response to paintings. Fra Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce (plate 23) is a convenient example: Cosimo de' Medici thought he dressed too sharply for a priest, and his sense of the dramatic was strong—during a sermon on the Crusade he stripped off his habit to reveal, Erasmus noted with distaste, the crusader's livery and armour underneath—but his sermons as we have them are decorous enough. In the course of the church year, as festival followed festival, a preacher like Fra Roberto moved over much of the painters' subject matter, explaining the meaning of events and rehearsing his hearers in the sensations of piety proper to each. The Nativity (Colour Plate IV) embodies mysteries of (1) humility, (2) poverty, (3) joy, each being subdivided and referred to the material details of the event. The Visitation (plate 38) embodies (1) benignity, (2) maternity, (3) laudability; benignity declares itself in (a) invention, Mary's act of seeking the distant Elizabeth out, (b) salutation, (c) conversation—and so on. Such sermons were a very thorough emotional categorization of the stories, closely tied to the physical, and thus also visual, embodiment of the mysteries. The preacher and painter were repetiteur to each other.

To look a little more closely at one sermon, Fra Roberto preaching on the Annunciation distinguishes three principal mysteries: (1) the Angelic Mission, (2) the Angelic Salutation
So far what Fra Roberto has said is mainly preliminary or marginal to the painter's visual drama of Mary. It is the third mystery, the Angelic Colloquy, that throws clear light on the fifteenth-century feeling for what, on the level of human emotion, happened to her in the crisis the painter had to represent. Fra Roberto analyses the account of St. Luke (1: 26-38) and lays out a series of five successive spiritual and mental conditions or states attributable to Mary:

The third mystery of the Annunciation is called Angelic Colloquy; it comprises five Laudable Conditions of the Blessed Virgin:

1. Conturbatio  —  Disquiet
2. Cogitatio  —  Reflection
3. Interrogatio  —  Inquiry
4. Humiliatio  —  Submission
5. Meritiatio  —  Merit

The first laudable condition is called Conturbatio; as St. Luke writes, when the Virgin heard the Angel's salutation—'Hail, thou art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women'—she was troubled. This disquiet, as Nicholas of Lyra writes, came not from incredulity but from wonder, since she was used to seeing angels and marvelled not at the fact of the Angel's apparition so much as at the lofty and grand salutation, in which the Angel made plain for her such great and marvellous things, and at which in her humility was astonished and amazed (plate 24(a)).

Her second laudable condition is called Cogitatio: she cast in her mind what manner of Salutation this should be. This shows the prudence of the most Holy Virgin. So then—said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS... (plate 24(b)).

The third laudable condition is called Interrogatio. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? that is to say, seeing I have the firm resolve, inspired by God and confirmed by my own will, never to know a man? Francis Mayron says of this: 'One could say that the glorious Virgin desired to be a virgin more than to conceive the Son of God without virginity, since virginity is laudable, while to conceive a son is only honourable, being not a virtue but the reward for virtue; and the virtue is more desirable than its reward, since virtue subserves merit whereas reward does not.' For that reason this modest, pure, chaste, maidenly lover of virginity inquired how a virgin could conceive... (plate 24(c)).

The fourth laudable condition is called Humiliatio. What tongue could ever describe, indeed, what mind could contemplate the movement and style with which she set on the ground her holy knees? Lowering her head she spoke: Behold the handmaid of the Lord. She did not say 'Lady'; she did not say 'Queen'. Oh profound humility! Oh extraordinary gentleness! Behold', she said, 'the slave and servant of my Lord.' And then,
The Annunciation in Florence, 1440-60.


lifting her eyes to heaven, and bringing up her hands with her arms in the form of a cross, she ended as God, the Angels, and the Holy Fathers desired: *Be it unto me according to thy word* (plate 24(d)).

The fifth laudable condition is called *Meritatio*. When she had said these words, the Angel departed from her. And the bounteous Virgin at once had Christ, God incarnate, in her womb, according with that wonderful condition I spoke of in my ninth sermon. So we can justly suppose that in the moment when the Virgin Mary conceived Christ her soul rose to such lofty and sublime contemplation of the action and sweetness of divine things that, in the presence of the beatific vision, she passed beyond the experience of every other created being. And the bodily sensations of the Child being present in her womb rose again with indescribable sweetness. Probably, in her profound humility, she raised her eyes to heaven and then lowered them towards her womb with many tears, saying something like: 'Who am I, that have conceived God incarnate etc. . . .'

The imaginary monologue continues and brings Fra Roberto's sermon to its climax.

The last of the five Laudable Conditions, *Meritatio*, followed after the departure of Gabriel and belongs with representations of the Virgin on her own, the type now called *Annunciation* (plate 50); the other four—successively Disquiet, Reflection, Inquiry and Submission—were divisions within the sublime narrative of Mary's response to the Annunciation that very exactly fit the painted representations. Most fifteenth-century Annunciations are identifiable Annunciations of Disquiet, or of Submission, or—these being less clearly distinguished from each other—of Reflection and/or Inquiry. The preachers coached the public in the painters' repertory, and the painters responded within the current emotional categorization of the event. And though we, unprompted by Fra Roberto, respond to a general sense of excitement or thoughtfulness or humility in a picture of the scene, the more explicit categories of the fifteenth century can sharpen our perception of differences. They remind us, for instance, that Fra Angelico in his many Annunciations never really breaks away from the type of *Humiliatio*, while Botticelli (plate 51) has a dangerous affinity with *Conturbatio*; that a number of marvellous fourteenth-century ways of registering *Cogitatio* and *Interrogatio* become blurred and decay in the fifteenth century, in spite of occasional revival by a painter like Piero della Francesca; or that around 1500 painters were experimenting particularly with more complex and restrained types of *Conturbatio* than that of the tradition used by Botticelli; they shared Leonardo's distaste for the violent mode.
... some days ago I saw the picture of an angel who, in making the Annunciation, seemed to be trying to chase Mary out of her room, with movements showing the sort of attack one might make on some hated enemy; and Mary, as if desperate, seemed to be trying to throw herself out of the window. Do not fall into errors like these.

Fifteenth-century pictorial development happened within fifteenth-century classes of emotional experience.

6. The effective unit of the stories was the human figure. The figure's individual character depended less on its physiognomy—a private matter largely left for the beholder to supply, as we have seen—than on the way it moved. But there were exceptions to this, and particularly the figure of Christ.

The figure of Christ was less open to the personal imagination than others because the fifteenth century was still lucky enough to think it had an eye-witness account of his appearance. It was in a forged report from a fictitious Lentulus, Governor of Judea, to the Roman Senate:

A man of average or moderate height, and very distinguished. He has an impressive appearance, so that those who look on him love and fear him. His hair is the colour of a ripe hazel-nut. It falls straight almost to the level of his ears; from there down it curls thickly and is rather more luxuriant, and this hangs down to his shoulders. In front his hair is parted into two, with the parting in the centre in the Nazarene manner. His forehead is wide, smooth and serene, and his face is without wrinkles or any marks. It is graced by a slightly reddish tinge, a faint colour. His nose and mouth are faultless. His beard is thick and like a young man's first beard, of the same colour as his hair; it is not particularly long and is parted in the middle. His aspect is simple and mature. His eyes are brilliant, mobile, clear, splendid. He is terrible when he reprehends, quiet and kindly when he admonishes. He is quick in his movements but always keeps his dignity. No one ever saw him laugh, but he has been seen to weep. He is broad in the chest and upstanding; his hands and arms are fine. In speech he is serious, sparing and modest. He is the most beautiful among the children of men.

Not many paintings contradict this pattern.

The Virgin was less consistent, in spite of the putative portraits by St. Luke, and there was an established tradition of discussion about her appearance. There was, for example, the problem of her complexion: dark or fair. The Dominican Gabriel Barletta gives the traditional view in a sermon on the Virgin's beauty—quite a common theme of sermons, though rather symbolically approached:

You ask: Was the Virgin dark or fair? Albertus Magnus says that she was not simply dark, nor simply red-haired, nor just fair-haired. For any one of these colours by itself brings a certain imperfection to a person. This is why one says: 'God save me from a red-haired Lombard', or 'God save me from a black-haired German', or 'from a fair-haired Spaniard', or 'from a Belgian of whatever colour'. Mary was a blend of complexions, partaking of all of them, because a face partaking of all of them is a beautiful one. It is for this reason medical authorities declare that a complexion compounded of red and fair is best when a third colour is added: black. And yet this, says Albertus, we must admit: she was a little on the dark side. There are three reasons for thinking this—firstly by reason of complexion, since Jews tend to be dark and she was a Jewess; secondly by reason of witness, since St. Luke made the three pictures of her now at Rome, Loreto and Bologna, and these are brown-complexioned; thirdly, by reason of affinity. A son commonly takes after his mother, and vice versa; Christ was dark, therefore...
This sort of thing still left room for the imagination. As for the Saints, though many carried some physical mark as an identifying emblem—like St. Paul's baldness—they were usually open to the individual taste and the painter's own traditions.

Still, as the humanist Bartolomeo Fazio pointed out, 'painting a proud man is one thing, painting a mean or an ambitious or a prodigal one is something else.' Many figures do express an ethos independently of any relation with other figures. We probably miss very little through not reading faces in a fifteenth-century way; their complex medical physiognomies were too academic to be a viable resource for the painter, and the commonplaces of popular physiognomies do not change that much:

... the eyes are the windows of the soul: almost everyone knows what their colour, what their restlessness, what their sharpness indicates. Something worth mentioning, though, is that people with long eyes are malicious and immoral. And if the white of the eye is widely extended and visible all round, this shows shamelessness; if it is concealed, not visible at all, this shows unreliability.

Leonardo da Vinci, however, distrusted physiognomies as a false science; he restricted the painter's observation to the marks left by past passion on the face:

It is true that the face shows indications of the nature of men, their vices and temperaments. The marks which separate the cheeks from the lips, the nostrils from the nose, and the eye-sockets from the eyes, clearly show whether men are cheerful and often laugh. Men who have few such marks are men who engage in thought. Men whose faces are deeply carved with marks are fierce and irascible and unreasonable. Men who have strongly marked lines between their eyebrows are also irascible. Men who have strongly marked horizontal lines on their foreheads are full of sorrow, whether secret or admitted.

If a painter makes much of this sort of thing, we will pick it up anyway (plate 26).
We may miss very much more by not sharing these people's sense of close relation between movement of the body and movement of the soul and mind. A painting like Pinturicchio's Scene from the Odyssey (plate 27) seems to be using a language we only half understand. Is it the urgent and well-dressed young man in the foreground expostulating or narrating, with his open hand and emphatic finger? Is the turbanned man with the raised palm registering surprise, dismay or perhaps even sympathy? Is the half-figure on the extreme right, with hand on heart and upturned glance, indicating a pleasant or unpleasant emotion? What is Penelope herself feeling? Collectively these questions become the general question: What is the subject of this picture? Does it represent Telemachus telling Penelope of his search for Odysseus, or does it show the Suitors surprising Penelope in her ruse of unravelling the shroud she claims to be her husband? We do not know enough of the language to be sure about it.

Physical expression of the mental and spiritual is one of Alberti's main preoccupations in his treatise on painting:

Movements of the soul are recognized in movements of the body . . . There are movements of the soul, called affections—grief, joy, fear, desire and others. There are movements of the body: growing, shrinking, ailing, bettering, moving from place to place. We painters, wanting to show movements of the mind with movements of the body's parts, use only the movements from place to place.

It is equally a preoccupation of Guidelmo Fibrac's treatise on dancing:

The virtue of dancing is as an action demonstrative of spiritual movement, conforming with the measured and perfect consonances of a harmony that descends pleasurably through our sense of hearing to the intellectual parts of our cerebral senses; there it generates certain sweet movements which, as if enclosed contrary to their own nature, strive to escape and make themselves manifest in active movement.

It is much reflected in fifteenth-century judgements of people, their gravity or levity, aggressiveness or amiability. And Leonardo again lays great emphasis and spends many pages on its importance for the appreciation of painting: 'the most important things in the discussion of painting are the movements proper to the mental condition of each living being.' But though he insists again and again on the need to distinguish one sort of movement from another, he naturally finds it difficult to describe in words the particular movements he means: he planned to describe the movements of anger, pain, sudden fear, weeping, flight, desire, command, indifference, solititude, and so on', but never actually did so.

This sort of sensibility and the standards behind it are elusive now—not least because we no longer believe the old pneumatic physiology through which they were rationalized. One sees them clearly only in the rather uninteresting form of a scale of freedom of movement proper to different types of people, from the vigour of young sparks to the restraint of elderly sages: as Alberti says, philosophers should not behave like fencers. But in gesture (plate 28), the most conventionalized physical expression of feeling, and in some ways the most useful for reading pictures, there are a few bearings to be found.

There are no dictionaries to the Renaissance language of gestures, though there are sources which offer suggestions about a gesture's meaning: they have little authority and must be used with tact, but suggestions borne out by consistent use in pictures do have a useful hypothetical role. Leonardo suggested two sources for the painter to draw on for gestures—orators, and dumb men. We can half follow him in this and look at two kinds of men who recorded some of their gestures—preachers, and monks bound to silence. Only a few hints come from the latter, lists of the language of signs developed in the Benedictine order for use during periods of silence. From the several hundred signs in the lists, half-a-dozen are worth trying on paintings; for instance:

**Affirmation:** lift your arm gently . . . so that the back of the hand faces the beholder.

**Demonstration:** a thing one has seen may be noted by opening the palm of the hand in its direction.

**Grief:** pressing the breast with the palm of the hand.

**Shame:** covering the eyes with the fingers.

Thus we are encouraged, for example, to read Masaccio's Expulsion from Paradise (plate 29) in a more precise way, as combining in the paired figures two inflections of emotion: it is Adam (lumina tegens digitis) who expresses shame, Eve (palma premenspector) only grief. Any reading of this kind depends on context; even in the Benedictine lists a hand on the heart, a smile, and eyes raised to heaven indicated joy, not grief. And it is possible that Quattrocento people themselves could mistake the meaning of a gesture or movement. S. Bernardino of Siena complained in one of his sermons that painters showed St. Joseph in the Nativity resting his chin on his hand (Colour Plate IV), indicating melancholy; but Joseph was a cheerful old man, he says, and should be shown so.

Though the gesture does often indicate melancholy, as at death beds, it is also used in the sense of meditation, as a Nativity context would suggest. Of course, it sometimes means both (plate 30).

A more useful and rather more authoritative source is through the preachers, skilled visual performers with a codified range of gesticulation not special to Italy. An Italian preacher could tour northern Europe successfully preaching even in places like Brittany and getting his effect largely through gesture and the quality of his delivery. Many Italians must have followed Latin sermons by the same means. There was biblical authority of a sort for this art of gesture: 'One must suppose that Christ used gesture when he said 'Destroy this temple" (John 11: 19) — putting his hand on his breast and looking towards the temple.' The preacher was taught to accent his texts in a similar way:

Sometimes the preacher should try to speak with horror and excitement, as in Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18: 3)

Sometimes with irony and derision, as in Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? (Job 2: 9)

Sometimes with an agreeable expression, drawing the hands towards oneself [atractions manuum], as in Come unto me, all ye that labour and art heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11: 28)

Sometimes with elevation and pride, as in They are come from a far country unto me, even from Babylon. (Isaiah 39: 3)

Sometimes with disgust and indignation, as in Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. (Numbers 14: 4)

Sometimes with joy, raising the hands up [elevarit manuum], as in Come, ye blessed of my Father... (Matthew 25: 34)

The problem was always, where to draw the line; Thomas Waleys's mid-fourteenth-century De modo componenti sermones urged:

... let the preacher be very careful not to throw his body about with unrestrained movement — now suddenly lifting up his head high, now suddenly jerking it down, now turning to the right and now with strange rapidity to the left, now stretching out both hands as if embracing East and West, now suddenly knitting the hands together, now extending his arms immoderately, now suddenly pulling them back. I have seen preachers who behaved very well in other respects, but who threw themselves about so much they seemed to be fencing with somebody, or to be insane enough to throw themselves and their pulpit to the ground, were there not people there to restrain them.

Fra Mariano da Genazzano — a preacher particularly admired for his delivery by the humanist Poliziano — collected his freely falling tears in cupped hands and threw them at the congregation. Such excesses were unusual enough to cause the comment through which we know about them, but a more moderate and traditional set of histrionic accents was evidently normal. There is a succinct English list of the conservative minimum in the third edition of the Mirror of the World, from the 1520s:

[1] when thou speakest of a solemn matter to stand upright with little moving of thy body, but pointing it with thy fore finger.

[2] And when thou speakest of any cruel matter or yeefull cause to bend thy fist and shake thy arm.

[3] And when thou speakest of any heavenly or godly things to look up and point towards the sky with thy finger.

[4] And when thou speakest of any gentiles, myldeness, or humility, to ley thy hand upon thy breast...

[5] And when thou speakest of any holy matter or devocyon to hold up thy hand.

Developing a list like this in one's mind, revising and enlarging it from one's experience of the pictures, is a necessary part of looking at Renaissance pictures. Handling the same matter as the 30. Vitore Carpaccio. The Dead Christ with St. Jerome and Job (about 1490). New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Panel.
This was pious gesture. Secular gesture was not discontinuous with it, but had a range of its own, difficult to pin down: unlike the pious kind, no one taught it in books, it was more personal, and it changed with fashion. A convenient example, and useful for reading some good paintings, is a gesture used in the second half of the century to indicate invitation or welcome. It can be studied in a woodcut of 1493 (plate 33) illustrating a Florentine edition of Jacobus de Cessolis' Liber seccorum, a medieval allegory of the social order as a chess-board; the Queen's Bishop's Pawn is an innkeeper in the allegory, and one of three attributes by which one recognizes him is to be his gesture of invitation—'he has his right hand extended in the manner of a person who invites.' The palm of the hand is slightly raised and the fingers are allowed to fan slightly downwards.

Prompted by the woodcut, we can find this gesture playing a

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part in many paintings; even when we already know that the painting represents an encounter, knowing the gesture helps us to read it more crisply, because the gesture lends itself to different expressive inflections. In Botticelli's fresco of A young man received by the Liberal Arts (plate 34) the principal figure uses a straightforward form to welcome the youth. Lodovico Gonzaga welcomes his son Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga with a version of seigneurial restraint in Mantegna's Camera degli Sposi (plate 5). Pintoricchio, always quick with an apt gesture, makes dramatic play with it in a group of three temptresses on their way to tempt St. Antony Abbot (plate 35). Any hearer of Fra Roberto Caracciolo's or another preacher's sermon on St. Antony would know the girls represented the second of four stages of assault on him, carnis stimulatio, and to the discriminating eye the character of the girls is already very clear in an over-free use of their hands. The maiden's handbook Decor puellarum, printed in Venice in 1471,
the plane of everyday profane life, establishing a distinct mode of physical events, supra-normal, a distinct grand style.

7. A figure played its part in the stories by interacting with other figures, in the groupings and attitudes the painter used to suggest relationships and actions. The painter was not the only practitioner of this art of grouping; in particular, the same subjects were often represented in sacred drama of one kind or another. This is not true of all cities. In Florence there was a great flowering of religious drama during the fifteenth century, but in Venice such presentations were forbidden. Where they did exist they must have enriched people’s visualization of the events they portrayed, and some relationship to painting was noticed at the time. In 1439 a Russian bishop, in Florence for the Council of Florence, saw and described two plays he attended in churches, the Annunciation and the Ascension. He remarked on the similarity of this or that detail with paintings: ‘The Apostles had bare feet and were as one sees in holy images.’ The angel Gabriel was a beautiful youth, dressed in a gown as white as snow, decorated with gold—exactly as one sees heavenly angels in paintings. But his and other descriptions of the sacred dramas do not tell us much about what we want to know: the way in which one actor physically addressed another. Two things however seem fairly clear. The first, negative and presumptive, is that the descriptions we have of sacred representations often point to their depending on spectacular effects which have little to do with the refined narrative suggestion of the painter. The plays seen by the Russian bishop in 1439 made their point with elaborate mechanical means, actors suspended on strings, great revolving discs, massed sources of artificial light, people going up and down in wooden clouds. Representations of the stories in the streets, like the St. John’s Day celebrations in Florence described by Matteo Palmieri in 1454, because they were less verbal and had a stronger element of the tableau vivant, seem closer to the painter, but even they relied on a splendour of numbers: 200 horsemen followed the Three Kings in 1454. There were many more modest shows, of course, but the painter, using the complex and subtle grouping of a few figures to suggest a dramatic event, handling static figures in such a way as to suggest mobile relationships but not contradicting the fact of his figures being immobile, could have only a limited amount in common with any of this.

In the second place, such fragmentary hints as one can find about the acting of the plays suggest that what they had in
common with the pictures may have been, paradoxically, what seem to us anti-dramatic conventions rather than realism. For instance, the plays were introduced by a choric figure, the festaiuolo, often in the character of an angel, who remained on the stage during the action of the play as a mediator between the beholder and the events portrayed: similar choric figures, catching our eyes and pointing to the central action, are often used by the painters (plate 37). They are even recommended by Alberti in his Treatise on Painting: 'I like there to be a figure which admonishes and instructs us about what is happening in picture...'. The Quattrocento beholder would have perceived such choric figures through his experience of the festaiuolo.


again, the plays were acted by figures which did not normally leave the stage between their appearances; instead they sat in their respective sedie on the stage, rising to speak their lines and move through their actions. The Florentine play of Abraham and Hagar has unusually clear directions for this:

When he has finished the prologue, the festaiuolo goes to his seat. And Abraham sits in a raised position, and Sarah near him; and at their feet on the right is Isaac, and to the left, rather further away, are Ishmael and Hagar his mother. And at the end of the stage on the right there should be an altar, to which Abraham will go to pray; and at the end of the stage on the left there must be a hill on which is a wood with a large tree where a spring will appear when the moment comes [for the episode of Hagar and the angel].

Hagar and Ishmael take no part for the first few minutes: they wait in their seats, as Abraham will return to his. This convention too has its counterpart in the logic of many paintings (plate 38).

For instance, in Filippo Lippi's *Virgin and Child with Saints* the assisting figures of saints sit awaiting their moment to rise and interpret, much as Prophets did in Florentine plays of the Annunciation.

In any event, with what one knows of these various spectacles one is still some way from the centre of the problem of the quality that interests us in the paintings: which is, how the depicted stance of, say, two figures towards each other can be so richly evocative of an intellectual or emotional relationship—hostility, love, communication—on a level less explicit than assault, embraces, holding of the ear, or even than truncated versions of these actions. The painter worked with nuances: he

at the event. We alternate between our own frontal view of the action and the personal relationship with the angel group, so that we have a compound experience of the event: the clarity of one kind of access is enriched by the intimacy of the other. The device works on us more subtly than a hooked thumb or pointing finger and it also demands more from us: it depends on our disposition to expect and work for tacit relationships with and within a group of people, and this effort on our part gives our recognition of the group's meaning all the more charge. We become active accessories to the event. This transmutation of a vernacular social art of grouping into an art where a pattern of people—not gesticulating or lunging or grimacing people—can still stimulate a strong sense of some psychological interplay, is the problem: it is doubtful if we have the right predispositions to see such refined innuendo at all spontaneously.

One fifteenth-century activity like enough the painters' groupings to give us a little insight into this is dancing: specifically the bassa danza (plate 41), the slow pacing dance that became popular in Italy during the first half of the century. Several things make the bassa danza a helpful parallel, much more so than the religious spectacles. In the first place it was an articulate art with its own treatises—the earliest is by Domenico da Piacenza, evidently written in the 1440's—and its own theoretical terminology: like the art of rhetoric, dancing had five Parts—aere, maniera, misura, misura di terreno, memoria. Secondly, the dancers were conceived and recorded as groups of figures in patterns; unlike the French, the Italians did not use a dance notation but described the movements of the figures fully, as if they were being seen by a spectator. Third, the parallel between dancing and painting seems to have suggested itself to fifteenth-century people too. In 1442 Angelo Galli, a poet at Urbino, wrote a sonnet to the painter Pisanello with a list of his qualities:

Art, misura, aere and draughtsmanship,
Maniera, perspective and a natural quality
Heaven miraculously gave him these gifts.

If we take the terms *aere, maniera* and *misura* in their dancing sense, as Domenico da Piacenza and his pupils define them, they are very apt criticism of Pisanello (plate 42). *Aere*, according to Guglielmo Ebreo, is 'airy presence and elevated movement, demonstrating with the figure ... a smooth and most humane emphasis.' Maniera, according to Domenico, is 'a moderate movement, not too much and not too little, but so smooth that the figure is like a gondola steered by two oars through the little waves of a calm sea, these waves rising slowly and falling quickly.' *Misura* is rhythm, but flexible rhythm, 'slowness compensated by quickness.'

We saw how Alberti's treatise on painting and Guglielmo Ebreo's treatise on dancing shared a preoccupation with physical movements as a reflex of mental movements. The dancing manual was the more grandiloquent about it, since this was the whole point of dancing, at least from an intellectual point of view. Domenico da Piacenza cites Aristotle in defence of the art. But as well as principles the treatises offer, in the form of the dances they describe, model figure patterns quite transparently expressive of psychological relationships. The dances were semi-dramatic. In the dance called *Cupido* or *Desire* the men perform a series of convolutions suggesting that they are tied to and are at the same time pursuing their partners, whose role is retreat. In the dance called *Jealousy* three men and three women permute partners and each man goes through a stage of standing by himself, apart from the other figures. In *Phoebus* two women act as a mobile foil for an exhibitionist man; and so on.

How the painters' style of grouping was cognate with this is usually clearest not in religious paintings but in paintings of the new classical and mythological subjects. In these the painter was forced to new invention in a fifteenth-century mode, instead of just refining and adapting the traditional religious patterns to the fifteenth-century sensibility. Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (plate 43) was painted in the 1480s for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici as the *Primavera* was some years earlier: his cousin Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, il Magnifico, had composed a dance *Venus*, probably in the 1460s:

*Bassa danza called Venus, for three persons, composed by Lorenzo di Piero di Cosimo de' Medici.*

First they do a slow sidestep, and then together they move with two pairs of forward steps, beginning with the left foot; then the middle dancer turns round and across with two reprises, one on the left foot
This is about a third of the dance, which develops along the same lines and is then repeated. The form is always of the two side figures dependent on the central one. Sex is not specified. The similar sense of informed pattern is of course not a matter of the particular dance having influenced the particular picture: it is that both the dance and the picture of Venus were designed for people with the same habit of seeing artistic groups. The sensibility the dance represents involved a public skill at interpreting figure patterns, a general experience of semi-dramatic arrangements that allowed Botticelli and other painters to assume a similar public readiness to interpret their own groups. When he had a new classical subject, with no established tradition for the arrangement and no assurance that the story was very widely or intimately known, he could let the figures dance their relationship out, as Botticelli lets them in his *Pallas and the Centaur* (plates 44-45). It does not matter much if we are not familiar with the story: the picture can be taken in the spirit of a ballo in due, a dance for two.

8. We have been looking at the painters' representations of people in terms of precisely that—represented people assessed not by the standards applied to real people but by standards adapted from experience of real people. At the same time the painters' figures and their environment were also colours and shapes, very intricate ones, and the fifteenth-century equipment for understanding them as such was not altogether the same as ours.

This is a great deal less clear and probably less important in the colours than in the shapes. Assembling symbolic series of colours was a late medieval game still played in the Renaissance. St. Antoninus and others expounded a theological code:

- White: purity
- Red: charity
- Yellow-gold: dignity
- Black: humility

Alberti and others gave an elemental code:

- Red: fire
- Blue: air
- Green: water
- Grey: earth

There was an astrological code, and Leonello d’Este, Marquis of Ferrara, was guided by it in his choice of clothes for the day. There were others too and, of course, the effect is that they largely canceled each other out. Each could be operative only inside very narrow limits: one might refer in one's mind to the heraldic code for coats-of-arms, or to the theological code when contemplating religious habits, and no doubt the astrological code when looking at Leonello d’Este. But unless reference to a code was prompted by special circumstantial cues of this kind, it could not be part of the normal digestion of visual experience. Symbolisms of this class are not important in painting, even though there are sometimes peculiarities consistent with them. There are no secret codes worth knowing about in the painters' colour.

The nearest thing to a code is what we met earlier, a greater...
sensitivity than ours to the relative splendour of hues and the medium of emphasis this offered the painter. Hues were not equal, were not perceived as equal, and the painter and his client lived with this fact as well as they could. When Gherardo Starnina followed his instructions to use two florin blue for the Virgin and one florin blue for the rest of the picture (p. 11) he was accenting a theological distinction. There are three levels of adoration: latria is the ultimate worship due only to the Trinity; dulia, the reverence for excellence, is what we owe the Saints, Angels and Fathers; hyperdulia, a more intense form of this, is due to the Virgin alone. In Starnina’s frescoes hyperdulia measured two florins the ounce. No doubt the latria due to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was expressed in gold accents. The accent offered by a valuable pigment was not something abandoned by the painters once they and their clients had become shy about flaunting large quantities of such pigments for their own sake. There were expensive colours, blues made from lapis lazuli or reds made from silver and sulphur, and there were cheap earth colours like ochre and umber. The eye was caught by the former before the latter (Colour Plate IV).
This may seem a shabby fact to us—though it would be difficult rationally to say quite why—and there was some intellectual and, even more clearly, pictorial distaste for it at the time: the tension is a characteristic part of the period. The distaste expressed itself in an argument for a pure relativity of colour. The most eloquent literary statement came in about 1430 from the humanist Lorenzo Valla, exasperated by a foolish heraldic hierarchy of colours the trecento lawyer Bartolo da Sassoferrato had pompously laid down:

Now let us look at Bartolo’s theories of colour . . . the colour gold [aureus] is the noblest of colours, he says, because light is represented by it; if someone wished to represent the rays of the sun, the most luminous of bodies, he could not do it more properly than by rays of gold; and it is agreed that there is nothing more noble than light. But if by gold we mean a tawny [fulvus] or reddish-yellow [rubilus] or yellowish [cremeus] colour, who was ever so blind or rotish as to call the sun yellowish? Raise your eyes, you ass Bartolo . . . and see whether it is not rather of a silvery white colour [argentaeus].

Which colour does he put next? . . . Blue, he says, is next—though the word he barbarously uses to denote ‘blue’ is the effeminate azuris rather than sapphirus. Air, he says, is represented by this colour. But does not this suggest he is now following the order of the elements? It does. But why did he leave the moon out . . . ? If you put the sun first, then you ought to make the moon second, and if you call the one golden you should call the other silver and next after the sun, just as silver comes second after gold . . . You put sapphire-colour in second place, Bartolo, seduced away from the hierarchy of Heavenly Bodies by the hierarchy of the Elements. Of course you do not think it right to take your examples from metals, stones, grasses and flowers; they would have been more appropriate, but you saw them as humble and abject things, you, O Bartolo, that are constitute of sun and of air alone. For, if we are following the order of elements, you have mentioned two but left two more out; and we, waiting for the grand and lofty progression to continue, feel let down. If the first colour is of fire and the second of air, the third will be of water and the fourth of earth . . .

But let us pass on. A little later the man says white is the noblest colour and black the lowest; and as for the other colours, they are good to the extent that they approach white and inferior as they approach blackness. There are a number of things to complain about in this. Does he not remember now what he said about gold . . .? And why do we die silk purple or white linen red, unless we find red more attractive than white? For while white is indeed the plainest and purest colour, it is not invariably the best.

And what shall I say of black? Indeed I find it is not considered of inferior excellence to white: the raven and swan are both holy to Apollo . . . In my view Ethiopians are more beautiful than Indians for the very reason that they are blacker. Why appeal to human authority when it is made puny by the heavenly? . . . If the Maker of all things saw no difference of value in colours, why should we little men do so?

Do we know more than God and shame to follow him? In Jesus’ name, even if Bartolo did not consider the stones and grasses and flowers and so many other things in his pronouncement on dress and ornament, how can he have overlooked the birds’ dress—the cock, peacock, woodpecker, magpie, pleasant and all the rest . . . Come then, hearken to this man at odds with God and men; and let us impose a law on our Pavia girls, now spring is nearly here, not to presume to weave garlands except as Bartolo prescribes. . . . But enough of this. It is stupid to lay down laws about the dignity of colours.

There are many pictorial statements of a similar argument (Colour Plate II).

Valla’s appeal to the limited, not to any medieval, sector of Nature represented by flowery meadows was a conventional move: the sculptor Filarete invoked the same meadows in some rather unhelpful remarks about which hues go well with which:

Learn from Nature and the fine arrangement of flowers in the meadows and grasses. Any colour goes well with green—yellow, red and even blue. You know how well white and black suit each other. Red does not go so well with yellow; it does go well with blue, but better still with green. White and red are good together.

Alberti’s remarks on colour harmonies are less simple-minded, and unrelated to the element symbolism he also perfunctorily admitted:

It will be pleasing in a picture if one colour is different from the next. For instance, if you are painting Diana and her band of nymphs, let one nymph have green drapery, another white, another rose, another yellow—different colours for each, and in such a way that light tones are always next to dark tones. If you have this contrast [of hues and of tones], the beauty of the colours will be clearer and more graceful. And there exists a certain affinity of colours, one joined with another producing a pleasing and worthy effect (Colour Plate I). A rose colour and a green or blue colour next to each other give beauty and seemliness to each other.

Alberti’s remarks on colour combination are the most distinguished one finds, and the difficulty of understanding quite what he means is a warning: words were not the medium in which fifteenth-century men, or anyone else, could register their colour sense.
9. In Florence, and in most other towns one knows about, a boy
in the private or municipal lay schools—the alternatives were
the church schools, now rather in decline, or one of the few
humanist schools—was educated in two stages. For about four
years from the age of six or seven he was at a primary school or
bottega, where he learned reading and writing with some
elementary business correspondence and notarial formulas. Then,
for about four years from the age of ten or eleven, he would
often go on to a secondary school, the abate. They read a few more
advanced books here, like Aesop and Dante, but the weight of
the teaching was now on mathematics. A few went on after this
to a university to become lawyers, but for most middle-class
people the mathematical skills of the secondary school were the
climax of their intellectual formation and equipment. Many of
their primers and handbooks survive and one can see clearly
what sort of thing this mathematics was; it was a commercial
mathematics adapted to the merchant, and both of its principal
skills are deeply involved in fifteenth-century painting.

One of these is gauging. It is an important fact of art history
that commodities have come regularly in standard-sized con-
tainers only since the nineteenth century: previously a container
—the barrel, sack or bale—was unique, and calculating its
volume quickly and accurately was a condition of business. How
a society gauged its barrels and surveyed its quantities is im-
portant to know because it is an index of its analytical skills and
habits. For instance, in the fifteenth century Germany seems to
have gauged its barrels with complex prepared rulers and
measures from which the answers could be read off: the job was
often done by a specialist. An Italian, by contrast, gauged his
barrels with geometry and \( \pi \):

There is a barrel, each of its ends being 2 bracci in diameter; the
diameter at its bung is 1 bracci and halfway between bung and end it
is 2\( \frac{1}{2} \) bracci. The barrel is 2 bracci long. What is its 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:

\[
2 \times 2 = 4; \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}.
\]

Add them together: \( 4 \frac{1}{4} \). Multiply \( 2 \times 2 \) by \( \frac{1}{4} \) and add this to \( 8 \frac{1}{4} \) to get \( 13 \frac{1}{4} \).

Divide by 3, \( 4 \frac{1}{4} \)... Now square \( 2 \frac{1}{4} = 2 \times 2 = 5 \frac{1}{4} \).

Add it to the square of the median diameter: \( 5 \frac{1}{4} + 4 \frac{1}{4} = 10 \frac{1}{4} \).

Multiply \( 2 \times 2 = 5 \). Add this to the previous sum: \( 15 \frac{1}{4} \).

Divide by 3, \( 5 \frac{1}{4} \).

Add it to the first result: \( 13 \frac{1}{4} + 5 \frac{1}{4} = 19 \frac{1}{4} \).

Multiply this by 11 and then divide by 14 [i.e. multiply by \( \frac{1}{2} \); the final result is \( 9 \frac{1}{2} \).

This is the cubic measure of the barrel.

It is a special intellectual world.

These instructions for gauging a barrel are from a mathematical handbook for merchants by Piero della Francesca, De
abaco, and the conjunction of painter and mercantile geometry is
very much to the point. The skills that Piero or any painter used
to analyse the forms he painted were the same as Piero or any
commercial person used for surveying quantities (plate 47). And
the connection between gauging and painting Piero himself
embodied is very real. On the one side, many of the painters,
themselves business people, had gone through the mathematical
secondary education of the lay schools: this was the geometry
they knew and used. On the other side, the literate public had
these same geometrical skills to look at pictures with: it was a
medium in which they were equipped to make discriminations,
and the painters knew this.

An obvious way for the painter to invoke the gauger's response
was to make pointed use of the repertory of stock objects used in
the gauging exercises, the familiar things the beholder would
have been made to learn his geometry on—cisterns, columns,
brick towers, paved floors and the rest. For instance, almost
every handbook used a pavilion as an exercise in calculating
surface areas; it was a convenient cone, or compound of cylinder
and cone, or of cylinder and truncated cone, and one was asked
to work out how much cloth would be needed to make the
pavilion. When a painter like Piero used a pavilion in his paint-
ing (plate 46) he was inviting his public to gauge. It was not that
they would try to make calculations about surface areas or
volumes, of course, but that they were disposed to recognize
the pavilion first as a compound of cylinder and cone, and then
secondarily as something deviating from the strict cylinder and
cone. The result was a more sharply focused awareness of the
pavilion as an individual volume and shape. There is nothing
trivial about Piero's use of his public's skill here; it is a way of
meeting the Church's third demand of the painter, that he should
use the visual sense's special quality of immediacy and force.
The beholder's precise and familiar assessment of the pavilion
mediates between his own position in the everyday and the
mystery of the Virgin's conception, rather as the three Angels are
mediators in the Baptism of Christ.

In his public appearances, the painter more normally de-
pended on his public's general disposition to gauge. To the
commercial man almost anything was reducible to geometrical
figures underlying any surface disposition to gauge. To the
commercial man almost anything was reducible to geometrical
figures underlying any surface disposition to gauge. To the
commercial man almost anything was reducible to geometrical
figures underlying any surface disposition to gauge.
truncated cones, the cloak to a circle of stuff allowed to lapse into a cone of stuff, the brick tower to a compound cubic body composed of a calculable number of smaller cubic bodies, and so on. This habit of analysis is very close to the painter’s analysis of appearances (plate 48). As a man gauged a bale, the 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 (plate 50) was leaving cues his public was well equipped to pick up.

There are several ways of seeing Niccolò da Tolentino's hat in Uccello's Battle of San Romano (plate 49). One is as a round hat with a flouncy crown; another is as a compound of a ring and plump squared-off disc disguised as a hat. These are not mutually exclusive: Lorenzo de' Medici, who had this picture in his bedroom, would have seen both and accepted it as a sort of serial geometrical joke. It demands attention initially by its exaggerated size and splendour; then in the second stage by the paradox of the pattern on this most three-dimensional of hats behaving as if it were two-dimensional, spreading itself flatly on the picture plane without regard for the object's shape; then, in the third stage, by a dawning anxiety about the polygon of the crown. Underlying it is something rectilinear, certainly; but is it hexagonal or four-sided? It is a problem hat, and as a way of making Niccolò da Tolentino noticeable the device of paradox and ambiguity is obviously effective.
though the geometry is less profoundly functional in the narrative than is the case with Piero's pavilion. But to construe the crown at all demands not only certain habits of inference—such as a presumption that the bit you cannot see is a regular continuation of the part you can—not only this, but a factor of energy and interest as well: that is, we will not bother to get this far unless we enjoy the exercise in some way, even if only on the level of exercising skills we value highly. Uccello's pictorial style must meet the proper cognitive style for the picture to work.

The geometrical concepts of a gauger and the disposition to put them to work sharpen a man's visual sense of concrete mass. He is likely to be aware at a higher level of the character of Adam in Masaccio's Expulsion from Paradise (plate 29) as a compound of cylinders or of the figure of Mary in Masaccio's Trinity (plate 64) as a massive truncated cone, and so of the figure itself. In the Quattrocento social world of the painter this constituted a stimulus to using his available means—in Masaccio's case, the Tuscan con-

vention of suggesting a mass by representing the tones of light and shadow one source of lighting would produce on it—in order to register his volumes clearly, with recognizable skill. A painter working in another convention could use different means to a similar end. For instance, Pisanello came from a north Italian tradition that registered a mass less with tones than with its characteristic edges. He could respond to the gauging sensibility

with figures set in twisted, counterpoised attitudes so that the edge presented to the picture plane spirals round the body like ivy round a column (plate 51). In many parts of Italy people seem to have preferred this convention, perhaps because it was the sort of painting they were used to and perhaps because they liked the mobile impression it made. In any event, Pisanello's St. George is a gauger's field-day in its own way.
In his treatise On Civil Life the Florentine Matteo Palmieri, whose description of the St. John’s Day procession we have already met, recommended the study of geometry for sharpening the minds of children. The banker Giovanni Rucellai remembered this, but replaced geometry by arithmetic: ‘It equips and spurs on the mind to examine subtle matters.’ This arithmetic was the other wing of the commercial mathematics central to Quattrocento culture. And at the centre of their commercial arithmetic was the study of proportion.

On 16 December 1486 Luca Pacioli the mathematician was in Pisa, and during the day he called in at the cloth warehouse of his friend Giuliano Salvati. A Florentine merchant, Onofrio Dini, was also there, and there was conversation. One of the things the Florentine, Onofrio Dini, kept his end up with was the following problem: A man was lying on his death bed and wished to make his will in as foresighted a way as he possibly could. His estate, he reckoned, amounted to the sum of 600 ducats. The man’s wife was shortly to give birth to a child, and he wished to make specific provision for both his widow and his orphan. He therefore made this disposition: if the child was a girl then it was to receive 200 ducats only, while the mother would receive 400; if, on the other hand, the child was a boy it was to receive 400 ducats and the widow only 200. Shortly afterwards the man died, and in due course his widow’s time came. But she gave birth to twins, and, to make things more complicated, one of the twins was a boy and the other a girl. The problem is: if the proportions between mother, son and daughter desired by the deceased are honoured, how many ducats will mother, son and daughter each receive?

Onofrio Dini probably did not realize it, but the game of proportion he was playing was an oriental game: the same problem of the widow and the twins appears in a medieval Arabic book. In turn the Arabs had learned this kind of problem and the arithmetic involved in them from India, for they were a Hindu development of the seventh century or earlier. Along with much other mathematics they were brought to Italy from Islam early in the thirteenth century by Leonardo Fibonacci of Pisa. Italy was full of problems like that of the widow and the twins in the fifteenth century. They had an entirely practical function: underneath the costumes of the widow and the twins are three early capitalists carving up a profit according to their relative investment in some trading venture. It is the mathematics of commercial partnership, and it was in this context that Luca Pacioli retells Onofrio Dini’s story in his Summa de Arithmetica of 1494.

The universal arithmetical tool of literate Italian commercial people in the Renaissance was the Rule of Three, also known as the Golden Rule and the Merchant’s Key. It was basically a very simple thing; Piero della Francesca explains:

The Rule of Three says that one has to multiply the thing one wants to know about by the thing that is dissimilar to it, and one divides the product by the remaining thing. And the number that comes from this is of the nature of that which is dissimilar to the first term; and the divisor is always similar to the thing which one wants to know about.

For example: seven bracci of cloth are worth nine lire; how much will five bracci be worth?

Do it as follows: multiply the quantity you want to know about by that quantity which seven bracci of cloth are worth—namely, nine. Five times nine makes forty-five. Divide by seven and the result is six and three sevenths.

There were different conventions for laying out the four terms involved:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{(a) } & 7 & 9 \\
\text{(b) } & 7 & 9 & 5 \\
\text{(c) } & 7 & 9 & 5 & 6 \\
\text{(d) } & 7:9 = 5:6 \\
\end{array}
\]

In the thirteenth century Leonardo Fibonacci had used the rather Islamic form (a). By the fifteenth century many people preferred the terms in a straight line, as in (b). In some copybook contexts the convention grew up in the later Renaissance of connecting the terms with curved lines, as in (c). Nowadays we would represent the relationships as in (d), but this notation was not used before the seventeenth century. The curved lines in notation (c) were not just decoration: they noted the relationships between the terms, because a series of terms in the Rule of Three is in geometric proportion. It is in the nature of the form and the operation that (1) the first term stands to the third term as the second stands to the fourth, and also that (2) the first term stands to the second term as the third stands to the fourth, and also that (3) if one multiplies the first term by the fourth term the product will be the same as the product of the second and third terms. A man noted these relationships as a means of checking his calculations.
The Rule of Three was how the Renaissance dealt with problems of proportion. Problems of proportion include: pasturage, brokerage, discount, tare allowance, the adulteration of commodities, barter, and currency exchange. These were very much more prominent than they are now. For instance, exchange problems were of an extraordinary complexity because each substantial city had not only its own currency but its own weights and measures. Plate 52 is a page from a Florentine Libro di mercantaniti of 1481 and deals with the differential between Florentine and some other cities' measures. Quattrocento people addressed this formidable confusion with the Rule of Three, and a good half of any of their treatises on arithmetic is given up to it. The difficulties were not of the form itself, which is simple, but of reducing a complex problem to the form, with the right terms in the right places; and for problems like compound interest the form was extended so that, instead of three initial terms, one might have many more.

So fifteenth-century people became adept in reducing the most diverse sort of information to a form of geometric proportion: A stands to B as C stands to D. For our purpose, the important thing is the identity of skill brought both to partnership or exchange problems and to the making and seeing of pictures. Piero della Francesca had the same equipment for a barter deal as for the subtle play of intervals in his pictures (Colour Plate 1), and it is interesting that it should be in relation to the commercial rather than the pictorial use that he expounds it. The commercial man had skills relevant to the proportionality of Piero's paintings, for the small step from the internal proportions of a partnership to the internal proportions of a physical body was naturally taken in the normal course of commercial exercises. In plate 53 for instance, are two proportion problems done on a goblet and on a fish. The lid, bowl and foot of the cup, and the head, body and tail of the fish are set in proportion—not in dimension but in the commercially relevant matter of weight. The operations are cognate with those involved in studying the proportions of a man's head, as Leonardo described them in plate 54.
From a to b—that is, from the roots of the hair in front to the top of the head—should be equal to cd—that is, from the bottom of the nose to the meeting of the lips in the middle of the mouth; from the inner corner of the eye m to the top of the head a is equal to the distance from m down to the chin s; s, c, f and b are equidistant each from the next.


The painter’s study of the proportions of the human body was usually a quite primitive affair in its mathematics, compared with what the merchants were used to.

The merchants’ geometric proportion was a method of precise awareness of ratios. It was not harmonic proportion, of any convention, but it was the means by which a convention of

harmonic proportion must be handled. More than this, even its compact suggestiveness carried within itself a tendency towards harmonic proportion. In plate 55 Leonardo is using the Rule of Three for a problem about weights in a balance, and comes up with the four terms 6 8 9 (12): it is a very simple sequence that any merchant would be used to. But it is also the sequence of the Pythagorean harmonic scale—tone, diatessaron, diapente, and diapason—as it was discussed in fifteenth-century musical and architectural theory (plate 56). Take four pieces of string, of equal consistency, 6, 8, 9 and 12 inches long, and vibrate them under equal tension. The interval between 6 and 12 is an octave; between 6 and 9 and between 8 and 12 a fifth; between 6 and 8 and between 9 and 12 a fourth; between 8 and 9 a major tone. This is the whole basis of western harmony, and the Renaissance could note it in the form of the Rule of Three: Pietro Cannuzio's Rules of Music's Flowers even put this notation of the harmonic scale at the top of its title page (plate 57), an invitation to the mercantile eye. In Raphael's School of Athens the attribute of Pythagoras is a tablet with the same motif numbered VI, VII, IX, XII. The harmonic series of intervals used by the musicians and sometimes by architects and painters was accessible to the skills offered by the commercial education.

Of course, the danger here is of over-statement: it would be absurd to claim that all these commercial people went around looking for harmonic series in pictures. The point to be made is less forthright. It is, first, that Quattrocento education laid exceptional value on certain mathematical skills, on gauging and the Rule of Three. These people did not know more mathematics than we do: most of them knew less than most of us. But they knew their specialized area absolutely, used it in important matters more often than we do, played games and told jokes with it, bought luxurious books about it, and prided themselves on their prowess in it; it was a relatively much larger part of their formal intellectual equipment. In the second place, 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. Because they were practised in manipulating ratios and in analysing the volume or surface of compound bodies, they were sensitive to pictures carrying the marks of similar processes. Thirdly there is a continuity between the mathematical skills used by commercial people and those used by the painter to produce the pictorial
This chapter has been becoming progressively more secular in its matter, but this may be a little deceptive. Indeed, it is possible that pictorial qualities which seem to us theologically neutral—proportion, perspective, colour, variety, for example—were not quite this. An imponderable is the moral and spiritual eye (plate 58), apt to interpret various kinds of visual interest in moral and spiritual terms. There are two kinds of pious Quattrocento literature which give hints, though no more than hints, about how this might enrich the perception of paintings. One is a type of book or sermon on the sensible quality of paradise, and the other is a text in which properties of normal visual perception are explicitly moralized.

In the first, vision is the most important of the senses, and the delights awaiting it in heaven are great. Bartholomew Rimbay-

57. The harmonic scale. From Pietro Cannusio. Regole florum musices (Florence, 1510), title page. Woodcut.

proportionality and lucid solidity that strike us as so remarkable now. Piero's De nobis is the token of this continuity. The status of these skills in his society was an encouragement to the painter to assert them playfully in his pictures. As we can see, he did. It was for conspicuous skill his patron paid him.

tinus’s *On the Sensible Delights of Heaven*, printed in Venice in 1498 and a very complete account of these matters, distinguishes three kinds of improvement on our mortal visual experience: a greater beauty in the things seen, a greater keenness in the sense of sight, and an infinite variety of objects for vision. The greater beauty lies in three particulars: more intense light, clearer colour, and better proportion (above all in the body of Christ); the greater keenness of sight includes a superior capacity to make discriminations between one shape or colour and another, and the ability to penetrate both distance and intervening solids. As another treatise with the same title, Celso Maffei’s *On the Sensible Delights of Heaven* of 1504, summed up: ‘Vision will be so keen that the slightest differences and variations in colour will be discernible, and it will not be impeded by distance or by the interposition of solid bodies.’ The last of these notions is the strangest to us; Bartholomew Rimbertinus had explained the thinking behind it:

An intervening object does not impede the vision of the blessed... If Christ, even though himself in heaven after his Ascension, saw his dear Mother still on earth and at prayer in her chamber, clearly distance and the interposition of a wall does not hinder their vision. The same is true when an object’s face is turned away from the viewer so that an opaque body intervenes... Christ could see the face of his mother when she was prostrate on the ground... as if he were looking directly at her face. It is clear that the blessed can see the front of an object from the back, the face through the back of the head.

The nearest mortal experience could come to this, perhaps, was through a strict perspective convention applied to a regular configuration, as happens in Piero della Francesca’s drawing of a well-head (plate 59).

But in the second kind of text some aspects of our normal mortal perception are discussed. Peter of Limoges’ *De oculo morali et spirituali* (On the Moral and Spiritual Eye) was a fourteenth-century book which had some vogue in Italy late in the fifteenth century: an Italian translation *Libro del ochio morale* was printed in 1496. Its programme was clear:

... many things are expounded in holy discourse relating to our vision and our physical eye. From this it is clear that a consideration of the eye and of such things as appertain to it is a very useful means of knowing more fully about the divine wisdom.

One of the ways the author carries this out is to take a number of familiar optical curiosities—that a stick half in water looks bent,
Zioni dua torri in un piano che luna e alta 80
braccia e talma e alta 90 braccia: et dal luna tor
re all'altra e 100 braccia: et in tra queste due torri,
e una fonte d'acqua in tal luogo che montandosi
due oggetti uno diciacqua et volando dispari uolo
gli abbono alla detta fonte suona tracco. Ciò sapere
quanto fa' e fonte sarà preso a ciascuna torre

80 - 90 - 100
80 - 90 - 100.

6400 8100 10000
8100
6400
1500
10000 1200
11500
58 1/2
la fonte alla torre
dell 80 braccia a brac-
cia 58 1/2 et la vanno in
fini 100 et 100 4
11/2 braccia sarà preso a
quella di 90 braccia


fact very simple: vision follows straight lines, and parallel lines going in any direction appear to meet at infinity in one single vanishing-point. The great difficulties and complexities of this convention arise in detail, in practice, in consistency, and in the

modifications of the basic principle necessary if the perspective of a painting is not to seem tendentious and rigid: they present themselves to the painter and not to the beholder, unless the painting has gone wrong in its perspective and one wants to say why. Many Quattrocento people were quite used to applying plane geometry to the larger world of appearances, because they were taught it for surveying buildings and tracts of land. There is a typical exercise in Filippo Calandri's treatise of 1491 (plate 60). There are two towers on-level ground. One is 80 feet high, the other 90 feet high, and the distance from one tower to the next is 100 feet. Between the towers is a spring of water in such a position that, if two birds set off one from each tower and fly in a straight line at the same speed, they will arrive at the spring together. One is to work out how far the spring is from the base of each tower. The key to the problem is simply that the two hypotenuses or bird-flights are equal, so that the difference of the squares of the two tower heights—100—is the difference of the squares of the two distances of tower from spring. The idea of perspective, of imposing a network of calculable

angles and notional straight lines on a prospect, is not outside the grasp of a man able to handle such an exercise in surveying.

If one brings these two types of thought together—geometrical experience enough to sense a conspicuous perspective construction, and a pious equipment for allegorizing it—one more shade in the Quattrocento painters’ narrative performance suggests itself. Passages of perspective virtuosity lose their gratuitous quality and take on a direct dramatic function. Vasari picked out the foreshortened loggia in the centre of Piero della Francesca’s Annunciation at Perugia as ‘a beautifully painted row of columns diminishing in perspective’; it is very noticeable that many Quattrocento Annunciations, death scenes, and scenes of the visionary have something similar (plate 61). But, in terms of the pious culture we have been looking at, suppose such a perspective is apprehended not just as à tour de force but also as a type of visual metaphor, a device suggestive of, say, the Virgin’s spiritual condition in the last stages of the Annunciation, as we have seen them in Fra Roberto’s exposition. It is then open to interpretation first as an analogical emblem of moral certainty (The Moral and Spiritual Eye) and then as an eschatological glimpse of beatitude (The Sensible Delights of Heaven).

This sort of explanation is too speculative to have much historical use in particular cases. The point of noting here the harmony between the style of pious meditation in these books and the pictorial interest—proportionality, variety and clarity of colour and conformation—of some Quattrocento paintings is not to interpret individual works, but to remind us of the eventual impalpability of the Quattrocento cognitive style. Some Quattrocento minds brought a moral and spiritual eye of this kind to these paintings: there seems room in many of the paintings to exercise it (Colour Plate I). It is proper to end this chapter on a faltering note.

III. Pictures and categories

1. It may be objected that the Quattrocento man invoked by this last chapter is just a church-going business man, with a taste for dancing. There are both offensive and defensive replies to this. The one is that, in any case, church-going and dancing business men did exist, included as unavoidable a Quattrocento figure as Lorenzo de’ Medici, and are a more balanced and representative type of the Quattrocento man than some that are current—‘civic humanists’, for example. The soft answer is more complicated.

The social practices most immediately relevant to the perception of paintings are visual practices. A society’s visual practices are, in the nature of things, not all or even mostly represented in verbal records. The church-going trader is the aspect of the public eye that emerged from the sort of sources available for Chapter II. He is not offered as an ideal type, in any sense, but he has the elements of the matter in him—religion, politeness, affairs. No Quattrocento man of the painter-paying classes had none of these. A prince like Leonello d’Este may have been higher on politeness and lower on mathematics, but he had some of the latter; as a matter of fact, some of the princes most active as patrons of good painting—in particular Lodovico Gonzaga of Mantua, the employer of Mantegna and Alberti, and Federigo da Montefeltro, Piero della Francesca’s patron at Urbino—were quite highly trained in mathematics. A financier like Giovanni Rucellai was good at the Rule of Three and perhaps hardly danced at all, but he certainly absorbed his society’s standards of decent social movement. For both kinds of man religious observance was institutional to the point of making the question of individual belief almost irrelevant.

Still, a great deal of the Quattrocento cognitive style most relevant to painting is not represented in Chapter II, and it is time to try a different approach. The reader will remember that Chapter I ended at an impasse, with an inability to read the Milanese agent’s account of four painters working in Florence. In fact, if one looks back to the letter (p. 26) some of its problems
turn out to have clarified themselves a little in the light of the materials of Chapter II. The virile air of Botticelli is rather more acceptable now that one has learned to approach Botticelli's paintings as representations in a mode cognate with the bassa danza (p. 78): indeed, it is almost virile aere. Again, one knows now from the encounter with the Rule of Three (p. 95) that the writer was likely to have quite an immediate sense of what proportion is, and his remark about Botticelli's integra proportional is correspondingly likely to reflect a genuine sense of interval. Filippino Lippi's aria più dolce, his sweeter air, is still relatively impenetrable, but given the stimulus to look for help, one finds a poem published by Francesco Lanciotti in 1508, in which a painter is urged:

Ove bisogna aria dolce, aria fiera,  
Variare ogni atto, ogni testa e figura,  
Come for varia a' prati primaveria.

Where a sweet or a proud air is needed,  
Vary every attitude, every head and figure,  
As spring varies the flowers in the meadows.

So aria relates to the character of movement, head and figure; and dolce contrasts with proud as well as virile—we can translate it as 'mild', perhaps. Perugino's aria angelica has already been a little clarified by information about such matters as religious gesture (p. 65). We will add to this the Four Corporal Gifts of the Blessed, expounded in many Quattrocento sermons and tracts: claritas, impossibilitas, agilitas, subtillitas—splendour, invulnerability, quickness, keenness. Ghirlandaio's buona aria remains a nondescript description of a slightly characterless artist.

Now the opaqueness of the letter to Milan is partly due to the writer's uncertainty with his words: he does not have the verbal faculty to describe pictorial style very fully or exactly. In spite of this, once one has broken through his words to a meaning, they are very much to our purpose. Each of his terms looks two ways: towards his reaction to the paintings, clearly, but also towards the latent sources of his standards. Virile, proportion and angelic refer the paintings to the polite, business-like and religious systems of discrimination he is drawing on. If a text of this kind is penetrable, a text by a verbally more skilled man is generally more acceptable now that one has learned to approach Botticelli's paintings as representations in a mode cognate with the bassa danza (p. 78): indeed, it is almost virile aere. Again, one knows now from the encounter with the Rule of Three (p. 95) that the writer was likely to have quite an immediate sense of what proportion is, and his remark about Botticelli's integra proportional is correspondingly likely to reflect a genuine sense of interval. Filippino Lippi's aria più dolce, his sweeter air, is still relatively impenetrable, but given the stimulus to look for help, one finds a poem published by Francesco Lanciotti in 1508, in which a painter is urged:

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his employer Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino; the occasion for the excursus on painting is a visit by Federigo to Mantua, where he sees the work of Andrea Mantegna, particularly praised as master of all the parts of painting:

... de tuci i membri de tale arte
lo integro e chiaro corpo lui possede
più che huom de Italia o de le externe parte.


But presently a rhymed list is given of other great masters of painting:

ne la cui arte splendida e gentile,
nel secul nostro, tanti chiar son stati,
che ciescun altro far parer pòn vile.
A Brugia fu, fra gli altri più lodati,
el gran Januès e 'l discepl Rugiorno,
cum tanti di excellenza chiar dotati,
ne la cui arte et altq magistero
di color, son stati si excellenti,
che han superati multe volte el vero.
Ma in Italia, in questa età presente,
vi fu el degno Gentil da Fabriano,
Giován da Fiesol, frate al bene arcente,
et, in medaglie e in pictura, el Pisano,
frate Philippo e Francesco Peselli,
Domenico, chiamato el Venetiano,
Massaccio et Andrein, Paolo Ocelli,
Antonio e Pier, si gran designatori,
Pietro dal Borgo, antico più di quelli,
dui giovin par d'etate e par d'amori,
Leonardo da Vinci e 'l Perusino
Pier dalla Pieve, ch'è un divin pictore,
el Ghirlandaia, el giovin Philipino,
Sandro di Botticello, e 'l Cortonese
Luca, de ingegno e spirto pellegrino.
Hor, lassando di Etruria el bel paese,
Antonel de Cicilia, huom tanto chiaro,
Giovan Bellin, che sue lode òn diatese,
Gentil, suo frate, e Cosmo cum lui al paro,
Hercule ancora, e molti che or trapasso,
non lassando Melozo, a me si caro,
che in prospectiva ha steso tanto el passo.

In this splendid, noble art
So many have been famous in our century,
They make any other age seem poor.
At Bruges most praised were
Great Jan van Eyck and his pupil Rogier van der Weyden
With many others gifted with great excellence.
In the art of painting and lofty mastery
Of colouring they were so excellent,
They many times surpassed reality itself.
In Italy, then, in this present age
There were the worthy Gentile da Fabriano,
Fra Giovanni Angelico of Fiesole, ardent for good,
And in medals and painting Pisanello;
Fra Filippo Lippi and Francesco Pesellino,
Domenico called Veneziano,
Masaccio, Andrea del Castagno, Paolo Uccello,
Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo, great draughtsmen,
Piero della Francesca, older than these;
Two young men like in fame and years—
Leonardo da Vinci and Pietro Perugino
Of Pieve, a divine painter;
Ghirlandaio and young Filippino Lippi,
Sandro Botticelli, and from Cortona
Luca Signorelli of rare talent and spirit.
Then, going beyond the lovely land of Tuscany,
There is Antonello da Messina, a famous man;
Giovanni Bellini, whose praises spread far,
And Gentile his brother; Cosimo Tura and his rival
Ercole de' Roberti, and many others I omit—
Yet not Melozzo da Forli; so dear to me
And in perspective so far advanced.

If we reduce all these names to a scheme, we have the table on p. 115.

Unlike many Florentines, Santi is conscious of the fine painting being produced in Venice and northern Italy: he is also very alive to the quality of Netherlandish painting, known and bought at Urbino. But the weight is, as it had to be, with Florence—13 out of 25 Italian artists—and it is to Florence also that one must go for the best criticism. We have already seen four painters from Santi's list in the Milanese agent's report: Botticelli, Filippino Lippi, Ghirlandaio, Perugino. We shall now look at Cristoforo Landino's characterization of four others: Masaccio, Filippo Lippi, Andrea del Castagno, Fra Angelico.
gate the secrets of nature. What branch of mathematics did he not know? He was geometrician, arithmetician, astronomer, musician, and more admirable in perspective than any man for many centuries. His brilliance in all these kinds of learning is shown in the nine books on architecture excellently written by him, which are full of every kind of learning and illuminated by the utmost eloquence. He wrote on painting; he also wrote on sculpture in a book called Statua. He not only wrote on these arts but practised them with his own hand, and I have in my own possession highly prized works executed by him with the brush, with the chisel, with the graver, and by casting of metal.

Alberti had written his treatise On painting in 1435, the first surviving European treatise on painting, and it seems to have circulated particularly among humanists interested in painting or geometry or good plain prose. Book I is a geometry of perspective, Book II describes the good painting in three sections—(1) 'Circumscription', or outlining bodies, (2) Composition, (3) 'Reception of light', or tones and hues; Book III discusses the education and life-style of the artist. The treatise's influence was slow to be felt outside learned circles, but Landino was clearly impressed by it and in the text we are going to read he played a part in bringing some of its central concepts to a wider public.

Pliny's Natural History was written in the first century A.D. and includes in its Books 34–36 the fullest critical history of classical art to survive from antiquity; this took both its facts and its critical language from a tradition of art criticism developed in Greek books now lost. Pliny's method depended very largely on a tradition of metaphor: he described artists' style with words that took much of their meaning from their use in non-pictorial, social or literary, contexts—austere, florid, hard, grave, severe, liquid, square and other such oblique terms. Landino's translation of Pliny was printed in 1473. Faced by Pliny's austerus, floridus, durus, gravis, severus, liquidus, quadratus he was not adventurous; he translated them as austero, florido, duro, grave, severo, liquido and quadro. Now when Landino came in 1480 to describe the artists of his own time one could expect him to use Pliny's terms. They are subtle, rich and precise words for describing art; we ourselves use most of them today, even though most of their metaphorical quality has withered. But to his great credit Landino did not do this. 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.
The account of the artists occurs in the Preface to his commentary on the *Divine Comedy*, in which he sought to refute the charge that Dante was anti-Florentine: he defends Dante's loyalty, and then Florence's excellence by speaking of the city's distinguished men in various fields. The section on painters and sculptors, which comes after that on musicians, falls into four parts. The first describes ancient art in ten sentences: this is after Pliny. The second describes Giotto and a few fourteenth-century painters: this copies a fourteenth-century critic, Filippo Villani.

The third describes the Florentine Quattrocento painters; it is Landino's own contribution and is the passage we shall read. The fourth describes a few sculptors. Cristoforo Landino on Masaccio, Filippo Lippi, Andrea del Castagno and Fra Angelico:

Fu Masaccio optimo imitatore di natura, di gran rilievo universale, buono compositore et puro sanza ornato, perche solo si dee all'imitazione del vero, et al rilievo delle figure; fu certo buono et prospetivo quanto altro di quegli tempi, et di gran facilita nel fare, essendo ben giovane, che mori d'anni ventisei. Fu fra Philippo gratioso et ornato et artificioso sopra modo: valse molto nelle compositioni et varieta, nel colorire, nel rilievo, nel ornamenti d'ogni sorte, maxime o imitati dal vero o ficti. Andreino fu grande disegnatore et di gran rilievo, amatore delle difficoltate dell'arte et di scrori, vivo et prompto molto, et assai facile nel fare. . . Fra Giovanni Angelico et vezzo et divoto et ornato molto con grandissima facilita.

Masaccio was a very good imitator of nature, with great and comprehensive rilievo, a good compositore and puro, without ornato, because he devoted himself only to imitation of the truth and to the rilievo of his figures. He was certainly as good and skilled in perspective as anyone else at that time, and of great facilita in working, being very young, as he died at the age of 26. Fra Filippo Lippi was gratioso and ornato and exceedingly skillful; he was very good at compositioni and at variety, at colorire, rilievo, and very much at ornaments of every kind, whether imitated after the real or invented. Andrea del Castagno was a great disegnatore and of great rilievo; he was a lover of the difficulties of the art and of foreshortenings, lively and very prompto, and very facile in working. . . Fra Angelico was vezzo, divoto, very ornato, and endowed with the greatest facilita.

MASACCIO

Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Mone Cassai, known as Masaccio, was born in San Giovanni Val d'Arno in 1401 and was admitted to the painters' guild at Florence in 1428. Between 1423 and 1428 he painted his surviving masterpieces at Florence, a fresco at the Trinity (plate 64) in S. Maria Novella (1425–26) and the several frescoes in the Brancacci chapel of S. Maria del Carmine (Colour Plate III), much damaged by fire in 1471. During 1426 he also painted a polyptych for a chapel in S. Maria del Carmine at Pisa; this was broken up by the eighteenth century and parts are now in London (the central panel), Pisa, Naples, Vienna and Berlin. Late in 1428 Masaccio went to Rome, where he seems almost immediately to have died.

(a) Imitatore della natura—imitator of nature

This and 'imitation of the truth' (imitazione del vero), in spite of their apparent simplicity, are varieties of one of the critical phrases most difficult to weigh in the Renaissance; a stronger form was to say a painter 'rivalled or surpassed nature or reality itself'. In many ways such phrases were inimical to discrimination. They were the easiest cliché of praise one could use and they set up an unspecified realism as a uniform standard of quality, none of which helps active consideration of an artist's particular strength and character. Nature and reality are different things to different people and unless a man defines them, as he rarely does, one is not much wiser: what nature and which reality? But the phrase undeniably invokes one of the principal values of Renaissance art, and the fact that Masaccio is the one Quattrocento painter Landino credits with this virtue suggests it had a meaning for him. Moreover, Leonardo da Vinci was soon to say much the same: 'Tomaso of Florence, called Masaccio, demonstrated with perfect skill that the painters who were arrogantly taking models other than Nature, mistress of master painters, were labouring in vain.' That is to say, one mark of the 'imitator of nature' is a relative independence from the pattern-books and formulas, the stock figures and accepted arrangements, which were a substantial part of the pictorial tradition. This is negative; elsewhere Leonardo offers a positive description of how the painter imitates nature:

Painting . . . compels the mind of the painter to transform itself into the mind of nature itself and to translate between nature and art, setting out, with nature, the causes of nature's phenomena regulated by nature's laws—how the likenesses of objects adjacent to the eye converge with true images to the pupil of the eye; which of objects equal in size appears larger to that eye; which of equal colours appears more or less dark, or more or less bright; which of objects equally low appears more or less

low: which of objects standing at equal heights will appear more or less high; why, of two objects standing at different distances [from the eye], one will appear less clear than the other.

This is all very much to the point; Leonardo is talking about perspective and the light and shadow through which we perceive the forms of objects, and it is for his mastery of these—prospettiva and rilievo—that Landino goes on to praise Masaccio. So we may say that the imitator of nature is the painter who turns away from the pattern-books with their ready-made formulas and solutions, to the appearance of actual objects; and that he reckons on studying and re-presenting these appearances particularly through their perspective and their relief—an edited 'reality' and selective 'nature'.

(b) Rilievo—relief
Masaccio is the prime exponent of rilievo—gran rilievo universale and rilievo delle figure. In descending order, it seems, he is followed by Castagno (gran rilievo) and Filippo Lippi (busto mollo . . . nel rilievo). Alberti, who uses rilievo to translate the Latin word prominenza, 'projection', had explained that it is the appearance of a form modelled in the round, attained by the skilful and discreet treatment of the tones on its surface:... light and shade make real things appear to us in relief (rilievato); white and black make painted things appear the same... The term was a technical one of the workshop, and Cennino Cennini used it freely in his early Quattrocento Book of the Artist:

How you should give your figures the system of lighting, light or shade, endowing them with a system of rilievo: If, when you are drawing or painting figures in chapels or painting them in other difficult places, it happens that you cannot control the lighting to your purpose, give the rilievo to your figures or design according to the arrangement of the windows in these places, since it is they that must provide the lighting (plate 66). And so, following the lighting, whichever side it is coming from, apply your rilievo and shadow after this system (Colour Plate III). ... And if the light pours from one window larger than the others in the place, always accommodate yourself to this brighter light; and you should systematically study and follow it, because if you work fails in this, it will have no rilievo and it will turn out to be a simple thing with little mastery.

It is a good account of one of the principal strengths of Masaccio's rilievo, and has a bearing on how to look at it: it is a commonplace of the guidebooks that there is a time of day, round 11 a.m., when the lighting is somehow right for Masaccio's frescos in the
Brancacci chapel, and we in turn accommodate ourselves to this. Highlights and shadows are apprehended as a form only when one has a firm idea of where the lighting comes from; if we are deprived of this idea, as we can be in laboratory conditions and occasionally in normal experience too, even real complex solids are seen as flat surfaces blotched with light and dark patches—exactly the opposite illusion from that sought by the painters. Landino’s emphasis on the rilievo of Masaccio’s frescoes has remained a constant of art criticism, though sometimes in disguise: Bernard Berenson—‘I never see them without the strongest stimulation of my tactile consciousness.’ But Landino has the advantage of talking about the pictures, in the painters’ terms, and not about himself.

(c) Puro—pure

Puro sanza ornato is almost pleonastic, since puro nearly means sanza ornato. Puro is one of Landino’s Latinisms and copies the literary critical sense of an unadorned, laconic style: Cicero had spoken of purus and clear, Quintilian of purus and distinct, Pliny the Younger of purus and plain style. It turns a negative idea—‘without ornament’—into a positive one—‘plain and clear’—with an element of moral overtone. It was necessary to do this because in the classical and renaissance system of criticism the opposite of ‘ornate’ could be either virtuous like ‘plain’ or vicious like ‘mean’; to say someone was un-ornate was not enough. Puro


says that Masaccio was neither ornate nor bleak. It takes its meaning from its opposition to ornato: and what Landino means by ornato is a problem better left till he uses it in a positive way for other painters, Filippo Lippi and Fra Angelico. But Landino is setting Masaccio on a scale of styles—plain rather than florid or grand—that is essentially functional, in the sense that the style is adapted to a specific purpose. Quintilian described a pure style without ornament, clear, distinct, not lofty (sermo purus et dilucidus et distinctus ceterum minime elatus ornatusque), which people thought proper to intellectual argument, though Quintilian himself thought a little ornament does argument no harm. In a book Landino did not know, De vulgari eloquentia (II. vi), Dante himself had set a ‘sapid but pure’ (pure sapidus) style against both an ignorant insipidus style and a primitively rhetorical style. For Dante the pure style was the properly austere style of scholars and teachers, and had its own flavour. Masaccio had his own systematic scholarship, of rilievo and prospectio. It would hardly strain the case to see his pictures as arguments, as well as models, for the imitation of nature through systematic rilievo and prospectio: this is how Leonardo (p. 119) saw them. Of course, puro falls some way short of proposing that Masaccio’s pictures are scholarly and instructive arguments in an austere mode; it is just consistent with their conspicuously being such.

(d) Facilita—ease

This means something between our ‘facility’ and ‘faculty’, but without the disapproving connotation of the first. It was much used in literary criticism and, strictly expounded, was the product of (1) natural talent and (2) acquireable skills developed through (3) exercise, though of course it was often used more freely and loosely than this. The practised fluency of facilita was one of the qualities most esteemed by the Renaissance, but it was and is difficult to pin down. Alberti treats of it under the name of diligenza-with-quickness (diligenza congiunta con prestezza) or quickness-with-diligence (prestezza di fare congiunta con diligenza) and orthodoxy finds its source in talent developed by exercise. It shows itself in a painting that appears complete but not over-finished: its enemies are pentimenti or corrections, an unwillingness to leave off from working on a piece, and the sort of stakeness that can be cured by taking a break. All this is specially related to fresco rather than panel painting—the Milanese agent’s distinct categories of ‘good at fresco’ and ‘good at panels’ (p. 26) have critical point—and our own lack of the experience of seeing a man working fast on the drying plaster makes it difficult to react
properly to the term *facilita*. Masaccio's frescoes are what is called *buon fresco* or true fresco, painted almost entirely on fresh wet plaster, a new section of this being put on for each session of painting. In this they differ from most Quattrocento frescoes, which are not true fresco at all but *fresco secco*, painted more on dry plaster. Thus Masaccio's *facilita* is measurable in the astonishingly small number of fresco sections that have left their mark on the walls of the Brancacci chapel: just 27 fresco sessions for the *Tribute Money* (plate 65) constitute a sort of *facilita* concretely visible in the seams between one session and the next, as well as in the broad, rich brush strokes that made this speed possible. For Vasari, looking back from the middle of the sixteenth century, *facilita nel fare* was the one quality Quattrocento painting had most conspicuously lacked. He admired in his own period 'a certain freedom' and 'a certain resolute spirit', the opposite of 'a certain hardness' or 'dryness' brought on by 'excessive study' in the Quattrocento, and he cannot see it in painting before Leonardo da Vinci. Critical calibrations shift and Vasari's had been influenced by a new sixteenth-century cult of the *buon fresco*: his complaint of 'dryness' is only partly metaphorical.

and taught by rules. The definition by Antonio Manetti which we began with is more inclusive, and in fact, within or without a pavement, Quattrocento perspective at its best is often intuitive. Masaccio followed a careful and detailed construction in his *Trinity* (plate 64), showily but not quite consistently calculated for the low viewpoint, but he clearly worked more freely in the Brancacci chapel. We ourselves do not have to draw a perspective construction for the *Tribute Money* (plate 65) to sense that the vanishing point is behind Christ's head and respond to this accent on Christ. The picture and our response would both lack *facilita* if we did.

**FILIPPO LIPPI**

Filippo Lippi was an orphan and became a Carmelite monk in 1421, aged about fifteen, at the same S. Maria del Carmine in Florence where Masaccio was presently to paint the Brancacci Chapel. He is not recorded as a painter until 1430 and it is not known by whom he was taught, though a connection with Masaccio is often argued. He became a client of the Medici family, who gave him help in a series of personal difficulties, including marriage to a nun. A large number of panel paintings by Filippo Lippi have survived. His largest works outside Florence were fresco cycles in the cathedrals at Prato (1452–64) and Spoleto (1466–9), where he died. Botticelli probably and his own son Filippino certainly were his pupils.

(1) *Gratioso*—gracious

The characterization of Filippo Lippi, a painter very different from Masaccio, begins with a word which was constantly veering between a more objective and a more subjective sense: (1) possessing *grazia* and (2) pleasing in general. The first was the more vernacular and precise, but the second was attractive to intellectuals like Landino because the Latin word *gratius* was commonly used with this meaning. It would be foolish to exclude either here, though *grazia* is the notion we shall address ourselves to. It is the quality he is praised for in the epigraph the humanist Poliziano wrote for him:

**CONDITUS HIC EGO SVM PICTURE FAMA PHILIPPS NVLLI IGNOTA MEE EST GRATIA MIRAN**

Here I lie, Filippo, the glory of painting:
To no one is the wonderful *gratia* of my hand unknown.

Within Landino himself there is a useful crossbearing to start from, for another artist, the sculptor Desiderio da Settignano (1428–64), is praised for having 'the utmost *gratia*. Filippo's paintings with Desiderio's reliefs is a comprehensible pairing.

At the lowest level, it is clear that both artists produced delicate and elegant half-length Madonnas with sweet faces, *gratiose* in either sense of the word. But it is more interesting to see the comparison on less obvious ground: for instance we can set the bands of angels on Desiderio's Tabernacle in S. Lorenzo at Florence (plate 69) beside the young people in Filippo's fresco of *Salome dancing before Herod*—not just Salome herself but the maidens in attendance on each side of the hall (plate 70). These
registration of complex solid objects, and one result was a great simplification of the physical ambience the artist cared to tackle. There are many more right-angles, many more straight lines and many more regular solids in Quattrocento paintings than there are in nature or had been in earlier painting. What the young painter now had to learn is shown in a contract in which the Paduan painter Squarcione undertook in 1467 to teach the son of another Paduan painter, Uguccione:

the system of the floor [i.e. ‘pavement’], well drawn in my manner; and to put figures on the said floor here and there at different points, and to put objects on it—chairs, benches and houses; and he is to learn how to do these things on the said floor; and he is to be taught a head of a man in foreshortening . . .; and he is to be taught the method for a nude figure, measured, before and behind; and how to put in eyes, nose, mouth and ears in a man’s head, measured in their places; and I am to teach him these things as thoroughly as I can and as far as the said Francesco has the capacity to learn them . . .

Systematic perspective noticeably and naturally brings systematic proportion with it: the first enables the painter to sustain the second. But there is a danger, for us as much as for Squarcione’s pupil, of equating ‘perspective’ exclusively with systematic linear perspective constructions, since these are conveniently described


seem essential gratia, and Leonardo wrote the recipe for such figures some years later:

The parts of the body should be arranged with gratia, with a view to the effect you want the figure to make. If you want it to display elegant charm (leggiadria), you should make it [1] delicate and elongated, [2] without too much exhibition of muscles, and [2a] the few muscles you do purposely show, make them soft, that is, with little distinctness and their shadows not much tinted, and [3] the limbs, specially the arms, relaxed—that is to say, [3a] no part of the body in a straight line with the part next to it.

One begins to see why Filippo Lippi, so endowed with gratia, has less rilievo than Masaccio or Castagno: the two qualities are not fully compatible. Leonardo's recipe, and Desiderio and Filippo's common practice, make up a rough description of pictorial gratia, but not a definition. It is doubtful whether a definition is desirable: later, in the sixteenth century, philosophers and theorists of art tried very hard to define grazia in neo-platonic terms, especially its difference from beauty, but the results were over-elaborate and academic. But one definition helpful and also proper to Landino in 1480 was that of the neo-classical literary critics, his professional colleagues. In their system gratia was the product of (1) varietà and (2) ornato. It is precisely these two qualities Landino now goes on to attribute to Filippo Lippi.

(g) Ornato—ornate

The main difficulty in understanding the Renaissance sense of the term 'ornate' is that it evokes, for us, an idea so much of decorative embroidery and appliqué embellishment; for us it is the knobs on things. But in the Renaissance this was a small and questionable part of the ornato, which embraced much more. Here again neo-classical literary criticism gave the clearest formulations of what ornato was, and especially Book VIII of Quintilian's Education of an Orator. For the literary critics the first two virtues of language were clarity and correctness, insufficient however in themselves to make a production distinguished, and anything additional to clarity and correctness was the ornato; Quintilian stated: 'the ornate is whatever is more than just clear and correct.' Much of what makes up an artistic production is ornate. Quintilian lists the general qualities of ornateness: piquancy, polish, richness, liveliness, charm and finish (acutum, nitoribus, copiosis, hilaris, incutundum, acuanum). In literary theory all this was further subdivided and analysed; but it is the general notion of ornato that spread to such other activities as painting. To Landino Filippo Lippi's and Fra Angelico's paintings were ornato, whereas Masaccio was without ornato because he pursued other values. That is to say, Filippo Lippi and Fra Angelico were piquant, polished, rich, lively, charming and finished, whereas Masaccio sacrificed these virtues for clear and correct imitation of the real. It is important to realize that 'without ornato' is a very much stronger and more interesting remark about Masaccio than 'not ornate' would be to us; Masaccio, in Landino's view, sacrificed a great deal. This is all very general,
of course, and is bound to remain so: true ornato is too much an element diffused through a pictorial style to be isolated like rilievo or perspective. But it is noticeable that when the Quattrocento used the term in the context of particular motifs in pictures it is very often in relation to the attitude or the movement of a figure. Alberti, for instance, suggests: 'Let the movements of a man (as opposed to a boy or young woman) be ornato with more firmness, with handsome and skillful attitudes.' And here the Renaissance was close to classical antiquity. In a famous passage Quintilian, trying to explain the effect of ornate figures in rhetoric, uses the simile of a statue; the stiff, upright statue with its arms hanging straight down, lacks gratia and ornateness, whereas a curved, mobile and varied pose has gratia and is the equivalent of ornate prose. And this perhaps is the best mental image for our purpose: the foursquare straight figure (Masaccio) is without ornato (Colour Plate III), and the flexed, counterpoised one (Filippo Lippi) is ornato (plate 71).

Landino also notes that Filippo Lippi was good at 'ornamenti of every kind, whether imitated from reality or invented.' In


Quattrocento usage ornamenti are usually rather closer to our sense of ornaments and decorative trappings. Properly used on figures or buildings they are a part of ornato, but only in moderation; Leonardo: 'In narrative paintings never put so many ornamenti on your figures and other objects that they obscure the form and attitude of the figures or the essence (essentia) of the objects.'

(h) Varietà—variety

The classic Quattrocento account of pictorial variety and the one most familiar to Landino was in Alberti's Treatise on Painting of 1435. Alberti was concerned to refine the notion of variety and differentiate between it and sheer quantity of stuff. He therefore distinguished between two kinds of interest: (1) copiousness (copia), which is a profusion of matter, and (2) varietà, which is a diversity of matter. A picture is 'copious' when 'there are mingled together old men, young men, boys, women, girls, small children, fowls, puppy-dogs, small birds, horses, sheep, buildings, tracts of country, and so on'; one is reminded of the list in the Ghirlandaio-Tornabuoni contract of 1485 (p. 17). All this is pleasant enough as long as it is appropriate and not confused;

in which our Tuscan painter Giotto put eleven disciples, all moved by fear seeing one of their companions walk on the waters, because he represented each figure with its face and action indicating a disturbed mind, so that each had its own diverse movements and attitudes.

There are paintings by Filippo Lippi that are both copious and varied, but it is the pictures that are varied with an economy of elements that Quattrocento critics most admired: a drawing for a *Crucifixion* (plate 73) represents very well what Alberti and Landino meant by variety of figures. The resonances between the pictorial value of variety and other areas of Quattrocento culture—with literary criticism and with the experience of the heavenly, as we have seen (p. 104)—are very powerful.

(i) *Composition*—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 Landino takes the concept. Alberti found his model in the classical literary criticism of the humanists, for whom *composicio* was the way in which a sentence was made up, with a hierarchy of four levels:

![Diagram of sentence hierarchy](image)

Alberti transferred the word and the model to painting:

![Diagram of picture composition](image)

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. It was also the imaginative skeleton on which the artist built up, and the critic judged, varietà. Indeed the two concepts are complementary: neither the centrifugal varietà nor the centripetal composizione is complete without the other. Composizione disciplines varietà; varietà nourishes composizione. Landino realized this and praises Filippo for composizione et varietà, as a pair; and here we have another cross-bearing for he praises another artist, the sculptor Donatello, for the same qualities. Donatello is mirabile in composizione et in varietà. Now this is initially a disconcerting conjunction. What can the eloquent and energetic figures and groups of Donatello's reliefs have to do with the gracious and restrained Filippo Lippi? A great deal, as it turns out, and Landino's perceptive match-making prods one into attending to a very real underlying similarity. Both artists composed groups in which varied figures combine into symmetrical groups, satisfying because of the tension between variety and symmetry (plates 74, 75). Both could gear this to narrative purposes, composing into a rich coherence a variety of 'movements of body and of mind' (plates 73, 76), and both sometimes extended this to very large numbers of figures. Both constructed uncanny but completely composed worlds behind their protagonists, pushing their composed space deep into the picture, whether the elements are trees and rocks, as often in Filippo (Colour Plate IV), or architectural fantasies, as usually in Donatello (plate 76). The general dissimilarity of the artists is therefore an opportunity for us: the principle of order these two have in common—plate 74 with plate 75, and plate 73 with plate 76, and plate IV with plate 76—uncluttered with accidental or superficial similarities, is composizione et varietà distilled. And once we learn to see this quality, we have a finger on one of the prime bearings of Quattrocento cognition.

(j) Colorire—colouring
This does not mean 'colouring' in our current sense, which refers mainly to hues. In fact, it is an important negative of
Landino's criticism that he never praises a painter for his colour, in our sense, as such: for that sort of thing one must go outside Florence. Giammario Filelfo addresses the Venetian Gentile Bellini:

Veduta ho lorpa tua col suo cholore,
La venustà col suo sguardo benegno,
Ogni suo movimento e nobil segno,
Che ben dimonstri il tuo gientil valore.

I have seen your work with its colour,
Its comeliness and generous glance,
Its every movement and noble gesture,
Well showing your lofty merit.

Content with a comely impression, this is a more naive and passive sensibility than Landino's. By colorire Landino means the application of pigment. It was sometimes used in a very general sense, almost equivalent with 'painting'; according to the biographer Vespasiano da Bisticci, Federigo da Montefeltro, 'because he did not find masters to his taste in Italy who knew how to colorire on panels with oil, sent to Flanders'. But there was a more special and interesting sense, which is what Landino has in mind, and this is given a definition by Piero della Francesca in his treatise \textit{On the painter's perspective}:'By colorare \textit{sic} we mean applying colours as they show themselves in objects, lights and darks according to how the illumination makes them change.' In other words, colorire partly overlaps with rilievo and coincides with the section of Alberti's treatise which he calls 'Reception of light'. To the painter the phenomenon of an objects' reception of light presented itself as the art of manipulating black and white, on the one hand, and red, blue, green and the rest of the colours, on the other: tones and hues. But colorire gains its full sense in opposition to the next value Landino invokes, not for Filippo Lippi but for Andrea del Castagno, disegno.

ANDREA DEL CASTAGNO

Castagno signed some frescoes in S. Zaccaria at Venice in 1442. It is not known who his teacher was, nor exactly when he was born, though 1423 is now considered a likely date. By 1444 he was back in Florence. The main line of his work thereafter lies in a series of frescoes in S. Apollonia (\textit{The Last Supper}, Crucifixion, \textit{Entombment} and \textit{Resurrection} (plate 77: about 1445-50), SS. Annunziata (St. Julian; \textit{The Trinity with the Virgin, St. Jerome and a Saint} (plate 79), the Villa Carducci at Sovllano outside Florence (a cycle of famous men and women, now removed to S. Apollonia), and the equestrian portrait of Niccolò da Tolentino in the Cathedral, 1456. He died in 1457.

(k) \textit{Disegnatore}—exponent of design

The term was associated with linear, as opposed to tonal, representation of the object. Francesco da Buti, a late fourteenth-century commentator on Dante: '[Giotto] was a master of the brush—that is, a finished painter (dipintore)—and also of the pencil (stilo)—that is, \textit{disegnatore} with pencil on panels.' This brings us immediately to the distinction between disegno and colorire. Cennino Cennini in his handbook: 'The foundations of the art of painting and the starting point for all these works of the hand are \textit{disegno} and colorire.' Colorire (Filippo Lippi) goes with brush, tones, the representation of surfaces, rilievo; disegno (Castagno) goes with pencil, lines, the representation of edges, perspective. As it happens we can see Castagno's disegno isolated
The performance of difficult things was valued in itself, as an exhibition of skill and talent. In Landino's time Lorenzo de' Medici, for instance, praised the form of the sonnet 'arguing from its difficulty—since noble accomplishment (virtù), according to the philosophers, consists in the difficult'. This held for painting too, and we are here again very close to the clients' demand for conspicuous skill: a painter publicly recognized as a successful lover of difficulties is one whose skill is publicly perceptible. Castagno is also facile nel fare, as Masaccio was too, but there is no contradiction here. The action is difficile, the agent facile: the good painter does hard things easily. This false paradox fascinated Renaissance critics and a sixteenth-century writer, Lodovico Dolce, played on it to differentiate between the styles of Michelangelo and Raphael: 'Michelangelo always sought difficulty in his works, while Raphael sought facility—a difficult thing to do.' It is a linguistic accident one would try to avoid nowadays, speaking of the action as difficult or intricate, perhaps, but of the agent as, say, fluent or adroit. But what sort of thing were the difficulties of the art, loved so publicly and successfully by Castagno? Landino's friend Antonio Manetti, in his biography of Brunelleschi told of the competition of 1401 for the doors of the Baptistry at Florence; Brunelleschi was one of those who

submitted a trial relief of *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (plate 78) and this had flaunted difficulties. All the judges were astonished at the difficulties he had set himself—the pose of Abraham, the placing of the finger under Isaac's chin, his prompt movement, and his drapery and manner, and the delicacy of the boy Isaac's body; and the manner and drapery of the Angel, and his action and way of seizing Abraham's hand; and the pose and manner and delicacy of the man taking a thorn from his foot, and also of the other man leaning over and drinking. They were astonished at how many difficulties there are in these figures, and how well they carry out their functions....


Brunelleschi's 'difficulties' were functional exploits of skill, *tours de force* that pointed up the narrative by conspicuously avoiding the stock solutions: Abraham's hand on Isaac's throat and the Angel's hand on Abraham's wrist are noticed first as strokes of virtuosity and then as accents in the story. Castagno's self-imposed difficulties too were not barren feats of dexterity but narrative devices of emphasis, and for Landino they lay particularly in his *scori* or foreshortenings.

(m) *Scori*—foreshortening

These are the special area of Castagno's difficulty. In his fresco of *The Trinity adored by the Virgin, St. Jerome and a Saint* (plate 79) the extraordinary foreshortening of the Trinity and the similar accents of skill on the faces of the three adoring figures are the main basis of the narrative. They replace gold accents; their localized character, the notion of difficulty or skill as something laid on in patches, is a survival from the gold-emphasis sensibility the skill-emphasis sensibility was replacing. It was as offensive to the later Renaissance as gilding itself became to the Quattrocento. *Scori* are a local application of perspective. Landino said of Paolo Uccello that he was 'skilful in *scori*, because he understood perspective well': perspective is thus the science or theory, *scori* the local appearance of its practice. In fact, a picture can be done in the light of systematic perspective without having any foreshortenings strident enough to call for comment on the *scori*: Masaccio's *Tribute Money* (plate 65) is an example. A picture can also have flashy *scori* without adhering to any careful method of perspective construction: the face of a squire attending to the spurs of the young Magus in the centre of Gentile da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* (plate 21) is a trick effect quite common in late gothic painting, learned and taught from a pattern model, not from a method. But in practice the terms *scori* often cover two kinds of interest. The first is foreshortening proper—a long thing viewed from one end so as to present a short stimulus to the eye; in this the exercise of the mind, inferring the long from the short, is pleasant. The second is the unfamiliar view. A human face seen from its own level, full-face or in profile, is hardly less 'foreshortened' than faces seen from above or below; but these are less familiar and more easily claim our attention. We notice the foreshortening of the nose seen from above more than we notice the foreshortening of the ear on a head seen full-face, because we have to make a little more effort to recognize it and the achievement is satisfying. Both these kinds
of interest are involved in, for instance, the figure of Christ in Castagno's *Trinity*. And it is essential to realize that the difficulty is something that is to tax the beholder as well as the artist: *scoeci* and other such kinds of interest were considered difficult to see and understand, the painter's skill making demands on the beholder's skill. The effort demanded was what directed attention. It is a very fundamental difference between the Quattrocento and the sixteenth century that the first realized this while the second, with its taste for blandness, did not. In Lodovico Dolce's *Dialego della pitura* of 1557 the naive character Fabrini feeds the cultivated one Aretino by saying: 'I have heard that *scoeci* are one of the principal difficulties of the art. So I would suppose that the painter deserves the more praise the more often he puts them in his work.' It is a caricature of the Quattrocento attitude, and Aretino corrects him. It is true, he says, that *scoeci* cannot be done without great skill, and a painter should use them occasionally 'to show he knows how to.' But this should only be done rarely: 'Scoeci are understood by few beholders, and so are pleasant to few; even to the knowledgeable beholder they are sometimes more irritating than pleasing.' From the same point of view Vasari condemned the *scoeci* in such Quattrocento painters as Castagno for being too studied and obtrusive, 'as painful to see as they were difficult to execute.'

(n) *Prompto*—prompt

Leonardo da Vinci warned the painter: 'if you want to please people who are not masters of painting, your pictures will have few *scoeci*, little *riemeno*, and little *prompto* movement.' Landino has already said that Castagno was a lover of difficulties, and he has drawn attention to his *scoeci* and *riemeno*; by now calling him *viso* e *prompto* he completes his characterization of him as the painter's painter, the artist appreciated by people understanding the skills of the art. Landino ascribes the same virtue to two other artists. In Giotto's *Nausicella* (plate 72) each of the Apostles 'has *viso* and *prompto* movements'; Donatello is 'prompto' and with great *viso accia* both in the arrangement and the placing of the figures (plate 76). Castagno's *David* (plate 80) represents the *viso* and *prompto* quality of attitude he has in common with Giotto and Donatello. It is a stronger diversification of the figure, more suggestive of particular movements, than Filippo Lippi's *gratia*, but the terms have one very important thing in common. They both involve a degree of conflation, probably less rather than more conscious, between two kinds of movement—depicted
movement of the painter's figures, naturally, but also inferred movement of the painter's hand. Leonardo speaks of gratia as a quality of painted figures; Filippo Lippi's epitaph speaks of the gratia of his hand. Landino refers to the prompto movements of Giotto's Apostles; Alberti invokes the term for his discussion of the sources of facility, 'diligence-with-quickness': 'The intellect moved and warmed by exercise becomes very pronto and quick in its work, and the hand follows speedily when a sure intellectual method leads it.' It is once more the Quattrocento sense of mind and body in the most immediate relationship: as a figure's movement directly expresses thought and feeling, the movement of a painter's hand directly reflects his mind. When Landino says that Filippo Lippi 'is' gratioso or that Castagno 'is' prompto it is impossible to exclude either sense. This ambiguity is not a problem, unless one makes it one by demanding a distinction alien to the Quattrocento itself. On the contrary, the conflation is the key to the Quattrocento sense of personal style—gratioso or prompto, aria virile or aria dolce; style or aria is something lying between the movement of figures and the movement of brush.

FRA ANGELICO

Fra Giovanni da Fiesole became a Dominican friar at Fiesole in 1407, aged about 20, and came under the influence of Giovanni Dominici, a great Dominican teacher whose pupils also included S. Antonino, later Archbishop of Florence. He appears to have come late to painting. The first recorded commission from him was in 1433, the Madonna of the Linen Guild (plate 3) now at S. Marco in Florence. From 1436 he painted many frescoes in the convent of S. Marco (plate 31). From about 1446 until his death at Rome in 1455 he spent two extended periods painting at the Vatican: his frescoes in the Chapel of Nicolas V there survive.

(o) Vezzo—blithe
This word is untranslatable. John Florio, in the first Italian-English dictionary (1598 and 1611), tried hard to find synonyms:

Vezzo, wanton, mignard, full of wantonness, quaint, blithe, bucksome, gamesome, flattering, nice, coy, squeamish, peart, pleasant, full of affectionation.

This is fair warning of its elusiveness. A vezzo was a caress and,
by extension, a delight; *vezzoso* was delightful in a caressing way. It was not a manly quality and in some contexts it was not a virtue at all. Though Boccaccio spoke approvingly of *vezzosi donne, vezzosi fanciulli*, a *vezzoso* man was an over-delicate and effete thing. Landino is talking not about a man—though his syntax may seem to say he is—but again about a quality lying somewhere between the character of Fra Angelico’s skill and the character of the human figures painted by Fra Angelico. As with *gratia*, there is a cross-reference within Landino’s text to Desiderio da Settignano (plate 69), who also is *vezzoso*. Perhaps ‘blithely (to take a hint from Florio) charming’ is a rough translation. But to what formal qualities in Fra Angelico does this particularly refer? Leaving aside the obviously blithe and charming character of such figures as the dancing angels in his pictures, it is likely that the word is saying something especially about the tonal values of his art. At least, it is in this sort of context that Alberti chose to use the word. He was anxious that the painter should not over-emphasize the tonal contrast of lights and darks, particularly lights, by adding much white or black pigment to his hues:

Much to be blamed is the painter who uses white or black without much moderation... It would be a good thing if white and black were made of pearls... because the painters would then be as sparing and moderate with them as they ought, and their works would be more true, more agreeable, and more *vezzoso*.

There was a physiological basis for this; in a popular treatise of the Quattrocento Girolamo di Manfredi had explained:

Why our vision is better with green colours than with whites and blacks: Every extreme weakens our perception, whereas the moderate and temperate strengthens it, since extremes affect the organ of perception immoderately. Thus white has an expansive effect, while intense black has an excessively concentrating effect. But a moderate colour, like green, has a temperate effect, not expanding nor concentrating too much; and therefore it strengthens our vision.

In this special sense, of a style in which strong tonal extremes do not assault us, *vezzoso* is clearly a true description of Fra Angelico’s painting (plate 24(d))—as also of Desiderio’s shallow and softened relief sculpture; they avoid the strong contrasts of such *rilievo* painters as Castagno. *Vezzoso* is blandly as well as blithely charming.

(p) *Devoto*—devout
With a word like this the problem is to steer a course between the blankness of our words ‘devoted’ or ‘devout’ and over-interpretation. What, first of all, was devotion? Fra Angelico certainly and Landino probably would have referred one to the classic account by St. Thomas Aquinas: devotion is the conscious and willed turning of the mind to God; its special means is meditation; its effect is mingled joy at God’s goodness and sadness at man’s inadequacy. But how does the *devoto* particularly show itself in artistic productions that are in any case expositions of religious matter? Here the late medieval and Renaissance classification
of sermon styles is helpful; we have seen that the relation between preaching and painting was close, and the categories of sermon are much to the point:

There are four styles of preaching . . . . The first style is more keenly exact (subtilis) and is for men who are wise and expert in the art of theology. Its function is to search into matters. The second style is more easily accessible (facilis), and is for people newly introduced to theology. Its function is to treat matters thoroughly. The third is more elaborate (curiosus) and is for those who want to make a display. As it is unprofitable, it should be avoided. The fourth style is more devout (devotus) and is like the sermons of the saints which are read in church. It is the most easily understood and is good for edifying and instructing the people . . . . The fathers and holy doctors of the Church, St. Augustine and other saints, kept to this style. They shunned elaboration and told us their divine inspirations in one coherent discourse . . . .

This is the sort of framework from which Landino seems to be taking his term. So we have a style: contemplative, blending joy and sadness; unelaborate, certainly, and intellectually un-assertive; "easily understood and good for edifying and instructing people." It would be difficult to quarrel with this as a description of the emotional colour of Fra Angelico (plate 81). But to treat pictorial qualities, particularly, does this correspond? Positively, of course, to the oscuro, the ornato, and the facilis Landino also attributes to Fra Angelico; negatively to the absence of difficula—accented scuro, sharp rilievo, or very prompt movements—which he does not attribute to him. What is absent from Fra Angelico's painting is seen as something purposefully renounced by him, much as ornato was purposefully renounced by Masaccio: the term devoto is of the same order as the term puro applied to Masaccio, and that the one belongs to the classification of Christian preaching, the other in that of classical rhetoric, is part of Landino's critical richness and sureness.

Pure, easy, gracious, ornate, varied, prompt, blithe, devout; relief, perspective, colouring, composition, design, foreshortening; imitator of Nature, lover of the difficulties. Landino offers a basic conceptual equipment for addressing Quattrocento pictorial quality. His terms have a structure: one is opposed to, or is allied with, or is subsumed by, or overlaps another. It would not be difficult to draw a diagram in which these relationships were registered, but the diagram would imply a systematic rigidity which the terms in practice do not and should not have. We can use them now as a complement and stimulus, and naturally not as a substitute, for our own concepts; they will give us some assurance of not altogether losing sight of what these painters thought they were doing. Quattrocento intentions happened in Quattrocento terms, not in ours.

Terms like Landino's have the advantage of embodying in themselves the unity between the pictures and the society they emerged from. Some 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.

For there is one area of metaphor here, very important for Landino, which was not considered in Chapter II. Categories like 'pure' or 'ornate' or 'composition' draw on the classical system of literary criticism, a complex and mature categorization of human activity to which humanist scholars like Landino gave a great deal of study. It did not belong in Chapter II because most churchgoing, dancing bankers were not humanist scholars: it was a skill of the learned. But in the course of the Renaissance some of this vocabulary for criticizing art and life trickled across from the scholars and writers to other people. The banker took to using many of these words and concepts without any particular awareness of their classical source. This process was an important part of the lasting classicization of European culture in the Renaissance, more important than some superficially more obvious parts: experience was being re-categorized—through systems of words dividing it up in new ways—and so re-organized. One facet of this reorganization was that the different arts were brought together by a uniform system of concepts and terms: ornate, in the sense we noticed, was applicable to painting and music and manners as well as literature. The affinity this lent the different arts was sometimes illusory, but much affected their practice. Landino's use of 'pure' and 'ornate' and 'composition' to an audience of plain men is a small part of this great process.

This book began by emphasizing that the forms and styles of painting respond to social circumstances; much of the book has been given up to noting bits of social practice or convention that may sharpen our perception of the pictures. It is symmetrical and proper to end the book by reversing the equation—to suggest that the forms and styles of painting may sharpen our perception of the society. Half the point of the exercise has been to imply that this is so.
It would be foolish to overstate the possibilities, but they are real. They arise from the fact that the main materials of social history are very restricted in their medium: they consist in a mass of words and a few—in the case of the Renaissance a very few—numbers. These cover some kinds of activity and experience repetitively and neglect others. Much of the most important experience cannot conveniently be encoded into words or numbers, as we all know, and therefore does not appear in the documents that exist. Besides this, many of the Renaissance words we must rely on are now almost completely worn out: it is difficult to close with Machiavelli’s words about what was important in the Renaissance because so many other words, comment and reformulation, have since got in the way. It is very difficult to get a notion of what it was to be a person of a certain kind at a certain time and place.

It is here that pictorial style is helpful. A society develops its distinctive skills and habits, which have a visual aspect, since the visual sense is the main organ of experience, and these visual skills and habits become part of the medium of the painter: correspondingly, a pictorial style gives access to the visual skills and habits and, through these, to the distinctive social experience. An old picture is the record of visual activity. One has to learn to read it, just as one has to learn to read a text from a different culture, even when one knows, in a limited sense, the language: both language and pictorial representation are conventional activities. And there are various destructive uses of pictures which must be avoided. One will not approach the paintings on the philistine level of the illustrated social history, on the look out for illustrations of ‘a Renaissance merchant riding to market’ and so on; nor, for that matter, through facile equations between ‘burgess’ or ‘aristocratic’ milieux on the one side and ‘realist’ or ‘idealizing’ styles on the other. But approached in the proper way—that is, for the sake of the argument, in the way followed in this book—the pictures become documents as valid as any charter or parish roll. If we observe that Piero della Francesca tends to a gauged sort of painting, Fra Angelico to a preached sort of painting, and Botticelli to a danced sort of painting, we are observing something not only about them but about their society.

These may seem to students of charters and parish rolls a hopelessly lightweight sort of fact. They are certainly a distinct kind of fact: what they offer is an insight into what it was like, intellectually and sensibly, to be a Quattrocento person. Such insights are necessary if the historical imagination is to be fed, and the visual is here the proper complementary to the verbal. But the bad work on this is best left to Feo Belcari of Florence, to the first lines of his play Abraham and Isaac, acted in 1449:

Lo Occhio si dice che e la prima porta
Per la quale lo Intellecto intende e gusta.
La secunda e lo Audire con voce scolta
Che fa la nostra mente essere robusta.

The Eye is called the first of all the gates
Through which the Intellect may learn and taste.
The Ear is second, with the attentive Word
That arms and nourishes the Mind.
Texts and References

Giovanni de’ Bardi: see p. 16 below.


Io feci quanto minuponesti della tavola, et missini impunto dogni chosa. el santo michele e in tal perfezione, che per chelle sue armadure, sono dario e doro e chosi laltre sue vesta, ne fui chon bartolomeo martello; disse delloro e di quello vi bisogniava io direbbe chon Ser franciescho, e chio altutto facessi quanto era di vostra volonté; e molto mi riprese mostrando io avere el torto contro divoi. — Ora giovanni io sono qui al tutto esservi schiavo, effarò chon effetto. Io o auto da voi quatordecili fiorini, et io vi scrisi vi sarebbe trenta di spesa, e sita così, perché bella dornamenti. 'priegevo per dio chomettiante in bartolomeo martelli, sopra questo lavoro chonducitore, essio oddi bisogni dachhuna chosa per rispaccio dellopera, io vada a lui e vedralla, io liene farò honore; e olgi detto che tra voi e me lui ne sia mio malevadore, ellui dicie essere chonento, e vuolo fare, pure chio vi spacc, epuio chio vere scriva. esse vi pare fateo, chio mi sto; perché io non nò più oro, neddanari per chile mette. Io vi priegeho chio non mi stia; e tre di chio non fo niente, e aspetto ci siate.

Eppiu se vi pare che a onghi mia spesa, chome è di sopra trenta fiorini, ched dogni e ciacedhuna chosa, finita di tutto, voi mene diate sessanta fiorini larghi di legniame, doro, di mentiuntura, eddipintura, e chome detto bartolomeo sia quanto eddetto, per meno impaccio di voi io larò di tutto finita per tutto di venti dachcho dalla parte mia, e bartolomeo gia mio malevadore. essella spesa non vè, starà a quello vi fia, e perché voi siate bene avisato, vi mando el disengn chomè fata di legniame e dalteza e largheza; e voglio perramore di voi non torvne più chellavoro di ciento fiorini; dimandogni altro. Priegeho rispondiate, che qui ne muoro; e vore’ poi partirni. essio fusi pro-
sontuoso innervii scritto, perdonatemi. effarò sempre quell più e quell
meno piacerà alla reverenza vostra. valete addì xx luglio 1457.
fratte filippo dipintore in firenze

Ghirlandaio and the Spedale degli Innocenti: P. Kuppers, *Die
Tafelbilder des Domenico Ghirlandajo* (Strasbourg, 1916) pp. 86-7:

Sia noto e manifesto a qualunque persona che vedrà o leggerà questa
presente scritta come a preghiera del venerabile religioso messer Fran-
cesco di Giovanni Tesori, al presente priore dello spedale degli Innocenti
di Firenze, e Domenico di Tomaso di Curado dipintore, lo frate
Bernardo di Francesco da Firenze, frate ingesiuto, a frate questa scrittà
mia mano per convegna e santo a l’allogacione d’una tavola d’alte
a andare nella chiesa del sopradetto spedale degli Innocenti con patti e
modi che qui di sotto si dirà, cioè:

Che oggi questo di xxii d’ottobre 1485 il detto masser Francesco dà
e alluova al sopradetto Domenico a dipignere uno piano, il quale è
fatto e a avuto da detto masser Francesco, el quale piano à fare huono
detto Domenico, cioè à pagare, e a colorire e dipignere detto piano,
tutto di sua mano in modo come apare uno disegno in carto con quelle
figure e modi che in esso apare, e più è meno secondo che a me frate
Bernardo t'hà detto che sia meglio, non uscendo del modo e composizione
de detto disegno; e debbe colorire detto piano tutto a sua spese di colori
buoni e oro macinato nell’adornamenti dove accadrano, con ogn’altra
spesa che ’n detto piano avessi, e l’azzurro abbàia a esse ultramarino di
pregio di fiorini quatro l’oncia in circa; ed debba aver fatto e dato fornito
del detto piano da oggi a trenta mesi prossimi a venire; e debba avere
per pregio del detto piano com’è detto, e tutto a sua spese, cioè
detto Domenico, fiorini centoquindici larghi se a me frate Bernardo
sopragriffito parrà se ne venghino, e possa pigliare parere di detto pregio
o lavoro da chi mi paresi, e quando mi paresi se ne venisse detto
pregio, n’abbia avere quel meno che a me frate Bernardo parrà; ed debba
in detto piano dipignere la predella del detto piano come parrà à fra
Bernardo detto; e detto pagamento debba avere in questo modo, cioè:
ché det masser Francesco debba dare al sopradetto Domenico ogni
messe fiorini in larghi, cominciai a di primo del novembre 1485,
secondo di mano in mano, come è detto, ogni mese fiorini tre larghi .
E non avendo detto Domenico fornito detto piano frallo infrascritto
tempo, abbia a cadere in pena di fiorini xv larghi; e così se ’l detto
masser Francesco non oservassi il sopradetto pagamento, abbia a cadere
nella sopradetto pena in tutta la soma, cioè che finito detto piano, gli
abbia a dare intero pagamento del tutto la soma che restassi.

Pietro Calzetta at Padua: V. Lazzarini, 'Documenti relativi alla
pittura padovana del secolo XV', in *Nuovo Archivio Veneto*, XV, ii,
1908, p. 82.


Starnina: O. Giglioli, 'Su alcuni affreschi perduti dello Starnina',

*Mantegna and the Gonzagas: P. Kristeller, Andrea Mantegna*
(Berlin, 1902) pp. 516-17, 526, 527, 538 and 541:

Nui voressimo, che vedestite ad ogni modo di ritarnee due galine de
India del naturale un maschio et una femina et mandarcce qua retrarte,
per che le voressimo far mettere suxo la tapezaria nostra: potereti veder
le nostre che sono ne d’zardino li a Mantua.

... pregno la S.V. che li piacia ordinare, che Andrea Mantegna ... venga
et stia continuamcnt cum me. Cum Andrea pigliaro spasso de mostrarli
miei camaim, e figure di bronzo et altre belle cose antique: sopra le
quale studiarone et conferirone de compagnia.

... mandiamo li certi designi de pinterpale quali prregnano che vi piacia
farli retrare per el voso D. Andrea Mantegna pentore celebré.

... ho recevuto el ritracto de la pittura de che la E.V. me ha mandato,
et facto ogni istantunia de Andrea mantegna mio pittoro li richide ad
ellegante forma, el quale me dice che la seria opera piu presto da
miatina che sua perché li non et assueto pingeri figure piccole, et
assai meglio faria una nostra dona aux qualche altra cosa de longeza de
uno brazo au un brazo et mezzo et modo quando piaceste a la vela V. III.ma
madona ...

Io ho praticato mercato cum Io. Marco orfice de quelle ole verche
e de li locali secondo el designo de Andrea Mantegna. Esso Io. Marro
aminda de le ole lire 5 soldi 10 de la marcha et deli vali presenti
ducati uno e mezzo de la marcha ... mandando a vostra excelvifa el designo
del fiasco fato per Andrea Mantagna acco quella possa judicare de
la forma inantie se incominejano.

For contracts in general: H. Lerner-Lehmkuhl, *Zur Struktur und
Geschichte des Florentinischen Kunstmärktes im 15. Jahrhundert* (Wat-
tenscheid, 1956); M. Wackernagel, *Der Lebensraum des Künstlers in
der florentinischen Renaissance* (Leipzig, 1938), translated by A. Luchs
as *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist* (Princeton, 1981),
with recent bibliography; H. Glasser, *Artists’ Contracts of the Early
Renaissance* (New York, 1977). Good selections of material are G.
Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d’artisti dei secoli, XIV, XV, XVI, I* (Florence,
1840); G. Milanesi, *Nuovi documenti per la storia dell’arte toscana*
(Rome, 1893), and in English, D. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in

3. Alfonso V. and the Sienese ambassador: Vespasiano da Bisticci,
*Vite di uomini illustri*, ed. P. D’Ancona and E. Aeschlimann
(Milan, 1951) p. 60:

Era a Napoli uno ambasciadore sanese, della loro natura, molto
Maesta del re il piú delle volte vestiva di nero, con qualche
ferramgiò nel cappello, o qualche catena d’oro col collo: i brocchi e
vestiti di seta poco gli usava. Questo ambasciador vestiva di broccato
d’oro molto ricco, e sempre quando veniva al re aveva questo broccato
d’oro. Il re piú volte con quegli suoi domestici se ne rideva di questo
vestire di broccato. Un di, ridendo disse a uno de’ suoi: per certo che io
voglio che noi facciamo che questo broccato muti colori; e per questo
ordinò una matriona di dare udienza in uno luogo molto misero; e fece
chiamare tutti gli ambasciadori, e ordinò con alcuno de’ suoi, che la
matriona in quella calca ognuno si stropicciasse addosso allo ambas-
sciador sanese, e stropicciassino quello broccato. La matriona, non solo
dagli ambasciadori, ma dalla Maesta del re era pinto e stropicciato in
modo quello broccato, che uscendo da corte, non era uomo che potesse
tenerne le risa, vedendo quello broccato, ch’era di chemini, col pelo
allussigliato, e causante l’oro, e rinunzio in seta gialla, che pareva la
cosa piú brutta del mondo. A vederlo la Maesta del re uscì dalla sala,
col broccato tutto avviluppato e guasto, non poteva tenere le risa ...

Pettrichon on skill and preciousness: De remediis utriusque fortu-
nae, I. xii, in Pettrichon, Opera omnia (Basle, 1581) p. 40.
Alberti on the depiction of gold: L. B. Alberti, Opera volgari, ed.
C. Grayson, III (Bari, 1973) p. 88:

Truovasi chi adopera molto in sue storie oro, che stima purgà maestà.
Non lo lodo. E bea che dipingesse quella Didone di Virgilio, a cui era
la faretra d’oro, i capelli aurei nodati in oro, e la veste purpura cinta
pur d’oro, i freni al cavallo e ogni cosa d’oro, non però ivi vorrei punto
adoreressi oro, perché che nei colori imitando i razi dell’oro sta piú
ammirazione e lode all’arte.

Giovanni de’ Bardi e Botticelli: H. P. Horne, Sandro Botticelli
(London, 1908) p. 353 (Document XXV):

settantotto, sol. XV a oro larghi, per flor. 75 d’oro in oro, pagati a
Sandro del Botticello, a lui contanti: che flor. 2 sono per azurro, e flor.
38 per l’oro e mettitura della tavola, e flor. 35 pel suo pennello.

P. Patriciano and S. Maria de’ Fossi: G. B. Vermiglioli, Bernardino
Pinturicchio (Perugia, 1837) p. vi (Appendix II):

Anche promette nel vacuo delli quadri o vero campi de’ figure
pegnerne paese et aiere et tutti li altri campi dove se mette colore excepto
li cornicioni dove se ha a ponerne loro ...

Ghirlandaio and Giovanni Tornabuoni: C. S. Davies, Ghirlandaio
(London, 1908) p. 171:

figuras hedfittia castra, civitates, montes, colles, planities, lapides, vestes,
animalia, aves, bestias quasununque ...

Fra Angelico at Rome: E. Müntz, Les Arts à la Cour des Papes, I
(Paris, 1878), p. 126:

23 May. A frate Giovanni di Pietro dipintore a la chappella di S.to
Pietro dell’ordine di san Domenico adi XXII di Maggio d. quaranta-
tr. b. viuti sette, sono per la provisione di d. 200 l’anno dadi 13 di Marzo
perinfino adi ultimo di Maggio prossimo a venire: f. 20, b. 200.

A Benoito da Lese dipintore da Firenze a la sopradetta chappella adi
detel f. dicio, b. dodici, e quali sono per sua provisione di f. vii il
meze dadi X di Marzo sino adi ultimo di Maggio prossimo: fl. xvii,
b. xii.

A Giovanni d’Antonio de la Checa dipintore a la detta chappella adi
detto d. due, b. quaranta due, sono per la provisione di f. ii il meze
xii di Marzo adi ultimo di Maggio prossimo: fl. ii, b. xii ...

A Lucchino d’Antonio da Poll dipintore alla detta chappella adi
Maggio fl. tre, sono per la sua provisione di 3 meze e quali debano
finire adi ultimo di Maggio prossimo a f. i il meze: f. iii ...

Piero della Francesca and the Madonna della Misericordia: G.
Milaunci, Nuovi documenti per la storia dell’arte toscan (Rome, 1893)
p. 91:

McCXXVII etc. die xi mensis iuni.

Egregii viri Petrus Luce benedicti, prior, Papus Simonis de Doctis,
Guasparre, Nicolai Martinii, Ambrosius Massi, consiliarii dicti prioris;
Johachinus de Pichis, Julianus de Doctis, Julianus Mathii Ciani, et
Michaelangelus Massi, homines electi ad hec; vice et nomine Societatis
et hominum Sancte Marie de Misericordia—dererunt et concesserunt
Pietro benedicti petri benedicti pictori ad faciendum et pingendum
vnam tabulam in oratorio et ecclesia dictae Societatis ad foggiam eum
que nunquiesorem quod sequeretur

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Guasparre, Nicolai Martinii, Ambrosius Massi, consiliarii dicti prioris;
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Pietro benedicti petri benedicti pictori ad faciendum et pingendum
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Johachinus de Pichis, Julianus de Doctis, Julianus Mathii Ciani, et
Michaelangelus Massi, homines electi ad hec; vice et nomine Societatis
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Pietro benedicti petri benedicti pictori ad faciendum et pingendum
vnam tabulam in oratorio et ecclesia dictae Societatis ad foggiam eum
que nunquiesorem quod sequeretur


- Item quod teneatur dictus magister Lucas et sic promissit pingere manu propria omnes figuram fiendas in dictis volitis, et maxime facies et omnia membra figurarum omnium a medio figure supra, et quod non possit pingi sine eius presentia ... Item quod teneatur omnes colores mitendos per ipsum mag. Lucam ...

- S. Antonino on differential payment of painters: S. Antonino, *Summa Theologica* III, viii. 4, many editions:
  
  *... et plus ei [i.e. the goldsmith] debetur qui melius opera artis exercet. Si cum in pictoria arte in faciendo simulacum figuram, multo plus petet in duplo vel triplo magnus magister quam rudis.*


II


   *Sforzasi il dipintore che la figura dipinta da sé, la quale non è altro che un poco di colore con certo artificio posto sopra una tavola, sia tanto simile, in quello atto ch'egli la fa, a quella la quale la natura ha prodotta e naturalmente in quello atto si dispone, che essa possa gli occhi de' riguardanti o in parte o in tutto ingannare, facendo di sé credere che ella sia quello che ella non è ...*  


   *Impossibil e' che la pittura imitata con soma perfectione di lineamenti, ombra lume colore, possa parere del medesimo rilevo qual pare esso naturale se già tal naturale in lunga distanza non e' veduto con un sol occhio.*


3. 'The beauty of the horse ...': Giordano Russo, *Arte de cogncizzare la natura d' cavall*, tr. G. Bruni, (Venice, 1493) pp. b. i v. b. ii r.:

   *La belesa del cavallo sì dunngnorsc in questo modo in prima vo haver el cavallo el corpo grando & longo in tanto che corrisponda le tue membere al suo grando & longo corpo come se convene ordinatamente. E il capo del cavallo debba esser gratile secco & longo convenientemente. La boella granda & laccara. Le narine grande & infaite. I ochi non concavi ne oculi. Le oreche pirole & portate a modo de' aspido el collo longo & ben gracile verso el capo. Le maxille ben gracile & seche. Le crine poche & plane. El pecto grosso & quasi rotondo. El garesse non accuto ma quasi destesso & dretto. La schena curta & quasi piana. I lombi rotondi & quasi grossi. Le coste grosse & i altri membri bovini. Le anche longe & destesse. La groppa longa & ampia ... El cavallo debba esser piu alto davanti che da dietro alquanto comme el cervo el dehba portare el collo levato. & la grossesse del colo arrete el pecto. Qui vora istemamente cognerese la belesa del cavallo bisogna el considera i supracipiti membri cosi alla alteza como alla longezza del cavallo ordinatamente & proportionabilmente convenirli del pelo del cavallo perchc diversi han diverso sentenle ...*  


   *Item sive te volo quod tripexus fuit ratio institutionis imaginum in ecclesia. *Primo ad instructionem rudium, qui est quas gubseudam libris coloreri videntur. *Secunda ut incarnationis mysterium et sanctorum exempla magis in memoria nostra essent dum quotidie oculis nostris representantur. *Tertia ad excidendum devotionis affectum, qui ex visis efficacibus excitatrum quam ex auditu.*

   Fra Michele da Carciano: *Sermones quadragesimales fratris Michaelis de Mediolano de decem preceptis* (Venice, 1492) pp. 48 v. – 49 r. (Sermo XX, De adoratione):

   *... imaginis Virginis et sanctorum introduce fuerunt triplici de causa. *Primo propter ruditatem simplicium, ut qui non possunt scripturas legere in picturis possunt sacramenta nostra salutis et fidei cernere. Ideo scribitur de consecratione distinctione 3 c. perlatum. Perlatum ad nos fuerunt quod inconsiderato zelo successus sanctorum imagines sub hac quasi excusatione ne adorari debuissent confregiser: et quia adorari eas vetuisse omnino laudamus: fregisse vero reprehendimus ... Aliud enim est picture adorare, aliud per pictam hystoriam quid sit adorandum..."
adiscere. Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis prorogat pictura
cernentibus; quia in ipsa ignoraentis vident quod sequi debeant; in ipsa
legunt qui litteras nesciunt. Unde et precipue gentibus pro lectione
pictura est. Verba hec scribit Gregorius Sireno episcopo marislenosi.
Secundo sunt images introducte proper teratatem affectivam: ut homines
qui non excitantur ad devotionem, cum alius audiant de sanctorum memoria,
salem moveantur duam ea in picturis quasi presentia cernunt. Plus enim excitatur auctores noster pro ea quae videt,
quam pro ea quae audit. Tertia introducte sunt proper memoriæ habili-
litatem: ... Et ideo quid multi quae audient tenere non possunt, sed cum
imagines videant recordantur: ideo introducte sunt.

For the quotation from St. Gregory, see Gregory, Epistulae, XI. 13
(Patrolologia Latina, I,XXVII, 1128); the letter was written in 787
to Serrinius the iconoclast Bishop of Marseilles.

The miraculous St. Antony: Sicco Polentone, Sancti Antonii Con-
fessoris de Padua Vita (Padua, 1476) p. 41.

Bonificacius quoque, ille ipse qui nominis eius Papa octavus fuit ...
illusquem sancti Iohannis in laterano cum bella sunt vetustate diei
non exaedicificari examinarique multa cum cura & sumptu facit. & quo pingit
in ea sanctos nominatim dedit. Istam ad rem fratrum minorum principi-
cipiui pictores acque iliam in arte singulares duo magistri crant. hii
depictis perfectissique uti summo a postifici iussi erant omnibus sanctis
vacuo in loco ymagines sanctorum Francisci et Antonii suo arbitrio
depinxerunt. Id audiens Papa moleste tullit acque dedigatus per con-
temptum ad suas iubes in hec verba inquit. Sancti Francisci picturam
postea qua faciam est acque animo tolleremus. Sed quod illius sancti
Antoni de Padua est ymagino poenitus deleta volo misii autem qui
postificis ipsis implerent. Alii acque alii omnes. terribili quadam a
persona ac ingenti furia in terram proiecti verberate acerit acque
expulsi sunt. Papa vero ut he auditiv. sinatis inquit Sanctorum illum
Antonium. sicut vult remanere nam ut videmus. perdere potius certa-
cum eo quam lucrari possemus.

Salutati on idolatry: Coluccio Salutati, ‘De fato et fortuna’,
Vatican Library, MS. Vat. lat. 2928, fols. 68 v.-69 r; printed in
M. Baxandall, Giotto and the Orators (Oxford, 1971) p. 61 n. 91.

Qui [Caecilius Balbus] michi videtur de simulacris suis non aliter autum-
masse quam et nos ipsi de memoris pictis vel sculptis sanctorum masy-
torumque nostrorum in fidei nostre rectitudine faciamus. ut hee non
sanctos, non deus, sed dei sanctorum simulacra sanctiis. Liceet
vulgus inductum plus de ipsis forte et aliter quam oporeat opinetur.
Quoniam autem per sensibiliti ventum est in spiritualium rationem
atque noticiam, si gentiles finxerunt fortuna simulacrum cum copia et
gubernaculo tamquam open tribuat, et humanarum rerum obint
regimen, non multum a vero diesserunt. Sic etiam cum nostrifigurant
ab effectibus quos videmus fortunam quas regimem aliquam manibus

rotam mira vertigine provelponentem, dummodo picturam illam manu
factam non divinum alicundo sanctiis sed divine providentie dis-
positionei et ordinis similitudinem, non etiam eius essentiam sed mun-
danarum rerum simiusa volumina representantes, quis rationaliter
reharendit?

S. Antonino on the faults of painters: S. Antonino, Summa Theo-
logica, III. viii. 4, many editions:

Reprehensibiles etiam sunt cum pingunt ea, quae sunt contra fides,
cum factu sunt Trinitatis imaginem unam Personam cum tribus capitibus,
quod monstrum est in rerum natura; vel in Assumptione Virginis
parvolum puerum formatum, scilicet Jesum, nisi in uterum Virginis,
quasi non esset de substantia Virginis ejus corpus assumptum; vel
parvulum Jesum cum tabula litterarum, quem non disliherit ah hominie.
Sed nec etiam laudandi sunt, quem apochrypha pingunt, ut obstricte
in partu Virginis, Thomae apostolo einguum suum a Virgine Maria in
Assumptione sua proprii dubitationem ejus dimissum, ac hujusmodi. In
historis et sanctorum, in ecclesiis pingere curiosa, quae non
valent ad devotionem exsitandum, sed resum et vanitarum, ut simias et
canes insequentes lepores, et hujusmodi, vel vanos ornatus vesti-
mentorum, superbum videtur et vanum.

The passage has been printed and discussed by C. Gilbert, ‘The

The medieval background to image theory: S. Ringbom, Icon to
Narratives (Abo, 1965) pp. 11-39 and H. Belting, Das Bild und sein
Publikum im Mittelalter (Berlin, 1981), Ch. III.

ii v.-x iii r. (Cap. XVI. Chome meditare la
vita di christo ...):

La quale historia acio che du meglie la poss innime nella
mente, e piu facilmente ogni acto di essa ti dita che alla memoria ti sara utile
è bisogno che tu fermi ne la mente loci e persone. Come una citate,
la quale sia la citade di Hierusalem,嫌疑na una citade la quale ti sia
bene pratica. Nella quale citade tu trovi li loci principali nelquali
forono exercitati tutti li acti dela passioni: come e uno palacio neghiale
sia il cancello dove Chriosto fece la cena con li discipuli. Anchera la
casa de Anna e la casa de Cayfas dove sia il loco dove fu menato la
nocte Misr Jesu. E la stantia dove fu menato dinani da Cayfas, e lui
deriso e beffato. Anche il pretorio de Pilato dove li parlava con li iudei:
et in esso la stantia dove fu ligato Misr Jesu alla colonna. Anche el
loco del monte de Calvarjo, dove esso fu posto in croce, e altri simili
lochi ...

Anchera e dibisogno che ti fermi nella mente alcune persone, le quale
tu habbi pratiche e noie, le quale tu representino quelle persone che
principalmente intervennero de essa passione: come e la persona de Misser
Iesu, della nostra Madonna, Sancto Pietro, Sancto Ioanne Evangelista, Sancta Maria Magdalena, Anna, Cayfas, Pilato, Luda, e altri simili, liquai tutti formarai nella mente. Così adunque hauendo formale tutte queste cose nella mente, si che quivi sia posta tutta la fantasia, e entrerà nel cubiculo tuo e sola e solitaria discuicendo ogni altro pensiero esteriere. Incominciarai a pensare il principio de essa passione. Incominciano come esso Misser Iesu vene in Jerusalem sopra Jasino. E morosamente tu transcorrendo ogni acto pensairai faciendo dimora sopra ogni acto e passo, e se tu sentirai alcuna divizione in alcuno passo ivi ti ferma: e non passare più oltre fina che dura quella dolezzza e divozone...

Fra Roberto: Robertus Caracciulus, Sermones de Laudibus sanctorum (Naples, 1498) pp. lxv r.—lxvii r. (Nativity), cli r.—civ r. (Visitation), cxlic r.—clii r. (Annunciation):

Lo terzo matterio da dechiarare circa la annuntiacione della madonna si chiaua angelica contemplatione: dove si conteneno cinque laudabili condizione de essa virgin benedicta.

La prima si chiaua contemplatione.

La seconda cogitatione.

La tertia interrogatione.

La quarta humiliatione.

La quinta oratione.

La prima laudabile condizione si chiaua contemplatione secondo scrive Luca. Havendo odita la virgine la salutazione di l'angelo si conturbò: la quale contemplatione non fu per alcuna incredulita secondo scrive Nigil de Lira: ma per una admiracione: percho che lei era solita videre gli angeli: e perho non si maraviglio tanto della apparitione quanto de quella alta e magna salutazione: dove l'angelo explicava de lei tante cose stupende e grande de che lei per la humilita stava atonita e stupefacta.

La seconda laudabile sua condizione si chiaua cogitatione che pensava quale era tale salutacione: dove appare la prudencia di essa virgin sacratissima. Allhora li disse l'angelo: Non timere o Maria perho che in quello punto che la virgin Maria concepi Christo l'animal sua fu levata in tanta contemplatione alta e sublime con gesto e dolezzza delle cose divine che citra la beatifica visione passo el modo de ogni altra creatura. E dell'estima della virgin nel ventre con quelle mirabile condizione delle quale disse ino sermone. Dove noi possiamo meritalemente contemplare che in quello punto che la virgin Maria concepi Christo l'animal sua fu levata in tanta contemplatione alta e sublime con gesto e dolezzza delle cose divine che citra la beatifica visione passo el modo de ogni altra creatura. E dell'estima della virgin nel ventre con quelle mirabile condizione delle quale disse ino sermone. 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sione gli si po dare alla barba copiosa, cioè folta over spessa: e come hanno li giovani di prima barba de colore simile all capelli, non troppo longa, ma nel mezo partita in due parte. Eso ha il suo aspetto simplice e maturu. Li oochi si ha relucenti vari, chiari, e risplendenti. Nel riprendere terribile nelle adomitione piacevoli et amabile. Allegro ma servando sempre la gravità. Etque mai non fu veduto ridere un pianger si. Nela statura del suo corpo largo nel pecto e dritto. Le mane sue et le braccia delectevole a veder. Nel suo parlare grande e raro c'è poco e modesto tra li figlioli deluomini.

The Virgin's colouring: Gabriel de Barletta, Sermones celeberrimi, I (Venice, 1571) 173:


Eyes as the windows of the soul: Galeottus Martius, De homine (Milan, 1490) p. a. iii v.: 

Sed oculorum prognostica longum esset referre. Nam cum fenestrae sint animorum, quid corum color, quid vero frequens motus, quid item aetiolencia indicent nemo fere ignorat. Unum tamen non reticendum est eos maleficos esse pesimisque moribus quisqu oculi sunt longi. Si cindita pars oculi extenta est aperitur et tota, impudentiam, cum autem aperitur nec omnino ostenditur, inostitad indiicat de oculis hucusque.


... ver' e' che li segni de' volti mostrano in parte la natura de gli huomini di lor vitii et complessioni, ma nel voli li segni che separano le guance da labri della boca, elle nari del naso e case de gli ochi sono evidenti sono huomini allegri et speso ridenti, e quelli che poco li segnano sono huomini operatori della cogitazione, e quelli ch'anno le parti del viso di gran rilevo et profondità sono huomini bestiali et iracondi con pocha ragionne et quelli ch'amano le linee interposte infra le ciglia forte evidenti sono iracondi e quelli che hanno le linee traversali de la fronte forte lineate sono huomini copiosi di lamentationi occulte o' paleis.

Alberti on movement: L. B. Alberti, Opere volgari, ed. C. Grayson, III (Bari, 1973) p. 74: 

[Ma questi movimenti d’animò si conoscono dai movimenti del corpo ...] Sono alcuni movimenti d’aniò detti affezione, come ia, dolore, gaudio et rime, desiderio et similii. Altri sono movimenti de’ corpi. Muovonsi i corpi in più modi, crescendo, discrescendo, inferm-endosi, guardando e mutandosi da luogo a luogo. Ma noi dipintori, i quali vogliamo coi movimenti delle membra mostrare i movimenti dell’ animo, solo riferiamo di què movimento si fa mutando il luogo.

Guglielmo Ebreo on movement: Trattato dell’arte del ballo di Guglielmo Ebreo Pesarese, ed. F. Zambrini (Bologna, 1873) p. 7: 

La qual virtute del danzare è una azione dimostrativa di fuori di movimenti spirituali li quali si anno a concordare colle misurate et perfette consonanze d’essa ermonia, che per lo nostro audito alle parti intellettive trai sensi cordiali con diletto discende, dove poi si genera certi dolci commovimenti, i quali, come contro a sua natura rinchiusi, si sfrazo quanto possono d’uscirsi fuori et farsi in atto manifesti.

Leonardo on movement: Trattato in Painting, ed. cit., I, 149-57 and II 48 r. 

Monks’ gestures: G. van Rijnberk, Le Langage par signes chez les moines (Amsterdam, 1954) which collates the surviving lists:

Affirmation: leva manum moderate et move, non inversam, sed ut exterior superficies sis sursum 

Demonstrare: extenso palma profilens 

Dolor: palma premens pectus dat significare dolorem 

Pudor: lumina quando tecto digitis designo pudorem. 

Preacher’s gestures: Tractatus solennis de arte et vero modo predicandi (Strasbourg, n.d.) p. a. ii r. and v. 

Aliquando cum horrore et commotione, ut ibi, Nisi conversi fueritis et cetera. 

Aliquando cum horrore et commotione, ut ibi, Nisi conversi fueritis et cetera. 

Aliquando cum yronia et decrison, ut ibi, Adhuc permanes in similitate tua. 

Aliquando cum gratia yultus et manuum attractione, ut ibi, Venite ad me omnes et cetera. 

Aliquando cum quadam elatione, ut ibi, De terra longinquæ venerunt ad me. 

Aliquando cum tedio et indignatione, ut ibi, Constituant us nobis ducem et cetera. 

Aliquando cum gaudio et manuum elevatione, ut ibi, Venite benedicti et cetera. 

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Valde tamen caveat ne motibus inordinatis jactet corpus sumum; nunc subito extollendo caput in altum, nunc subito deprimendo, nunc vertendo se ad dextrum, nunc subito cum mirabili ecleusitate se vertendo ad sinisterum, nunc ambas manus sic extensando simul quasi possei simul orientem occidentemque completo, nunc vero subito vae in omnium conjungendo, nunc extensando brachia ultra modum, nunc subito retractando. Vidi eum aliquos qui quando alia in sermonibus se habebant, tamen ut motibus corporis se jactabant quod videntur cum aliquo duellum insinare, seu potius insinuisse, in tantum quod scispos cum pulpite in quo stabant nisi alii succurrissent praecipitassent.


Maidlynly hearing: Deur puellorum, (Venice, 1471) pp. 51-2:
... et cosi standing et andando sempre cum la mano dextra sopra la sinistra, al mezo del crezer nostro davanti ...

7. Religious drama: see A. d'Ancona, Origini del teatro italiano, 2nd ed., I (Turin, 1891) especially pp. 228 (Matteo Palmieri on the 1454 St. John's Day pageant), 251 (on the Russian Bishop and the Ascension play of 1439) and 323 (on festinando and solie).

Abraham and Hagar: printed in A. d'Ancona, Sacre rappresentazioni dei secoli XIV, XV, e XVI, I (Florence, 1872) 1-41 and especially p. 13:

Finita l'annunziatrice il festinando va a sedere. Et Abraam sta a sedere luogo a un poco rilevato e Sarr a presso a lui et a piedi loro da mano dextra debbe stare Isaac, e da mano sinistra un poco più discosto debbe stare Ismael con Agar sua madre; et alla fine del palco da mano destra debbe essere un altare, dove Abraam va a fare orazione, et alla mano sinistra alla fine del palco ha a essere uno monte in sul quale sia uno bosco con uno arbore grande, dove arà apparire una fonte d'acqua a modo di pozo, quando sarà il tempo.

Angelo Galli on Pisanello: Vasari, Le Vite; I, Gentile da Fabriano ed il Pisanello, ed. A. Venturi (Florence, 1896) pp. 49-50:
Arte, mesura, aere et seagno, Manera, prospectiva et naturale
Gli ha dato el cello per mirabil dono.

Domenico da Piacenza's dancing treatise: 'De arte saltandi et choraeas duendì', Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS. it. 972. fols. 1 v.-2 r.

On mannera:
... tenire el mezo del tuo movimento che non sia ni tropo, ni poco, ma

Cum tanta suavitate che pari una gondola che da due rimi spinta sia per quelle undicelle quando el mare fa quieta secondo sua natura, alzando le dicte undicelle cum tardezza et assabandonse cum presteza.

On music:
... tardezza rioperated cum presteza.

Cupid, Phoebus, Venus, Jealousy, all in Trattato dell'arte del ballo di Ciguelhar dl Ferrlo Pisanello, ed. F. Zambrini (Bologna, 1873) pp. 47, 50-2, 65-6, 95-7:

Bassa danza, chiamata Venus, in tre, composta per Lorenzo di Piero di Cassino de' Medici.

In prima faccio una contendenza, e poi vadino insieme con duo passi sciempi, cominciando col pie manco; e poi quello di mezo torni indietro, attraverso, con duo riprese, l'unu in sul pie manco, così per lato, et l'altra in sul pie ritto pure attraverso; et in quello tempo, che quello di mezo fa quelle riprese, gli altri due vadin lunzi con due passi doppj, e poi diano meza volta in sul pie ritto, tanto che si voltino l'uno verso l'altro; e poi faccino duo riprese, l'una in sul pie manco e l'altra in sul pie ritto; et poi venghino incontro l'uno all'altro con una passo doppio, cominciando col pie manco; e poi faccino la volta del giroso tutti insieme; poi quello di mezo venga incontro agli altri con duo passi sciempi; et in quel tempo gli altri faccino una riverezza in sul pie manco ...

On aere (p. 17):
... aicrea presenza et elevato movimento, colla propria persona mostrando con destreza nel danzare un dolce et umanissimo rilevamento.


Inteueurnur rationes tuae de coloribus ... Color aureus est, inquit, nobilissimus colorum, quod per eum figuratur lux. Si quis enim vellet figurare radios solis, quod est corpus maxime luminosum, non posset commodius facere quam per radios aureos, constat autem luce nihil esse nobilis. Animadvertite stuporem hominis, stoliditatemque

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unquam ita caecus atque ebrius fuit, nisi similis ac par Bartolo, qui solem croceum dixerit? Sustolle pauperis oculos asine,... et vide an sol est aureus vel argenteus .... Quod postea, quae proximo loco colorum ponit? ... Sapphires, inquit, est proximus, quem ipse, ut est barbarus, et quasi cum fominis, et non cum viris liquatur, azurum vocat: per hunc colorum, ait significatur aer. Nonne hic hic aliquid digere videtur, qui ordinem sequiui elementorum? certe. Sed necio quare lunam praetermissit, ... quum solem primum feceris, lunam delubras facere secundam, quae et alior aere est, et, magis tamen quendam colorum habet quam aer, et quum illum dixeris aureum, hanc oportebat argenteam nominare et proximam a sole facere, ut argentum secundum est ab auro: ... Sapphirum igitum secundas numeros loco, delectatus, ut dixi, ordine elementorum: a metallis enim, a lapidibus preciosis, ab herbis et floribus, non putatis tibi exempla sumenda: quae si propria magis et accommodata erant, tum humilia tibi et abjecta duxisti, ut qui ex sole tantum est factus et aere. Nam quum seriem elementorum prosequeris, de dubius dieci, de duobus alteris omnium, et nobis expectantibus tam altum venerabilisque processum, quodam modo illudis. Si primus color est igneus, sequens aerius, tertius aquaticus est: quartus terres ... Pergamum ad caeca. Paulo post ait album esse nobilissimum colorum, nigrum abiectissimum, aliis vero ita quenquam optimum, ut est albo coniunctissimum, rursum ita quenquam deterrium: ut est uiginiti proximus. Horum quid primum reprehendam? an quod aurei coloris non numimini? ... Aut ear seria filu urucce tingentur, lanae candidae rubricarantur, nisi rubes color albo putaretur esse vellusior? Nam si candor est de Lapidibus et herbis, et floribus, et multis aliis Bartholus quum de vestibus et oper mentibus hominum loquentur, poterant ob lipsus de avium, propa diesmixt, vestibus, ut galli, pavonis, pici, picae, phasiani, et aliorum complurum? ... Eamus nunc e hominum audiamus, a divinis atque humanus rebus dissentientem: et pulles Ticen nis, ver enim adventat, legem imponamus, ne serta, nisi quomodo Bartolus divinis atque humanis rebus dissentientem: et pueUis Ticinensibus, ver ...

Alberi on colour harmonies: Opere volgari, ed. cit., III, p. 86:
Sarà ivi grazia quando l'uno colore appresso, molto sarà dall'altro differente; che se disingenera Diana guido il coro, sia a questa ninfa panni verdi, a quella bianchi, all'altra rosati, all'altra croci, e così a ciascuna diversi colori, tale che sempre i chiari sieno preso ad altri diversi colori oscuri. Sarà per questa comparazione ivi la bellezza de' colori più chiara e più leggiadra. E truovasi certa amicizia de' colori, che l'uno giunto con l'altro l'orge dignità e grazia. Il colore rosato preso al verde e al cilestro si danno insieme onore e vista. Il colore bianco non solo appresso il cenericio e appresso il croceo, ma quasi preso a tutti posto, porge letizia. I colori oscuri stanno fra i chiari non sanza alcuna dignità, e cosi i chiari bene s'avolano fra gli oscuri. Cosi adunque, quanto disti, il pitore disporrà suo colori.


Piero della Francesca on gauging a barrel: Piero della Francesca, Trattato d'abaco, ed. G. Arrighi (Pisa, 1970) p. 233:
Egl'è una bocche che i suoi fondi è ciascuno per diametro 2 bracci; et al coihiume é 26, et tra i fondi e 'l coihiume è 26, et è lunga 2 bracci. Domando quanto sarà quadrata.
Questa è de spettie de piramide taglate, però fa' così. Montiplica il fondo in sè, ch'è 2, fa 4, poi montiplica 2 in sè fa 4; giungi insieme fa 8. Pol montiplica vi a vi 26 fa 4; giungi con 8 fa 13. parti per 3 ne vene 4.5; cioè radici di 4.5 e in sè montiplicato fa 22.5 e questo tieni a mente. Tu ai che montiplicato 26 in sè fa 4, hora montiplica 26 in sè fa 8.5; giungi insieme fa 10.5, et montiplica 26 vi a vi fa 5 giungi insiemi fa 15.5, parti per 3 ne vene 5.5, cioè la radici de 5.5, che in sè
montiplicato fa 5\frac{1}{2}. Giognilo chon quello de sopra ch'è \frac{4}{5} fa 9\frac{2}{3}. il quale montiplica per n e parti per 14, ne vene \frac{5}{14} e tanto è quadrata la dieta botte.


Uno vien a morte, e a sua donna gravida. E fa testamento de duc. 600 che si trova in tutto. Di quali la donna facendo maschio, ne die haverle 300, el fio 400. E facendo femina, la donna ne deba haverle 400. E la fina 200. Acade che fei fin et fa. Dimandaze che ne torna per uno, actió sia salva la intension del testatore . . .

Piero della Francesca on the Rule of Three: *Trattato d'abaco*, ed. cit., p. 44:

La regola de l'croce dire che se déi montiplicare la cosa, che l'omo vole sapere, per quella che non è simigliante e, la somma che fa, partire per l'altra; et quello che ne vene c è de la natura de quello che non è simigliante, et sempre il partitore è simile a la cosa che l'omo vole sapere.

Esempio. Bracci 7 di panno vaglano 9 Libre, che varà 5 bracci?

Fa' così: montiplica la quantità che tu voci sapere per quella quantità che vale li 7 bracci di panno, ch'è 9 Libre, così 5 via 9 fa 45, parti per 7 ne vene 6 Libre e resta 3 Libre: fannone soldi sono 60, parti per 7 ne vene 8 soldi e resta 4 soldi; fane d'e[en]ari sono 48, parti per 7 ne vene 6 denari \$. Adunqua 5 bracci di panno a quella ragione vaglano 6 Libre 8 soldi 6 denari §.


11. The sensible delights of paradise: Bartholomeus Rimbertinus, *De deliciis sensibilibus paradisi* (Venice, 1498) pp. 15v.-26r., in particular p. 17r.:

... intersticium non impedit visum oculorum beatorum ... Nam si christus existens in celis post ascensionem suam videbat matrem suam dulcissimam: adiuec in terra existentem et in cubiculo orantem, patet quod nec situs nec paries impedit.

Item non plus impedit opacitas intersticii quam inreio rei visibilis ab ante et retro: ut de facie locuti sumus. Unde Christus poterat faciem matris prostrare in terram intuere et nunc mater eius beatissima, quamlibet devotum suum: ac si in faciem eius de directo resiperet. Et sic patet quod per dorsum videre potest pecus et per scopul faciem.

Celsus Maffeus, *De sensibilibus deliciis paradisi* (Verona, 1504) pp. A viii v.-B ii r., in particular pp. B i v.-B ii r.:

Et visus erit ita acutus ut minimas differentias colorum et varietates discernere poterit. Nulla etiam distantia aut corporum interpositum eit impedimento.


Se diligentemente vorremo col spirito pensare nella lege del signore, facilmente cognozzeremo che nelli sacri elogi spesso si recitano quelle cose che alla visione & occhio materiale si appartengano. Donde e manifesto che la considerazione del occhio & di quelle cose che ad esso si appartengano e assai utile ad haverle piu piena noitia de la sapientia divina.

Undecimo mirabile in la visione.

E provato per la antiqueta scientia, che sottoarti li ragi over fine non si puo certificare la quantita dela cosa che si vede, ma si puo ben discernere se si vede per deritte linee: come e manifesto in alcuna cosa la quale hora se vede in aere & hora in arqu. Similmente, il percetto si puo certomedicalmente comprendere secondo il grado della propria quantita da quello eliquale diversamente rivisto e peraggio non discerne la colpa di esso peccato ne risguarda quello per deritta linea ma per obliqua & interorta . . .


Landino on Alberti: *Comento di Christoporo Landino fiorentino sopra la comedia di Danile Alighieri* (Florence, 1481) p. iv r.


Landino's Pliny: C. Pliniius Secundus, *Historia naturale*, trs. C. Landino (Rome 1473) and later editions.


La pittura...costringe il mezzo del pittore a trasmutarvisi nella propria mente di natura e sia interpretare infra essa natura e' arte comenando con quella le cause delle sue dimostrazioni costrette dalla sua legge et in che modo le similitudini degli obbietti circostanti al occhio concorrono con l'eri simulacri alla poppilla del occhio; e infra gli obbietti eguali in grandezza quale si dimostrerà maggiore a esso occhio; e infra li colori eguali qual si dimostrerà più o men oscuro, o più o men chiaro; e infra le cose d'egual bassezza quale si dimostrerà più o men bassa et di quelle che sono poste in altezza eguale quale si dimostrerà più o men alta et degli obbietti eguali posti in varie distanze perché si dimostreranno men noti l' uno che l'altro.

For representative classical and renaissance contexts for the phrase see Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXIV, 61 (natura ipsa imitanda esse) and Lorenzo Ghiberti, *I commentarii*, ed. J. v. Schlosser, I (Berlin, 1912) p. 48 (II. 92): 'mi ingegnai con ogni misura osservare in esse [the Gates of Paradise] cercare imitare la natura quanto a me fosse possibile'.


Come tu de' date la ragione della luce, chioscuro alle fue figure, dotandole di ragione di rilievo.

Se per virta' t'avvenisse, quado disegnasti o ritraessi in cappelle, o coloristini in altri luoghi contrari, che non potessi avere la luce dalla man tua, o a tuo modo, seguita di dare el rilievo alle fue figure, o veramente disegno, secondo l'ordine delle finestre che trovi ne' detti luoghi, che ti hanno a dare la luce. E così, seguitando la luce da qual mano si sia, da el tuo rilievo e l'osuro, secondo la ragione detta ... E se la luce prosperasse con finestra che fusse maggiori d'altra che fusse ne' detti luoghi, seguita sempre la più eccellente luce, e voglia con debito ragionevole intenderla e seguirla; perché, ciò mandando, non sarebbe tuo lavoro con nessuno rilievo, e verrebbe cosa semplice, e con poco maestro.


(e) *prospettiva*: Antonio Manetti, *Filippo Brunellesco*, ed. H. Holtzinger (Stuttgart, 1887) p. 9:

... quello che' e dipintori oggi dicono prospettiva; ... è una parte di quella scienza, che è in effetto porre bene e con ragione le diminuzioni et accrescimenti che appaiono agli occhi degli uomini delle cose di lunghi et da presso: casamenti, piani e montagne e paesi d'ogni ragione e in ogni luogo, le figure e l'alre cose, di quella misura che si appartiene a quella distanza che le si mostrano di lunghi ... 

Dante, *Convivio*, II. iii. 6 (sensibilmente e ragionevolmente è veduto ... secondo che per un' arte che si chiama perspettiva, e arismetrica e geometria) and II. xii. 27 (la Geometria è bianchissima, in quanto è senza macula d'errore e certissima per sé e per la sua anchella, che si chiama Perspettiva). Sforzzone's contract of 1467


(f) grazioso: for Filippo Lippi’s epigraph, H. Mendelsohn, Fra Filippo Lippi (Berlin, 1909) p. 34; for Leonardo on grazia, Treatise on Painting, ed. cit., I, 382 and II, 114 r.

Le membra col corpo debbono esser acomodate con grazia al proposito dell’effetto che tu vo chi faccia la Figura, et se tu voi fare Figura che dimostri in sé leggiadria, debbi fare membra gentili e distese senza dimostrazione di troppo muscoli e que pochi ch’al proposito farai dimo­
strare faghi dolci cioè di poca evidentia con ombre non tinte, et le membra massimamente le braccia, dismodate, cioè che nessun membro non istia in linea diritta col membro che s’aggiogion con seco.

For grazia and literary criticism, see, for example, Quintilian, Institutiones oratoriae, IX, I 1, 3.

(g) ornato: Quintilian, Institutiones oratoriae, VIII, iii. 49 and 61 (Ornatum est, quod perspice ac probabilis plus est), and XII, x. 66; Alberti, Opere volgari, ed. cit., III, p. 78 (Sia nell’ uomo moviment con più fermezza ornati con belli posari e artificioi); Leonardo on ornamenti, Treatise on Painting, ed. cit., I, 275 and II, 60 v. (Non fare mai nelle istorie tanti ornari alle tue figure e’ altri corpi che impedischno la forma e l’attitudine di tal figure e l’essentia de predetti altri corpi).

(h) varietà: Alberti, Opera volgari, ed. cit., III, pp. 68-74. On diversity of objects:

... a’ suoi luoghi sien permissi vecchi, giovani, fanciulli, donne, fanci­


(k) disegno: Francesco da Buti, Commento sopra la Divina Commedia, II (Pisa, 1860) p. 285 (‘[Giotto] di pennel fu maes­


(h) varietà: Alberti, Opera volgari, ed. cit., III, pp. 68-74. On diversity of objects:

... a’ suoi luoghi sien permissi vecchi, giovani, fanciulli, donne, fanciul­


(k) disegno: Francesco da Buti, Commento sopra la Divina Commedia, II (Pisa, 1860) p. 285 (‘[Giotto] di pennel fu maestro; cioè fino dipintore, o di stile; cioè o disegnatore con stilo ne le taule ... ’); Cennino Cennini, Il libro dell’arte, ed. cit., p. 3 (El fondamento dell’arte, e di tutti questi lavori di mano principio è il disegno e ‘l colorire); for Castagno’s sinopie, U. Proccaci, Sinopie e affreschi (Milan, 1961) pp. 67-8 and Plates 120-9; Alberti, Opere volgari, ed. cit., III, p. 100; Piero della Francesca, De prospectiva pingendi, ed. cit., p. 63:

La pittura contiene in se tre parti principali, quali diciamo essere disegno, commensuratio et colorare. Desegno intendiamo essere profil e contorni che nella cosa se contiene. Commensuratio diciamo essere essi profil et contorni proportionalmente posti nei luoghi loro. Colorare intendiamo dare i colori comuni nelle cose se dimostrano, chier et usciri secondo che i lumin li devariano.

stupivano e maravigliavansi delle difficoltà ch'egli aveva messo innanzi, come fu l'attitudine d'Abram, l'attitudine di quel dito sotto el mento, la sua prontezza, e panni, e 'l modo e la fine di tutto quel corpo del figliuolo, e 'l modo e panni di quello Angelo e suoi reggimenti, e come gli piglia la mano; l'attitudine e 'l modo e la fine di quello che si trae lo stecco del piè, e così di quello che bee chianto; e di quanta difficoltà sono quelle figure, e quanto bene elle fanno l'ufficio loro ... 

(m) scorci: Landino on Uccello, *Commento*, ed. cit., p. viii r. (... artificioso negli scorsi, perché intese bene di prospettiva); Lodovico Dolce, op. cit., I, 180-81 (Ho inteso, che gli scorci sono una delle principali difficoltà dell'arte. Onde io crederei, che chi più spesso li mettesse in opera, più meritasse laude ... gli scorci sono intesi da pochi, onde a pochi diletano, et anco a gli intendenti alle volte più apportano fastidio, che dilettrione); Vasari, *Le vite*, ed. cit., IV, 11 (... si come erano a loro duri a condurli, così erano aspri a vederli).


(o) vezzoso: Alberti, *Opere volgari*, ed. cit., III, p. 84:

Per questo molto si biasimi ciascuno pittore il quale senza molto modo usi bianco o nero ... sarebbe certo utile il bianco e nero si facesse di quelle ... perle ..., che'n sarrebbero quanto debbono avari e massai e sarebbero loro opera più al vero dolci e vezzose.

[Girolamo di Manfredi,] 'Albertus Magnus', *El libro chiamato della vita, costumi, natura dellomo* (Naples, 1478) p. lxxvii r.:

Perché il nostro vedere e megliore nei colori verdi che nei bianchi e nei negri.

Ogni obietto estremo debilita il sentimento e il meglio e temperato conforta perché li estremi movano distemperatamente lorgano del sentire come il tropo bianco move disregregando il forte negro move tropo uniendo e paucificando. Ma il colore meglio come e il verde temperatamente move ne tropo desgregando ne tropo uniendo. Impero conforta molto il vedere.

(p) devoto: St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a-2ae, q. 180, aa. 1 and 7; the four preaching styles in 'Ars predicandi et syrmocinandi', Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, MS. Magl. VIII, 1412, fol. 18v.:

Quattuor sunt genera predicationis ... Primum genus est subtilius pro sapientibus et expertis in arte: et istud est investigandum. Secundum est facilius pro noviter introductis in theologia istud est penitus observandum. Tertium curiosius pro illis qui solum volunt apparere. Istd est tanquam inutili fugiendum. Quartum devotius sicut sunt sermones sanctorum quaeg leguntur in ecclesia. Istd est plurimum tenendum et est bonum pro populo edificando et informando ... Quartum genus predicandi servaverunt antiqui patres, et doctores sancti et Augustinus, et ali sancti qui omnem curiositatem deviantes in quadam massa nobis divinas inspirationes ediderunt sine divisione vel subdivisione aut concordantia aliquai.
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