



Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence

Megan Holmes

In Gabriele Paleotti's treatise, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (1582), in a short chapter entitled 'Sacred Images', the author enumerates a number of 'different ways according to which an image can be defined as sacred'.¹ In this systematic categorization written in the aftermath of the Council of Trent, there is a hierarchy imposed that privileges images authorized directly by God and manufactured, or acted upon, by divine and sacred agents through imprinting, saintly touch, and miraculous transfiguration. These most sacred images include contact relics of the Holy Face, images made by early Christian saints, figurations produced 'not by human hand' (*acheiropoietia*), and images 'in' and 'through' which God performs miracles. At the top of Paleotti's list are the cherubim on the tabernacle of the Ark of the Covenant, fashioned according to God's plan, described in the Old Testament Book of Exodus (31:1–6; 37:1–9). The next four categories of sacralizing conditions correspond with images that, in Paleotti's day, were conventionally known as miraculous images (*immagini miracolose*) – although Paleotti himself does not use this term.²

[An] image is called sacred if it enters into contact with the body, or with the face or with other parts of our Lord or one of his saints, where, just by means of that contact, the figure of the body or of the part that was touched is printed there, as in the case of the Holy Face of Christ, left there by St Veronica, kept in Rome; or the sacred *sudarium* in which the most beatified body of Our Savior was wrapped following his death, which still today preserves imprinted the image of Christ . . . preserved with great veneration by the Duke of Savoy; or whatever other figure was painted or configured in this way.

[An] image is called holy that would be made by a holy person, like those made by St Luke or others still, painted by other saints.

[An image is called holy] because it was made in a miraculous manner, as is said about the image of the Savior in Rome, that was for this reason called *αχειροποιητος* [*acheiropoietos*], that is, not made by the hand of a man, but invisibly, by the work of God, or by other similar means.

[An] image is called holy when God has performed manifest signs and miracles in that image, as we know, for example to have occurred in that [image] in the Holy House of Loreto, transported from such a far-away land,

**Detail from Francesco
Pesellino, *Madonna and Child
with Angels*, 1450s (plate 5).**

DOI:
10.1111/j.1467-8365.2011.00833.x
Art History | ISSN 0141-6790
34 | 3 | June 2011 | pages 432-465

Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence

Table 1 Florentine Image Cults, 1250-1600. (Key: blue = year of significance, e.g. plague, flood, 1399 Bianchi penitential movement; green = nunnery; red = extant image.)

Origin of Cult	Institution	Image Subject/Title	Media
1292	Orsanmichele	Madonna di Orsanmichele	fresco (new panel 1347)
by 1333	Baptistry	Crucifix	polychrome wooden sculpture
1344	S. Maria Novella (Chiostro Verde)	Madonna del Sangue	fresco
by 1360s	SS. Annunziata	La Nunziata	fresco
1370s	S. Maria delle Grazie	Madonna delle Grazie	fresco
late 14th century	S. Maria del Carmine	Madonna del Popolo	panel
by 1384	S. Miniato al Monte	Crocifisso di San Giovanni Gualberto	panel
by 1397	Cathedral	Madonna del Popolo ('de' Chierici')	fresco
1399	S. Pier del Murrone (moved to S. Michele Visdomini in 1552)	Crocifisso dei Bianchi	polychrome wooden sculpture
1399	S. Lucia sul Prato	Crocifisso dei Bianchi	polychrome wooden sculpture
1399	S. Spirito	Crocifisso dei Bianchi	polychrome wooden sculpture
1399 (legend)	S. Croce	Crocifisso dei Bianchi	polychrome wooden sculpture
by 1399 (legend)	S. Lucia di Camporeggi	Crucifix	wooden sculpture
1439 (legend)	S. Pier Maggiore	Maria Vergine Gravida	panel
1440	S. Maria del Carmine	Crocifisso del Chiodo	polychrome wooden sculpture
c. 1450	Orsanmichele	Crucifix	polychrome wooden sculpture
by 1462	Chiarito	Crocifisso dei Bianchi	polychrome wooden sculpture
1472	S. Maria Novella	Madonna della Pura	fresco
1473	S. Maria del Carmine	Crocifisso della Provvidenza	panel
1493	Orsanmichele	Madonna della Rosa	marble sculpture
by 1501	S. Clemente	Crucifix	wooden sculpture
1501	S. Maria dei Ricci	Annunciation	fresco
1506	S. Michele Berteldi	Madonna and Child	fresco
1509	S. Giuseppe	Madonna del Giglio	panel
1512 (legend)	S. Caterina	Madonna and Child	panel
1515	La Crocetta	Madonna and Child	panel
1520	Madonna della Querica	Madonna della Querica	fresco or panel
by 1527	Annalena	Madonna della Palla	stone sculpture
1527	S. Maria Novella	Madonna della Peste	panel
by 1530	S. Lorenzo	Madonna and Child	panel
1530 (legend)	S. Maria degli Angioli	Madonna and Child	terracotta sculpture
1536	S. Jacopo tra' Fossi	Crucifix	wooden sculpture
c. 1540	S. Marco	Annunciation (variant of SS. Annunziata image)	fresco
by 1550	Le Murate	Crucifix	wooden sculpture
1552 (?)	S. Pier del Murrone (removed from S. Niccolo dei Freri at this date)	Crucifix	panel
1557	Le Murate	Madonna della Neve	relief marble sculpture
1557 (legend)	S. Elisabetta in Capitolo	Crucifix	wooden sculpture
1557 (legend)	S. Jacopo in Via Ghibellina	Crucifix	wooden sculpture
1557 (legend)	S. Maria degli Angioli ('degli Angiolini')	Crucifix	small sculpture
1564	Madonna della Pace	Madonna della Pace	fresco
by 1570	(Oratory behind) SS. Annunziata	Crocifisso delle Misericordie	sagomata painted panel
1576	S. Maria Novella	Crucifix	polychrome wooden sculpture
1588	Cathedral	Madonna and Child	marble sculpture
1589	S. Veridiana	Madonna and Child	terracotta sculpture
by 1591	S. Maria Nipotecosa	Crucifix	wooden sculpture
1595	Oratory of the Madonna della Tosse	Madonna della Tosse	panel
?	SS. Annunziata	Crocifisso dei Bianchi	polychrome wooden sculpture
?	S. Trinita	Crocifisso dei Bianchi	polychrome wooden sculpture
?	S. Orsola	Crocifisso dei Bianchi	polychrome wooden sculpture
?	S. Lucia di Camporeggi	Crucifix	painted canvas
?	S. Jacopo in Campo Corbolini	Madonna del Giglio	panel
?	S. Stefano in Pane	Madonna and Child	panel
?	Tabernacolo delle Cinque Lampade	Madonna and Child (two images)	fresco (street-side tabernacle)

which has performed so many miracles, as can be seen there everyday. The same is said of other images that are found elsewhere and that, by divine means, are seen at times with the face radiant, at times with tears spilling from the eyes, or drops of blood, or they make some movement as if they were alive, or also, because in them is recognized the goodness of God who, through them (*per mezzo loro*), has, in an instant, healed the sick, restored the vision to the blind and liberated others from various dangers.³

In this hieratic sequence, miraculous images like the *Veronica*, the *Sudarium*, the *Lateran Christ*, and the *Madonna of Loreto*, occupy a prominence that was reflective of their revered status as potent sacred objects venerated within contemporary devotional culture.

Paleotti's text on the sacralization of images, though written in the late sixteenth century by a Bolognese reformer with an interest in imposing a systematic order on a fluid domain of religious practice, provides a useful point of departure for this investigation of Florentine Renaissance miracle-working images. Paleotti points to types of highly venerated images from the Italian Renaissance to which art historians have paid little attention until fairly recently. Miracle-working images have been considered primarily in terms of their typologies and have been dismissed as archaic in style, of little aesthetic interest, and irrevocably compromised by ritual dressing-up.⁴ Or they have been simply ignored, as in the case of the Marian cult image enshrined within Bramante's innovative illusionistic choir at San Satiro in Milan (c. 1480).⁵ This situation is changing now as scholars, beginning with Richard Trexler and Hans Belting, and followed by Michele Bacci, Paul Davies, Klaus Kruger, Robert Maniura, and Gerhard Wolf, among others, have begun to investigate the dynamic relationship between prominent image cults and late medieval and Renaissance artistic discourse and practice in Italy.⁶

Even with this encouraging recovery of the miraculous image, it must be acknowledged that these are extremely difficult objects and related religious phenomena to study from an art historical perspective. One problem lies in the nomenclature itself – 'miraculous image'. While, as noted above, this was a designation that had currency in the Renaissance, it does not generate a tidy category, a closed set of objects that looked and functioned in a manner markedly distinct from that of other devotional images from the period. Any religious image was potentially the site of miraculous manifestation and potent sacred intercession. However, it was only the images that performed repeatedly for a wide populace, that were officially recognized by religious and civic authorities, that acquired the physical signs of enshrinement and votive offerings, and that had active custodians who preserved the memory of the cult, that acquired reputations as *immagini miracolose* and left traces of their performative pasts.

These highly venerated images, when they do survive, are rarely available for close examination and technical analysis in the way that museum objects are. Their material and formal composition have often changed significantly over time through devotional accretion and ritual manipulation, compromising their legibility as historical documents. They have been physically re-contextualized through the acts of translation and enshrinement, and materially transformed through repainting, reverential crowning, bedecking with votive offerings, and modern restoration attempts to recover an 'original' image beneath layers of cultic accretion.⁷ The art historian's task is further complicated by the fact that religious sanctuaries do not keep neat curatorial files or detailed conservation reports. Cultic

memory is transmitted through votive objects, miracle stories, and retrospective legends and from the ideological perspectives of devotees and sanctuary custodians. Furthermore, the representational modality of miraculous images during the Renaissance period is quite hard to define. Theologians struggled to articulate this semiosis in contradistinction to idol worship, particularly in the sixteenth century when image cults were criticized by Protestant reformers and defended by the likes of Paleotti. Devotional practices indicate that cultural attitudes about sacred immanence, in and through miraculous images, were fluid, ambiguous, and full of contradictions. The miraculous phenomena associated with highly venerated images, too, were open to question in the Renaissance period and have proven to be particularly difficult for modern and contemporary scholars to comprehend with the critical tools of post-Enlightenment, Durkheim-influenced, secularizing academic inquiry.⁸

This study focuses on miraculous images and image cults within a single region – Florence and Florentine territory – from c. 1250 to 1600. The Florentine case provides



1 Map of Florentine Territorial State, c. 1250–1600. (Based on the map by E. Fasano Guarini in *The Journal of Italian History*, 2: 2, 1979, with the boundaries of the Florentine contado and Grand Duchy.)

a useful complement to recent studies of cultic activities in Rome, where celebrated icons of the Virgin and Christ date back to the sixth century.⁹ Florence did not have any prominent image cults prior to the late thirteenth century, in contrast to Rome and papal territories, towns along the principal pilgrimage routes to the ‘Holy City’ (like Lucca), and areas under the direct influence of Byzantine culture (like Venice).¹⁰ The situation changed very quickly, however, with image cults proliferating rapidly during the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, transforming the sacred geography of the region.¹¹ Table 1 lists the foundation dates of over forty image cults in the city of Florence between 1292 and 1600, providing some idea of the frequency with which new cults sprang up over this period. Image cults were also founded in the Florentine *contado* and in the subject towns that were absorbed into the expanding Florentine territorial state (plate 1).¹² This pattern is similar in many of the Italian city-states at this time, and an investigation of Florentine developments can provide a useful set of parameters for exploring the common characteristics of image cults during the Renaissance, as well as regional variations and changes over time.¹³ The development of image cults within Florentine religious devotional culture also corresponds precisely with the period during which critical transformations were taking place in the visual arts in Florence, and the city was among the most important artistic centres in Europe. The Florentine case thus provokes a consideration of the relationship between miraculous images and image cults, and broader artistic practices during the Renaissance.

Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, this article will consider the surviving miraculous images from the region of Florence and the cultural conceptions about miraculous images that are embedded within a variety of historical texts: chronicles, sanctuary histories, miracle stories, and literary *novelle*. A particular attentiveness will be paid to the miraculous images themselves, as physical, fashioned material objects that were seen, touched, and imagined. Of interest will be how this materiality was understood by contemporaries and the extent to which it was integral to the extraordinary supernatural qualities with which these sacred images were endowed. The premise here is that the formal and material properties of miraculous images should not be ignored by art historians because they played an important role in structuring cultic experience and in characterizing the sacred beings and the variety of mediation offered in, and through, the images.

The Material and Formal Properties of Florentine Renaissance Miraculous Images

What then can be said about the materiality of Florentine Renaissance miraculous images? For one thing, this materiality was highly mutable and was perceived as such by the participants in sanctuary culture. The very designation of a sacred image as ‘miraculous’ marked a change in the phenomenology of the object – a recontextualization within a new ritual framework of an image previously deployed for other purposes. The *Madonna dei Ricci* (plate 2), for example, was a fresco of the Annunciation above the side door on the exterior of a Florentine parish church until, according to the contemporary foundation legend of the cult, Antonio Rinaldeschi threw horse dung at it in 1501 (plate 3), triggering a series of events which led to its veneration and enshrinement within an oratory.¹⁴ Most Florentine Renaissance miraculous images were conventional works like this Annunciation prior to becoming the focus of cultic veneration. They were sacred representations, almost exclusively of the Virgin and Christ, in the local stylistic idiom, sometimes of recent manufacture, displayed in accessible locations – a lateral altar or an exterior wall of a



2 *Madonna dei Ricci*, 1470s. Fresco. Florence: Santa Maria dei Ricci. Photo: Megan Holmes.

3 Filippo di Lorenzo Dolciante, 'Antonio Rinaldeschi throws horse dung at the Annunciation', detail from the *Foundation Legend of the Madonna dei Ricci*, 1502. Tempera on panel, 34 × 38 cm. Florence: Museo Stibbert. Photo: Nicolò Orsi Battaglini.

church, a city gate, a street-side tabernacle – that were not tied to local authorities, to prestigious lineages through patronage or ritual, or to acclaimed painters or sculptors.¹⁵ Unlike a number of the Venetian and Roman image cults, Florentine miraculous images did not acquire their authority, at least not initially, through ties with Byzantium and the celebrated miraculous images of Constantinople, or with early Christian image culture.¹⁶ In some instances, Florentine miracle-working images were said to have been painted by St Luke, or to have been miraculously made 'without human hand', but these legends were elaborated retrospectively, as a form of cultic accretion, after the images had gained fame.

Miraculous images were usually made out of less expensive materials – fresco, painted panel, polychrome wooden sculpture – rather than more valued and magnificent media like gold, silver, bronze, marble, or mosaic. The *Madonna del Morbo* (plate 4), for example, was a venerated image in the provincial town of Poppi to the east of Florence and was considered to offer protection against the plague. This painting was the product of serial production in the booming Florentine Madonna industry in the second half of the fifteenth century. It was manufactured with a cartoon taken from a tracing of a painting by Pesellino (plate 5), and is known in seventeen surviving variations.¹⁷

I do not mean to trivialize Florentine miraculous images by emphasizing these characteristics. On the contrary, the modest material qualities and the accessibility of these sacred figurations allowed them to be drawn into a relationship of intimate votive address, without intimidating or overawing devotees. This accessibility was key to the efficacy of Renaissance miraculous images, particularly at the onset of cultic devotion, and was a dimension of the vernacular culture within which image cults were rooted. For image cults in Florence, while undoubtedly influenced by precedents in Byzantium and Rome, developed

in tandem with the vernacularization of religious devotional culture in the later middle ages. There was a marked rise in the number of sanctioned image cults just at the time that vernacular religious culture began to flourish in Tuscany. A growing body of vernacular devotional literature was available, including texts composed specifically about miraculous images that constructed a very intimate form of address and exchange between the laity and sacred beings, which had an impact on sanctuary culture.¹⁸ Miracles involving sacred images became standard features in manuscript and printed editions of the *Miracoli della Vergine*, saints' lives, and sanctuary miracle collections, while vernacular poems and *laude* about specific miraculous images circulated.¹⁹ Furthermore, certain characteristics of the miraculous images themselves are analogous to literary features associated with vernacularization: the

variety of media and formats, the relative legibility of these highly venerated images, and their site-specificity.

Most Florentine miraculous images acquired their initial reputation for efficacy through ‘hierophany’ – a term coined by the comparative religion scholar, Mircea Eliade. Hierophany, in this context, signifies the manifestation of sacred immanence in, or in the vicinity of, the image, through some kind of observable sign – like a detected movement or change in the image, an apparition of the saint in proximity to the image, or the material evidence of a healing, exorcism, or some other response to prayer.²⁰

Once an image had proven its efficacy through repeated demonstrations of hierophany, its materiality was again modified through enshrinement, which repositioned miraculous images in new spatial settings that had implications for how their ‘objectness’ was perceived. An image located on an exterior wall of a church or in an outdoor tabernacle could be moved to an elaborate tabernacle above the main altar of an oratory or church and covered with a veil drawn back only on feast days – with all of the liturgical implications of such a transposition. In churches that were not primarily sanctuaries, the inner façade wall was a convenient locus for cultic veneration and a number of miraculous images in Florence were enshrined in this location. The *Madonna dei Chierici* (plate 6), for example, was originally painted in fresco on a lateral interior wall of the new Florentine Cathedral circa 1350–75, but was detached and removed to the inner façade wall once the cult gained momentum at the end of the century.²¹

The enshrinement structures that framed Florentine miracle-working images ranged from intricate free-standing micro-architectural monuments embellished with sculpture and ornament, like the tabernacle enshrining the *Madonna of Orsanmichele*

4 Filippo Lippi and Pesellino Imitator, *Madonna del Morbo*, c. 1475. Tempera on panel, c. 74 × 45 cm. Poppi: *Madonna del Morbo*. Photo: Megan Holmes.

5 Francesco Pesellino, *Madonna and Child with Angels*, 1450s. Tempera on panel, 72.4 × 54 cm. Toledo: Toledo Museum of Art. Photo: Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo.

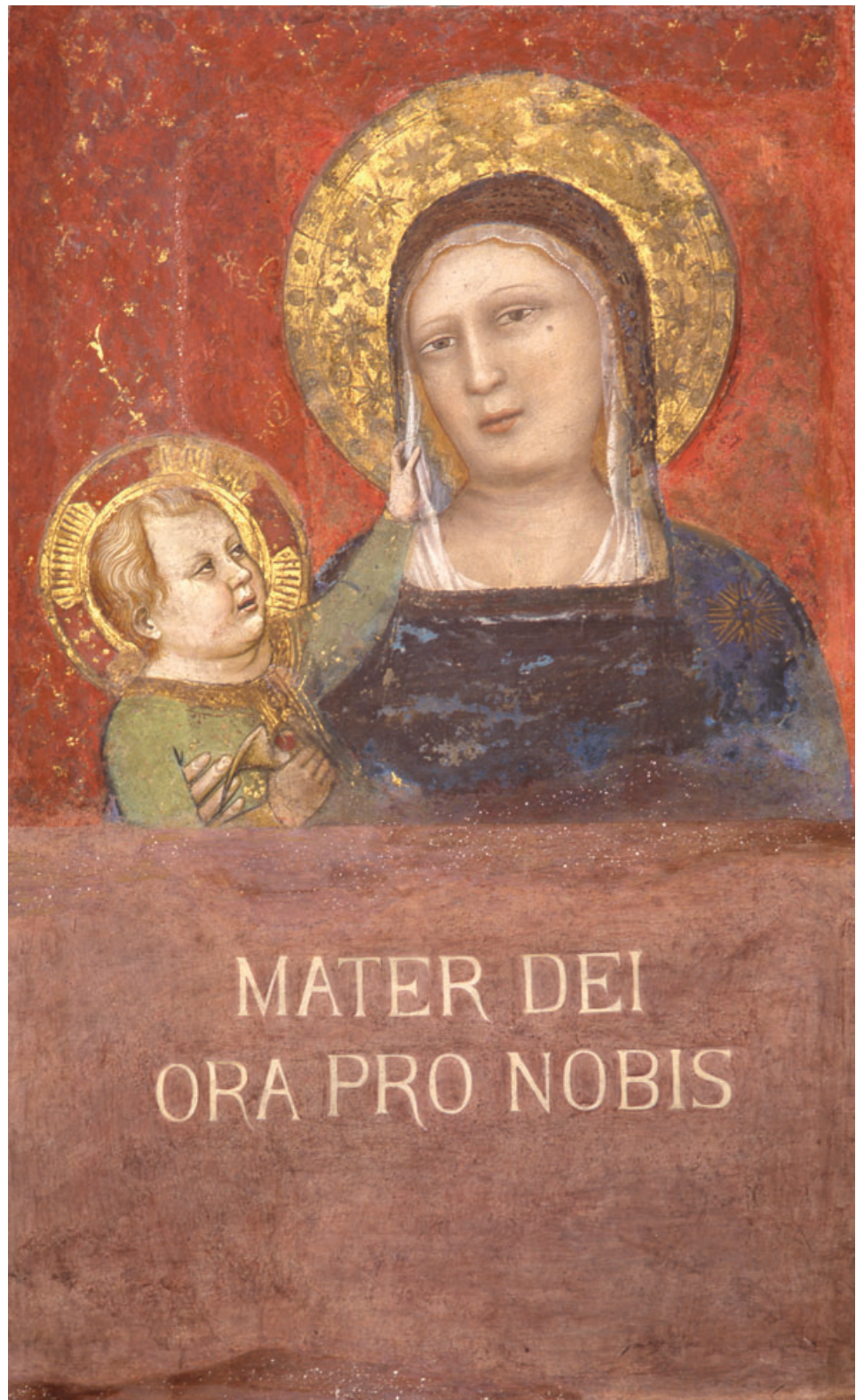


6 *Madonna dei Chierici*, c. 1350–75. Fresco. Florence: Santa Maria del Fiore. Photo: Opera del Duomo, Florence.

7 Bernardo Daddi, *Madonna di Orsanmichele*, 1347 (enshrined within Andrea Orcagna's tabernacle, 1355–59). Tempera on panel, 250 × 150 cm. Florence. Photo: Nicolò Orsi Battaglini.

8 *Madonna of Impruneta*, late thirteenth century (enshrined in the della Robbia tabernacle chapel). Tempera on panel, 122 × 54 cm. Impruneta: Pieve di Santa Maria. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

(plate 7), to more modest wall frames. The decorative idiom was characterized by the virtuoso articulation of micro-architectonic structure and ornament and the conspicuous display of costly materials. Veiling rituals were introduced soon after images became active as sites of potent sacred intercession.²² The *Madonna of Impruneta* (plate 8), for example, was unveiled in the sanctuary at Impruneta on the





first Sunday of each month for confraternal devotions, on the second Sunday each May for an anniversary celebration, and during processions to Florence, which occurred on average once every three years, at the behest of the Florentine priors. As miraculous images gained in prestige, they spent more time under cover.²³ The *Madonna of Orsanmichele* (plate 7) was unveiled weekly during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, but toward the end of the following century, a Dominican poet observed that the image: ‘always remaining covered by a curtain of precious veils, it is rarely shown’. The celebrated *SS Annunziata* (plate 9), after the middle of the fifteenth century, could go for years without being unveiled.²⁴

Miraculous images were also implicated in continual processes of accretion and modification through cultic dressing-up and renewal. Votive offerings, usually crowns and jewels, could be physically affixed to the objects, while on festive occasions and in times of crisis, vestments were draped over sculpted effigies and around portable processional panels.²⁵ Images were repainted as a form of renewal designed to honour the cultic persona associated with the image and to enhance the efficacy of the object as a conduit for sacred intercession.²⁶ Bernardo Daddi’s striking monumental *Madonna of Orsanmichele* (1347) is best understood as the repainting of a pre-existing cult image on the site, which involved the complete renewal of the image, from the support up, and its re-enshrinement within Orcagna’s sumptuous new tabernacle. As noted earlier, the most prestigious miraculous images acquired retrospectively legends of Eastern origin and divine or sacred authorship as a form of cultic accretion, which influenced the perception of their materiality. By the mid-fifteenth century, the face of the Virgin in the *Annunciation* at the *SS Annunziata* was said to have been painted by an angel, making it the only officially recognized miraculous image in Florence made ‘not by human hand’ (*acheiropoieton*). By the late fourteenth century, the *Madonna of Impruneta* was said to have been painted by St Luke.²⁷ These were the two most prestigious Florentine miraculous images in the Renaissance, rivalling the celebrated Roman *Luke Madonnas* and the *Lateran Christ*.²⁸ It is fair to say that if a Florentine had been asked, in the middle of the sixteenth century, to identify the most important painting in the city, the miraculous *Annunciation* in the *SS Annunziata* would have been the response – even from an educated elite member of Florentine society or a discerning patron of the arts.

9 *Annunciation*, c. 1350.
Fresco, 285 × 220 cm.
Florence: SS Annunziata.
Photo: reproduced with kind
permission of the Padri Servi
di Maria of the SS Annunziata,
Florence.



Cultic enshrinement, veiling/unveiling, and ritual dressing-up operated in dynamic tension with the materiality of the cult object – the mere wood, plaster, and pigments out of which it was made. The richness of the trappings of enshrinement and dressing-up reified the high valuation given to an object that was materially modest. There was an ideological function to this arrangement too, allowing the mere wood, plaster and pigments to assert themselves as such in a defence against accusations of idolatrous worship. One of the definitions of idolatry in this period was the veneration of mere matter, as opposed to the transcendent sacred being represented by the effigy.²⁹ Thus, miraculous images, as objects of intense desire, should not be adored for their media. As a consequence, they did not exhibit materials and forms considered at this time to be alluring – precious metals and gems, virtuoso displays of artistry, and seductive figurations. It could even be argued that it was their very lack of an aesthetic appeal aligned with contemporary artistic tastes at the high end of production that made these images suitable objects of cultic veneration. Francesco Bocchi, for example, was intent to point out that in the miraculous image of the *SS Annunziata* (plate 9), the neck and face of the Virgin, said to have been made by an angel, were ‘not in the manner (*maniera*) of Michelangelo or Andrea del Sarto, but sweetly full of marvelous vigor’.³⁰ As an image cult acquired prestige and age, an aesthetic of archaism could prevail, enhanced by a legend of Eastern or early Christian origins, or sacred authorship, which gave worth and visual interest to an object that was stylistically outmoded or had darkened – like the celebrated *Volto Santo* of Lucca (plate 10), said to have been manufactured by Nicodemus who had been present at the Crucifixion of Christ.³¹

Enshrinement, dressing-up, and retrospective legends could place pressure upon the material image to justify the extraordinary value that it was accorded. There are interesting examples where the visual idiom of miraculous images and the very notion of ‘sacred likeness’ were challenged according to other competing conceptions about representation. Franco Sacchetti wrote about the *Volto Santo* of Lucca in the late fourteenth century:

... for a long time now the *Volto Santo* has been in the city of Lucca: is there anyone who has ever said how it would be if it were not for belief? Who would want to say that this is the image of our Lord (were it not for the veneration of the one who would say it)? Because Christ had the most beautiful and well-proportioned body that ever was; he did not have popping-out or terrified eyes.³²

One sixteenth-century Florentine sceptic of cultic culture, Agnolo Firenzuola, mused that there was really nothing intrinsically different between the celebrated Annunciation at the SS Annunziata (plate 9) and a similar image in nearby San



10 *Volto Santo*, twelfth century (?). Polychrome wood, 278 × 245 cm. Lucca: San Martino. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

11 *Annunciation*, 1371. Fresco.
Florence: San Marco. Photo:
Nicolò Orsi Battaglini.



Marco (plate 11) that would justify the higher level of veneration accorded the Annunziata fresco. Cult value, he implied, was purely a function of 'the manner of displaying it with so much ostentation'.³³

There is a story told in Francesco Bocchi's sanctuary history of the *Annunciation* at the SS Annunziata, written in 1592, in which Michelangelo was asked by Duke Alessandro de' Medici to verify the authenticity of the face of the Virgin in the fresco as the product of divine artifice, on an occasion when the Duke had the image unveiled for some visiting foreign dignitaries. If there is any historical basis for this story, the event would have taken place sometime between 1530 when Alessandro became duke, and 1534 when Michelangelo left Florence for Rome, never to return. In Bocchi's account, Duke Alessandro addressed Michelangelo, who had dropped to his knees before the image, and said, 'Tell me a little about your impression of this Image.' Michelangelo remained mute and immobile, either in 'a stupor ... brought upon the senses by the divine face (*divin volto*) or with his spirit overcome by fear of the divine beauty'.³⁴ The Duke repeated his question and Michelangelo finally answered him:

If someone were to say to me, because this is my expertise, that this Image was painted by human means (*da senno umano*), I would say that it is a lie: because in truth the skill (*artifizio*) of a man and his talent (*ingegno*) could not arrive at the heights of which this is worthy. Therefore, I conclude that this

divine likeness (*divin semblante*) was miraculously (*miracolosamente*) done by God and the Angels without others.³⁵

Later, when asked by a friend why he had begun to demonstrate a new reverence for the Annunciation image, he responded:

After I was allowed, in the company of those noblemen, . . . to see the likeness of the Holy Virgin Annunciate from close up, which I had never before seen, I say now the same thing that I said then, that here it is not the skill of brushes (*arte di pennelli*) that made the face of the Virgin, but something truly divine (*divina veramente*). It therefore is fitting that I humbly admire and adore it.³⁶

This anecdote is interesting on many counts, not the least of which is the suggestion of the extremely limited access to this highly venerated Florentine cult image that the populous would have had in the early years of the Medici Dukedom, to the extent that the Michelangelo of the story – a Florentine – had never had a good, close look at the fresco prior to this privileged viewing made possible by a Medici Duke. The story also reveals a certain characteristic tension embedded within the discourse on, and the experience of, miraculous images in the Renaissance period. In Bocchi's account the sacred image is put to the test. The form and matter of the holy face are scrutinized for signs of divine or human manufacture, for features that would place it beyond



12 Pietà, 1470s. Fresco.
Bibbona: Madonna della
Pietà. Photo: Bridgeman
Art Library.

or within conventional perceptual boundaries and thresholds. At the same time, the holy face is inscrutable, irreducible; it resists reductive or even metaphoric readings. Michelangelo, in the end, is without words to describe the *divin sembiante* and can only assume a devotional posture before the image.

Transfiguration and Sacred Immanence

There was another way in which the distinct materiality of miraculous images was critical to the extraordinary status that these venerated objects were accorded during the Renaissance period. The materiality of miraculous images was directly



13 Attributed to Desiderio da Settignano or Donatello, *Madonna della Neve*, c. 1460. Marble relief, 85 × 50 cm. Florence: Oratorio della Madonna (Le Murate). Photo: Gabinetto Fotografico della Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico, Artistico, ed Etnoantropologico e per il Polo Museale della Città di Firenze, Florence.



14 Crocifisso dei Bianchi,
fourteenth century.
Polychrome wood, c. 100 × 80
cm. Florence: Santo Spirito.
Photo: Kunsthistorisches
Institut, Florence.

implicated in a category of miracle, known as a ‘transfiguration’ (*trasfigurazione*), that was fundamental to sanctuary culture. The transfiguration of an image involved a perceived change in the visual appearance of the material figuration and was usually understood as a portent or a sign of saintly or divine agency.³⁷ Many miraculous images were initially activated as cult objects through transfiguration and these miracle stories were told and retold in the form of foundation legends recounting the origins of the cults. The figure of the Virgin in the *Pietà* of Bibbona (plate 12), for example, was suddenly transformed on 5 April 1482, when, as Luca Landucci described in his diary, it ‘was transfigured (*si trasfigurava*), that is it changed from blue to red, and from red to black and then various other colors’.³⁸ A marble relief of the *Madonna and Child* in the Florentine nunnery of Le Murate (plate 13) was witnessed floating upon the floodwaters during the tremendous inundation of the Arno River in 1557, buoyant as heavy stone truly should not be.³⁹ The Bianchi Crucifix in Santo Spirito in Florence (plate 14) miraculously survived the fire that gutted Brunelleschi’s church in 1471. The wood of the sculpture failed to burn, as ‘the fire was seen visibly to withdraw from around [it]’.⁴⁰ Outside of Florentine territory, in Forlì,

a similar instance of miraculous flame resistance was said to have occurred in 1428 when a woodcut print of the Virgin and Child did not burn when the schoolmaster’s house in which it was displayed went up in flames. The image became known henceforth as the *Madonna del Fuoco* – the *Madonna of the Fire* – and it was translated to the Cathedral where it was venerated.⁴¹ The materiality of the image – the light, thin delicate medium of the cotton rag paper – was thus critical to the public perception of its sacred qualities, as was the blue pigment of the Bibbona *Pietà*, the marble of the *Madonna and Child* at the nunnery Le Murate, and the wood of the Bianchi Crucifix of Santo Spirito. Portable images could miraculously become so heavy that they could not be physically moved, like the crucifix said to have been carried in procession to the Augustinian nunnery church at the Chiarito in Florence by a group of itinerant flagellants during the Bianchi devotional movement in 1399. According to legend, the penitents were forced to leave behind the now unbearably heavy image of Christ and it was subsequently enshrined and venerated in the church.⁴² This kind of sign was usually interpreted as an emphatic preference, on the part of the sacred being represented, that the image remain in that specific location rather than be transported to another destination. In this regard images were behaving just as saints’ relics had for centuries in determining the desired topographical locus of the related cult. The marble *Madonna and Child* at Le Murate, for example, was considered to have floated to a more accessible location within the convent so that the image could be venerated by the public as well as by the nuns.⁴³

The majority of miracles of transfiguration, however, involved the material image behaving ‘as if’ it were an animate body, moving, speaking, exuding bodily fluids like blood, tears, and sweat, and demonstrating emotive states.⁴⁴ These miraculous manifestations were perceived to act directly upon the mimetic

physiognomy of the image. Figurations nodded or inclined their heads, observed what took place before them, closed their eyes, and wept. They spoke to supplicants through their represented lips and listened to responses through their painted ears. Tacky blood oozed from gaping wounds on the body of the crucified Christ. Timely bodily movements saved people from danger while more subtle gestures indicated a blessing or approbation. Examples abound in the chronicles recounting the Bianchi devotions of 1399. Luca Dominici, who was himself a participant in the penitential processions, recorded the following miracle that took place on 21 August 1399, outside the city of Prato:

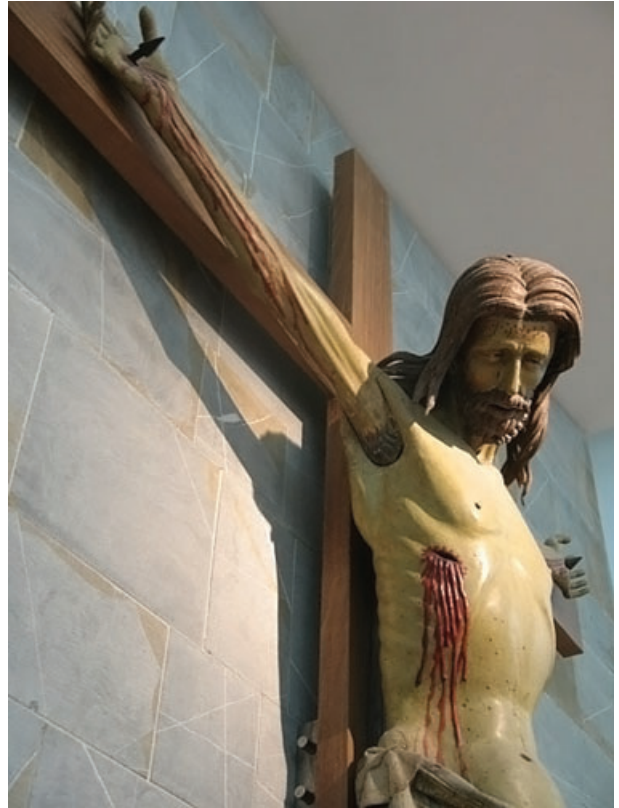
In the panel of our Lady which was in the room of Bartolommeo di Battifolle Panciaticchi, St John the Evangelist was painted at the side of the Crucifix, as was the custom, and it was an old panel, and St John was crying. At once the Bishop and the Officials and every person went to it in procession. And the Bishop and the Officials arrived after some time and found that St John had a large, beautiful tear in his right eye; then the Bishop carried it in his hands to the altar set up at San Giovanni Fuorcivita. There everyone saw it and I, too, and I touched St John: all the time the tear remained fixed. And here mass was sung and the Bishop thought that this miracle was made to show that Christ had approved of the peace that Bartolommeo had spontaneously made with the Lassari family.⁴⁵

On another occasion, Luca Dominici reports with anatomical precision ‘the Crucifix that the Florentines carried was that from Santa Croce [and] after they placed it on the altar of the Church in Passignano, it miraculously poured out living blood (*sangue vivo*) in great quantities from many parts of the body and from its head and from its kidneys and from its arms and other places.’⁴⁶

A theological understanding of the miraculous transfiguration of images was available in the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas. While Aquinas did not directly address this specific type of miracle when parsing the different ranks and orders of miracles in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, the transfiguration of a sacred image would have fallen under the highest of his three categories, in that it was an event ‘in which something is done by God which nature never could do.’⁴⁷ In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas discussed a somewhat similar type of miracle that occurred when the infant Christ Child or the flesh of Christ appeared in the host. When just one person witnessed such an occurrence, Aquinas noted that this could be a miraculous apparition, caused by God, acting on the visual perception of the beholder, involving no outward change in the host itself. The same would hold true in the case of a sacred image that was seen transfiguring by a single supplicant, while it maintained its static ‘quality’ in the eyes of others. Aquinas acknowledged a different order of miracle, however, when many people observed these changes in the host, and they appeared to endure for some time. This, he explained, involved an actual change in the outward appearance of the host, in its so-called ‘accidents’ (*accidentia*).⁴⁸ The transfiguration of sacred images can be understood in a similar vein, in spite of the significant differences between the host and sacred images. Image transfiguration, from a Thomistic perspective, involved ‘accidental’ changes involving certain ‘qualities’ (*qualitas*) of the images, like their colour, weight, and configuration (*figura*). These were not changes in the substance (*substantia*) of the images. A crucifix was still an image fashioned out of wood, even after the wood miraculously appeared to behave in a very un-wood-like fashion, and the marble *Madonna* relief at Le Murate



15 Attributed to Giovanni di Balduccio, *Crucifix*, early fourteenth century. Polychrome wood, 190 x 176 cm. Florence: Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (originally in the Baptistery). Photo: Megan Holmes.



16 Detail of Giovanni di Balduccio (attrib.), *Crucifix*, early fourteenth century.

was still made of stone, even as it was seen floating. This was emphatically not a case of 'transubstantiation', when the very substance of the thing was changed or converted. Transubstantiation was reserved for the consecrated host and wine when they were converted from bread and wine into the body of Christ.⁴⁹ This same order of explanation can be extended to miracles of transfiguration that involved the exudation of bodily fluids. A wooden crucifix that bled or wept, like the transfiguring processional image from Santa Croce described by Luca Dominici above and the Florentine Baptistery Crucifix (plate 15 and plate 16) which was also witnessed bleeding in 1399,⁵⁰ did not itself experience transubstantiation or incarnation. It remained a carved wooden crucifix, even as it behaved like a human body and effused blood and tears that were understood to be real carnal substances (*sangue vivo*). These distinctions, however, even when maintained in practice, could be very confusing, particularly when the effluvia of miraculous images were collected and adored as relics.⁵¹ Furthermore, repeated hierophany 'in' and 'through' the image effectively consecrated the object as sacred and left some ineffable trace, or tackiness, of sacred presence attached to the image. Miraculous images were treated like holy relics, even if their link with sacred beings was mimetic rather than metonymic, and their materiality not as obviously consecrated.

Religious and secular authorities were nervous about the possibility of an overly literal interpretation of sacred embodiment in the image, labelling this kind of devotional behaviour idolatrous and associating it with the unlearned and the simple-minded.⁵² As a consequence, image cults were under constant surveillance. Efforts were made to investigate some of the more spectacular reports and repeated instances of miraculous transfiguration, in order to ensure that all potential natural causes for the phenomenon be considered. In Pistoia, authorities made certain that the bodily sweat issuing forth from the fresco of the *Madonna dell'Umiltà* in 1490 was

not caused by excessive humidity in the wall.⁵³ In Rome, at the height of the Bianchi devotional movement that had extended down from Liguria and Tuscany in the year 1399, woodworkers and painters were called in to examine a sculpted processional crucifix that bled at the command of a charismatic penitent who claimed that he was St John the Baptist. When one of the experts probed the side wound, the chest cavity appeared to be hollow. The papal investigator cried out ‘Do it with more conviction!’ and the artisan ‘cracked open the side wound of the crucifix’ and discovered within an internal mechanism that, when squeezed, caused three or four drops of a blood-like substance to issue forth from a little leather sack through the wound.⁵⁴ Images were scrutinized; the testimony of witnesses was examined; suspicions of fraud were investigated; and the orthodox position on the image as the sign (*signum*) of the sacred prototype was reiterated in the sanctuary context.⁵⁵

Miraculous Images and Sacred ‘Personhood’

In considering miracles of transfiguration and the notion of immanence in and through the image, I want to work with the concept of agency proposed by the anthropologist Alfred Gell. According to Gell, works of art and artifacts can, on occasion, be understood to support ‘the abduction of agency’, allowing the people who interact with them to attribute active agency to them. This is because objects can be endowed with a kind of ‘personhood’ and the behaviours and characteristics associated with human agency.⁵⁶ Understood as such, Renaissance miraculous images were ‘social agents’ whose material and figurative features, under certain circumstances, were ascribed intentioned behaviour by religious beholders. The materiality of miraculous images – the very matter and form out of which they were made – thus had the potential to contribute to the perception that the images were responsive to the needs of supplicants and were animate in this responsiveness. An example of this kind of agency attributed to the material image can be seen in the case of the miraculous *Madonna dei Terremoti* (‘Madonna of the Earthquakes’; plate 17) from the town of Scarperia located to the north of Florence, where the miracle of transfiguration that launched the cult was motivated by an unusual iconography. The fresco, dating to the late fifteenth century, represents the Virgin with the swaddled Christ Child nestled within the drapery of her lap, with a pillow resting beneath his head. The Virgin’s hands, which typically support the baby in images of the enthroned Virgin and Child, are here brought together in prayer. This is a very odd format that, not altogether successfully, conjoins the typology of the Madonna and Child enthroned with a relatively new Florentine iconography of the Adoration of the Christ Child where the Virgin kneels upon the ground, popularized by Fra Filippo Lippi’s altarpiece for the Medici Palace Chapel (1459). The fresco in Scarperia appears to have become the object of cultic veneration in 1542 when a strong and destructive earthquake rocked the region.⁵⁷ As the legend goes, the Madonna, who had originally been cradling the Christ Child in her arms, transfigured, dropping the baby into her lap in order to pray to God to cease the tremors.

According to Gell, there are two basic strategies by which inanimate objects are transformed by humans into what he calls ‘quasi persons in artifact-form’.⁵⁸ Gell refers to the first of these strategies as ‘externalist’ because it involves a projection, from the outside, by the people within a religious community, of the role of a ‘social other’ onto the object. The image is the passive recipient of ritualized acts that enmesh it in ‘the structured routines of daily life’.⁵⁹ The dressing-up and procession of miraculous images, as well as the intimate prayers addressed to the sacred being associated with a specific sanctuary image (the ‘Madonna of Orsanmichele’), would

17 *Madonna dei Terremoti*, c. 1470–1500. Fresco. Scarperia: Oratorio della Madonna dei Terremoti. Photo: Megan Holmes.



fall under this category. The second strategy of animation that Gell describes he calls ‘internalist’ because it treats the inanimate material as if it possessed within it, a mind or animating spirit, a homunculus. An inner–outer dichotomy is thus set up in relation to the object – the inner, animate soul or mind and its outer, visualized form, or body. Representational features in the outer body that suggest access to the inner spirit or mind are thus of key importance, as they open up ‘routes of access to this

inwardness'. Mimesis, too, can play a significant role in the perception of the object-as-person. Gell's 'internalist conception of agency' helps account for how the physical materiality and the representational features of cult images – gaping wounds (see plate 15) and wide staring eyes (see plate 6, plate 7, plate 10 and plate 18) – were implicated in miracles of transfiguration and imaginative encounters with the cultic personae. Gell allows us to move beyond a generalized notion of animation as a superficial result of an artist's tricks of the trade, like the eyes in the portrait that follow the beholder, to more culturally specific conceptions of anthropomorphism and embodiment. Late medieval and Renaissance theories of human physiology were extremely attentive to how inner, vital spirits manifest themselves on the exterior physiognomy and passed out of (and into) the body through critical orifices.⁶⁰

There are, however, a number of problems inherent in Gell's universalizing formulation. The theory of the 'homunculus within the object' relies unproductively upon an ahistorical mind/body binary, which fails to differentiate the complex operations of the mind and soul, which Caroline Walker Bynum argues must be treated as two distinct elements in late medieval Christian conceptualizations



18 *Madonna delle Carceri*, c. 1350–1400. Fresco. Prato: *Madonna delle Carceri*. Photo: Mandragora, Florence.

about human physiology and behaviour.⁶¹ Gell's theory of 'personhood' also forces miraculous images to assume personhood and to conform to human behaviours when they often clearly did not. These were, after all, supernatural embodiments. Sacred effigies were seen to weep precious crystals, rather than tears; their exudations of sweat were interpreted as a form of lament; and a 'face-to-face' encounter with the Veronica in Rome could blind the beholder.⁶² Certain anatomical parts of miraculous figurations could be considered more sacred than others. It was just the face of the Virgin, for example, that was said to have been painted by an angel in the *Annunciation* at the SS Annunziata and this feature was often isolated in prayers and in copies of the cult image.⁶³ Nor does the metaphor of interiority quite get at the slippery and variable relationship in the Renaissance between the sacred being and the transfiguring effigy.

The ambiguity of this relationship is evident in a devotional poem that was written about a miraculous image known as the *Madonna delle Carceri* (plate 18) in Prato.⁶⁴ The poem describes how the cult originated when the Virgin 'descended from Heaven on July 6th, 1484'. According to the temporality of the poem, at the very same time that the Virgin was in transit from Heaven, she was also 'accustomed to be' in 'her perfect effigy' on the wall of the abandoned prison in Prato. The vernacular word used to describe the Virgin's habitual relationship to her frescoed image is interesting: *prochurare* – meaning literally 'to arrive at' or 'to obtain' and usually used in relation to a state of being or material property. It implies the process of becoming, so that the immaterial transcendent Virgin in the poem assumes a state of visibility in her image. The material effigy frescoed on the wall is conceived as a superficial skin that, through transfiguration, becomes 'unstuck' or 'detached' (*dispicchar*) from the plaster supporting structure and moves about freely through the old prison grounds. The 'Queen of Heaven' then returns 'to that wall with her saintly feet, where great miracles are seen to take place'. The mobile image thus operates with its saintly prototype immanent in the vicinity, orchestrating its every move. The author of the poem is careful, however, to avoid the explicit conflation of the Virgin and her material image.

Transfiguration was ultimately a kind of material performance that signalled sacred presence and divine agency operating in the world. The conceptualization of the celestial Virgin momentarily 'inhabiting' her image helps us to appreciate, too, how the repainting, dressing-up, and enshrinement of a miraculous image were acts that were understood to enhance the dynamic material integrity of the image and make it a more fitting accommodation for the Virgin when she chose to preside in her sanctuary.

Satirizing the Animate Image in the *Novella*

During this period a new critical perspective on miracles of transfiguration and sacred immanence developed, and with it a literary genre that satirized the miracle story and took particular delight in exposing the apparent contradictions and paradoxes inherent in miracles of image animation. These ribald tales appear first in Italy in the second half of the fourteenth century in *novelle* and in the following century, within the more specialized humorous genre of the *burla* or *facezia*.⁶⁵ They are modelled after thirteenth-century French *fabliau* about Christian images and after Boccaccio's satires on the authenticity of sacred relics. It is telling that this genre in Italy came to embrace miraculous images when it did, at precisely the time that miracles of transfiguration were becoming a commonplace within cultic devotion. The stories of Franco Sacchetti, Poggio Bracciolini, and the Piovano Arlotto offer a kind of critique of image cults from within Catholic religious

culture before the stakes of the debate were ratcheted up in the sixteenth century with the Reformation.⁶⁶ These tales turn on the problematic role played by fallible human sensorial perception in identifying and comprehending the miraculous transfiguration of images and in discerning between natural, divine, and diabolical causes when witnessing the phenomenon.⁶⁷ They satirize the misperceptions of simple, uneducated people and the creative manipulation of spurious miracles by wily characters. We encounter pictures that chatter away with devotees and painted crucifixes that are 'alive' but can be killed, should the need arise – all with risibly natural explanations for the apparently miraculous. In the Piovano Arlotto stories, there is an evening devoted to a competitive exchange of these fashionable and entertaining stories between the Piovano and Piero de' Medici.⁶⁸

A particularly entertaining example of this genre is an over-the-top *novella* by Franco Sacchetti about an incarnate crucifix.⁶⁹ The foolish protagonist in the story is a painter from Siena named Mino whose wife was philandering with another man. Mino finds out about this and surprises the lovers by returning unexpectedly to his house one night.

This Mino was a painter of crucifixes more than of other works, particularly those that were carved in relief; he always had in his house, among those completed and in progress, sometimes four and sometimes six; and he kept them, as was the practice of painters, on a panel or a long board, in his workshop, leaning against the wall, one alongside the other, each covered with a large cloth. At the time he had six of them – four carved and in relief, and two that were painted in two-dimensions.⁷⁰

Mino arrived home and began to hammer on the door. The lovers scrambled for a quick solution to their problem and ran to the painter's workroom. The woman said: 'You want to do something good? Climb up on this board, and position yourself on one of these two-dimensional crucifixes with your arms on the cross, just as the others are, and I will cover you with the same linen cloth ...; then some saint will help us.'⁷¹ The man did as he was told, comically assuming the position of a veiled sculpted crucifix. The painter searched the house and eventually made his way into the workshop. Sacchetti savours the paradox, writing with evident irony: 'When the incarnate crucifix (*crocifisso incarnato*) heard him there, he thought about how he should seem to be; and it was fitting for him to be like the others that were of wood.'⁷² Mino initially found nothing amiss and eventually retired to bed with his wife. The next morning, however, he returned to his workshop where the lover was still splayed against the cross beneath the cloth:

Looking at his crucifixes, he saw two toes of one of the feet of the man who was covered [by the cloth]. Mino said to himself, 'For certain, this is the friend!' And looking over the various tools with which he roughed out and carved those crucifixes, he failed to see among them one that was more suitable to him than the axe. He took this axe and made ready to climb up to the living crucifix (*crocifisso vivo*) in order to cut off the principal thing that had brought him there ...⁷³

The lover then succeeds in fleeing through the open door of the shop, although Sacchetti plants the suggestion that he may not have escaped with his offending organ intact.⁷⁴

Mino, deeply distressed at being ‘cuckolded by the crucifix’ (*scornato del crocifisso*), confronts his wife about her infidelity. A tussle ensues in which the woman beats up her husband and then compares him to Boccaccio’s famously dim-witted painter Calandrino who was forever mistaking illusions for reality. Mino finally backs down, accepts his wife’s dalliance, and explains away his bruises to his fellow townsmen as having come about when one of his crucifixes fell on his face.

This story, in which a painter is ‘cuckolded’ by a libidinous ‘incarnate crucifix’ that escapes from his shop, parodies conventional miracle tales featuring image transfiguration and the veiling rituals associated with highly venerated images. Sacchetti was criticizing the kind of popular piety practised by people who privileged this type of spectacular miracle and had an overly literal understanding of transfiguration as incarnation or transubstantiation – the image as Real Presence. Sacchetti also exhibits an awareness of considerations related to the visual arts. He satirically mobilizes the powerful theological and artistic tropes of the *Deus artifex* and the *imago Dei*, and highlights the mimetic underpinning both of Christian image theory and Trecento artistic discourses based upon classical antique models of naturalism. The mimetic claims of religious representation in this period placed certain pressures upon miraculous images, where competing conceptions about ‘likeness’ and its effects could undermine the authority of the cultic objects as representational figurations (just as Sacchetti himself had challenged the *Volto Santo* of Lucca). However, Sacchetti should not be understood as debunking image cults in general. On the contrary, he was an active participant in the Florentine image cults of his day, designing the programme of Marian miracles for the stained glass windows at Orsanmichele and advising on the relocation and enshrinement of a newly activated Madonna fresco (plate 6) in the Cathedral.⁷⁵ He was advocating a more theologically precise understanding of the ‘signs and wonders’ of miraculous transfiguration in order to discourage imaginative licence in this cultural domain, as well as the idolatrous veneration of mere matter and mundane figurations. Sensory perception was fallible and phenomena that appeared to be miraculous needed to be verified by multiple witnesses and processed through the faculty of reason – which he considered the province of secular and clerical *litterati* who were necessary mediators in cultic activities.

The witnessing and the interpretation of the materiality of miraculous images by participants in sanctuary culture were thus potentially charged and contested acts. The introduction of veiling rituals, after an image acquired a reputation for potent intercession, had the effect of significantly reducing the possibility for new miracles of transfiguration to occur outside of the sanctioned periods of ritual celebration conducted by the resident clergy and authorized by the custodians of the cult. Veiling effectively ‘de-materialized’ miraculous images as objects of corporeal vision in the sanctuary. However, whenever cultic authorities intervened to reduce the direct sensorial contact that devotees had with miraculous images, alternative possibilities tended to open up. When people encountered the veiled cult object, as was the norm when they made their daily or weekly devotions or visited the sanctuary as pilgrims on non-festive occasions, the sacred presence inherent in the object could still be experienced. The intercessory powers of the image could be activated through objects that had come into direct contact with it, including reproductive prints like the woodcuts of the *Madonna delle Carceri* that were rubbed against the unveiled image and sold to supplicants.⁷⁶ Miraculous images also generated satellite cult sites featuring copies of the image that were more physically accessible to touch and sight, like the fresco on the inner façade wall at San Marco (plate 11) that reproduced the

composition of the perpetually veiled miraculous *Annunciation* just down the road at the SS Annunziata (plate 9).⁷⁷ There was also a rich votive culture which involved intimate encounters between supplicants and the sacred beings associated with specific miraculous images, that occurred at a distance from the images themselves, in the form of visions. People in crisis would pray to ‘La Nunziata’ – the toponym of the Virgin associated with the miraculous *Annunciation* fresco – and she would appear to them in a vision and intercede on their behalf, as visualized in a print from a collection of miracles from the SS Annunziata (plate 19). Devotion to an image like the *Annunciation*, which by the mid-fifteenth century was rarely unveiled, could also be complemented by participation in other image cults in the city that featured material effigies that could be touched and kissed on a regular basis and that mediated in the affairs of distinct social groups and religious sub-cultures.⁷⁸

The Dialectic in Image Veneration

The efficacy of Florentine Renaissance miraculous images ultimately depended upon the apparently contradictory conditions of devotees’ immediate, intimate sensorial experience of these sacred material objects (and the extended cultural memory of this contact), and their awe-struck acknowledgement of the inapprehensible, ineffable alterity of these same objects.⁷⁹ Perceptions of sacred immanence in and through the image, and of the responsiveness of the Virgin and Christ to votive supplication, were generated out of a certain tension or dialectic. Miraculous images were experienced by devotees as both accessible and inaccessible, close and distant, familiar and ‘other’. In making this assertion, I am going against the grain of the conventional view where cult images are associated with aura (think of Walter Benjamin, for example, in ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’).⁸⁰ Enshrined miraculous images are typically folded into the public sphere of orchestrated, formalized ritual, and are considered to have communicated their extraordinary status by means of a distancing effect and through their manifest visible difference from normative religious representations displayed in sacred and secular spaces. This cultic veneration is set up as a binary to private devotion and mysticism, both characterized by immediacy, access, and an unmediated and personal relationship with the sacred.⁸¹

This polarizing schema is not borne out by the historical record. *Ricordi*, *laude* prayers that were sung before cult images by lay confraternities, miracle stories, and the imagery of *ex-votos* all exhibit a yearning for the image and the corresponding sacred persona, conceived of as entities that were both fearsome and ardently desired. The devotional practices oriented toward miraculous images – prayer, liturgy, pilgrimage, procession, votive exchange, veiling/unveiling – facilitated both direct, close, and even quotidian engagement with the images and their surrogates, and more mediated forms of ritualized reverence conducted on special occasions.

At certain times miracle-working images were immediately perceptible to the senses of the supplicant. During intervals of unveiling, supplicants could kneel down before the image and fix their eyes upon the face of the figure, addressing Christ or the Virgin directly with generic prayers for mercy or requests for more personalized acts of intercession. This kind of dynamic, embodied, and sensorial image devotion is akin to what Christopher Pinney has called ‘corporetics’ (or ‘sensory corporeal aesthetics’) in his work on South Asian rural Hindu image culture.⁸² It involves an intimate and interactive mode of addressing a sacred image as if the sacred being were immanent, attentive, and responsive. In the context of Florentine miracle-working images, this variety of devotion was sustained by certain conventions and

practices. Votive supplication established a highly personalized relationship between the devotee-in-crisis and the sacred being, with a sense of mutual accountability in the exchange of salvic sacred intercession for material offerings of thanks. The images themselves also had agency in structuring this intimate and direct manner of address. The corpus of surviving Florentine Renaissance miracle-working images reveals a large percentage of figures of Christ and the Virgin with large, wide-open eyes that appear to engage the viewer in an exchange of looks (see *plate 6*, *plate 7* and *plate 18*). The sacred figures also exhibit active intercessory gestures (see *plate 18*) and there is often tender interaction between the Madonna and Child (see *plate 4*, *plate 6*, *plate 7* and *plate 13*) that could have functioned as a visual metaphor for Marian *misericordia*. The images are also composed in what would have been a familiar visual idiom, as devotees encountered iconography, typologies, figuration, motifs, and styles that were in common use in Florentine visual arts at the time. This kind of devotional intimacy and sensorial engagement with the image could also occur at a remove from the enshrined miraculous image in the sanctuary. People could experience mental images and interior visions of miracle-working paintings and sculptures in their domestic devotion and during moments of crisis. These visualizations within the mind's eye were understood as perceptual experiences of memory images imprinted in the mind or visions implanted by divine means.⁸³

The accessibility and familiarity of miraculous images were counterbalanced by occasions and characteristics that contributed to a sense of the images' 'alterity' and an attitude of awe and reverence on the part of beholders. There were distancing mechanisms within the enshrinement structures that rendered miraculous images physically inaccessible: the veils covering the images, balustrades and grills that enclosed the more elaborate tabernacle chapels, and the high elevation of the simpler wall frames. A familiar pictorial idiom could be effectively transformed through the ceremonial dressing-up of the images, through the enshrinement setting, or by the signs of age that older images gradually acquired (darkening, style and iconography from an earlier period). When images were activated on feast days and during moments of civic crisis, their unveiling was orchestrated by the clergy and followed set liturgical protocols. Here the extraordinary treatment accorded the images and the respect shown by the assembled community bespoke of the tremendous prestige and power of both the cult objects and the sacred beings represented.

This dialectic of accessibility and inaccessibility, of familiarity and radical 'otherness', of closeness and distance, that attended image veneration, shaped and sustained belief in powerful, yet intimate sacred intercessors who operated in and through their sanctuary images. This dialectical dynamic heightened the intensity of veneration and votive supplication, generating charged emotions, vivid sensations, and great personal expectations during times of dire need. 'Blessed is the one who is able to kiss it!' 'Blessed is the one who was able to touch it!' exhorted a witness to the procession of the miraculous crucifix from Santa Maria a Ripalta in Pistoia in 1399, describing how people crowded round to embrace and kiss the sculpture as it was carried through the streets of Tuscan towns and placed on display within churches and piazze.⁸⁴

Miraculous Images and Florentine Renaissance Visual Art

In conclusion, I'd like to return to the question of the broader impact of image cults and the materiality of the miraculous image on the visual arts in Renaissance Florence. Evidence suggests that Florentine practitioners were active participants in the rich devotional culture associated with miraculous images. We see traces

of their veneration of miraculous images in the ex-votos left by Antonio Filarete at the SS Annunziata and by Francesco da Sangallo at Santa Maria Primerana in Fiesole.⁸⁵ Visual artists contributed to the enshrinement of miraculous images and to the decoration of the sanctuaries built to house them. The sculptors Orcagna, Michelozzo, and Luca della Robbia produced the tabernacles for the *Madonna of Orsanmichele* (plate 7), and the SS Annunziata and the *Madonna of Impruneta* (plate 8), respectively, while Francesco di Giorgio, Vittorio Ghiberti, and Giuliano and Antonio da Sangallo all designed centralized churches in the *all'antica* architectural style for Marian miraculous images in Florentine subject towns (Cortona, Prato, Bibbona, and Montepulciano).⁸⁶ Bernardo Daddi, in a very unusual commission, was asked to make anew the *Madonna of Orsanmichele* in 1347. The iconography and the visual effects of Florentine miraculous images also influenced the manner in which painters and sculptors represented the Virgin, the Christ Child, and the crucified Christ. The *Annunciation* at the SS Annunziata (plate 9) has evident echoes in Florentine Annunciation imagery from the 1360s through the eighteenth century, while Michelangelo, when designing the sculpture of the *Virgin and Child* for the New Sacristy in San Lorenzo, derived the iconography and the dynamic position of the Christ Child from an early fourteenth-century miracle-working image, later known as the *Madonna di San Zenobio*, enshrined within a transept chapel in the church.⁸⁷

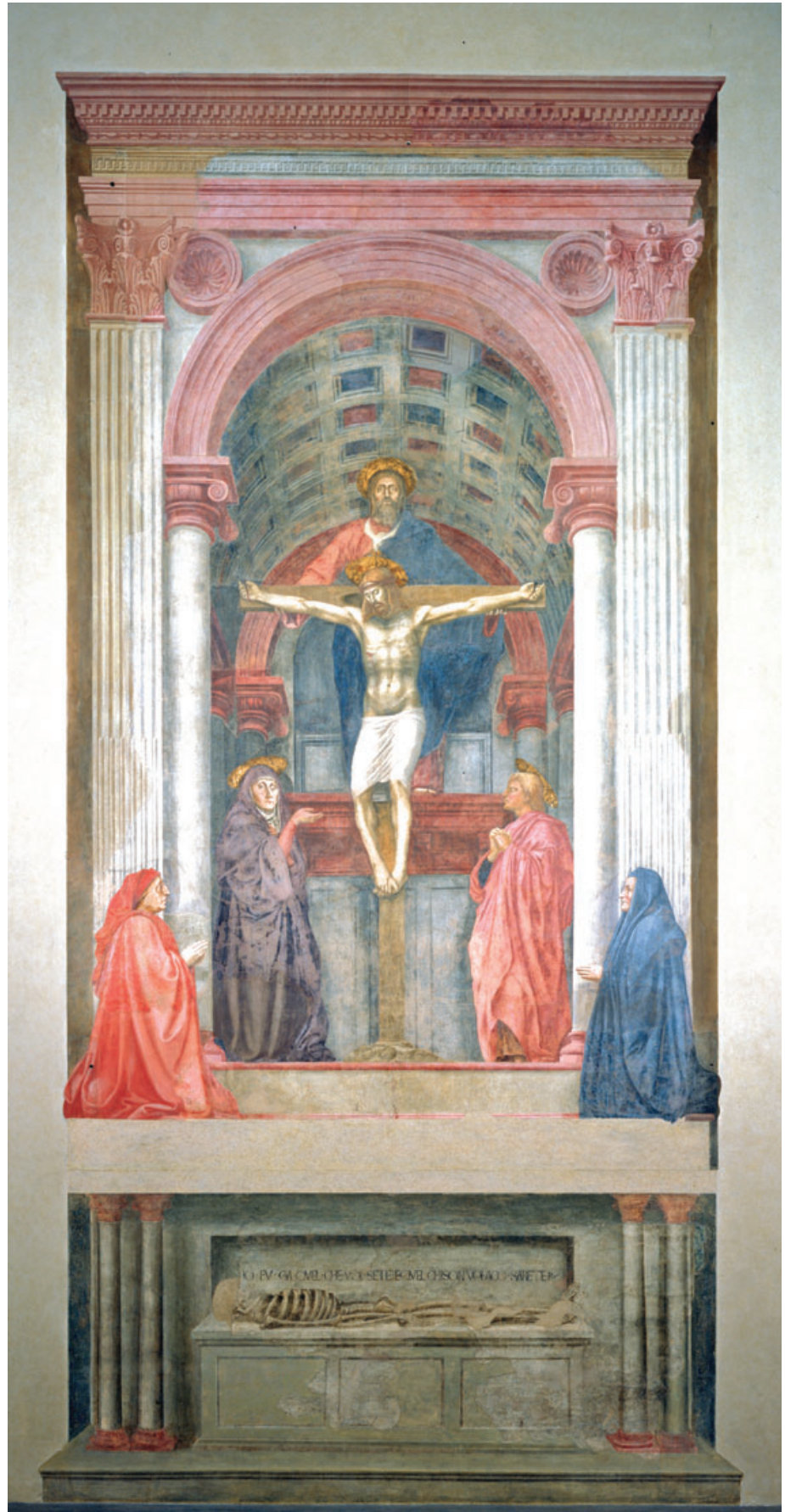
One can go even further, however, in demonstrating the close interrelationship between miraculous images and image cults, and Florentine artistic culture during the Renaissance period. Image cults, as they proliferated throughout Florence and Florentine territory and were bound up in an emergent Florentine identity, engaged a form of imagistic veneration that was predicated upon the possibility and the expectation of sacred immanence manifest in the immediate vicinity of the images, through tangible, physical, material signs. This was a highly performative and spectacular domain of devotional culture where Christ and the Virgin were experienced as if present in the church or sanctuary environment. Healing miracles took place before the images and the abundant ex-votos on display attested to the potency of the miraculous images as conduits for sacred intercession. Intimate visionary encounters with the sanctuary protagonists, like 'La Nunziata of Florence', were vividly perceptible to the interior senses of supplicants in their prayers (plate 19). On rare occasions, images miraculously transfigured before the eyes of witnesses and this dynamic form of sacred embodiment, featured in countless foundation

19 'With his house in ruins around him, Domenico Giusti remains unharmed', woodcut illustration from Luca Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata di Firenze*, Florence: Giorgio Marescotti, 1593. Photo: Biblioteca Marucelliana, Florence.



legends and miracle stories, stimulated the mimetic imagination of devotees and encouraged the conflation of the miraculous image and the sacred being represented. This modality of the sacred associated with miraculous images – perceptible to the senses, immanent in the immediate physical environment, and dynamically interactive with the religious supplicant – is of a similar order to that found in the most progressive contemporary Florentine religious art. There were also compelling convergences between the discourse on 'the miraculous' in religious devotion and the emergent discourse on the marvelous qualities of the visual arts.⁸⁸ Painters and sculptors, like Giotto, Masaccio, Donatello, Leonardo, and Michelangelo, staged vivid and immediate encounters between the beholder and sacred subjects through the manipulation

20 Masaccio, *Trinity*,
1426–27. Fresco, 667 × 317
cm. Florence: Santa Maria
Novella. Photo: Nicolò Orsi
Battaglini.



of perspective systems, the effects of naturalism, and narrative interaction and settings. The visuality operative in Masaccio's *Trinity* (plate 20) in the nave of Santa Maria Novella, for example, is not so very different from that activated in devotion before the unveiled *Madonna of Orsanmichele*, enshrined within Orcagna's tabernacle chapel (plate 7).⁸⁹ In both cases, monumental sacred subjects, set within architectonic spaces, would have been revealed to the Renaissance beholder. This imposing hieratic staging is countered, however, by an intimacy that is forged through the visual engagement between the beholder and the outward-looking sacred figures – the Virgin in Daddi's painting at Orsanmichele, and the Virgin and God in Masaccio's *Trinity*. The sense of the physicality and the presence of the sacred figures produced through Masaccio's extraordinary handling of perspectival pictorial space would have been akin to the effect, at Orsanmichele, of the revelation of the customarily veiled miraculous *Madonna* in the sanctuary space, with the very act of pulling back the veil visualized just above the painting in the sculptural decoration of Orcagna's tabernacle chapel. For the beholder positioned in Orsanmichele before the enshrined *Madonna* and in Santa Maria Novella before the *Trinity*, in the dynamic experience of viewing, clear distinctions between fictive representation, the material world, visionary apparition, and the transcendent spiritual realm would have broken down and the sacred subjects would have appeared to be present in the physical space of the beholder and responsive to direct address in a highly personalized relationship. It is compelling to imagine that Masaccio was striving to visualize certain effects of the sacred-made-manifest that had emerged during the Trecento in the context of image cults like that associated with the *Madonna of Orsanmichele*. The recovery and integration of miracle-working images and sanctuary culture within art-historical accounts of the Florentine Renaissance should foster a more nuanced understanding of the nature of the relationship and the reciprocal influence between this domain of religious culture and wider practices in the visual arts.

Notes

This article is related to my forthcoming book *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*. Versions were presented at the Getty Research Institute, Johns Hopkins University, Northwestern University, and Columbia University, and I benefited from the lively discussions that ensued. I would like to thank Aden Kumler and the anonymous readers for *Art History* for their extremely insightful comments, which I hope I have adequately addressed. Thanks are also due to Samuel Bibby, Paul Davies, John Najemy, Patricia Simons, and Elizabeth Sears.

- 1 Paleotti lists eight different ways according to which an image can be considered to be 'sacred'. Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, Rome, 2002, 58–61; see also Michele Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista: Storia delle immagini sacre attribuite a san Luca*, Pisa, 1998, 340–1.
- 2 The term 'immagine miracolosa' is found most frequently in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly in sanctuary histories, such as Francesco Bocchi's *Opera di M. Francesco Bocchi sopra l'immagine miracolosa della SS. Nunziata di Firenze*, Florence, 1592. Most earlier writers refer to images by their titles ('Nostra Donna di Santa Maria Impruneta' or 'La Nunziata di Firenze') or with reference to miracles or a special devotion ('una figura di Nostra Donna ... [che] aveva fatto miracoli' (Lucca Landucci, *Diario Fiorentino*, Florence, 1883, 279). Paleotti's eschewal of the term 'immagine miracolosa' is very likely on account of the Tridentine context in which his treatise was conceived. This kind of image and related image cult had been criticized by Protestant reformers and defended at the Council of Trent. On the nomenclature

found in the scholarly literature, see Michele Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista*, 18–20; Michele Bacci, 'Pro remedio animae: Immagini sacre e pratiche devozionali in Italia centrale (secoli XIII e XIV)', Pisa, 2000, 13–14.

- 3 'In secondo luogo un'immagine si dice sacra se è entrata in contatto con il corpo, con il volto o con altre parti di nostro Signore o di qualcuno dei suoi santi, in quanto, anche solo per quel contatto, in essa si imprime la figura del corpo o della parte che è stata toccata, come nel caso del volto santo di Cristo, lasciatoci da santa Veronica, conservato a Roma; o come per il sacro sudario in cui fu avvolto il beatissimo corpo del nostro Salvatore dopo la morte, che ancora oggi conserva impressa l'immagine di Cristo, sudario che viene conservato con grande venerazione dal sig. Duca di Savoia; oper qualsiasi altra figura che si sappia essere dipinta o raffigurata nel modo suddetto.

'In terzo luogo, si dirà santa un'immagine che sia stata composta da una persona santa, come quelle fatte da S. Luca o altre ancora dipinte da altri santi.

'In quarto luogo, perchè essa è stata fatta in modo miracoloso, come si dice a proposito dell'immagine del Salvatore a Roma, che è stata per questo detta *αχειροποιητος*, cioè non fatta per mano dell'uomo ma, come invisibilmente, per opera di Dio, o di altre simili.

'In quinto luogo si dirà santa un'immagine quando Dio abbia operato manifestamente segni e miracoli in tale immagine, come sappiamo ad esempio essere accaduto in quella della santa casa di Loreto, trasportata da un così lontano paese, la quale ha operato così numerosi miracoli, come ogni giorno se ne possono vedere. La stessa cosa si dirà di altre immagini che si trovano altrove e che, per opera divina, si erano vedute talora con il volto radioso, talora versare

- lacrime dagli occhi, o gocce di sangue, or fare qualche movimento come se fossero vive, o anche perchè in esse si sarà riconosciuta la bontà di Dio che, per mezzo loro, ha in un istante risanato i malati, ridato la vista ai ciechi e liberato alcuni da pericoli vari.' Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, 58–61.
- 4 For an example of a connoisseurial approach, see the integration of Florentine miracle-working images in Miklós Boskovits's continuation of Richard Offner's *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Origins of Florentine Paintings 1100–1270*, Section I, vol. 1, Florence, 1993, 198–204, 218–22, 282–5, 452, 510–23. For a discussion of the critical fortunes of the miracle-working Annunciation fresco at the SS Annunziata, see Megan Holmes, 'The elusive origins of the cult of the Annunziata in Florence', in Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf, eds, *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Rome, 2004, 97–122.
 - 5 The fresco of the Madonna and Child, originally on the exterior of the church, was venerated by the fourteenth century, with a foundation legend that traced the origin of the cult to 1242. Tim McCall and Paul Davies have forthcoming articles that link Bramante's innovative architecture with the miraculous image (McCall, 'Architecture of the miraculous in Milan: Bramante's *Coro Finto* and the cult of the Madonna of S. Maria presso S. Satiro', forthcoming, *Renaissance Quarterly*; Davies, 'Framing the miraculous: The use of perspective in Italian renaissance tabernacle design', forthcoming).
 - 6 Richard Trexler, 'Florentine religious experience: The sacred image', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 19, 1972, 7–41; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago, IL, 1994; Michele Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista*; Michele Bacci, 'Pro remedio animae'; Paul Davies, 'Studies in the Quattrocento Centrally Planned Church', PhD dissertation, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London University, 1992; Klaus Kruger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren: Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien*, Munich, 2001; Robert Maniura, 'The icon is dead, long live the icon: The Holy Image in the renaissance', in Antony Eastmond and Liz James, eds, *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium*, Aldershot, 2003, 87–104; Robert Maniura, 'The images and miracles of Santa Maria delle Carceri', in Thunø and Wolf, *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 86–93; Gerhard Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani. Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter*, Weinheim, 1990; Gerhard Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel. Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance*, Munich, 2002; Gerhard Wolf, 'Le immagini nel Quattrocento tra miracoli e magia. Per una "iconologia" refundata', in Thunø and Wolf, *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 305–20.
 - 7 The Lateran Christ in the Sancta Sanctorum in the Lateran palace in Rome, which probably dates from the seventh century, was most recently restored in the 1990s, leaving little legible figuration on the panel (Giovanni Morello and Gerhard Wolf, eds, *Il Volto di Cristo*, Milan, 2000, 36; Maria Andaloro, 'L'acheropita in ombra del Laterano', in Morello and Wolf, *Il Volto di Cristo*, 43–5).
 - 8 A detached, ethnographic perspective on religious culture was significantly influenced by Emile Durkheim's *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1917). A recent assessment of this interpretive tradition is found in Thomas Idinopulos and Brian Wilson, eds, *Reappraising Durkheim for the Study and Teaching of Religion Today*, Leiden, 2002. An interesting anthropological perspective on cultural attitudes (ethnographic and contemporary) toward so-called 'magical' beliefs and practices is provided by Michael Taussig in his article 'Viscerality, faith, and skepticism: Another theory of magic', in *Walter Benjamin's Grave*, Chicago, IL, 2006, 121–55.
 - 9 On image cults in Rome, see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*; Gerhard Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani*; Shelly Zuraw, 'The efficacious Madonna in Quattrocento Rome: Spirituality in the service of papal power', in Andrew Ladis and Shelly Zuraw, eds, *Visions of Holiness: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Italy*, Athens, 2001, 101–35.
 - 10 On the cult of the *Volto Santo* of Lucca, featuring a wooden crucifix dating to the twelfth or thirteenth century, see Giuliano Agresti, Italo Alighiero Chiusano, and Aurelio Amendola, *Volto Santo*, Lucca, 1989. On the Madonna icon in Spoleto in the papal territories, dated to the twelfth century and active in cultic devotion in the early thirteenth century, see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 241 and 323. On the proliferation of venerated copies of the Lateran Christ in Lazio, see Walter Angelelli, 'La diffusione dell'immagine lateranense: le repliche del Salvatore nel Lazio', in Morello and Wolf, *Il Volto di Cristo*, 46–9.
 - 11 On the substantial increase in the number of religious sanctuaries and image cults in Tuscany and elsewhere in Europe at precisely this time, see Anna Benvenuti and Isabella Gagliardi, 'Santuari in Toscana. Primo bilancio di una ricerca in corso', in Giorgio Cracco, ed., *Per una storia dei santuari cristiani d'Italia: approcci regionali*, Bologna, 2002, 265–310; William J. Connell in his review of Giorgio Cracco's *Per una storia dei santuari cristiani d'Italia: approcci regionali*, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 91: 2, 2005, 345; and Mary Lee Nolan, 'Shrine locations: Ideals and realities in Continental Europe', in Sofia Boesch Gajano and Lucetta Scaraffia, eds, *Luoghi sacri e spazi della santità*, Turin, 1990, 75–84. The Piovano Stefano, in his prologue to the statutes of the Confraternity of the Madonna of Impruneta, written around 1370, testifies to the great number of image cults throughout Italy, noting: 'Onde di non più dire delle immagini di Nostro Signore e sua Madre nelle parti d'Italia ci rendiamo scusati: imperò che tanti sono i luoghi, il dove la divina misericordia, per antico e per moderno, ae operati et aopera innumerabili et indicibili miracoli, che non ne bisogna prolissa scrittura.' Antonio Cecchi, ed., *Capitoli della Compagnia della Madonna dell'Impruneta*, Florence, 1866, 10.
 - 12 In my forthcoming book I address the relationship between the expanding Florentine territorial state and image cults in the Florentine *contado* and subject territories.
 - 13 I address the significant changes that occur within Florentine image cults over this extended period to a greater extent in my forthcoming book.
 - 14 William J. Connell and Giles Constable, *Sacrilege and Redemption in Renaissance Florence: The Case of Antonio Rinaldeschi*, Toronto, 2005.
 - 15 The exceptions in Florence are the *Madonna della Neve* at Le Murate (plate 13), which features a marble relief attributed to Donatello or Desiderio da Settignano, venerated beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century (Kate Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy*, Cambridge, 2003, 340–1), and the *Madonna of Orsanmichele* (plate 7), which Bernardo Daddi was commissioned to make as a replacement for an existing venerated image (Diane Finello Zervas, *Orsanmichele*, Modena, 1996, vol. 1, 62–5). In Venice, at San Rocco, an image of Christ on the Way to Calvary, that has been attributed to Titian or Giorgione, was venerated by the mid-sixteenth century (Peter Humfrey, *Titian: The Complete Paintings*, Ludion and New York, 2007, 43 and Christopher Nygrem, forthcoming PhD dissertation, 'Titian's artistic icons: Venetian religious painting between theology and devotion', Johns Hopkins University). In Rome, veneration directed toward a sculpture of the Madonna and Child by Jacopo Sansovino in Sant'Agostino began at some point in the early modern period (Bruce Boucher, *The Sculpture of Jacopo Sansovino*, London and New Haven, 1991, vol. 2, 320–1). Marco Ruffini and Francesco Caglioti have recently convincingly identified a miracle-working crucifix in the Servite church in Padua as a work of Donatello in their articles in the 2008 volume of *Prospettiva* (130/131): 'Un'attribuzione a Donatello del "Crocifisso" ligneo dei Servi di Padua' (22–49) and 'Il "Crocifisso" ligneo di Donatello per i Servi di Padova' (50–106). In all of these cases, however, the identity of the artists does not appear to have been a significant factor in the prestige of the image in cultic devotion.
 - 16 The *Nikopeia Madonna* in San Marco in Venice, for example, is considered by art historians to be an eleventh-century Byzantine icon, which, by the sixteenth century was said to have come from Constantinople to Venice following the 1204 sack of the former city (Francesco Sansovino, *Venezia città nobilissima*, Venice, 1581, 38; Belting *Likeness and Presence*, 195–6 (and 195–205 on Byzantine icons in San Marco); Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista*, 317–18). There was also a cult in parts of Italy, including the Veneto, known as the 'Madonna di Constantinopoli', that was linked with the Hodegetria icon in Constantinople (Michele Bacci, 'The legacy of the Hodegetria: Holy icons and legends between East and West', in Maria Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Aldershot, 2005, 79–90). There are icons in Rome that may be as old as the sixth and seventh centuries: the *Lateran Christ*, the icons of Peter and Paul in the Sancta Sanctorum, the *Madonna* images of San Francesca Romana, Transtevere, Santa Maria

- Maggiore, the Pantheon, and the Madonna of San Sisto (see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*; Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani*; Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista*, 235–80).
- 17 The *Madonna del Morbo* in Poppi was venerated by at least 1530 (*I mille santuari mariani d'Italia illustrati*, Rome, 1960, 339; Patrizia Freschi, "'Sub tutela Matris": L'Oratorio della Madonna del Morbo di Poppi', in Liletta Fornasari, ed., *Il Seicento in Casentino: dalla controriforma al tardo barocco*, Florence, 2001, 169–73.) On the serial production of this painting and others from the same Florentine workshop, see Megan Holmes, 'Copying practices and marketing strategies in a fifteenth-century Florentine workshop', in Stephen Campbell and Stephen Milner, eds, *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City*, Cambridge, 2004, 38–74.
 - 18 On the rise of the vernacular in religious culture in the fourteenth century, see Lina Bolzoni, *La stanza della memoria. Modelli letterari e iconografici nell'età della stampa*, Turin, 1995; Cesare Segre, ed., *Volgarizzamenti del due e trecento*, Turin, 1953; Giuseppe De Luca, ed., *Prosatori minore del Trecento. Scrittori di religione*, Milan, 1954; Carlo Delcorno, 'La predicazione volgare in Italia (sec. XIII–XIV): Teoria, produzione, ricezione', in *Revue Mabillon*, 4, 1993, 83–107.
 - 19 Vernacular versions of the lives of saints Francis of Assisi and Giovanni Gualberto, for example, contain crucifix miracles and the miracula and histories the *Madonna delle Carceri* in Prato and the *SS Annunziata* in Florence recount numerous miracles of transfiguration and prayers addressed to the Virgin (Anna Benvenuti, *Santa Maria delle Carceri a Prato: Miracoli e devozione in un santuario toscano*, Florence, 2005, 104–53; Luca Ferrini, *Corona di Sessanta Tre Miracoli della Nunziata di Firenze*, Florence, 1593). Poems about the *Madonna of Orsanmichele* by the fourteenth-century writers Giovanni Cavalcanti and Franco Sacchetti are quoted in Zervas, *Orsanmichele*, text volume, 39–40 and 99.
 - 20 I am following Michele Bacci here in his discussion of 'hierophany' in relation to early Tuscan miraculous images: 'Pro remedio animae', 19. On hierophany in Eliade, see *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, New York, 1958; *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, London and New York, 1959, 11–13; entry on 'hierophany' by Eliade and Lawrence E. Sullivan in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York, 1989, vol. 6, 313–18.
 - 21 The *Madonna dei Chierici* is now in a chapel in the tribuna of the Cathedral. Giuseppe Poggi, *Il Duomo di Firenze*, Florence, 1988, vol. I, CVII. Timothy Verdon, 'The Intercession of Christ and the Virgin from the Florentine Cathedral: Iconographic and ecclesiological significance', in Annalisa Innocenti and Timothy Verdon, eds, *La cattedrale e la città: Saggi sul Duomo di Firenze*, Florence, 2001, vol. II, 131–49.
 - 22 I address the enshrinement and veiling of Florentine miracle-working images in my forthcoming book. For discussions of veils and veiling, see Mary Pardo, 'The subject of Savoldo's *Magdalen*', *Art Bulletin*, 71, 1989, 67–91; Herbert Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing. Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*, Philadelphia, PA, 2000; Klaus Krüger, *Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren*; Gerhard Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel*; Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory*, Toronto, 2004; Paul Hills, 'Titian's veils', *Art History*, 29, 2006, 771–95; Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, Cambridge, 2007.
 - 23 In my forthcoming book I argue that the veiling of miraculous images differed from the conventional practice of veiling altarpieces in the greater amount of time that miraculous images spent under veils and in the significance of the act of unveiling as a form of divine revelation.
 - 24 On the unveiling of the *Madonna of Orsanmichele* in the 1333 statues of the *Compagnia di Orsanmichele*, see Arnaldo Cocchi, *Notizie storiche intorno antiche immagini di Nostra Donna che hanno culto in Firenze*, Florence, 1894, 32–3. In his poem the Theotocon, written c. 1469, Domenico da Corella claimed the *Madonna of Orsanmichele* was rarely uncovered ('Semper aperta manens pretiosi tegmine veli, Monstratur rara') (Giovanni Lami, *Deliciae Eruditorum*, Florence, 1742, vol. 13, 84). On the unveiling of the *Madonna of Impruneta*, see the statutes of the *Compagnia della Madonna*, in a redaction dating to c. 1375: Cecchi, *Capitoli della Compagnia della Madonna dell'Impruneta*, 16 and 25. On the veiling of the *SS Annunziata*, see Ottavio Andreucci, *Il Fiorentino istruito nella chiesa della Nunziata*, Florence, 1858, 94–5.
 - 25 On the transformation and the dressing-up of images in devotional practices, see Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, New York, 1998, 23–5; Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford, 1998, 96–154; David Areford, 'In the Viewer's Hands: The Reception of the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe, c.1400–c. 1500', PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2002, ch. 2; Diana Webb, *Patrons and Defenders: The Saints in the Italian City States*, London and New York, 1996, 209; Richard Trexler, 'Being and non-being: Parameters of the miraculous in the traditional religious image', in Thunø and Wolf, *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 22–3.
 - 26 Cathleen Hoeniger, *The Renovation of Paintings in Tuscany, 1250–1500*, Cambridge, 1995; Barry Flood, 'Between cult and culture: Bamian, Islamic iconoclasm, and the museum', *Art Bulletin*, 84, 2002, 641–59.
 - 27 The *Annunciation* in the *SS Annunziata* was venerated by the 1360s, with the foundation legend first documented in 1456 (Holmes, 'The elusive origins of the cult of the *Annunziata* in Florence', in Thunø and Wolf, *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 97–122). The *Madonna of Impruneta* was venerated by 1330, acquiring the legend of Lucan authorship by 1385 (Giovanni Battista Casotti, *Memorie storiche della miracolosa immagine di Marie Vergine dell'Impruneta*, Florence, 1714, vol. 1, 93 and 155; Franco del Grosso, 'Origine del culto alla *Madonna d'Impruneta* e suoi rapporti con la città di Firenze', in *Impruneta. Una pieve, un paese. Cultura parrocchia e società nelle campagna Toscana*, Florence, 1983, 33–77; Carlo Nardi, 'La "Leggenda riccardiana" di Santa Maria all'Impruneta: Un anonimo oppositore del pievano Stefano alla fine del Trecento?', *Archivio storico italiano*, 149, 1991, 503–51). The reference to St Luke in the preface to the capitoli of the confraternity of the *Madonna of Impruneta*, composed by Piovano Stefano circa 1375 and published by the *Accademia della Crusca* (Cecchi, *Capitoli della Compagnia della Madonna dell'Impruneta*, 13) and discussed by Nardi, is a later insertion in the manuscript (Florence, *Archivio di Stato, Capitoli delle compagnie religiose soppresses* 78, 13). On venerated images associated with St Luke, see Michele Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista*.
 - 28 The most prestigious Roman miracle-working images during the renaissance were the *Veronica*, the *Lateran Christ*, the *Madonnas* of Santa Maria Maggiore, San Sisto, Santa Maria in Trastevere, the *Aracoeli*, Santa Maria del Popolo, and the Pantheon. See Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 311–29, and Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani*.
 - 29 See for example, Antonio degli Agli, *De rationibus fidei* (Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, *Conventi Soppressi*, B.9.1268, 50r). On idolatry, see Jean-Claude Schmitt, ed., *L'idolatrie*, Paris, 1990; Thomas Lentz, 'Idolatrie im mittelalter. Aspekte des traktates "de idolatria" zwischen dem 12. und 15. Jahrhundert', in Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert and Roland Liebenberg, eds, *Frömmigkeit — Theologie — Frömmigkeitstheologie. Contributions to European Church History*, Boston, MA and Leiden, 2005, 31–45; *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67: 4, 2006, edited by Jonathan Sheehan, dedicated to 'Idolatry'; Michael Cole and Rebecca Zorrach, eds, *The Idol in the Age of Art*, Aldershot, 2009.
 - 30 'La maniera della gola e del volto non è simile a maniera del Buonarroto nè di Andrea del Sarto, ma dolcemente piena di mirabil vigore;...' Francesco Bocchi, *Della imagine miracolosa della SS. Nunziata di Firenze*, Florence, 1852, 71.
 - 31 On archaism and the alterity of miraculous images, see Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista*, 13–32 and 257; Michele Bacci, 'Pro Remedio Animae', 19ff. On the *Volto Santo* of Lucca, see Giuliano Agresti, Italo Alighiero Chiusano and Aurelio Amendola, *Volto Santo*, Lucca, 1989; Herbert Kurz, *Der Volto Santo von Lucca: Ikonographie und Funktion des Kruzifixus in der gegürteten Tunika im 11. Jahrhundert*, Regensburg, 1997; Bacci, 'Pro Remedio Animae', 25–9.
 - 32 '... lungo tempo sia stato il Volto Santo nella città si Lucca: fu mai alcuno, che dichiarasse che cosa fosse, se non per credenza? Chi vuol dire, che sia la immagine del nostro Signore? (salvo la reverenza di chi il dice) che Cristo fu il più bello e 'l meglio proporzionato corpo che mai fosse, e non ebbe gli occhi travolti né spaventati.' Quoted in Bacci, 'Pro Remedio Animae', 25, from Franco Sacchetti, *I sermoni evangelici, le lettere ed altri scritti inediti o rari*, Florence, 1857, 217. Sacchetti writes in a similar manner about the *Volto Santo* in one of his *novelle* (Franco Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, Rome, 1996, LXXIII, 215).
 - 33 'niuna altra cosa aveva dato tanta riputazione a quella de' Servie ..., se non il mostrarla così per l'imbicco e con tanta sicumera.' Agnolo Firenzuolo, *Opere*, Florence, 1958, 607.

- 34 'Ditemi un poco, che vi pare di questa Imagine? In questo, o fosse lo stupore che nella vista del divin volto gli avea i sensi occupati, o soprapreso l'animo da timore di divina bellezza, altrimenti non fece motto il Buonarrotto.' Bocchi, *Della imagine miracolosa*, 82.
- 35 'Se alcun mi dicesse (perocchè questa è arte mia) che questa Imagine da senno umano fosse stata dipinta, io direi che e' dicesse bugia: perchè di vero l'artifizio dell'uomo, e il suo ingegno non puote, come è questo valore, tanto alto arrivare: onde io avviso, che miracolosamente sia stato fatto questo divin semblante da Dio e dagli Angeli senza più.' Bocchi, *Della imagine miracolosa*, 82–3.
- 36 'dopo che e' mi fu conceduto in compagnia di que' Signori... di vedere il semblante da presso della santissima Nunziata, la quale prima veduta non avea, dico ora il medesimo che dissi allora, come quivi non è arte di pennelli, onde stato sia fatto quel volto della Vergine, ma cosa divina veramente: la quale, come conviene umilmente ammiro e adoro,' Bocchi, *Della imagine miracolosa*, 83.
- 37 The theological underpinning of the miraculous transfiguration of images was the traditional definition of a miracle as an act of God that transpired contrary to natural occurrences. Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, Philadelphia, PA, 1987, 3–19; Michael Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150–1350*, Burlington, VT, 2007. Image transfiguration was analogous to the Transfiguration of Christ (Matthew 17:2). This kind of image miracle became commonplace in the fourteenth century in Italy, undoubtedly influenced by the encounter of St Francis of Assisi with the speaking Crucifix of San Damiano. Within middle Byzantine religious culture, images that underwent this kind of material transformation were understood as 'inspired' (*empsychos graphē*) and included an icon of Christ known as 'Antiphonites' ('he who responds'), Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 185 and 512; Bissara Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium*, University Park, PA, 2006, 149–52.
- 38 'si trasfigurava, cioè diventava d'azzurra rossa, e di rossa poi nera e di diversi colori.' Luca Landucci, *Diario Fiorentino*, Florence, 1883, 41–2. On the cult of the Pietà of Bibbona, see Gemma Landolfi and Maddalena Paola Winspeare, *Bibbona. Guida ai beni storici e artistici*, Livorno, 1994, 85–107.
- 39 This miracle is described in the 1596 chronicle of the nun of Le Murate, Giustina Niccolini. See Lowe, 'Nuns' Chronicles and Convent, 340–2; Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie storiche delle chiese fiorentine*, Florence, 1754–62 (reprint: Rome, 1989) vol. I, 100.
- 40 'quando Santo Spirito abbruciò si vidde visibilmente cavarsi il fuoco intorno.' Luca Dominici, *Cronache*, Pistoia, 1933, vol. I, 98. This comment was added after 1600 by the copiest of Luca Dominici's *Cronache*, which was composed in the early fifteenth century. This fourteenth-century crucifix is currently enshrined above an altar in the right transept of Santo Spirito.
- 41 This image is illustrated by Lisa Pon in 'Place, print and miracle: Forlì's "Madonna of the Fire" as functional site', *Art History*, 31: 3, 2008: 303–21 (fig. 1). See also Bartolomeo Ricceputi, *Istoria dell'immagine miracolosa di Maria Vergine detta la Madonna del Fuoco della città di Forlì*, Forlì, 1686; Adamo Pasini, *Storia della Madonna del Fuoco di Forlì*, second edn, Forlì, 1982; Areford, 'In the Viewer's Hands', 1ff.
- 42 Veneration to the Chiarito Crucifix (now in the nunnery of San Domenico in Querceto, Sesto Fiorentino) is first documented in 1460, with the cult becoming one of the most prominent in Florence in the early sixteenth century (Richa, *Notizie storiche delle chiese fiorentine*, vol. 5, 199–207; *Acta Sanctorum*, Paris, 1863, May, vol. VI, 164–5). Many Florentine miraculous crucifixes were retrospectively associated with the 1399 Bianchi penitential movement. This retrospective legend of the Chiarito Crucifix is recounted in Richa, *Notizie storiche delle chiese fiorentine*, vol. 5, 207.
- 43 Lowe, 'Nuns' Chronicles, 340–1.
- 44 The conjunction 'as if' (*come*) was frequently deployed in miracle stories and accounts of the miraculous transfiguration of sacred images, thereby presenting the actions of the transfiguring image as analogous to human corporeal behaviour. See, for example, Paleotti's use of 'come se fossero vive' in discussing images that weep, bleed, and move, at the end of the long quotation in note 3 above.
- 45 '... essendo per cantarsi la messa a S. Giovanni fuor Civita, venne la novella che nella tavola di nostra Donna, che era nella camera di Bartolommeo di Battifolle Panciaticchi, era dipinto S. Giovanni Evangelista a llato al Crocifisso, come è usanza, e era una tavola antica, e che S. Giovanni piangea. Subito il Vescovo e li Uffiziali e ogni persona mandornola a processione, e m. lo Vescovo e gli Uffiziali andorno su pezza e trovorno che S. Giovanni aveva una lagrima grossa bellissima all'occhio destro; allora m. lo Vescovo l'arregò con le sue mani su l'altare fatto a S. Giovanni Fuorcivita. Ivi ciascuno la vidde e io similmente e toccai S. Giovanni: tuttavolta la lagrima stette ferma. E quivi si cantò la messa e m. lo Vescovo predicò e fu tenuto un grandissimo miracolo e bello. Disse m. lo Vescovo pensava che questo miracolo fusse per mostrare che Cristo aveva grata la pace che Bartolommeo fece spontaneamente co' Lazzari.' Luca Dominici, *Chronache*, vol. I, 89. On the Bianchi image miracles, see Daniel Bornstein, *The Bianchi of 1399: Popular Devotion in Late Medieval Italy*, Ithaca, NY and London, 1993, 145–61.
- 46 'il Crocifisso che portarono i Fiorentini fu quello di S. Croce, avendolo ellino posato in sull'altare della Chiesa di Passignano, gittò sangue vivo in gran quantità per molte parti del corpo e per il capo e per le reni e per le braccia e per altri luoghi miracolosamente.' Luca Dominici, *Chronache*, vol. I, 113. This miracle is said to have occurred on an unspecified day in September 1399.
- 47 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Book III, question 101 (*Opera Omnia*, ed. Roberto Busa, Stuttgart, 1980, vol. 2, 94; English from edition: London, 1905). Aquinas gives as an example of this first rank of miracles the sun reversing its course. Within this rank, he distinguishes different gradations, based upon how far removed from nature the event is, with the reversal of the sun being of a higher order than the parting of the sea. The transfiguration of images would assumedly have been a lesser degree of miracle within this top rank. The second rank of miracles consisted of occurrences that were also found in nature, but not in the particular order, with the example of a blind person recovering sight and a dead person living again. The third and bottom rank of miracle involved occurrences that were also found in nature, but not according to the same principles, like a person cured of a fever by divine means. See also Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 19–21.
- 48 *Summa Theologica*, Part III, Question 76, article 8. On the interpretation of Eucharistic miracles in the medieval period, see Peter Browe, *Die eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters*, Breslauer Studien zur historischen Theologie, Breslau, 1938 and *Die Eucharistie im Mittelalter: Liturgiehistorische Forschungen in kulturwissenschaftlicher Absicht*, Münster, 2003, 251–63 and 265–89; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, Philadelphia, PA, 2007, 85–111. I thank Aden Kumler for these references.
- 49 James A. Weisheipl, 'The concept of matter in fourteenth century science', in Ernan McMullin, ed., *The Concept of Matter*, Notre Dame, IN, 1963, 147–69; David Burr, *Eucharistic Presence and Conversion in Late Thirteenth-Century Franciscan Thought*, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Philadelphia, PA, 1984; John Wippel, 'Thomas Aquinas's Derivation of the Aristotelian Categories (Predicaments)', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25: 1, 1987: 13–34; Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Matter and Form and the Elements: A Translation and Interpretation of the 'De principiis naturae' and the 'De mixtione elementorum' of St Thomas Aquinas*, Notre Dame, IN, 1998.
- 50 This polychrome wooden crucifix with moveable arms, once in the Baptistery and now in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, was venerated by 1333 (Louisa Becherucci and Giulia Brunetti, *Il Museo dell'Opera del Duomo a Firenze*, Milan, 1970, vol. I, 231–2). Luca Dominici recorded in his chronicle under the date 27 September 1399: 'Item un Crocifisso, ch'è in S. Giovanni Ritondo, si disse gittava sangue; perchè Fiorentini ebbono gran paura.' Luca Dominici, *Cronache*, vol. I, 113. On the veneration of this image in the sixteenth century, see note 78 below.
- 51 The tears of the *Madonna delle Carceri*, for example, were wiped with a silk tassel that was venerated as a relic (Benvenuti, *Santa Maria delle Carceri*, 52). On relics of the blood from the miraculous Beirut Crucifix, see Michele Bacci, 'The Berardenga Antependium and the Passio Ymaginis Office', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 61, 1998, 8. Aquinas approved of blood relics derived from images, but not of blood relics said to come from the body of Christ, with the understanding that blood relics derived from images did not contain Christ's actual blood (*Summa Theologica*, Part III, Question 54, article 3). See also Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 96–111.
- 52 On Thomas Aquinas' formulation of the 'image as sign' see Jean

- Wirth, 'Structure et fonctions de l'image chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin', in Jérôme Baschet and Jean-Claude Schmitt, eds, *L'image: Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident médiéval*, issue of *Cahiers du Léopard d'Or*, 5, 1996, 39–42. For the Florentine context, see Richard Trexler, 'Florentine religious experience: The sacred image', 18–23. The connection between idolatry and superstition is raised by the Florentine Antonio degli Agli in his *De rationibus fidei* (1460s), Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale, Conventi Soppressi, B.9.1268, 50r–52r.
- 53 Gaetano Beani, *S. Maria dell'Umiltà: Notizie storiche della sua imagine e del suo tempio in Pistoia*, Pistoia, 1885.
- 54 'A tutti pareva che fussi vero sangue, e pure, come Dio volse, uno di loro cominciò con una punta di coltellino a rasiare e subito li parve non fusse vero sangue. Rastiano così sentì che questo crocifisso ere vuoto dentro. Subito il Senatore disse: "Fa' arditamente". E ellì fesse il costato del Crocifisso e trovollo che era voto dentro e eravi un boccio di cuoio cotto e entrovì sangue e acqua, perchè non si rappigliasse, e meglio corresse e paresse più vera cosa: avealo così ordinato che a certo punto e con citato modo quando voleva ne gittava 3, o 4 goccioline per lo costato, e pare vero sangue e pareva gran miracolo e sì non se ne potea avvedere persona, sì l'avea acconcio mirabilmente e sottilmente.' This event took place in late October, and is described in the chronicle of Luca Dominici (Dominici, *Chronache*, vol. I, 205; Bornstein, *The Bianchi of 1399*, 158–9).
- 55 Vincenzo Federici, 'Il miracolo del crocifisso della compagnia dei Bianchi a Sutri', *Scritti di storia, filologia, e d'arte per le nozze Fedale-De Fabritiis*, Naples, 1908, 107–18 (on an episcopal inquest involving a transfiguring image). On other challenges to the miracles reported during the Bianchi movement, see Bornstein, *The Bianchi of 1399*, 166–7. See also Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, 60. Stuart Clark discusses a notorious case of fraudulent miracles of transfiguration that took place in Berne in 1509 when four Dominicans were executed for simulating a bleeding host and an animated statue of the Virgin. The incident was seized upon by Protestant reformers and circulated throughout Europe in Latin and vernacular texts on the excesses and abuses of Catholic imagistic devotion. *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*, Oxford, 2007, 174–5.
- 56 Gell, *Art and Agency*, 12–27.
- 57 Francesco Niccolai, *Mugello e Val di Sieve*, Rome, 1974. Lia Brunori Cianti, 'Il patrimonio artistico', in Scarperia, *Storia arte artigianato*, Florence, 1990, 39–40. The cult image has been associated with a document of 1448 and related in style to the work of Francesco d'Antonio. This dating and authorship, however, seems too early to me.
- 58 Gell, *Art and Agency*, 133.
- 59 Gell, *Art and Agency*, 134–5.
- 60 For a general account of the physiology of bodily 'spirits' and fluids, see Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Modern Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*, Chicago, IL, 1990, 97–113. Art historians have investigated how conceptions about emissive vision influenced portraiture and the representation of beautiful female subjects in the renaissance (see, for example, Regina Stefaniak, 'Correggio's Camera di San Paolo: An archaeology of the gaze', *Art History*, 16, 1993, 203–38).
- 61 Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Why all this fuss about the body? A medievalist perspective', *Critical Inquiry*, 22, 1995, 1–33. I thank Pat Simons for calling my attention to this counter-position to Gell.
- 62 The *Madonna delle Carceri* in Prato was observed sweating blood in 1484 (Lorenzo di Jacopo degli Obizzi, *Miracoli della Vergine Maria delle Carceri*, Florence, c.1485, 5v). The sweat issuing from the *Madonna dell'Umiltà* in Pistoia in 1490 was considered to be a form of lament by the Virgin for the factional strife in the city (Gaetano Beani, *S. Maria dell'Umiltà: Notizie storiche della sua imagine e del suo tempio in Pistoia*, Pistoia, 1885), while the tear seen hanging from the eye of the painted figure of St John the Evangelist in a painted Crucifixion in Prato in 1399 (described in the text above) was interpreted as a sign of approval of the reconciliation that had taken place between two families that same day (Dominici, *Cronache*, vol. I, 89). On the Veronica, Debra Birch, writes 'Gervase of Tilbury noted that because of its fearsome effect upon the viewer it had to be kept covered, while Gerald of Wales had heard how a pope, who had presumed to peer too closely at it, had been struck blind' (Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1998, 85). She cites Gervase of Tilbury, *Oita Imperialia*, ed. G. G. Leibnitz, *Scriptores Rerum Brunsvicensium*, Hanover, 1707, 967 and Gerald of Wales, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, 278.
- 63 I would like to thank Amy Powell for this observation. According to Francesco Bocchi, some claimed that the figure of Gabriel, too, was painted by an angel (*Della imagine miracolosa della SS. Nunziata di Firenze*, 25). In his *Ricordi*, Alessandro Allori records numerous commissions for the heads of both the Virgin and Gabriel in isolation, between 1579 and 1583 (Alessandro Allori, *I ricordi*, ed. I. B. Supino, Florence, 1908, 17–23).
- 64 Lorenzo di Jacopo Obizzi, *Miracoli della Vergina Maria delle Carceri*, Florence, c. 1485. I consulted the copy of Obizzi's rare incunabulum in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California (Rare Books, 101498). The poem, printed on twenty-two quarto-size leaves, presents the foundation of the cult, early miracles, and a lauda to the Madonna delle Carceri. See Marco Villorosi, 'Un poemetto e una lauda sulla Madonna delle Carceri di Prato di Lorenzo di Jacopo degli Obizzi', *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 36, 2000, 238–70. Here is the relevant section of Obizzi's poem discussed in this section of my article: '[2r] Onde la madre di noi peccatori / piu non potendo avanti agliocchi sancti / vedersi far si facti disonori. // Diciel discesa cosuo sancti amanti / a sei diluglio et mille quattrocento / octanta quattro anona senza chanti [this last stanza is underlined by a reader in iron gall ink]. // [2v] Operar volle a nostro salvamento / che in quel luogho tanto dissoluto ove ogni di si faceva mancamento / ... un fanciullecto tenerello allora. // Deta docto anni/et con lasua manina / un certo grillo volendo pigliare / quel seguito con ogni sua doctrina. // Di passo in passo si lo fe volare / inquel tal luogho ove egli aldirrimpetto / di nostra donna usando procurare. // Visibilmente senz'alchul difecto / chostui che Iacopino e nominato / Iavidde dispicchar dal muro decto. // Et inquel luogho vile et violato / posarsi in terra dove ginocchioni / el suo sancto figliuolo hebbi adorato // Et che orandol con sancte orationi / con lasua mano il pecto si battea / standogli appresso con gran divotioni. // [3r] Dipoi ponendo mente lavedeva / levarsi quindi et lasciare el figliolo / che lesue braccia tenere moveva. // Et vidde il rondinin che quasi avolo / vivo parendo si voleva levare / siche questo fanciullo essendo solo. // Vidde laverigin po in basso andare / in quella schura charcere disotto / et con laman tre volte ivi nectare. // Et che cio facto su torno dibotto / et ilfigliuolo in braccio si ripresi / ghardando Iacopin senza far motto. // Dipoi di facto in alto sidistese / et su nel muro si fu ritornata / che tutto vidde tal fanciul palese. // O madre di Iesu glorificata / la quale orando il pecto tibattevi / dinanzi altuo figliulo inginocchiata... // [3v] Tu dogni peccator ben se colonna / et sempremai per lor gratia intercedi / ritraendogli alciel sotto tua gonna. // Ma ritornata cosuoi sancti piedi / la reina del cielo inquel tal muro / over gran miracoli far sevedì.' 65 On the *facezia* as a literary form, see Giovanni Fabris, 'Per la storia della facezia', in *Raccolta di studi di storia e critica letteraria dedicata a Francesco Flamini dai suoi discepoli*, Pisa, 1918, 93–138; Barbara Bowen, 'Renaissance collections of faceziae, 1344–1490, a new listing', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39, 1986, 1–15 and 'Renaissance collections of faceziae, 1490–1528', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39, 1986, 263–75. See also the essays in Gabriella Albanese, Lucia Battaglia Ricci and Rossella Bessi, eds, *Favole parabole istorie*, Rome, 2000.
- 66 Examples of this kind of story are found in Poggio Bracciolini's *facezie* and in the tales told about the Piovano Arlotto (Poggio Bracciolini, *Facezie*, ed. and trans. Marcello Ciccutto, Milan, 1983, 129–31; *Facezie, motti e burle del Piovano Arlotto*, Florence, 1982, 64–7).
- 67 For a comprehensive historical treatment of discernment in vision during this period, see Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*.
- 68 *Facezie, motti e burle del Piovano Arlotto*, 64–7.
- 69 This particular novella is very close to the French *fabliaux* entitled 'Le prestre crucifié', recounted by Michael Camille in *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art*, Cambridge and New York, 1989, 213 (I thank the anonymous reader for *Art History* for this information).
- 70 'Era questo Mino dipintore di crocifissi più che d'altro, e specialmente di quelli che erano intagliati con rilievo; e aveane sempre in casa, tra compiuti e tra mani, quando quattro e quando sei; e teneagli, come'è d'usanza de' dipintori, in su una tavola, o desco lunghissimo, in una sua bottega appoggiati al muro l'uno allato all'altro, coperti ciascuno con uno sciugatoio grande; e al presente n'avea sei; li quattro intagliati e scolpiti, e li due erano piani dipinti' Sacchetti, *Il*

- Trecentonovelle, LXXXIV, 250.
- 71 'Disse la donna: – Vuo' tu far bene? Sali su questo desco e pònti su uno di quelli crocifissi piani con le b[r]accia in croce, come stanno gli altri, e io ti coprirò con quel panno lino medesimo ...; poi qualche santo ci aiuterà.' Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, LXXXIV, 250–1.
 - 72 'Quando il croifisso incarnato lo sente ivi, pensi ciascuno come gli pareo stare; e gli convenia stare come gli altri che erano di legno.' Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, LXXXIV, 252.
 - 73 'guardando Mino questi suoi crocifissi, ebbe veduto due dita d'uno piede di colui che coperto stava. Dice, Mino fra se stesso: – Per certo che quest'è l'amico –. E guardando fra certi ferramenti, con che digrossava e intagliava quelli crocifissi, non vidde ferro esser a lui più adatto che un'ascia che era tra essi. Presa quest'ascia, e accostatosi per salire verso il crocifisso vivo, per tagliargli la principal cosa che quivi l'avea condotto ...' Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, LXXXIV, 253.
 - 74 'E levala fuori dell'aperta porta; Mino drietoli parecchi passi ...' Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, LXXXIV, 253. Sacchetti plays on the word 'levala' which can mean both 'he gets up from there' (i.e. the lover raises himself from the painted crucifix) and 'he removes it' (i.e. the painter cuts off 'la principal cosa', the lover's penis). The sentence really only makes sense when read as the lover getting up and out of the door, but Sacchetti, with his love of language, carefully chooses a word that brings to mind the more dire scenario. In the earlier French version of this story, there is no ambiguity, as the sculptor, before realizing how he had been tricked, pauses to trim away a little 'excess material' that he observes on the crucifix (Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 213; again, I thank the anonymous *Art History* reader for calling this to my attention).
 - 75 On Sacchetti's involvement with the cult of the *Madonna of Orsanmichele*, see Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, text volume, 165–70; for his involvement with the cult of the *Madonna dei Chierici*, see Poggi, *Il Duomo di Firenze*, vol. I, 202.
 - 76 Robert Maniura describes this process in 'The images and miracles of Santa Maria delle Carceri', in Thunø and Wolf, *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 86–93.
 - 77 Evidence for the veneration of the San Marco Annunciation, in addition to Firenzuola's story about one man's special regard for the image, comes from Vasari and Richa. In the expanded 1568 edition entry on Pietro Cavallini, Vasari describes the image as covered up ('sta coperta'; *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, eds Paola Barocchi and Rosanna Bettarini, Florence, 1966–87, Text vol. II, 187), while Richa notes the votive offerings and continued veneration in his day (*Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine*, vol. VII, 157).
 - 78 We get a sense of this dynamic participation in multiple image cults in Florence from a humorous novella written by Agnolo Firenzuola in the 1530s, where he parodies a man who pays his devotion to miraculous crucifixes in the Chiarito, the Baptistery, and San Pier del Murrone, and prefers the San Marco Annunciation to the more celebrated image in the SS Annunziata (Firenzuola, *Opere*, 607).
 - 79 I am using the term 'alterity' in a manner similar to that found in discussions of venerated images (see note 81 below), and distinct from the usages within philosophy, anthropology, gender studies, and post-colonial theory.
 - 80 Walter Benjamin considers the 'aura', 'cult value', and the ritual function of the sacred image in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), published in translation in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, London, 1973, 217–52.
 - 81 This visible difference is held to have marked these objects as closer in their essence to the modality of the supernatural than to that of the mundane and the familiar, communicating aura and sacred immanence. This quality of 'alterity', it has been argued, was produced through the elaborate framing structures that encased miraculous images and by means of veiling, votive display, and ritual observances. The images themselves are often considered to be Byzantine in origin or style, and archaizing in appearance, and to reproduce typologies associated with highly venerated icons in Byzantium and Rome. This characterization is diffused through the art-historical literature on late medieval and early modern image cults. A more nuanced position is found in Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 484–5. Michele Bacci provides the richest discussion of 'alterity' in the context of miracle-working images in *Il pennello dell'Evangelista*, 13–32; 'Pro remedio animae', 19ff; and 'Le sculture lignee nel folklore religioso: alcune considerazioni', in Clara Baracchini, ed., *Scultura lignea: Lucca 1200–1425*, Florence, 1995, 38.
 - 82 Pinney situates the practice of 'corpotherics' within a rural community in modern India, and associates it with subaltern Indian religious cultural practices. He aligns 'corpotherics', however, with pre-modern European modes of visual experience, with reference both to Hans Belting's Christian image culture 'before the era of art' and Michael Fried's paradigm of modern Western art in transition from a 'theatrical' to an 'absorptive' mode, with the gradual effacement of the beholder's presence within the pictorial constructions. 'Photos of the Gods': *The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*, London, 2004, 23ff. and 193ff.
 - 83 See Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*.
 - 84 'beato chi lo potrà baciare!' (19 August 1399, in Pistoia); 'Beato chi lo poteva toccare!' (26 August 1399, in Pistoia) (Dominici, *Cronache*, vol. I, 87 and 107).
 - 85 Filarete's votive offering at the SS Annunziata does not survive (Antonio Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, eds Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi, Milan, 1972, vol. II, 691). Francesco da Sangallo's relief is still in the church, with the inscription 'Eius intercessione liberatus Franc. Sangallius Iuliani filii civis Flor. Facie A.D.N.S. MDXXXII' (Maria Grazia Ciardi Duprè Dal Poggetto, ed., *Santa Maria Primerana. Chiesa del popolo fiiesolano. Le opere d'arte*, Florence, 1988, 65–7; fig. 24).
 - 86 On the centralized Marian sanctuary churches, see Davies, 'Studies in the Quattrocento Centrally Planned Church', 222–4.
 - 87 Sheryl Reiss, 'A medieval source for Michelangelo's Medici Madonna', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 50, 1987, 394–400 (illustrated in figs 2, 3). The venerated Madonna image in San Lorenzo, dating to the fourteenth century, was attributed to the St Cecilia Master by Richard Offner (*A Critical Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, New York, 1931, Section III, Vol. I, 92ff. The date of the origin of the cult is unknown. The image later became known as the *Madonna di San Zanobi* and was considered to be a Byzantine painting given to San Zanobius (Richa, *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine*, Vol. V, 58). The panel is currently in the transept chapel adjacent to the Old Sacristy; it was apparently on a column in the church by 1464 and was in the north transept chapel by the early sixteenth century (Reiss, 'A medieval source for Michelangelo's Medici Madonna', 397–8).
 - 88 Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150–1750*, New York, 1998; Pamela Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship: Technical Arts and the Culture of Knowledge from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Baltimore, MD, 2001; Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*.
 - 89 I am using the *Madonna of Orsanmichele* as a comparative example, even though the painting was made by a celebrated artist, because it provides a useful instance of an enshrined miraculous image in a sanctuary setting that has remained more or less unaltered since Masaccio's time. The high level of artistry manifest in the painting and the association of the image with Bernardo Daddi do not undermine the particular point that I am making here about the visual engagement of the beholder with the unveiled enshrined miraculous image.