

## **Michelangelo's works in the eyes of his contemporaries**

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The ideas presented here were suggested by the well-known fact that Michelangelo's two most important biographers, Ascanio Condivi and Giorgio Vasari, offer diverging interpretations of his large-scale project for the tomb of Pope Julius II as a free-standing monument.<sup>1</sup> The intention here is not to make yet another attempt to determine which iconographic programme Michelangelo really had in mind. Rather, this chapter begins with a consideration of the contradiction between Vasari and Condivi, moves on to the contemporary reactions to other works by Michelangelo, and ultimately addresses the way in which Michelangelo took the observer into account during the conception of his works. The study builds upon earlier research by David Summers and Thomas Frangenberg.<sup>2</sup> Michelangelo's late work is excluded from these considerations.

Since the time of Petrarch, and to a growing extent during the sixteenth century, writings on the theory of art had been concerned with observers. In general, beholders were classified into different types according to their level of education – namely, laymen and connoisseurs.<sup>3</sup> Laymen were not regarded as being entirely incapable of recognizing beauty, but during Michelangelo's lifetime there was a fairly general consensus that they were not able to appreciate art in the most appropriate way. Advanced art, in particular, was considered to be beyond them; they were thought to be unable to recognize its artistic qualities or to understand its content. As Anton Francesco Doni stated in 1548, they were not even able to distinguish between Cleopatra and Lucretia.<sup>4</sup>

Confirmation that the situation sometimes was as Doni and others claimed is provided by a report by the Ulm chaplain Felix Faber on his visit to Venice in 1483. Faber describes the magnificent tombs of the Doges. They show Christ, the Madonna and saints, he notes, as well as 'pagan images': ancient gods and

heroes, naked warriors and genii with emblems of triumph. He is surprised by the sudden incorporation of pagan elements into the Christian context, and reports that the general public in Venice also found it difficult to understand: 'the simple people think they are images of saints, they revere the images of Hercules in the belief that they signify Samson, the images of Venus as Mary Magdalene, etc.'<sup>5</sup> There are many examples of this type of reinterpretation of pagan representations to give them Christian meaning.<sup>6</sup> It would therefore not be surprising to find contradictory statements by ordinary people regarding the tomb of Julius.

But Vasari and Condivi were far from being laymen of this type. Their information was partly derived from Michelangelo himself. Condivi apparently wrote his *Vita* after consulting Michelangelo. Vasari had a sufficiently close relationship with the aged Michelangelo to be able to check with him some of the information that he added to the second edition of his *Lives*. In addition, Vasari was a supreme connoisseur of art, undoubtedly one of the most experienced and knowledgeable of his time. The question therefore arises of who would have been able to understand the iconographic significance of a work like the tomb of Julius if even these two men were unable to do so. Perhaps it would not have been possible for any contemporary observer. This suggestion might then lead to the awkward supposition that only artists or patrons were able to understand such works – plus, at best, a few art historians much later on. What, in these circumstances, was the value of iconographic interpretations for the contemporary beholder? What interest did the viewer have in the meaning of a work he was unable to understand? This appears to me to be a general problem,<sup>7</sup> but in the case of Michelangelo it is a particularly urgent one.

We may begin this examination by first taking a closer look at the disagreement between Vasari and Condivi. As it is a very well-known case, we can concentrate here on the salient issues.<sup>8</sup> The accepted facts are as follows. In 1505, Michelangelo suggested to Julius II that the Pope's tomb should be constructed in the form of a gigantic free-standing monument. This project is known only from Vasari's and Condivi's descriptions. It was to be as large as a small church – approximately 11 metres long, 7 metres wide, and as high as a three-storey house. It was to be richly decorated – with architectural articulation, numerous bronze reliefs, and forty marble statues larger than life size. No tomb of the Renaissance had been planned on so ambitious a scale; however, the project did not come to fruition. After the death of Julius II in 1513, Michelangelo supplied a new project. This design was not executed either, but he created a number of sculptures for it: the *Moses*, later used on the tomb erected for Julius II in S. Pietro in Vincoli; two so-called *Slaves*, now preserved in the Louvre; and, according to Vasari,<sup>9</sup> the *Victory* group which is now in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Sketches for the 1513 project have

survived; they show that the subdivision and decoration of the lower part of the first project was mostly preserved.<sup>10</sup> This area was divided into sections using herm figures instead of pilasters with niches between them, except at the entrance to the tomb chapel. Victory groups were to be placed in the niches – either winged women in long robes set above subjugated men, as in the sketches for the 1513 project, or (if the *Victory* in the Palazzo Vecchio was indeed originally intended for Julius's tomb) youths in ideal nudity set above subjugated men. Fettered nude youths were to stand in front of the herm figures, and the two *Slaves* in the Louvre were intended for this purpose. They both have an animal as an attribute; in one case it is a monkey, while in the other the animal is not clearly recognizable, although it could also be a monkey. In the sketches, an attribute is given to the captives in only one case – a trophy.<sup>11</sup> Michelangelo later started four more *Slaves*. They were left incomplete; the conception is recognizable, but attributes are not.

In the first edition of his *Lives* in 1550, Vasari provides only a fleeting and imprecise survey of the overall project.<sup>12</sup> He concentrates on the artistic qualities of the figures, particularly those he was able to see. He describes in detail the figure of Moses, which stood in Rome as the only figure for this project to have been completed. He deals with the captives more cursorily, as the completed ones were no longer in Florence and those that remained were incomplete.

Vasari makes a passing reference to the bound figures as *prigioni* ('captives') or *infinite provincie* ('countless [allegories of] provinces'). He refers to the groups of figures in the niches as 'naked Victories that have captives underneath them'. The descriptions as 'captives' and 'Victories' correspond to the quality that was evidently intended for these figures, and they refer vaguely to their meaning. It remains unclear, however, what 'captives' and 'Victories' were doing in the context of a tomb and which provinces might have been intended. Nevertheless, an overall context of significance emerges – the decoration was to represent a triumph, and, as can be stated on the basis of the provinces, it was to be the triumph of a secular victor. In accordance with this notion the tomb was intended to surpass all of the imperial tombs of antiquity *di bellezza, di superbia e d'inventione*. In the same year, Simone Fornari repeated Vasari's comparison with the imperial tombs of antiquity, offering it as his only characterization of the Julius tomb.<sup>13</sup>

The programme appears to be perfectly self-contained. It is also well-suited to a personality such as that of Julius II; he was an unusually aggressive, even warlike Pope. With his secular attitudes, and particularly in his bellicosity, he earned a great deal of criticism both in his own lifetime and later. Paying no attention to his critics, he had no scruple in styling himself as a new Julius Caesar – to such an extent that Bramante had the idea of aligning St Peter's with the Vatican Obelisk, the supposed tomb of Julius Caesar. If Michelangelo's

project had been for the tomb of a *condottiere*, there would not be the slightest reason to doubt Vasari's account. For a prince of the Church, however – and particularly for a Pope – the programme Vasari describes does not seem entirely appropriate even in Renaissance terms. It is not suited to the role of the successor to St Peter and does not match the iconographic programmes usually employed for the tombs of Popes.

Condivi provides much more detail about Michelangelo's project than Vasari does in the first edition of the *Lives*.<sup>14</sup> He describes in detail the arrangement of the whole tomb, presents the programme of figures coherently, and explains what in his view the individual figures signify. He leaves one odd gap, however: the numerous groups of statues set in the niches, which so clearly suggest Victories, are vaguely described as 'statues', without any further identification. Like Vasari, he describes the figures that were to be fettered to the herm figures as 'prisoners'. Regarding their meaning he states that 'they were to represent the Liberal Arts, as well as painting, sculpture and architecture', and together they signify that 'the death of Pope Julius had taken all talents (*virtù*) captive, as they would never find another patron as generous as he was'. According to this view, Vasari's interpretation is incorrect. The programme as Condivi interprets it does not contradict the iconography of the tombs of princes of the Church to quite the same extent as Vasari's. The *artes liberales* had already appeared on papal tombs – in particular on the tomb that Julius II, when still a cardinal, commissioned for his uncle, Pope Sixtus IV.<sup>15</sup> However, both before Michelangelo and after him, the Liberal Arts were shown as females, as was normal for personifications given the female gender in Latin and Italian. In addition, in earlier times they normally were neither naked nor fettered, and had attributes to indicate their identity. Condivi asserts that Michelangelo's 'prisoners' were intended to be 'easily' recognizable, but this is not the case. In general, the programme as described by Condivi is likewise highly unusual, and in view of its spectacular breaches with tradition, the interpretation appears far-fetched. In addition, if Condivi's account were to be more convincing than Vasari's, he would have to offer an explanation of the Victories.

In the second edition of the *Lives*, Vasari responds with a long description of the tomb of Julius that resembles Condivi's account, but modifies it.<sup>16</sup> Vasari insists that the 'captives' that were to have been fettered to the herm figures signify provinces, and explains that they represented all the provinces that the Pope had 'conquered and made subject to the Church'. The 'Victories' are here not referred to explicitly. Instead, it is stated that there were 'various other statues, that were also fettered'. These embodied 'ingenious virtues, and showed that these were subject to death no less than the Pope who had so laudably made use of them'.<sup>17</sup> Vasari does not explicitly state where these 'statues' were intended to stand, but presumably he is referring to the

groups of statutes that Condivi mentions in the niches without stating their significance, and which Vasari had earlier described as 'Victories'. The 'other fettered statues' would then refer to the male figures crouching on the ground, on which the winged women stand. The older description as 'Victories' would in this case be misleading, but not altogether erroneous; it was not a secular triumph that was to have been represented in the niches, as one might have expected in view of the fettered Provinces, but rather the triumph of death, which has conquered the *virtù ingegnose*.

According to this view, Condivi had confused the meaning of the figures. It is not the fettered youths in front of the herm figures, but the subjugated figures under the Victories that signify the *artes liberales* and fine arts (hence Vasari's formulation *sottoposte alla morte*). The direct juxtaposition of the Pope's military triumph with the triumph of Death is nevertheless rather surprising; Vasari is no more convincing than Condivi here. Perhaps he may not have wanted to admit that he had made an error in the first edition of the *Lives*. It would be equally conceivable that Condivi was right in referring to the 'captives' in front of the herm figures as *artes liberales* and fine arts, and that the Victories were intended to signify the subjugation of the provinces. If the details given by Vasari and Condivi are not taken completely literally, still other interpretations are possible, as the ensemble is so unique and its meaning is so loosely characterized.<sup>18</sup>

The Medici tombs provide another example of the peculiar treatment of the iconographic content of Michelangelo's works in the reports by Vasari and Condivi.<sup>19</sup> In this case we have better information, as the tombs were more fully completed and a few notes regarding their meaning have been preserved in Michelangelo's own hand.

What is considered certain – limited again to what is of relevance here – is as follows. In 1519, Michelangelo, commissioned by the Medici Pope Leo X, began work on the tombs of the two last descendants of the direct Medici line, Giuliano and Lorenzo, who had unexpectedly died when still young. At the Pope's instigation, they had both been elevated to the rank of *condottieri* of the Church or the Republic of Florence and of titular Dukes. The two tombs occupy two walls facing each other. They are designed as counterparts and together form a unit. The sarcophagi of the *condottieri* are set in front of the lower zone of the walls. In the upper zone, three niches are found on each side between the architectural subdivisions. Statues of the two deceased *condottieri*, bearing signs of their military dignity (armour, helmet, commander's staff), are set in the central niches. The adjoining niches are empty. Two figures lie on top of each of the sarcophagi, one male and one female. One of the female figures on the sarcophagi is characterized as an allegory of Night by several attributes – four different ones in all. The other recumbent figures are not marked with any attributes. In analogy with the figure of Night, it can be assumed that all of

the recumbent figures were intended to represent the *Times of Day*. Their sexes correspond to the gender of the Italian words for them: *la notte* and *il giorno*, *l'aurora* and *il crepuscolo*. Furthermore, the figures' postures are an expression of the respective times of day. The architectural decoration was to be crowned with trophies, and additional statues were planned. Statues of four river gods were to lie underneath the sarcophagi, and allegories were to be placed in the niches beside the *condottieri*. It is recognizable from the sketches that the allegorical figures are in mourning.<sup>20</sup> According to Vasari's report, those next to Giuliano were intended to embody Heaven and Earth. The Earth was to have mourned the loss of the deceased, with bowed head. Heaven, with raised arms, was to have joyfully greeted his arrival in Paradise.

Like the large-scale project for the tomb of Julius, the Medici tombs are unique; indeed, the closest parallels are between the two ensembles themselves. Both feature the idea of triumph, and the apex of the tomb of Julius was also destined to have two figures standing alongside the deceased Pope – which, according to Vasari's report, would have been similar in posture to the allegories of Heaven and Earth planned for the tomb of Giuliano de' Medici, conveying exactly the same meaning.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that the four figures on the sarcophagi embody the *Times of Day* was already known before Vasari and Condivi.<sup>22</sup> Vasari describes the executed figures and the planned river gods, and notes in passing what they were intended to signify. He regards the river gods, obviously enough, as representing *tutte le parti del mondo*; they are meant as the four quarters of the Earth. Vasari describes the figures of the deceased as *capitani armati*. He nevertheless omits mention of the trophies. Doubt has recently been cast on his identifications of the statues of the deceased.<sup>23</sup> If there has in fact been an error, Michelangelo himself would not be entirely blameless, as he did not use individual physical characteristics or facial traits to identify the deceased. The figures that were to stand alongside the *condottieri* are not mentioned in Vasari's life of Michelangelo, but are referred to in other biographies in his *Lives* – particularly that of the sculptor Tribolo,<sup>24</sup> in which he describes in detail the form and meaning of the figures relating to Giuliano's tomb. Vasari does not comment on the overall significance of the figures on the Medici tombs. It remains an open question why the *Times of Day* and the 'whole world' belonged there. Instead, Vasari's interest lies in the moods which the figures suggest. He points out the differing characters expressed in the statues of the deceased. Lorenzo looks *pensoso*, while Giuliano is *fiero*. This is in accordance with the actual statues, although in glaring contradiction to the characters of the historical personalities. Had the characterizations been allocated the other way round, on the other hand, they would suit the respective characters of the deceased so well that one might suspect Vasari identified the figures incorrectly. Vasari gives particular emphasis to the melancholy mood of the

*Times of Day*. He mentions specifically that *Night* and *Aurora* are mourning because the *condottieri* have died.

Condivi's account remains noticeably incomplete with regard to elements that might reveal the meaning of the Medici tombs. He omits all of the parts that were not executed. He mentions only the statues of the deceased, without identifying them individually, and two of the figures lying on the sarcophagi, namely *Day* and *Night*. He claims that both of these are marked by attributes. But this is in fact only true of *Night*. *Day* and *Night* together embody Time. Condivi does not mention their moods. Instead, he attempts to develop an interpretation of the work, which he claims can be deduced from the individual elements. The figures differ in their movements and actions, but are unified in 'intention and form';<sup>25</sup> they were intended to express the idea that 'time consumes all'. This was to be made clear by a mouse, as these animals are constantly gnawing and eating.<sup>26</sup> However, this overall conception does not emerge clearly from the work. Michelangelo was prevented, as Condivi reports, from executing the mouse, and the melancholy figures that together were to represent all-consuming time appear less as destroyers than as sufferers themselves. Condivi's observations do not even attempt to explain the connection with the other elements that were planned for the Medici tombs.

Vasari and Condivi are talking at cross purposes, but they do not directly contradict each other. Nevertheless, their descriptions create the overall impression that they had very different conceptions of the iconography of the Medici tombs. Condivi apparently had a quite abstract conception in mind, which is indicated only by special signs – 'note', as he terms them, referring to the destructive effect of time. By contrast, Vasari saw a conception that was expressed so obviously that it scarcely needs to be mentioned: the whole world and Time are in mourning because the Medici *condottieri* have died. The two conceptions at least share the common element that they are both very simple.

As yet, we have merely presented in concentrated form what Vasari and Condivi say about the meaning of the tombs in terms of content. In their reports, however, by far the greatest attention is given to the design and the artistic value, while details of meaning are provided mostly in passing and are noticeably incomplete and incoherent. Generally speaking, Condivi and especially Vasari are apparently less interested in meaning than in artistic characteristics.<sup>27</sup> Vasari boasts that Michelangelo outdid everything that had previously existed in the field of sculpture; he had even surpassed antiquity. And if he had been able to complete everything as he had wished, it would have been apparent that he was superior even to Nature. At the end of his essay, Vasari quotes one of many Latin verses that 'highly learned persons' had written in praise of the Medici tombs. But in spite of all their learning, they

offer no explanation of the meaning of the tombs either. Instead, a paraphrase is used that suggests that *Night* is actually alive and is only sleeping.<sup>28</sup>

As far as one can tell from surviving accounts, Vasari's and Condivi's responses were quite normal. Other contemporary observers of Michelangelo's works usually focus – in their notes, travel descriptions, descriptions of cities, historical reports and other texts – on the appearance and artistic quality of the works, just as Vasari and Condivi do. Works are mainly praised for their beauty. The iconographic content, if it is mentioned at all, is assumed to be known for individual figures, in that they are referred to by the corresponding names, such as *Night*. There is barely any mention of the overall significance of entire ensembles, with the exception of some few specialized essays on art theory.

A typical example of such texts is the treatment of the Medici tombs in the learned guide to Florence by Francesco Bocchi of 1591.<sup>29</sup> Bocchi also discusses Michelangelo's work in another of his texts.<sup>30</sup> Once again, we are dealing with an established connoisseur. Bocchi approaches the iconography of the Medici tombs with the promising statement that Michelangelo had created here a work 'with profound thought and more like a philosopher than a sculptor'.<sup>31</sup> He then reports Condivi's remarks on the significance of the *Times of Day*, not entirely in agreement with them, and instead suggesting a correction. Bocchi counters Condivi's statements by saying that nothing can be created or destroyed *by* time, but at best *in* time. This, he insists, was what Michelangelo had intended. A single sentence is devoted to this line of thought, after which his attention turns away from the iconography. In contrast, the description and appreciation of the artistic qualities and cultural significance of the Medici tombs fill more than twenty printed pages.

Michelangelo's *David* is not usually even mentioned by name in notes written in the Renaissance. Just as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* was usually referred to in its time as *donna nuda*, the *David* was simply described as *il gigante*, the giant.<sup>32</sup> The documents referring to the statue's creation and its transportation from the Opera del Duomo to the Palazzo Vecchio already refer to it as the 'Giant'.<sup>33</sup> More than its size, however, the figure's beauty attracted the attention of contemporaries. After the statue had been unveiled, all the renowned Florentine artists debated, at the request of the city council, where it would best be sited.<sup>34</sup> Most of them were interested principally in the statue's outstanding beauty. To emphasize its special artistic achievement, the difficult circumstances of its creation were addressed repeatedly: Florence's Opera del Duomo had kept a large block of marble, on which a start had been made in the fifteenth century with the intention of producing a figure of the prophet David. But the work turned out so badly that it was left unfinished. Michelangelo offered to complete the miscarried piece, and the result was his *David*. Michelangelo worked on the figure in secret, and its unveiling created



an unprecedented sensation. At one stroke, he became the most famous sculptor of his time. This story is reported again and again, and Vasari and Condivi go into particular detail regarding the difficult conditions in which the *David* was created.<sup>35</sup>

When Renaissance accounts are aiming to emphasize the fame of the works of art they are discussing, they normally use rhetorical topoi familiar from other contexts which in principle could be applied equally well to other works. Such devices have a certain art-theoretical purpose, as they are intended to point out that a maximum of skill, as the Renaissance understood it, is evident in a work. The most common topoi were affinity with antiquity and imitation of nature. These notions were invoked in relation to Michelangelo's sculptures from the very start, and particularly by Vasari.

Affinity with antiquity was usually expressed by comparison with famous Greek sculptors such as Phidias and Praxiteles, or by comparisons with famous sculptures such as the *Dioscuri* on the Quirinal; Michelangelo was described as having brought antiquity back to life or even as having surpassed it.<sup>36</sup> The *David* became the paradigm for the revival of ancient sculpture, since he had created the first monumental free-standing sculpture in ideal nudity since antiquity.<sup>37</sup> To this extent, there was some genuine justification for comparisons with the *Dioscuri* or other ancient works. Even the usual description, *il gigante*, suggests a comparison with the colossal statues of antiquity.

Renaissance beholders regarded the Medici tombs as offering the prime example of the imitation of nature that Michelangelo had achieved. Vasari asserts that Michelangelo achieved the effect of natural bodies. This comment was often taken up later and further embellished.<sup>38</sup> It often led to the conclusion that Michelangelo's powers were equivalent to those of nature, or even surpassed them. In the case of the Medici tombs, however, a variant of this view predominated which culminated in a comparison between death and life. It was claimed that the marble did not produce the effect of dead matter, but that of living figures. Francisco de Hollanda calls one of the statues of the *condottieri a vivo morto*;<sup>39</sup> or, in a play on the name Michelangelo, it was said that like an angel, he had aroused the marble to life.<sup>40</sup> A popular word play involving this sort of expression was that, conversely, the observer risked being turned to stone from utter amazement. Doni extends the word play with reference to the figure of *Night* in the form of a dialogue, concluding with the words 'I am marble and she is flesh'.<sup>41</sup> The topos of bringing marble to life is derived from ancient word plays,<sup>42</sup> ultimately originating in the Pygmalion myth; the reverse topos, being turned into stone, is prefigured in the myth of Medusa.<sup>43</sup> Topoi of this type were in continuing use during the Middle Ages and were taken up in the Renaissance,<sup>44</sup> but their especially frequent use with reference to the Medici tombs may have owed something to the fact that they were tombs. Similarly, the reference to sleep in the epigram recorded by

Vasari was evidently a response to the fact that the figure represents night. However, the topos of the transformation of dead matter into life was also used in other contexts. For example, it served to praise Michelangelo's achievement in creating a figure as perfect as the *David* from a block of disfigured stone. Vasari puts it as follows: 'And it was certainly a miracle that Michelangelo was able to raise up one who had died'.<sup>45</sup> Although the Pygmalion legend was used to illustrate that sculpture surpasses painting in the imitation of nature (as it was by Benedetto Varchi, for example), it was also used to praise painting, particularly in the case of Titian.<sup>46</sup> This type of comparison was thus widely applicable.

A rhetorical form developed here which was only loosely connected with the works of art to which it was applied and whose topoi are generally transferable to other works. The Renaissance literature on Michelangelo's sculptures mainly focuses on providing variations on this type of rhetoric. A similar pattern can also be seen in commentaries on architectural works. Florence Cathedral, New St Peter's, and the façade of Strasbourg Cathedral were praised in almost identical words during the Renaissance, despite their differing appearances. In each case, it was said that the buildings were enormously large, reaching into the sky, that they surpassed the Temple of Diana in Ephesus, and were one of the wonders of the world.<sup>47</sup>

One topos included in commentaries on Michelangelo's works was more problematic than such rhetorical phrases. Naturalistic representation of the nude body, if it is successful, has an erotic dimension. This is evident in the comments on the Medici tombs, even when it is not explicitly noted. It was usually the female figures, *Night* and *Aurora*, that were praised for their extraordinary approximation to nature. This choice can hardly have been due to the sculptures of the male sex being less accomplished; one decisive element was surely a sex-specific role assignment. The comments that have been preserved are written by male observers, and it was natural for them to perceive the erotic effect of a naturalistic representation of the body more in the case of the female than the male sex. However, cultural and linguistic conventions had an effect at least as important as individual sexual preference. Both male and female authors in the Renaissance praise the *grazia*, *leggiadria* and sometimes the sexual aura of female images. With the exception of figures such as Adonis, such remarks would have been thought inappropriate in relation to representations of men.

In antiquity, writings in praise of sculptures mentioned erotic effects quite openly. Again, the legendary point of reference is the story of Pygmalion, a human being falling in love with a statue. Even when the statue does not come to life, such love may find its expression. The best-known example is provided by the *Aphrodite* of Cnidus.<sup>48</sup> For the first time in ancient Greece, Praxiteles created a naturalistic representation of a naked woman in a life-

size statue. For this reason, the work was regarded as being the finest of all sculptures; it made Cnidus an attraction for tourists from all over the ancient world. Several authors vividly praise the intensity of the statue's erotic effect.<sup>49</sup> A boy is said to have fallen in love with it to such an extent that he satisfied his needs with it one night. The stain he left behind was shown to visitors as evidence of the sculpture's powerful attraction.

During the Renaissance, nudity again came to be regarded as an artistic ideal, and erotic aura was one measure of the artistic quality of a sculpture. In the *paragone* literature, sculpture was described as having a particular ability to elicit an erotic effect because the sense of touch, which contributes to the artistic judgement of the modelling, is at the same time the medium of sexual experience.<sup>50</sup> Erotic scenes were therefore used as allegorical illustrations of the sense of touch.<sup>51</sup> In the same vein, painted representations of nude women were perceived as having an erotic impact. For example, in a letter to Alessandro Contarini, Ludovico Dolce quoted the story of the *Aphrodite* of Cnidus in praise of Titian's so-called *Pardo Venus*.<sup>52</sup> Anton Francesco Doni paraphrased the Pygmalion legend in a letter to Michelangelo of 1543 in praise of the Medici tombs: 'This Aurora makes one forget the most beautiful and divine women one has ever seen, to embrace and kiss her.'<sup>53</sup> Doni goes on to say that the figures not only amaze the mind, but in fact deprive the viewer of his senses. The erotic impact, however, also had an awkward aspect: no matter how much it might prove the work's artistic quality, it did not conform with Christian modesty. It was not entirely appropriate in a public context, and even less so in a religious one.

This discrepancy was largely ignored in educated circles during the Renaissance; it could easily be explained away in Neoplatonic terms by claiming that the contemplation of beauty allowed the viewer to pass from the earthly to the divine. Despite the complexity of such philosophical reasoning, the mechanism involved was essentially simple. Nevertheless, it has not, so far as I am aware, been recorded that this approach was ever taken to Michelangelo's works during the Renaissance: it was never used even in defence against the accusation of licentiousness. Perhaps it was so commonplace that it did not require explicit mention. In the case of Bronzino's *Christ in Limbo* in S. Croce, an exceptional attempt was made to justify the work's erotic aura by a Neoplatonic appeal to ideal beauty,<sup>54</sup> but this rationalization was so blatant that it immediately aroused opposition.<sup>55</sup>

Ultimately, decency set limits to the praise of eroticism. In texts addressed to a wide range of readers, the erotic effect was rarely addressed as plainly as in Pliny or Lucian; in treatises on art and other such writings, only vague allusions could be made. Authors often referred briefly to the story of the *Aphrodite* of Cnidus or a similarly embellished eulogy of ancient sculptures and left the details to the reader's erudition. This is the way in which Bocchi,

for example, proceeds in his discussion of the Medici tombs, and in particular in his treatment of the *Night*.<sup>56</sup> In the private context, as in the letters by Dolce and Doni quoted above, one could express oneself more openly. In a less private context, when mentioning the Medici tombs in his *I Marmi* (1552), Doni omits any mention of the erotic effect.

The general public, ignorant of matters of art, was not conversant in the practice of rationalizing erotic responses in Neoplatonic terms. Vasari recounts with relish several anecdotes that reveal the disturbing results; a typical example is found in his biography of Fra Bartolomeo.<sup>57</sup> A follower of Savonarola, Fra Bartolomeo entered the monastery of S. Marco. He rose to become the most famous painter in Florence, but he was reproached with being incapable of depicting the nude body. He countered this scepticism by painting an altarpiece with St Sebastian for his monastery's church. Vasari reports that this demonstration of the artist's skill was successful beyond measure. At confession, however, it emerged that the new altarpiece was having an intensely erotic effect on the faithful – so intense that the monks decided they had to remove it. They hung it in the chapter house, but it continued to provoke inappropriate responses, so it was sent to France as a gift. A similar story concerns the allegory of Justice that Guglielmo della Porta provided for the tomb of Paul III in St Peter's, a figure derived from the female allegories on the Medici tombs. A Spaniard allegedly satisfied himself with it, like the Greek boy with the *Aphrodite* of Cnidus. As a result, the sculpture was covered with a metal robe (1594/95).<sup>58</sup>

Reservations and accusations were raised on many sides against excesses of this type. In the period in which Michelangelo was still an apprentice, Savonarola lashed out against the decline in morals evident in art and the way in which viewers took pleasure in it. The Council of Trent demanded an avoidance of all sexual allure. 'Figures should therefore be neither so painted nor so decorated with beauty as to provoke lust.'<sup>59</sup> Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* gave rise to more indignation than any other work of art,<sup>60</sup> and exposed genitalia had to be overpainted. Not all of the irritation over the *Last Judgement* was honestly motivated, however; Pietro Aretino who seems to have initiated the public criticism, claimed to be afraid that the depiction of naked bodies would be grist to the mill for the Lutherans<sup>61</sup> even though the Lutherans had not made the slightest sign of complaining about the fresco.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, Michelangelo was maligned as an 'inventor of smut', with the 'smut' also understood as *capricci luterani*. There was a complaint that artists everywhere were imitating Michelangelo's bad example, so that modern sculptures were not promoting faith and prayer, but instead undermining them (1549).<sup>63</sup>

The nudity of the *David* was likewise a problem. When the 'Giant' was being transported from the Opera del Duomo to its place in front of the Palazzo Vecchio, stones were thrown at it during the night.<sup>64</sup> Only with difficulty can

such an act be explained in terms of political motives. The perpetrators would still have had Savonarola's sermons against moral decay ringing in their ears; it was only five years earlier that Savonarola had been burned at the stake. Even a liberal spirit such as Alberti had demanded that in paintings the 'obscene' or disagreeable parts of the body should be covered – either with clothing, or leaves, or with the hands.<sup>65</sup> It is pointless for today's art historians to attempt, for reasons of piety towards Michelangelo, to deny the erotic aspects of the *David*. They point out that Donatello had already depicted David nude, but Donatello's *David* is still a child, unlike the mature man represented in Michelangelo's statue, and the younger the depicted figure was, the more its innocence would tend to drive out any eroticism – one need only think of the boy figures of Christ and St John the Baptist. Scale, location and purpose are also important factors; in contrast to Michelangelo's 'Giant', Donatello's *David* is a small figure, and it was intended for a private setting, not for a public space, still less for a church.

No matter what today's art historians may feel, in its time it was not possible, due to considerations of public morality, for the 'Giant' to be left entirely naked. After the nocturnal attack, the city fathers immediately saw to it that David's private parts were covered. They had a gilded garland of leaves prepared for the purpose, of a kind that was customarily used for naked statues in churches and can often be seen painted on depictions of ancient cult statues.<sup>66</sup> As evidence of the indecency of the *Last Judgement*, Aretino mentions that the chaste Florentines had hidden David's private parts 'under golden leaves', although the statue was only standing in a public square and not in a sacred place (1543).<sup>67</sup> A *veduta* of the Piazza della Signoria dating from the sixteenth century shows the *David* and other statues with golden garlands of leaves round their loins.<sup>68</sup> But even the garland of leaves did not completely cancel the erotic aura, as is shown by a short satirical text written by Machiavelli, the imaginary statutes of a society dedicated to pure pleasure. The members were supposed to offend against all rules of society and decency; if they failed, they were liable to so-called punishments that served for still greater pleasure. Ladies, for example, would have to inspect the *David* intensely.<sup>69</sup> Art history has acknowledged this kind of reaction to the *David* just as rarely as it has noted the existence of a garland round his loins.

The question remains: what kind of reactions from viewers did Michelangelo expect his works to inspire? Among the studies for the Medici tombs, a few notes have survived that record Michelangelo's own conception of their meaning, but this conception sounds so literary and is so difficult to recognize in the sculptures themselves that it has been rejected by many modern art historians. It has even been disputed that Tribolo was really meant to make the figures of Heaven and Earth, as Vasari reports, although notes in Michelangelo's own hand and other documents attest to it.

One of Michelangelo's notes concerning the Medici tombs says that 'the Day and Night are speaking to each other and saying, "With our swift course we have led Duke Giuliano to death; it is only just for him to take his revenge. And his revenge is this: as we have killed him, he has taken the light from us with his death, and as he closed his eyes, he has closed ours, so that they no longer shine over the earth. What would he have been able to make of us had he lived?"'<sup>70</sup> This statement suggests that the meaning is simply that Time has destroyed Giuliano's life. The mouse mentioned by Condivi is evidently a play on this notion. Bocchi's doubts regarding Condivi's statement are therefore not justified, although in principle logical. At best, Bocchi is right to the extent that he restates a vague, common phrase with greater precision. Simple logic will thus not be able to do justice to Michelangelo's conception. The destruction of life by Time is only the first part of the meaning. According to Michelangelo's note, what Condivi omits to mention is the poetic idea that Giuliano's death has taken away the light from the day, as if the course of the sun had been interrupted or the life of Time itself had been threatened. When one also takes the river gods into account, the idea can be extended: with Giuliano's death, time and the world feel they have lost their life and their splendour.

Michelangelo notes a similar idea on another sketch. He shows a figure holding up the epitaph. The note states: 'Fame is holding the epitaphs down; she is walking neither forwards nor backwards, because the Dukes have died and their actions have come to a standstill.'<sup>71</sup> Just as in the first note the sun has stood still in its course, so too Fame has ceased to advance, due to the Dukes' deaths. Like Time and the World, Fame has also lost its life and its splendour. The same idea apparently provided the basis for the 'captive' Liberal Arts on the tomb of Julius. Their activity is ended by death; they are subjugated by death.

Similar ideas are also discernible in the epitaphs of other Renaissance tombs, and a few famous examples can be given here. Inscribed on the tomb of the Humanist Leonardo Bruni (*d.* 1444) are the words: 'Since Leonardo departed from this life, History is in mourning, Eloquence has fallen silent, and it is said that the Muses, both Greek and Latin, could not keep back their tears.'<sup>72</sup>

Figures of the Liberal Arts and Muses shown in mourning already appear on the tomb of King Robert the Wise of Naples (*d.* 1343), and this topos occurs again in the epitaph on the king written by Petrarch.<sup>73</sup> On Michelangelo's tombs, mourning is expressed in the melancholy mood of the allegorical figures. The silence of eloquence due to the death of the great rhetorician Bruni has further-reaching implications: it means that this virtue itself has succumbed. This metaphor forms a direct parallel to the subjugation or capture of the Liberal Arts on the tomb of Julius and the standstill of Fame in the Medici tombs. In all of these cases, their activity is terminated by death.

The epitaph written by Pietro Bembo for Raphael (*d.* 1520) suggests that the artist's death presents a danger for the survival of all life:

To Raphael Sanzio, son of Giovanni, of Urbino,  
The most outstanding painter, rival of the Ancients:  
When you see his images, which almost breathe,  
It is easy to see the bond between nature and art.

...

Here lies Raphael; in his lifetime the great Mother of all  
things [i.e., Nature] feared she would be outdone,  
And when he died she feared she would die, too.<sup>74</sup>

Others wrote in a similar style about Raphael's death – for example, Antonio Tebaldi, in a sonnet addressed to Baldassare Castiglione: 'And the day on which dread death took him from the Earth was the last day in the life of painting.'<sup>75</sup> And Vasari: 'Well might Painting, when this noble artist died, die itself, for when he closed his eyes, she too was left almost blind.'<sup>76</sup> In an epitaph for Albrecht Dürer (*d.* 1528), Willibald Pirckheimer reduced this topos to the elementary formula: 'Talent, honesty, clarity, wisdom, virtue, art, and piety and faith lie buried here.'<sup>77</sup>

The epitaph for Pope Silvester II (*d.* 1003) had already claimed that when he died, the world was paralyzed, peace destroyed, and the tranquillity of the triumphant Church was shattered.<sup>78</sup> An epitaph for Julius II complains that, after St Peter had been freed from his fetters and led out of imprisonment by the Pope, St Peter and Christ – i.e., the Church – had once again been placed in bonds by the Pope's death:

I was Julius, Pontiff of Rome,  
Who found Peter bound in chains,  
Without his keys and with his mantle torn  
Among the children of a Moorish shepherd.

From prison I unbound him, slowly, slowly,  
And I began to give him his winged mantle;  
If I had not died I would have given  
The keys of all his flock into his hand.

...

Death interposed itself – a god has taken me, a sad one  
Whom I deny; at my death a second time  
St Peter and Christ return to chains.<sup>79</sup>

The exaggerations that such obituary notes contain were often associated with fame. One need only think of the way in which Michelangelo was raised to the status of a 'divine' figure and placed alongside the Archangel Michael. Similar exaggerations were normally heard at the death of great personalities. Raphael again provides an example. He died on Good Friday, and at the moment of

his death part of the Vatican Loggie were said to have collapsed. It was thus claimed that Heaven had wanted to give a sign, as it did on the death of Christ, when an earthquake shook the Temple in Jerusalem. In addition, Raphael's age on his death was equated with that of Christ. This almost blasphemous association with the Saviour was introduced in the upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and was spread even by a philosopher as pious as Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola.<sup>80</sup> Praise of princes was expressed in similar religious metaphors during this period.<sup>81</sup>

Although they are so obvious, the parallels between Michelangelo's verses on the Medici tombs and Renaissance epitaphs receive little attention today; I have found no references to them. It appears that they have not been taken seriously because they are perceived to be purely rhetorical in nature. Admittedly, such epitaphs are formulae with little philosophical or emotional depth: the mourning for artists and literary figures can be related to the theme of the decline of the arts and sciences, referred to as 'dying', so pervasive since antiquity.<sup>82</sup> The motif of St Peter's chains in the epitaph for Julius II is even less sophisticated; it is based on the fact that S. Pietro in Vincoli, where St Peter's chains are preserved, was the titular church of the future Julius II when still a cardinal.

Although such expressions may seem trivial in themselves, the epitaphs they belong to could also reach a high level of literary beauty, which in its own way was not inferior to that of great works of art. The concentration on formal economy and perfection often gave them the power to release a strong emotional effect. Bruni's epitaph is a high-quality example. Today often perceived as frustratingly unspecific, rhetoric did play an important role in the Renaissance, and Michelangelo's notes show that it also did for him.

Michelangelo went a step further. The figures of Heaven and Earth that were planned for the tomb of Julius and for the Medici tombs not only embody the triumph of Death over all earthly things, but also the triumph of eternal life over death, a theme which brings us into the conceptual sphere of Petrarch's *Trionfi*. The meaning of the tomb of Julius, as Vasari explains it, was freely based on this famous text, except that Love was replaced with earthly Felicity. This would suggest the sequence: earthly triumph, triumph of Death over all things earthly, triumph of eternal life. In the Medici tombs, however, the triumph of Death assumes a much more important role than in Petrarch, as Death conquers both Fame and Time. In Petrarch, Fame conquers Death, and Fame is conquered by Time.

The meaning conceived by Michelangelo for the tombs is evident from his notes, when seen in relation to their literary sources, but without such aids, it is barely recognizable. All that one perceives is a vague sense of melancholy. Recalling other epitaphs, one might add a sense of mourning over death and extinguished glory, but one need not. Even the *ignudi* on the ceiling of the



Sistine Chapel have a melancholy aura, although, as we shall see, they are apparently intended to proclaim a Golden Age.

Sixteenth-century art theory addressed the question of how the artist can succeed in communicating the content of his work to the beholder. He is advised to keep to models that are so well known that the observer will be able to recognize them. For example, Vasari's friend Giovanni Battista Adriani writes in a letter about the tapestries that were to be made for Duke Cosimo's chambers,

[...] Furthermore it seems to me that a new picture will please much more, if one already has some idea of the depicted subject. Because in this way one will recognize the whole from what you put there, and it gratifies the viewers that everyone can figure things out on his own without the help of others. If it is well painted and arranged, a story of this kind thus pleases both the eye and the mind, while another that is not so well known may please the eye with its artistic quality, but not to recognize anything in the depiction is unsatisfying to the mind. [...] One who paints something that is completely unknown, or known only to a few, will in my opinion give less pleasure, particularly because these decorations are made for effect and for the satisfaction of the majority.<sup>83</sup>

Many authors – Giovanni Andrea Gilio (1564), Raffaele Borghini (1584) and others – admonished painters to keep to well-established iconographic models and warned against arbitrary deviations from them and against extravagances.<sup>84</sup> Advice of this type was particularly associated with the notion of *istoria* in art-theoretical texts, but similar advice was also given in other areas. The rule can be transferred to tombs in the sense that the artist was meant to keep to the usual, appropriate repertoire of the genre: an observer wishing to understand the significance of a new tomb ought to be able to start from what he already knows about tombs.

Felix Faber's account of the tombs of the Doges, quoted earlier, illustrates how this process might work. The ordinary people who thought Hercules was Samson and that Venus was Mary Magdalene were interpreting the representations on the tombs in terms of what they expected, and their expectations were evidently based on what they knew from representations used in an ecclesiastical context. Such interpretations do have a certain amount of justification. In this particular case, the result was misleading, but in methodological terms it is not entirely erroneous even today; all the art historians who prefer their own ideas to the evidence of Vasari and Condivi and even of Michelangelo's own notes are basically imitating the method of the people Faber describes. Even Erwin Panofsky, in his Neoplatonic interpretation of the tomb of Julius, starts from historical experience, pointing out that what Vasari and Condivi report would have been unusual for the tomb of a Pope.<sup>85</sup> His interpretation is based on what he knows from many Renaissance theoretical texts and what is sometimes suggested by Michelangelo's late writings.

These considerations are intended simply to underscore the potential and limits of interpretation: while an interpretation based on parallels in other works functions well in a period in which a typical repertoire is already established, as in the time of Adriani, it remains inconclusive in a period of such far-reaching change and innovation as the early High Renaissance. The principal obstacle to understanding the iconographic significance of Michelangelo's works is their originality. Outstanding artists of the Renaissance were often unwilling to subordinate themselves to any preconceived scheme. A well-known example is provided by Isabella d'Este's attempt to force a set programme on artists: Perugino agreed to her demands, but the attempt failed with Giovanni Bellini, because he was so famous that he could claim for himself the liberty of supplying a *fantasia* in his own style.<sup>86</sup> Michelangelo was able to take the same liberty. He himself reports regarding the painting of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel that he was initially commissioned to paint the twelve Apostles, but once his outstanding mastery had been acknowledged, Pope Julius II allowed him 'to do what I wanted'.<sup>87</sup> Regarding the decoration of the cupola in the Medici Chapel, Pope Leo X gave him a free hand 'to do as you wish'.<sup>88</sup>

Michelangelo's works do not fit into any typical repertoire. Although their iconography takes up traditional rhetorical topoi, their design falls well outside the framework of what was then customary. Not only were many of his works unusual, they even violated decorum, defying expectations defined by custom and usage. In his *Discussions on Painting* (1538), Francisco de Hollanda portrays Michelangelo as quoting the famous passage from Horace: 'Painters and poets have always been permitted the most daring things. We ask for liberty for them and for ourselves, and grant it to all.'<sup>89</sup> In view of what the present inquiry has shown regarding Michelangelo's works, Francisco does indeed seem for once to be recording the master's genuine views.

Artistic freedom was also debated in Renaissance art theory. It was granted that genius expresses itself through inventive freedom, but the disadvantage of such freedom – that it makes understanding difficult because it departs from what is customary – was also recognized. If the artist wished to remain comprehensible, it was thought necessary for him to include in his works special attributes or recognition signs. The way in which such attributes work is again evident from the report by Felix Faber. In spite of his surprise regarding the pagan content of the representation, Faber recognized the ancient meaning of the figures. As he describes it himself, he succeeded in doing so thanks to the signs that were provided: *cum signis poetiarum fictionum*. Raffaele Borghini described this mechanism in particular detail (1584).<sup>90</sup> He considers it tedious to have to search for a long time in order to find out what figures represent. If the artist does not give his personifications clearly comprehensible attributes, he asserts, one would have to assume that he was intending to depict simply a

man or a woman. It would also be a hindrance if the figures carried attributes that differ from the norm or are poorly visible.

Borghini's observation brings us to the second obstacle that makes it difficult and sometimes almost impossible to understand the significance of Michelangelo's works: the artist did not give sufficient attention to placing the appropriate attributes clearly. It might even be said that he sometimes deliberately avoided doing so, a tendency that became even more pronounced in his late works.

The *David* can already be criticized on this score. From the principal view of the figure no attributes are visible. Researchers have climbed up to the hand to see whether it holds a stone, but what use is that to a viewer without a ladder? A strap is visible from behind, resembling the strap that holds the quiver on the *Belvedere Apollo*;<sup>91</sup> it is generally said to be a sling because a sling would be appropriate for David. The strap is not entirely clear even when one can see it, but if the *David* had been set up in front of a wall or in a niche, as some members of the committee on its placing proposed, it would not have been visible at all. Although the statue was set up in a free-standing position, Raphael ignored the strap when he sketched it from behind.<sup>92</sup> Nor is *David* recognizable from his posture. The statue does not represent a specific action, and in the biblical narrative David does not appear naked.<sup>93</sup> If the tradition that the statue is meant to represent David were not so strong, its meaning would probably be no less controversial today than that of the so-called *David-Apollo* in the Bargello Museum.

The *ignudi* on the Sistine ceiling have no attributes at all, and there is nothing to suggest that they were meant to have a deeper significance. Half of them are supporting medallions. If one wishes – but only if one wishes – one can regard them as angels. On two small preparatory sketches for the arrangement of the ceiling frescoes, winged figures appear in their place, in one case naked and in the other clothed – i.e., angels, genii, or allegories.<sup>94</sup> In the *Last Judgement*, Michelangelo showed angels without wings or clothing. The remainder of the *ignudi* carry garlands of oak leaves and acorns, the emblem of Julius II. There were any number of garland-carriers in the Renaissance, and they were usually merely decorative figures; nevertheless, Vasari saw the *ignudi* as symbolic. He says that with their varied movements, of the greatest artistic perfection, and with their garlands, they were intended to show that a Golden Age had reigned under Julius II.<sup>95</sup> Such a claim, rhetorical as it may seem, is certainly consistent with the rest of what is known of Michelangelo's iconographic conceptions. In this view, the agile vivacity of the *ignudi* would relate to the captives on the tomb of Julius and the immobile *Fama*. An interpretation of this type might seem attractive, but is open to doubt in view of the fact that the *ignudi* in the Sistine Chapel do not radiate the happiness of a Golden Age, but have a melancholy quality similar to that of the *Slaves* on the tomb of Julius.

Their significance as embodying a Golden Age can at least not be verified with certainty.

Fettered figures like those on the tomb of Julius can in principle have a wide variety of meanings if there are no signs to specify what is intended. In addition to the range of customary interpretations already mentioned, new ones based on rhetorical motifs could be added at the time. For example, Vasari says of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* that it threatens to take the observer captive in fetters.<sup>96</sup> Condivi claims that each of the Liberal Arts should be equipped with appropriate signs so as to be easily recognizable. The two *Slaves* in the Louvre do in fact have signs, but the attribute of the *Rebellious Slave* is so hard to recognize that it was overlooked by art historians for a long time: Erwin Panofsky was the first to discover it.<sup>97</sup> The attribute of the other slave is a monkey, but it would also have been difficult to recognize if the figure had been set up as planned, because the monkey is not easily visible from the front. Without Condivi's information, the meaning of the monkey would still be scarcely comprehensible: it might be indicating the arrogance of the subjugated provinces just as well as the imitation of nature or other subjects.<sup>98</sup> The late *Slaves* are not even consistently characterized with fetters.

In the case of the Medici tombs, one of the personifications, the *Night*, is more than amply equipped with attributes. But this does not hold for the other *Times of Day*. On the contrary, Borghini refers to them as negative examples in his discussion of attributes. In his view, it would be completely impossible to identify them if their meaning had not been handed down by tradition. 'They are not only beautiful, but glorious; nevertheless I do not know what I should say about their invention, as they carry no signs of the type given by the ancients to indicate what they mean. And if the names Michelangelo gave them had not been circulated, I cannot see that anyone, no matter how educated, would be able to understand them.'<sup>99</sup>

Michelangelo left the deeper conceptual content of the Medici Chapel even more enigmatic. According to Condivi, the understanding of the entire ensemble was to depend on the tiny detail of the mouse, which was, moreover, to be placed near only one of the figures, so that to understand the meaning, a viewer would independently have to get the idea of transferring it to the others. Borghini considers it tedious not to find the attributes where they belong.

Nor did Michelangelo observe the rule that the attributes should be familiar ones. Instead, he invented some that are so original that observers would scarcely have been able to understand them. Michelangelo describes one ineffective attribute of this type in his note on the *Fama* who was to have held the epitaph on the Medici tombs: '[...] she is walking neither forwards nor backwards, because the Dukes have died and their actions have come to a standstill.' Figures that carry epitaphs or other items and neither move

forwards nor backwards were as widespread in the Renaissance as agile garland-bearers; their immobility is due to the fact that they are standing to display the epitaphs and there is nothing to suggest that death has caused it.

The opposite idea, that it is *Fame* that has conquered Death, would actually make more sense here. By holding up the epitaph, *Fame* is ensuring the Dukes' posthumous renown and thereby vanquishing death. Based on models from antiquity, this idea was very widespread during the Renaissance. Since Alberti, tombs and works of art in general were thought to be able to ensure the fame of the deceased person even after death. In Francisco de Hollanda's *Dialogues on Painting*, it is Michelangelo himself who expresses this view.<sup>100</sup> Michelangelo also made use of the conventional rhetorical trope that written obituaries overcome death. In a letter to Vasari about the *Lives*, he describes the author as a 'reviver of dead men' who also 'prolongs the life of the living'.<sup>101</sup> The observer lacks any point of reference that would allow him to glean from figures holding epitaphs the meaning proposed in Michelangelo's note. Even Michelangelo himself could hardly have been unaware of this drawback.

Michelangelo often made it even more difficult to understand his works by not completing the few attributes that he conceived for them – the mouse in the Medici tombs, for example, or the enigmatic animals at the feet of the 'captives' for the tomb of Julius. Although it was ostensibly due to external circumstances that Michelangelo was unable to finish his works, he sometimes seems to have considered completing them as unimportant. I have explained the reasons for this impression elsewhere and there is no need to review them here.<sup>102</sup> I would merely refer to the large project of the tomb of Julius, the 'tragic' fate of which, viewed pragmatically, could have been foreseen from the very start; or the statues whose completion Michelangelo himself prevented (such as the *Pietà* in Florence, the *Rondanini Pietà*, etc.); or the individual parts of statues that were evidently left in less than complete state intentionally, while the rest received the finest polish (such as the attributes of the *Slaves* on the tomb of Julius, or the heads of the two male *Times of Day* on the Medici tombs).

The careless treatment of attributes is all the more noticeable when contrasted with the specificity Michelangelo gave his works in other ways. He was, for instance, able to express the mood of his figures with masterly clarity. The 'captives' on the tomb of Julius are clearly expressing mourning, and already in the Renaissance numerous beholders noted that the figures on the Medici tombs have a melancholy quality. Contemporary comments note equally distinctly that the *David* displays daring and readiness for battle.<sup>103</sup> Michelangelo succeeded equally well in showing that the *Bacchus* which he created in 1496–97 for Raffaele Riario is drunk. This is reflected in the comments made about it and even in the drawings produced by Marten van Heemskerck in the period between 1532 and 1536.

Michelangelo took greater care than anyone before him in matters concerning the revival of antiquity. This is shown both by the allegories on the Medici tombs and also by the *David* and *Bacchus*. The *Bacchus* has all of the attributes typical of him in antiquity, as is rightly emphasized in the praise Condivi dedicates to it.<sup>104</sup> Michelangelo gave Bacchus a wineskin, a grapevine, a panther's skin, and a small satyr. Following the model of ancient statues and descriptions, he provides him (as Vasari already emphasizes in particular in the first edition of the *Lives*)<sup>105</sup> with effeminate traits and a staggering posture as an expression of drunkenness.<sup>106</sup> One is surprised by the wealth of attributes, their clarity, and by Michelangelo's precise imitation of antiquity at a time when archaeological knowledge was still uncertain and had to be recovered with great effort.<sup>107</sup> The *David*, a true monument of Renaissance classicism, borrows from antiquity both in its posture and in its details. Antiquity has been so precisely observed that the figure as a whole has the effect of offering a response to the *Belvedere Apollo*.<sup>108</sup> It is equally obvious that the river gods planned for the Medici tombs and the allegories of the *Times of Day* are derived from antiquity. *Day* in particular – the view of the back as presented to the observer – resembles the *Torso Belvedere*, which Michelangelo is said to have admired more than any other ancient sculpture.<sup>109</sup>

Michelangelo succeeded in imitating antiquity with such perfection that the *Sleeping Cupid* gave the impression of being a forgery. The *Bacchus* stood among the ancient sculptures in the collection of Jacopo Galli, as if it was one of them, and in his views of the collection Marten van Heemskerck even shows it damaged, so that it looks like an ancient fragment. Some observers thought that Michelangelo's statues were reproductions of ancient figures. When the Frankfurt legal scholar Johann Fichard visited Florence in 1536, he thought that Michelangelo's *David* was Orpheus and that the allegories of *Day* and *Night* were Hercules and Minerva.<sup>110</sup> Countless times right up to the nineteenth century, copies after the *Times of Day* were given new meanings, for example, Mars and Venus.<sup>111</sup> Little needed to be changed to permit such adaptations; only a few new attributes had to be added. Michelangelo's own picture of Leda provides an example of this type of variation on the figure of *Night*.

In remarking that the large-scale project for the tomb of Julius surpasses all of the imperial tombs of antiquity, Vasari was referring to the overall impression that Michelangelo's conception clearly gave. Any educated person would have been able to recognize that the project represented a response to ancient models.<sup>112</sup> The arrangement in the form of a stepped pyramid, according to Vasari, resembles the typical tombs of Roman rulers. The catafalque that was erected at Michelangelo's funeral adopted the same arrangement, and the reference to antiquity was noted in descriptions of it. The tombs of the Roman rulers were supposed to have had the same architectural articulation and niches with inset figures as in the project for the tomb of Julius. The

Victories that Michelangelo was planning for the niches and the motif of the *ignudi* in front of the herm figures are derived from ancient sarcophagi. Similarly, the models of Roman triumphal arches and other monuments of victory were seen as suggesting that captives were customary for this type of tomb, understood as personifications of the provinces subjugated by Rome. Apparently influenced by Michelangelo's large-scale project for the tomb of Julius, Leonardo da Vinci used the motif of captives for the tomb of Gian Giacomo Trivulzio a year later. He did not add any attributes to identify them, but since Trivulzio was a *condottiere*, there can be hardly any doubt that they represented people subjugated in war, as they had in antiquity.

In view of his ability to express meaning when he wanted to, Michelangelo must himself have realized that he was often not communicating the significance of his figures in a wholly comprehensible way. One is tempted to ask whether he may have been doing this deliberately. The fact that he did not really concern himself with the attributes, that he hid them or positioned them inconspicuously, or omitted them, or only suggested them during the planning stage, or did not complete them, stands in too clear a contrast to his careful observation and imitation of ancient attributes in some of his works to be explained by ineptitude, oversight, or misfortune. If Michelangelo had really been concerned to provide the key to the iconography of the Medici tombs, he would surely have been able to find the time to execute a detail as tiny as a mouse. His interest in doing so was evidently minor. Similarly, when painting the Sistine ceiling, he lost interest in the *ignudi's* wings, apparently without considering that this omission made the meaning of the figures unclear. The effect and significance of the attributes in the Louvre *Slaves* was evidently reduced by the less finished treatment given them.

In this context, the notes added by Tiberio Calcagni in the margin of his copy of Condivi's *Life* deserve attention, since they record Michelangelo's reaction to the book.<sup>113</sup> They do not include any comments or corrections by Michelangelo relating to the conceptual content of his works. Michelangelo was thus evidently not particularly concerned about whether Condivi had described the meaning of the Medici tombs or the large-scale project for the tomb of Julius incorrectly or not entirely accurately.

Perhaps one should not make excessively complex iconographic demands of all of Michelangelo's works, but rather satisfy oneself with simple rhetorical conceits – in the case of the Medici tombs, along the lines suggested by Michelangelo's own notes; or in the case of the tomb of Julius, in the style of the epitaph for the Pope cited above, which simply takes over the motif of fetters from S. Pietro in Vincoli. Although the poem was composed after the death of Julius II, the Pope himself seems to have seen St Peter's chains, preserved in his former titular church, in an obvious relationship to current liberation from political bonds.<sup>114</sup>

Perhaps it was sufficient for Michelangelo if the observer understood the obvious meaning of his works, such as the reference to the imperial tombs of antiquity in the tomb of Julius, or the mourning for the dead in the Medici tombs. This would be perfectly appropriate for tombs, since their basic function lay in perpetuating the good reputation of the deceased. It is also possible that Michelangelo did not intend his conceptual meaning to be understood literally at all. Perhaps he regarded the deeper, more abstract ideas connected with his works as free associations rather than as binding for the observer – as something like poetic variations on a theme. The art historians – and they are by no means few in number – who have ignored his notes on the meaning of the Medici tombs apparently accept this attitude on Michelangelo's part, even if they do not admit it openly. It seems possible that Michelangelo was leaving observers free, within certain limits, to associate their own ideas with his works, as he did himself. Perhaps he would have accepted an interpretation coloured with Neoplatonism as generally appropriate, even if he had not thought of it himself. In that case, he would only have been consciously taking account of what was common in his time. There is evidence that it was quite customary in the Renaissance to project independent meanings onto works of art at a later stage. The *David* is an outstanding example. The Opera del Duomo had originally planned it as a decoration for the Cathedral; when the city fathers placed it in front of the town hall, it became a symbol of republican freedom; when the Medici recovered control of Florence, it became a model of the good prince. Another example is provided by Michelangelo's *Victory* now in the Palazzo Vecchio. In his life of Michelangelo, Vasari states that it referred to the victory of death over the *artes liberales*; on another occasion, he interprets it apodictically as a reference to military victory.<sup>115</sup>

When one takes all of these arguments together, it appears quite possible that Michelangelo expected observers to react to his works in exactly the ways they actually did; that is, to attend primarily to the artistic quality and the expression of feeling. In his comments on the *Last Judgement*, Vasari explicitly emphasizes that Michelangelo's intentions were precisely so directed:

It is sufficient to see that this extraordinary man wished to paint nothing but the perfect and well-proportioned composition of the human body, and in various postures, together with the movements of the spirit. It was sufficient for him to satisfy the demands of that in which he surpassed all other artists, to demonstrate the way of the great style and the nude, to show how much he knew of the difficulty of design.<sup>116</sup>

Even in portraits, the form and expression of feeling are said to have interested him more than individual physical features. Niccolò Martelli reports in 1544 that Michelangelo refused to portray the Medici dukes naturalistically;<sup>117</sup> instead, he depicted them with ideal *grandezza*, so that



– as he is reported to have said – they would still be admired a thousand years later in the belief that they had really been as magnificent as they look in their portraits.

The history of the creation of the *David* suggests that artistic ideals such as the revival of ancient art were foremost in Michelangelo's mind, and that he wished to be seen exactly as he was indeed seen by his contemporaries. The Opera del Duomo commissioned Michelangelo to represent the prophet David, a figure usually shown at a mature age, clothed and with a suitable attribute such as a scroll or harp.<sup>118</sup> On his own authority and in secret, Michelangelo breached the contract by depicting David as the youthful vanquisher of Goliath, but he was not really interested in David as the saviour of Israel, since he largely suppressed the attributes that would have been appropriate to this subject. He was evidently not concerned with the hero as such; what mattered to him was creating a colossal figure in ideal nudity for the first time since antiquity. In any case, it was this achievement, not the significance of the figure as David, that formed the basis of the immense fame of the statue and consequently of Michelangelo himself.

The *David* thus recalls the blithe recommendation that Sebastiano del Piombo gave to Michelangelo in 1533 regarding the decoration of the lantern of the Medici Chapel: he should paint the rape of Ganymede, he advised him, adapting the subject to the sanctity of the location by using a trick: '[...] you could give him a halo, so that he would look like St John in the Apocalypse being borne up into Heaven'.<sup>119</sup> The strap on the *David*, which marks his sling in a barely visible way behind his back, resembles the halo for Ganymede. Perhaps Sebastiano's ironical advice was referring to the reinterpretation of Ganymede in *Ovide moralisé* as a prefiguration of the evangelist St John.<sup>120</sup> References were still being made to the Christian reinterpretations in *Ovide moralisé* in the sixteenth century, although it was also possible to mock them.<sup>121</sup> The rest of the decoration of the dome proposed by Sebastiano, with flowers, masks, and *varie cose bizzarre* does not suggest any connection between Ganymede and St John.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps Sebastiano was only using a figure of speech meaning 'a handsome boy'. In a burlesque poem, Anton Francesco Grazzini refers to Donatello's statue of St George at Or San Michele as *il mio bel Ganimede* (1545).<sup>123</sup> Sebastiano's attitude would certainly correspond to what Erasmus of Rotterdam had in mind when he criticized excessive reverence for antiquity, the Ciceronian formalism of ecclesiastical literature and paganism in art, which tended to regard the rape of Ganymede as being more important than the Ascension of Christ.<sup>124</sup>

In other works as well, Michelangelo was apparently more interested in the revival of antiquity than in the iconographic meaning. He was particularly eager to depict figures in ideal nudity, based on the model of antiquity, giving no consideration to whether this was appropriate in the Christian context or

to whether the erotic effect might offend against modesty. His dedication to this approach was undeterred even in the case of the figure of Christ.

As early as during his first stay in Rome, I believe, Michelangelo encountered difficulties with his passion for ideal nudity. In 1500 he was commissioned to paint the altarpiece for the funerary chapel of Bishop Giovanni Ebu of Crotone in S. Agostino in Rome. Apparently because the chapel was dedicated to *pietas*, he created an *imago pietatis* adapted from the *Entombment of Christ* (National Gallery, London). In disregard for the meaning of the image, the stigmata – which are actually what elicits the *pietas* – are missing: Michelangelo apparently omitted them because they would have detracted from the body's beauty. In disregard for decency, the genitals of Christ are not concealed. Although Michelangelo was well established in Rome, had received the commission thanks to his excellent connections, had already made substantial progress on the work, and had no other commitments at the time, he did not complete the picture and left the Eternal City hastily, as if in flight, and repaid the fee he had already received for it. The reasons for these events are not recorded, but it seems to me obvious that the painting caused offence due to the uncovered genitals prominent at the centre, and that it was rejected. At an unknown period, the genitals of Christ were partly scratched out of the painting.

In 1514, Michelangelo was commissioned to produce a statue of the risen Christ for the altar on the tomb of Marta Porcari in S. Maria sopra Minerva in Rome. The motif was a common one for tombs,<sup>125</sup> and the risen Christ was to be naked (*ignudo*). The patron probably understood *ignudo* to mean naked with the exception of a loincloth, as was customary,<sup>126</sup> but Michelangelo created a completely naked figure. He apparently adopted the practice – widespread since the beginning of the Renaissance regarding crucifixes – of forming the whole body in the nude, and then covering the genitals with a cloth, either a real one or one reproduced in ephemeral materials. In the same way, with the statue of Christ, it was therefore up to the patron or the clerics of the church to cover its nakedness with a cloth. All Renaissance representations show the statue with a loincloth. Nevertheless, the genitals were damaged in this case as well, certainly out of religious zeal.

Michelangelo's uncompromising imitation of ideal nudity *all'antica* apparently offended many people's modesty. It was probably the widespread indignation over the artist's attitude that Aretino exploited, with his well-known publicity skills, when he levelled the accusation of immodesty against the *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel, although in this context nudity was perfectly normal and iconographically appropriate. Aretino's polemic was contemptible but effective because it contained a core of truth: it denounced the fact that for Michelangelo, the imitation of antiquity was ultimately more important than meaning or decorum.

Admittedly Michelangelo may have been an extremist in his pursuit of ideal nudity based on the model of antiquity, but the general attitude that artistic qualities were more important than iconographic meaning was widespread in his time. Evidence is provided not only by contemporary descriptions of works of art, but also by the criticisms that were often made during the Renaissance of the way in which art was gaining independence. Alberti already felt the need to observe that it was not appropriate to have objects in churches that distracted the spirit from religious contemplation to all sorts of 'sensual stimulation and idolatry'.<sup>127</sup> Savonarola warned against placing the sort of images in churches which, instead of guiding the spirit towards God, would distract it and entice it to consider only their artistic value. During the Counter-Reformation, a warning was issued that the realization of artistic aims should not interfere with the communication of Christian principles. In directives of this type and many similar admonitions, as well as in Vasari's *Lives* and other texts that directly or indirectly refer to art, it becomes clear that during the Renaissance in the eyes of many artistic merit was genuinely more important than content. And as the rhetoric used in epitaphs shows, literary form was sometimes more important than intellectual substance.

For reasons of caution it may be wise to note in conclusion that there is no intention here of supporting the older view, going back to Jacob Burckhardt, that the Renaissance was more pagan than Christian in spirit, or even that it had little interest in religious concerns. We are sceptical only about burdening Michelangelo's works and Renaissance art in general with too much abstract complexity. Underlying this chapter is the idea that Michelangelo's work does not belong to a dry, academic environment, but to the bustling and colourful world of a social elite that certainly possessed intellectual skill, but for whom exquisite taste, up-to-the-minute fashion and outward stylishness were also very important. The responses of his contemporaries, and the artist's tacit acceptance of their reactions, strongly suggest that individual world-views or personal piety do not constitute the real content of the works produced in such a cultural context.

## Notes

1. My interest in the phenomenon developed from a lecture on the large-scale project for the tomb of Julius II which I gave in 1996 at the 24th Colloquium at the Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance on 'La chapelle funéraire et la tombe monumentale à la Renaissance'. The following discussion of the tomb of Julius is based on this still unpublished lecture. I refer here to the 'large-scale project', in contrast to the first project for a wall tomb published by M. Hirst, F. Hartt, P. Joannides and D. Cordellier in 1976–91. I am grateful to Thomas Frangenberg for tirelessly providing me with valuable suggestions on the manuscript which have helped me to state my ideas more precisely.
2. Summers 1981; Frangenberg 1990. Source collections: Steinmann and Wittkower 1967 and Vasari 1962. Comments on the Medici tombs in Rosenberg 2000, pp. 146–51. See also

- Vasari 1966 ff. and Condivi 1887. On the *Lives*, see also Hirst 1996. The literature on the history of individual works by Michelangelo is cited here only in exceptional cases.
3. Lerner 1969; Baxandall 1971, pp. 59–63, 97; Duggan 1989, pp. 227–51; Frangenberg 1990, pp. 47–58.
  4. A.F. Doni, letter of 1548 to Giulio Cinabro, in Frangenberg 1990, p. 65, n. 80.
  5. '[...] et simplices putant esse Sanctorum imagines, et honorem exhibent Herculi, putantes Samsonem, et Veneri, aestimantes Magdalenam, et sic de aliis'; Faber 1843–49, III, p. 425; Huse and Wolters 1986, pp. 162–3.
  6. The most famous example is the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius; cf. Buddensieg 1983. As a close parallel to Faber's report, although the reinterpretation may in this case have been deliberate, one need only mention the tomb of Giovanni Arberini (*d.* 1486) in S. Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, into which an ancient relief depicting Hercules' battle with the Nemean lion is incorporated, understood as representing the battle of Samson with the lion.
  7. Some familiar parallels for these iconographic problems in Vasari's *Lives* include the following: Vasari was unable to interpret fully the programme which Annibale Caro had developed for Taddeo Zuccari's decoration in the Palace of Caprarola; see Gombrich 1972, p. 11. Some allegorical interpretations were arrived at later; see McGrath 1985, pp. 117–34.
  8. Cf. Echinger-Maurach 1991; on the iconography, with a detailed discussion of the earlier literature, see pp. 190–219; and in general on Michelangelo's sculpture, see Poeschke 1992.
  9. Frey 1887, pp. 69, 71.
  10. De Tolnay 1975–80, fol. 50r (Uffizi 608 Er).
  11. De Tolnay 1975–80, fol. 157r (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, Parker 297r).
  12. Frey 1887, pp. 63–4.
  13. Fornari 1550, cited in Steinmann and Wittkower 1967, no. 704.
  14. Frey 1887, pp. 62–4.
  15. Panofsky 1993, pp. 96 ff.; Eitlinger 1953; Goldberg 1966.
  16. Frey 1887, pp. 63–5.
  17. 'Questi prigionieri erano tutte le provincie, soggiogate da questo pontefice e fatte obediante alla chiesa apostolica, et altre statue diverse, pur legate, erano tutte le virtù et arti ingegnose, che mostravano esser' sottoposte alla morti [sic], non meno che si fussi quel pontefice che si honoratamente le adoperava'; Frey 1887, p. 67.
  18. If the winged figures, rather than their captives, were interpreted as *artes liberales* and fine arts, the question of who was subjugated by them remains; see Garrard 1984.
  19. Frey 1887, pp. 125–36.
  20. De Tolnay 1975–80, fol. 186r (Louvre, inv. no. 838 r), fol. 189r (British Museum, inv. no. 1859-6-25-543 r), fol. 193v (Louvre, inv. no. 686 v).
  21. '[...] e sopra era per fine 2. figure, che una era il Cielo, che ridendo sosteneva in sulle spalle una bara insieme con Cibale, dea della terra; pareva, che si dolessi, che ella rimanessi al mondo priva d'ogni virtù per la morte di questo huomo, et il Cielo pareva, che ridessi, che l'anima sua era passata alla gloria celeste'; Frey 1887, p. 69; Vasari in 1568 on the large-scale project for the tomb of Julius. Condivi considers the figures as angels; Frey 1887, p. 68.
  22. Anonimo Magliabechiano (1536–46), M. Tramezino (1544), B. Varchi (1549); see Vasari 1962, III, pp. 953, 970.
  23. Lewis and Trexler 1981; Trexler 2000.
  24. Vasari 1962, I, p. 247; III, p. 1130–1.
  25. 'Et avenga che di tutte fusse una intentione et una forma, nondimeno le figure son tutte differenti e 'n diversi moti et atti'; Frey 1887, p. 134.
  26. '[...] significandosi per queste il Giorno et la Notte e per ambi due il Tempo, che consuma il tutto. Et per che tal suo proposito meglio fusse inteso, messe alla Notte

[...] la civetta et altri segni, accio accomodati, così al Giorno le sue note. Et per la significatione del Tempo voleva fare un topo, havendo lasciato in su l'opera un poco di marmo, il qual poi non fece, impedito; percióche tale animaluccio di continuo rode et consuma, non altrimenti chel tempo ogni cosa divora'; Frey 1887, p. 136.

27. Rubin 1995; Alpers 1960.
28. 'La Notte, che tu vedi in sì dolci atti / Dormir, fu da uno Angelo scolpita / In questo sasso, er perche dorme, ha vita. / Destala, se no'l credi, e parleratti' (Giovanni Strozzi); Frey 1887, p. 135; Giannotti 1939, p. 45.
29. Bocchi 1591, pp. 518–40.
30. Bocchi, *Oratio*.
31. 'Con grave considerazione e da Filosofo più tosto che da Scultore, sopra due Sepulture ha figurate il Buonarroto quattro figure, le quali tutte e quattro significano il Tempo. Perche quantunque non sia alcuna cosa generata dal tempo, ne corrotta altresì, ma si generi in tempo et si corrompa; tuttavia, secondo quello, che comunemente si dice, ha il Buonarroto con la figura del Giorno, della Notte, del Crepuscolo e dell' Aurora, quasi con vaga perifrasi espresso il Tempo da cui, seguendo la morte, è la vita nostra consumata'; Bocchi 1591, p. 266.
32. Cf. Steinmann and Wittkower 1967, no. 1125, 17, 287, 831, 388 etc. (Luca Landucci 1504, Albertini 1510, Epigram Rosselli, before 1521, 'colosso', Paolo Giovio, c. 1527, Cambi 1532); Doni 1928, II, p. 20, etc.
33. Frey 1920, pp. 103–80; Isermeyer 1965; Seymour 1974, pp. 140–45; Weil-Garris 1983.
34. Gaye 1839–40, II, pp. 455–62; Seymour 1974, pp. 139–55.
35. Frey 1887, pp. 48–53; Vasari 1962, II, pp. 195–6.
36. Smick 2000.
37. Cf. Bush 1976, pp. 100–18.
38. Rubin 1995, p. 275; Hazard 1975; Smick 2000, pp. 161–2.
39. Francisco de Hollanda 1899, p. 56. On the historical context of the work, cf. Deswarte-Rosa 1995.
40. Epigram by Giovanni Strozzi, published by Vasari at the end of the life of Michelangelo, Frey 1887, p. 135. Epigram on the Medici tombs in Doni 1928, II, p. 21. In a letter of 12 January 1543, Doni praises Michelangelo as the master who was able to waken marble to life, like God; Vasari 1962, III, p. 980.
41. 'Anzi io son marmo ed ella è carne', Doni 1928, II, p. 21. In a letter to A. Lolloio of 17 August 1548, Doni writes, 'Abbate avvertenza non vi rapire in estasi nel considerare queste figure di marmo e di non vi trasmutare in pietra'; Vasari 1962, III, p. 953.
42. An example of a similar word play in antiquity: 'Vivebam: sum facta silex, quae deinde polita / Praxitile manibus vivo iterum Niobe' (When I was alive, I was turned to stone; but polished by the hand of Praxiteles I live again as Niobe); Ausonius, *Epigrams* LXIII.
43. On the Pygmalion myth, Blühm 1988; Shearman 1992, pp. 47 ff. On Vasari's variations on this myth, cf. Barolsky 1995, pp. 47 ff.
44. The most impressive example of the medieval use of this topos is probably provided by the well-known account of the statue of Venus in the description of Rome by Master Gregorius (twelfth- or thirteenth-century): 'Hec autem imago ex Pario marmore tam miro et inexplicabili perfecta est artificio, ut magis viva creatura videatur quam statua: erubescit etenim nuditatem suam similis, faciem purpureo colore perfusam gerit.' Magister Gregorius 1970, p. 20. For other examples see Schapiro 1987, pp. 24–63 ('Über die ästhetische Bewertung der Kunst in romanischer Zeit', 1943); Frugoni 1984–86; Seiler 1989, p. 162; Jakobson 1973, pp. 152–89; Stoichita 2003.
45. Frey 1887, p. 51; Vasari 1962, II, pp. 203–4.
46. Varchi 1960–62, I, p. 47; Rogers 1986, p. 302 (Giovanni della Casa on Titian's portrait of Elisabetta Quirini Massola).
47. Smith 1992, pp. 42–5; Günther 1997, p. 184; Wimpfeling 1505, fol. 39v; Frankl 1960, p. 857.
48. Hinz 1998.

49. Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXVI, 20–21; Pseudo-Lucian, *Erotes*, 15–16.
50. Pardo 1993.
51. Nordenfalk 1985, pp. 13–17.
52. Goffen 1987, pp. 692–3; cf. Ginzburg 1980.
53. 'Quella Aurora fa lasciare delle più belle et più divine donne che si vedesser mai per abbracciare et bacciar lei', Poggi, Barocchi, and Ristori 1965–83, IV, p. 161. Referring to the myth of Narcissus, Alberti regards painting as 'embracing' the external appearance through the means available to art. Alberti 1972, 61–3; Pardo 1993, p. 81.
54. Borghini 1584, p. 187.
55. Frangenberg 1990, pp. 101 ff.
56. Vasari 1962, III, p. 1036.
57. Vasari 1878–85, IV, p. 188. Freedberg 1989, pp. 346 ff.; cf. in general Ginzburg 1983, pp. 237–8.
58. Liebrecht 1879, p. 101; Kris and Kurz 1980, p. 101; Kömer 1999.
59. Blunt 1940, p. 118.
60. De Maio 1978, pp. 18–63.
61. Steinmann and Pogatscher 1906, p. 494, letter of January 1546 to Enea Parmigiano; Thode 1902–13, II, pp. 66–7.
62. De Maio 1978, pp. 28–31, 210 ff.
63. Gaye 1839–40, II, p. 500; Thode 1902–13, III, p. 124.
64. During the night of 14 May 1504; L. Landucci, *Diario Fiorentino*, see Vasari 1962, II, p. 208.
65. Alberti 1972, pp. 78–9.
66. On 31 October 1504 a goldsmith received payment for a gilded 'ghirlanda' consisting of 'un filo d'octone con vinctotto foglie di rame'; Vasari 1962, II, p. 217; Isermeyer 1965, p. 325. The garland has usually been regarded as a garland of victory for the head (as stated in Weil-Garris 1983, p. 385). But there is no confirmation of this view. The opinion also expressed by Isermeyer, that it was the usual garland of leaves around the loins, is confirmed by the witnesses cited in the following, as well as by a *veduta* of the Piazza della Signoria – not previously noted – which clearly shows the gilded garland of leaves around the loins (painted in yellow), but no garland on the head (see below).
67. '[...] o imitate la modestia Fiorentina, la quale sotto alcune foglie auree sotterra quelle [le vergogne] del suo bel colosso; et pure è posto in piazza publica et non in luogo sacro'; letter of Pietro Aretino dated 6 November 1545 to Michelangelo about the *Last Judgement*; Steinmann and Pogatscher 1906, p. 492.
68. Anonymous Florentine painter, *La festa degli omaggi in Piazza della Signoria*, Florence, Uffizi, inv. no. GDSU 1919 P.
69. 'Sotto pena di havere ad guardare con gli ochiali il Gigante di Piazza'; Machiavelli 1993, p. 932; Gilbert 1995, p. 247.
70. 'El dì e la nocte parlano e dichono: noi abiamo chol nostro veloce chorso conducto alla morte el ducha Giuliano; è ben giusto, che e' ne facci vendecta chome fa. E la vendecta è questa: Che avendo noi morto lui, lui chosi morto a tolta la luce a noi e chogli ochi chiusi a serrato e nostri, che non risplendon piu sopra la terra. Che arrebbe di noi dunche facto, mentre vivea'; De Tolnay 1975–80, fol. 201r (Casa Buonarroti, 10 Ar).
71. 'La fama tiene gli epitaphi a giacere non va ne inanzi ne indietro perche son morti e li loro operare è fermo'; De Tolnay 1975–80, no. 189r (British Museum, inv. no. 1859-6-25-543 r). Other translations of this difficult text are given in Gilbert 1971, pp. 393 ff.
72. 'Postquam Leonardus e vita migravit / Historia luget, eloquentia muta est / Ferturque musas tum graecas tum / latinis lacrimas tenere non potuisse.'
73. 'Morte sua viduae septem concorditer artes / Et musae flevire novem.' Petrarch, *Epistolae poeticae*, II, 8; Panofsky 1993, p. 96.

74. 'Raphaeli Sanctio Ioann. F. Urbinati / Pictori eminentiss. veterumq. aemulo / cuius spiranteis prope imagines si / contemplere naturae atque artis foedus / facile inspexeris / [...] Ille hic est Raphael, timuit quo sospite vinci / Rerum magna parens et, moriente, mori.' Vasari 1878–85, IV, p. 386. Cf. Buddensieg 1968.
75. '[E] 'l di che l'empia morte al mondo el tolse, / L'ultimo fu de la pittura giorno'; Golzio 1936, p. 335.
76. 'Ben poteva la pittura, quando questo nobile artefice morì, morire anche ella; ch'è quando egli gli occhi chiuse, ella quasi cieca rimase'; Vasari 1878–85, IV, p. 383.
77. 'Ingenium, probitas, candor, prudentia, virtus, / Ars, pietasque, fidesque, hic tumulata iacent'; van Mander 1991, p. 61.
78. '[...] Abegit / lastralis spatio secula morte sui / obriguit mundus discussa pace triumphus / aecclesiae nutans dedidit requiem'; S. Giovanni in Laterano.
79. 'Julio fui pontefice romano, / Che trovai Pietro in vincula legato, / Senza le chiave, col manto squarzato / Sotto a' figlioli d'un pastor marrano.  
  
Di carzer el disligai, piano piano, / E cominciaili a pore el manto alato: / E se morte non era, i' l'arei dato / Di tutto il grege suo le chiave in mano  
  
[...]  
Morte vi s'interpose, un Dio mi ha, tristo / Ch'io nego; al morir mio un'altra volta, / In vincula tornar San Pietro e Cristo'; Hartt 1950, p. 123.
80. 'Di questa morte li cieli hanno voluto mostrare uno de li signi che mostrorno su la morte del Christo quando lapides scisi sunt'; Pico della Mirandola, letter of 11 April 1520 to the Duchess of Mantua; Golzio 1936, pp. 114–15.
81. Huizinga 1996, p. 181. For another example for this kind of rhetoric on Raphael, cf. Pellegrino 2003.
82. Cf. in antiquity Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXV, 28; XXXIV, 52; Schlosser 1927, pp. 271–2. Cf., for example, Bembo's epitaph on Raphael with Alberti's complaint that at his time nature, mother of all things, having grown old, was no longer producing men of either greatness or genius as she had in the glorious age when she was still young: 'Onde stimai fusse, quanto da molti questo così essere udiva, che già la natura, maestra delle cose, fatta antica e stracca, più non producea come né giuganti così né ingegni, quali in que' suoi quasi giovinili e più gloriosi tempi produsse, amplissimi e maravigliosi' (in the dedication of the treatise on painting to Brunelleschi; Alberti 1972, p. 32). Alberti's complaint is based in turn on Ammianus Marcellinus.
83. 'Parmi ancora che la pittura nuova piaccia molto più, quando della storia dipinta si ha alcuno lume da sé. Perciochè facilmente da quello che tu ne fai vi si riconosce dentro tutto il restante, cosa che assai aggrada a riguardanti che ciascuno da per sé pare imparare senza aiuto d'altrui. E così, ove è ben figurata et atteggiata una cotale storia, porge diletto all'occhio et a l'animo insieme; mentre dove un'altra, non così conosciuta, può bene dilettere la vista per virtù dello artefice, ma l'animo non vi sadisfarà drento giamai non vi riconoscendo cosa alcuna. [...] Perciò che a mio giudizio chi dipinge cosa non punto conosciuta, o da pochi, non diletta ugualmente, massimamente faccendosi cotali ornamenti a pompa, et per sodisfazione delli più [...];' G.B. Adriani, letter to the Duke of Florence; Hope 1981, p. 334 ff.
84. Frangenberg 1990, pp. 82–91.
85. Panofsky 1980, pp. 251–90.
86. Summers 1981, p. 453; Hope 1981.
87. 'Ch'io facessi ciò ch'io volevo.' Michelangelo's report to Gio. Fr. Fattuci (1524); see Vasari 1962, II, p. 462.
88. 'De l(e) (vo)lte che se ha da l(avorar)e che è nel cielo de la lanterna, (Nostro) Signore se referise a vui, che fate far quello volete vui'; Sebastiano del Piombo, letter of 7 July 1533 to Michelangelo; Poggi, Barocchi, and Ristori 1965–83, IV, p. 18.
89. 'Pictoribus atque poetis / Quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas: / Scimus, et hanc veniam petimusque damusque vicissim'; Horace, *Ars poetica*, 9–11; De Hollanda 1899, p. 102.
90. Borghini 1584, pp. 66–7.
91. The strap is referred to as 'cigna' in the documents of 31 October 1504 on the gilding of the accessories of the *David*; Isermeyer 1965, p. 325.

92. Knab, Mitsch, and Oberhuber 1983, p. 226; Meyer zur Capellen 1996, pp. 120–23; Rosenberg 2000, p. 250, NZ 416.
93. On the relationship of the nudity of Donatello's childlike bronze *David* to the biblical narrative, cf. Fehl 1973, p. 301. Cf. also Herzner 1982, pp. 104–7.
94. Drawings in the British Museum, London, and Institute of Arts, Detroit. De Tolnay 1945, pp. 63–7, figs 230–31. On the possibility of interpreting winged figures as allegories, cf. Garrard 1984. Cf. also the confusion of the personifications of Heaven and Earth with angels in the interpretations of the figures that were to carry the bier on the large-scale project for the tomb of Julius II. On the interpretations of the *ignudi* in general, see Vasari 1962, II, pp. 497–505; Kuhn 1975, pp. 52–8.
95. Frey 1887, pp. 97 ff.
96. 'Questa opera mena prigionieri legati queglii che di sapere l'arte si persuadono [...]'; Frey 1887, p. 169.
97. Panofsky 1980, p. 268.
98. Weisbach 1919, p. 72; Panofsky 1980, pp. 268–9; Echinger-Maurach 1991, pp. 243–4, 341–4.
99. 'Sieno figure quanto all'attitudini e al componimento della membra non solo belle, ma maravigliose, nondimeno non so io dirmi dell'inventione, poiche elle non hanno insegna alcuna di quelle, che davano loro gli antichi, per farle conoscere per quelle, che sono state finte; e se non fosse già divulgato il nome che Michelangelo le fece per tali, non so io vedere che alcuno, come che molto intendente, le potesse conoscere'; Borghini 1584, pp. 66–7.
100. De Hollanda 1899, pp. 92 ff.; cf. pp. 42 ff. On the source value of the *Dialogues* for Michelangelo's view of art, cf. Summers 1981, pp. 134–7; Folliero-Metz 1996; Deswarte-Rosa 1997. A sceptical view is expressed in Hope 1982.
101. [...] 'sendo voi risuscitatore d'uomini morti, che voi allung(h)iate vita a' vivi, o vero che i mal vivi furiate per infinito tempo alla morte'; Poggi, Barocchi, and Ristori 1965–83, IV, pp. 346–7.
102. I dealt with this aspect in a lecture given at the 24th German Art Historians' Conference held in Munich in 1997 ('Die Inszenierung als Kunstwerk') on the topic of 'Die Tragödie vom Grabmal: Michelangelo's Plan for the tomb of Julius II'. Cf. Barocchi 1958; Sanpaulesi 1964; Brunius 1967; Schulz 1975; Bockemühl 1986.
103. Summers 1978.
104. 'Gli fece fare in casa sua un Bacco di marmo di palmi dieci, la cui forma et aspetto corrisponde in ogni parte all'intentione delli scrittori antichi [...]'; Frey 1887, p. 40.
105. 'Un Bacco di marmo, maggior ch'el vivo, con un Satiro attorno; nel quale si conosce, che egli ha voluto tenere una certa mistione di membra maravigliose e particolarmente avergli dato la sveltezza della gioventù del maschio e la carnosità e tondezza della femina [...]'; Frey 1887, pp. 42–3.
106. The expression of drunkenness is probably derived from Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXIV, 69. The posture and symbols are probably based on statues of satyrs such as those which were then in the Maffei Collection (Bober and Rubinstein 1986, no. 73). This type of figure was usually identified as Bacchus in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
107. For example, even around 1450 an artist as learned as Lorenzo Ghiberti mistook a depiction of the Punishment of Marsyas for the Ages of Life; Krautheimer and Krautheimer-Hess 1982, p. 312.
108. The *Belvedere Apollo* was probably found in 1489 and was located in the collection of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere at the time when the *David* was being made; Bober and Rubinstein 1986, no. 28; *Hochrenaissance* 1998, pp. 510–11, no. 219.
109. The many sixteenth-century texts that testify to Michelangelo's admiration for the *Torso Belvedere* are collected in Vasari 1962, IV, pp. 210–11; Bober and Rubinstein 1986, no. 132; Wünsche 1998.
110. Fichard 1815, p. 103; Vasari 1962, III, p. 979.
111. Barkan 1999, pp. 179 ff.
112. Frazer 1975. The reception of antiquity in the large-scale project for the tomb of Julius shall be discussed in greater detail in my essay on the tomb of Julius in the Proceedings of the 24th



Colloquium of the Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, Tours, on 'La Chapelle funéraire et la tombe monumentale à la Renaissance' (1996). Cf. Echingner-Maurach 1991, pp. 180–81.

113. Procacci 1966; Condivi 1998.
114. Hartt 1950, p. 122.
115. Letter from Vasari of 18 March 1564 to Leonardo Buonarroiti; Vasari 1962, II, p. 330. Vasari suggests to present the group to the Duke of Florence instead of using it for Michelangelo's tomb, since Michelangelo had never been a soldier and had never conquered anyone ('che M. non fu mai soldato che vincessi nessuno'). Of course, the reason given by Vasari might have been merely a pretext for supporting his own project. For another example in Vasari, cf. McGrath 1985, or, in the field of theory, Frangenberg 1990, p. 89.
116. 'Basta che si vede, che l'intenzione di questo uomo singulare non ha voluto entrare in dipignere altro che la perfetta e proporzionatissima composizione del corpo umano, ed in diversissime attitudini; non sol questo ma insieme gli affetti delle passioni e contentezze dell'animo, bastandogli satifare in quella parte; nel che è stato superiore a tutti i suoi artefici; e mostrare la via della gran maniera e degli ignudi, e quanto e' sappi nelle difficoltà del disegno [...]'; Vasari 1878–85, VII, p. 210. On Vasari's attitude, cf. Alpers 1960, p. 206. On the significance of the expression of feeling for Alberti, see *ibid.*, p. 199; Pochat 1986, p. 230; Gilbert 1952, pp. 204–7. However, the expression of movement and feeling were primarily ascribed to rhetoric and music; Gombrich 1945, p. 59.
117. Steinmann and Wittkower 1967, pp. 240–41; Vasari 1962, III, pp. 993–4. On the evaluation of portraits in art theory, cf. von Schlosser 1911, pp. 250–54.
118. On the earlier statues of the prophets for the buttresses of Florence Cathedral, cf. Herzner 1973.
119. 'De l(e) (vo)lte che se ha da l(avora)e che è nel cielo de la lanterna, (Nostro) Signore se referisce a vui, che fate far quello volete vui. A me parebbe (che) li staese bene de Ganimede, e farli la diademe che paresse San Ioanni de l'Apochalipse quando el fu ra(p)to in cielo'; Sebastiano del Piombo, letter of 7 July 1533 to Michelangelo; Poggi, Barocchi, and Ristori 1965–83, IV, p. 18.
120. Panofsky 1980, pp. 279 ff.; Demirsoy 2000.
121. As François Rabelais does in the preface to *Gargantua et Pantagruel*.
122. Cf. Rosenberg 2000, pp. 144–5.
123. Grazzini 1882, pp. 557 ff.; Shearman 1992, p. 46.
124. Kapp 1990; Chastel 1983, pp. 132–3; Günther 1997, pp. 95 ff.
125. The only unusual aspect was that the *Risen Christ* is shown here with the instruments of the Passion – a motif that Baccio Bandinelli admittedly wanted to transfer a little later (c. 1536) to the double tomb for the two Medici Popes in S. Maria sopra Minerva (sketch in Madrid, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de S. Fernando). The motif is explained by the liturgy; cf. Schwedes 1998, pp. 67–70.
126. Countless Renaissance sources show that *ignudo* did not always mean 'completely naked', but just as often 'mostly naked'. This is overlooked in Panofsky-Soergel 1991. That Michelangelo's *Christ* in S. Maria sopra Minerva was referred to as *ignudo* does therefore by no means imply that the statue was set up completely naked. The figure of Christ on crucifixes was usually referred to as *ignudo* in spite of its loincloth. Many depictions show that the statue of Christ in S. Maria sopra Minerva wore a loincloth. It is true that the loincloth was only ephemeral. Like many such additions, it was exchanged on several occasions over time. This explains the phenomenon, observed by art historians with sceptical astonishment, that later depictions of the statue of Christ show different loincloths.
127. Alberti 1966, p. 608.