CHAPTER 2

HISTORIES

Before the images of ancient sculpture reappear, there exists already a body of verbal lore concerning the world in which they once lived. That body is large, consisting of all the documents of ancient culture, which had been avidly read since antiquity almost without interruption. We have so far focused on what might be called the tradition of ignorance: the effort to imagine Rome (in the literal sense) with the smallest recourse to hard facts and the largest recourse to the faculty of symbolization. But this symbolization of the art of Rome is not merely a tissue of imaginings, whether of ancients who look beyond the structures they really see or of medievals who must invent structures out of ruins. Many widely preserved classical texts offered early Renaissance observers an account in words of the world of ancient images.

Some of the most important of these texts were not meant to be documents in art history at all. The celebrated Horatian "ut pictura poesis" is merely the most widely diffused, if also the most unspecific, formulation in an ancient tradition by which poetry is defined, defended, or attacked by analogy to the visual arts.[1] Characteristically, painting or sculpture is thought to offer a simpler case in the speaker's rhetorical gambit; once the point about poetry is made by analogy, the speaker does not go back to clean up the matter of the differences between the verbal and the visual arts.[2] As viewed retrospectively in the early Renaissance, this analogical tradition enforces the sisterhood of the arts while rendering the terms of similarity and difference between them highly ambiguous. So far as the rediscovery of ancient art objects is concerned, ut pictura poesis and its progeny teach very little about what to see in ancient art. Yet these pronouncements generate and validate the belief that the history of textual thinking, with its greater documentation and respectability, can be applied quite directly to a newly reconceived history of images, even if there is no consensus on how to apply it.

Closer to the phenomena of ancient art itself is the oratorical tradition going back to Cicero and Quintilian, according to which rhetoric is taught by reference to well-known works of art or even to the theory of the visual arts. In part this is merely a special example of ut pictura poesis, with all the ambiguously totalizing qualities of that analogy, but it is something more as well. An influential passage in Quintilian, for instance, uses the mannered qualities of Myron's *Discobolus* (fig. 2.1) to justify verbal *figura*, equating an upright body with literal speech and an artistically arranged body with elegant rhetorical variation.[3] Another important description, of a painting depicting the Sacrifice of Iphigenia, suggests that the artist Timanthes renders grief most vividly by covering the face of the suffering Agamemnon. Once again, this exemplum makes a rhetorical point, here concerned with the persuasive power of silence. It appears in both Cicero and Quintilian, and, significantly, it is repeated by Alberti in *De Pictura* and emerges visually in borrowings by both Donatello and Ghiberti from a relief version (fig. 2.2), known by the early fifteenth century, of the same subject with the same iconography.[4] Besides enforcing the analogy between words and images, this textual tradition describes some important works of art. More important, it establishes the rhetoricity of images and instructs Renaissance viewers in a rhetorical mode of ekphrasis.

We shall have occasion to return to these readings and ways of reading. But my present concern is with a textual tradition that is fully and explicitly concerned with the history of art rather than with *sententiae* about images that are excerptable from other discourses. When modern archaeology attempts to reconstruct ancient art, it can rely upon Lucian and the Philostratuses for imaginative accounts or Pausanias and Apollodorus for documentary accounts, though these texts were scarcely available in the early Renaissance. Vitruvius was extensively read, largely in the attempt to reconstruct architecture.[5] But it is from three late books of Pliny's *Natural History*, well preserved and widely read at least from the time of John of Salisbury, that the moderns had reason to suppose they knew what to expect of ancient art.

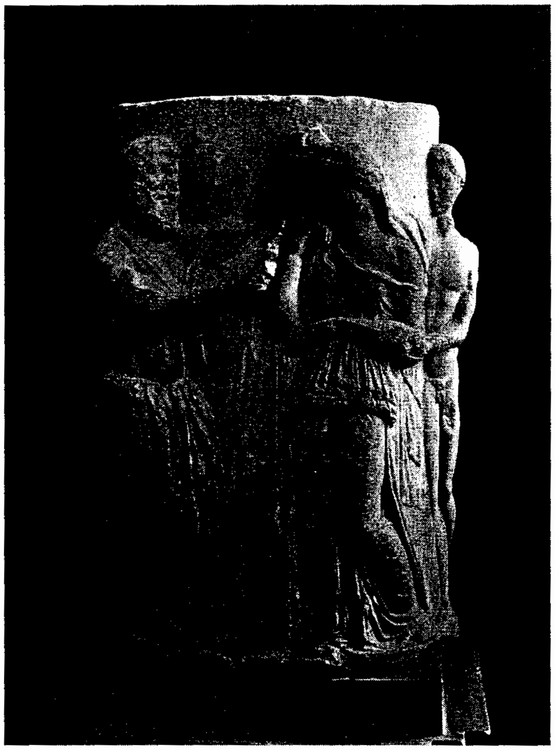
THE *NATURAL HISTORY* OF ART

It is the destiny of a text like the *Natural History*, encyclopedic and discursive, to be read for facts, Pliny's books on art more than most because they document a world of objects largely lost.[6] A historian of ancient art, whether in 1490 or 1990, has a vested interest in *not* deconstructing Pliny, in not raising too many questions concerning his limitations, his prejudices, and above all his imagination. Modern scholars, armed with other contemporary documents and with a great many of the art objects themselves, tend to believe (or even assume) that they can filter out Pliny's idiosyncrasies so that he can serve the purpose of helping to reconstruct the history of ancient art. Perhaps this is true; perhaps the idiosyncrasies are inseparable from the encyclopedic material; or perhaps the idiosyncrasies themselves would be a better guide to ancient art than the encyclopedic material. These are questions in twentieth-century method. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the constellation of facts and imagination within the orbit of the *Natural History* is quite different. I propose to consider Pliny as the central grounding text of the rediscovery of ancient art. Our subject, in other words, is situated at an intersection between the long-canonized account of art history to be found in Pliny and the new phenomenon of the unearthing of art objects as well as a revised viewing of ancient objects long since above ground. Pliny's text, known widely from at least the twelfth century onward, will come to define both art objects and aesthetics in the Renaissance. To understand the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries we must read the first century carefully.

Pliny creates the History of Art by carving out a small territory from the space long occupied by two other, better-established Histories: Natural History and the History of Rome. The first is his explicit subject. Pliny sets out to organize the natural universe, to provide a record of its diverse manifestations, and to organize them into a taxonomy. This turns out to be anything but a value-free enterprise, a dry scientific record, because it is motivated by a powerful sense that the story of nature has been eclipsed and threatened by sophisticated civilization. One can scarcely find a page of this long work that does not contain a lament about the corruption of nature by human beings. It would be wrong to ascribe to Pliny the mid-twentieth-century idea of corruption within a holistic ecosystem; yet his purpose is to memorialize a nature that is being distorted, misused, or ruined. The History of Rome is the inescapable other context for the History of Art. Pliny writes in what we might call the first great twilight of Roman civilization, close to the memory of the Augustan age but closer to the times of Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero. The decay of nature becomes a newly powerful subject for Pliny and his audience not because of a sudden increase in technology or pollution but because the state of political power in the first century inspires an awareness of universal decay, of the falling off from some better age in the past—which has generally been associated with a purer state of nature than that of the present moment. When he concludes the whole work with the proposition that "pulcherrima omnium est iis rebus quae merito principatum naturae optinent Italia" ("there is no land so well endowed with all that wins Nature's crown as Italy" [37.201]), he is knitting together the national and the natural in a tone of melancholy retrospective.

The History of Art is born of these other histories for reasons that are quite obvious: first, works of art are made out of natural materials; second, they are defined both in origin and in use by their place in public life. But in what sense do these associations of art objects give art a *history?* Natural history, to begin with, gives art a taxonomy, a kind of vertical system, as the field of art comes to be structured by the materals out of which it is made. The developments of the various arts are understood as taking place within a given medium. Art objects come to be defined by all the material hierarchies that govern the natural world: works made of clay, for instance, are given relatively short shrift near the end of book 35, though they are praised precisely because of Pliny's reverse snobbism in regard to humble objects. Art, furthermore, becomes the crowning case of human beings' developmental relation to their natural environment, granting it a technological model for progress—and, given Pliny's pessimistic view, for regress as well. On the side of progress, there is Pliny's account of early times when Phidias *aperuisse* statue making while Polycleitus *consummasse hanc scientiam* (34.54, 34.56). In the present age, on the other hand, certain elements of technologi-

2.2. *Iphigenia Prepared for Sacrifice, Agamemnon with Covered Head*, two views from the *Ara of Cleomenes*, Roman marble, first century B.C., after Greek original attributed to Cleomenes, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



cal progress have been lost precisely because the moderns have developed corrupted notions about natural materials: so bronze casting has fallen on evil days because Nero was interested only in gold and silver. In other cases technology has become *too* good, as in the use of multiple exotic pigments or of wall painting in fresco, which were unknown and unnecessary in the great past time of Apelles.[7]

If natural history offers one axis for art, political history offers the other. The chronology of history itself is tightly bound up with the birth and flowering of the visual arts. Marble sculpture, which Pliny describes as the earliest of the arts, has its origins in the time of the first Olympiad, with the representation of the human likeness at first consecrated to Olympic winners (34.16). This is more than a chance conjunction, since the Olympics form the basis for Pliny's calendar, which he then uses as a kind of matrix for the development of the arts: "cessavit deinde [olympiade CXXI] ars ac rursus olimpiade CLVI revixit" ("after that the art languished, and it revived again in the 156th Olympiad" [34.52]). In Rome's history as well, the origins of society and of art are closely related. Pliny dates the early flowering of Greek painting with the time of Romulus (35.55) and describes the Hercules statue in the Forum Boarium as having a great ritual significance in the time of Evander (34.33), another founding figure in the myths of Roman origins. Within modern times, the history of art is partly the history of its promotion by a succession of Roman rulers. Particularly in the case of painting, Pliny writes one version of his history as the progress of the art's respectability, as encouraged, in a stepwise manner, from the early time of Messala, who made painting respectable by using it to commemorate a victory in the Punic

Wars; through Julius Caesar, who dedicated mythological paintings in important public spaces; to Augustus, who decorated the Forum with paintings; to the patronage of Tiberius, whose very promotion of art, Pliny implies, had a regressive effect on its respectability, given the emperor's own perverse values.[8]

Insofar as art is at the nexus of nature and public power, it may come in conflict with them. Although Pliny may ultimately validate the notion that art triumphs over these constitutive realms, there is also considerable grounding in the *Natural History* for the anxiety that art can become as corrupted as the natural world, and for the same reasons. Julius Caesar made painting respectable by promoting public subjects in public spaces, whereas artists like Apelles and Protogenes proved their worth by not executing private commissions. But generations of patrons, plunderers, and collectors have made art into a private business or a matter of private enjoyment.[9] Whole categories of artistic endeavor—categories, as it happens, of great prominence in the Renaissance—are seen as intrinsically corrupted. Fresco painting Pliny declares to be a decadent modern practice because he associates it with privatization and property. Color is itself damned by association with imperialism. The overuse and trivialization of the color purple, says Pliny, can be traced to the exploitation of the resources of India: "omnia ergo meliora tunc fuere, cum minor copia" ("everything in fact was superior in the days when resources were scantier" [35.50]). The history of marble sculpture, though it rises to great heights of appreciation, is introduced as "praecipua morum insania" ("the prime folly in our behaviour" [36.1]), because the quarrying of materials destroys nature and bestows no benefit on humankind.

These nostalgic reflections on the making of art objects begin to suggest that art is not only the victim but also the medium of corruption in its relations to nature and power. Nor is this an accident of art's material basis or its imperial promotion. Its very communicative impulses are corruptible. Once upon a time, the *Apoxyomenos*, Lysippus's beautiful statue of a boy scraping his body, was displayed publicly outside the Baths of Agrippa; Tiberius, however, fell so in love with the statue that he removed it to his own bedroom, until finally the people were so outraged that they demanded its return to public view (34.62). Which is the truer message of the *Apoxyomenos*: the literal signification of a boy who is cleansing himself as a fittingly accessible emblem in front of the public baths or the erotic signification of a beautiful youth reserved for the emperor's private delight? Pliny has no doubts, particularly since Tiberius is famous for his perversity. But one does not forget, as in the old joke about the Rorschach blots and the dirty-minded patient, that it is Lysippus who is drawing the dirty pictures; the "love" that Tiberius feels for the statue ("apoxyomenos . . . quamquam adamatum") slides all too easily between lust and art appreciation.

Another Lysippean statue, of the young Alexander, is appropriated by a different hated emperor, Nero, who is so enchanted by the work that he orders it to be plated with gold. This, as Pliny explains, so reduces the statue's value that the plating must eventually be removed; its worth is only partially restored, however, since the process leaves serious "wounds" (34.63). Once again it is a tale of imperial decadence. Nero, notorious for orientalizing the shows of power, appropriates the image of Alexander in both literal and figurative senses, covering it with gold as part of his self-aggrandizement and his indulgence in luxury.[10] Like Tiberius, he takes too much pleasure in the statue—the word here, *delectatus*, like *adamatum*, has ironic appropriateness to the context of connoisseurship—and like Tiberius he perverts the statue as a result. But what Nero responds to is not the erotic so much as the totemic significance of the statue, and he perverts it not by privatizing it but by imposing on it values determined in the material world, which is the basis (but only the basis) for art objects themselves. Nero, like his predecessor, fails to understand the true value of art, and in so doing fails to understand the real value of Alexander—or rather the distance that separates him from Alexander. In the paradoxical discovery that the statue is worth more (*pretiosior*) without the external augmentation of its value (*pretium*) lies one of Pliny's deepest presuppositions: namely, that the work of art, however entangled with the value systems of power and of the material world as valorized by power, determines its own value independently.

The Alexander statue is not merely marble or gold and not merely a representation of Alexander; the *Apoxyomenos* is not merely a beautiful boy and not merely a symbol of cleanliness; nor in either case can the emperor be trusted to make the determinations. Behind this account lies a sense of tension in the triad of nature, art, and power that animates much of Pliny's text and will continue to reverberate powerfully in the Renaissance. At issue are conflicting determinations of value. The normative histories, natural and political, bestow values based either on materials or on subject matter: in the first case, gold makes a statue valuable, and in the second, the representation of Alexander makes a statue valuable. Both kinds of value are further enhanced by their association with powerful patronage, which determines what subjects are valuable and sets the going rate for precious materials. But the very presence of these alternatives describes another basis for value. Pliny criticizes as "foolish" Cato's decision to sell all the statues he finds when he conquers Cyprus, except for one, which is that of the philosopher Zeno. It is the subject matter—and Cato is proverbial for his philo-philosophy—that enchants the general, of whom Pliny says, "Non aere captus nec arte" ("it was not the bronze nor the artistry that attracted him" [34.92]).

The alternative of artistry itself is the crucial missing term in Pliny's jeremiads against his own contemporaries. So long as the history of art is inseparable from the histories of nature and the state, Pliny's account can only be highly ambivalent. Pliny introduces an apparently enthusiastic history of artistic achievement as the crowning term in his history of the natural world. But it turns out that art and its natural materials are at war with each other, as a consequence of which art perverts the natural world. A developmental model of the human being in nature bestows upon Pliny's history of art the model of technological progress. At the same time, technological progress is precisely what has led art away from authentic public use and into realms that are perverse, private, and sybaritic. Yet this whole argument is couched in a narrative whose central purpose is to celebrate artistic genius and artistic achievement. That narrative can emerge only when art is granted its own history.

The intersection of artistry and history is, for Pliny, the awareness that artistic objects are subject to decay and loss. To understand artistic loss as significant is already to presuppose that the individual object is unique for its artistry: in other words, not replaceable by another object made of the same material or depicting the same subject. Often this decay is physical. The Colossus of Rhodes, for instance, is grandiose even in ruined condition. What was a human body, admittedly of gigantic proportions, is now a collection of corporeal fragments: "Pauci pollicem eius amplectuntur, maiores sunt digiti quam pleraeque statuae" ("Few people can make their arms meet round the thumb of the figure, and the fingers are larger than most statues" [34.41]). This dissolution of the corporeal architectonic makes it possible to compare arms to fingers, fingers to statues, and trunk to caves, since all the body parts are now reformed at the lowly level of modern, normal-sized individuals rather than high off the ground on the scale of the mythic ancients who produced such colossi and were depicted in them. The modern observer on the ground substitutes for the lost original a new set of imaginative shapes that constitute the heritage of the ancients.

Another form of decay engages Pliny even more. The Colossus of Rhodes, though ancient and crumbling, can be ascribed to Chares of Lindus, whose artistic origins go back to the primal figure of Lysippus. But there are statues in mint condition, newly installed in Pliny's own time, that lack an identity:

> Romae quidem multitudo operum et iam obliteratio ac magis officiorum negotiorumque acervi omnes a contemplatione tamen abducunt, quoniam otiosorum et in magno loci silentio talis admiratio est. qua de causa ignoratur artifex eius quoque Veneris quam Vespasianus imperator in operibus Pacis suae dicavit antiquorum dignam fama. [36.27]

> At Rome, indeed, the great number of works of art and again their consequent effacement from our memory, and, even more, the multitude of official functions and business activities must, after all, deter anyone from serious study, since the appreciation involved needs leisure and deep silence in our surroundings. Hence we do not know the maker even of the Venus dedicated by the emperor Vespasian in the precincts of his temple of Peace, although it deserves to rank with the old masters.

The Venus in Vespasian's temple is a victim of *obliteratio*, a term whose physical meaning of erasure is being transferred to a metaphorical meaning of loss of fame. Pliny's underlying model—of constant importance in his account of art, though it lies too deep to be directly confronted—is that of the Roman statue-cum-inscription.[11] In perfect condition, such a statue presents an image and a set of words that may reveal both the subject and the name of the artist. The loss of letters—*obliteratio*—is as devastating a form of decay as is the loss of body shape to the Colossus of Rhodes. Equally significant is the implied cause of this obliteratio, which is the public life of Rome itself. Statues become *obliteratae* because there are too many of them, related to too many public functions, crowding the contemplative space of Rome. What is needed is the reinscription of letters.

These *litterae* are, in fact, art history. The physical decay or disappearance of an important work is parallel to—indeed, virtually synonymous with—the loss of information as to the identity of the artist. Complete works are not only perfect in all their parts; they also have pedigrees that include the names of the artists as well as their bloodlines—that is, their placement in a narrative sequence demonstrating the development of the art. The uniqueness of the individual object is therefore identified with the person of the artist who produced the work: name, life, character, the rest of the artist's oeuvre. Inhering in this nexus of assumptions are both the principles of art history and the definition of the historian's task as we continue to understand them. Just as those who contemplate the Colossus of Rhodes re-create the statue, the art historian re-creates the space of Rome, producing a kind of museum of history in which the contemplative function is restored at the same time as the works and their pedigrees are put back together. Thus, according to Pliny's model, as with the statue and its inscription, art itself depends on words for both existence and meaning. The historian, who provides and preserves names and bloodlines, becomes an essential term in the completion of the work.

What those words are about is the memorializing of fame. Pliny's search for historiographic principles generally begins with a history of the medium's technology until it reaches maturity; then he proceeds through a sequence of great men. The sequence itself comes to be determined by the relations among great men, sometimes of a personal kind, as in the case of Apelles and Protogenes, but more often through the medium of discipleship, rivalry, and influence. In either case, the determining factors in the nature of an artist's work are the individual personality and the fabric of what we would call the artistic community. Even Lysippus, whom Pliny immortalizes as denying artistic parentage ("negat ullius discipulum fuisse" [34. 61]), is soon placed in a complicated family tree of descendants—both biological and aesthetic—who make up the *secta Lysippi*, a term for philosophical schools, here transferred to artists and thence immortalized on the walls of every modern museum.[12]

Pliny valorizes this system of relations by conceiving his account in terms of the famous. The chronology of the history of bronzes, for instance, is based on the most famous names. Pliny then goes on to explain that he will proceed quickly through an account of the most famous (though there is nothing "raptim" about the thirty paragraphs he devotes to this section), "reliqua multitudine passim dispersa" ("throwing in the rest of the throng here and there under various heads" [34.53]). *Passim dispersa*, indeed: the lesser artists in this medium are consigned to lists in alphabetical order! The account of painting enjoys a wider range of principles, but the most space is devoted to "celebres in ea arte." The history of marble sculpture is almost entirely devoted to the famous and to the subject of their fame. The earliest known sculptors *inclaruerunt*; Phidias is "clarissimum . . . per omnes gentes quae Iovis Olympii famam intelligunt" ("the most famous sculptor among all peoples who appreciate the fame of his Olympian Jupiter"[36.18])—a construction that equates the sculptor's renown with Jupiter's. The *Laocoön*, though it is referred to as greater than any painting or bronze, is introduced as an example not of excellence but of collaborative art, which poses special problems, as Pliny sees it, for the development and maintenance of individual fame.[13] Similarly, the Mausoleum, though it receives proper praise as being one of the wonders of the world, mostly interests Pliny as a problem in multiple authorship and glory (36.30–31). Four sculptors worked on the structure—one on each of the four walls. It was intended as a memorial to King Mausolus, but the queen who commissioned it died before it was completed, whereupon the artists agreed to continue working, thereby creating, according to Pliny, a monument to themselves and art more than, presumably, to either the subject or the patroness who commissioned it.

I spoke of the memorializing of fame, which implies a prior condition merely transcribed by the historian; yet it should already be clear that the *litterae* the historian provides make for a more dynamic relation between fame as it exists in the ambient culture and fame as it is canonized in the historian's text. We might say that these terms existed in a never-ending circle were it not for the fact that the point of entry to this circle is made quite clear. In his history of bronze sculpture, Pliny offers an etiology for canon formation:

> venere autem et in certamen laudatissimi, quamquam diversis aetatibus geniti, quoniam fecerant Amazonas, quae cum in templo Dianae Ephesiae dicarentur, placuit eligi probatissimam ipsorum artificum, qui praesentis erant, iudicio, cum apparuit eam esse, quam omnes secundam a sua quisque iudicassent. haec est Policliti, proxima ab ea Phidiae, tertia Cresilae, quarta Cydonis, quinta Phradmonis. [34.53]
>
> The most celebrated have also come into competition with each other, although born at different periods, because they had made statues of Amazons; when these were dedicated in the Temple of Artemis of Ephesus, it was agreed that the best one should be selected by the vote of the artists themselves who were present; and it then became evident that the best was the one which all the artists judged to be the next best after their own: this is the Amazon by Polycleitus, while next to it came that of Pheidias, third Cresilas's, fourth Cydon's, and fifth Phradmon's.

Fame is construed fundamentally as a competition, and the fact of a synchronic contest among artists living and dead judged by artists themselves speaks to a kind of transhistorical community of artists, who exist (as we have seen in connection with the history of progeny and influence) largely in relation to one another.[14] It is this community that Pliny presents as the ultimate place of judgment. But it is also presumed that every artist judges himself number one: indeed, the rules of the contest have to be changed so as to correct for this ego. And once fame has been so determined, Pliny accepts the competitive verdict. Polycleitus and Phidias receive a great deal of Pliny's attention; Cresilas gets a brief moment of praise; Cydon and Phradmon are scarcely mentioned elsewhere.

Fame, in other words, begins as a story that artists tell about themselves, nearly always in a highly competitive arena. Examples are many. The obscure Spartan sculptors Sauras and Batrachus have reason to fear that they will be thought of not as the creators of the temples at the Porticoes of Octavia but merely as rich philistines who paid for them in the hopes of gaining an immortalizing inscription; so they create their own figural inscription by sculpting their names in rebus form as a lizard and a frog (36.42). The sons of Archermus go these sculptors one better. They are engaged in a war with the satirical poet Hipponax, who attempts to achieve a *condemnatio memoriae* on them (partly successful, since even Pliny identifies them as having lived "Hipponactis poetae aetate"). But they respond by crossing into the realm of words, indeed of the historian, by producing an authoritative verbal inscription with the self-fulfilling assertion of their fame: "quibus [simulacris] subiecerunt carmen non vitibus tantum censeri Chion, sed et operibus Archermi filiorum" ("to their pedestals they attached verses to the effect that 'Chios is esteemed not merely for its vines, but also for the works of the sons of Archermus'" [36.12]).

The ego that had to be corrected for in Ephesus comes to be the hallmark of the myth of the artist that is at the heart of the Plinian inheritance:

> [Zeuxis] opes quoque tantas adquisivit, ut in ostentatione earum Olympiae aureis litteris in palliorum tesseris intextum nomen suum ostentaret. postea donare opera sua instituit, quod nullo pretio satis digno permutari posse diceret. . . . [Fecit athletam] adeoque in illo sibi placuit, ut versum subscriberet celebrem ex eo, in visurum aliquem facilius quam imitaturum. [35.62–63]
>
> Also [Zeuxis] acquired such great wealth that he advertised it at Olympia by displaying his own name embroidered in gold lettering on the checked pattern of his robes. Afterwards he set about giving away his works as presents, saying that it was impossible for them to be sold at any price adequate to their value. . . . [He made an Athlete], in the latter case being so pleased with his own work that he wrote below it a line of verse which has hence become famous, to the effect that it would be easier for someone to carp at him than to copy him.
>
> [Parrhasius] fecundus artifex, sed quo nemo insolentius usus sit gloria artis, namque et cognomina usurpavit habrodiaetum se appellando aliisque versibus principem artis et eam ab se consummatam, super omnia Apollinis se radice ortum et Herculeum, qui est Lindi, talem a se pictum, qualem saepe in quiete vidisset. [35.71]
>
> Parrhasius was a prolific artist, but one who enjoyed the glory of his art with unparalleled arrogance, for he actually adopted certain surnames, calling himself the 'Bon Viveur,' and in some other verses 'Prince of Painters,' who had brought the art to perfection, and above all saying he was sprung from the lineage of Apollo and that his picture of Heracles at Lindos presented the hero as he had often appeared to him in his dreams.

Countless traits of the artist-myth are launched and elaborated in these descriptions of the two famous painters. Works by geniuses are immensely expensive but at the same time beyond price; great works of art, however subject to the quibbles of critics, remain unique and unrepeatable, especially by critics; artists exist under the special patronage of the gods, which links them to a supernatural world of inspiration as well as to the very heroes of the past age whom they represent in their works.

Most important in all these etiologies of fame is the artist's self-immortalization and the logocentric nature of fame that brings artist and historian together. Parrhasius creates himself in verbal narrative, living the good life and making himself famous for it, inventing exalted rank on this earth and exalted ancestry beyond it, declaring himself in communication with the gods. Zeuxis, on the other hand, creates himself in the visual medium, but even this must be grounded in inscription. He writes himself a laudatory caption; he also appears at Olympia—once again, the symbolic point of origin of the arts—as his own work of art with his own signature upon himself. The historian's engagement in this mythmaking remains as involuted as his whole relation to artistic fame. The tone is a bit critical, for Pliny (like many writers on art in later periods) proceeds from an inscribed assumption, often denied, that artists are *not* meant to be rich and powerful. Yet in the end Pliny collaborates as ever in the project of assuring the fame of the artist, both by recounting these self-created myths and by validating them in regard to the works these artists created.

It is not only the greatness of the works that valorizes the myth of the artist: the art object and the personality exist in a complicated circular relationship, as a consequence of which the life can be read in the work and the work in the life. Thus in the heritage of Plinian historiography, biography and critical analysis are completely interwoven; and given Pliny's emphasis on the artist's self-invention and self-communication, the presence of the personality in the work is no accident but rather a kind of perpetual self-portraiture. Parrhasius paints some dirty pictures, which Pliny describes as a bit of spare-time recreation, but it is ambiguous whether the recreation consists in the painting or in the erotic activity upon which the painting was modelled (35.72). Praxiteles sculpts his Merry Courtesan with an autobiographical significance: "hanc putant Phrynen fuisse deprehenduntque in ea amorem artificis et mercedem in vultu meretricis" ("connoisseurs detect in the figure the artist's love of her and the reward promised him by the expression on the courtesan's face" [34.70]). Once again, the passage is ambiguous. It is not specified whether the reward visible in her face is the pleasure she will grant him or the gift (perhaps the statue itself) that he will grant her. The underlying ambiguity in all these cases is that of artistic self-representation, of the artist's capacity both to mirror and to re-create himself.

Not all these autobiographies are sexual; indeed, the most important and most frequently cited mythic materials are concerned with the artist's relation to art itself. We learn, for instance, of the frenzied artist Apollodorus, "inter cunctos diligentissimum artis et iniquum sui iudicem, crebro perfecta signa frangentem, dum satiari cupiditate artis non quit, ideoque insanum cognominatum" ("of quite unrivalled devotion to the art and a severe critic of his own work, who often broke his statues in pieces after he had finished them, his intense passion for his art making him unable to be satisfied, and consequently he was given the surname of the Madman" [34.81]). The elements of the myth, along with their many reverberations in later history, are clear enough: artistic frenzy is insatiable, indeed is a form of madness that leads to *non finito* and self-destruction. As it happens, this is a piece of metahistory, since Pliny is here speaking of Apollodorus not in person but as the subject of a statue by Silanion. Artistic frenzy turns out to be contagious: "hoc [cognomen, i.e., insanum] in eo expressit, nec hominem ex aere fecit, sed iracundiam" ("this quality he brought out in his statue, the Madman, which represented in bronze not a human being but anger personified" [34.82]). Who *expressit* madness so well? Presumably Silanion, but given that his subject is another sculptor, the confusion is all too easy; and at the very least the statue becomes a kind of compensation for all those works of Apollodorus lost through his artistic rage at the same time as it is analogously reduced to that very quality. The two sculptors together end up collaborating in a paradoxical image of self-expression and self-destruction.

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The same terms—artistic frenzy, self-representation, metamorphic reduction—generate an aesthetic in one of Pliny's most interesting stories, concerning Protogenes, who also fulfills the myth of the eccentric artist similarly self-created—"quis eum docuerit, non putant constare" ("Who his teacher was is believed to be unrecorded" [35.101]). The anecdote concerns a painting of Ialysus in the Temple of Peace in Rome:

> est in ea canis mire factus, ut quem pariter ars et casus pinxerit. non iudicabit se in eo exprimere spumam anhelantis, cum in reliqua parte omni, quod difficillimum erat, sibi ipse satisfecisset. displicebat autem ars ipsa. . . . spumaque pingi, non ex ore nasci. anxio animi cruciatu, cum in pictura verum esse, non verisimile vellet, absterserat saepius mutaveratque penicillum, nullo modo sibi adprobans. postremo iratus arti, quod intellegeretur, spongeam inpegit inviso loco tabulae. et illa reposuit ablatos colores qualiter cura optaverat, fecitque in pictura fortuna naturam. [35. 102–3]
>
> In the picture there is a dog marvelously executed, so as to appear to have been painted by art and good fortune jointly: the artist's own opinion was that he did not fully show in it the foam of the panting dog, although in all the remaining details he had satisfied himself, which was very difficult. But the actual art displayed displeased him. . . . The foam appeared to be painted, not to be the natural product of the animal's mouth; vexed and tormented, as he wanted his picture to contain the truth and not merely a near-truth, he had several times rubbed off the paint and used another brush, quite unable to satisfy himself. Finally he fell into a rage with his art because it was perceptible, and dashed a sponge against the place in the picture that offended him, and the sponge restored the colours he had removed, in the way that his anxiety had wished them to appear, and chance produced the effect of nature in the picture!

Like Apollodorus, Protogenes is an insatiable perfectionist, nearly driving himself mad over what must be an unimportant detail in a heroic picture concerning the founder of a city.[15] So extreme is his frustration that he risks destroying the picture (much as Apollodorus smashed the statues that displeased him); but through a kind of miracle the fit of anger solves the problem. Throwing in the sponge (so to speak) is not—for all Pliny's references to *casus* and *fortuna*—in the least random. The sponge is the locus of all Protogenes' colors; and hurled at the picture, it does not *introduce* colors but *reponuit*, that is, puts them back. In fact, it is a story of metamorphosis, with Protogenes' art concentrated in the sponge, producing a work of art—the dog foaming at the mouth—that is the image of the raging painter himself. More than the Silanion anecdote, however, this story describes an aesthetic. *Displicebat ars; verum esse, non verisimile vellet:* for the painter in a frenzy of creation, art and verisimilitude are shams; he insists upon the thing itself. The thing itself turns out to be the painter's own passion, which is transmitted to the canvas not by a sequence of well-articulated brushes but by the random throwing of a sponge (which is presumably intended to *remove* colors). For that throw Pliny uses the verb *impingere*—hurl against, drive—which turns the action into an alternative type of *pingere*, or painting. The artist becomes not only the affective subject of his work but also the measure of its authenticity as reality rather than representation.

Given the political world in which Pliny writes and in which he was read, both originally and fifteen hundred years later, the most telling index of the artist's importance is not fame per se, nor eros, nor the frenzy of inspiration, so much as it is the artist's independence from public power and authority as embodied in the sovereign. Part of Pliny's account of this relationship is, roughly speaking, historical. Throughout these books of the *Natural History*, there are countless references to the high cost in money and effort that powerful individuals are willing to expend for the sake of works of art; it is also clear that art was an important pawn in the exercise of power, as evidenced by the many references to plunder, collecting, and privateering.[16] But Pliny's stories of personal relations between artist and sovereign are mythic rather than historical—examples not of some authenticatable patronage relations but of some persistent idea as to how artists' lives might be lived. Whether these ideas are concerned with eros, egotism, inspiration, or politics, the codification and transmission of such stories inspires, in contemporary or later times, the belief that such roles for the artist have existed. This in turn becomes an important standard for measuring the present or the recent past; canonized by Pliny, by antiquity, and by humanism, this body of tales provides a standard to be imitated.

In one of the most widely disseminated of these stories, Alexander, we are told, often visited Apelles' studio (a detail that turns up in narratives of other artists employed by monarchs). These visits occasion a considerable shift of power as the monarch attempts to discuss painting and is ridiculed even by the boys who help Apelles mix his colors. Pliny could hardly have embarrassed Alexander more than by making the *pueri*, his young assistants, into the emperor's superiors in the realm of art. The principal force of these political narratives is to establish art as its own independent realm, in which (in this case) Apelles is so much more the emperor than Alexander that even his lowliest helpers rank higher. It is not enough, of course, to assert this independent power of the artist; the story must demonstrate that Alexander recognizes it—since, after all, it is the emperor's power that authorizes other powers. So by decreeing that only Apelles may paint his portrait, Alexander creates an emperor of painting and selects Apelles for the job.

The relationship turns more subversive when the emperor gives over his favorite concubine in marriage to Apelles, once the artist has fallen in love with her after painting her in the nude. The exposure of Pancaspe to the artist is another of Alexander's extraordinary recognitions of Apelles; that the painter should fall in love with her follows both from the beauty she must possess to have won the emperor's heart and from the well-established eroticism of visual representation and the artist. It is not even surprising, given the emperor's other recognitions of the artist's "equality," that he should grant her to Apelles. But it is the gloss upon Alexander's gift that most strikingly demonstrates the power of the artist: "magnus animo, maior imperio sui nec minor hoc facto quam victoria alia, quia ipse se vicit" ("great-minded as he was and still greater owing to his control of himself, and of a greatness proved by this action as much as by any other victory" [35.86–87]). Pliny takes the truism that the conquest of one's own desire is greater than the conquest of a kingdom and makes Apelles into the agent by which Alexander achieves his greatest victory—a victory of art, love, and self-control.

The story of Protogenes and King Demetrius dramatizes the same contest of powers. The king wishes to lay waste the very territory in which the artist's studio is located. When he fails to persuade Protogenes to leave the battle zone, he abandons his plans for conquest. The result is a victory for art and a defeat for Demetrius's ambitions against the Rhodians; and just as Alexander's power is necessary to confirm Lysippus', so Demetrius must accept—even enthusiastically—that it is better for him to visit the artist in his studio than to win a military victory: "relictisque victoriae suae votis . . . spectavit artificem" ("quitting his aspirations for his own victory, . . . [he] looked on at the work of an artist" [35.105]). But the payoff of this anecdote is not so much about power as about art:

> sequiturque tabulam illius temporis haec fama, quod eam Protogenes sub gladio pinxerit: Satyrus hic est, quem anapauomenon vocant, ne quid desit temporis eius securitati, tenentem tibias.
>
> Fecit et Cydippen et Tlepolemum, Philiscum tragoediarum scriptorem meditantem, et athletam et Antigonum regem, matrem Aristotelis philosophi, qui ei suadebat, ut Alexandri Magni opera pingeret propter aeternitatem rerum; impetus animi et quaedam artis libido in haec potius eum tulere. [35.105–6]
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> And even to this day the story is attached to a picture of that date that Protogenes painted it with a sword hanging over him. The picture is the one of a Satyr, called the Satyr Reposing, and to give a final touch to the sense of security felt at the time, the figure holds a pair of flutes.
>
> Other works of Protogenes were a Cydippe, a Tlepolemus, a Philiscus the Tragic Poet in Meditation, an Athlete, a portrait of King Antigonus, and one of the Mother of Aristotle the philosopher. Aristotle used to advise the artist to paint the achievements of Alexander the Great, as belonging to history for all time. The impulse of his mind and a certain artistic capriciousness led him rather to the subjects mentioned.

So far is Protogenes from representing the dramatic experience of public life, in which he is himself an important participant, that he creates a masterpiece of bucolic relaxation. The sword hanging over him, whether literal or figurative, appears in the picture only by absolute negation, by being transformed, if not into a ploughshare, then into the instrument of rustic music making. Nor is it a coincidence that Pliny chooses this moment to contrast Protogenes' genius with Aristotle's practical notion of art. The philosopher presumes that the immortality of art is a function of the immortality of its subject matter. Protogenes does not limit himself to the private or the pastoral, but we have already seen him concentrate his attention upon the detail of a barking dog in a picture that was supposed to celebrate the founder of Rhodes. The list of subjects offered here is notably independent from royal patronage, and to the extent that it rides on the coattails of public fame, that fame is of a poetic and imaginative kind. The effect of Pliny's narration is to place "impetus animi et quaedam artis libido" in a highly privileged position. The ultimate significance of a history of art defined by artists—their personalities, their interrelations, their particular genius—is to grant an independent reality to the works that they produce. The paradox of Pliny's account, which so embeds art in the contexts of politics and matter, is that those contexts make it possible to offer art a magna carta and a declaration of independence.

MIMETIC NARRATIVES

Pliny's great-man theory is only one aspect of his history of art. By our standards it is scarcely history at all, since the stories of individual fame stand as a set of ahistorical, excerptible anecdotes with no necessary placement in an evolutionary narrative.[17] Yet there is definitely such a narrative in the *Natural History*. Indeed Pliny's establishment of art as an independent discourse may have less to do with the anecdotes of powerful or self-absorbed artists than with his depiction of growth and change in the history of representation—for it is in relation to the *signified* that art as *signifier* will ultimely declare its most vital independence:

> est et equus eius [Apellis], sive fuit, pictus in certamine, quo iudicium ad mutas quadripedes provocavit ab hominibus. namque ambitu praevalere aemulos sentiens singulorum picturas inductis equis ostendit: Apellis tantum equo adhinnivere, idque et postea semper evenit, ut experimentum artis illud ostentaretur. [35.95]
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> There is, or was, a picture of a Horse by him [Apelles], painted in a competition, by which he carried his appeal for judgement from mankind to the dumb quadripeds; for perceiving that his rivals were getting the better of him by intrigue, he had some horses brought and showed them their pictures one by one; and the horses only began to neigh when they saw the horse painted by Apelles; and this always happened subsequently, showing it to be a sound test of artistic skill.

> in foro fuit et illa pastoris senis cum baculo, de qua Teutonorum legatus respondit interrogatus, quantine eum aestimaret, donari sibi nolle talem vivum verumque. [35.25]
>
> It was also in the forum that there was the picture of the Old Shepherd with his Staff, about which the Teuton envoy when asked what he thought was the value of it said that he would rather not have even the living original as a gift!

These anecdotes about paintings, at least one of which is meant to be a joke, describe two extreme attitudes toward the nature of pictorial representation. The first is an example of perhaps the most famous of all topoi in the visual arts, clearly something of a cliché already in Pliny's time, since he tends to manipulate it in witty and unexpected ways. The story, in all its dozens of forms, praises an artistic image by declaring that it is absolutely indistinguishable from the thing it was meant to represent. The critic who makes this determination of equivalence is nearly always an animal. As it develops, the belief in absolute equivalence between representation and thing represented must generally be ascribed to a naïf, even though that ascription need not undercut the praise for the work of art that represents reality so faithfully. The other story also depends upon a naïf—the ambassador from the barbarian North. It further depends upon a crucial fact of Hellenistic art about which we shall have more to say: that is, the great fashion in Rome and elsewhere for humble and even disagreeable subject matter in art. The Teuton is ridiculed for having the most unsophisticated theory of representation: namely, that a thing is always better than a representation of a thing, and since the ambassador does not wish to possess an old shepherd, he is still less interested in a picture of an old shepherd. What the sophisticated listeners perceive from this story is that the value of a picture of an old shepherd is completely unrelated to the value of an old shepherd; indeed, that representation and thing represented occupy different planes of reality.

Both Apelles' horses and the anonymous old shepherd are understood to be great works, but they are praised for nearly opposite reasons. These are not isolated examples, for almost every one of Pliny's stories about a work of art is concerned either with one of these two extreme positions or with the problematic of their opposition. Nor do these provide merely alternative categories for understanding the artistic impulse itself; rather they become the key to a developmental history. In a familiar model that parallels ontogeny and phylogeny, the early history of art is representationally naive. True to his ambivalence about civilization, Pliny does not ridicule the archaic period. Indeed, however foolish the Teuton ambassador may seem in the present age of Vespasian, Pliny expresses a fervent nostalgia for a time when art objects and the things they represented could be measured against one another in clear and simple ways. The principal example is the portrait, which originated, according to Pliny, at the Olympic games, the first occasion on which human achievement was sufficiently great to allow that mortals—rather than gods—might be represented. Once again, the Olympic Games form the terminus a quo for the history of art. As a further tribute, those who were victorious three times received the award in their statues of perfect mimesis—*similitudo expressa*, thus establishing a parallel between the equivalence of representation and the equivalence of lofty actions and suitable recompense.

For Pliny, the accurate representation of the human figure lies at the heart of precisely that social and cosmic order which is disappearing in the modern world.

> Imaginum quidem pictura, qua maxime similes in aevum propagabantur figurae, in totum exolevit. . . . statuarum capita permutantur. . . . adeo materiam conspici malunt omnes quam se nosci, et inter haec pinacothecas veteribus tabulis consuunt alienasque effigient colunt, ipsi honorem non nisi in pretio ducentes. . . . itaque nullius effigie vivente imagines pecuniae, non suas, relinquunt. iidem palastrae athletarum imaginibus et ceromata sua exornant, Epicuri voltus per cubicula gestant ac circumferunt secum. . . . artes desidia perdidit, et quoniam animorum imagines non sunt, negleguntur etiam corporum. [35.4–5]

> The painting of portraits, used to transmit through the ages extremely correct likenesses of persons, has entirely gone out. . . . Heads of statues are exchanged for others. . . . So universally is a display of material preferred to a recognizable likeness of one's own self. And in the midst of all this, people tapestry the walls of their picture-galleries with old pictures, and they prize likenesses of strangers, while as for themselves they imagine that the honour only consists in the price. . . . Consequently nobody's likeness lives and they leave behind them portraits that represent their money, not themselves. The same people decorate even their own anointing-rooms with portraits of athletes of the wrestling-ring, and display all round their bedrooms and carry about with them likenesses of Epicurus. . . . Indolence has destroyed the arts, and since our minds cannot be portrayed, our bodily features are also neglected.

The principle of mimetic likeness is first of all associated with orderly relations in families, which also express their regularity by means of resemblance. Mimesis becomes for Pliny equivalent to respect for one's ancestors. Its decay is accompanied by a perversion in regard to Pliny's other basis for valuing an artistic object: fetishizing the material and developing a connoisseur's attitude toward the thing itself. The death of mimesis also destroys the possibility of uniting animus and corpus in a work of art—or indeed, of portraying either accurately. By ascribing this state of affairs to Epicureanism, Pliny associates the death of portrait painting with theories that the universe is ultimately random.

Between the similitudo expressa of the Olympic portraits and the randomness of the present day, Pliny sees a progressive decadence from this mimetic ideal. In the golden age a grateful populace erected statues to the greatest heroes. Later, lesser men were memorialized, sometimes at their own behest, and usually with falsifications in the representation made necessary by the undeserving nature of the individual represented. Inscriptions—viewed negatively from the perspective of early history—became necessary to bridge the gap between the fame the individual subjects really deserved and the propaganda that was being disseminated about them. Closely parallel are the living inscriptions provided by those who erect statues of themselves and then give speeches in front of the statues advertising their own heroic actions.[18]

Not only inscriptions but, more seriously, art itself comes to be used to distort accurate representation. The simple toga is replaced with cloaks or with self-aggrandizing costumes; a short poet erects a statue of himself (among the Muses, no less) in which he is tall. In particular the staging of the human figure distorts its authentic value. The first equestrian statues were (parallel to the first exact portrait likenesses) reserved for winners of horseback-riding contests; hence the subjects were accurately represented in this posture. But now nonequestrians appear exalted on horseback, and the fashion gives itself further airs with chariots drawn by two, four, or even six horses. Pliny attaches the same criticism to the placing of statues at great heights: "Columnarum ratio erat attolli super ceteros mortales, quod et arcus significant novicio invento" ("The purport of placing statues of men on columns was to elevate them above all other mortals; which is also the meaning conveyed by the new invention of arches" [34.27]). The argument is ultimately a mimetic one: real-life mortals spend their time on the ground and thus should be represented at that level. By extension, the triumphal arch—though not directly mimetic—is understood as an oversized extension of the triumphator's person. Portrait representation, even without frills, is a potentially dangerous exaltation; and the fact that the honorees for this exaggerated standing have not always been well chosen—that they include tyrants, women clad in togas, Hannibal, and the prefect of markets Lucius Minucius—attests to a decay in the authenticity, both mimetic and political, of representation.

Yet Pliny's ambivalences about art—its connection with civilization, its connection with decadence—turn this nostalgic account of archaic mimesis into the first stage of an evolutionary argument that celebrates a development away from perfect likeness and toward more complicated forms of representation. The origins of figurative sculpture and painting turn out to be quite similar:

> [filia Butadis] capta amore iuvenis, abeunte illo peregre, umbram ex facie eius ad lucernam in pariete lineis circumscripsit, quibus pater eius inpressa argilla typum fecit et cum ceteris fictilibus induratum igni proposuit. [35.151]
>
> [The daughter of Butadis] was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief, which he hardened by exposure to the fire with the rest of his pottery.

> De pictura initiis incerta nec instituti operis quaestio est. . . . omnes umbra hominis lineis circumducta, itaque primum talem. [35.15]

> The question as to the origin of the art of painting is uncertain and it does not belong to the plan of this work. . . . All agree that it began with tracing an outline round a man's shadow and consequently that pictures were originally done in this way.

The artistic image is taken directly off reality. Although representation and the thing represented are not identical (as they are to the whinnying horses of Apelles), the act of representation completely subordinates itself to the real. That this subordination is by means of the shadow relegates representation both to a verisimilar and to an inferior position.

The early history of improvements upon this primitive verisimilitude tends explicitly to increase the exactitude of mimesis: various sculptors are praised for more accurate renditions of sinews, veins, or hair. Implicitly, however, representation is already developing in other dimensions. Myron, we learn in a telling phrase, "primus. . . multiplicasse veritatem videtur" ("is the first sculptor who appears to have enlarged the scope of realism" [34.58]). *Multiplicare veritatem* is an appropriately ambiguous notion. Sometimes it seems to involve what we would call conventions of representation, like the invention of different skin colors to distinguish male from female. At other times it is concerned with the showing of emotion or with elegant decoration of hair or drapery. Most often, however, progress is defined in terms of *symmetria*, a term one translates at one's peril, given the fact that, as Pliny says, "non habet Latinum nomen" (it has no Latin name).[19] In concrete terms, this quality seems to be expressed most essentially in the proportions of the human body. Lysippus "quadratas veterum staturas permutando," "capita minora faciendo quam antiqui, corpora graciliora siccioraque, per quae proceritas signorum maior videretur" ("modifying the squareness of the figure of the old sculptors," "by making his heads smaller than the old sculptors used to do, and his bodies more slender and firm, to give his statues the appearance of greater height" [34.65]). Already in Pliny, real bodies—especially ones from the past—are understood as blockish, while the mission of a more sophisticated art is to produce grace and stylishness as defined in what the sixteenth century would think of as mannerist terms.

This canon becomes explicitly antiverisimilar when Pliny shifts to the same evolutionary history in painting. In this case, Zeuxis offers a counterexample:

> reprehenditur tamen ceu grandior in capitibus articulisque, alioqui tantus diligentia, ut Agragantinis facturus tabulam, . . . inspexerit virgines eorum nudas et quinque elegerit, ut quod in quaque laudatissimum esset pictura redderet. [35.64]

> Nevertheless Zeuxis is criticized for making the heads and joints of his figures too large in proportion, albeit he was so scrupulously careful that when he was going to produce a picture for the city of Girgenti, . . . he held an inspection of maidens of the place paraded naked and chose five, for the purpose of reproducing in the picture the most admirable points in the form of each.[20]

It is no accident that Pliny juxtaposes the overlarge features with the classic anecdote that derives female beauty from the imitation of multiple sources. Zeuxis (whom Pliny often damns with faint praise) produces unaesthetic works precisely because he places himself within the limits of the real. The Girgenti painting has questionable prospects both because five women's beauties cannot be proportionally combined and because the work will be the result not of the artist's genius but rather of his (misguided) attempt at multiple mimesis. Zeuxis, it should be remembered, will lose the contest with Parrhasius because of a similarly "unenlarged" notion of verisimilitude.

The persistence in these descriptions of *videri*—seeming in the context of seeing—points to what is for Pliny the high point of technical evolution in art: not reality or even verisimilitude but something like the illusion of verisimilitude. Painting in particular lends itself to this distinction, since, as Pliny is well aware, two-dimensional art always operates on illusion; and he gives special praise to the rare work that can suggest figures beyond what is visible, such as one by Parrhasius, which "ostendat etiam quae occultat" ("disclose[s] even what it hides" [35.68]). As he goes on to describe the practice,

> extrema corporum facere et desinentis picturae modum includere rarum in successu artis invenitur. ambire enim se ipsa debet extremitas et sic desinere, ut promittat alia et post se ostendatque etiam quae occultat. [35.67–68]

> To give the contour of the figures, and make a satisfactory boundary where the painting within finishes, is rarely attained in successful artistry. For the contour ought to round itself off and so terminate as to suggest the presence of other parts behind it also, and disclose even what it hides.

Even more famous and influential is the etiology of foreshortening:

> [Pausias] eam primus invenit picturam, quam postea imitati sunt multi, aequavit nemo. ante omnia, cum longitudinem bovis ostendi vellet, adversum eum pinxit, non traversum, et abunde intellegitur amplitudo. dein, cum omnes, quae volunt eminentia videri, candicanti faciant colore, quae condunt, nigro, hic totum bovem atri coloris fecit umbraeque corpus ex ipsa dedit, magna prorsus arte in aequo extantia ostendente et in confracto solida omnia. [35.126–27]

> [Pausias] first invented a method of painting which has afterwards been copied

> by many people but equalled by no one; the chief point was that although he wanted to show the long body of an ox he painted the animal facing the spectator and not standing sideways, and its great size is fully conveyed. Next, whereas all painters ordinarily execute in light colour the parts they wish to appear prominent and in dark those they wish to keep less obvious, this artist has made the whole ox of a black colour and has given substance to the shadow from the shadow itself with quite remarkable skill that shows the shapes standing out on a level surface and a uniform solidity on a broken ground.

It is a celebration of deception, a trick to make an ox seem large or to cause the spectator looking in the margins of the lines to imagine forms that are not really there. But it is the sculptor Lysippus who is characterized as having made the quintessential breakthrough in the evolution of representation: "vulgoque dicebat ab illis [sculptoris veteribus] factos quales essent homines, a se quales viderentur esse" ("he used commonly to say that whereas his predecessors had made men as they really were, he made them as they appeared to be" [34.65]). Lysippus, it should be remembered, is something of an enfant terrible, given to extravagant boasts about his originality and his skill. That he should praise himself so boldly for *not* making men as they are; that Pliny should place Lysippus as a milestone in the progress of art for his rejection of *esse* and embrace of *videri* is the most powerful of signals that art is not the servant of reality but rather the master of its own reality.

The establishment of value in terms of artistry rather than of mimesis speaks to particular choices of subject matter. In early times only the truly worthy were honored by representation. The devaluation of this mark of esteem via the elevation of the trivial and the self-glorification of the ambitious correspondingly brings honor to works of art that represent matters not apparently connected to power. The three-time Olympic winners of ancient days were of apolitical significance; in more modern times, Protogenes is implicitly praised for not following Aristotle's advice to glorify Alexander. Pliny's tastes for a disinterested art and for personal style converge upon works that represent apparently insignificant or even unpleasant matters. Such works cannot derive their value from the sponsorship of the parties represented nor from the nobility of the narrative conception; what is left is the contribution of the artist. In this, as we have suggested, Pliny reflects the practice of Hellenistic art, in which such genre subjects were popular for parallel reasons—that is, the development of private but powerful connoisseurship. Pliny, however, goes beyond the recognition of this state of affairs by placing his praise for these works in the context of the alternative (and less valued) aesthetic of power and significance. He tells us, for instance, that a statue of a dog licking its wounds is so valuable that the only insurance policy worthy of it is a death sentence upon its guardians, should it ever come to grief (34. 38). Pliny places it at a pivotal spot in the development of the nobility of art as an example of *audacia*, presumably because of the boldness of the subject matter—the more so since the piece is housed in the shrine of Juno on the Capitol. Pliny is often correspondingly unimpressed with self-important subject matters. He passes over the likeness of Theodorus's self-portrait in bronze to dwell upon the "magna suptilitate" of the tiny figures—presumably images of works of art themselves—held in the figure's hands (34.83). Similarly in his account of Phidias, he mentions, but does not praise, the vast size of works like the Jupiter or the Minerva, while he concentrates on the impressive quantity of detail carved into small spaces (36.18).

The logical endpoint of this movement away from the thing represented and toward the method of representation is that a work of art have no subject at all. This extreme might appear radically anachronistic were it not for two of the most often retold stories in the *Natural History*. Both involve the quintessential Plinian arena of competition between two geniuses. It seems that Apelles, who is the very prototype of the famous and worldly artist, wishes to pay a call upon Protogenes, for his part the prototype of the troublesome hermit artist. Not finding him at home, Apelles leaves as his calling card neither his name nor an image but an extremely fine line which he paints on a handy canvas. Protogenes returns, recognizes the "hand" of Apelles at once, draws an even finer line in a different color on top of the first line as an identification of himself when Apelles should once again return. Whereupon Apelles draws yet a third and finer line; Protogenes admits defeat and seeks the real person of his adversary in the town. The story places ultimate value upon pure technique—not even the technique of producing similitudo or of making human features more elegant than they really are—but of the most fundamental and nonrepresentational basis of draughtsmanship. In this basic act, the anecdote suggests, is the quintessential signature of the artist (as perhaps only equal or near-equal geniuses can read it), the more perfect as a means of identification because it is not blurred by reference to external reality. Yet though completely nonrepresentational, it is a work of art: "spectatam nobis ante, spatiose nihil aliud continentem quam lineas visum effugientes, inter egregia multorum opera inani similem et eo ipso allicientem omnique opere nobiliorem" ("It had been previously much admired by us, on its vast surface containing nothing else than the almost invisible lines, so that among the outstanding works of many artists it looked like a blank space, and by that very fact attracted attention and was more esteemed than any masterpiece" [35.83]). Once again, the judgment of value is on the side of artistry: a perfectly executed blank space is preferred to *egregia opera*.

The competition between the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius turns more directly upon the question of representation. Zeuxis depends for his contest entry upon the traditional animal test of realism, painting grapes so real that birds try to peck at them:

> [Parrhasius] detulisse linteum pictum ita veritate repraesentata, ut Zeuxis alitum iudicio tumens flagitaret tandem remoto linteo ostendi picturam atque intellecto errore concederet palmam ingenuo pudore, quoniam ipse volucres fefellisset, Parrhasius autem se artificem. [35.65]

> Parrhasius himself produced such a realistic picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds, requested that the curtain should now be drawn and the picture displayed; and when he realized his mistake, with a modesty that did him honour he yielded up the prize, saying that whereas he had deceived birds Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist.

We have already seen that Zeuxis is something of a mimetic literalist, and he will continue to be so even after this concession to Parrhasius, since in the next anecdote he criticizes his own painting of a child carrying grapes, because the birds that (once again) swarm about it prove that the image of the boy must be less realistic than that of the grapes if it fails to deter the birds. In the contest with Parrhasius, literal mimesis as defined in this tradition is exploded, or at least relegated to a realm many phyla below that of art and artists. But the reading that Zeuxis offers in regard to his own defeat does not sufficiently take into account the nature of Parrhasius's image. The painting of a curtain offers a kind of ultimate step in the audacia that for Pliny characterizes nontraditional subjects for representation. Well beyond the realm of dogs licking wounds and boys playing dice, a curtain is another type of that *nothing* toward which images like the fine lines of Protogenes and Apelles were tending. More than that, however, a curtain is a nothing that makes the viewer think of represented images, that seems to promise a real image underneath. To be fooled in this way is to respond precisely to the aesthetic of representational illusion. It was Parrhasius, we should recall, who was praised for an art that "ostendat etiam quae occultat." The curtain with an invisible picture behind it—an image that a fellow artist believed in—is the ultimate case of revealing what it hides.

Both in the technique that Pliny praises and in the painting of the curtain, Parrhasius is, in fact, painting the invisible, for the ultimate way to "multiplicare veritatem" is to capture in an image that which cannot be seen. This step beyond representation has its own history, viewed by Pliny as contrasting with the evolution of grace and symmetria. Myron, credited as the first to "complicate truth," is said to have been unable to depict the invisible ("animi sensus non expressisse" [34.58]), as though artistic refinement were incompatible with revelation of inward values, while painters who succeed in communicating the spirit of their subjects are often criticized for their maladroit proportion or colors. The nature of this interiority for Pliny is both moral and affective: that is to say, it consists in rendering the invisible spiritual values of its (presumably human) subjects; but it also offers a dramatic representation of the psyche, which is similarly invisible in literalist terms. Thus Aristides, for instance, was "omnium primus animum pinxit et sensus hominis expressit, quae vocant Graece ἤθη item perturbationes" ("the first of all painters who depicted the mind and expressed the feelings of a human being, what the Greeks term *ethe* [character], and also the emotions" [35.98]).

But there is another, perhaps more significant invisibility in the greatest artistic images as Pliny understands them—that is, the genius of the artist: "in unius huius [Timanthis] operibus intelligitur plus semper quam pingitur et, cum sit ars summa, ingenium tamen ultra artem est" ("Indeed Timanthes is the only artist in whose works more is always implied than is depicted, and whose execution, though consummate, is always surpassed by his genius" [35.74]). Timanthes, it will be remembered, veiled the face of Agamemnon. In his work, as Pliny sees it, inwardness is preferred to artfulness, for the *summa ars* that is surpassed in this oeuvre is surely gracefulness, technique, and symmetria. But the inwardness here is not merely ethe, which has reference to the subject, but also the invisible idea of the artist that inspires the work. Pliny's aesthetic reveals itself most vividly when he relates the ontogeny of individual painters to the phylogeny of the history of art, here speaking about the conclusion of both histories:

> illud vero perquam rarum ac memoria dignum est, suprema opera artificum inperfectasque tabulas, sicut [opera Aristidis, Nicomachi, Timomachi et Apellis] in maiore admiratione esse quam perfecta, quippe in iis liniamenta reliqua ipsaeque cogitationes artificum spectantur, atque in lenocinio commendationis dolor est manus, cum id ageret, exstinctae. [35.145]
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> It is also a very unusual and memorable fact that the last works of artists and their unfinished pictures such as [he cites works by Aristides, Nicomachus, Timomachus, and Apelles] are more admired than those which they finished, because in them are seen the preliminary drawings left visible and the artists' actual thoughts, and in the midst of approval's beguilement we feel regret that the artist's hand while engaged in the work was removed by death.

The unmistakable Plinian ambivalence must not go unnoticed: the strategy of the sentence suggests that the connoisseur's pleasure at these works is virtually purchased at the expense of an early death for the artistic genius. Yet the ringing tones of the aesthetic are not muted for this sadness. What is most important in the artistic image is not the material from which it is constructed, not the memorialization of the subject, not even artfulness or beauty, nor yet the memorialized life of the artist; it is rather the artist's idea that inspired the work. In this claim, which is almost more Vasarian than Vasari, Pliny turns the work of art into a representation of its own unique idea.

ART IN THE KEY OF MYTH

"More Vasarian than Vasari": my immediate reference is to a much quoted passage from the *Life of Michelangelo* concerning the *Medici Madonna*: "Although the figure is not equal in every part, and it was left rough and showing the marks of the gradine, yet with all its imperfections there may be recognized in it the full perfection of the work."[21] I am not initiating a full-scale comparison between the two inventors of art history. Rather I conclude my discussion of the *Natural History* by admitting the extent to which it has been a reading across time—specifically, from the perspective of the Renaissance. I make no apology for this. Pliny's text, like any grandly ambitious and culture-summing work that is widely accessible for many centuries, is open to more than one reading that focuses legitimately on its actual contents. The focal points of the preceding analysis—loss, inscription, fame, representation—do not consist of a complete account either of Pliny or of the Renaissance; but they do describe a grand area of overlap between the two. Wholly other readings of these books are possible, which would probably reveal much about the Renaissance by negation.[22] I shall sum these differences up in a single issue, which could stand as an almost universal principle for what gets omitted from diachronic readings.

A Renaissance reading of Pliny, by building into itself—however tacitly—the historical distance between imperial Rome and early modern Italy, is bound to flatten all the historical distances written into the original text. To be specific: the *Natural History*, and especially its books on art, enact a complicated and by no means explicit structuring of history, not to mention geography. To talk in his own place and time about art, Pliny must juggle Greece and Rome, classical and Hellenistic (our terms, not his); he must show an awareness of the world of difference that separates, say, the *Doryphoros*, the *Laocoön*, and the Corinthian bronzes that Cicero valued.[23] He must deal with the paradox of Roman chauvinism versus an assumption such as was expressed by Virgil's Anchises that the arts are definitionally other to the *pax Romana*,[24] and along the same lines he must integrate the triumph of Rome with his disposition to claim that things were better in the past. He must construct a calendar that somehow relates ancient mythic time to the chronology of the modern Caesars. While he tells the legendary stories about the distant past of Phidias and Zeuxis, he also must reflect such realities as the downgraded native arts of Italy and the Roman fashion for assembling ostentatious collections of not always authentic imported work.[25]

All these layers of time and place are present in Pliny's world and, after a fashion, in his book. They can be teased out by modern scholarship, and that process may reveal much about first-century attitudes toward art and history. But Pliny is not writing modern scholarship, and he does not share our historicity nor our structure of categories. In short, Pliny's history of art already gives permission to readers to collapse historical and geographical distinctions. A reading such as I have offered in the previous pages abundantly takes that permission. The result is not, I would argue, ahistorical, but it is a history of art in the key of myth—that is, grounded in a set of ancient stories and large structures that seem to swallow up and account for the events of more recent times. If Pliny is already writing such a history, then his Renaissance readers are, like myself, all too glad to comply by treating the *Natural History* as more a flat map than a relief.

Material from books 34, 35, and 36 of the *Natural History* is cited, borrowed, alluded to, plagiarized, and reinvented whenever there is talk about art from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries; indeed, Pliny forms the core—the repeated and

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familiar set of cultural données—upon which any new aesthetic or historical claims are constructed.[26] But its very ubiquity renders a historical account difficult. The *Natural History* was not discovered or rediscovered during the Renaissance: it was simply present as a constant, a source of largely unimpeachable lore. Petrarch, to whose example we shall return, creates no self-regarding romance of rebirth surrounding this particular text, as he does with other works to which he accords a greater imaginative prestige—though he does lament the loss of Pliny's *History of Rome*, which he uses as an example of the unbridgeable distance that separates his age from antiquity.[27] As for the *Natural History*, he does possess a manuscript that he lavishly annotates, and he borrows from it in a wide range of ways in *De Remediis utriusque fortunae*, among other places. Indeed the history of ancient art is plagiarized from Pliny more or less verbatim and without much change from Ghiberti's *Commentari* in the 1440s to the prefatory letter by Giovanni Battista Adriani that is intended to fill in the ancient background to the revised edition of Vasari's *Lives* published in 1567. As for individual excerpts—typically, narrative anecdotes—their presence is to be noted from the days of Boccaccio and Petrarch to the age of the learned academies and treatises upon art that close the sixteenth century.

As a way of mapping this monolith, let us concern ourselves with the modalities by which the *Natural History* enters and shapes the Renaissance discourse of art. Alberti must be the logical, if not the chronological, starting point:

> Sunt qui referant Phyloclem quendam Aegyptium et Cleantem nescio quem inter primos huius artis [picturae] repertores fuisse. Aegyptii affirmant sex millibus annorum apud se picturam in usu fuisse prius quam in Graeciam esset translata. E Graecia vero in Italiam dicunt nostri venisse picturam post Marcelli victorias ex Sicilia. Sed non multum interest aut primos pictores aut picturae inventores tenuisse, quando quidem non historiam picturae ut Plinius sed artem novissime recenseamus.[28]
>
> Some say that one Philocles, an Egyptian, and a certain Cleanthes were among the first to practice this art [of painting]. The Egyptians declare that painting was practiced in their country some six thousand years before it was brought over to Greece. They say that the art was brought from Greece over to us in Italy after the victories of Marcellus in Sicily. But we do not care all that much to make claims about who the first painters or the inventors of painting were, since we are not recounting *historiam picturae* like Pliny but rather surveying this art in an entirely new way.

The ambiguities of the passage cluster about the phrase *historia picturae*, which is the activity ascribed to Pliny and against which Alberti designates his own, new approach. In fact, Alberti borrows not only the information from Pliny but also the gesture of *praeteritio*, that is, of offering an opinion while pretending to dismiss the subject. Pliny had said of his own etiology of painting, "De pictura initiis incerta nec instituti operis quaestio est" ("The question of the origin of the art of painting is uncertain and it does not belong to the plan of this work" [35.15]). But what exactly is this supposedly rejected historia picturae? *Historia* is both *history* and *story*. An account of painting that begins with its earliest Egyptian origins is a history; an account that focuses on *a certain* Philocles and *some* Cleanthes *or other* is a set of stories.[29] Alberti places himself outside either of these activities in order to define a third alternative, which appears to be a phenomenological account of the way that perception and representation actually function. By modern—or even later Quattrocento—standards, Alberti's account may be whimsical and unscientific, but that should not dim the force of his reaction to Pliny as bearer of the prevailing methodology.

Alberti is of course correct about Pliny in his punning description: Pliny writes a developmental history largely through the medium of anecdotes. And Alberti, no less than any other writer on the history of art in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, depends considerably on Pliny's history of anecdotes. Indeed his somewhat disingenuous rejection of the Plinian model becomes even more complicated when we recollect that for him the very highest achievement of the visual arts is a kind of narrative image to which he gives the ambiguous name *historia*. These much praised historiae are sometimes classical, like Timanthes' painting of Iphigenia, which we mentioned earlier, and sometimes modern, like Giotto's *Navicella*. In one passage Alberti declares that no ancient artist knew how to compose a historia; yet he implies throughout that ancient artists invented and defined this model. Pliny's history will in effect turn the culture of art itself into just such a historia as those Alberti praises in the practice of art: that is, a narrative of complex parts.

In Alberti's (partial) rejection of this kind of historia for himself, we can understand both the Plinian tradition and the new attitude promoted in *De Pictura*. Alberti's humanist project looks upon the conjunction of anecdote and history as part of an old-fashioned and exploded tradition of commonplaces. Compared to a set of physical rules for perception or representation, the endlessly repeated stories of birds being fooled by painted grapes or of artists being deferred to by emperors emerge essentially as fantasies about nonexistent things. But we should not be as quick to condemn the persistent industry of Plinian tales. As Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz demonstrated brilliantly half a century ago, the traditional stories of art and the artist—for which no document in the Western tradition is more significant than Pliny's—are not just a series of commonplaces but also a set of encoded beliefs that affect the ways art is perceived and (one would add from a late twentieth-century perspective) the ways artists design their lives and work.[30] To discard as empty cliché in the history of aesthetic writing, say, the repeated claim that an artistic image is so real that it almost speaks, is to compose a progressivist history whose advances are judged entirely by some reified form of modern scientific discourse.[31]

We are essentially dealing with another classical mythology, which comes to the Renaissance in close association with the corpus of tales about the pagan gods and which will be submitted to similar processes of reading. There are tales of origins—of painting, sculpture, and so on—whose model is Ovidian etiology. There are countless instances of multiply retold narratives—like King Demetrius's terminating his war rather than harming Protogenes' studio, or the contest of verisimilitude between Zeuxis's grapes and Parrhasius's curtain—which become the fundamental myths of art. And there are the towering individuals, like Lysippus, Zeuxis, and Apelles, who turn into the gods or epic heroes of this material, collocating not only sequences of anecdotes but also sets of characterizations and personality traits.

Examples of this procedure of mythmaking ought properly to begin with the *Natural History* itself. Pliny reports, for instance, that Apelles never let a day go by without drawing at least one line. Shortly thereafter he tells the story of the shoemaker who properly corrects the same artist's rendition of a sandal but then, puffed up with critical pride, goes on to fault the shape of the leg; to this Apelles indignantly replies that shoemakers should not surpass their fields of expertise (34.84–85). Both of these stories, Pliny announces, have issued in proverbs—"nulla dies sine linea" and "ne sutor ultra crepidam" (the latter continues in our language as "shoemaker, stick to your last"). Roman readers were doubtless familiar with the proverbs and could see them coming as the anecdotes unfolded. Petrarch, for his part, glossed both these punch lines by writing *Proverbium* in the margin of his manuscript, though it is unclear whether he was recording something he already knew or discovering and thereby disseminating an old proverb afresh.[32] Whether in the first or the fourteenth century, the biography of an artist attains an originary function in determining the very language as it is spoken in the culturally definitive realm of the proverb. Pliny's direct reference to this operation will encourage later readers to proverbialize many more narratives of ancient art in their attempt to speak the language of antiquity and naturalize themselves within it.

As it happens, the Renaissance has powerful and venerable models for naturalizing ancient stories into its own culture. We may take the example of Ghiberti, who in a more or less exact translation tells the story of Apelles and Protogenes drawing ever finer lines on a panel (N.H. 35.81–83). At the conclusion he adds his own view:

> Tengo che questo che Prinio scrive veramente può essere vero, ma molto mi meraviglio sencio in costoro tanta profondità [di scientia] d'arte et con tutte le parti del pittore [et di geometria] et dello scultore, mi pare certamente una debile dimonstratione e'ssì fatto auctore questo recita la pruova di costoro, parlo come scultore et certo credo dovere essere così. . . . Appelle compuose et publicò libri continenti dell'arte della pictura, essendo ito a Rodi a casa Protogine trouando la tauola apparechiata et uolendo mostrare Appelle la nobiltà dell'arte della pictura et quanto egli era egregio in essa, tolse il pennello et compuose una conclusione in prospettiua appartenente all'arte della pictura.[33]

> I maintain that that which Pliny writes could actually be true. But I am much amazed, finding in those people such depth of knowledge about art including all aspects of the painter and of geometry, as well as sculpture, that it seems to

> me a weak demonstration if this story is supposed to prove that, I speak as a sculptor and assuredly believe it has to be so. . . . Apelles wrote and published books about the art of painting, having gone to Rhodes to the house of Protogenes and finding the table set, and he wanting to demonstrate the nobility of the art of painting and to what extent he was himself exceptional in it, he took his brush and composed a problem in perspective relative to the art of painting.

He goes on to detail each of the finer lines as increasingly learned and perfect solutions to the problem of perspective. Ghiberti swerves from Pliny by locating in the ancient story a validating etiology for the most up-to-date and advanced development in the science of art. That is not so surprising, given Ghiberti's wish to establish Apelles as a theoretician and to identify himself with that activity.[34]

What is perhaps more interesting is the *mode* of Ghiberti's thinking, for his relation to Pliny's anecdote is precisely that of a modern mythographer to ancient myth. He narrates the event straight and declares that it *might* be true, but only if understood by means of a specialized hermeneutic system. In place of biblical exegesis, which qualifies mythographers for their task, Ghiberti offers his experience as sculptor and theoretician, enabling him to traverse Pliny's ignorance (or secrecy) and unlock the truth hidden in the ancient story, known specially by himself and Apelles. Pliny, in fact, may offer the original grounding for the special exegetical role that Ghiberti assigns himself: the panel with the lines was later considered extremely valuable, as Ghiberti translates it, "spetialmente da' pictori et dagli statuarij et da quelli erano periti" (especially by painters, sculptors, and experts).[35]

Whatever the particular utilities of the Apelles-Protogenes anecdote—and they turn out to be great—this exegetical process demonstrates that the artist legends tend to have one of the crucial requisites for both myth and mythography: a core of meaning that is elliptical, empty, or mysterious. The panel with the lines, as both Pliny and Ghiberti tell us, was burned in a fire: we will never know what it really looked like. And even if we could see it, its nonrepresentational subject would render it especially unrevealing. But equally elliptical is Parrhasius' curtain or the Helen that Zeuxis makes up out of five separate women or (perhaps most notoriously) the canon of measurement that is credited to Polyclitus. All these stories inspire mythological hermeneutics because they demand completion; and in their various ways, Renaissance writers on art and Renaissance artists (quite often the same people) feel the need to enter the stories by way of completing them.

In another instance, more than one Renaissance individual enters a Plinian anecdote:

> He is not universal who does not love equally all the elements in painting, as when one who does not like landscapes holds them to be a subject for cursory and straightforward investigation—just as our Botticelli said such study was of

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> no use because by merely throwing a sponge soaked in a variety of colours at a wall there would be left on the wall a stain in which could be seen a beautiful landscape. He was indeed right that in such a stain various inventions are to be seen. I say that a man may seek out in such a stain heads of men, various animals, battles, rocks, seas, clouds, woods and other similar things. It is like the sound of bells which can mean whatever you want it to. But although these stains may supply inventions they do not teach you how to finish any detail. And the painter in question makes very sorry landscapes.[36]

The writer is Leonardo, and the reference is to Pliny's anecdotes about Protogenes and Nealces (*N.H.* 35.103–4), who overcome difficulties of artifice in representing animals by the accident of hurling their painting sponges at the panel they are working on. Once again, the swerve from Pliny is itself interesting. Pliny's artists are depicting the foam that issues from the mouths of beasts. It is therefore quite natural that a randomly thrown sponge might leave the appropriate impression, because foam is itself variegated and formless and because the anger of the artist who throws the sponge (at least in Protogenes' case) replicates the mood of the foaming beast. None of this is true of landscape painting. As with Ghiberti's exegesis of the Apelles story, the Renaissance here goes the ancient text one better on its own terms. Pliny had introduced the subject of the sponge as an example of fortune intruding upon the world of artistic skill. Leonardo expands the role of fortune into a much larger principle—a sort of Gombrichian "beholder's share," that is, the way perceivers create the images they perceive.[37] Not surprisingly, Leonardo finds this possibility disturbing; and though he cannot deny it on the part of the viewer, he scorns it in regard to the education of the artist.

But once again, it is the system of translation from ancient story to modern artist that is particularly revealing—all the more so when two modern artists are involved. Neither Leonardo nor Botticelli makes any reference to Pliny, though there are elsewhere abundant clues testifying to Leonardo's familiarity with the *Natural History*.[38] Botticelli's comment, whatever its authenticity and its missing context, speaks to a domestication of the Plinian anecdote: the myth has been detached from its ancient past and become a transhistorical proof or demonstration of an artistic principle. Botticelli and his contemporaries may enter the narrative at will and displace Protogenes or Nealces. The myth has also become an evident commonplace in the conversation of artists at the same time as it retains vestiges of ancient and incontrovertible truth. It is this latter quality that troubles Leonardo, who must go to considerable lengths to dislodge its authority. If the Plinian myths are universalized and made anonymous, they are also reinvented and transferred to specific modern artists. To continue for a moment with the sponge story, Vasari reports of Piero di Cosimo that "he would sometimes stop to gaze at a wall against which sick people had been for a long time discharging their spittle, and from this he would picture to himself battles of horsemen, and the most fantastic cities and widest landscapes that were ever seen; and he did the same with the clouds in the sky."[39]

From Protogenes to Botticelli to Piero (or Pliny to Leonardo to Vasari) this story is increasingly attaching itself to the eccentric painter. On another mythic front, the number of artists whose work, like that of Zeuxis, deceives animals (and occasionally human beings) is legion.[40] A somewhat smaller number (e.g., Titian, Michelangelo) have experiences with emperors and popes that resemble those of Apelles with Alexander.[41] A somewhat less famous story concerning Apelles deals with his success in restoring himself to the good graces of Ptolemy by drawing a perfect likeness of the scoundrel who had slandered him to the emperor (35.89). Several derivative treatises on art from the middle of the sixteenth century narrate this tale in its original Plinian form. But it then appears in Armenini's *De' veri precetti della pittura* as a lengthy narrative from the life of Il Sodoma, who is insulted by a Spanish soldier in the garrison at Siena and succeeds not only in perfectly identifying his assailant in a drawing but also in ingratiating himself with the Spanish prince as a result of the talents he thereby exhibits. Vasari, incidentally, does not tell this story in his biography of Il Sodoma but offers a variant of it in the life of Filippo Lippi, who is captured by Moorish pirates and endears himself to their captain by drawing his portrait—an art, Vasari tells us, unknown to the Moors.[42]

The familiarity (not to say banality) of this procedure, common to myths of many different types in many different cultures, should not lead us to overlook its significance. Those who tell stories about Titian or Il Sodoma that are identical to stories Pliny told about Apelles are undoubtedly aware of the earlier versions, since their familiarity with the *Natural History* is beyond dispute, as is that of many members of their audience. To us, the doubling casts doubt on the veracity of both ancient and modern narratives, and by way of explanation we are moved to leave history behind in favor of psychology, sociology, or anthropology. Renaissance habits of mind, on the other hand, seem to find in the repetition something more like a confirmation. Once again, we are observing what happens when the materials of art history become mythology: that is, they come to be understood typologically. The recurrence of these events—even if we cannot understand it as the working out of a divine plan such as that which links Old and New Testaments or pagan and Christian narratives—tends to confirm both their accuracy and their enduring importance. More specifically, this recurrence validates the modern artist at the same time as it helps to construct an unbroken tradition.

If the Plinian heritage is narrative or mythological, it is also (like many other such traditions, including mythology) *rhetorical* in its later appropriation. Michael Baxandall has demonstrated the complexity and significance of rhetoric in the development of the visual arts and their languages during the early Renaissance, but it is worth restating and extending his valuable observations in regard to the *Natural History* in particular.[43] The ways Pliny will be used rhetorically are themselves written into the

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original work. Even in its own terms and time, the *Natural History* is an act of persuasion: not only the celebration and canonization of a list of great artists but also a polemic concerning the glories of nature and tradition as they are threatened by modern decadence. If the material is *ab ovo* rhetoricized, it will certainly not turn "straight" in the Renaissance: that is why Plinian lore is less often repeated as a complete history in itself and more frequently cannibalized to furnish exempla for other histories and other acts of persuasion. Along these lines the *Natural History* will provide for the Renaissance a storehouse of instances upon which an epideictic rhetoric is built, whether the thing being praised is art, a particular artist, humanism, or the example of antiquity.

This praise can often be a matter of some ambiguity. In Pliny's own work we have also seen how complicated, not to say self-contradicting, the polemic can be, when praise for great artistry gets tangled up with denunciations of high technology and aesthetic hedonism. In similar ways—though the particular issues may vary—Plinian materials will find themselves in Renaissance contexts where different rhetorical stances contradict one another. There are many instances of individual stories that function in multiple ways—like the sponge throwing that seems to support quite opposite aesthetic opinions as refracted through Botticelli and Leonardo. But this is a matter best viewed in terms of the entire project of praising ancient aesthetics rather than individual stories.

This project may be best observed in a dialogue from Petrarch's *De Remediis utriusque fortunae* between Gaudium and Ratio, which provides one of the first extensive redactions (perhaps *the* first) of material from Pliny's history of art in modern writing, including information concerning the origins of the arts and their place in Rome's public culture, a description of the patronage circle surrounding Alexander the Great, comparisons of various artistic media, and a discussion of the relation between materials and artistry. Most of what Petrarch reproduces from the *Natural History* are claims for the importance of the visual arts. Pliny is credited by name with declaring painting to be the basis of the liberal arts. He is credited indirectly with demonstrating the high value that Augustus, Vespasian, and other emperors and nobles had placed upon the arts, as well as "the great fame of the artists, based not on the babble of the crowd or on the silent works themselves, but loudly proclaimed and celebrated in the works of established authors."[44] Petrarch also repeats Plinian assertions concerning the antiquity of the arts, the high educational standing of practitioners, the power of artistic verisimilitude, and the specially humble nobility of modeling in clay.

What is not evident from this summary is that all these exempla of praise are woven into an argument that condemns the practice and, especially, the appreciation of art. The context is Reason's attack on Pleasure, in which the larger rhetorical claim—fundamentally Platonic—declares that aesthetic pleasure, specifically *visual* aesthetic pleasure, is fetishistic; that is, it substitutes for the pleasure that comes with contemplating God's real creation and may act as an obstacle to that activity. (The text does at one point wrestle with the possibility that artistic images might, in the Platonic way, facilitate our love of God's creation, but it then finesses the whole argument by sliding over to the biblical injunction against graven images.) Petrarch, we might surmise, finds something uncanny and irreligious in all those stories of deceitful representations—grapes that fool birds, curtains that fool artists—which Pliny adduces in praise of their makers. One might further see in this reaction early signs of the Renaissance paragone. After all, Petrarch's own medium cannot be said to substitute for God's reality, while the fact that the visual arts in comparison with the verbal seem to have a more direct appeal to a single bodily sense makes them a convenient target for charges of unregenerate hedonism.

But I am less interested in decoding Petrarch's message than in observing the process of his rhetoric:

> You take delight in the pencil strokes and colors which please because of price and skillfulness—their variety and artistic composition. And you are fascinated by the lifelike gestures, the movement in these inanimate and immobile pictures, the faces jutting out of posts, and the portraits that seem about to breathe and make you think that they might utter words. The danger here lies in the fact that great minds, in particular, are captivated by these things—and what a peasant will pass off with brief enjoyment, a man of intellect may continue to venerate with sighs of admiration. This is a complicated matter, and our task here is not to inquire into the origins of art and its development, nor the wonders of its works, the dedication of the artists, the mad extravagance of princes, and the enormity of the prices which brought paintings from far across the oceans to Rome and hung them in the temples of the gods, the bedrooms of the emperors, on public avenues, and in galleries. Nor was this sufficient. The Romans themselves had to apply their right hands, as well as their minds, which should have been applied to greater tasks, to the pursuit of painting. This the most eminent philosophers of Greece had done long before. As a result, you regard painting as more closely related to nature's creations, above all other handicrafts, and, if you can believe Pliny, the Greeks even assigned it to the front rank of the liberal arts.
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> But I pass by these things, because, in a way, they are contrary to my intent to be brief and to my present purpose; they might, in fact, seem to contribute to the very illness I promised to cure, and to excuse the lunacy of connoisseurs by the sheer beauty of the artifacts described.[45]

Nearly all of Pliny's grounds for celebrating the visual arts are packed into this gigantic parenthesis—or what is declared at the end to have been a parenthesis—in, once again, a gesture of praeteritio, pretending to silence on a subject about which some decisive opinions have been uttered. Pliny faced the same problem, for instance, when he introduced marble sculpture as the "praecipua morum insania" ("the prime folly in our behaviour") and proceeded to wax rapturous over masterpieces like the *Laocoön*.

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For both authors, and many later ones, the exemplarity offered by the ancient artists turns out to be easily overwhelmed by the things themselves—for Pliny the actual art objects, for Petrarch and the Renaissance the stories about them. To give Petrarch his due, he knows that his rhetoric has got out of hand, that the attempt to frame each article of Pliny's praise in pejorative terms fails to suppress the wonderment of the original. This may, of course, be no failure at all: Petrarch may have a more complicated strategy. Or else, as is yet more likely, his own cultural attitudes may be too deeply self-contradictory to result in a clean strategy at all. After all, in this dialogue Gaudium, the art lover who speaks only in one-sentence banalities that refer to unreflective enjoyment, has certainly not read Pliny; it is left to Ratio both to celebrate and to condemn the power of art. Later writers will not always feel as guilty about artistic pleasures, or as competitive. But that will not prevent them from finding in Plinian materials a rhetoric that inevitably threatens to get out of hand—that is, to menace the established superiority of the Christian over the pagan or the verbal over the visual. Material that is always rhetoricized always threatens to take on a life of its own.

What we have been observing so far is rhetoric turned on itself. More fundamental and more universal is the way rhetoric turns on other things. To declare the uses of Plinian material rhetorical, in other words, is to say that it furnishes a set of exempla that may be transferred from their original context to other arguments or discourses. Whatever Pliny's original strategies of praise may have been, the Renaissance epideictic project that exploits the *Natural History* attempts to translate ancient history to modern analogy. Citing the high prices that Pliny quotes for works of art alongside the story of Demetrius' abandoning his attempt to conquer Rhodes, Alberti declares that "Pliny collected many other such things in which you can see that good painters have always been greatly honoured by all."[46] Lodovico Dolce, at the other end of the Renaissance, has Aretino praise Raphael over Michelangelo by reference to Pliny's account of Apelles, who bested *his* rivals through the unique qualities of his art.[47] In the operations of rhetoric and exemplarity between these instances, there is considerable divergence. Alberti offers a barrage of ritually repeated anecdotes all proving a simple and stable point about the importance of art. Dolce, on the other hand, captures the subtle rhetoricity of the original text, which locates Apelles in competition with contemporary rivals (like Raphael in regard to Michelangelo); he goes on to worry the very quality that sets him apart, referring to it first as *venustas*, then as *venus* (a complicated name and abstraction, to be sure), and finally as the Greek *charis*—all rendered as though in the voice of Apelles himself. It is therefore no surprise that Dolce ends up having to call this quality "la venustà, che è quel non so che, che tanto suole aggradire, così ne' pittori come ne' poeti, in guisa che empie l'animo d'altrui d'infinito diletto, non sapendo da qual parte esca quello che a noi tanto piace" (that loveliness, namely, that certain something which has a way of being so pleasing, among both the painters and the poets, to the extent that it fills the souls of other people with infinite pleasure, without our being able to know whence comes that which pleases us so); as a way out of all this je ne sais quoi, Dolce refers the reader to Petrarch's description of Laura (*Rime* 215) for clarification—itself endowing her beauty, specifically her eyes, with a *non so che* that can scarcely set the matter on firm ground.[48]

This kind of epideictic gesture moves quickly beyond the rhetoric of persuasion into the rhetoric of figural language and, more than that, into a self-consciousness about language. The *Natural History* itself shows the way. Throughout his account of ancient art, Pliny lays explicit stress on the problems of terminology; and the passages in which he invents terms or calls attention to them, or throws up his hands and slides over to a Greek word, are frequently repeated in the Renaissance.[49] Plinian praise, in other words, comes down to the moderns already embodied in a language that calls attention to its own limitations—that is, of words attempting to capture images—as well as to the paragone that exists among different languages and different discourses. Apelles' venustas, as interpreted by Dolce, ends up invoking a different language in the most literal sense; then it slides from the world of images to that of poetry. This is no isolated example. As a massive verbal construction, the *Natural History* is by its very nature likely to feed into the problematics of differing discourses.

Pliny's text also becomes the art-historical term in a set of interrelations with other, more explicitly rhetorical works from antiquity that make use of the same narratives. An especially noteworthy instance is that most widely diffused rhetorical exemplum of all, the tale of Zeuxis and the painting of Helen commissioned by the citizens of Croton, a narrative found in the *Natural History* but more fully rendered in Cicero's *De inventione*.[50] The story of the painter who creates a single work of art by composing five separate but partial real-life models becomes a central paradigm for Renaissance accounts of some quite divergent activities in divergent disciplines. Cicero, who tells the story first and at greatest length, uses it as what seems a disproportionately bulky justification for a rather simple point about his own use of multiple sources rather than a single model. That turns out to be a methodological issue of almost obsessional interest to all sorts of Renaissance humanists, as witness the much discussed use of the analogy to the bee, who creates honey by mixing the pollen from many flowers.[51] Petrarch's bee—itself a grain of pollen plucked from Seneca—may be wholly logocentric, and Cicero may himself have had no notions of visual theory when he made a similar point by reference to the Crotonian painting. Yet the attachment of the name Zeuxis to this argument in rhetoric renders it a living piece of the history, theory, and practice of the visual arts. From Alberti to Raphael to Vasari (not to mention the inevitable Dolce), Zeuxis' painting of Helen will be used to define and complicate the nature of visual representation, the sources of artistic inspiration, and the means by which painters form their individual styles. It maintains this position of authority in part because it is woven into a Plinian narrative concerning both the specific qualities of Zeuxis and a larger historical argument about the place of verisimilitude in the development of a visual aesthetic. Yet the story also remains attached to its origins in

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the history of verbal discourse. It thus maintains a constant double utility, providing intellectual authority to writers on visual subjects and representational authority to writers on verbal subjects.

All these modalities—narrative, myth, rhetoric—apply themselves to the Plinian *story*, whereas a different set of approaches in the Renaissance is concerned with the Plinian *history*. It has been widely observed that the historical narrative offered in the *Natural History* exercised great influence. A teleological account that moves from primitive attempts at mimesis to marvelously successful replication to aesthetic distinctiveness that transcends mere copying—each of these moves associated with particular break-through geniuses—this plot seems all but inevitable post-Pliny. But is it *propter* Pliny? Rather than hypothesize alternative histories, it seems appropriate to understand the structural nature of this history, for which I turn to a widely read contemporary of Pliny's, the rhetorician Quintilian, who draws frequent analogies to the visual arts in his *Institutio oratoria*, as we saw in connection with Myron's *Discobolus*. Toward the end of his lengthy account of oratory, Quintilian turns to the problem he calls *genus orationis*, which H. E. Butler renders as the "kind of style."[52] It is reasonable enough that the translator places quotation marks around his own phrase, because style is a problematic concept here and not to be taken for granted as the English equivalent of whatever Quintilian is talking about.

In fact, the whole point of the passage is to define, describe, or invent the category under consideration:

> The question of the "kind of style" to be adopted remains to be discussed. This was described in my original division of my subject as forming its third portion: for I promised that I would speak of the art, the artist and the work. But since oratory is the work both of rhetoric and of the orator, and since it has many forms, as I shall show, the art and the artist are involved in the consideration of all these forms. But they differ greatly from one another, and not merely in *species*, as statue differs from statue, picture from picture, and speech from speech, but in *genus* as well, as, for example Etruscan statues differ from Greek and Asiatic orators from Attic.[53]

Quintilian is recording the breakdown of his own *divisio*—especially significant, since his very purpose is to make tight logical distinctions. In this quandary, he turns first to the long-established distinction between genus and species and then—at some length—to the record of painting and sculpture as practiced by the famous Greek artists of the past. This body of traditional material offers Quintilian a great scheme of differences: Zeuxis knew how to represent light and shade, while Parrhasius was the master of the line; Polyclitus triumphed in gracefulness, Phidias in grandeur.

Crucial to this set of distinctions is that they are not purely hierarchical. The varying genera are not understood as simply better or worse; rather, they legitimize a free play of alternatives. Separate kinds of work have "their own following of admirers, with the result that the perfect orator has not yet been found, a statement which perhaps may be extended to all arts, not merely because some qualities are more evident in some artists than in others, but because one single form will not satisfy all critics, a fact which is due in part to conditions of time or place, in part to the taste and ideals of individuals."[54] This last set of determinants is vital to the structuring of the argument and will take us finally back to Pliny. Quintilian does not design his claims as historical: as a rhetorician, he is far more concerned with taxonomies than with teleologies. Yet when he comes to enumerate the varieties of visual style, many of his assertions are based in chronology. Early work is relatively coarse and stiff (though he does not dismiss it), and only when one arrives at the high point in artistic development is difference rendered largely without value judgment. The model of evolutionary development through time is all but inescapably joined to the more synchronic model of legitimate difference among artistic practitioners; the two together depend on a narrative in which great individuals appear in a generational pattern of their own. We can call these three structures art history, art criticism, and the lives of the artists.[55] Or we can be more cautious and say that however we define the various modern discourses of the visual arts, their origins are written in the first century and subsequently reread and rewritten.

Some of the most influential arguments about the conceptual origins of the artistic Renaissance have observed how Pliny's (or Quintilian's) narrative is retold in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[56] By the 1380s, when Filippo Villani composes an originary catalogue of great Florentines, including artists from Cimabue to Taddeo Gaddi, there exists already *in nuce* an account of the progressive improvements wrought by Giotto.[57] The Dante version—subjected to much commentary over the half century following the appearance of the *Commedia*—has Giotto eclipsing the once great fame of Cimabue:

Credette Cimabue ne la pintura
tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido,
sì che la fama di colui è scura.

Cimabue thought to hold the field in painting,
and now Giotto has the cry,
so that the other's fame is dim.

The Boccaccio version refers only to Giotto, "avendo egli quella arte ritornata in luce, che molti secoli sotto gli error d'alcuni, che più a dilettar gli occhi degl'ignoranti che a compiacere allo 'nteletto de' savi dipigneano, era stata sepulta" ("who has brought back to the light this art, which had for many an age lain buried under the errors of certain folk, who painted more to divert the eyes of the ignorant than to please the understanding of the judicious").[58] It is noteworthy that both these loci classici place the arts on a time line without specifying which aesthetic developments count as progress. They may be said to be implicit in the *Decameron* story, where Giotto is

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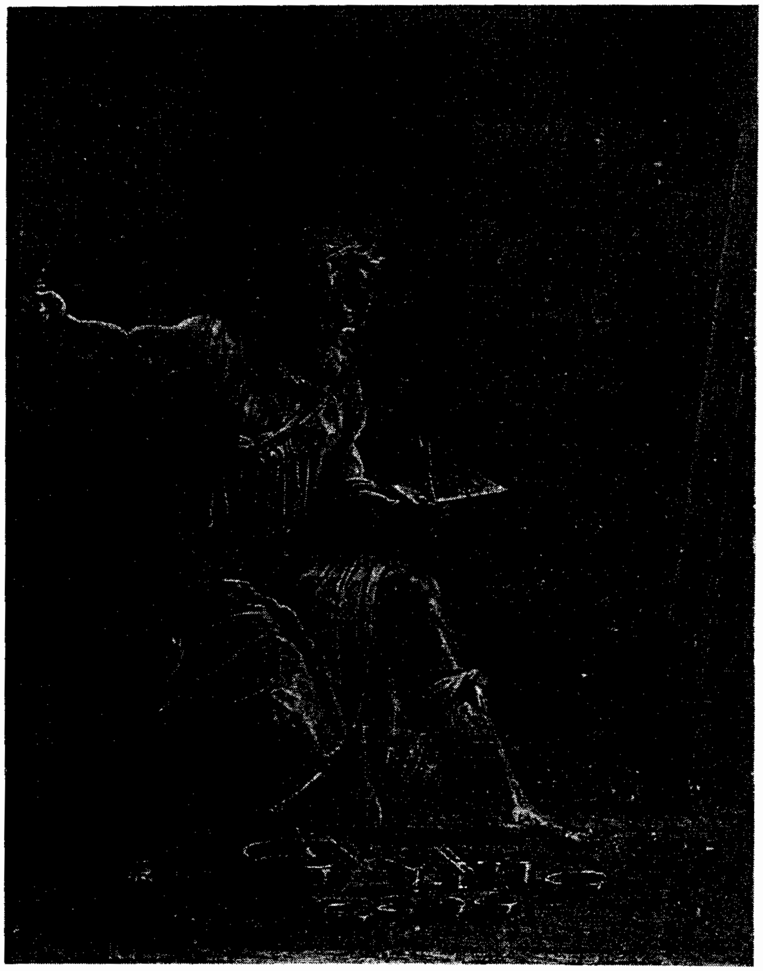
praised in traditional fashion for creating images that can be mistaken for the real thing. The pattern starts to emerge as explicitly Plinian when Villani prefixes his Florentine history of painters with an uncommented-upon sequence of ancient artists. A century later, in his similarly patriotic project of writing a preface to Dante's *Commedia*, Cristoforo Landino (who had translated the *Natural History*) goes the final step. He begins with the earliest progressive developments in Pliny's narrative—tracing a shadow; using a limited number of colors—and segues to a detailed account of Florentine art based on the familiar mix of functional differentiation, chronological progress, and great-man theory.[59]

Both Ghiberti and Landino recount the progressive details of the origins of the arts; but, when arriving at the sequence of the most famous ancient names, they tend to imitate Pliny the catalogue rather than Pliny the teleologue. The antique narrative serves as a model, but the moment of progress is displaced onto Cimabue and Giotto. The modern history of art begins with the demise of this classical magnificence in the Middle Ages and on its rebirth—a concept that is also Plinian, as witness the often quoted "cessavit deinde ars ac rursus olimpiade CLVI revixit" ("after that the art languished, and it revived again in the 156th Olympiad" [34.52]).[60] The terms of the rebirth are drawn from a Plinian history that is far more extended and technical in the way it distributes the gradual improvements in verisimilitude and style.

It is not so clear, as it has sometimes been claimed, that the fifteenth-century writers convert the developmental account in the *Natural History* into a full-scale history of art in their own time. Villani's Cimabue "antiquatam picturam . . . arte et ingenio revocavit" ("summoned back with skill and talent the decayed art of painting"), while Ghiberti's Giotto "fu inventore e trovatore di tanta doctrina la quale era stata sepulta circa d'anni 600" ("was inventor and discoverer of so much learning that had been buried some six hundred years"). But once both writers get past the Cimabue-Giotto nexus, they offer a synchronic description of difference rather than a time line of progress. Villani, for instance, has Maso di Banco as master of beauty and then the famously apocryphal Stefano as master of verisimilitude—precisely the Plinian opposition but rendered as rhetorical alternatives and not as chronology (if anything, the chronology is backward).[61] The same holds for Ghiberti, who adds many details to the varying skills of artists but does not place them in a progressive relation. Landino is yet more schematic, granting each painter or sculptor a distinctive talent without reference to any teleology: Andrea del Castagno is a draughtsman, Uccello a perspectivist, Fra Angelico a master of gracefulness, Pesellino a miniaturist. Rarely before the time of Vasari, in other words, can we detect a full-scale historical or evolutionary narrative.[62]

For the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, then, art history may resemble an evolutionary account but is more likely to consist of a one-time developmental big bang, wrought by a great man (occasionally with the help of a precursor) and leading to a period of artistic production differentiated less by linear improvements than by a series of legitimized alternative skills or styles. The reigning model is not a grand continuum of history but a set of individual encounters across a single great divide. In a



2.3. Giorgio Vasari, *Protogenes Throwing the Sponge*, monochrome tempera, 1548, Casa del Vasari, Arezzo

sense, this is the inevitable paradox of historicism. If the moderns are living under the influence of an ancient originary text—in this case, Pliny—does that text merely structure their own history, or does it also equip them to observe how their history swerves from the past example?[63] When Ghiberti organizes the calendar of art history by Olympiads, which are appropriate to Pliny but have no reference in Quattrocento Florence, or when the pseudonymous Prospettivo Milanese, writing about a visit to Rome in 1500, describes the Domus Aurea grotteschi as painted by "Cimabuba Apelle Giotte," it is clear enough that ancient example has produced an unhistoricist history.[64] Yet the issue becomes less risible when we recognize how much of this history is being composed by artists themselves. At the beginning of the Renaissance Petrarch will write "Nota tu, Francisce," or some other encouraging message, to himself at several points in the margins of his *Natural History* manuscript where Pliny offers pithy sententiae of use to an artist. At the end of this period, Vasari will decorate his house with scenes from Pliny (figs. 2.3, 2.4) as a kind of identification and inspiration.[65] Modern artists (and some of the humanists who write about them) place themselves in a Plinian framework as part of a project of self-definition and self-promotion that, to

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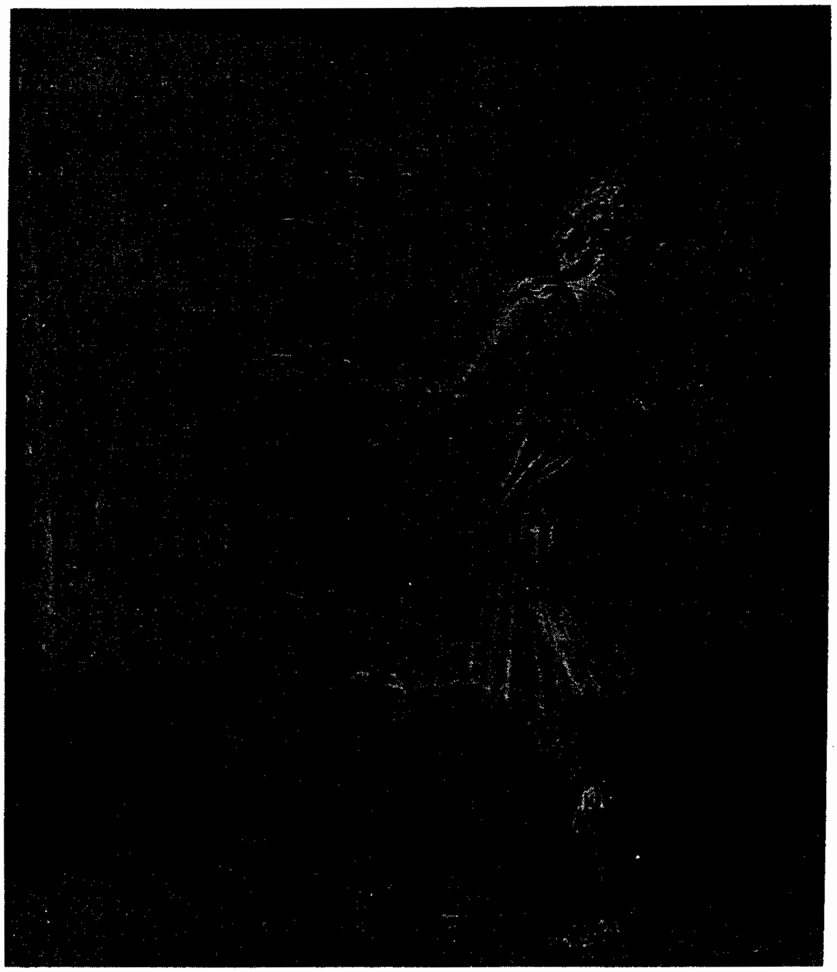
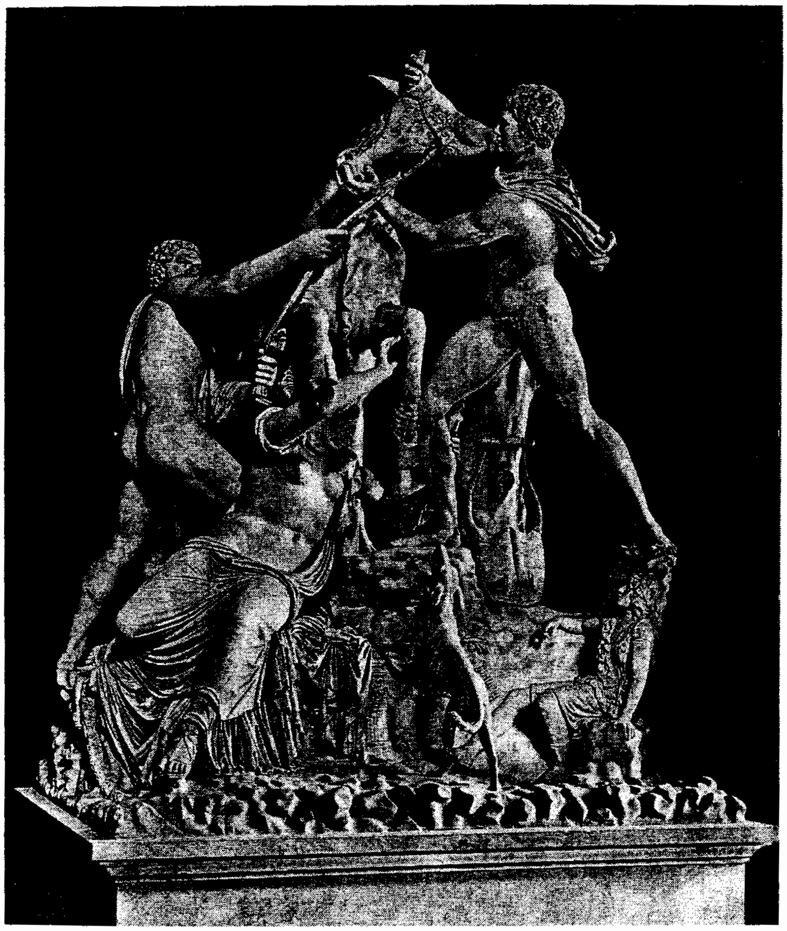


2.4. Giorgio Vasari, *Timanthes Painting Iphigenia*, monochrome tempera, 1548, Casa del Vasari, Arezzo

be sure, depends on history but also acts to erase some of what we would consider historical distance. Pliny's stories, his history, and his historiography are all susceptible to being objects of an unmediated, and therefore, by our standards, naive, face-to-face encounter between past art and present artists.

"CERTAIN ANTIQUITIES CITED BY PLINY"

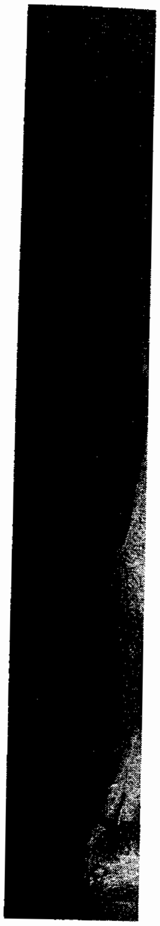
Finally, Pliny is also the great enabler of that more literal encounter with sculpture. It should be said at once that this is no simple or straightforward relation. In the pages of the *Natural History* so extensively analyzed above, not only does Pliny fail to mention the rediscovered statues by name (with the exception of the *Laocoön*), but his most salient and most often repeated assertions about art, whether historical, theoretical, or biographical, generally have little direct reference to the kinds of objects that the Renaissance excavated. Marble sculpture in general gets a relatively small share of Pliny's attention. More is devoted to bronzes, of which the moderns saw few, and more still to painting, of which they saw nothing. Nor is the matter merely statistical. As we



2.5. *Farnese Bull*, Roman marble, second century A.D., Museo Nazionale, Naples

have already seen, marble brings out Pliny's greatest moral qualms about the arts as luxury goods. Bronze interests him because it is more technological as well as less pretentious than marble, while painting occupies the greatest spotlight (and these proportions increase in the postclassical reception), because it raises the most complex questions concerning representation. One can note these facts and argue that they render Pliny irrelevant to the subject of this book. But given that the theory and practice of the arts during the Renaissance embraces all the media, I would suggest rather a kind of hourglass-shaped model, according to which the complete range of the visual arts in antiquity stands in parallel to the complete range produced by the moderns, with the meeting point being that small subset of ancient art that is still visible and consisting mostly of marble fragments. It is the *Natural History* that fills in the empty spaces.

In fact, we are in a position to draw quite a few interesting lines of connection between objects rediscovered in the Renaissance and passages in Pliny, though it is noteworthy how rarely such links were made before the later years of the sixteenth century. Eventually it becomes almost commonplace. The Niobid hoard unearthed in 1583 is identified with the statue that Pliny declares to be an example of uncertain authorship ("par haesitatio est in templo Apollinis Sosiani, Niobae liberos morientes Scopas an Praxiteles fecerit"; "equally there is doubt as to whether the Dying Children



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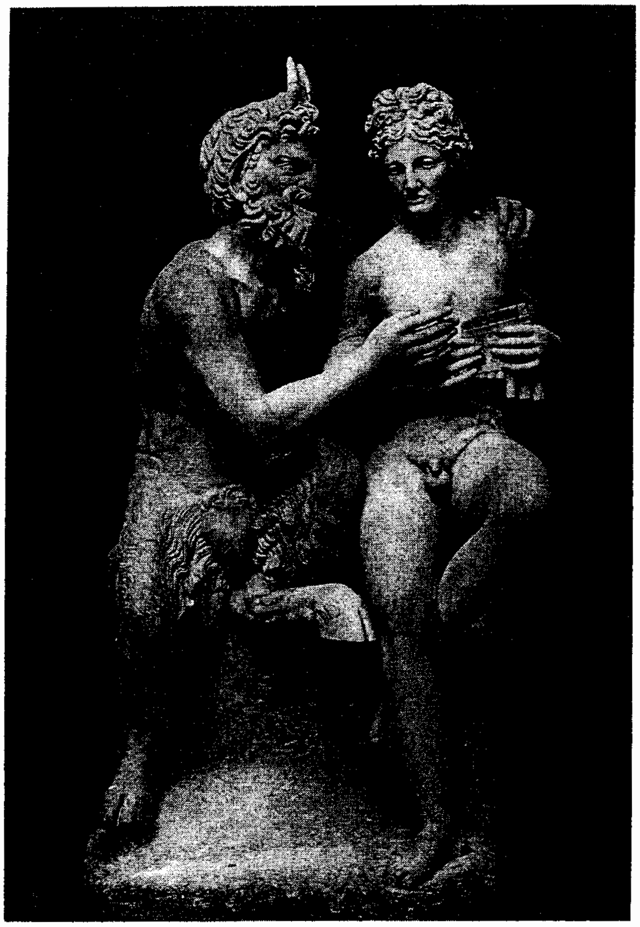
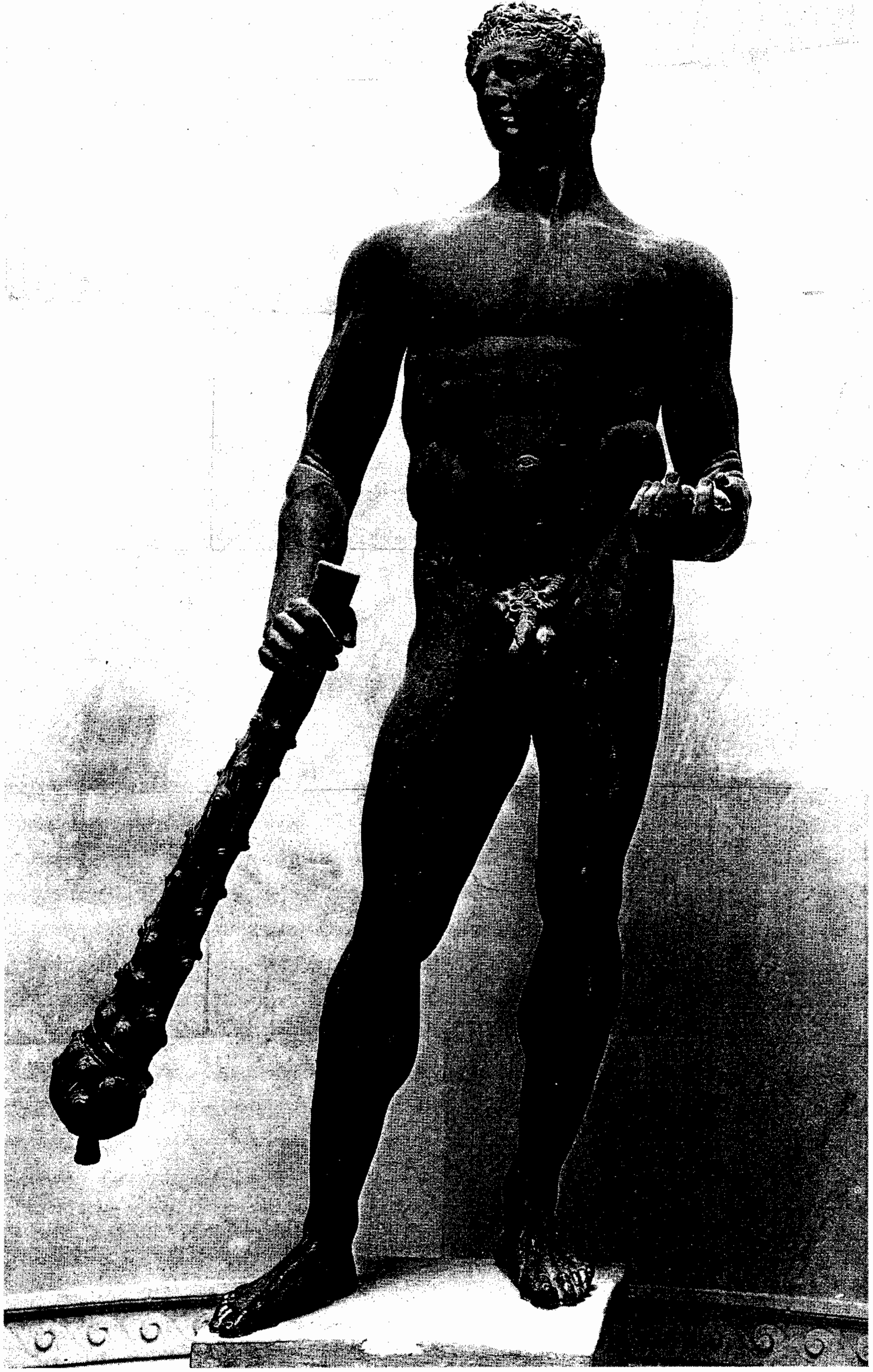


2.6. *Pan and Apollo*, marble, Roman copy of Hellenistic original, Museo delle Terme, Rome

of Niobe in the temple of the Sosian Apollo was the work of Scopas or Praxiteles" [36.28]), and this conjunction initiates a centuries-long quixotic debate as to whether the artist is Praxiteles or Scopas.[66] The *Farnese Bull* (fig. 2.5), found in 1545 at the Baths of Caracalla, is at first given various, usually Hercules-related, titles; but by the time of its extensive restoration in the 1580s, it has clearly been correlated with Pliny's description of a work by Tauriscus and Apollonius of Rhodes, "Dirce et taurus vinculumque ex eodem lapide" ("Dirce and the bull with its rope, all carved from the same block of stone" [36.34]).[67] Not that Pliny was without authenticating value before this time. Francesco Albertini (1510) looked at some Vatican fragments and identified them as coming from Polyclitus's *Astragalizontes*. Ulisse Aldrovandi (1550), enthusing about a *Pan and Apollo* (fig. 2.6) in the Cesi sculpture garden, declares, "This is one of those most beautiful works that one sees in Rome. And perhaps it is one of the three Satyrs which Pliny celebrates so much," thus responding to a Plinian passage (36.29) that is confusing about the nature and number of statues but not about their fame and value.[68]

That these somewhat improbable identifications could be proposed renders all the more surprising those Plinian references that are *not* associated with new discoveries, as, for instance:



2.7. *Hercules Standing*, colossal gilt bronze, Roman copy of Lysippean original, second century B.C., Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome

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> Fuisse autem statuariam artem familiarem Italiae quoque et vetustam, indicant Hercules ab Euandro sacratus, ut produnt, in foro boario, qui triumphalis vocatur atque per triumphos vestitur habitu triumphali. [34.33]
>
> That the art of statuary was familiar to Italy also and of long standing there is indicated by the statue of Hercules in the Cattle Market said to have been dedicated by Evander, which is called "Hercules Triumphant," and on the occasion of triumphal processions is arrayed in triumphal vestments.[69]

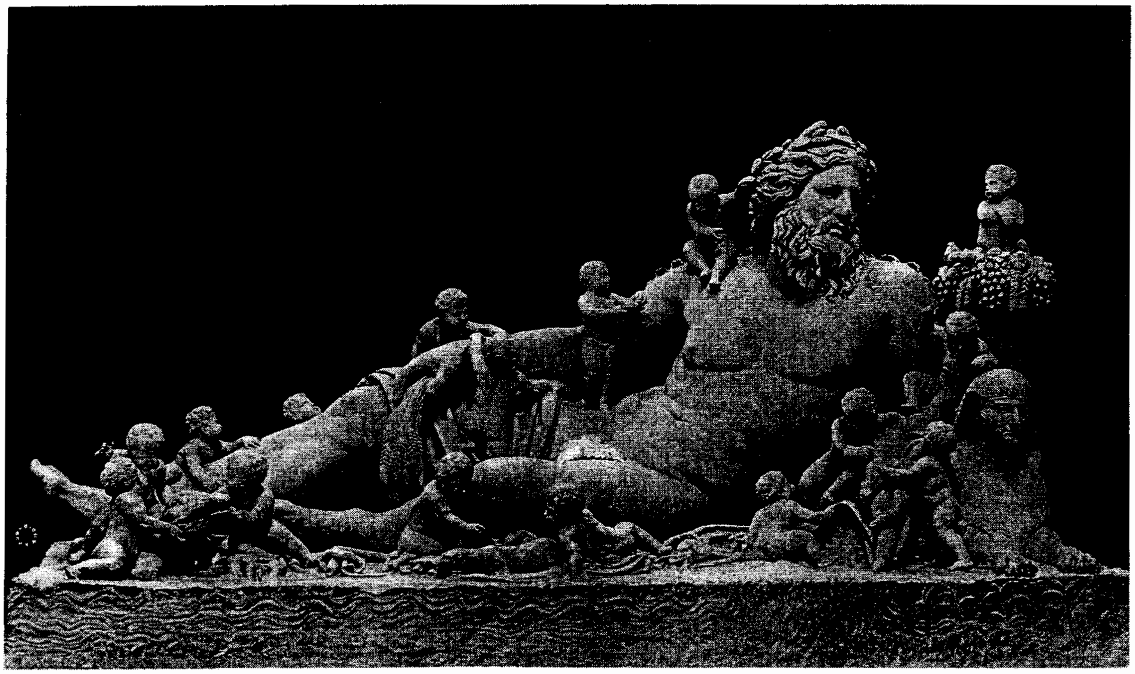
More even than that of the *Laocoön*, this Plinian description would seem tailor-made for the construction of a modern myth. In fact, during the pontificate of Sixtus IV a beautiful bronze Hercules (fig. 2.7) is discovered in none other than the Forum Boarium. This work, which is soon moved to the Conservators' Palace, appears in exceptionally fine condition and receives wide attention, notably from both Aldrovandi and Albertini. Aldrovandi even mentions the discovery location, but that interests him only insofar as to propose a connection between the Cattle of Geryon and the origins of the Forum Boarium.[70] None of the commentators seems to have made the connection.

There are many other such instances of what we must call lost opportunities. Who could resist applying Pliny's phrase "the second most famous *symplegma* in the world" ("alterum in terris symplegma nobile" [36.35]) to those many statues of two men in erotic or athletic postures, such as that noticed by Aldrovandi in the Cesi garden?[71] Did no one try to link any of the innumerable rediscovered satyr statues to Pliny's account of the Praxitelean work (N.H. 34.69), which was called "periboëton," or famous? As for the *River God Nile* (fig. 2.8), with its many fragmentary putti, discovered around 1512–13, there is clearly some disposition to allegorize the figures,[72] though no connection is drawn to Pliny's *Nile* in the Templum Pacis, about which he says that the sixteen children denoted the height in cubits of the river at flood stage. Nor does the etiology of foreshortening, which Pliny invokes to praise Pausias's *Immolatio Boum*, get applied to the Suovetaurilia relief, which was well known and widely imitated before the end of the fifteenth century.[73] Perhaps the most surprising instance of all is the so-called *Cleomenes Altar* depicting Iphigenia's sacrifice (see fig. 2.2). As was suggested earlier, there existed a powerful verbal tradition, both in antiquity and in the Renaissance, devoted to the painter Timanthes, whose version of this subject was said to have reached the highest levels of emotional representation by covering rather than revealing the suffering face of Agamemnon. It appears as a rhetorical topos for Cicero and Quintilian, and gets repeated as such by Alberti, and the image itself is quoted by both of Alberti's most distinguished contemporaries, Ghiberti and Donatello. Yet the realms remain separate, at least until Vasari, late in his life, chooses as one of the Pliny stories with which he decorates his house the scene of Timanthes painting the Iphigenia (see fig. 2.4), where the painting-within-a-painting may be a version of the altar.[74]

There is, of course, a limit to how much historical capital we can make out of what *doesn't* happen or what *isn't* written down. Most such identifications between Plinian descriptions and the rediscovered works would be shaky if attempted. Nor can one be sure that no such claims were made in documents that have not survived or that I haven't noticed. At all events, it is easy enough to pinpoint the precise meeting place of Pliny's text and the rediscovery of ancient statues in two texts that have been, and will continue to be, at the center of this book. First, Francesco da Sangallo's retrospective report on the 1506 discovery of the *Laocoön*, which declares that the statue was identified by reference to the laudatory account in the *Natural History*: "Questo è il Laocoonte, di cui fa mentione Plinio."[75] And second (though it was in fact written earlier), the pivotal moment in Vasari's developmental version of art history. He offers a three-stage account of the development of modern art, beginning with the stiff and clumsy (though laudable) efforts of Giotto and Cimabue, then turning to the fifteenth-century artists, who had better style and drawing ability but lacked delicacy, refinement, and supreme grace. Then he turns toward his own age:

> That finish, and that certain something which they lacked, they could not achieve so readily, seeing that study, when it is used in that way to obtain finish, gives dryness to the manner.
>
> After them, indeed, their successors were enabled to attain it through seeing excavated out of the earth certain antiquities cited by Pliny as among the most famous, such as the Laocoon, the Hercules, the Great Torso of the Belvedere, and likewise the Venus, the Cleopatra, the Apollo, and an endless number of others, which, both with their sweetness and their severity, with their fleshy roundness copied from the greatest beauties of nature, and with certain attitudes which involve no distortion of the whole figure but only a movement of certain parts, and are revealed with a most perfect grace, brought about the disappearance of a certain dryness, hardness, and sharpness of manner.[76]

For the discoverers of the *Laocoön* in 1506, the *Natural History* is an authenticating guidebook; when they come upon a statue in the appropriate place and fitting the Plinian description, the statue and the book gain a mutual and interdependent authority. Through this conjunction, the whole of Pliny's text gains a truth value and renders itself eligible for transfer to the modern age as readily as does the marble of the statue. Vasari's citation of Pliny signals the completeness of that transfer. It is not just that this climactic stage of aesthetic achievement corresponds to the highest accomplishments recognized in the *Natural History*—that is, gracefulness rather than pedantry. But in addition these are shown to be the direct result of, first, the excavation of ancient sculpture and, second, the canonization of a list of rediscovered masterpieces by Pliny. Vasari summons into being a kind of humanistic triangle trade: the authoritative words of Pliny, the statues that come out of the ground and get shipped to the Belvedere, the making of artistic geniuses of the order of Michelangelo.



2.8. *River God Nile*, colossal Roman marble, second century A.D., Vatican Museums, Rome

As may have already become clear, such an account is, and is not, the thesis of this book. That ancient texts, excavated art objects, and Renaissance aesthetic theory and practice are bound together is fundamental. That it is possible to specify the workings of these relationships and to see them as so efficiently productive is, on the other hand, open to question. While we read Pliny as the text that accompanies the rediscovery of ancient sculpture, we must simultaneously observe the difficulties of such a reading. Those difficulties begin in the Renaissance itself—indeed, they show up in the two texts I have just cited. The case of Vasari is quite simple: apart from the *Laocoön*, the statues he lists are anything but "citate da Plinio."[77] What he is really enumerating are the principal attractions on view in the Belvedere. Moreover, he is partaking in a widely shared sixteenth-century cultural fantasy that these are the same as the work of the canonized masters celebrated in the *Natural History*.

As for the *Laocoön* itself, although it seems likely that here Pliny and the discovery are on the same track,[78] it is clear, as I have suggested already, that some Renaissance observers at least were perceptive enough to notice divergences between what they read and what they saw. I have quoted Cesare Trivulzio's letter of 1506 before, but it is worth reviewing more fully:

> Questa statua, che insieme co' figliuoli, Plinio dice esser d'un pezzo, Giovanangelo romano, e Michel Cristofano fiorentino, che sono i primi scultori di Roma, negano ch'ella sia d'un sol marmo, e mostrano circa a quattro commettiture; ma congiunte in luogo tanto nascoso [sic], e tanto bene saldate e ristuccate, che non si

> possono conoscere facilmente se non da persone peritissime di quest'arte. Però dicono che Plinio s'ingannò, o volle ingannare altri, per render l'opera più ammirabile. . . . L'autorità di Plinio è grande, ma i nostri artefici hanno le sue ragioni, nè si dee disprezzare quell'antico detto: *Foelices fore artes si de iis soli artifices iudicarent*; onde non so dire a qual parere io mi appigli. Comunque sia la cosa, le statue sono eccellentissime, e degne d'ogni lode.[79]

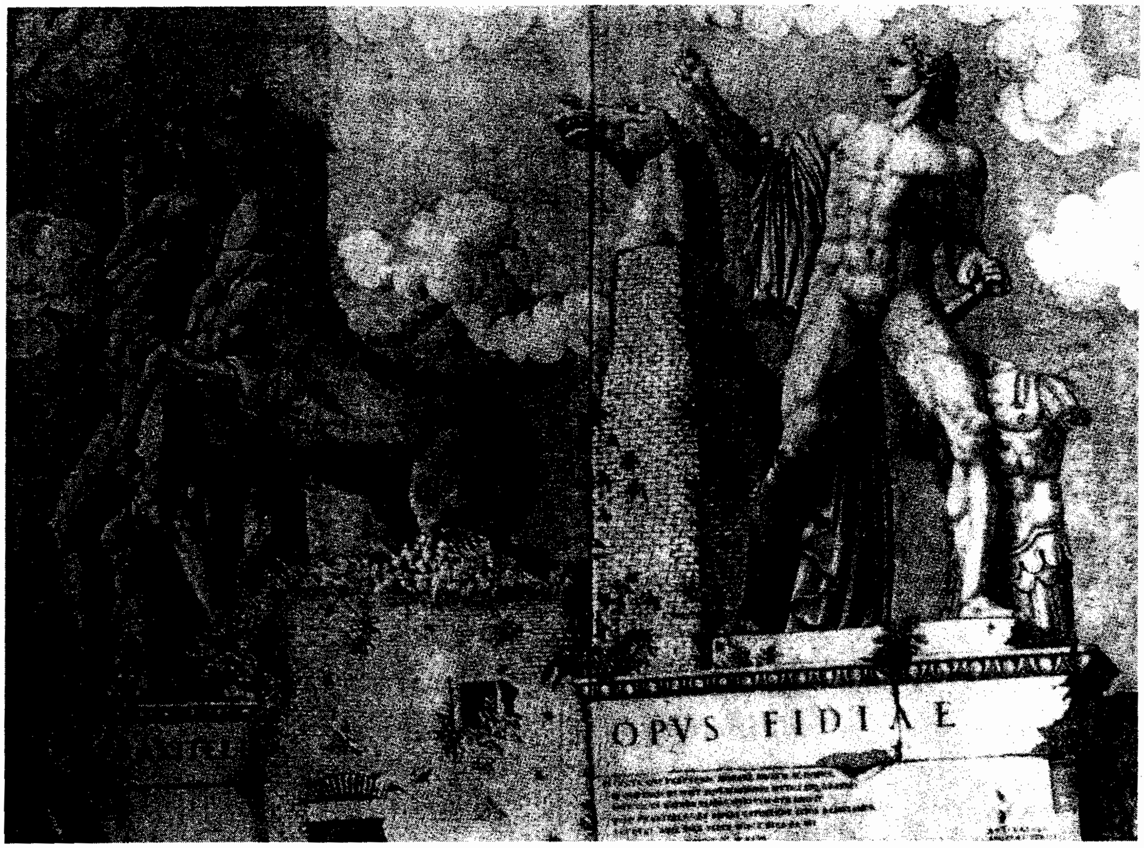
> This statue, which together with the sons, Pliny declares to be of one piece, the Roman Giovanangelo and the Florentine Michel Cristofano [Michelangelo], who are the leading sculptors in Rome, deny to be of a single block of marble; and they point to approximately four junction points but fused in such hidden places and so well consolidated and plastered together that only the greatest experts in this art can readily recognize them. They say that Pliny was deceived, or wished to deceive others, in order to render the work more impressive. . . . The authority of Pliny is great, but our artists can also be right; nor should one undervalue that ancient saying: *how fortunate the arts would be if they were judged solely by artists*. From all of which I can't say which opinion to support. However it may be, the statues are of the greatest excellence, and worthy of the highest praise.

This document testifies to the same lively conversation among artists that was implied in the more often cited Sangallo letter about the *Laocoön*. But the link with Pliny—also clearly part of an ongoing conversation—produces here, at least, a remarkable awareness of the distance between text and discovered object. It is not just that they contradict each other; rather, this difference opens the door to the possibility of a much more indeterminate hermeneutic. If Pliny is mistaken about the *Laocoön*, then he may be fallible on grounds of misinformation. Or he may be intentionally deceitful because he is engaging in a specifically rhetorical project of overpraising the statue. Or he may be ignorant because he is a writer and not an artist. In any of these cases, the moderns, who have the object in front of them, who are (supposedly) speaking uninflated truth, and who include artists capable of seeing the work through expert eyes, have the advantage over the fifteen-hundred-year-old text. Despite Trivulzio's cautious impartiality, his true preference is perhaps signaled by his adoption of the plural when he refers to the *Laocoön*. I raised the question earlier whether Pliny's authority equipped his Renaissance readers to swerve from that very authority: this is one of the cases in which that seems to have taken place.

With all due respect to the case of the *Laocoön*, then, the real place to look for Pliny and the rediscovery of ancient art is neither in the way they coincide nor in the way they contradict each other but in the space between them. Perhaps this can be best summed up through two citations, one verbal and the other visual, that long predate the discovery year of 1506. The first takes us back to *De Pictura*. We saw how Alberti rejects a Plinian "historia picturae" while embracing the notion of historia for what he considers the highest achievement of visual art. He introduces historia by distinguishing it from another term: "Amplissimum pictoris opus non colossus sed historia. Maior enim est ingenii laus in historia quam in colosso" ("The great work of the painter is not a colossus but a 'historia', for there is far more merit in a 'historia' than in a colossus").[80] The opposition between "historia" and "colossus" is hardly self-explanatory until we realize that Alberti is once again positioning himself in relation to the *Natural History*. Pliny introduces the colossal statue (and, in one instance, painting; see N.H. 34.39–46, 35.51) as a generic category with his characteristic mixture of awe for grandiose achievement and contempt for human overreaching. When Alberti opposes it to historia, the colossus comes to include not only the massive works that Pliny had in mind—some of which were, of course, visible throughout the Middle Ages—but also all the other kinds of monumental Plinian works of art that, in 1435 at least, Alberti can read about but not see. His historia, on the other hand, is imagined on the basis of ancient narrative paintings described by Pliny along with the similarly discursive sarcophagi that are widely visible in modern times but not mentioned in the *Natural History*. "Non colossus sed historia" becomes Alberti's way of creating a modern aesthetic devoted to story, discourse, and an honest, human-sized imitation of nature, in contrast to a grandiosity that Pliny chronicles but also (halfheartedly) censures.[81] Alberti derives this aesthetic under Pliny's influence at the same time as it expresses itself in opposition to Pliny and by reference to the distance that separates Pliny's text from the currently visible arts of antiquity. It is a position that will become far more difficult by the end of the fifteenth century, when so much rediscovered monumental sculpture will have captured the visual imagination and rendered a preference for the less aesthetically ambitious narrative reliefs more problematic.[82]

If Alberti is attempting to force a distance between the ancients and the moderns, my other citation is attempting to force them together. From late antiquity until their installation was radically altered in 1589, the massive *Horse-Tamers* of the Quirinal Hill were placed on pedestals inscribed "Opus Fidiae" under the left-hand pair of figures and "Opus Praxitelis" under the right-hand pair (fig. 2.9).[83] In the upcoming chapter I shall have more to say about the role of error, uncertainty, and fragmentariness in our subject, and I shall return to these inscriptions. For the moment, let us say there is something curious in ascribing these virtually identical statues to two great Greek sculptors who, even by Plinian account, lived thirty Olympiads apart (according to our information, more like 150 years). It is, of course, more surprising that such attributions could be convincingly made in late imperial Rome than that they would be believed by the moderns. We have no records with which to reconstruct the fifth-century logic of this claim, but we have considerable information about postclassical responses. Medieval viewers had no idea who Phidias and Praxiteles were; because they were unable to identify the subjects, it was not surprising that they dreamed up an elaborate story in which the names belong to two philosophers.

Whatever the questions about the statues' narrative, by the fourteenth century it is clear enough who Phidias and Praxiteles were. Petrarch's pithy account of the works probably stands as the truest reading of this long-accepted attribution: "Hoc



2.9. Nicolas Beatrizet, engraving of *Dioscuri* from Antoine Lafréry, *Speculum Romanae magnificentiae*, Rome, 1546

Praxitelis Phidiaeque extans in lapide tot iam seculis de ingenio et arte certamen" ("On these stones still survives after so many centuries the great rivalry in talent and skill between Praxiteles and Phidias").[84] Yet again, a swerve from the *Natural History* that is very much in keeping with it. Petrarch, seeing the works themselves as almost literally a horse race, uses the Plinian term for artistic competition (cf. *N.H.* 34.53, 35.95, cited above) and applies it to a pair of artists who had not been characterized as rivals. Whether later Renaissance viewers were as quick to read the pair of statues as a monument to emulation is hard to say, but they did continue to ascribe them to the two sculptors, in a remarkably persistent act of attribution.[85] The names inscribed on the two *Dioscuri* therefore stand for a barely tenable dream that the ground of the modern city might contain not just the imports, copies, and lesser works that constitute late imperial Roman collection but the works of the great mythic artists themselves. There are some noteworthy indications that the idea of these attributions does not survive the fifteenth century.[86] But when Flavio Biondo writes in the 1440s that these are "opera sane tantis opificibus digna"[87] ("works wholly worthy of such great artists"), no real Phidiases and Praxiteleses are available to act as benchmarks for recognizing what it meant to be "worthy" of them. There were only the words of Pliny and, almost as enduring, the sculpted inscriptions, which stand as a link between the *Natural History* and the material remains of the ancients as well as a measure of the great distance that separates them. Viewers of this installation were, until the end of the sixteenth century, invited to make the statues into the embodiment of Pliny's heroic version of art history.

In effect, then, the *Natural History* steps into a crucial lacuna at the center of the rediscovery of ancient art. These masses of newly unearthed glorious fragments appear as the work of geniuses. What they are missing is their corporeal wholeness and, more important, the inscriptions or the verbal history that will announce who the geniuses were. Fourteenth-century writers had already begun to transfer the model of literary fame, indeed of mythic fame, to certain artists. Dante uses the names of celebrated painters to problematize fame—the new success of Giotto has eclipsed the once mighty fame of Cimabue—but the writers of the next generations, including Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Filippo Villani, owing perhaps to greater self-consciousness or to greater Florentine chauvinism, begin to produce canonical myths about figures like Giotto and Simone Martini in a tradition that had generally been reserved for writers like themselves.

The aspiration for (or the achievement of) great fame in the visual arts is, in other words, nothing new in the early Renaissance. But the appetite for this fame goes unfulfilled in regard to these massive mute discoveries in marble and bronze. Pliny provides exactly what he seems to have intended to provide: a verbal account of fame and the famous that can stand alongside the material history that the objects themselves silently imply. As it will develop, this "standing alongside" is quite problematic in the first or the fifteenth century, because the *Dioscuri* are not by Phidias and Praxiteles, the *Bed of Polyclitus* is not by Polyclitus, the trio of *Laocoön* sculptors are nobodies, and the signer of the *Torso Belvedere* is not even mentioned in the *Natural History*. The troublesome equation of late Roman imports with legendary Greek masterpieces creates a will to identify Hellenistic sculpture—intricate, decadent, self-referential, and "baroque"—with the words appropriate to a high classicism produced centuries earlier and commented upon through a first-century veil of nostalgia that is itself part of what the Renaissance imports.

In the end it may not be so much a question of coincidences, or failures of coincidence, between the *Natural History* and the phenomenon of discovery as it is of elective affinity between Pliny and the Renaissance. The ancient writer himself derived his role as a historian from a recognition that the visual arts have a special capacity to sink into oblivion. The *Natural History* already inscribes the sense of ruin that will be manifest in the experience of the modern observer of these arts; and it invests with meaning the phenomenon of art perceived through decay. These first-century reflections on art, fame, and the written word thus form an extraordinarily meaningful time capsule for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Pliny projects a sense that works of art have fallen into a decay that is both material and memorial; he writes in order to reconstruct the objects and their fame. For the Renaissance, those losses are not projections but a part of visible experience. As soon as a modern sense of history starts to develop—that is, once ancient works of art begin to appear afresh and once they are understood as products of a continuous past rather than as ahistorical marvels—Pliny's task of reconstruction comes to be understood as both possible and necessary. Indeed, the role that Pliny envisages for himself as a historian, along with his allusions to others who memorialize visual works in words, cannot be truly perceived until fourteen hundred years after he writes his history. Only then does Pliny's prophecy fulfill itself. Above all, this prophecy declares the indispensability of the written word in the history of art. What Pliny describes in the Hellenistic period—the competition and cooperation of writers and artists, the wide transmission of personal fame—he himself helps to enact in the Renaissance.

Even this elective affinity is part of the *Natural History*'s own internal logic. Gian Biagio Conte, Pliny's most sensitive reader in our time, has said, "An encyclopedia is essentially a text whose author cannot—and must not—foresee the totality of its possible uses, an 'open' totality of mechanisms that can be disassembled and rearranged differently according to the reader's needs."[88] This is a particularly telling description coming from a scholar who has perceived so subtly the ways in which texts exercise strong control over their eventual reading.[89] Applied to the *Natural History*, these notions do not contradict one another; rather they point to a particularly active or paradoxical interpretive destiny, one that is torn between authorial control and the inevitable openness of the medium. Pliny begins his work with an epistle to the emperor that is explicitly concerned with his own place in a history of reading and of being read. He composes a whole theory of imitation, influence, and plagiarism, comparing his own practices to those of Virgil, Cicero, and other writers (N.H., preface, 21–23), and he explains to the emperor exactly how the book can be read. These directive strategies are true of the whole encyclopedia: the elaborate table of contents, the lists of numbers of facts, the references to sources are all part of a bid for authority.

Yet in the same preface Pliny recognizes a different approach to intertextuality:

> Et ne in totum videar Graecos insectari, ex illis nos velim intellegi pingendi fingendique conditoribus quos in libellis his invenies absoluta opera, et illa quoque quae mirando non satiamur, pendenti titulo inscripsisse, ut *Apelles faciebat* aut *Polyclitus*, tamquam inchoata semper arte et inperfecta, ut contra iudicorum varietates superesset artifici regressus ad veniam, velut emendaturo quicquid desideraretur si non esset interceptus. [preface, 26]

> And so as not to seem a downright adversary of the Greeks, I should like to be accepted on the lines of those founders of painting and sculpture who, as you will find in these volumes, used to inscribe their finished works, even the masterpieces which we can never be tired of admiring, with a provisional title such as *Worked on by Apelles* or *Polyclitus*, as though art was always a thing in process and not completed, so that when faced by the vagaries of criticism the artist might have left him a line of retreat to indulgence, by implying that he intended, if not interrupted, to correct any defect noted.

At the same time that Pliny is describing how he wishes to be read, he is defining a kind of indeterminacy in the process, producing an etiology and justification for the existence of future readings as integral to the text itself.[90] It is a sort of manifesto of reader response avant la lettre. What is especially significant for us is that his comparative term for the place of his text in history is the practice of just those visual artists that he will become so famous for chronicling. The analogy to the practice and tradition of painters, here and elsewhere, signals an importation into discursive thinking of the flexible, the labile, the multivalent—in this case, specifically, the open-ended futures of a text's reading. It is a powerful historical coincidence—yet not a coincidence—that the liveliest of all the intertextualities to which Pliny will be subjected is precisely the entry of material art objects and later art history into the reading of the *Natural History*. Apelles, Polyclitus, and the others, more than anything else, will end up leaving Pliny's history in the imperfect tense.

UNEARTHING THE PAST: ARCHAEOLOGY AND AESTHETICS IN THE MAKING OF RENAISSANCE CULTURE

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