The Authors Reply:

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The image produces the effect of a collapse of time, an effect that we attempted to describe and account for in various ways. Philology, the science of difference, emerged in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a tool for chronological sorting. Philology is therefore compelled to dismiss the constitutional anachronism of the image as mere error. In one classic account of the Renaissance, reasserted by Charles Dempsey, art proceeds in step with the recovery of letters initiated by Petrarch. Our account stresses instead the misalignment between philology and art. The new category "artwork," we have argued, offered a theoretical sanctuary for the lies and confusion generated by figuration by reconceiving forgery and anachronism as intertextual citation.

The aim of our paper, in any case, was not to readjust period labels but rather to introduce an analytical model that describes the emergence of the modern institution of the
artwork as a reframing and redirecting of figural anachronism. This model is capable of tracking the artwork as it distances itself from competing myths of origins and reinvents itself as the projection of a hypothetical world within which metaphors of time can be staged and compared. As we proposed above, the self-divided, ironic nature of the artwork, which was latent in Erwin Panofsky’s thought, was later lost in the academic obsession with periodization.

For Aby Warburg, a painting or a costumed ritual was a dense archive of cultural energies, a “dynamogram” that concretized and transmitted traumatic, primordial experiences.1 Archaic stimuli were directly imprinted in matter and gesture, Warburg believed, giving figuration the power to disrupt a historical present tense. Dempsey, in his book on Botticelli’s Primavera and in his response here, says that Warburg shows us that quattrocento vernacular festivals were engaging in a vital rapprochement with antiquity, “a remaking of living culture by assimilating into it the more perfect forms of Greek and Roman civilizations . . .”. We believe Warburg was saying something far stranger. Warburg’s cultural symbol was a token (symbolon) that “throws together” past and present. For Warburg, Botticelli was doing more than “assimilating” ancient art; his paintings themselves, mystically, fled their own historical present and became works of ancient art. The chain of strong symbols is recursive, as Michael Podro pointed out, in the sense that the symbol is both an image of a situation and a gesture within that situation.2 The work of art that was built around an antique pathos formula itself became a pathos formula in its own right.

Both Dempsey and Michael Cole maintain that Sandro Botticelli’s Primavera was a unique product of Florentine Laurentian culture and could only with difficulty be connected to a substitutional theory of image production. We believe that Botticelli’s citations of antique models function in Warburg’s sense as reactivations of archaic gestures. The Calumny of Apelles was a reinstatement of a lost original achieved through a process of reverse engineering from textual sources. The Birth of Venus was a repetition of a famous painting by Apelles, doubled and reinforced by an embedded citation of the Knidian Aphrodite by Praxiteles (through the Medici Venus, as it were). In Primavera Botticelli cited the ancient group of the Three Graces and then added another layer of commentary on substitution by taking seasonal recursion as its subject matter. This is not to begin to speak of its relation to altarpiece and tapestry traditions. And then these three modern paintings themselves reentered the chain of substitutions.3 Like many other works of the time, these are authorial interventions whose remarkable qualities are, paradoxically, in part the result of the effort to find a way back to a system of authorless production.

Cole rightly points out that Jan van Eyck’s signed works deliberately broke with an authorless, substitutional theory of origins. He also points out that van Eyck’s signatures and dates were blindly copied by later painters still working within a traditional paradigm. This suggests to Cole that our argument may amount to no more than the simple distinction between, on the one hand, progressive author-artists and, on the other, mediocre copyists still inhabiting a “long Middle Ages.” We would respond that artistic authorship and replication were locked into a closer, more dialectical relation. Van Eyck’s paintings thematized authorship, but within the framework of a reengagement with the authorless Byzantine icon. No mode of figuration more clearly embodied visual art’s challenge to time than the portrait, which, as Leon Battista Alberti famously recognized, allowed the person to live on after death. Portraiture in the fifteenth century, in fact, arose in response to the importation of Byzantine portrait icons, as the portraits of van Eyck, Giovanni Bellini, Albrecht Dürer, and Leonardo plainly announce. All of these artists were enthralled by the capacity of the icons—to which they attributed a hoary antiquity—to report the likenesses of people over vast stretches of time and thus to allow direct face-to-face encounters with past people. They drew associations between the icons’ time-collapsing capacity and their apparent authorlessness, what we would call the suppression of context-sensitive features in the interest of referential functionality. The efforts of Renaissance artists to endow their own works with such time-resistant capacities became, however, the laboratory of a new conception of authorship.

The institution of the artwork thus crystallized around a series of stagings and restagings of the clash between the two theories of origins we have attempted to outline. Art is a sequence of nested reflections on the origins of art. The artwork framed itself, then reframed that framing operation, and then again framed that reframing, and so on, and in this way marked out a provisional place for itself in society as an autopoietic system whose sole function was to generate fictions, or hypotheses about reality. The substitutional and authorial theories of origins, therefore, do not map respectively onto Hans Belting’s categories of Bild and Kunst, as both Cole and Dempsey suggest. For Belting, Kunst adopts some of the rhetorical and semantic mechanisms of Bild but eventually, after transportation to a secular and bourgeois sphere, is alienated from Bild. In our model, by contrast, Bild is a myth invented retrospectively by Kunst. Moreover, our model adds a dimension that is not present in either Belting or Warburg: the idea of art as a self-staging and self-referential project.

The concepts of substitution and performativity were clearly articulated, as Cole points out, in the late-sixteenth-century controversy over the legitimacy of the Christian image. The invented, fictive image, for Gregorio Comanini or Gabriele Paleotti, was the image that did not belong to a substitutional chain. The theologians were at last finding words to match the self-theorization of art that had unfolded over the first decades of the sixteenth century. But to frame the problem of artistic authorship in theological terms, in effect recapitulating the medieval debates about the legitimacy of the Christian image, was to miss the point of modern, fictional art. The artwork by 1560, certainly by 1600, was already several cycles beyond the idolatry problem. The theologians misunderstood the dialectic between substitutional and authorial theories of authorship—already articulated during the Eastern iconoclastic controversy of the eighth to ninth centuries—as a still-vital competition. The religious image of 1600 appeared to repeat the dilemma of the pristional Christian cult image, but it was repetition with a difference. Through the recursive process of self-staging set in motion in the fifteenth century, the artwork had long since acquired an autonomy that alienated it both from its divine
prototypes and from its author. The new modes of display, the art market, the collecting of drawings and prints, the concern with establishing authorship, and the published treatise on art constituted sociological registrations of the radical claims made by the autopoetic closure of the work of art. The torrent of theological writing about art in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries formed still another kind of response, memorable mostly for its inadequacy to its object.

Against this broader recapitulation of the argument, we can now return to Vittore Carpaccio’s painting. The painting is a figuration that is already deep into the framing process. Its art quality is the effect of its intensive citational character, which generates a diagram of available theories of the origins of art. Dempsey endorses the view that Carpaccio has represented a pair of adjoining rooms that would have been familiar to contemporaries. In effect, he brings the picture back into temporal focus, seeing it as a painting that clearly locates itself in the year of its own genesis, say, 1503. We stress instead the painting’s internal temporal dislocations and argue that the rooms cannot so easily be mapped back onto an interior of 1503. In Carpaccio’s painting we see a contemporary statue, copied from one standing on a church altar in Venice, embedded in a S. Marco-style apse. That mosaic-clad apse itself, fronted by an altar and flanked by portals, has been likened (rightly) to the typically Byzantine church arrangement of apse and pastophoria, and yet here it is strangely inserted into a private space—a collapsing of private and public spheres that would have struck a temporally dissonant note with any contemporary viewer. Carpaccio may have thought that the conjunction spoke of earlier times. Recent research has, in fact, increasingly revealed the presence of invented and anachronistic elements in otherwise very deliberate depictions of contemporary interiors in painting of the period. The incongruous elements, precisely because they appear in an otherwise recognizable setting, would have been especially provocative invitations to contemporary viewers, unsettling the temporal focus on which Dempsey insists. Through their capacity to restage things in a fictional context, paintings had the capacity to mobilize even the contemporary and quotidian elements into a more complex temporal and symbolic economy—an operation already at work in contemporary devotional exercises and mnemonic practices.

Both rooms are stocked with recognizable contemporary objects, or old things of the sort that might be seen in contemporary collections—a paratactic arrangement, with temporal references shooting off in all directions. It was one of the functions of the scholar’s study to operate as a machine for imaginative time travel, as many period voices from the scholar’s study attest. The anachronistic theater of the study was, in other words, itself one of the preformations of the artwork. Carpaccio’s painting effects the translation by re-framing the space pictorially and filling it with citations of time-bending artifacts and with the time-resistant costumes and appurtenances of a prelate.

Of course, Carpaccio represented finely crafted items of his own day, including images, like the bronze Venus by Antico or the bronze Christ. In the painting these modern figures, like the miniature copy of one of the S. Marco horses, function as effective stand-ins or equivalents for antiquities. The strongly surrogate function was explicitly acknowledged in period documents. In a letter to Isabella d’Este, Antico himself referred to a batch of bronzes he had made after the antique as *antichità*, and in her response Isabella uses the same word. We propose that it is the referential authority of the modern works that commends them for inclusion in Augustine’s study. Dempsey’s objection that “this *studio* has not a single object in it that can be securely identified as ancient” disregards that thesis. Our argument was directed precisely against the prevailing assumption that when a painter represented contemporary features it was in order to insist on the contemporaneity of those features. The bell, the armillary sphere, the hourglass, the finely crafted chairs, the liturgical implements, the vestments, and so on, certainly were based on close examination of the best examples of contemporary manufacture. At the same time, they are presented as samples of fine furnishing of the sort that might have existed at any time and that would be appropriate for the study’s occupant. This kind of furnishing is the least time specific. The point of our argument was to pull the works of “art” in the room into the temporal model that applies naturally to the furnishings.

A legendary tradition initiated by Eusebius and perpetuated throughout the Middle Ages described an ancient bronze statue of Christ at Paneas whose drapery, coming into contact with herbs growing beneath it, rendered those herbs miracle-working. The highly unusual drapery of the bronze statue in Milan is, we believe, fashioned in direct reference to this legend, tying the statue to this originary image. Dempsey attempts to normalize the drapery though comparison with other statuary. But his comparison misses what is particular to the Milan statue: the drapery does not simply fall to the side of the figure and onto the plinth, it falls to the side of the plinth itself and well below the level of the figure’s feet, pooling up on the ground beside the statue. It is a singular motif, not found in any other work of the period. It insists on the idea that the drapery is crossing an ontological boundary, making contact with the world beyond the work of art. The motif is thus not only an evidentiary link to the Paneas statue but also a form of boundary testing, a symptomatic response to the problems raised by freestanding statuary as a category of object. The foliage on the plinth, which we take in this context to refer to the herbs of the legend, is not “familiar” and “highly conventional” (Dempsey) for the simple reason that plinths themselves were a new development in the period, part of the new set of problems that arose with the revival of freestanding statuary. Arguably, any motif underneath a statue would have been significant at this early date, and it is worth noting that the closest comparanda that survive from this period—for example, the statuettes by Antico, among others—stand on smooth, unadorned bases.

As we pointed out, Carpaccio does not record these details of the statue in his notation of the type. No one at the time needed a philological reference on that level of specificity in order to grasp the substitutinal import of the statue. It is a freestanding bronze figure in a pallium; it reverberated, overwhelmingly, with antique associations. The natural response would have been to see it as a redaction of an antique prototype, with or without help from Eusebius. And that is exactly what people appear to have done, for why else would
this statue have impressed itself so suddenly and forcefully on the entire world of Veneto art of about 1500—on Carpaccio, on Alvise Vivarini, on Gima da Conegliano, on Antonio Lombardo, on the Bregnos, and on Andrea Riccio? The statue carried authority not because of its now forgotten author of the 1490s but because it held out the promise of proximity to a portrait from the time of Christ, and thus to Christ himself. In its abstract handling of body and face the statue actually suppresses the signs of authorship, ensuring a smooth referential operation. The drapery detail was an added footnote to engage and animate the cognoscenti—and perhaps also a symptom of worry that the substitution model needed philosophical bolstering.8

The analysis of the Christ statue was part of our effort to outline a structure of temporal instability at work in the painting as a whole, a structure that, we argued, was in part modeled on exegetical procedures going back to Augustine himself. Our reading thus offers a conceptual framework for the many erudite exegeses of the picture that have been presented. It arose from an effort to go beyond an analysis of the picture’s meaning or program and instead to understand the picture itself as a metacommentary on the temporal operations of images, artifacts, books, music—the whole array of human arts whose limits are exposed in the story of Augustine’s vision. Hence, our emphasis on the picture’s elaborate citational structure, the recursive pattern that runs through the painting and whose logic inexorably absorbs the painting itself.

We concur with virtually everything Claire Farago says about disciplinary responsibility and self-awareness and about the ideological force of the discourse of chronological reason, obviously one of the foundational self-legitimating discourses of the West. We do not actually feel addressed by her critique. She speaks of “the context of the discussion in which Wood and Nagel wish to participate” as disengaged from politics and society at large. Which “context of discussion” is that? Our text explicitly signaled its connection to Benjamin’s reception of Surrealism, and in general to a body of highly creative prewar thinking about the temporality of the figure. Surrealism is negatively inscribed within the neo-enlightened, liberal (in the European sense) scholarship of the postwar period. The wearisome debates about the periodization of the Renaissance that dominated American scholarship from the 1940s to the 1970s and, in general, the orthodoxies and pieties of postwar scholarship emerged out of the context of world war and emigration. One might hesitate before describing the scholarship of the émigrés, even the Renaissance scholars among them, as politically “disengaged.”

To take up Farago’s excellent challenge: Saint Augustine’s study is indeed our study. The modern scholar who recognizes him- or herself in the Carpaccio painting must be prepared to see the world through its temporal kaleidoscope. The Renaissance studiolo proves to be an inhospitable setting for the lucid differentiations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship. The continuity between Carpaccio’s painting and the model we have proposed is already implicit in the art system of our own time. The art system today theorizes itself as postautonomous, in the sense that art is located no longer in a discrete object but rather in a network of display, commentary, mediation, and theorization. This is the place where our paper is written from, and from such a vantage point it starts to look as if historical art was always already dispersed in networks. It seems obvious today that the work of art was a fragile historical construction; that the campaign to secure a concept of “pure visibility” that might underlie the institution of the artwork was never really won; and that the forces and conflicts that shaped the idea of the artwork are still legible in the artworks. A chronologically rationalist approach, as Farago suggests, will not help very much in understanding the historical processes of cancellation, condensation, and misremembering that created the institution of the artwork. Our effort to excavate the anachronistic underhistory of the work of art is therefore by its nature a challenge to enlightened historical models.

Notes

1. For the citation, see Ernst Gombrich, Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography (London: Phaidon, 1970; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 248; see also Georges Didier-Huberman, L'image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg (Paris: Minuit, 2002), 176.

2. Michael Podro, The Critical Historians of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 176–77.

3. On recursion and reentry as basic structures of aesthetic communications, see Niklas Luhmann, Art as a Social System (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 55, 245–46, 277, 301–2.

4. Patricia Fortini Brown, “Carpaccio’s St. Augustine in His Study: A Portrait Within a Portrait,” in Augustine in Iconography: History and Legend, ed. Joseph C. Schnaebel and Frederick van Fleteren (New York: Lang, 1999), 507–547, at 511.

5. These problems are perceptively treated by Luke Syson in his essay “Representing the Domestic Interior,” due to appear in the catalogue of the exhibition The Renaissance at Home, which will open in 2006 at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. We thank Mr. Syson for sharing his work and ideas with us.

6. Ann Hersey Allison, “The Bronzes of Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi, called Anzico,” Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien 89–90 (1993–94): 92, docs. 74–75. Also discussed by Dora Thornton and Luke Syson, Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy (London: British Museum Press, 2001), 130.

7. The motif was familiar from Roman ornament. It can be found, with palmette variations on the lotus motif, on the frieze of the Forum of Nerva and, closer to the Veneto, at the palace of Dioleitan at Split. A version of it appears on capitals in the Doge’s Palace in Venice. In our period it was often used as border ornament, as Dempsey suggests—in contemporary bronze work as well as on frames and moldings. The closest parallel to its use under the statue in Milan is in a Venetian bronze relief of a resurrected Christ that may well be modeled on the Milan statue, where it decorates the stylobate directly under the feet. See John Pope-Hennessy, Renaissance Bronzes from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Reliefs, Plaquettes, Statuette, and Morters (London: Phaidon, 1965), cat. no. 355, and see also cat. nos. 492, 566. There is no question here of correlating the ornament with actual herbs, a procedure discredited in an analysis of this very motif by Alois Riegl, “Lo ‘smeraldo’ smerrito, ossia il ‘vero profilo’ di Cristo,” in Il volto di Cristo, ed. Giovanni Morello and Gerhard Wolf (Milan: Electa, 2000), 215–26.

8. The case of this statue is almost exactly analogous to the contemporary phenomenon of profile medal portraits of Christ. These, too, were a fifteenth-century invention, and yet they enjoyed authority as artifacts imprinted with an ancient likeness, according to some originating in a portrait of Christ engraved on an emerald gem by Sultan Bajazet II to Pope Innocent VIII in 1492. Again, the medium of bronze reinforced the conceptual possibility of a reliable chain of replicas extending back to antiquity. And once again contemporary artists pressed the image into service, as if it had special authority. Raphael used the medal portrait as a model for his image of Christ in the tapestry cartoon of the Miraculous Draught of Fishes, as has often been noted. See Phline Helas, “Lo ‘smeraldo’ smerrito, ossia il ‘vero profilo’ di Cristo,” in Il volto di Cristo, ed. Giovanni Morello and Gerhard Wolf (Milan: Electa, 2000), 215–26.