Leonardo da Vinci and the ethics of style

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Introduction: seeing style otherwise

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For the past half century, the concept of “style” has received new attention from philosophers, historians, and critical theorists who share an interest in the ways that forms of representation such as writing and art carry content. The history of “style” is much older and more complex, however, particularly in the discipline of art history, where the premise that “style” endows “art” with an autonomous history has been a fundamental and yet deeply problematic assumption. Other disciplines look to art history for an understanding of style, but, as this Introduction will elaborate, art historians have a vexed relationship with the discipline’s foundational concept. Art historian Willibald Sauerländer suggests that, instead of trying to compensate for its shortcomings in our histories of art, as the majority of the art historical literature to date had done, we should rather ask why “the history of style with all its aesthetic alienation from the complexity and contradictions of real history had such an enormous success.”¹

Leaving aside for a moment what “real history” might be, it is the case that, for all its inadequacies, “style” (however it is defined) has always been and is still the dominant category for organizing the material evidence that constitutes art history’s subject domain. One obvious reason for this longevity is the weight of our archives, and another the profitability of the knowledge that the history of style produces: lucrative applications of “style” range from museum blockbusters to theme park attractions to television documentaries and detective stories about great works of art.² The apparently endlessly escalating appeal of Leonardo da Vinci in popular culture is a case in point: at this writing, The Da Vinci Code, morphing from bestselling novel to a diversified culture industry since its initial publication in 2003, is setting new benchmarks for market expectations, based on the most tried and true art historical formula of all, the myth of the great artist whose inimitable style is permanently fascinating and ultimately imponderable.³
The semantic mutability of the concept of style, as Philip Sohm proposes, can productively be understood as a receptive ground onto which writers project their personal views. Yet there are other reasons besides its semantic mutability that style sustains our attention today, not only in the mass media but also in the research agendas of contemporary historians and philosophers. Why do contemporary philosophers concern themselves with questions of style? This question opened a recent anthology directed to interrelationships between philosophy and the arts regarding the concept of style. The answer proposed there is that since all texts exhibit style-related features, attention to these expressive elements provides a self-reflexive mechanism for discovering how content is constructed for readers. The editors suggest that philosophers can best learn how styles are formed and transformed from the field of art history, where style has been a major issue “long before philosophy discovered its significance.” True enough; the exemplary status of art history regarding questions of style for fields dealing solely in texts is longstanding; but the problematic nature of the manner in which “style” has been used in the discipline of art history and its current analytic functions also need to figure into these interdisciplinary discussions. Our nineteenth-century art historical predecessors frequently articulated their ideas about collective identity in terms such as “Germanic,” “Mediterranean,” “classical,” “Late antique,” and “Romantic,” which were said to define the “essential” content of specific works of art. Visual characteristics were thought to manifest collective psychology. As these muddled distinctions taken from the writings of Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) suggest, “race,” epoch, and national identity were often interchanged and conflated in the early practice of art history. They derived from earlier notions of a nation or “race” of people as well as from the scientific concept of race that emerged in the 1790s to signify permanent hereditary differences that determine cultural characteristics. The formalist vocabulary of art history, like modernist concerns with the language of the text that developed around the same time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rendered such racializing assumptions implicit:

art history . . . conceives style primarily as expression, expression of the temper of an age and a nation as well as expression of individual temperament . . . it remains no mean problem to discover the conditions which, as material element – call it temperament, zeitgeist, or racial character – determine the style of individuals, periods, and peoples.

“Vision itself has its history,” continued Wölfflin in Principles of Art History (1915), “and the revelation of these visual strata must be regarded as the primary task of art history.” “Style,” understood since
the nineteenth century as visible “form,” presented the possibility of writing a universal history based on the “scientific” observation of cultural products. It was largely under such auspices, observes David Summers, that the history of art came into existence as an intellectual discipline. From Johann Winckelmann’s classical ideal of simplicity and grandeur in sculpture seen as an expression of the “Greek soul,” to art historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth century such as Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin, and Wilhelm Worringer who developed formal descriptive vocabularies to investigate the structures of the human spirit, “style” has been used to explain the non-mimetic features of works of art in terms of individual and collective identities. In practice, formal analysis has implied a theory of expression. For Wölfflin and his successors, the range of formal style visually observed became coextensive with the range of deep principles of the worldview of races, nations, and epochs.

Writing in 1955, E. H. Gombrich famously criticized the Wölfflinian idea of formal analysis as a “physiognomic fallacy,” by which Gombrich meant the mistaken assumption that the mentality of artists, ages, or places in which works of art were made can be read from the forms of the works themselves. After decades of discussion, the numerous problems with claiming that “style” is capable of making other cultures directly available to us have been articulated clearly and at length within the discipline of art history. The gist of Gombrich’s arguments, to cite David Summers again, is that the meanings we simply see in works of art are not historical and therefore not explanatory: “In order to try to gain such historical understanding we must actually do history.”

It is a mistake to suppose that projective meanings actually belong to the works over which they are projected. But what does it mean to “do history,” to do “real history” at this point in time? Few art historians today fail to grasp the sinister implications and dangerous kinds of essentialism entailed in drawing direct connections between the forms of art and the mentality of individual artists or the spirits of whole nations, races, and epochs that the majority of art historians writing in the later eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century understood to be their charge. In a recent study of the concept of style in early modern Italian literature on art, Sohm observes that, today, style is less important as a concept than as “a heuristic that enables us to perform certain analytic functions” adaptive to the contingent needs of art historians. Yet Sohm himself does not acknowledge the history of the concept of style linked with racial theory and Social Darwinism that developed after the period that his specialized study treats – an oversight that causes him to misread Gombrich’s objection to the “physiognomic
fallacy” as merely dismissing the role of artistic intentionality in theories of interpretation.\textsuperscript{14}

Understanding Gombrich’s “physiognomic fallacy” argument as if it referred to seventeenth-century discussions of ingenium (roughly translatable as natural endowment) is a serious misreading.\textsuperscript{15} The concept of style in its early modern adaptation from ancient rhetorical theory functioned within a framework of classification dominated by norms and rules, prescriptions and interdictions for writing and speaking persuasively. Style, translation of the Latin technical term elocutio, initially referred to the embellishment of a text with literary figures (such as metaphor and simile) appropriate to the subject matter and to the audience for which the work of art was intended. Sauerländer summarizes the modern history of the concept of style as a development that took place in three stages: (1) In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the ancient rhetorical concept of style was transplanted to other fields of human activity, including art criticism and what later came to be known as the visual arts. (2) By the mid-eighteenth century, style referred to something specific relating to a person, region, or nation. (3) In 1764, Johannes Winckelmann first came to apply the concept of style to historical periods of time, thus transforming the traditional normative concept of style into a hermeneutical instrument in which visual perception served as a direct means of gaining historical insight.\textsuperscript{16} By 1900, this enlarged conception of style put art history in a key position among the humanities, but for reasons that we now generally regard as deeply problematic.

Style remains today an instrument of classification, but its primary purpose is no longer to instantiate a theory of evolution. Yet the taint of racial theory and cultural evolutionism is still felt, as one recent essay on the nature of connoisseurship, by classicist Richard Neer, emphasizes. Neer defends the study of style in general, and of connoisseurship in particular, as an etiological instrument based on morphological criteria.\textsuperscript{17} The identification of an artifact is an important act of critical judgment, Neer argues, pointing to the basis of judgment described in Kant’s third Critique.\textsuperscript{18} Neer, drawing upon Richard Wollheim, argues that the way out of the racist dilemma is to draw a distinction between individual and general styles. Individual style is generative, standing causally to the artist’s output, while general style alone is problematic because it is merely (or “trivially”) taxonomic. The problem remains, however, of accounting for the manner in which individual style “stands causally,” to its maker. These questions have been pursued most often in terms of the role that representational conventions play in determining style, a topic that Neer does not address.\textsuperscript{19} The social aspect of style that concerns Neer – and, along with convention, also concerns the authors of
the present volume – is "what it means to see style." How are stylistic judgments constituted out of interested engagements with others?20

In the present volume we are not concerned, as Neer is, with justifying the contemporary practice of connoisseurship as "a natural history of, in, and as art."21 The core issue around which this volume revolves is not the science of style (prized apart from the history of racial theory or otherwise). Ours is a philosophical concern that, far from dismissing the ethical underpinnings of our historical practice as irrelevant, puts the question of ethics at the center of consideration. An important part of that question is the general responsibility of academics for the knowledge they produce, an issue to which this Introduction will return at its conclusion. Specifically, this volume examines historical claims advanced for Leonardo da Vinci's exemplary positioning in the narrative history of art that began in the mid-sixteenth century. What are the present-day implications of that exemplarity? How did "style" (maniera, stile, elocutio) and key terms and notions associated with it (such as scienza, grazia, ingegno, imitation, biography, and decorum) operate in its early days, while also keeping in mind what later became of the concept of style in and for the discipline of art history?

It is still not difficult to find studies that attempt to validate a nineteenth-century conception of style through a historical engagement with art. Jonathan Gilmore's The Life of a Style: Beginnings and Endings in the Narrative History of Art (2000) is an ambitious recent attempt to understand style in these terms, and it will be worth engaging his argument in order to differentiate the aims of the present collection of essays from such projects. Gilmore assumes that there are features internal to art, or to a tradition of art, that can explain its history ("such an account is required if . . . sense is to be made of the view that art has its own history").22 What, Gilmore wants to know, taking his cues from Arthur Danto, are the features responsible for the structure of the history of art told as the history of style? His stated aim is to show that a certain kind of narrative structure emerged out of an internal relationship between historical beginnings and endings that go unrecognized in historical narratives of art history.23 Drawing upon Thomas Kuhn's theory of a scientific paradigm as a tradition that may be described independently of the actual scientific discoveries achieved, and Michael Baxandall's notion of the "painter's brief," Gilmore aims to address the question: what kind of structure does the history of art exhibit?24 He asks how painters have conceived general problems in a particular context. Against Gombrich, who held that artists throughout history responded to the same motivations (in which case, art is understood to develop progressively because all artists were preoccupied with the same problem of representing
nature), Gilmore argues that certain problems reached an internal ending. For example, the development of perspective "came to an end with Leonardo" because Leonardo exposed inherent limitations in the system of linear perspective.25

In contrast to Gilmore's project, the present volume is engaged with a historical examination of what has in the past been construed as a theory of style. We do not assume that our contemporary understanding of the formal qualities of the work of art can be imposed on historical objects or texts about those objects. Articulating the relationship between present and past within the same historical continuum is the objective of our research. To proceed as Gilmore does would be to place ourselves outside that historical continuum, viewing historical evidence from an ideal (and, to our minds, ahistorical) vantage point. In one sense, the essays in this volume build upon Walter Benjamin's concept of a dialectical cultural history as one that rubs history against the grain. According to Benjamin, the decisive element in establishing new social relations through writing is the impossibility of ever possessing the past.26 A dialectical cultural history is possible if it adopts "the destructive element which authenticates both dialectical thought and the experience of the dialectical thinker."27 The "destructive element" refers to the possibility that the reserve of the past will destroy aspects of the present and open it to the future. Ultimately, Gilmore fails to think dialectically because he prescribes in advance the relationship between past and present, selecting what is relevant and why it is relevant and reducing the past to items in an inventory of the present.

To take Leonardo da Vinci's interest in perspective as an example of what is missing from Gilmore's methodology: Gilmore is certainly historically accurate in saying that Leonardo's interest in testing the limitations of linear perspective by studying its distortions led him to reject linear perspective schemes in his paintings. However, it is not the case (judging from the historical record) that the development of perspective thus came to an end with Leonardo. Leonardo and his successors, as the essays by Janis Bell and Pauline Maguire Robison in this volume document extensively, understood aerial perspective as perspective, too. Contra Gilmore, Leonardo considered he was still working on the same problem of establishing a convincing pictorial space when he abandoned centralized linear perspective constructions and depicted the atmospheric effects of distance through color and chiaroscuro instead. It is important to bear in mind in this context that neither "linear" nor "aerial" were, strictly speaking, period terms during Leonardo's lifetime.28 These terms are modern attempts to categorize differences within the broader science of perspective or optics. Moreover, in the seventeenth century major
debates erupted at the French Academy concerning the respective merits of their period equivalents geometric perspective and empirical perspective based on the observation of natural phenomena. To take the position that Gilmore does is to side, on the one hand, with those Academicians who defended the superiority of geometric perspective and, on the other hand, with those who eventually emerged as the winning side in this debate (those who advocated for “aerial” perspective) without acknowledging that his historical narrative represents these conflicting vested interests in rather convoluted ways. Beyond this, geometric perspective remained an important part of artistic practice long after Leonardo, especially to project foreshortened figures and architectural settings onto ceilings and curved vaults.\textsuperscript{29}

Pictorial perspective understood in these broader, more historically accurate terms provides a significant concrete example of the way in which contemporary historians can unwittingly abuse modern categories of style. Functioning as premises, these modern categories preempt the evidence — they take as a premise that which should be the object of investigation. By contrast, the methodologies that characterize the present collection of essays, as diverse as they are, share a commitment to studying historical categories of style. Such a relativistic approach may, in fact, mean that there is no history of art as formal analysis left to defend. For Gilmore, thinking about how an “artist’s brief” and its associated limits explain artistic developments led him to propose a theory of style structured in terms of a concept of emergence: a style reaches its limits once its contours have been revealed — thus, the “end of art” recapitulates the beginning of art.\textsuperscript{30} Once Leonardo discredited the premises on which linear perspective was based, the history of linear perspective as a style came to an end. Art in Gilmore’s scheme is nothing more (or less) than the projection of art history’s modern concept of style onto the historical material. What is the justification for calling linear perspective a style? What justifies the assumption that there was nothing further to be invented once Leonardo understood the shortcomings of central point perspective? Only the preexisting category of “linear perspective” defined in Gilmore’s terms. Whatever does not correspond to these pre-established categories (defined by Gilmore in terms of perspective, of contour, and so on) is not taken into consideration.

The present study is concerned not with justifying the modern category of style, but with establishing a dialectic between what we currently understand style to have been and its decidedly un-modern, unrecognized characteristics. The most sensitive area of investigation, where it is crucial not to collapse our contemporary categories onto historical ones, concerns the definition of what it means to be modern. The coincidence of
terminology ("modern," "style") demands special care so that we do not confuse our own position with that of the historical record and consequently project ourselves inappropriately into the past. Our relationship to the past is the matter under investigation.

Chronology, as Hayden White recognized thirty years ago, is a powerful and seductive rhetorical apparatus, a fictive construct that masks ideology under the guise of "natural time."31 For his first full-blown biographer Giorgio Vasari, writing in 1550 and again in 1568, Leonardo da Vinci introduced the "modern manner" in a tripartite scheme of history comprising a tripartite organization of the visual arts.32 (The term "visual arts," it should be remembered, is retrospectively applied to the sixteenth century.)30 In the Preface to this over-determined scheme in The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, Vasari (or an editorial team writing on his behalf33) singled out certain elements of Leonardo's "maniera" as intrinsically "modern": the force and boldness of his drawing, the extreme subtlety with which he counterfeited the minutiae of nature "exactly as they are," and such profound knowledge of art that Leonardo "may truly be said to have endowed his figures with motion and breath." Vasari also listed distinctive but general qualities that set Leonardo's work apart from that of his predecessors and in first place among his contemporaries, including the qualities of "good rule, better order, right proportion, perfect drawing, and divine grace."35

What ideology is (still) masked by this fictive construct of modernity? Vasari's magisterial contribution to the literature on art and his positioning of Leonardo as a key figure within The Lives is one major reason for Leonardo's exemplary standing in the history of style, as the chapters in this volume by Catherine Soussloff and Fredrika Jacobs examine. Vasari's "Life of Leonardo" serves not only as the beginning of the modern style in his scheme, it also functions as a synecdoche for the bella maniera of Vasari's own time. Yet beyond any of the other great artists that Vasari's biographies celebrate, Leonardo's exemplary status in the history of style is secured by the role that the artist's biography, supplemented by his own theoretical writings, played in art theory since the seventeenth century. So, while Vasari's characterization of Leonardo's maniera does not conform in any precise manner to features we would identify today as constituting either an artist's personal style or the collective style of a place or time, the language and categories that Vasari used to talk about Leonardo's style - which he and later generations construed broadly to include the artist's theoretical considerations as a writer and his artistic practice - established important historical precedents for making and writing about Western art in general. Pauline
Maguire Robison explores some of these implications in her contribution to this volume on seventeenth-century French art theory.

What should we make of Vasari’s claims for Leonardo’s art in particular and for the birth of modern art in general? The main reason that “style” has emerged recently as a relevant consideration for philosophy follows from the critique of the absolutist pretensions of traditional metaphysics through attention to the literary character of the philosophical text. If what we communicate is intrinsic to the form of our communication, then style becomes the point on which concern for meaning and truth focuses. If the validity of all propositions ultimately depends on style, as Nietzsche and Wittgenstein were among the first to insist, then the matter of style raises not only ontological issues but also thorny ethical issues that have been around at least since Quintilian defended rhetorical modes of persuasion on the grounds that orators (lawyers) are by calling morally good people. And what if they are not? More generally, what is the responsibility of the author toward a community of readers, and where is that responsibility grounded? Wittgenstein takes up the problem of style as an alternative medium to discursivity—which is, style is what cannot be said but can be shown. Style “shows” its sense, shows itself.

Contemporary philosopher Charles Altieri suggests that style and aesthetics have become a model for ethics due to the need to describe agency within acts of valuing. For the sake of argument, let us consider the historical sources of early modern discussions of style in moral philosophy and in natural philosophy as alternative “language games” that assign value in two different ways. The agency of the artist in relation to his style is weighted differently depending on whether painting is considered to be a branch of moral philosophy or a branch of natural philosophy. Although we are not accustomed to thinking about Leonardo’s style in such terms, it is clear that he considered painting on an ethical foundation in the sense that the painter’s social responsibility is to demonstrate the relation of man to the universe or divine law. Painting is natural philosophy and a “true science,” defined by Leonardo in the following terms:

No human investigation can claim to be a true science (vera scientia) if it does not pass through mathematical demonstrations; and if you would say that those sciences that begin and end in the mind possess truth, this is not conceded, but denied for many reasons. The foremost [reason] is that such mental discourses do not involve experience, and nothing renders certainty of itself without experience.

Historians of science have lately investigated the use of the word “scientia” during this period. According to Pamela Smith, “scientia”
most often implied a deductive structure that could be conveyed in propositional form.\textsuperscript{41} Such is the definition of painting as a form of geometry that Leonardo gives here. During the same period, the word “ars” most commonly denoted a discipline teachable in words, or an epitome that reduces a discipline to its teachable precepts.\textsuperscript{32} In keeping with the Scholastic Aristotelian understanding of the term, Leonardo understood “scientia” (from Latin scire, to know) as knowledge of the causes of effects in nature.\textsuperscript{43} This understanding is clear from the passage just cited: those mental discourses that result in certainty, that is, a knowledge of causes, are grounded in both experience and the first principles of geometry. By these means, the painter is able to demonstrate his understanding of nature to the viewer:

necessity compels the mind of the painter to transmute itself into the actual mind of nature to become an interpreter between nature and art. Praising the causes of nature’s demonstration in this, the painter is compelled by the laws of nature . . . The painter will demonstrate various distances by the variation of color of the air interposed between objects and the eye. He will demonstrate how species of objects penetrate mists with difficulty. He will demonstrate how mountains and valleys are seen through clouds in the rain. He will demonstrate dust itself, and how the combatants raise a commotion in it. He will demonstrate how fish play under the surface of the water and in its depths. He will demonstrate the varied colors of polished pebbles lying on the washed sand in riverbeds, surrounded by verdant grasses beneath the surface of the water. He will demonstrate the different heights of the stars above us and similarly, innumerable other effects.\textsuperscript{44}

Painting, defined as a practice that engages with nature, belongs to those practices new in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that have little to do with the scholarly tradition of natural philosophy, even though Leonardo identifies himself as a natural philosopher. This situation raises the same quandary for the history of art as it does for the history of science: how do we classify the practices of craftspeople, Smith asks, who were experts in the behavior of nature? Does science begin with the seventeenth-century declaration of the new experimental philosophers that they were the sole experts in the behavior of nature, or do we note that scientific knowledge is heterogeneous? Historians of science have become aware that there is no term that captures the techno-scientific knowledge/practices to which Leonardo’s activities belong.\textsuperscript{45} The examination of knowledge-making practices cuts across both the disciplines of the history of science and the history of art, and should encourage us to reconsider the relationship of thinking, doing, knowing, and making more generally in the early modern period.\textsuperscript{46} The many beautiful natu-
ralistic effects that Leonardo describes verbally here and demonstrates visually in his paintings and drawings – nature’s ornaments, as he sometimes calls these details (discrezioni) – produce an exalted state of being in his viewers:

a harmonic proportion results from painting because it serves the eye. . . . If such a harmony of beauties is shown to the lover of whatever beauties are being imitated, without doubt he will be stupefied with admiration and incomparable joy and overcome in all of his other senses.  

As these passages suggest, the painter’s ethical responsibility in Leonardo’s view consists of searching for and communicating knowledge of nature’s first principles, grounded in direct experience. Moreover, Leonardo’s descriptions of nature, verbal and visual, while they are expressions of his lifelong scientific interests, also conjure up the interplay of the senses in the process of religious contemplation. Movement of the senses expressed through optical effects, a fundamental trope that Byzantine religious ekphraseis passed on to the Latin West, is one of Leonardo’s central preoccupations, as my own chapter in this volume elaborates. Implicit devotional metaphors for the purification of the soul and its return to a state of grace are present in Leonardo’s paintings and his verbal descriptions of painting in ways that would have been widely understood by early modern audiences and beholders, educated and uneducated alike. The writings of St. Augustine provide a broadly Christian, Latin foundation for understanding how the physics of vision provided a model for discussing the process of coming to an understanding of God. In Augustine’s mature treatise on the Trinity (De trinitate), the metaphor of physical vision describes a devotional procedure:

If we at any time try to distinguish internal spiritual things more subtly and describe them more easily, we must take examples from external things to illustrate them . . . Let us therefore use in particular the testimony of the eyes, because this sense far excels the rest, and although it is a different kind of vision, it is close to spiritual vision.  

The formal elements of Leonardo’s paintings – color, line, sfumato, chiaroscuro, and so on as they coalesce into representational elements – the color of the sky, the shimmer of light, the surface of flesh and drapery – are the means by which the senses are engaged – attracted – in the specifically religious sense that St. Augustine and the many other religious writers speak of longing, desire, and love.  

To the trained, contemplative eye, the objects of the sensible world are direct evidence of the beauty and goodness of the creator: “certainly you do not love anything but the good, because the earth is good by the height of its
mountains, the moderate elevation of its hills, and the flat surface of its fields... and good is the countenance of a person with regular features, a cheerful expression, and glowing color.\textsuperscript{50}

These Augustinian ideas can be applied to Leonardo’s understanding of painting: what is “true” becomes indistinguishable from what is “beautiful” and from what is “good” for the soul. Today, the question of ethics has displaced earlier, more traditional concerns over epistemological issues, write the editors of a recent anthology addressing current philosophical trends: what is good for living determines what is true for thinking.\textsuperscript{51} Yet the same could be said of Leonardo’s understanding of the benefits of art, although perhaps the emphasis is on the converse: what is true for thinking is good for living. In either case, such claims set Leonardo far apart from Vasari. For Vasari, although the painter is likewise more elevated than the traditional craftsman by reason of his intellectual work, he is more like the historian, responsible for communicating moral values. We might say that Vasari and Leonardo participated in different “language games.” The concept of style as a mirror of the writer’s character reaches back to ancient moral philosophy and rhetorical theory and forward to early modern humanism. Patricia Rubin has most recently analyzed Vasari’s biographies with regard to the classical rhetorical models on which they were based, models that would have been readily discernible to contemporary readers.\textsuperscript{52} Relevant in the present context of discussion is the manner in which subjects are praised in epideictic rhetoric by reference to external circumstances, physical attributes, and qualities of character. Vasari’s rhetorical models taught him to describe actions that reveal the virtues and vices of a man’s character. Accordingly, Vasari shows how Leonardo was honorably trained and how he surpassed his masters. It is not surprising that Vasari’s biography of Leonardo resembles Castiglione’s description of the ideal courtier, since both texts are indebted to ancient rhetorical formulas such as those in Cicero’s \textit{De oratore} and the Ciceronian \textit{Rhetorica ad herennium}.

The didactic purpose of Vasari’s biographies was essentially the same as that of the art he describes: to convey moral values through exemplification. What is true must be presented as plausible and persuasive. As Rubin puts it, Vasari’s Life of Leonardo is a fabrication, not a fiction.\textsuperscript{53} Vasari, who was himself a courtier, worked for Cosimo I de’ Medici, for whom he painted an enormous number of allegorical and historical paintings, most of them planned by the Duke’s humanist advisor Vincenzo Borghini.\textsuperscript{54} The role of visual artists in establishing and maintaining the legitimacy of Cosimo’s rule was significant, and the sheer quantity of their production meant that Vasari and other artists working for Cosimo could not afford Leonardo’s elaborate, time-consuming design
procedures. In the changed climate of support for the visual and plastic arts only a few decades after Leonardo’s death, Leonardo’s “true science” was transformed into a technological handmaiden for the production of historical narratives on a monumental scale to praise and justify the absolute ruler of the Florentine state.

There are at least two sets of conflicting ideas involved in what Leonardo and Vasari associated with style. First, let us consider the relationship between Leonardo’s understanding of painting as a form of natural philosophy and Vasari’s understanding of painting as a vehicle of moral philosophy or moral history. Their relationship is like the miscommunication between two languages in which the words sound similar but mean different things. One way to glimpse the false resemblance between them is to consider the kind of truth that each type of philosophy was thought capable of achieving. According to Scholastic hierarchies of knowledge, still relevant in the early modern era, moral philosophy is capable of arriving at contingent or probable truths, while the goal of natural philosophy is the absolute certainty that mathematics is capable of achieving. In its practical applications to the actual world, however, natural philosophy, predecessor of the modern physical sciences, is also concerned with probabilities rather than the absolute truths of traditional metaphysics — which natural philosophy approaches by different means than moral history does.

Another difference, and the source of historical tensions that extend far beyond the early modern period, is due to the fact that moral philosophy by definition involves a direct relation between human subjects, while natural philosophy involves the investigating subject in relation to nature. (Even in the case of the anatomical sciences, where the object of investigation might be human, the investigator treats the subject matter as an object.) These two aspects — the level of certainty and the nature of the investigating subject’s relationship with the world — are important to bear in mind in assessing the complex history of style’s signifying properties. Of immediate importance is the fact that Vasari and his humanist contemporaries reframed Leonardo’s understanding of painting as an optical science that investigates the causes of natural phenomena. Instead of considering painting as the pursuit of scientific truth, as Leonardo and other contemporary artists claimed, they considered the scientific knowledge of painters as a technical skill (techne) in keeping with the rhetorical tradition. And Vasari reframed Leonardo, the man whose own ethical practice was grounded in natural philosophy, into a verbal portrait of the artist as a study of moral character.

The other set of conflicting ideas, and another major reason that the ethics of style deserves our attention, has to do with the morally
edifying power assigned to painting within the humanist tradition. Since Alberti, the content of the narrative, comprised of the story and the way in which it is presented, justified painting as a form of moral education and justified the painter’s association with poets and historians. However, as Vasari’s own relation to Cosimo I attests, and the relation of the French Academy to the French king in the next century further demonstrates, painting (along with sculpture and the other imitative arts) was patronized primarily for its ability to justify and extol the virtues of the ruler. The conflict between individual education and morality legislated from above has not been treated by art historians as a matter of style, only in terms of cultural history. Anthony Blunt, writing in 1940, notes only that Alberti’s “social and ethical views” are not clearly reflected in his writings other than on architecture, and he rarely mentions the moral purpose of art. In most cases, Blunt is at pains to explain that writers based their views on more than morality. He mentions Gregorio Comanini’s view that painting “should aim at moral improvement by means of instructions according to the principles of the Church, not as pleasure by means of aesthetic stimulus.” This thesis sums up the whole Counter-Reformation position on the fine arts, Blunt adds, and closes the topic.

Rensselaer Lee handles the period literature in a similar way: the moral purpose of painting is rarely mentioned at all. A more or less technical discussion of the parts of painting constitutes the majority of his analyses of texts. Discussing the importance of Horace’s dictum that painting and poetry should instruct as well as delight, Lee adds that this “half-moralistic definition of the purpose of art” might not be consistent with Aristotle’s position that art has no conscious didactic content, but most Renaissance and Baroque critics accepted Horace because he “provided an ethical sanction.” Beyond making this assertion, Lee does not often mention the ethical or moral purpose of painting or develop a discussion related to it. Instead, his history of the humanist theory of painting is organized in terms of the parts of painting such as imitation, decorum, invention, and so on. He speaks of “the temporary impoverishment of humanistic values” in the sixteenth century when the “concept of artistic decorum which in Horace’s own mind was not devoid of moral implication” could acquire “a dogmatic significance” missing from its classical connotations.

We have inherited the subjectivity of these foundational texts in the history of art literature which are skewed toward the aesthetic components of style – and its constituent elements of decorum, imitation, invention, and so on – at the expense of the ethical purpose that stylistic components of works of art were meant to serve – true even in the case
of works intended primarily to delight a learned audience. It is an opportune time to investigate the ethical implications of style in the early modern period, in part because the relationship between the absolute, normative terms in which moral philosophy legislated values then is so different from the way in which ethics now is understood in relativistic terms. Tensions in the period texts are easy to spot from our present-day perspective and important to consider if we want to come to terms with the hegemonic strategies of Western art.

Leonardo was of course well aware of the humanist tradition that associated painting with rhetoric and poetics. The proverb “every painter paints himself” was a commonplace expression of the notion that style is the mirror of the artist’s moral character which Leonardo discussed at length, in predictably scientific terms. (Robert Zwijnenberg’s contribution to this volume concerns Leonardo’s understanding of this Tuscan aphorism.) Leonardo warned student painters to avoid mistaking the idiosyncrasies of their own bodies for an ideal set of proportions by drawing others, noting nature’s variations and thus perfecting their own judgment. He also defended painting as an art more noble than poetry because it offers a more direct imitation of nature: the higher art is the one that “immediately presents you with the demonstration by which its maker generated it.” At the same time that he defended painting as a science of optics grounded in the first principles of geometry, hence capable of achieving certainty, Leonardo exulted in the apparent contradiction that the more a painting appears to be true, the more false it actually is: “The prime marvel to appear in painting is that it appears detached from the wall, or some other plane, and that it deceives subtle judges.”

Leonardo acknowledged painting’s value as moral philosophy: “Painting is a mute poem and poetry a blind painting, and both proceed by imitating nature as far as their powers make it possible, and many moral habits can be demonstrated through both of them.” Yet the tension in Leonardo’s text between two standards for evaluating the worth of art is real, due partly to the lack of precedent for defining a discipline with one leg in the mathematical sciences of the Quadriovium and the other in the arts of the Trivium. The fundamental problem underlying early modern discussions of painting was the epistemological dilemma of how to select the criteria by which to judge a work of art. Should a work of art be judged on the basis of its mastery of the optical underpinnings of relief or on the basis of its poetic invention, usually interpreted to mean its subject matter? Which truth is more elevated, moral or natural philosophy? Despite his acknowledgement of painting’s value in the humanist sense, Leonardo defined painting on the model of
a mixed science (scientia media) in Scholastic terms, that is, a science
grounded in mathematical principles and in experience.

Leonardo, like his sixteenth-century successors, drew from both
traditions. He connected the artist's ingegno with the "categories of
vision," based on Aristotle and later optical theorists, but also with the
"ornaments of nature," derived from literary theory. The conflation
between scientific and rhetorical modes of argumentation originates in
the ancient texts. In the Rhetorica, Aristotle distinguished between
admissible and inadmissible modes of persuasion in terms of what is
essential and what is inessential to the subject. Enthymemes, a kind of
syllogism, are the substance of rhetorical persuasion, just as syllogisms
are the substance of dialectics, and demonstration of causes the substance
of science. It is "not right to pervert the judge by moving him to anger
or envy or pity - might as well warp a carpenter's rule before using it"
(1354a24–25). These modes of persuasion by appeal to the judge or jury's
emotions are inessential to the case. Regardless of the subject, the argu-
ment must be based on facts (pragmata): "we must take the facts, real
or imaginary, these must be our material" (1396a5–30).

An "imaginary fact" sounds like an oxymoron to us, but in the
Aristotelian tradition the association between facts and the imagination
is based on the notion of the fantasia as a complex of powers that can
collect images, as a mirrored surface is "impressed" with images, and also
function like a syllogistic process. The concept of the imagination as a
mirror of nature originates with Aristotle (De memoria et reminiscencia
449b ff.), and subsequent writers reinforced the associations. Although
it is difficult to say who in this broadly diffused tradition Leonardo's
direct sources were (although his wording is close to Dante's discussion
of sight in the Convivio in the early MS A), in the context of the present
discussion it is more important to establish a genealogy of issues. The
humanist theme that ordinary, natural language tied to the common sense
is worthy of praise was developed in the early fifteenth century by Lorenzo
Valla into a theory of rhetorical argumentation that emphasizes veris-
militude through the inclusion of concrete visual exempla. Alberti's Della
pittura participated in the same trend of devising more powerful methods
of rhetorical argumentation. Thus, when Leonardo addressed the issue
of truth in painted imitation, even though his discussion seemed to be
limited to the comparison of painting and poetry, he used arguments that
had important, immediate precedents in humanist polemics in defense of
elocution. Furthermore, the "ten ornaments" of nature that Leonardo
derived from Aristotle's ten properties, or "predicates," i.e., expressions
used to talk about any subject (Topics 102b) by way of optical theory,
were also incorporated into humanist theories of rhetorical invention,
Introduction: seeing style otherwise

thus providing additional correspondences between humanist literary and artistic issues. Lorenzo Valla, like his successor Giorgio Valla (author of an encyclopedia that Leonardo owned), based his mode of argumentation on Aristotle’s predicates discussed in the Topics. As early as 1492, Leonardo identified the subordinate elements of painting with these same Aristotelian categories. Lorenzo Valla incorporated mathematical terminology and Aristotelian predicates to redefine rhetorical figures like *translatio*, *comparatio*, and *compositio*, constructions that had belonged to *descriptio* in medieval literary theory. The resemblance to Leonardo’s definition of painting as a mathematical science filled with “discourses” or “ornaments” is noteworthy.

It would take us far beyond the scope of the present volume to show how historical concerns with mental images (fantastic forms or phantasms) are continued in contemporary discussions of ethics. Perhaps it will suffice in this Introduction to suggest that the status of perceptual judgment has been the central issue all along. The problem lies with perception itself – for what is given to us may not be possessed without mediation. Whenever we attempt a positive determination of the objects of our perception, we immediately produce interpretations that prevent us from certifying the soundness of our identifications. Then how does perception combine with cognition to supply an interpretation of appearances? And if correct judgments are possible, how do we account for errors of judgment? What is the status of the extra-mental object of perception – the original and ever-present other? Mary Pardo, in her contribution to this volume, observes how the history of mental images in medieval faculty psychology is relevant to Leonardo’s artistic process.

The premise that truth refers to a single external reality describable in Euclidean terms grounded Leonardo’s defense of painting, but it cannot ground our own post-Cartesian epistemology. Style, writes contemporary philosopher Lambert Wiesing, is thought to be capable of occupying the place vacated by the concept of truth. The historical problem of the status of the object of perception has currency in contemporary discussions of ethics, and the connections with the pre-Enlightenment accounts under discussion here merit further consideration. Particularly relevant are critiques of metaphysics that replace the transcendental signified (God, the Divine, etc.) with an extra-mental human “other” at the end of the chain of signification stretching from perception to cognition. Against a notion of truth as the instrument of mastery being exercised by the knower over areas of the unknown as he or she brings them into the fold of the same, Emmanuel Levinas argues that this other is not a threat to be reduced, nor an object given to a
knowing subject, but that which constitutes “me” as an ethical being: “To be in relation with the other face to face is to be unable to kill. It is also the situation of discourse.” For Levinas, ethics replaces ontology as the basis of truth. In place of absolute Truth is the criterion of truthfulness and its necessary corollary, style, that is, the mode of fabricating a plausible, persuasive account of probable, contingent truth.

Wiesing’s contemporary understanding of style recalls the role accorded to artistic embellishment in ancient and early modern humanist rhetorical theory: that is, the purpose of artifice is to create a convincing semblance of truth. Yet in order to be convinced, the creator (artist or writer) and the audience must be conversant with the same conventions of artifice. Ultimately, the didactic value of the work of art is also grounded in the moral character of the artist/writer/orator. This fitting relationship between the audience, author, and work of art is traditionally understood as “decorum.” Communication between artist and audience is mediated by the work of art, that is, by artifice that is comprised of both convention and expression.

Leonardo’s paradoxical arguments for the supremacy of painting as an art capable of demonstrating the causes of observed phenomena by deceiving the viewer both deny and affirm the presence of artifice. Leonardo himself addressed issues derived from medieval discussions of the role of artifice in ways that often clarify later references that would otherwise be too vague for us to see the continuity of issues. Where medieval texts drew a sharp distinction between the artist’s noble, passive state receiving “exemplary forms” in contact with God, and his active but menial productive state, Leonardo made no clear distinction between “exemplary” mental forms and actual painted images. His mid-sixteenth-century successors, university-trained writers such as Benedetto Varchi and Vincenzo Borghini, bothered with these distinctions even less. They defined disegno as a noble, unifying element that belongs to the artist. Their arguments for the primacy of disegno have precedents in Petrarch, the writings of fifteenth-century artists such as Cennino Cennini, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Averlino Filarete, and similar statements were made by their contemporaries such as the writers Agnolo Doni, Lodovico Dolce, and artists Paolo Pino, Jacopo Pontormo, and Benvenuto Cellini. The terms of discussion are derived from the medieval Scholastic argument that the craftsman’s initial free act of contemplation makes the exemplar form “alive” in him to carry out the physical act of producing a useful object.

Ancient literary allegories, such as Lucian’s Dream or Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy, or Leonardo’s sophistic literary fictions delivered in the persona of a painter, for that matter, are direct precedents
to writers of Vasari’s generation who reassigned *disegno* from mental activities associated with painting to the physical effort of sculpting or painting defined on the model of sculpture. In the introduction to painting added to the 1568 edition of *The Lives*, Vasari discusses *disegno* as a “rough sketch” used in carving or modeling in clay, and he compares this to other methods of sketching, modeling, and fixing images in the memory and drawing from the imagination to bring works to perfection. 81 *Disegno* refers to the entire process of making, both physical and mental, but the metaphor that explains the process shifts in Vasari’s conception to a medium (that of modeling or carving) that Leonardo had considered menial because it is manual. Although Leonardo never mentions *disegno* in connection with sculpting in the same terms that Vasari does, at a deeper level he did share with Vasari and his contemporaries an association of *disegno* with the imagination or *fantasia’s* power to manipulate plastic form. Ultimately, all these discussions are indebted to Aristotle’s *forma agens*, the active part of the mind that is identical with its object in the case of “things without matter” (*De anima* 430a55). In speculative operations, that which thinks and that which is thought are the same: images take the place of direct perception for the thinking soul, which acts like a hand, or instrument.

Neither Leonardo, nor Vasari, nor anyone else of their era ever questioned the existence of an eternal world order that is not directly visible, but is nonetheless perceptible to sense. For us, however, images do not really take the place of direct perception and explaining the relation between that which is outside the mind and that which is inside has been (and still is) the central issue of Western philosophy, and of aesthetics in particular. The attempt to use “style” to address this question in nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century art history has already been mentioned. With the contemporary critique of the absolutist pretensions of traditional metaphysics, the notion of style is returned to its rhetorical origins, where persuasion rather than proof, probability rather than the absolute truths of mathematics (2 + 2 always equals exactly 4), and the process of writing rather than the body of revealed truth, become the points on which the concern for signification and truth focus. 82 Commenting on philosophy’s growing awareness of its own stylistics, Berel Lang and the editors of the anthology *The Question of Style in Philosophy and the Arts* (1995) note that the rhetorical strategies of philosophical writing tend to work in opposition to its overtly proclaimed argumentation, just as they do in the dialogue *Gorgias*, where Plato sets out to demonstrate the futility of rhetoric by employing all the rhetorical devices he professes to despise. 83 The same self-contradiction holds true for philosophy, mathematics, and the sciences: fields where the rhetoric of objectivity is the
strongest are those under the complete domination of a particular style, based on a particular notion of propriety. And the same is true, of course, of Leonardo’s claims for his paintings as artfully artless because they are true to nature, an argument justifying certain forms of artistic imitation over others that became commonplace in sixteenth-century writings on art and literature.

For, regardless of person, period, or place of origin, the workings of style, to cite Charles Altieri again, call attention to powers of subjective agency too fluid and resistant to concepts to be easily handled by traditional models of desire and judgment:

style maps a will onto the world but since such activity is so various and so resistant to concepts and images, the force of that willing must be developed through the kind of examples that art affords – that is, examples where the intensity of investment is fundamental to the engagement with the world.

The present volume is intended to provoke creative and thoughtful strategies for contemplating the ethical claims at the core of the concept of style – and, ultimately, at the core of the discipline of art history and any other discipline for which art history provides a model. We may have forgotten that art history, like the art it describes, is concerned with ethics. We may not have known that a tension runs through the discipline due to its double roots, in moral philosophy and in natural philosophy. Ours is a project of re-membering, an effort to recover from the amnesia that modernism has bestowed upon us.

Summaries of the chapters

This section introduces the arguments made by the seven contributors to this volume, where the complexity of the concept of style unfolds through a diverse body of material and textual evidence. The lead essay, by Catherine Soussloff, entitled “Discourse/figure/love: the location of style in early modern sources on Leonardo da Vinci,” begins with the observation that, while the critical assessment of most artists is based on the material evidence of their artwork, in Leonardo’s case that assessment is based on a body of preliminary, unfinished, and destroyed works. How this situation has inflected our understanding of Leonardo leads to her hypothesis that the matter of style is, for historians of art, an ethical pursuit grounded in the desire to know the artist as an other. Soussloff argues that the discussion of style does not require an originary archive as much as it requires the verbal performance of rhetoric. By analyzing early modern biographies of the artist, Soussloff asks how the expressiv-
ity of the work (its *pathos*) and the character of the artist (its *ethos*) are held in tension through textual representation. These classical rhetorical strategies structure the early modern genre of artistic biography. What concerns Soussloff, in keeping with the overall intention of this volume to examine the relationship between our agency as historians and the subjects of our investigation, is the role of the biographer/historian. She argues that “style” is actually the historian’s projection or “embrace” on the path towards understanding. Paradoxically, the case of Leonardo brings issues of style (and the desire to know) to the fore precisely because the artist cannot be well known.

This first chapter examines the early modern biographical literature on Leonardo in terms of its language and structure: from the archival records to the earliest biographical notice by Antonio de’ Beatis, who visited the aging Leonardo in Amboise in 1517, two years before the artist’s death; to the Latin biography written by Vasari’s friend Paolo Giovio in the 1520s; to two brief anonymous notices that circulated in the Florentine-Roman milieu during roughly the same period. In these early biographical writings, Leonardo’s drawings, especially his anatomical drawings, copies after his lost works, and documents regarding his movements and his patrons “perform a revelatory function.” The most significant trope to emerge from this literature, according to Soussloff, is the characterization of Leonardo’s distinctive hand (*mano*) as a divine gift that, counter-intuitively in Vasari’s telling, emphasizes human doubt. In the next century, however, Raffaelle Trichet du Fresne’s biography, published in Paris in 1651 as part of the first edition of Leonardo’s treatise on painting, established a different view of Leonardo’s style. Based in part on Leonardo’s career in Milan and in part on a new theoretical literature on art, not the least of which is Leonardo’s treatise on painting, Trichet expanded Vasari’s discussion of Leonardo as a divine artist based on his ability to imitate nature into a discussion of Leonardo’s theoretical acumen — in the process overturning Vasari’s view of the artist as being incapable of successfully completing his work and having no followers.

The second chapter, by Mary Pardo, entitled “Leonardo da Vinci on the painter’s task: memory/imagination/figuration,” relates Leonardo’s compositional procedures to Alberti’s characterization of painting: he paraphrases Cicero’s characterization of friendship in *De amicitia*, that whoever looks upon a true friend looks upon a sort of image of himself. Pardo regards the ethics of the self in relation to the other as the basis for Leonardo’s style and its legacy. In this historical context, that is, of understanding painting as the mirror of the artist’s inner nature, the leading question regarding the ethical dimension of style becomes how
the artist assumes social obligations as a professional “persuader.” The answer that Pardo provides involves Leonardo’s instrumental remodeling of the imaginative process as it implicates the beholder.

Pardo is first of all interested in the role of memory as a definable constituent of visual expression. She analyzes Leonardo’s surviving notes on the training of painters, the nature of painting, and processes of human perception, locating the role of memory in the broader historical context of image-making during and preceding Leonardo’s lifetime. Medieval image-making entailed the principal social functions of religious imagery to instruct, to move, and to delight, three aims of writing derived from rhetorical theory. However, the license traditionally granted to the image. Pardo argues, provided an occasion for transgression that Leonardo exploited in unprecedented ways. Alberti’s *della Pittura*, 1435/36, and the painter Cennino Cennini’s workshop manual, ca. 1400, are the two foundational texts known directly to Leonardo that enable Pardo to investigate the ways in which the pictorial tradition addressed different aspects of memory deriving from the artist’s subjective experience. Leonardo broadened the artist’s exploration of the mind’s internal senses when he translated his mental discoveries into visible form, as exemplified in the compositional sketch (as Gombrich famously argued). Despite his familiarity with Alberti’s treatise, Leonardo’s notes on painting appear closer to the workshop tradition of Cennini in their attention to artistic training as a sequence of steps in which the student learns to select those features from appearances that can be successfully re-embodied on a surface as a pattern of shading and contour marks. The painter first embraced the individuality of his *fantasia* as an apprentice who replicates the master’s designs, stockling his memory and acquiring the internal criteria by which to select and embellish pictorial forms.

Leonardo created an auxiliary memory in the form of portable sketchpads for registering and visualizing movement through an energized treatment of line. Pardo argues that Leonardo systematically extended the range of process-oriented draughtsmanship to target those aspects of representation that mimic intervals rather than things: movement, gesture, atmospheric effects, and other visible tokens of *grazia*. For Leonardo, the power of sight gave access to a higher order of reality than the senses could normally convey to the mind—thus Leonardo justified painting as an art of memory replacing human memory “at the level of the soul’s yearning for harmonic correspondences.”

Continuing the discussion of ethics as the relationship to oneself, in the next chapter, entitled “St. John the Baptist and the essence of painting,” Robert Zwijnenberg furthers the discussion of style as the material embodiment of the artist’s inner desire by exploring Leonardo’s
understanding of the Tuscan aphorism that every painter paints himself ("ogni pittore dipinge sé") within the framework of classical rhetoric provided once again by Alberti's treatise on painting. Zwijnenberg argues that the central requirement of painting, which Leonardo knew from his reading of Alberti and from other sources, is controlling the unity of form and content, or *res* and *verba*, to render a convincing representation. Leonardo’s Saint John in Zwijnenberg’s reading is a successful attempt by Leonardo to “grasp intellectually the basis of his own style.” Zwijnenberg draws on both textual and visual evidence to argue that Leonardo practiced painting as a self-reflective act of contemplating the relationship between body and soul, grounded in a deeply normative and ethical belief that the painter must be a good man. Leonardo took this humanist understanding to a new level by seeing his role as a painter as that of a natural philosopher who must ceaselessly seek knowledge of nature and demonstrate that knowledge as the “relation of man to the universe or divine law.”

Zwijnenberg begins his argument with a discussion of why the painting of St. John is so difficult to comprehend. His close reading of the painting turns on the way in which Leonardo understood the Tuscan aphorism as formative for his own theory and practice: the painter needs to understand the cause of his own defects based on the Aristotelian idea that the soul forms a body. Drawing upon Leonardo’s idiosyncratic interpretation of the Angel of the Annunciation known through a surviving drawing and copies, and traditional renditions of Bacchus that include some of the attributes represented in this painting, Zwijnenberg suggests that the androgynous appearance of John, an ascetic Christian prophet, may be due to Leonardo’s intention to unite opposites. Perhaps this figure, interpreted as a coincidence of sexual and spiritual opposites, is also the persona of the painter, while the painting as a whole functions as a meditation on the activity of painting. In this case, Leonardo aimed to reveal the emotions of the soul in the movements of the body conceived as a place of contradiction, taking on Pliny’s challenge regarding the limits of painting by painting the unpaintable.

Fredrika Jacobs’ chapter, entitled “Leonardo, grazia, and the gendering of style,” also deals with the coincidence of opposites in sexual terms, but from the entirely different perspective of gender constructs. She questions the widespread modern assumption that Leonardo’s homosexuality is directly figured in his art, either as a matter of his painterliness or as an expression of his psyche. This chapter introduces a new set of issues regarding the types of visual and intellectual pleasure associated with reading—and, by extension, with viewing—art. While the previous chapters dealt with the rhetorical function of art to teach, associated with
moral philosophy, this chapter deals with the ability of artistic embellishment to delight, an aim associated with epideictic rhetoric and poetry.

Jacobs acknowledges the formal complexities and paradoxical play that constituted cultured discourse in sixteenth-century Italy as a manifestation of the era’s taste. Through a close reading of Vasari’s concept of grazia, she argues that his layering of one gender paradox over another is overlooked in modern assessments of Leonardo’s style. Jacobs notes the strategic correspondences between Vasari’s characterization of Leonardo’s personal maniera and his general discussion on the modern bella maniera at the beginning of Part III of The Lives. She finds that Vasari’s understanding of grazia is related to other sixteenth-century discussions such as Agnolo Firenzuela’s definition of the qualities of the truly beautiful woman (1540s). Vasari’s language also has affinities with texts where the gendered associations of grazia are more ambivalent, such as Castiglione’s discussion of the ideal courtier (1528) and especially Mario Equicola’s Neoplatonic treatise on love (1525), which introduced a concept of beauty as the coincidence of opposites (in this text both the effeminate male and the manly female exemplify grace). From these intertextual relationships, Jacobs concludes that Vasari’s Life of Leonardo is primarily about the nature of style discussed in gendered terms rather than a reliable historical account of Leonardo’s actual sexual identity manifested in his art.

The next chapter also deals with modern misreadings of sixteenth-century notions of style. My own essay, entitled “‘Three ducats in Venice’: connecting Giorgione and Leonardo,” questions whether similarities between artists’ individual manners, the basis of the disputed discussion of whether Leonardo influenced Giorgione or vice versa, are adequately explained by the canonical art historical model of interpretation. That is, to what extent do direct contact and personal influence historically account for stylistic similarities and differences among individual artists? Since experience itself is a historical category, an understanding of how the historical work of art frames the beholder’s experience – that is, how the object constitutes its subjects – necessitates connecting contemporary responses to images with their historical precedents. This responsibility is the historian’s ethical charge. When the act of beholding is construed within a historical framework, the socially constructed nature of subjectivity acquires a new resonance. Viewed in terms of an institutionally sanctioned discourse, the artifice of religious images has served as the means through which Christian ideology shapes individuals, engaging their senses in a devotional routine that promises to meet such classic ethical goals as self-realization, serving the highest good, and achieving true happiness.
This chapter presents Leonardo’s *Virgin of the Rocks*, commissioned in 1483, as a case study to develop alternatives to the work-as-the-artist model for explaining the significance of style. It argues that the painting’s intercessory religious role, overlooked in all modern interpretations, was in keeping with the original commission by the Milanese Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception for its main chapel in the Church of San Francesco Grande, an important depository of saints’ relics set on a miraculous site and one of the most sacred centers of Latin Christianity. Meditational practices described by St. Augustine and other theologians are significant for understanding the initial horizon of viewer expectations. To investigate the religious function that his pictorial artifice served, the chapter traces Leonardo’s descriptions of nature to their ultimate sources in Byzantine ekphrastic descriptions of works of art and Iconophile justifications of images. While different visual traditions based on the same textual sources developed in Greek and Latin Christianity, in both cases the purpose of the artistic image was to move the beholder psychologically by engaging the senses. In Leonardo’s altarpiece, the rendering of natural phenomena served the purpose of guiding worshipers on an inner journey, exciting the imagination through external stimuli, moving the soul through the contemplation of external images to an internal “imaginative vision” directed toward achieving a state of grace.

The sixth chapter, by Janis Bell, entitled “Sfumato and acuity perspective,” looks more closely at the scientific underpinnings of Leonardo’s naturalism. This essay and especially the following one are concerned with Leonardo’s impact on later generations of painters. Bell focuses on *sfumato*, another essential feature of Vasari’s *maniera moderna* based on the artist’s personal style. Vasari himself associated *sfumato* with moral values relating a person’s style to his character. *Sfumato* is also the aspect of Leonardo’s style closely identified with his philosophical interests and his theoretical program for painting. The ethical dimension of these interests for Leonardo has already been noted: he saw himself as a natural philosopher who was constantly searching for the causes of natural phenomena. The interface between Leonardo’s scientific and aesthetic interests are the subject of this chapter. The word *sfumato* itself derives from the Italian word *fumo* (smoke), and is used to describe the effect of murky shadows that obscure the definition of edges. Bell provides a historiography of its use in Leonardo studies, arguing that in the artist’s own writings *sfumato* was associated not only with darkness and dim light but also more generally with the limits of perception. For Leonardo, *sfumato* also refers to conditions of bright light such as the invisibility of details in a distant landscape.
Leonardo’s interests in *sfumato* developed in the context of his fascination with the dynamic acuity of vision dependent upon the focusing mechanism of the eye and external conditions. The modern term “acuity perspective” that Bell proposes encompasses Leonardo’s wide-ranging interests in what we call visual perception as well as in the understanding of visual sensations by the mind. As Mary Pardo also notes in her contribution to this volume, Leonardo was interested in representing visual perception conceived dynamically as a process. Bell similarly notes that his writings on *sfumato*, as well as his artistic study of continuous gradations and the intermingling of light and shadow, critique Alberti’s advice on how to shade figures and draw the outlines of things. Bell follows Leonardo’s lifelong search for alternatives to linear perspective in the organization of his pictures through his writings and his visual experiments. Together, they document how Leonardo’s fluid naturalism manifests his new understanding of the dynamic process of perception. *Sfumato* was an indispensable factor in the accurate representation of nature while also possessing aesthetic qualities. Leonardo’s concern for the continuity between the visible and the invisible, as Bell notes and others in this volume have touched upon in other contexts, challenges the Tuscan tradition of *disegno*. Yet, by the late seventeenth century, the effects associated with “acuity perspective” had become mainstream in French pictorial theory – these developments, mentioned by Bell, are the subject of the next, final chapter in this volume.

Trends observed by other contributors to this volume regarding the transformation of Leonardo’s ideas in mid-sixteenth-century Florence became institutionalized during the next century. In the closing chapter, entitled “Leonardo’s *Trattato della Pittura*, Nicolas Poussin, and the pursuit of eloquence in seventeenth-century France,” Pauline Maguire Robison suggests how and why Leonardo’s ideas on painting are at the core of art theory formulated at the French Academy in the latter part of the seventeenth century. The focus of this chapter is the seminal role played by Nicolas Poussin in the transmission and transformation of Leonardo’s concept of painting as a form of natural philosophy into a model of eloquent painting, vehicle for moral history. Maguire Robison argues that Poussin’s painting, *Israelites Gathering Manna in the Wilderness*, 1637–39, long considered by specialists to be a watershed in the artist’s development, is an ideal expression of concepts that Poussin derived from Leonardo’s *Trattato*.

The political events that first gave Poussin access to Leonardo’s manuscripts in Rome in the 1630s and later resulted in the belated publication of the *Trattato* in Paris in 1651 (with engravings after Poussin’s drawings) are crucial to understanding how Leonardo’s naturalism was
transformed into an academic model of history painting as an art capable of moral persuasion, without crediting Leonardo. Poussin was summoned to France in 1639 by Louis XIII to identify a cultural identity for the French dynasty capable of rivaling Papal Rome, where Poussin had been at the center of artistic activity under Urban VIII. However, between 1642 and 1653, the cultural and political scenes in both Paris and Rome were greatly altered during a period of civil strife following the deaths of the Pope, the French king, and his minister of culture Cardinal Richelieu. Richelieu's ambitious plans for the visual arts were changed, Poussin's French patrons lost their bases of power, and the Roman collector Cassiano dal Pozzo's plans to publish Leonardo's treatise on painting faltered.

What is most significant in the present context of discussion is the realization of Richelieu's vision for an academy of painting and sculpture under Louis XIV. This vision was based on the model of the literary Académie française, founded in 1635, to establish a program to form a normative language of suitable beauty and majesty to eulogize and immortalize the crown. Richelieu proposed a series of conferences (lectures) to formulate rules useful for instruction and criteria to judge future works. This program came to fruition under Louis XIV's cultural minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Exemplary paintings played an important role at the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, presenting students with models of decorous painting based on classical rhetorical formulas filtered through ancient and modern humanist rhetoric, poetry, and history. In 1667, the Académie selected Poussin's Manna as the ideal of pictorial eloquence (grande manière), based on Charles Le Brun's conference on the painting, which placed highest value on history painting and on the choice and unity of subject matter. In 1680 Henri Testelin, secretary of the Académie, published six tables of precepts which constitute the ultimate distillation of Leonardo's ideas though he is hardly mentioned.

In keeping with his rhetorical understanding of painting, Poussin made it clear to his patrons that style, manière, is something an artist manipulates to achieve the most appropriate means of expression for a chosen subject. Through a close reading of the Trattato supplemented by a close reading of the Manna, Maguire Robison argues that Poussin's figure composition served as a concrete demonstration of Leonardo's precepts on the human figure, infusing antique models with liveliness, anatomical correctness, and psychological intensity. What Poussin's literary sources, most explicitly Franciscus Junius's De pictura veterem, 1637, do not mention is the notion of perspective. Maguire Robison argues that Poussin's skill in rendering aerial perspective also derived (directly and indirectly) from Leonardo's Trattato. By the same token,
learned viewers versed in the same rhetorical texts and academic criteria interpreted Poussin’s rendering of figures in his narrative compositions and optical effects in his accompanying landscape settings – first systematically demonstrated in the *Manna* – as moralizing history lessons.

Thus the humanist theory of painting inaugurated with Alberti’s *della Pittura* in 1435 blossomed into a full-blown ethics of style by the mid-seventeenth century that established France’s cultural hegemony of the arts in Europe and endured as the ideal of academic painting for over two hundred years. The relationship between style and ethics during the period that is the subject of this collection of essays is complex. It is widely recognized within the discipline of art history that Aristotle’s analogy between the products of nature and art was the cornerstone of the humanist tradition for discussing imitation. In the *maniera moderna* that Vasari defines as beginning with Leonardo, imitation of nature involved not only the perfection of artistic skills based on a knowledge of optics and anatomy, but also, and most importantly, development of the powers of judgment to discern what kinds of naturalistic artifice best suited a given situation. Another cornerstone was Aristotle’s analogy between art and moral philosophy. Accordingly, both art and moral philosophy involve a sequence of actions for the sake of an end – art is the process that, like Nature, results in the production of a work (*Physics* 199a11–13), whereas practical wisdom results in right action (“a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man”; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140b5–6). On this principle, seventeenth-century academic art theory and criticism held that contemplating depictions of right action develops the beholder’s moral character. Natural philosophy and moral philosophy combined to lead toward the truth exemplified in the human figure. The ethical element for Poussin was the artist’s commitment – his vigilance – to discern particulars in nature relevant to the situation at hand, rather than relying on rules. Excellence in style, as in moral conduct, was an exercise in practical wisdom that resulted neither in excess nor in deficiency, but in eloquence.

The present-day rift between ethics and traditional moral philosophy is not one we would wish to collapse, yet it is important to note that style was considered an ethical matter in the formative period of discourse in the early modern period – a problematic that was lost from view in the nineteenth century, when style was redefined as the external manifestation of individual and collective mentality. The relatively recent critique of art history’s foundational assumptions did not recover this earlier ethical understanding of style either. In one sense, the understanding of style as an inevitably racial marker has become post-foundationalist myth – a new “black box” in need of unpacking. The
present volume of essays constitutes an attempt to begin rethinking the historical divide that separates current interest in the relationship between ethics and style from discussions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The following essays articulate the complexity of ways in which style involved ethical considerations during that period, and still involves us in its conundrums and aporia though we may not recognize it.

In opening this volume, I would like to emphasize that the chapters that follow are emphatically not intended to make a contribution to moral philosophy or to other traditional concerns over epistemological issues. In the words of philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, we resist the urge to salvage the integrity of our own moral vision, whether “our own” refers to Western art, or the discipline of art history, or its humanist past, or to the way in which style has been framed in the discourse on art. Nor is ours an effort to resolve the conflicts within the discourse on style by postulating a new universality, because such a move is necessarily “always a demand with an address” – to cite Bauman again. The question of ethics for us, as art historians, begins with the need for the narrator to articulate his or her position in relation to the events narrated. Disciplinarity and professionalism do not excuse intellectuals from taking responsibility for the effects of the knowledge they produce beyond their own narrow specializations. Perhaps the point of direct contact between the aims of this volume to think about the ethics of style historically and contemporary efforts to think about what ethics is – an ethics that puts into question the normative myths of traditional philosophical ethics – involves thinking through the long-established alliance between an ethics of responsibility and a poetics of imagination in contemporary terms. Speaking to this possibility, philosopher Richard Kearney argues that ethics and poetics converge at the juncture of words that are exchanged between “I and the other.” To say the same thing in less logocentric terms, the work of art occupies this juncture.

Notes

1 Sauerländer, “From Stilus to Style,” citing 266. A quarter century later, Sauerländer seems more resigned: in a recent article lamenting the field’s lack of coherence, he accuses art historians as having become insecure about discussing the “truth” of paintings. See Sauerländer, “Babel and Pentecost,” 204.

2 Findlen, “Possessing the Past,” has written about the commercial exploitation of the concept of the Renaissance. My thanks to Ira Westergård for this reference.


4 Sohm, Style in the Art Theory, 3.
5 Van Eck, McAllister, and van de Vall, “Introduction,” The Question of Style, 1.
6 Ibid., 3.
7 “Das Sehen an sich hat seine Geschichte, und die Aufdeckung dieser ‘optischen Schichten’ muß als die elementarste Aufgabe der Kunstgeschichte betrachtet werden.” Wölflin, Kunstgeschichte Grundeubegriffe, 112. Translation cited from Principles of Art History, 10–11. See further discussion and references in my article, “‘Vision Itself Has its History.’”
8 Summers, “‘Form,’ ” 375.
10 The scholarship is too extensive to cite in this short essay. In addition to the studies already cited, see my essay, “‘Vision Itself Has its History.’”
11 Summers, “‘Form,’ ” 380.
12 “Thus baldly phrased,” writes Summers, ibid., 382, “such inferences seem improbable and daring, but in fact they are everywhere to be found in art historical writing and teaching.” For James Elkins, “Style,” what is at stake today is “not so much the tenuousness of such judgments; it is rather the fact that people employ these physiognomic and psychological criteria without realizing that they do so” (882). It should be noted that among contemporary philosophers, Richard Wollheim has pursued the ways in which projection and intentionality intersect in the matter of style; for a brief introduction to the issues, see Wollheim, “Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expression in the Arts.” On style and projection, in this volume see the article by Catherine Soussloff.
13 Sohm, Style in the Art Theory, 9. This is the most erudite study of the early modern concept of style ever undertaken.
14 Ibid., 65–70; 65: “He [Gombrich] excludes ingenium from style with Churchillian authority by labeling it the ‘physiognomic fallacy,’ a theory, popular in the nineteenth century, that takes style to be an external sign of individual or collective character.”
15 This notion of ingenium was developed by Cicero, who distinguished between the ingenium of mathematicians and that of orators. Cicero praised eloquence by claiming that while in mathematics every diligent student attains the “object of his desire,” in oratory only the very best masters, with outstanding ingenium, ever succeed (De oratore 1.3.9–1.5.16).
17 Neer, “Connoisseurship and the Stakes of Style,” 2–3.
18 Ibid., 6.
19 The scholarship is extensive; for an introduction, see Gombrich, “Image and Code”; Bryson, Holly, and Moxey, eds., Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation; Summers, Real Spaces, a systematic attempt to rework the formalist project of art history with regard to the role of convention in a globally conceived context.
20 Neer, “Connoisseurship and the Stakes of Style,” 14, 23.
21 Ibid., 26.
22 Gilmore, The Life of a Style, 150.
23 Ibid., see 4–16 for this formulation.
24 Ibid., see 133 and 47 on Kuhn and Baxandall, respectively.
25 Ibid., 65. Gilmore relies on Erwin Panofsky’s 1927 essay “Perspective as Symbolic Form” for his basic formulation, supplemented by more recent specialist scholarship, but he does not take into account important critiques of Panofsky such as Damisch, L’origine de la perspective, or Soussloff, The Absolute Artist.
26 Caygill, “Walter Benjamin’s Concept of Cultural History.” See also, Caygill, Walter Benjamin, especially chapter 1.
28 For an excellent discussion of the history of the term “aerial perspective,” see Bell, “Zaccolini’s Theory of Color Perspective”; on linear perspective, see Kemp, The Science of Art.
29 For an overview of this history, see Kemp, The Science of Art, 99–162 on perspectival projections.
30 Gilmore, The Life of a Style, 140.
31 White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation.”
32 Vasari, “Preface to the Third Part,” 620. Frangenberg, “Bartoli, Giambullari, and the Prefaces to Vasari’s Lives,” has recently argued that Cosimo Bartoli was the principal author of the preface to the third part of The Lives, added to the revised edition of 1568, in which a chronological ordering of artists’ biographies was recast as a three-part periodization of art history. Regardless of who actually wrote the preface (or any other part), the work appeared under the authorship of Giorgio Vasari, which is the relevant point in the context of my discussion here. See further discussion in this volume in the chapters by Fredrika H. Jacobs and Catherine M. Soussloff. The fabrication of the historical idea of individual authorship is an interesting issue in itself, discussed, notably, by Michel Foucault. For an introduction, see Chartier, The Order of Books.
33 The term “visual art,” which seems too neutral even to have a history, as first used in the late nineteenth century (in its German form, as bildenden Kunst) in the first formalist theories of art by Fiedler, Über die Beurteilung von Werken der bildenden Kunst (1876); Wölfflin, Renaissance und Barocke (1888); Hildebrand, Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst (1893); and Riegl, Stilfragen (1893). An even earlier occurrence of the term is the periodical Zeitschrift für bildenden Kunst, published from 1866 to 1932 (vols. 1–65).
34 As proposed by Frangenberg, “Bartoli, Giambullari, and the Prefaces to Vasari’s Lives”; see the comment in this volume by Fredrika Jacobs, “Leonardo, grazia, and the gendering of style,” n. 9.
35 Vasari, “Preface to the Third Part,” 620. Vasari’s list is interesting partly because he names five categories all of which speak (in ascending order)
directly to issues of decorum, a term referring to the correspondence among artistic embellishment (style, or *elocutio*, the rhetorical term), the subject of representation, and the viewing audience. The decorum of a work of art was often treated in terms of a proportionality (of the parts to each other and the whole; or between nature and art, as examples from Leonardo’s writings discussed in this Introduction will clarify). Vasari’s categories and language emphasize that he considered Leonardo’s art bound by the laws of decorum to verisimilitude. Accordingly, the standard of imitation advocated by the most important ancient authorities Vitruvius and Horace is that art is an ideal imitation of nature that does not exceed what is possible in nature. Sixteenth-century literary and artistic debates over decorum revolve around the extent and limits of artistic license. Decorum (ethical appropriateness) and décor (aesthetic appropriateness) have been closely related since antiquity (relevant texts under these subject headings are available in Pollitt, *The Ancient View of Greek Art*. In the early modern history of these ideas, the study of works of art was considered to contribute to a person’s moral character, that is, the ability to make judgments about what is true and false in nature and good and bad in art developed the ability to make judgments about right and wrong. See Bell and Willette, eds., *Art History in the Age of Bellori*, for an excellent historiographical introduction to the cultural history.


37 Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 12.1.x.1ff., where he discusses the “kind of style” the orator should adopt; see Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric*, 82–147.

38 For Wittgenstein, the aesthetic character of truth is not present to individual participants in a given language game. Wittgenstein, *Vorlesungen*, 123; as discussed by Wiesing, “Aesthetic Forms of Philosophizing,” 118–20.

39 Altieri, “Personal Style as Articulate Intentionality.”

40 Leonardo da Vinci, *Libro di Pittura*, *Codex Urbinas* 1270, no. 1, “Se la pittura è scientia, o no” (“Whether Painting Is Science, or Not”). Translation and transcription cited from Farago, *Paragone*, n. 1 (179): “Nissuna humana investigacion si pò dimandare vera scientia se essa non passa per le Matematiche dimostrazioni. E se tu dirai che le scientie che principiano e finischano nella mente habbiano verita, questo non si concede, ma si nega er molte ragioni. E prima che in tali discorsi mentali non accade esperientia, sanza la quale dà dì sì certezza.” Chapters 9, 10, and 12 of the *Paragone*, or *parte prima*, of the Codex Urbinas argue in various ways that painting is a form of philosophy concerned with nature.

41 Smith, “‘Art’ is to ‘Science.’” See also, on revisionist readings of science, the overview by Smith and Findlen, “Introduction: Commerce and the Representation of Nature,” on “the importance of commerce to scientific and artistic representations of nature and the growth of new technologies transforms the conventional story of the Scientific Revolution” (citing 3).

42 See Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method*; and Ong, *Orality and Literacy*. 
The Latin term *scientia*, as John Weisheipel explains, “was used to designate a discerning, penetrating, intellectual grasp of a situation or of a given subject. Technically it was employed of knowledge that explained the situation fully and accurately through all or any of its true causes . . . In other words, in medieval usage the term ‘science’ was given to every field of intellectual endeavor in which true causal explanations could be discovered.” Weisheipel, “Classification of the Sciences,” 55.


Smith, “‘Art’ is to ‘Science,’” cites the recent studies of Watson-Verran and Turnbull, “Science and Other Indigenous Knowledge Systems,” who use the term “assemblage”; and discuss techno-scientific knowledge/practices that could easily encompass the range of Leonardo’s scientific investigations. See also, two special issues of *Perspectives on Science* 13, numbers 1 and 2 (2005), that develop this view; and further, Kaufmann, “Questions of Representation,” a helpful review of recent issues and literature in an interdisciplinary perspective.

See Lave, *Cognition in Practice*; and Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*; both cited in Smith, “‘Art’ is to ‘Science.’”


Augustine, *De trinitate* 8.3.4.


Augustine, *De trinitate*, as cited by Miles, “Vision,” 126–8, stresses the importance of physical vision for Augustine to emphasize the necessity and nature of human effort. The ray of light touches its object and thereby connects the viewer and object, “printing” the object on the soul of the viewer. In the act of vision, the will has the power to unite viewer and object through the power of the sense of sight (*De trinitate* 11.2.5): the mind is formed by the images it formulates. Directing its energy outward, the mind “binds itself
to these images with so strong a love as even to regard itself as something of
the same kind . . . it is made like them” (10.6.8).
51 Madison and Fairhaim, “Introduction,” The Ethics of Postmodernity, citing
William James, “a veritable postmodern avant la lettre,” for insisting that
“the true” is merely one species of “the good.”
52 Rubin, Vasari. On the genre forms established by convention that appear in
Vasari’s writings and elsewhere in biographies of artists, see Soussloff, The
Absolute Artist.
54 On the decoration of Cosimo’s Palazzo, see Allegri and Cecchi, Palazzo
Vecchio, and Muccini, Palazzo Vecchio. On Vasari’s role, see also Rubin,
Vasari. On Borghini’s method of invention, see Scorza, “Vincenzo Borghini
and Invenzione”; and Jacks, ed., Vasari’s Florence. For an excellent reading
of how these images were meant to be used by learned viewers, see McGrath,
“‘Il Senso Nostro’”; and for the manner in which the rhetorical tradition of
improvisatory conversation, with regard to Vasari’s visual programs, was
encouraged in the more general public, see Tinagli Baxter, “Rileggendo I
‘Ragionamenti.’”
55 Leonardo’s so-called treatise on painting, compiled after the artist’s death
from holograph writings by his student Francesco Melzi, was significantly
abridged in Florence during the very years that Vasari decorated the Palazzo
Vecchio for the Duke, after 1569 Archduke, Cosimo I de’ Medici. See the
forthcoming study, Farago, ed., Re-reading Leonardo: the Treatise on Paint-
ing across Europe from 1550–1900.
56 Scholastics and humanists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries proposed
different schemes for organizing knowledge, but they agreed that the sciences
were interrelated and hierarchical, rather than autonomous as they are con-
sidered today: the higher sciences must contain the principles demonstrated
in the subordinate disciplines and must subsume the principles of the lower
ones. Following primarily Aristotle and Hugh of St. Victor, who was influ-
enced by Arabic sources, Thomas Aquinas classified the sciences according
to the nobility of their subjects in relation to mathematics, the only discipline
capable of achieving certainty (In de Trinitate, Qu. 5.4.7). In this system of
classification, widely adopted by Scholastic writers, the sciences limited to
“opinion” are lower than sciences that achieve “scientific knowledge” (ibid.).
Aquinas divided the rational sciences into three branches of discourse
arranged in descending order of certitude as the judicative, inventive, and
sophistic modes of logic. Poetry, in this scheme uses inventive logic, which
results in belief or opinion: for the poet is concerned with conjecture and
“induces something virtuous by means of representation” (Aquinas, Comm.
To Aristotle, Post. Anal., Lecture 1.1.5). On the grounds that poetic inspira-
tion is a form of revealed knowledge, Petrach claimed that figured language
deserves to be placed next to theology, at the summit of the sciences (Invective
contra medicum). For similar reasons Lorenzo Valla and other humanists
writing in the mid-fifteenth century proposed joining eloquence with moral


58 See Barzman, *The Florentine Academy*, on the relationship of the Florentine Accademia del Disegno to the Grand Ducal state of the Medici.


60 See for example ibid., 122, with reference to Ludovico Dolce.

61 Ibid., 132.


63 Ibid., 40. Among recent contributions that have attempted to account for the epistemological project of humanist art theory, see Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy*.

64 Kemp, “‘Ogni dipintore dipinge se’”; and the chapter by Robert Zwijnenberg in the present volume.


66 Leonardo da Vinci, ibid., n. 45 (281): “La prima maraviglia che apparisse nella pittura è il parer spiechato dal muro, od altro piano, et inganare li sottili giudicij con quella cosa che non è divisa dalla superfitie della pariete.”

67 Leonardo da Vinci, ibid., n. 21 (217): “La pittura è una poesia mutta, et la poesia è una pittura ciecha, e l’una et l’altra va imitando la natura quanto è possibile alle loro potentie, e per l’una et per l’altra si po dimostrare molti morali costumi.”


71 Valla, *De expetendis et fugiendis rebus opus*.

72 These are complex issues; see further discussion in Farago, *Paragone*, 315–32.


74 See the excellent discussion of this problematic in Kant and Plato by Rosen, “Writing and Painting.”


76 Wiesing, “Aesthetic Forms of Philosophising,” 118.

77 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 87.
In this volume, Catherine Soussloff explores these connections in her analysis of the genre of artistic biography.


Van Eck, McAllister, and van de Vall, "Introduction," *The Question of Style*, 11.

Ibid., 2. and see further in the same volume, Berel Lang, "The Style of Method: Repression and Representation in the Genealogy of Philosophy," 18–36. It is noteworthy that Lang's own, earlier anthology, *The Concept of Style*, was more concerned with making new, largely structuralist contributions to style theory than it was with framing the issue of style in historical and historiographical terms. Lang acknowledges the growing importance of style's own history to the analysis of style in the "Postface" to the revised edition in the following terms, which holds true for the present volume as well: any history of style or study of the concept of style is bound by the definition of style to be represented historically, and this in turn is grounded in the experience of the writer (citing 15).

One of the most important contributors to a self-reflexive approach to style in history writing has been Hayden White, who has articulated these methodological issues in numerous places, including *The Content of the Form*; see also the excellent volume, Chandler, Davidson, and Harootunian, eds., *Questions of Evidence*, the outcome of a series of issues of *Critical Inquiry*.

In addition to Pauline Maguire Robison's chapter here, on the theme of artlessly naturalistic style, see Roskill, *Dolce's "Aretino"*; Pardo, *Paolo Pino's "Dialogo"*; and for a recent overview of seventeenth-century issues, Bell and Willette, eds., *Art History in the Age of Bellori*.

Altieri, "Personal Style as Articulate Intentionality," 213.

See the entries on décor and decorum sub numero in Pollitt, *The Ancient View of Greek Art*.


Ibid., 39.

Kearney, "The Crisis of the Image," asks, with reference to Levinas and to Guy Debord's *Society of Spectacle*, whether we can assume an ethical responsibility in the age of mass media technologies when the image ceases to refer to some original event – issues that are more familiar to art historians in relation to Walter Benjamin's critique of technological reproduction.