

James Elkins

On Modern Impatience

Modern works are not done with the patience typical of the Renaissance. Initially this means simply that Renaissance artists spent a disproportionate number of hours per work, and in that form the claim is easily substantiated.¹ Comparisons can be made virtually at random, provided we are careful to compare equivalent media and to exclude cases where technology has sped things up (Leonardo could never have hoped to do as many monumental bronzes as Henry Moore has achieved). We could contrast the number of hours that went into Titan's *Bacchanal* with the hours in Matisse's early major work, the *Dance of Life*; or the hours in Hugo Van der Goes's *Portinari Altarpiece* – a triptych – with the hours in Max Beckmann's *Jason* triptych; or nudes by Titian or Giorgione with those by Modigliani or Wesselman. Exceptions are hard to come by. Perhaps (but only perhaps) Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler* took longer than a typical portrait by Bronzino, but Picasso's cubist portraits were his most complex works of that period, and Bronzino's portraits were his simplest aside from drawings and cartoons. The small predella panels of typical fifteenth century altarpieces were done with something like the same amount of labor that Sutherland, Bacon, or Hockney put into average-sized paintings. The rare and famous cases of long working hours (for example Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, his *Woman with a Mandolin*, or Matisse's *Serf*) are amply balanced by the years that were spent on typical large Renaissance commissions. Elaborate modern works are not common: one thinks principally of works influenced by photography such as Seurat's *Grande Jatte*, Balthus' three street scenes (each of which took around two years to complete), Boccioni's *Form of Motion in Space*, Wyeth's *Christina's World* (and any number of other late romantic landscapes), and photorealist paintings based on snapshots, from Chuck Close to Richard Estes. Other examples are peripheral or unique: some earth works, the Boyle family's exhaustive copies of random parts of the earth's surface, or the counting projects launched by Jonathan Borofsky and Roman Opalka.²

It has been argued that modern works are like icebergs: what we see in a Picasso portrait is only the one-tenth that remains after the nine-tenths have been hidden. Watching the film *The Mystery of Picasso* is in part witnessing a demonstration of that fact as Picasso insists on creating nearly complete paintings and then beginning again from scratch. (It is not that his labor is to be doubted, but that Picasso's *ostentatio* is at once repetitious, grandiose, didactic, and a little strained, and it leaves the viewer wondering what *really* or *usually* happened when no cameras were present.) Yet it is no recourse to claim that more thought goes into modern works: the problem with Whistler's rejoinder (>You do not pay for the time I spent making it, but for the lifetime of experience that went into it<) is that we cannot know how much preparation went into Renaissance works.³ Piero della Francesca, for example, wrote three full and complicated books, more words than all major modernists except Kandinsky, and more pedagogic illustrations than any modern artist except Klee. The detail, complexity, and compositional finesse of Piero's paintings argue that time was put into lost perspective studies, composition sketches and cartoons, rather than pa-

limpsests on the panels and walls. The fact that Matisse labored two years attempting to balance real and »abstract« in the *Serf* does not support the counterclaim that Titian must have spent less time on the eight figures in his *Bacchus and Ariadne*.

One might also object that fifteenth-century artists were still bound to try to represent the real world, and so had to put in more time in the studio painting complicated architectural ornaments and drapery. They lived in a highly ornamented world – a world whose ornaments were more intricate and commoner than the blank surfaces and grids of modernism – and they were interested in trying to depict Corinthian capitals, perspective arcades, goblets, pictured tiles, and brocaded Saints' robes. Surely it takes more time to sculpt, draw or paint an Ionic aedicule than it takes to represent a Postmodern punched-out window. Rouault and Picasso were spared the exigencies of real stained-glass construction when they made their »stained glass« paintings. It might also be urged that some fifteenth-century artists attempted to bring geometric harmonies to bear as organizing principles, and that this would have entailed more work than modernism's more intuitive senses of harmony. It must have been quicker for Toulouse-Lautrec to skew an interior or displace a figure than it was for Domenico Veneziano to distill his geometries. Dissonance has fewer rules than harmony. Yet these differences are not fully convincing. It is not that realism doesn't take more time, it is that we cannot explain the contrast I have in mind here by appealing to realism. Can the complications of Renaissance realism account for the majority of any one Renaissance work? Only a small percentage of the *Bacchus and Ariadne* is taken up with drapery, chalices, tambourines, wheels, thickets, and thyrsi. And why wouldn't a simply drawn facade or nude do as well as a complex polyptych for a demonstration of geometric perfection? Another problem is invoking the term »realism«. Is the *St. Lucy Altarpiece* an engine fueled by realist aspiration? Even Mantegna's endlessly fractured landscapes, where the word *engine* fits better, do not respond to a »realist« critique. Here too, it is not that naturalism was not an ambition, it is that it cannot account for enough of the painting or enough of any single painting.

Perhaps Renaissance artists were offspring of the medieval identity of artist and craftsmen, so they felt required to work long hours. But in making this somewhat Victorian assessment, we assume that the artists felt their intricate inventions to be some kind of drudgery, and the delight we often take in them speaks against this. Saying that the longer Renaissance working hours were taken up by required drudgery also implies that the artists were tied by convention to a kind of painting they may not have preferred. This is yet another form of one of the commonest historical chauvinisms, the notion that the artists we study were somehow less aware or less in control of some aspect of their work than we are. In this case we need to distinguish between the claim that the artists worked long hours on repetitive tasks from the notions that they misprized their labor or were naive about the expressive results of their habits.

I entertain these objections at some length because in my experience – teaching and discussing this issue – modern (mal)practice seems to stand in need of some defense, and the first impulse is often to dismiss altogether the kind of distinction I seek to make. (That urge indicates two things: the survival of Renaissance ideals, and the lack of a positive balancing formulation to describe modern and postmodern practice.) But regardless of how this issue is put, the question of the disappearance of pa-

tience is unsolved. The shift away from realism is our best shot at an answer, but it cannot explain the supernumerary objects and textures in Renaissance works. Given that the disparity exists, and that it is a consequence of more than conventional representational goals, what might it signify? Given that »patience« may not be the right term for some Renaissance works, what might a proper opposite be? Should we speak of modern works at »impatient«? And could it be that sloppiness and fastidiousness, haste and care, insouciance and concentration, »drudgery« and play, are symptoms of a coherent group of issues? To explore this, it will be helpful to first consider the *non finito*, an important class of paintings that can be imagined as either patient or impatient, and then turn to the differing dynamics of Renaissance and modern works.

1

Our extreme positions are well-defined: on the side of impatience is abandon, whether literal (works left half-done) or figural (works done rapidly or carelessly, with uneven passages), and on the side of patience is perfection, overdetermination, and the perpetually incomplete painting with its attendant pathologies of compulsion and obsession. This last is known to us from works as different as Richard Dadd's potentially infinite *Fairy-Feller's Master Stroke* and Balzac's parable of impossible fastidiousness, and the former is familiar in Tintoretto's visible *imprimature* and Egon Schiele's blank paper and canvas. In less virulent forms, both possibilities bear on the perennial difficulty of knowing when a picture is finished. It is curious that unfinished works may be the result of either hypertrophied obsession or anemic disinterest. Though Kafka's *Castle* is properly, thematically unfinished – one would not want to see it completed – and lost in its own labyrinths, can the same be said for his *Amerika*, which has less internal reason to be unfinished?⁴ The entire category of intentionally unfinished pictures – the *non finito* – has this ambiguity at its core. How do we know when a work is the product of unslakable fastidiousness or growing disinterest?

At one end of the history of the *non finito*, then, are Renaissance works that were left unfinished before the category itself came into critical being. There are at least three possible reasons why Parmigianino's *Madonna with the Long Neck* (1535) was left unfinished (plate 1). (The signs of its incompleteness: a second saint in the background is represented by a single foot, and the painting lacks the roof and all but one column of a temple and some finish in the drapery.) First, Vasari says it was left in Parmigianino's studio, »perchè non se ne contentava molto« (»because he wasn't satisfied with it«), and Sydney Freedberg glosses that Parmigianino had fully explored a certain style in the painting, so that it was »embalmed« or »entombed« and he did not want to return to it.⁵ In that case, the painting would not be *non finito* but *incompiuta* (incomplete) and its voids perhaps meaningless.⁶ To another scholar, the *incompiuta* is a typical gesture of hermeticism, which intends not to be understood.⁷ In that case, the lacunæ would signify a specific doctrine, and the painting would be, in a strong sense, satisfactorily finished. Its *non finito* would be assigned a symbolic value rather than a formal one. It has also been proposed that the single column is more appropriate as a symbol of the Virgin than the full temple, that the second prophet was omitted because their identities were not important and he wanted to sig-

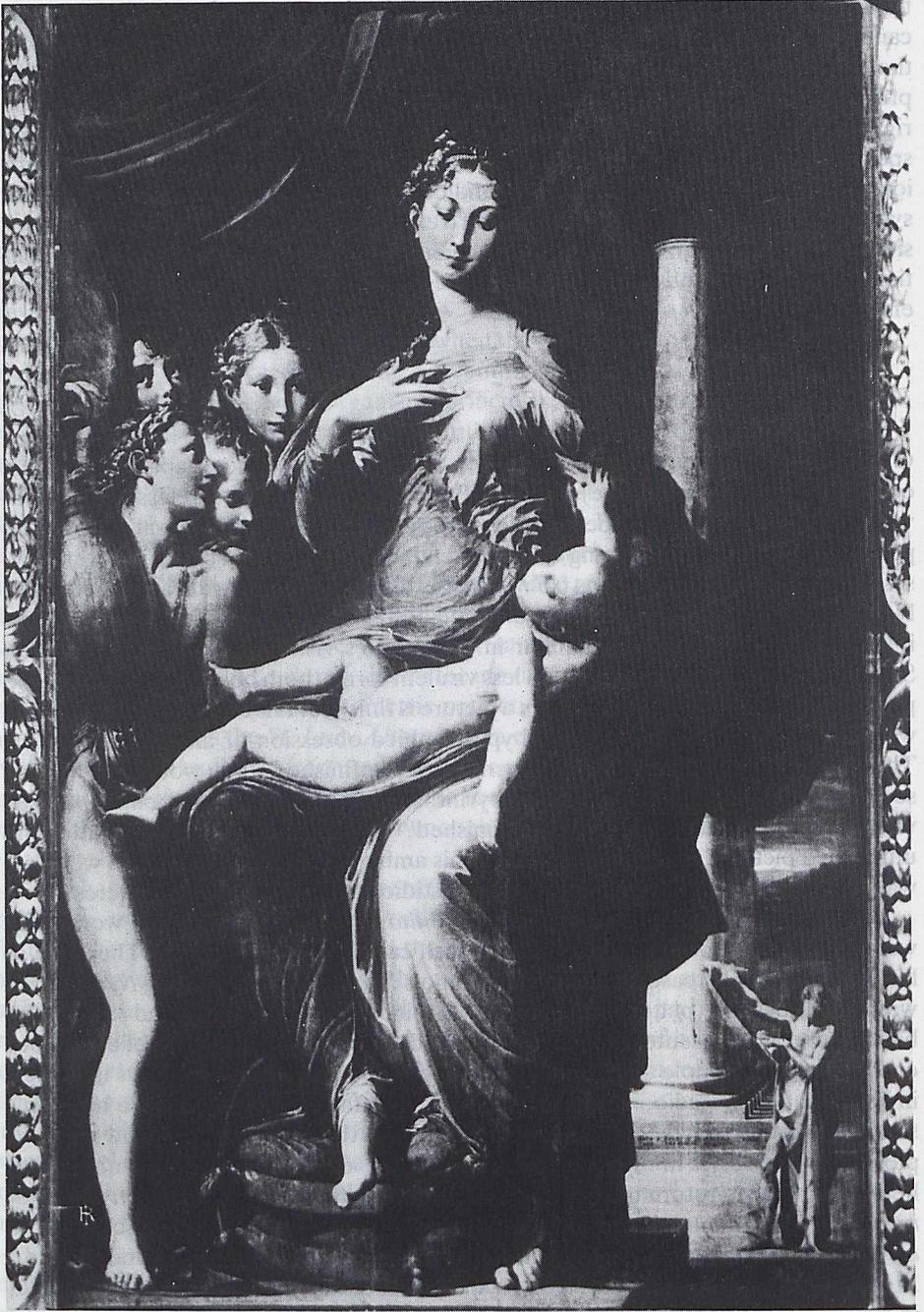


Plate 1 Parmigianino, *Madonna with the Long Neck*, 1535. Florence, Uffizi.

nify the truth of the doctrine of Immaculate Conception, not the debates over it. In another painting Parmigianino painted a lone column as sign of the Virgin. In this last case the painting is unfinished »in reverse«: to finish it, Parmigianino would have effaced the half-finished portions of the temple.⁸

I choose this example rather than the more famous *non finito* works of later generations to show the kind of complexity that attends the *non finito*. Even though the unfinished portions of Parmigianino's painting do not have the »aesthetic of the sketch« (the loose, *primo pensiero* look of later centuries' *non finito* passages) they still invite personal readings: they ask us to think of Parmigianino's decisions, and through them, of his mental state. Even this marmoreal *non finito* is an intimate and autobiographical gesture. Whether or not we want to assign the nascent category of *non finito* to Parmigianino's painting, it demonstrates the power of *non finito* to open meditation on intention, completeness, confessional meaning, autobiography, pictorial unity, the sequence of creation, the methodology of iconographic creation, and the practical dimensions of stylistics. It does so by questioning a basic grammatical structure of painting that calls for uniformity of intention, and in so doing it creates a rhetorical *antithesis* where there had been none. Pictures and sculptures deliberately left »unfinished« cause us to re-imagine completed works as less interesting because they are more uniform.

There is a decisive difference between Renaissance and modern *non finito*. In Renaissance and Baroque sculpture and painting, unfinished portions can always be completed in imagination – the viewer knows, from comparison with completed portions and analogous works, how the »entire« would appear. Modern works that attempt *non finito* effects can possess more radical discontinuity, since it can be impossible to know how the gaps would have been filled. The earliest modern pictures where the imagined process of »completion« is uncertain are, I think, Cézanne's and Picasso's. What would one of the late *Mt. St. Victoire* paintings look like if Cézanne had continued work? What is »missing« from the loosely delineated passages? Or is what is »missing« to be located in the more closely delineated portions, so they lack a lack of detail? As soon as it becomes difficult to answer these questions, two more intractable ones come up. First, we can ask: How do we know this *is* finished? Given Cézanne was dissatisfied with some of his late works, and that they are all in some sense experiments, can we see where and what disappointed him? Can we even perceive the gaps, as we so easily can in Parmigianino? And second: If the paintings are finished, what does »finish« mean? Older *non finito* pictures are finished works, but they are bipartite since they consist of conventional, predictable finish and simple absences of that finish.⁹ But if unfinish is not absence, how can we know what and where it is? Where are the two parts in an »unfinished« synthetic cubist still life? If it's no longer possible to make this kind of distinction, the ideas of *process* and *method* also become illegible. Was the image constructed from absence to presence, or erased from presence to absence?

Later artists thematized these aporias. Would De Kooning have »fixed« the »blurred« passages in his early portraits? Is the cloudy left arm of the *Glazier* (1940) an erasure or a sketch? Is the uncertain, multiple *Seated Figure (Classic Male)* (c. 1940, plate 2) best read as a record of process, or as a completed construction? And – a truly difficult question – if it is both, what in the picture tells us so? Do the unreadable pseudofigural amalgams of Pollock's »psychoanalytic drawings« answer to the

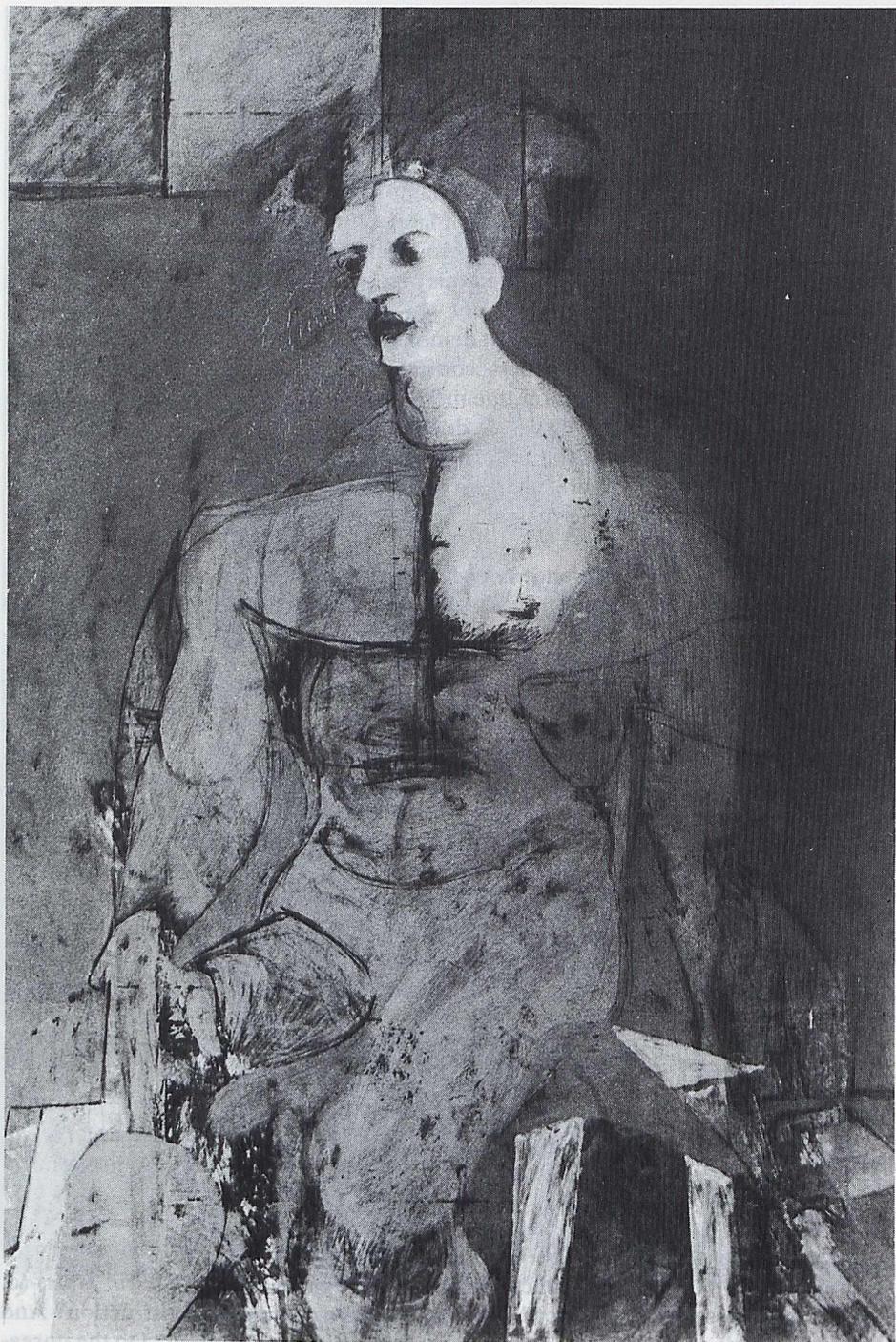


Plate 2 Willem de Kooning, *Seated Figure (Classic Male)*, c. 1940. Houston, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation.

problem of avoiding cubism – of not repeating, at any cost, the look of Picasso – or are they blurs of figures imagined too baldly? Pollock later said that drip paintings were the conscious overpainting the unconscious: and if there is more than confessional posing there, is it a figural unconscious? Giacometti's portraits are similar cases. Though it is not possible (by Giacometti's own judgement) to call the portraits of Yamehara »finished«, it is also not possible to say where they may have gone or which portions are unfinished. Much of contemporary art that plays with mixtures of abstraction and realism also makes use of this newly-overturned hierarchy since it continually problematizes the relation of finished and unfinished. How abstract or how realistic should a form be? The question is repeated by artists and teachers in front of mixed abstractions, and if it is to have a sensible answer, that answer must depend on what we can make of Cézanne, Picasso, De Kooning, Pollock, and Giacometti. The undecidable questions about criteria of finish share this common ground: they all depend on the intentional *thematizing* of the *non finito*, rather than its simple instantiation.

Before, a picture was *built*: it possessed an internal structure, and building a picture was like building a house – one did not begin with the roof, or call it finished when a wall was missing. (This is one of the dogmas that architectural deconstructivism addresses.) Parmigianino's painted temple is »under construction«, like a real temple might be. In modernism the metaphor of making is no longer architectural, and this particular absence hints that there is now a radically different concept of how a picture is made.

2

»Passagework« is a musical term, referring not to a background *per se* but to things that are done by rote: principally scales, arpeggios, cadences, transitional themes, and sequences. Passagework is routine, both for the hearer and the composer. It breaks free of its subsidiary role only in exceptional circumstances – when a sequence takes an unexpected fourth step, or when a bridge theme is continued into a secondary theme. Usually passagework is heard with a different ear than the themes it connects – one listens less intently, perhaps using the moments of passagework to consolidate the memory of the more important themes that have just been heard. The detailed slow movement figurations invented by Johann Nepomuk Hummel are a different matter.¹⁰ Typically, they bridge a measure or a beat well marked in the bass, but they do so in a *rubato* (accelerating and decelerating tempo) or by *parlando* (mimicking the interrupted cadences of speech). Rhetorically, such figurations are extreme contrasts expressing the dominion of the rigid bass over whatever claims ornament may have on its stability. They serve in part to let us experience the ornament/ground *antithesis* as a struggle of lyrical freedom against an often funeral necessity. For these reasons, figurations are the sites of *increased*, rather than decreased, attention. As a pianist playing a Chopin nocturne launches a *delicatissimo* figured ornament, one listens with sharpened awareness, waiting to hear how the accelerating notes will collapse – just in time – on the next beat.

Renaissance painting offers parallels to both modes. Passagework, sometimes called »fill«, may well account for many of the hours put in on a commission. In a

painting, passagework is surface over which the eye glides on its way from one center of interest to the next. As in musical passagework, pictorial fill has interesting but immediately recognizable and uniform texture. In music, broken chords progress in sequences repeated every measure or beat; and in Renaissance painting, grass between Saints' feet is sprinkled with plants at intelligible intervals. Both ask only that the eye or ear identify the pattern and move on. If a plant is symbolic, or particularly beautiful, it may suddenly become the object of attention on the painter's part. In that case, even when it is apparent that the painter expended tremendous effort, the plant's beauty is understood in the context of patterned grass, and it takes its place in that context.

Since »figuration« carries the misleading connotation of »figural«, we may call such centers of attention »detailwork«.¹¹ There is typically a higher-level play between passagework and detailwork, in which each reinforces the meaning and function of the other. Ingres' portraits have odd moments, »knots« or »vortices«: whirling arcs, sinuous lines, crescents, arabesques, rough textures, knobby or bony projections on which the eye is impaled (and a corresponding fear and erasure of sharp angles). These tend to occur just where passagework drapery or backdrop is becoming particularly tedious or weak. The *M. Marcotte* in the National Gallery in Washington (1810, plate 3) is an instance of this, with its bizarre visual pun between a claw-like tassel of a black cocked hat, a medallion, and the sitter's hand – which begins to appear arthritic and monstrous in continued comparison with the hat tassel. The three »vortices« are set against a receding passagework of dark fabric, and the two poles of attention are set in an unstable dynamic: the more we are drawn into the vortices, the more we struggle to get »out«, but the framing blankness cannot hold our eyes, no matter how closely we peer at it.

Passagework and detailwork are connected to the thematic of patience and sloppiness by the obvious but paradoxical fact that passagework requires patience to construct and repays it with the viewer's inattention. Passagework therefore invites sloppy treatment, which in turn makes it more interesting, less like passagework and more like detailwork. In this way, and in many others, detailwork can overcome an entire picture, and the difference between detail and passage can disappear. The modern *non finito* pictures we considered have lost the formal relation between finished and unfinished, and traded it for a greater intellectual complexity. To be unable to decide between finished and unfinished is to have lost a predictable logic of picture-making that comes from this kind of underlying structure.

Premodern pictures also embody this distinction in the relation between »figure« (denoting any single object of attention) and »ground« (meaning whatever we see past in order to see the object). Raphael's *School of Athens* does this literally, since it has figures and a ground; but it also does it metaphorically, since we pay more attention to faces than drapery folds, more to the Bramantesque temple than the steps below. The passagework/detailwork distinction is normally like this: there is a literal level, which helps us distinguish between the picture's subject and its setting, and any number of metaphoric levels, creating a dynamic of tension, attention, relaxation.

In Renaissance painting this relationship takes many forms, and sometimes the paintings can be nearly all one or the other. Domenico Veneziano's *St. Lucy Altarpiece* may be either: its wispy drawing, its richly embroidered composition, its myop-



Plate 3 Jean-Baptiste Ingres, *Portrait of M. Marcotte*, 1810. Washington, National Gallery.

ic geometry, its peacock colors, are all evidence of thought. What in such a painting was done absentmindedly, by a tired, distracted, or uninterested hand? Very little: even the white plaster stretches of the arcade are attentively shaded. But without contrast, the whole becomes a uniform field for the eye – the very definition of passagework. Botticelli provides similar examples. What occupied him specially in the *Birth of Venus* or the *Altarpiece of St. Barnabas* (1482)? Is there any way to say that he spent more time and attention on one detail than another? The late *Mystical Nativity* is, on the other hand, nearly all passagework, despite its beauty. Botticelli was possessed by prophecies and politics, and his most acute attention seems to have gone into iconography and inscriptions. Most figures are uninteresting variants of his earlier types (the Virgin is particularly lifeless). There is a glowing meadow, a shining straw roof, and some green and pink iridescent angels' wings – but most of it is rote fill, illustration, analogous in its way to what billboard painters must do to get their messages across.

These are abnormalities (Botticelli is arguably a case of visual pathology). Normally the two modes are juxtaposed, providing a sequence of tension and release more articulated than Botticelli's monomania or Raphael's rhetorical clarity. Carlo Crivelli (c. 1432 - c. 1495) is an exemplar of what we must still call »Renaissance patience«, and also of the more intricate relation of passage and detail. The *Madonna with Child* in Verona (c. 1450-60, plate 4) has traces of Squarcione, Donatello, Lippi, Flemish painting, and Mantegna, and when we see those influences, we see passagework – work that was probably relatively easy. The Crucifixion at the upper right, although it is richly detailed, is one such scene. Crivelli is not the inventor of such scenes, which can have the look of a learned lesson (this one may owe something to Antonello da Messina and something to Flemish art). The same may be said of the sky at the top, which has a cotton-wool look that Mantegna invented. And the Virgin's face has not attracted much attention – a common result in Crivelli, where inanimate objects often take precedence. The demotion of the central face is a signal that we should not equate this antithesis with the figure/ground opposition, which is a special case. Any form may be central, »figural«, in this sense.

The painter's full concentration is not to be doubted where there are oddities, novelties, and awkward forms. A rotten cherry in the fruit swag seems to have captured his attention, and so did the oddly marbelized Cloth of Honor. Sometimes he catalogues his abilities, and that too is something that would have taken full attention: the brick wall at the left has its off-center bricks, projecting bricks, missing bricks, overgrown bricks, bricks cracked diagonally, vertically, notched, scored, gouged and chipped. It is an encyclopedia of bricks, corresponding to the roster of symbols of the passion, the ladder, spear, column, and rooster denoting both betrayal and resurrection. The bricks, fruit swag, Cloth of Honor, and some other portions are magnets to our eyes as they were to his (though that equation is by no means always true), and their relation to the parts he did by rote or memory are not as easy to spell out as they were in Raphael.

Would we want to say that Crivelli thought of the drapery in this painting as a kind of work, something requiring »patience«? Though we can tell his full attention was not given to each stitch, it is also true that there is no evidence he wanted to speed up or slow down. There is a uniformity to his myopia. »Patience« implies a desire to be elsewhere, but the drapery does not give evidence of that. It appears that »patien-

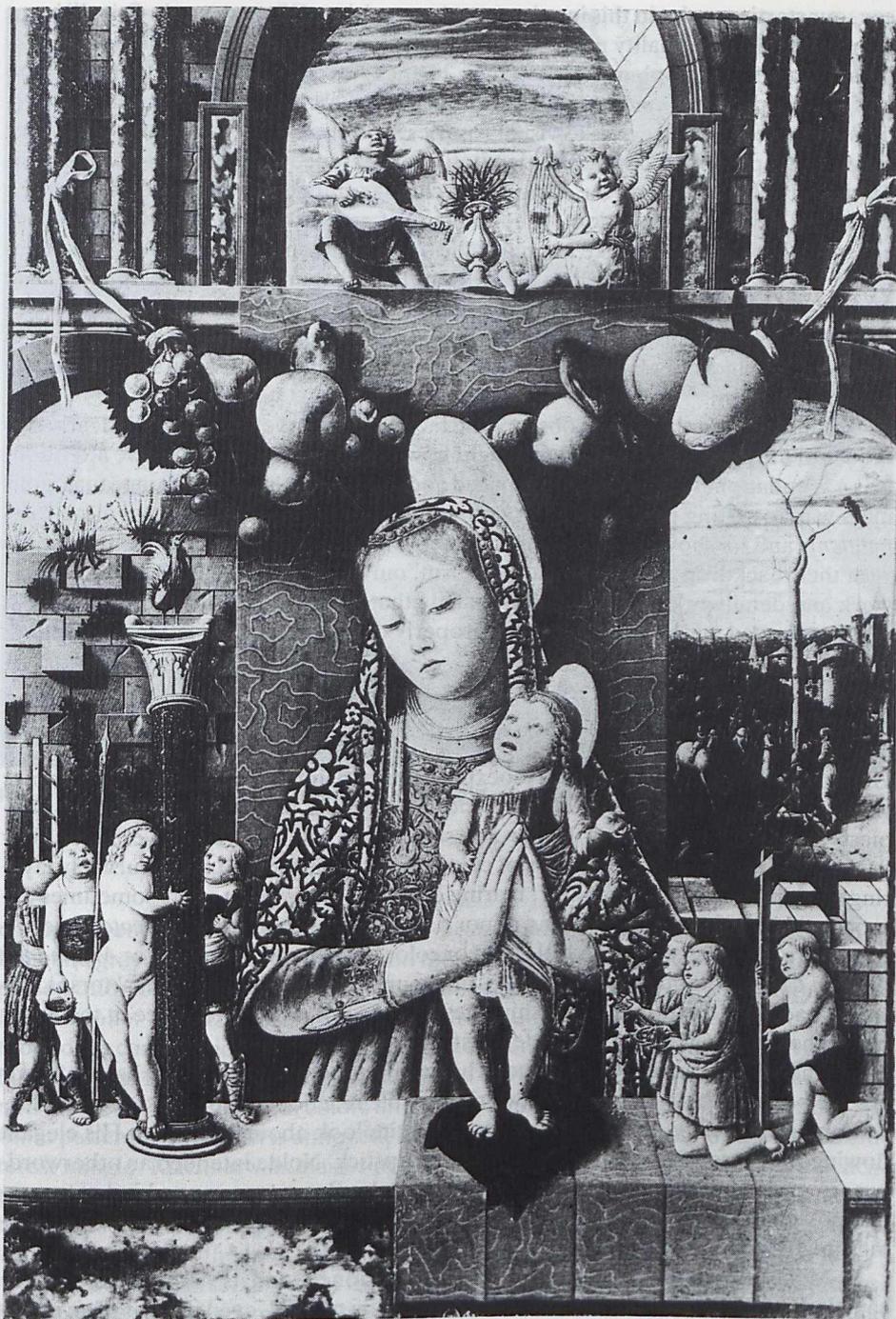


Plate 4 Carlo Crivelli, *Madonna with Child and Symbols of the Passion, view of Golgotha and Jerusalem*, c. 1450-60. Verona, Civico Museo di Castelvecchio.

ce«, our starting-point in this inquiry, requires revision. What we see in Crivelli is not so much a negative quality meliorated by moments of free invention, but *two species of attention*, with complementary virtues. He fixes on the passages he knows by rote as if they were opportunities for meditation. His endless brick walls and swagged borders are repeated prayers, like visual rosaries, and the parallels to Christian prayer may run deep. Longhi saw in the »decorative exuberance« of vines and flowers in his *Madonna della Candeletta* the signs of a declining art, but they may also be signs of a measured, ritualized devotion. The moments of artistic license, on the other hand, are special delights not unlike homilies, the sacrament, and other moments of articulation of the Catholic mass. The cherries and pearls punctuate the *Madonna della Candeletta* as the sacrament punctuates the mass. Thinking of his works this way – though I would not insist on these precise meanings – releases them from seeming like problems, and allows them a wholeness and a consonance between symbol and extrasymbolic form.

This revision should not obscure the fact that for Crivelli there were clearly two modes of attention. One, which we might now call prayerful or meditative attention, was a foundational activity. It was a paced and conservative way of seeing, analogous in its way to setting up stage scenery or sewing costumes. The other was clearly *dependent*, and its showcase performances work by virtue of the contrasts they make with their backdrop. In this modulated form, our initial musical analogy of passage-work and detailwork holds true. It is exactly that two-step hierarchy, I will suggest, that has eroded and provoked what is properly called modern impatience.

3

Historically, Expressionist and Neoexpressionist painting has risked incoherence when it has tried to let intuition and spontaneity rule picture-making. The »sloppiest«, wildest paintings by Nolde are sometimes the least effective, since they degenerate into smeared rainbows of color. Because he painted by impulsively layering thick pure colors, wet in wet, marine oils like *Smoking Steamers* sometimes approach a kind of grey soup. (Some minor paintings, reproduced in the *catalogue raisonné*, are formless slop, with little light or color left in them.) The *Dance Around the Golden Calf* has a successful uncontrol in the upper part, where womens' torsos flap wildly back and forth, but his slashing gestures do not mimic the dance in the lower part, where the legs look like scattered sticks.

These limits are especially true of his religious paintings, where religious fervor got the better of his control of a viewer's possible reactions. The Christ in his *Resurrection* has a ghostly, and yet comic, transvestite look about Him, with His elegant flowing robe, green eye shadow and smeared lipstick. Nolde intended an otherworldly perfection but achieved an incongruity. Nolde's »sloppiness« was a kind of trance-like possession in which he did not think to step back and consider the way his paintings might look to a viewer who came at them cold.

Most Expressionist painting is not as impassioned, and its »sloppiness« is more caustic. The artists of *Die Brücke* reserved a certain control, even if it was of an intentionally absentminded sort. German Expressionism may be defined in part by its lack of interest in *mimesis*: Kirchner's *Girl Before a Mirror* (1909-10, plate 5) pays just



Plate 5 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Girl before a Mirror*, 1909-10. Berlin, Brücke-Museum.

enough attention to color, consistency of flesh, anatomical possibilities, direction of light and gravity, laws of reflection, and the requirements of expression, to get the representation on canvas. Kirchner's eye is impatient, and its flightiness is apparent in every stroke: his gaze barely lights and seldom lingers. Instead his look circulates around his composition, rising, tumbling and whirling. *Fränzi Before a Carved Stool* (1910) has no form not absolutely essential to the root content: girl, blank stare, »primitive« stool. The unnatural colors and rough paint signify the painting was done without patience. The artist is annoyed, he paints with a furious haste. Anger and disinterest mingle. Kirchner was master of this kind »sloppiness«, which is really a delicate mental state composed of *ennui* or *noia*, acidic condescension, and intense interest that keeps sparking but goes out too quickly to catch. He, rather than Nolde, stands at the beginning of the kind of modern impatience that can be properly so called.¹²

This is skittish seeing, and I think it pertains also to the way we see his paintings. Kirchner did not spend enough time looking at details of his figure studies to see that he had made paws or fins, or broken limbs, or smiles where he meant sarcastic masks. It is possible to linger long enough over the *Girl Before a Mirror* to enumerate its de-

partures from academic expectations, but it is an artificial way of seeing the work. Parts of her figure are outlined or shadowed in red, parts in blue, and parts not at all, and the places those three treatments meet are themselves sloppily handled, done in a ruleless fashion. Even to notice that is to risk looking too analytically. The proper way to view such paintings is rapidly and with joy in their laconic candor.

This *lack of modulation* in the speed of viewing is a sign of the absence of the detail/passagework *antithesis*. Looking at a Renaissance painting is a structured experience: our eye moves quickly, then not so quickly; it searches, then rests, then peers. We scan and skim alternately. Corresponding to those visual speeds are moments of more and less intense concentration, reverie, even lapses. In Renaissance paintings such as Crivelli's details are placed like gems into their settings. Modern art witnesses the overcoming of setting – the devaluation of passagework and the rescinding of its meaning – and the emergence of the idea that a picture need not be muffled by conventional requirements but can be wholly revelatory of its author's mentality. Entirely aside from the wishful thinking this entails (since there can be not immanent continuous free attention), it marks the place where impatience in the true modern sense can enter picturemaking. For if there is no backdrop of lessened attention, no conventional setting against which to play, then play loses its meaning, its sense of place. It is that lack of rule that leads, I believe, to what I have been calling modern impatience.

The difficulty – or meaninglessness – of extended performances, and the concurrent attraction to smaller forms, has also been felt in music. The structure of Schönberg's longer pieces in the absence of tonal architecture remains a problem for modern composers, one that has not been directly solved by the various strategies of serialism or even by isolated felicities such as Carter's »metric modulation«. Some of Stockhausen's longer piano pieces seem to be made out of ornaments (I am thinking of *Klavierstück IX*), and that audacity alone gives them a certain impetus. But sustaining attention – both of the listener and the composer – can be difficult. The visual analogue is not gigantic paintings but paintings on which gigantic amounts of time have been lavished. Their absence from contemporary art speaks for the absence of the inner structure we have been studying. We have lost the distinction between foundation and ornament, and with it we have lost a quality that we misname »patience«, but which might be better named »meditation«. In its place we have a new rapidity, something I think is properly called impatience.

Anmerkungen

- 1 One cannot say as easily that they spent more hours than we do *at work*, given that modern artists such as Nolde, Dubuffet, Giacometti, and others spent long hours in the studio. But photographs of Dubuffet turning out figures with an electric saw suggest that there may be more works per year (per month, per day) in most modernist studios.
- 2 Another way of imagining this lack of patience, which I will not pursue here, is to survey the techniques *not* widely taught in art school. Among them are: Renaissance lost-wax bronze casting, marble sculpting, all forms of engraving (wood engraving, copper and steel engraving), traditional oil techniques (as reconstructed by modern scholarship), academic drawing (with its lexicon of hatching, *contorni*, and so forth), and technical photographic printing (e.g., the zone system). The common trait of each of these is that it requires more patience than the analogous commoner technique: engraving is more time-consuming than etching, the zone system than photograms or pinhole techniques, glazing than scumbling, and so forth.
- 3 I take Whistler's quip seriously. Stripped of its hyperbole, it can mean that the hours he spent observing the Thames are analogous to the hours a Pre-Raphaelite might have spent sketching an icon. In this form the claim is a good response to an ultimately important, if crudely put, objection.
- 4 Certainly the traditions of critical reception play a role here, although I want to leave them out of account as far as possible. The question I mean to ask is not: Has the unpainted, fragmentary *Belvedere Torso* come to seem »finished«? But rather: Is Schönberg's *Moses und Aron* in its only possible state (the remainder being unsayable)?
- 5 The succeeding style in Parmigianino's *œuvre* was a more symmetrical, less serpentine and more sober style influenced by Counter-Reformation ideas. See Freedberg, *Parmigianino*, 90ff.
- 6 A *non finito*, properly speaking, is a work left unfinished for expressive effect, and needs to be distinguished from works abandoned with no thought for the effect. The latter include works left incomplete at the artist's death and those »abandoned« in the usual sense of that word. To retain inconsistency such pictures can be called *incompiuta*.
- 7 »[U]n tipico atteggiamento »eremitico« (l'*opus* è destinato a non compiersi mai).« M. F. Dell'Arco, *Il Parmigianino, un saggio sull'eretismo del cinquecento* (Rome, 1970), 44.
- 8 See the *Madonna and St. Zacharias* in the Uffizi. This is complicated by the possibility that the »unfinished« temple signifies the uncompleted task of Jesus and the predestination to that task.
- 9 This is not to say that the idea of the invisible or inchoate did not change: it has its own history, sometimes as spotted confusion (*macchie*), other times as *opus incertum*, roughchiselled stone or cloudshapes. (Examples: Piero della Francesca's invocation of the area beyond vision as swimming with *macchie*; Correggio's »unfinished« figure of Jove in the *Io*; Michelangelo's artificially blocked-in »natural« unfinished rock forms.)
- 10 See for example W.S. Newman, *The Sonata since Beethoven* (Chapel Hill, 1969), 230ff.
- 11 This relation, between passagework and detailwork, is cousin to the »larger« philosophical problem that may be imagined as the opposition, in theory, words, structures, or images, of something »foundational« or »grounding« and its dependent superstructure. It is everywhere an unstable configuration, with the »foundation« prey to encroachments of »ornament«, and its declivity may be figured as a ruin succumbing to smothering vines, a fop or demimondaine in a froth of lace, an austere Brunelleschian church encased in polychrome Baroque ornament, or a fifteenth-century stained glass window whose unified classicism is fractured by leaded panes. The ornamental proves to be a dangerous adversary, and some of the most interesting works are those that work

in the period between absolute logic (undorned foundation) and utter destruction (apotheosis of ornamentation).

- 12 Uncaring rapid execution is more common in recent painting. We are near the borders of comprehensible sloppiness in Jonathan Borofsky's *Sing at 2,841,77* (1978-83) and his *Man in Space #2 at 2,783,196 and 2,783,197* (1982). The backgrounds in these paintings are filled in the most uncaring possible manner. They are painted both roughly and inconsistently. But at the same time, they work by con-

trast with the crisp outlines of his figures and of the canvases themselves. When sculpture is added, it is often sharp-edged, and so are the polaroids he glues to the canvases. Within the limits of this dialectic, Borofsky works as messily as he can. A self-portrait, *Head with a Shape on It at 2,535,405* (1978), could not have been done with a larger brush: the brushes he used were barely sufficient to make the colored emanations and to trace the expression.