Articles

Image and identity in the unfinished works of Michelangelo

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We know very little about Michelangelo's last work, the *Rondanini Pietà* (fig. 1), from contemporary sources. It is mentioned only in a document dated August 21, 1561; in the inventory of Michelangelo's belongings compiled on February 9, 1564; in a letter written by Daniele da Volterra on March 17, 1564; and by Giorgio Vasari in the second edition of the *Lives* (1568).[1] Beyond these brief citations, interest in the master's final sculptural project has remained idiosyncratic, centering on its perceived autobiographic, rather than artistic, significance. Accounts have adhered to romantic notions of artistic expression and to a view of the unfinished that privileges actualization over disjunction.[2] The issue of incompletion, particularly the incompletion of the *Rondanini Pietà*, demands, however, a more rigorous approach, one that is able to recognize the self-referential aspects of image-making while equally making clear the complexities inherent in such an intersubjective endeavor.

In its present state, the *Rondanini Pietà* is a complex work whose surface bears witness to numerous interventions. The product of a series of campaigns, the two-figure grouping exists as an amalgam of Michelangelo's extended involvement with the block; a portion of the original head of the Virgin, her left leg, the polished hip, legs, and fragmented arm of Christ accompany the protean forms and unresolved surfaces of Michelangelo's later interactions. These coexisting finished and unfinished passages reveal that the master's last work had, in fact, reached a state of completion only to be deconstructed and subsequently put back into progress.

Michelangelo most probably began the first version of the *Rondanini Pietà* around 1552.[3] It seems to have been developed from a sheet of sketches now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (fig. 2); the presence of two three-figure groupings along with those of Christ and the Virgin suggest that Michelangelo may have originally conceived of the piece as an Entombment.[4] The result of this exploratory process was not, however, the formation of a sculpturally solid and balanced triad, but the creation of a rather ungainly duo, a Pietà in which Mary stands and Christ hangs limp in her arms.

Although Michelangelo began the *Rondanini Pietà* in the early 1550s, he later abandoned it in order to work on the *Florence Pietà*, which was already in progress. In 1555, however, the artist mutilated the nearly completed, four-figure ensemble.[5] And therefore, as Vasari observed:

> . . . it was necessary for him to find another block of marble, so that he could continue using his chisel every

1. For a concise account of sixteenth-century documentation, see Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo: The Final Period*, vol. 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 154–157.

2. For a summary of approaches through 1962 that present Michelangelo's final work as a consummated effort, not in terms of technique, but in relation to his spiritual needs, see Giorgio Vasari, *La vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, ed. Paola Barocchi, vol. 4 (Milan-Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1962), pp. 1677–1690. More recent accounts that can be read within this context are Frederick Hartt, *Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture* (New York: Abrams, 1976), pp. 290–300; id., *Three Pietàs* (New York: Abrams, 1975), pp. 119–194; Robert Liebert, *Michelangelo* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp.409–415; Jean Pierre Barricelli, "Michelangelo's *Finito*: In the Self, the Later Sonnets, and the Last *Pietà*," *New Literary History* 24 (1993):597–612.

3. This dating has much to do with the fact that the work was not mentioned in either Vasari's first edition of the *Vite* (1550) or in Condivi's account of the master's life (1553). For a summary of the literature on the piece, see Tolnay (see note 1), vol. 5, pp. 89–92, 154–157; Vasari (see note 2), vol. 4, pp. 1667–1690.

4. See Charles de Tolnay, *Corpus dei disegni di Michelangelo* (Novara: Istituto Geografico de Agostini, 1975–1980), vol. 3, pp. 81–83, with reference to previous literature. Tolnay maintains that the *Rondanini Pietà* relates most closely to the sketch on the far left, which he sees as the last in the series. It has recently been suggested, however, that the sketch on the far right comes closest to the master's conception (see Alexander Perrig, *Michelangelo's Drawings: The Science of Attribution* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991], p. 56).

5. The *Florence Pietà* is the only work that Michelangelo actually tried to destroy before abandoning it. Vasari himself offered two

Figure 1. Michelangelo, *Rondanini Pietà*, ca. 1552–1564. Marble, H: 1.95 m. Milan, Castello Sforzesco. Courtesy of the Civico Museo d'Arte Antico, Milano.
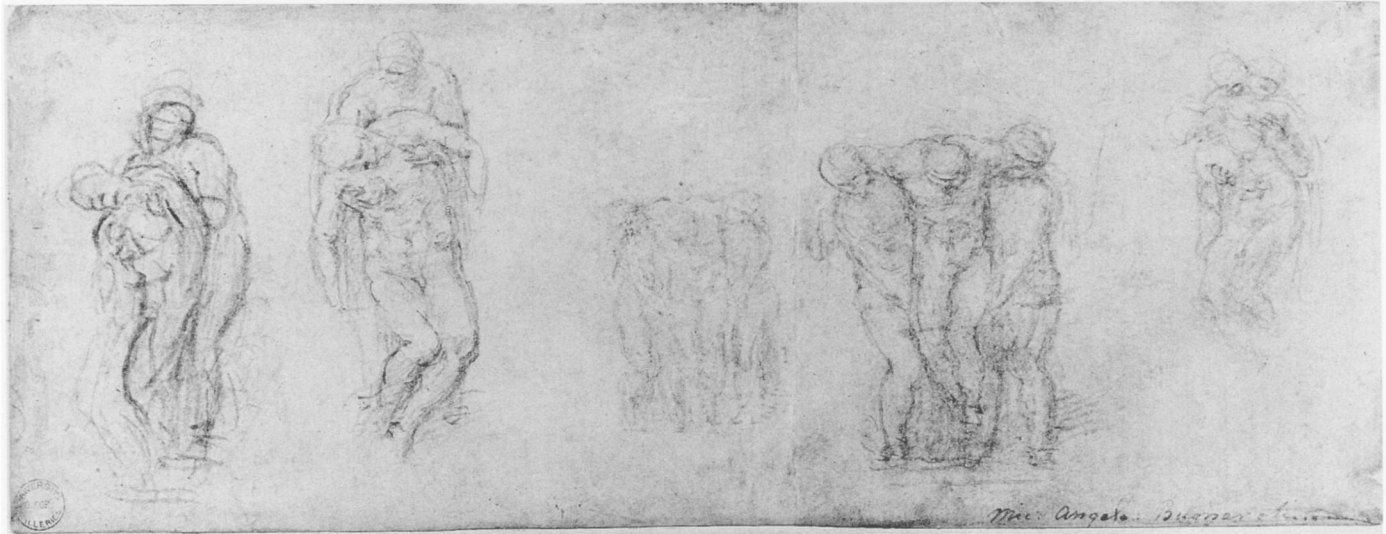
Figure 2. Michelangelo, *Five Sketches for an Entombment*, ca. 1550–1556. Black chalk, 10.8 X 28.2 cm. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum. Courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

day; so he found a far smaller block containing a Pietà already roughed out and of a very different arrangement.[6]

As Vasari explains, Michelangelo returned to the partially worked *Rondanini Pietà* after the mutilation of the Florentine group. But while Vasari's guidance on issues of chronology may be of interest to the art historian, it is his awareness of the master's compulsive desire to maintain his involvement with the stone that

remains central to our discussion. It is, however, Daniele da Volterra's letter to Lionardo Buonarroti, dated July 11, 1564, that most poignantly reveals Michelangelo's intense attachment to the block. "I forget whether I also mentioned," he writes, "that he stood and worked on the body of Christ for this Pietà throughout the whole of Saturday before Carnival Sunday."[7] Daniele was referring to February 12, 1564. Michelangelo died six days later. We ourselves may wonder (although neither Vasari nor Daniele seems to have explicitly done so themselves) why the aged artist remained so intent on the strenuous act of carving, an activity that must surely have taxed the strength of the octogenarian. The cause of Michelangelo's tenacious attachment to the block is, however, not as elusive as it first may seem. It is inextricably linked to his conception of sculpture, to the dynamic nature of incomplete form.

The fact that Michelangelo left nearly three-fifths of his sculptural works unfinished has aroused the interest of critics since the sixteenth century.[8] It has led certain

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possible causes, one relating to flaws in the marble, the other to the master's own harsh judgment (*Le vite de pió eccellenti Pittori, scultori ed architettori*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi [Florence: Sansoni], vol. 7, pp. 242–243). Despite Vasari's rationale, Michelangelo's action has been the subject of heated debate amongst scholars. See Leo Steinberg, "Michelangelo's Florentine Pietà: The Missing Leg," *Art Bulletin* 50 (1968): 343–359; id., "The Metaphors of Love and Birth in Michelangelo's Pietàs," in *Studies in Erotic Art*, ed. Theodore Bowie and Cornelia Christenson (New York and London: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 231–336; "Animadversions," *Art Bulletin* 71 (1989):480–505; Robert Liebert, "Michelangelo's Mutilation of the Florence Pietà: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry," *Art Bulletin* 59 (1977):47–54.

6. Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull (New York, 1965), p. 404.

. . . *fu necessario trovar qualcosa poi di marmo, perchè e' potessi ogni giorno passar tempo scarpellando; e fu messo un altro pezzo di marmo dove era stato già abbozzato un'altra Pietà, varia da quella, molto minore.*

Vasari (see note 5), vol. 7, pp. 244–245

7. *Io non mi ricordo se in tutto quello scritto io messi chome Michelagnolo lavoro tutto il sabbato della dominica di carnovale ellavoro in piedi studiando sopra quel corpo della pietà. . . .*

Cited by Tolnay (see note 1), vol. 5, p. 155

8. The most important contemporary discussions of Michelangelo and the question of the unfinished are surely those of Giorgio Vasari

scholars to adopt a conflict-based theory while others have viewed the *non-finito* as an essential, and more importantly intentional, part of the artist's pictorial language.[9] Perhaps one reason this view attained a certain popularity is because by the end of the fifteenth century, the *intendenti* had already shown an admiration for the inchoate.[10] It has been suggested, for example, that Angelo Poliziano, tutor to the Medici household and adviser to Michelangelo on the subject of his early and unfinished relief, the *Battle of the Centaurs*, eschewed the notion of diligent completion.[11] This predilection undoubtedly derived not only from his belief in the notion of divine inspiration and the indefinite forms such fury engendered, but from his knowledge of such antique sources as Pliny's *Natural History*.[12] Even an artist as great as Protogenes, Pliny tells us, did not know "when to take his hand from a picture."[13] This warning against excessive finish would find repetition in such sixteenth-century treatises as

Lodovico Dolce's *Aretino* of 1557 and played a significant role in the development of a Venetian theory of art.[14] To an artist such as Michelangelo, however, the question of finish was not so easily resolved. We know from Condivi that the master disapproved of Donatello's manner, noting that while his works seemed complete when viewed at a distance they lacked adequate polish when seen from up close.[15] We know as well, however, that many of Michelangelo's own sculptural projects remained barely roughed out. Rather than see in Michelangelo a basic conflict between word and action, we must recognize that for the artist, the issue of *non-finito* was a highly complex affair. It was not a question of finished versus unfinished, but rather, of incomplete versus incompletable. Attesting to this notion is the fact that his only signed work, the St. Peter's *Pietà* bears the following inscription: "MICHELANGELUS. BONAROTUS. FLORENTIN. FACIEBAT."[16] The use of the imperfect *faciebat* by artists rather than the perfect *fecit* was another well-known Plinian trope, one that made clear the idea that the image was "always a thing in process and not completed."[17] But for Michelangelo, this notion would ultimately prove problematic; despite their enormity, the artist wished to see his concepts realized in stone. It is this schism, the gulf between art as continuing process and as *concetto* to be resolved that brought Michelangelo to the point of despair not only because he recognized the pictorial implications of the conflict, but because he saw in it existential tensions that defied solution.

The *non-finito* as both artistic and human dilemma was, however, a concept familiar to the period writ large. Ever since Petrarch completed his *Rime sparse* ca.

([see note 5], vol. 7, pp. 242–243, 270) and Ascanio Condivi (*Michelangelo: La vita raccolta dal suo discepolo Ascanio Condivi*, ed. Antonio Maraini [Florence, 1928], p. 102). These accounts will be discussed at length below.

9. These positions are neatly summarized in Juergen Schulz's important article, "Michelangelo's Unfinished Works," *Art Bulletin* 57 (1975). Other important studies include Henry Thode, *Michelangelo Kritische Untersuchungen* (Berlin: G. Grote, 1908), vol. 1, p. 91; Carlo Aru, "La veduta unica e il problema del non-finito in Michelangelo," *L'Arte* 8 (1937):46–52; Aldo Bertini, "Il problema del non-finto nell' arte di Michelangelo," *L'Arte* 1 (1930):131–138; Teddy Brunius, "Michelangelo's non-finito," in *Contributions to the History and Theory of Art* (Uppsala, 1967), pp. 29–67; Paola Barrocchi, "Finito e non-finito nella critica vasariana," *Arte Antica e Moderna* 3 (1958):221–235. On the notion that Michelangelo may have preferred an unfinished state, see above note 2 as well as Tolnay (see note 1), vol. 4, pp. 62–63; André Chastel, *Art et humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), pp. 330–331.

10. For an extended discussion of the notion of pictorial resolution, see David Cast, "Finishing the Sistine," *Art Bulletin* 73 (1991):669–684.

11. On the relationship between Michelangelo and Poliziano, see David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 242–249. The suggestion that Poliziano was, in fact, the one to offer the subject to Michelangelo comes to us both from Condivi (see note 8), pp. 18–19, and from Vasari (see note 5), vol. 7, p. 143. For a summary of the scholarship of the Battle of the Centaurs, which most probably dates from 1492, see Tolnay (see note 1), vol. 1, pp. 133–137.

12. On the relationship between Poliziano and Pliny's text, see V. Jûren, "Fecit Faciebat," *Revue de l'art* 25 (1974):27–30.

13. Pliny, *Natural History*, trans., H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), vol. 9, 35:80.

14. For Dolce's text, see Mark Roskill, ed., *Dolce's "Aretino" and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), p. 157. On Venetian notions of finish, see Paula Carabell, "*Finito* and *Non-finito* in Titian's Last Paintings," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 28 (1995):79–93.

15. Condivi (see note 8), p. 32. On Donatello's manner of working and the notion of over diligence see the see Vasari's discussion of in the "Life of Luca della Robbia" (see note 5), pp. 169–172.

16. On the inscription, see Tolnay (see note 1), vol. 1, p. 146; Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, "Michelangelo's *Pietà* for the Cappella del Re di Francia," in *Michelangelo: Selected Scholarship in English*, ed. William Wallace (New York: Garland, 1995), vol. 1, p. 233. Titian, as well, used a similar signature on his *Ressurection* altarpiece in Brescia, see Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London: Phaidon, 1969–1973), vol. 1, pp. 126–127.

17. Pliny (see note 13), vol. 1, preface, section 26.

18. On Petrarch's notion of the instability of man, see the

1374, the self had come to be viewed as an unstable and changing entity.[18] The appearance of Pico della Mirandola's so-called "Oration on the Dignity of Man" in 1486 further set the stage for the Renaissance notion of self-fashioning by arguing in favor of the individual's multipotentialed character.[19] The most extended treatment of this concept, however, occurs in Baldassare Castiglione's Book of the Courtier (1528) where man's desire for self-definition, his constant need to construct his own identity vis-a-vis the world around him, takes center stage.[20] Interestingly, Castiglione's awareness of the intersubjective nature of identity formation is one that clearly prefigures the revisionist strategies of Jacques Lacan, who equally views the self as a social construct.[21] What is made explicit in Lacan, however, is that the quest for ego integrity will ultimately end in failure. The self will continue to be a fragmented entity destined to remain unfinished even unto death.

Michelangelo himself had, of course, participated in

just such a self-inventive enterprise when he commissioned his friend and disciple, Ascanio Condivi, to set down "skillfully and with long patience from the living oracle of his speech," an account of his life that would correct the misconceptions perpetuated by Vasari's 1550 redaction.[22] As Condivi noted in his preface, "there have been some who, writing about this rare man . . . on the one hand have said things about him which never were so, and on the other hand they have left out many things which are most noteworthy."[23] Michelangelo's main concern, it seems, was what Condivi aptly called the "tragedy of the tomb," the monument to Julius II that, according to the master, should have been amongst his greatest projects, but instead ended in relative failure. It is, however, this great unconsummated event that exists as one of the most important structuring elements of Michelangelo's life, introducing into an otherwise triumphant career the notion of fragmentation and loss. Thus, for Michelangelo, the process of self-fashioning, of creating an identity that would not only define him in the here and now, but would endure into posterity, became

introduction to Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics, trans. Robert Durling (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Thomas Greene, "The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature," in The Disciplines of Criticism, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 241–264.

19. On Pico della Mirandola, see The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948). Pico's belief in man's multipotentialed nature was, in fact, predated by Marsilio Ficino's own formulation in his Theologica Platonica, Lib. 14, ch. 3, which was less clearly expressed. See Charles Trinkhaus, In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), vol. 2, esp. pp. 487–498. On the notion that man's identity is created in relation to social and political factors see, Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self–Fashioning from More to Shakespeare (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). The significance of Pico's "Oration" will be discussed below.

20. Baldassare Castiglione, Il libro del Cortegiano (1528), in Opere di Baldassare Castiglione, Giovanni della Casa, Benvenuto Cellini, ed. Carlo Cordié (Milan and Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1960). On the self–fashioning in Castiglione, see Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, "Castiglione's Courtier: The Self as Work of Art," in Renaissance and Revolution (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), pp. 131–160; Valeria Finucci, The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto (Stanford: Standford University Press, 1992).

21. See, in particular, Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I," and "Function and Field of Thought and Language," in Écrits, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: Norton, 1977), pp. 1–7, 30–113. The relationship of Lacan's work to Renaissance thought will be clarified below. Others to acknowledge such an affinity have been Juliana Schiesari, The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in

Renaissance Literature (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992); Lynne Enterline, The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

22. Ascanio Condivi, The Life of Michelangelo, trans. Alice Sedgwick Wohl (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), p. 4.

E se punto me ne viene, mi contento che sia non di buono scrittore, ma di raccoglitor di queste cose diligente e fedele, affermando d'averle raccolte sinceramente, d'averle cavate con destrezza e con lunga pazienzia dal vivo oraculo suo. . . .
Condivi (see note 8), p. 5

On the relationship between these three figures, see Johannes Wilde, "Michelangelo, Vasari, and Condivi," in Michelangelo: Six Lectures (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 1–16. On Michelangelo and the notion of self–fashioning, see Paul Barolsky, Michelangelo's Nose: A Myth and its Maker (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State Press, 1990); id., The Faun in the Garden: Michelangelo and the Poetic Origins of Italian Renaissance Art (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State Press, 1994); Paul Barolsky and William Wallace, "The Myth of Michelangelo and Il Magnifico," Source: Studies in the History of Art 12 (1993):16–21.

23. Condivi (see note 22), p. 3.

Prima, perchè sono stati alcuni che scrivendo di questo raro uomo, per non averlo (come credo) così praticato come ho fatto io, da un canto n'hanno dette cose che mai non furono, dall'altro lassatene molte di quelle che non dignissime d'esser notate.
Condivi (see note 8), p. 4

closely tied to the notion of incompletion. If what his Northern contemporary, Albrecht Dürer said is true, that the artist paints "to make himself seen in his works," what Michelangelo must have seen was a self-destiny to remain unfinished.[24]

The second of the two lectures delivered by Benedetto Varchi to the Accademia Fiorentina on March 13, 1547, addresses the question of which is the more noble art, painting or sculpture, a form of debate known as the *paragone*.[25] Perhaps to lend credence to his own opinions, but equally to demonstrate that the executant had become a theorist in his own right, Varchi solicited responses to his query from eight artists, four of whom favored painting, the others, sculpture.[26] Following in the tradition of Leonardo da Vinci, the practitioners of the pictorial arts emphasized the value of artifice; they continued to praise painting's ability to vitiate the two-dimensional reality of the picture plane and celebrated its power to create a convincing likeness of the natural world.[27] The sculptors naturally took the opposite approach. Turning a potential shortcoming into an advantage, they lauded their art for its solidity and rejected painting as an immaterial and specular endeavor.[28] For them, sculpture was truth, painting

mere illusion. Varchi also seemed to favor the more tangible art. Although he ultimately unifies the two mediums under the rubric of *disegno*, he nonetheless makes clear his preference for the more substantive medium, glyptic form:

> Painting is . . . sophistry, that is [it is] apparent and not true, not unlike figures which appear in a mirror; one is conscious that those things that appear in the picture do not exist in reality. This does not happen in sculpture.
>
> It is certain that a figure in relief has more of truth and of the natural in regard to substance than a painting. This is demonstrated by the figure of Pygmalion and all the ancient idols which were in relief so as to be better able to deceive men.[29]

For Varchi, as for the practitioners he queried, the nobility of sculpture resides in its materiality; unlike painting whose planimetric presence produces only a simulacrum of the object it depicts, the marmoreal body conforms to its prototype in both form and substance. Such an observation was, of course, hardly new. Even Leonardo who wished to disparage, rather than praise, the glyptic arts made a similar claim: sculpture doubles, painting dissembles. But what moves the discussion beyond the level of this commonplace criticism is Varchi's invocation of the mythic sculptor, Pygmalion. It is here that the *paragone* takes on a fuller resonance; it alerts us to the fact that to engage in the art of sculpture was to engage in discourse with desire.

The myth of Pygmalion serves as the most celebrated exemplar of the potentiality of plastic form—its ability to be transformed into a work that lives.[30] As such, it is a

24. As cited in Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self–Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. xviii.

25. Varchi's second lecture was divided into three disputes: *Della Maggioranza e Nobilita dell' Arti; Qual sia piu Nobile, o la Scultura o la Pittura; In Che Siano Simili et in che differenti i Poeti e i Pittori.* On Varchi's lectures, see Leatrice Mendelsohn, *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi's Due Lezzioni and Cinquecento Art Theory* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1982). On the *paragone*, see John White, "*Paragone*: Aspects of the Relationship between Sculpture and Painting," in *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), pp. 43–109; Erwin Panofsky, *Gallileo as a Critic of the Arts* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954).

26. Listed in the order in which their letters appeared are Vasari, Bronzino, Pontormo, Tasso, San Gallo, Tribolo, Cellini, Michelangelo. The first four were the defenders of painting, the second, those who championed sculpture.

27. On Leonardo da Vinci and the notion of *paragone*, see Irma Richter, *Paragone: A Comparison of the Arts by Leonardo da Vinci* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1949); Claire Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's 'Paragone': A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in the Codex Urbinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

28. Cellini, for example, observes: "*La pittura non è altro che o arbero o uomo o altra cosa che si specchi in un fonte. La differenza che è dalla scultura alla pittura è tanta quanto è dalla ombra e la cosa che fa l'ombra*" (in *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, 3 vols., ed. Paola

Barocchi, [Milan and Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1971–1976], vol. 1, p. 522). Tribolo notes: "*che a me mi pare la scultura sia la cosa proprio, e la pittura sia la bugia*" (ibid., p. 518).

29. Mendelsohn (see note 25), pp. 77, 121.

Poi soggiungoni che la pittura è, come noi diremmo, sofistica, cioè apparente e non vera, non altramente quasi che si veggono le figure negli specchi; conciossia che quelle cose che appariscono nella pittura, no vi sono in verità, il che non avviene nella scultura.
>   *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento fra manierismo e*
>   *controriforma, 3 vols., ed. Paola Barocchi,*
>   *(Bari: Laterza, 1960–1962), vol. 1, pp. 41–42*

E certa cosa è ch'una figura di rilievo ha pió del vero e del naturale, quanto alla sostanza, che una dipinta; il che dimostrano sì la figura di Pimmalione, e sì che tutti gl' idoli antichi erano di rilievo, perché meglio potessero ingannare gli uomini.
>   *Ibid., p. 47*

30. The artist's ability to produce living works has long existed as a commonplace in art criticism, where it functions as a panegyric to the

fitting presence in any defense of the art of sculpture. The legend, however, functions equally as an Ur-text of the sculptor's desire to find fulfillment through his own creation and, in this manner, exists not only as a tale of artistry, but of Eros as well. Perhaps the most well-known version of Pygmalion is Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses*.[31] The poet tells of a sculptor who fabricates the perfect mate, an ivory maiden with whom he falls in love. But as Ovid recalls, Pygmalion's passion is so aroused by the image before him that he beseeches Venus to provide him with what he lacks, a power that will transform his handiwork to real flesh.

While sculpture's capacity to quench such ardor finds ample recognition at the hands of the poets, it is the artists themselves who offer graphic testimony to its unfailing supremacy.[32] Much like his literary predecessors, Hans Speeckaert's allegory of the art of sculpture leaves no doubt as the power of plastic form by clearly associating it with the fulfillment of desire (fig. 3).[33]

Figure 3. Pieter Perret after Hans Speckaert, *Sculptura*, 1582. Engraving, 40.7 X 28.2 cm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

skill of the creator. Such compliments abound in the *Greek Anthology* (trans. W. R. Paton [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917], book 9, nos. 713–742, book 16, nos. 129, 167) and occur, for example, in Callistratus's ekphrastic account of the powers of the mythic Daedalus (*Descriptions*, trans. Arthur Fairbanks [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931], 431K). On the epigramic tradition and its relationship to the work that lives, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), esp. pp. 291–293; John Shearman, *Only Connect . . . Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1992, pp. 112–117.

31. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2d. ed., trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), book 10, pp. 245–297. The original legend occurs in the *Kypriaka* by Philostephanus, a work that was transmitted through the Christian authors Clement of Alexandria and Arnobius. On Ovid's sources, see Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). On Ovid's influence on Renaissance thought, see Leonard Barkin, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986); Charles Martindale, *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

32. On the Pygmalion theme in the visual arts, see Andreas Blühm, *Pygmalion: Dei Iconographie eines Künstlermythos zwischen 1500 und 1600* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988); A. Pigler, *Barockthemen* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974), vol. 2. For further accounts, see Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Harry W. Robbins (New York: Dutton & Co., 1962), lines 20843–20858; Durling (see note 18).

33. Speeckaert's design is by Peter Perret, who completed the plate in Rome in 1582. See Blühm (see note 32), pp. 50–51, 181; F. W. H.
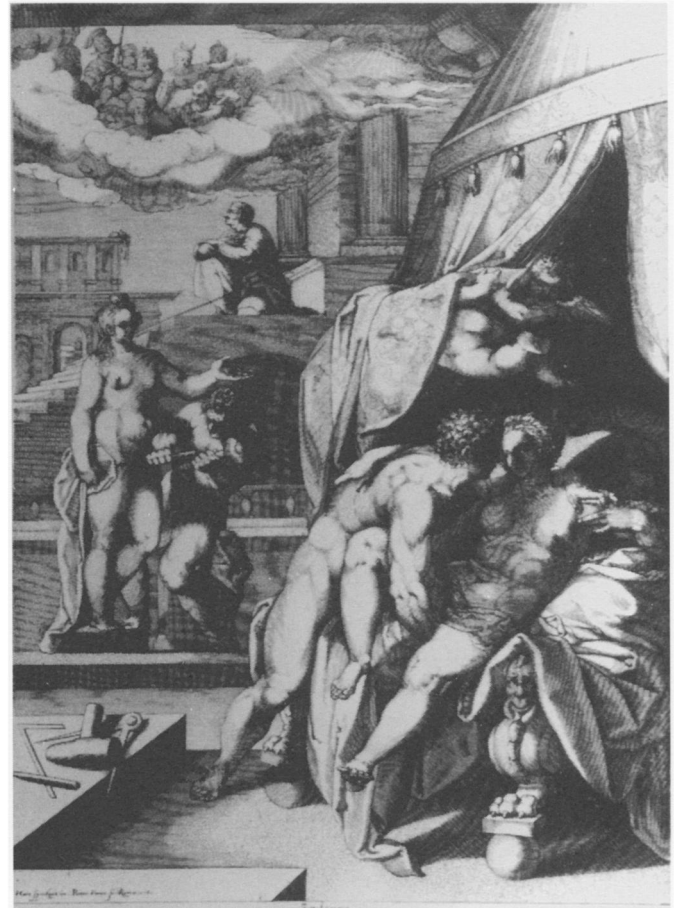
The medium's capacity to duplicate its prototype both in form and substance facilitates its transformation into a work that lives, thus enabling Pygmalion's progression from sculptor to lover.

The notion that sculpture is an erotically satisfying art finds surprising acknowledgment at the hands of the

Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700* (Amsterdam: Van Gendt & Co., 1976), vol. 17, no. 33, p. 48; Pigler (see note 32), vol. 2, p. 230. Its allegorical function is made clear by the inscription, *Scultura*, along the bottom edge. A pendant representing *Pittura* depicts Apelles painting Alexander the Great. On the frequent juxtaposition of Apelles with Pygmalion, see David Cast, *The Calumney of Apelles: A Study in the Humanist Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 190.

painter and theorist, Paolo Pino, who, in his *Dialogo di pittura* (Venice, 1548), offers the following rationale:

> . . . and not only do we [sculptors] satisfy the sense of sight, but also that of touch, which is why that Athenian youth was besotted over the image of Venus, his idol.[34]

The phenomenological status of glyptic form has traditionally encouraged a relationship to sculpture that is explicitly sexual in nature. *Agalmataphilia*, falling in love with statues, occurs as a familiar topos in both classical and Renaissance writings on art, so much so that it serves as a critical commonplace, the intensity of viewer response functioning as proof of sculptural excellence. Prefiguring Pino's insight is, of course, always Ovid's own account of the relationship between artistry and erotic compensation, which places equivalent emphasis on the notion of tactile involvement. It is in the following simile that the poet makes clear the significance of the artist's touch:

> The ivory grew soft to his touch and, its hardness vanishing, gave and yielded beneath his fingers, as Hymettian wax grows under the sun and, moulded by the thumb, is easily shaped to many forms and becomes usable through use itself.[35]

As Ovid's evocation of both the sculptural and sexual suggests, for statue to become enlivened form, for sculptor to satisfy his desire, artistic and erotic touch must function as one. The act of sculpting is then an act of love, a search for self-closure that is enacted in studio practice.

Michelangelo's response to Benedetto Varchi's *paragone* questionnaire is one of the few instances, apart from those contained in his poetry, in which the artist makes his views on image-making known. Although his reply ultimately reconciles painting and sculpture, deeming them equal by means of their

common goal, its aphoristic nature has raised questions about the master's actual stance.[36] Michelangelo's opinion on technical matters has, however, always remained clear:

> By sculpture I mean that which is fashioned by effort of cutting away, that which is fashioned by the method of building up being like painting.[37]

To the artist, the subtractive method was synonymous with the very art of sculpture as it was only *per forza di levare* that he could address the obdurate nature of his preferred medium, stone. The most profound expression of Michelangelo's technical preference may, however, be found in one of his best-known sonnets:

> Not even the best of artists has any conception that a single block of marble does not contain within its excess, and that is only attained by the hand that obeys the intellect.
> The pain I flee from and the joy I hope for are similarly hidden in you, lovely lady, lofty and divine; but, to my mortal harm, my art gives results the reverse of what I wish.
> Love, therefore, cannot be blamed for my pain, nor can your beauty, your hardness, or your scorn, nor fortune, nor my destiny, nor chance,
> if you hold both death and mercy in your heart at the same time, and my lowly wits, though burning, cannot draw anything from it but death.[38]

Ever since the sixteenth century, "Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto," has been the subject of critical debate; this is particularly true of the opening quatrain,

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34. Mary Pardo, "Paolo Pino's *Dialogo di pittura*: A Translation with Commentary" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1984), p. 363.

> . . . e non solamente sodisfaciamo al vedere, ma anco al tatto, e per ciï quel giovane ateniese s'impassite della imagine di venere suo idolo.
>   Barocchi (see note 28), p. 550

Similar sentiments, along with references to Praxiteles' Venus were expressed by Benedetto Varchi in his comparison of the arts of painting and sculpture (Barocchi [see note 28], p. 538) and by Anton Francesco Doni (ibid., p. 564). On the seductive power of Praxiteles' work, see Pliny (see note 13), 36.21; Lucian, *Amor*, 15. On arousal by image, see Freedberg (see note 30), chap. 12.

35. Ovid (see note 31), 10:283–286.

36. On the interpretative issues raised by Michelangelo's response, see Summers (see note 11), pp. 269–278; Mendelsohn (see note 25), pp. 156–159.

37. Trans. E. H. Ramsden, *The Letters of Michelangelo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), vol. 2, p. 75.

> Io intendo scultura quella che si fa per forza di levare; quella che si fa per via di porre è simile alla pittura
>   Barocchi (see note 28), vol. 1, pp. 522–523

38. Trans. James Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Annotated Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), no. 151.

> Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto/ c'un marmo solo in sé non circonscriva/ col suo superchio, e solo a quello arriva/ la man che ubbidisce all'intelletto./ Il mal ch'io fuggo, e 'l ben ch'io mi prometto,/ in te, donna leggiadra, altera e diva,/ tal si nasconde; e perch' io pió non viva,/ contraria ho l'arte al disãato effecto./ Amor dunque non ha, né tua beltate/ o durezza o fortuna o gran disdegno/ del mio colpa, o mio destino o sorte;/ se dentro del tuo cor morte e pietate/ porti in un tempo, e che 'l mio basso ingegno/ non sappia, ardendo, trarne altro che morte.

which has proved of great interest to art historians.[39] These first four lines have been considered a vivid description of Michelangelo's subtractive method and have been cited to support the notion that his technical preference derived from a belief in a priori form; it has been suggested that Michelangelo followed a Neoplatonic conviction proposing a pre-existing and perfect likeness residing within the block, one that could only be revealed through the gradual removal of stone.[40]

The Neoplatonic concept of a priori form finds reification in the so-called *Awakening Slave*, a figure that clearly corresponds to the process described by Michelangelo in his opening quatrain (fig. 4). Begun as one of the later slaves for the ill-fated tomb of Julius II, it was eventually abandoned in its present state of completion when the artist left for Rome in 1534.[41] For centuries, the *Awakening Slave* has given viewers the impression that it is struggling to free itself from the surrounding mass of stone. This perception derives from the fact that the unfinished figure still retains an organic unity with the block, while simultaneously appearing to emerge fully formed from its marmoreal matrix. Its current condition reveals that Michelangelo restricted his work to only one side; he penetrated the block diagonally, starting from the left edge and, as a result, produced an image that, at this phase of resolution, remains close to a relief.[42] Such a technique was,

however, celebrated by his contemporaries. Benvenuto Cellini (*Treatise on Sculpture*, 1568) shows his admiration by offering the following advice to beginning sculptors:

> When you are satisfied with your model you draw the principle views of your statue on to the stone, and mind it be well drawn, for if not you may miscut your block. The best method I ever saw was the one that Michelangelo used; when you have drawn on your principal view you begin to chisel it round as if you wanted to work a half relief and thus gradually it comes to be cut out.[43]

It is, however, Giorgio Vasari who describes the process with the greatest evocative precision:

> One must take a figure of wax or some other firm material and lay it horizontally in a vessel of water; then, as the water is, of course, flat and level, when the figure is raised little by little above the surface the more salient parts are revealed first, while the lower parts (on the underside of the figure) remain submerged, until eventually it all comes into view. In the same way figures must be carved out of marble by the chisel; the parts in highest relief must be revealed first and then little by little the lower parts. And this method

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39. "*Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto*" was the subject of Benedetto Varchi's first lecture to the Academia Fiorentina on March 7, 1547. His commentary will be discussed below.

40. This concept finds initial recognition in the work of Aristotle (*Metaphysics* IX, 6). The extent to which Michelangelo was influenced by Neoplatonic thought has long been a matter of debate. Those who maintain that the master's life and work can best be understood in such terms have included Erwin Panofsky, "The Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo," in *Studies in Iconology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 171–230; Charles de Tolnay, *The Art and Thought of Michelangelo*, trans. Nan Buranelli (New York: Pantheon, 1964), pp. 31–55; Nesca Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (New York and London: Octagon Books, 1935), pp. 225–229, 239–269. Those who have strongly opposed such a reading include Hartt (see note 2), esp. pp. 161–162; Martin Weinberger, *Michelangelo the Sculptor* (New York and London: Routledge, 1967), pp. 375–385. For a more moderated view, see Summers (see note 11), pp. 11–17.

41. The precise dating of the Boboli slaves has been a problematic issue, with opinions ranging from 1519 to as late as 1530–1534. For a summary of the various positions, see Tolnay (see note 1), vol. 4, pp. 113–114; John Pope-Henessey, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture* (New York: Random House, 1985), p. 323.

42. Michelangelo's unifacial engagement with the block finds surprising acknowledgement in Sigismondo Fanti's *Triompho di fortuna*

(Venice, 1527) under the sign of Jupiter where the artist is depicted at work on either Dawn or Night for the Medici Chapel. On the iconographic significance of Fanti's account and its relationship to Michelangelo's art, see Irving Lavin, "David's Sling and Michelangelo's Bow," in *Past-Present: Essays in Historicism in Art from Donatello to Picasso* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 40–43; Tilmann Buddensieg, "Gregory the Great, Destroyer of Pagan Idols: The History of a Medieval Legend Concerning the Decline of Ancient Art and Literature, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 18 (1965):63, n. 57. This woodcut occurs, however, not only on page 38 with reference to the master, but on pp. 40, 41, 44 verso, 46, 49, and 51 verso. On the notion that the image was first conceived with Michelangelo in mind, see Charles de Tolnay, "*La Venere con due amorini già a Pitti ora a Casa Buonarroti,*" *Commentari* 17 (1966):332, n. 7. On Michelangelo's relationship to the sphere of Jupiter, see Kristin Lippincott, "When was Michelangelo Born?," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52 (1989):228–232.

43. Trans. C. R. Ashbee, *The Treatises of Benvenuto Cellini on Goldsmithing and Sculpture* (New York: Dover, 1967), pp. 136.

> *E, da poi che uno si sia satisfatto nel sopradetto modello, si debbe pigliare il che la sia ben disegnata; perché chi non si risolvessi bene al disegno, talvolta si potria trovare ingannato da'ferri. Ed il miglior modo che si sia mai visto è quello che à usato il gran Michelangelo: il qual modo si è, di poi che uno à disegnato la veduta principale si debbe per quella banda cominciare a scopire con la virtó de ferri come se uno volessi fare una figura di mezzo rilievo, e così a poco a poco si vience scoprendo.*
> *Trattato della scultura, ed. Carlo Cordié (Milan and Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1960), p. 1095*
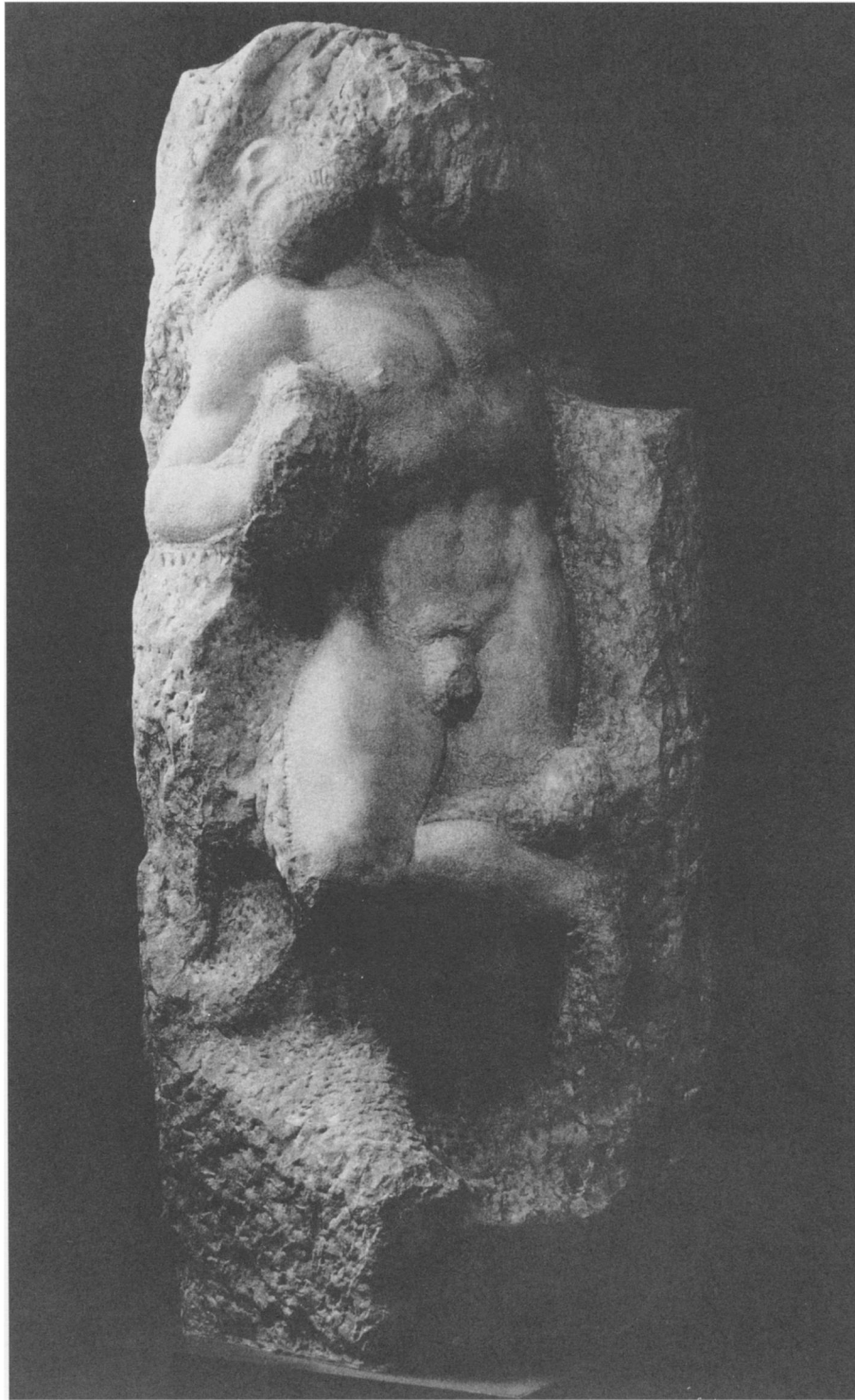
Figure 4. Michelangelo, *Awakening Slave*, ca.1530–1534. Marble, 2.38 m without base. Florence, Accademia delle Belle Arti.

can be seen to have been followed by Michelangelo in the statues of the prisoners. . . .[44]

As these artist/theorists make clear, Michelangelo's method of carving involved modeling contours into the depth of the stone, always pushing back from a frontal position.[45] He removed successive layers of marble parallel to the confronting plane so that the forms closest to him emerged first; the protruding parts of the figure are almost finished while the recessive sections are summarily roughed out or remain completely embedded in the block. Unfortunately, we do not know precisely when the master adopted such a technique, but we can be certain that it differed considerably from other established methods.[46] Generally, a sculptor would work the marble in from several sides at once; each surface would then emerge at an equal level of resolution until eventually they united into a completed piece.[47] However, Michelangelo's unifacial technique allowed him involvement with a single aspect of evolving form, a primary site of engagement that was essential to the process of identity formation.

The self-referential nature of image-making was, of course, a Renaissance commonplace, finding expression in the maxim, *ogni dipintore dipinge se*.[48] Michelangelo's own awareness of this phenomenon is attested to in the opening lines of the following madrigal, postscripted "for sculptors":

> Since it's true that, in hard stone, one will at times
> make the image of someone else look like himself,
> I often make her dreary
> and ashen, just as I am made by this woman;
> and I seem to keep taking myself
> as a model, whenever I think of depicting her. . . .[49]

Speaking as a practitioner and addressing himself to other working artists as well, Michelangelo describes the mechanism by which art resembles its maker; the creator projects his affective status onto the surface where it confronts him like a mirror image.[50] Such a correspondence extends, however, beyond the repetition of mere physical appearance. Although the term automimesis was often used to describe situations in which a work rehearsed the bodily traits of its creator, it also denoted the repetition of less obvious, inner qualities as well.[51] It is to this more expansive meaning

44. Vasari (see note 6), p. 421.

. . . *che se e' si pigliassi una figura di cera o d'altra materia dura, e si mettessi a diacera in una conca d'acqua, la qual acqua, essendo per sua natura nella sua sommità piana e parti, così vengono a scoprirsi prima le parti pió rilevate, ed a nascondersi i fondi cioè le parti pió basse della figura, tanto che nel fino ella così viene scoperta tutta. Nel medesimo modo si debbono cavare con lo scarpello le figure de'marmi; prima scoprendo le parti pió rilevate, e di mano in mano le pió basse: il quale modo si vede osservato da Michelangnolo ne'sopradetti prigoni. . . .*

Vasari (see note 5), vol. 7, p. 273

45. On the development of Michelangelo's relief method and its possible relationship to his early training, see Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, "'The Nurse of Settignano': Michelangelo's Beginnings as a Sculptor," pp. 30–36.

46. Such a technique was clearly put into use as early as the *St. Matthew*. The absence of works left in a comparable state of incompletion and that predate the *St. Matthew* leaves us unsure whether Michelangelo had, in fact, employed this method in his other early, free-standing statues.

47. On technique, see Peter Rockwell, *The Art of Stoneworking: A Reference Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Rudolf Wittkower, *Sculpture: Processes and Principles* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977); Nicholas Penny, *The Materials of Sculpture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993); Charles de Tolnay, "Michelangelo e il blocco," in *Momenti del marmo: Scritti per i duecento anni dell'Accademia di belle arti di Carrara* (Rome, 1969), pp. 99–102.

48. On the notion of "every painter paints himself," see Martin Kemp, "*Ogni Dipintore Dipinge Se*": A Neoplatonic Echo in Leonardo's Art Theory?" in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. Cecil Clough (New York: A. F. Zambelli, 1976), pp. 311–323; id., "'Equals Excellence': Lomazzo and the Explanation of Individual Style in the Visual Arts," *Renaissance Studies* 1 (1987):1–26; Chastel (see note 9), pp. 102–104.

49. Saslow (see note 38), no. 242.

S'egli è che 'n dura pietra alcun somigli/ talor l'immagin d'ogni altri a se stesso,/ squalido e smorto spesso/ il fo, com'i son fatto da costei./ E par ch'esempro pigli/ ognor da me, ch' i' penso di far lei . . . /

For a similar observation in reference to painting, see no. 173. A satirical application of the notion of automimesis finds expression in Michelangelo's critique of a well-painted ox created by a less-than-accomplished artist. In this context the master observed, "ogni pittore ritrae se medesimo bene," (Vasari [see note 5], vol. 7, p. 280).

50. On the notion of mirroring, see Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," in Sheridan (see note 21), pp. 1–7; J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, "Mirror Phase," in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York and London: Norton, 1973), pp. 250–252. The signifiance of the mirroring function will be discussed below.

51. See, for example, Marsilio Ficino, *Theologia Platonica* X.4. On Ficino and the self-reflective nature of art, see André Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'art* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), pp. 65–68. The notion that "every painter paints himself," was given greater moral meaning by Savonarola in his *Prediche sopra Ezechiel* ([Venice, 1571], 71 verso) where he invokes the maxim to underscore the artist's Christian responsibility to raise his soul to the highest level possible.

of the notion *ogni dipintore dipinge se* that Michelangelo's madrigal refers. When the master observed that he was doubled by the block, he was not, in fact, claiming that his creation reflected his outward characteristics, but instead, that it presented a penetrating image of his own self-status.

As we recall, the opening quatrain of "Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto," suggested that Michelangelo subscribed to the idea of a priori form. His recognition of the phenomenon of automimesis, however, complicates this concept and forces us to reframe a Neoplatonic notion into one that defines image-making in more dynamic terms. Clearly, Michelangelo affirmed the presence of a projective urge, acknowledging his propensity to impose his emotional state onto his own creation. This process was made easier by his unifacial approach to the block; the single, confronting surface served as a passive receptor, a mirrorlike substance that reflected back to the artist a version of his own identity. Thus, rather than residing a priori within the stone, the image results from the artist's own objectifying drives, an externalization of psychic functions that are then realized through the gradual removal of stone.

Centuries earlier, the philosopher, Plotinus, had already recognized that sculpture, particularly sculpture that was accomplished *per forza di levare*, formed a striking parallel to the process of self-fashioning:

> How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has: Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself as beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop 'working on your statue' till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you till you see 'self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat.'[52]

As Plotinus makes clear, for image and individual alike, the journey toward indefectibility is one that can only take place through subtractive means; in each transformative endeavor, realization is dependent upon the perfection within. Such an observation, of course, lends existential significance to the notion of artistic

process, describing self-fashioning as analogous to the sculptor's technique. But Plotinus's account not only characterizes the metamorphic possibilities of plastic form as comparable to the evolutionary capabilities of the individual, it also suggests a fundamental concordance between image and identity, self and statue, that we saw in Michelangelo's own oeuvre. Seen in these terms, the master's commitment to the art of sculpture was a resolution to shape his own identity.

The reciprocity between self and image is a reality that remains fundamental to Michelangelo's lifelong relationship with the unfinished. Vasari tell us that:

> Michelangelo used to say that if he had had to be satisfied with what he did, then he would have sent out very few statues, or rather none at all. This was because he had so developed his art and judgment that when on revealing one of his figures he saw the slightest error he would abandon it and run to start working on another block, trusting that it would not happen again. He would often say that this was why he had finished so few statues or pictures.[53]

Vasari's account suggests that Michelangelo's approach to the block was duplicitous in nature; the sculptor faced a surface that simultaneously contained a flawless image and one marred by imperfection, two contradictory aspects of the same object that ultimately caused him to abandon his work in a state of incompletion. Vasari himself noted such biformity in the master's *Medici Madonna*, observing that "although this statue remained unfinished, having been roughed out and left showing the marks of the chisel, in the imperfect block one can recognize the perfection of the

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52. *Enneads*, I.6.9, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). In this passage, Plotinus makes reference to Plato's *Phaedrus*, 252D7 and 254B7.

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53. Vasari (see note 6), p. 404.

... *usava dire, che, se s'avessi avuto a contentare di quel che faceva, n'arebbe mandate poche, anzi nessuna, fuora; vedendosi che gli era ito tanto con l'arte e col guidizio innanzi, che come gli aveva scoperto una figura, e conosciutovi un minimo che d'errore, la lasciava stare, e correva a manimettere un altro marmo, pensando non avere a venire a quel medesimo; ed egli spesso diceva essere questa la cagione che egli diceva d'aver fatto sì poche statue e pitture.*

Vasari (see note 5), vol. 7, p. 243

A similar sentiment is expressed by Condivi:

... *è anco di potentissima virtó immaginativa, onde è nato primieramente e ch'egli poco si sia contentato delle sue cose, e che sempre l'abbia abbassate; non parendogli che la mano a quella idea sia arrivata, che'egli dentro si formava.*

(See note 8), p. 102

completed work."[54] What Vasari, of course, is describing is the disjunctive relationship between idea and image that frequently occurs in Michelangelo's work; execution often fell short of conception, the emerging forms deficient compared to the integrity of his projected design. But this was not the only conflict with which Michelangelo was confronted; the other depended upon the equivalence between maker and made and represented the split between an indefectible self and one that would forever remain in a state of fragmentation.

We have seen how Michelangelo's unifacial method of carving engendered a special relationship between artist and work, one that rehearsed the terms of a specular confrontation. Such mutual facing has, in this century, proved of equal significance to the notion of the self as Jacques Lacan demonstrates in his seminal essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I."[55] Central to Lacan's thesis is the dyadic nature of the mirror image, which, in the course of human development, functions as both an affirming and alienating structure. Lacan maintains that when the child first sees his reflection, he perceives himself as a fully autonomous being, as, in effect, ideal form. Ultimately, however, the child realizes the fictive nature of this identification and becomes aware not only of the reality of his own physical dependence, but of the disintegration of his corporealized ego, of what Lacan calls the fantasy of the "body in bits and pieces."[56] It is

Figure 5. Michelangelo, *St. Matthew*, ca. 1503–1506. Marble, 271 cm. Florence, Accademia delle Belle Arti.

54. Vasari (see note 6), p. 368.

. . . *et ancora che non siano finite le parti sue, si conosce nell'essere rimasta abozzata e gradinata, nella imperfezione della bozza, la perfezione dell'opera.*
Vasari (see note 5), vol. 7, p. 195

This work appears in the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo, site of the Medici tombs. See Tolnay (see note 1), vol. 3, pp. 144–146.

55. Sheridan (see note 21), pp. 1–7. For an alternate reading of the mirror stage, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," trans. William Cobb in *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 96–155. Both Lacan and Merleau-Ponty are indebted to the work of Henri Wallon, whose explorations into the phenomenon of specular recognition aided them in their formulations despite their subsequent ideological split (Henri Wallon, "Comment se developpe, chez l'enfant, la notion du corps propre," *Journal de Psychologie* 28 [1931], pp. 705–748). On the relationship between mirror-image and body-image, see Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (New York: International University Press, 1950), esp. pp. 273, 278.

56. On Lacan's notion of bodily fragmentation, see "Some Reflections on the Ego," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953):13.

this schism, this split between integrity and fragmentation, that defines the character of the individual. It alerts him to the fact that he will always remain both subject and object to himself, a decentered ego derived from the image of an Other. His identification with reflected form thus initiates a view of identity that is based upon a model of alterity; the Other's likeness is established as the matrix of the self. In Michelangelo we see how his own experience of disjunction, his struggle with an irreconcilable breach between idea and image, and his problem with the unfinished are all directly related to precisely this form of specular encounter. His inability to sustain a permanent relationship with the ideal results in a breakdown of his own creative powers and potential for self-fashioning, a situation made more acute by his unifacial attachment and interactive dependency on the stone.

Michelangelo's *St. Matthew* (fig. 5), much like its successor, the *Awakening Slave*, owes its present appearance not only to the fact that it is unfinished, but to its status as relief.[57] The artist began at the left knee and eventually cut deeper and deeper into the marble until the figure seemed to emerge fully formed out of its matrix of stone. Vasari describes this process with utmost accuracy:

> Michelangelo blocked out in the Office of Works of Santa Maria del Fiore a marble statue of St. Matthew. Rough as it is, this is a perfect work of art which serves to teach other sculptors how to carve a statue without making any mistakes, perfecting the figure gradually by removing the stone judiciously and being able to alter what has been done as and when necessary.[58]

This didactic stance is prefigured in the biographer's technical preface, with obvious deference to Michelangelo's approach:

> Those artificers who are in a hurry to get on, and who hew into the stone at the first and rashly cut away the marble in front and at the back have no means afterwards of drawing back in case of need. Many errors in statues spring from this impatience of the artist to see the round figure out of the block at once, so that often an error is revealed that can only be remedied by joining on pieces. . . . This patching is after the fashion of cobblers and not of competent men or rare masters, and is ugly and despicable and worthy of the greatest blame.[59]

On a purely technical level then, a relief-like attack on the block offered the artist a sufficient amount of unworked stone to accommodate any errors or modifications he might make during his involvement with the piece. Michelangelo chose, therefore, to liberate the frontal plane of the *St. Matthew* from the mass of stone, but decided to leave the recessive sections fully embedded where their yet unrealized potential afforded an unprecedented amount of artistic flexibility. This approach was, as Vasari observed, greatly superior to the more traditional way of carving; when an artist chose to work all four sides at once, he was forced to remain faithful to his initial conception, unable to alter or repair the figure once he began to sculpt. But Michelangelo's method allowed him to keep the work in a constant state of becoming. The unfinished *St. Matthew* attests to the fact that the master preferred to delay closure, allowing his *concetto* to evolve through the very act of carving.

The notion of evolution, of a progressive journey toward perfection figured prominently in Renaissance thought.[60] It was Pico della Mirandola who best

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57. The *St. Matthew* was commissioned in 1503 as one of the the twelve apostles for Santa Maria del Fiore. Although the contract was annulled in 1505, it may have been reactivated in 1506 while Michelangelo was again in Florence after having returned from Rome. It is during this time that the majority of work would have taken place. On problems of chronology and style, see Tolnay (see note 1), pp. 113–115, 168–171; Pope-Hennessy, (see note 41), pp. 310–311.

58. Vasari (see note 6), pp. 339–340.

Ed in questo tempo ancora abbozzï una statua di marmo di San Matteo nell'Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore; la quale statua così abbozzata mostra la sua perfezione, ed insegna agli scultori in che maniera si cavano le figure de' marmi, senza che venghino storpiate, per potere sempre guadagnare col guidizio, levando del marmo, ed avervi da potersi ritrarre e mutare qualcosa, come accade, se bisognassi.

> *Vasari (see note 5), vol. 7, pp. 157–158*

59. Trans. Louise S. Maclehose, *Vasari on Technique* (New York: Dover, 1960), pp. 151–152.

Perchè quelli che hanno fretta a lavorare, e bucano il sasso da principio, e levano la pietra dinanzi ed di dietro resolutamente, non hanno poi luogo dove ritirarsi, bisognandoli: e di qui nascono molti errori che sono nelle statue; chè, per la voglia c'ha l'artefice del vedere le figure tonde fuor del sasso a un tratto, spesso si gli scuopre un errore che non puï rimediarvi se non vi si mettono pezzi commessi, come abbiamo visto costumare a molti artefici moderni: il quale rattoppamento è da ciabattini, e non da uomini eccellenti o maestri rari; ed è cosa vilissima e brutta e di grandissimo biasimo.

> *Vasari (see note 5), vol. 1, pp. 154–155*

60. On this notion, see Trinkhaus (see note 19).

expressed the concept in his "Oration on the Dignity of Man" of 1486:

> At last the best of artisans ordained that the creature to whom He had been able to give nothing proper to himself should have joint possession of whatever had been peculiar to each of the different kinds of beings. He therefore took man as a creature of indeterminate nature, and assigning him a place in the middle of the world, addressed him thus: 'Neither fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hands We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world's center that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though maker and moulder of thyself, though mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. . . .'[61]

The notion that man exists as a work-in-progress bears, of course, a close affinity to Michelangelo's own view of image-making. But unlike Pico's insular philosophy, the artist's idea of transformation depends upon his interaction with the block and is, therefore, an operation that is ultimately decentering. It shifts the basis of positive change away from a Piconian guise of self-sufficiency to a mode in which the realization of indeterminate form is based upon a model of alterity. Michelangelo's reliance on the substantive presence of the stone establishes the act of (trans)figuration as a dialectical process in which the shared potential of maker and made is achieved through interactive means.

That change depends upon intersubjective involvement and that it corresponds to the rules of artistry is a dynamic that was explicated by one of Michelangelo's chief apologists, Benedetto Varchi. In the first of his two *lezzioni* delivered to the Accademia Fiorentina, Varchi attempts to clarify the significance of

Michelangelo's sonnet, "Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto," with particular attention to the analogy between block and beloved made by the master in the second quatrain:

> Neither more nor less [than what occurs in art] says our poet, happens in Love. Because both what is within [the heart of] the beloved and in a face . . . exists potentially. All pleasure, all joy and all happiness can be drawn from it by a good master of love. But if instead he extracts unhappiness, trouble and discontent . . . then, the poet says, the lover does not know the art of love. Thus he should not complain about either love, his beloved or fate, but blame himself [in art] . . . the fault lies not in the marble but in the artist. . . . In the same way [in Love] the blame cannot be placed on the beloved object or anything else but solely on the Lover. . . . This appears to me to be the substance of this beautiful sonnet.[62]

According to Varchi, block and beloved are equivalent structures because they share the quality of potentiality; in each, perfection resides within, where it waits to be uncovered by the attentive artist/lover. It is this important parallel that establishes the sculptor's technique as equivalent to the terms of amorous involvement. As the critic himself suggests, just as the artist maintains the capacity to discover ideal form through subtractive means, the individual is able to achieve unity through the power of love.[63] Thus Varchi's commentary not only offers a philosophical rationale for Michelangelo's analogy between block and beloved, but elucidates a theoretical basis for the connection between sculptural technique and the mechanism of love. Through his invocation of the Aristotelian notion of potentiality, Varchi makes clear that the artist's

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61. Trans. Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Osker Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 224–225. For the original Latin text with facing Italian translation, see *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Florence, 1942).

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62. As cited in Mendelsohn (see note 25), p. 105; for an extended discussion of this lecture, pp. 103–107; Summers (see note 11), pp. 203–233.

63. Varchi rehearses his belief in the power of love as follows:

> What is the instrument which Nature has given us to transform into actuality our potentiality, that is, to rise to heaven and be transformed from men into Gods? . . . this instrument (beyond science) is, without a doubt, Love . . . by means of Love, not only can we, but we must, elevate ourselves again from this mortal veil and ascend from this world in another form to that otherworldly splendor, alighting in heaven and there visibly contemplating the Prime Mover face to face, becoming like him.
>
> *Quoted in Mendelsohn (see note 25), p. 63*

On the anagogic function of love, see Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985).

subtractive method is a process that, like amorous desire, is instrumental in the formation of self.

Central to Varchi's analysis is the assumption that both art and love are assimilative constructs. In each, a process of identification occurs in which the individual attempts to realize his own potential through his empathic involvement with the Other.[64] This process depends, of course, on the sense of sight and derives from the notion that amorous captivation takes place when vaporous spirits pass into the eyes of the lover to his soul where they imprint the image of the beloved.[65] As Varchi suggests, the mutual facing between artist and work is fully analogous to this other type of benevolent accord; in both, the confrontation between self and object, seer and seen results in a state of existential fusion that is specular in nature. The artist/lover projects ideal form onto the opposing object and, through a process of identification, becomes an ego derived from dissimulated presence.

Varchi's account of intersubjectivity, a state of reflexive involvement in which the individual is constituted through his approximation to the status of the Other, had, by the middle of the sixteenth century, become a commonplace notion in a Renaissance theory of love. Almost a century earlier, Marsilio Ficino had noted:

Likeness generates love. Likeness is a certain nature which is the same in several things. For if I am like you, you also are necessarily like me. Therefore the same likeness which compels me to love you also compels you to love me. . . . There is also the fact that the lover engraves the figure of the beloved on his own soul. And so the soul of the lover becomes a mirror in which the image of the beloved is reflected. For that reason, when the beloved recognizes himself in the lover, he is forced to love him.[66]

This effect was equally observed by Michelangelo who, as Vasari notes and as we might suspect from what we know of his intense relation to the block, was "in love with his art":

Just as, by taking away, lady, one puts
into hard alpine stone
a figure that's alive
and that grows larger wherever the stone decreases,
so too are any good deeds
of the soul that still trembles
concealed by the excess mass of its own flesh,
which forms a husk that's coarse and crude and hard.
You alone can take them out
from within my outer shell,
for I haven't the will or strength within myself.[67]

The metamorphic exchange alluded to by Michelangelo is one where the sculptor/lover becomes his own object of contemplation. In his attempt to construct his ego by means of the combined processes of love and art, he identifies with the Other and loses his self; through the presence and virtuosity of his own beloved, he is transformed into an image of alterity.[68]

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64. Although this idea remains implicit in Varchi's commentary, it finds unequivocal expression in his *Sopra sette dubbi d'amore*, a lecture read before the Florentine Academy on the first Sunday in June, 1554:

Love is the desire of enjoying with union a thing which is either beautiful or judged to be beautiful; which means simply that the lover is transformed into the thing loved with the desire that the latter be transformed into him.
            Cited in John Charles Nelson, Renaissance Theory of Love (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 141

65. Michelangelo himself made reference to this dynamic numerous times in his poetry, see for example sonnet nos. 3, 8, 23, 27, 30, 77, 131, 137, 142, 258, 276, and fragment A26. This idea can, of course, be found much earlier. In antiquity, the notion was expressed by Plato in the *Phaedrus*. See Robert Baldwin, "'Gates Pure and Shining and Serene': Mutual Gazing as an Amatory Motif in Western Literature and Art," *Renaissance and Reformation* 10 (1986):23–48; Ruth H. Cline, "Hearts and Eyes," *Romance Philology* 25 (1972):263–297. In the Trecento the idea was expressed by Dante in the *Divine Comedy* (Purgatorio 18: 22–27). On love as a visual construct also see, Maurice Valency, *In Praise of Love* (New York: Octagon Books, 1958), pp. 219–222; Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 57.

66. Fincino (see note 63), p. 57.
67. Vasari (see note 6), p. 419.

Nè paia nuovo a nessuno che Michelagnolo si dilettassi della solitudine, come quello che era innamorato dell'arte sua. . . .
            Vasari (see note 5), vol. 7, p. 270

A similar sentiment can be found in the statement that Michelangelo's works were his children (see ibid., vol. 7, p. 281).

Sì come per levar, donna, si pone/ in pietra alpestra e dura/ una viva figura,/ che là pió la pietra scema;/ tal alcun' opre buone,/ per l'alma che pur trema,/ cela il superchio della propria carne/ co' l'inculta sua cruda e dura scorza./ Tu pur dalle mie streme/ parti puo' sol levarne,/ ch'in me non è di me voler né forza./
            Saslow (see note 38), no. 152.

68. This notion finds equivalent expression in sonnet nos. 8, 108, 193, 194, and 235 (Saslow [see note 38]). It had, however, by the sixteeth century become commonplace and may be found, for example, in Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, book 4,

Michelangelo's involvement in just such a reflexive exchange finds confirmation in Donato Giannotti's dialogue of the 1540s. Here, the artist is made to observe that when compelled to love someone because of their outstanding virtue, he is "no longer his own," but rather, belongs wholly to his object of desire.[69] Giannotti's account of the decentered subject proves more than a dialogic convention, however, when Michelangelo himself describes the tendency to dissemble:

> A man within a woman, or rather a god
> speaks through her mouth, so that I,
> by having listened to her,
> have been made such that I'll never be my own again.
> I do believe, since I've been
> taken from myself by her,
> that, being outside myself, I'll take pity on myself;
> her beautiful face spurs me
> so far above vain desire
> that I see death in every other beauty.
> O lady who pass souls
> through fire and water on to days of joy:
> Pray, make me never turn back to myself again.[70]

As Michelangelo makes clear, the process of self-realization through love is both a constructive and destructive endeavor, one involving recovery as well as loss. The notion that the individual discovers "not only love, but life and death together" finds repeated

expression in the artist's poetry.[71] Ficino again precedes Michelangelo in describing this irreducible dialectic:

> It also happens that those who have been trapped by love alternately sigh and rejoice. They sigh because they are destroying themselves, because they are ruining themselves. They rejoice because they are transferring themselves into something better.[72]

The cyclical relationship between self-affirmation and alienation described above depends upon the amatory identification of subject with object. The individual in love is confronted by an image that embodies both sameness and difference, a bivalent likeness of the Other that constitutes as well as destroys. Ficino's account of reflexive discourse is one that clearly prefigures Lacan's own specular model where identity is created through a divided perception of self; the subject's ego takes form the moment it is lost to the Other. That identity exists as a visual construct is a notion that can, of course, be traced back to antiquity where its most potent form of expression is the mythical tale of Narcissus.[73] Like Narcissus's transformation through and into his object of desire, the artist finds himself situated as both maker and made.

This Ovidian dilemma in which the individual exists simultaneously as lover and beloved, creator and created, returns us, in essence, to the Renaissance commonplace, "*ogni dipintore dipinge se*," a maxim that clearly rehearses the terms of a Narcissistic encounter; the lover/artist recognizes himself in his own creation, realizing that his identity is dependent upon an image of his own making. The tragic figure of Narcissus was, of course, associated early on in the Renaissance with the notion of image-making.[74] But more to the point here is

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para. 70; Annibale Romei, *Discorsi* (Pavia, 1591), *Giornata Seconda: Dell'Amore Humano*, p. 82; in a letter written to Michelangelo from Frate Lorenzo in 1516 (as quoted in Tolany [see note 1], vol. 1, pp. 250–251; John Arthos, "Michelangelo," in *Michelangelo: Selected Scholarship in English*, ed. William Wallace [New York: Garland, 1995], vol. 5, p. 166).

69. *Qualunche volta io veggio alcuno che habbia qualche virtó, che mostri qualche destrezza d'ingegno, che sappia fare o dire qualche cosa pió acconciamente che gli altri, io sono constretto ad innamorarmi di lui, et me gli do in maniera in preda, che io non sono pió mio, ma tutto suo.*

   Dialogi di Donato Giannotti: De' giorni che Dante consumo nel cercare l'Inferno e 'l Purgatorio, ed. Deoclecio Redig de Campos
   (Florence: Sansoni, 1939), p. 68

70. *Un uomo in una donna, anzi uno dio/ per la sua bocca parla,/ ondi'io per ascoltarla,/ son fatto tal, che ma' pió sarï mio./ I' credo ben, po'ch'io/ a me da lei fu' tolto,/ fuor di me stesso aver di me pietate;/ sì sopra 'l van desio/ mi spronga il suo bel volto,/ ch'i'veggio morte in ogni altra beltate./ O donna che passate/ per acqua e foco l'alme a'lieti giorni,/ deh, fate c'a me stesso pió non torni.*
                                        Saslow (see note 38), no. 235

On this theme of self-alientation, also see nos. 8, 108, and 154.

71. *Amor non già, ma gli occhi mei son quegli/ che ne' tuo e begli/ e vita e morte interna trovato hanno* (Saslow [see note 38], p. 31).

72. Fincino (see note 63), Speech II, chap. 6, p. 52. Also see, Speech II, chap. 8, p. 56.

73. Ovid (see note 31), book 3:345–510.

74. *Perï usai di dire tra i miei amici, secondo la sentenza de' poeti, quel inventore; ché già ove sia la pittura fiore d'ogni arte, ivi tutta la storia di Narcisso viene a proposito. Che dirai tu essere dipingere altra cosa che simile abbracciare con arte quella ivi superficie del fonte?*
                                        L.B. Alberti, De pictura, para. 26

This passage has been the focus of much scholarly attention, see for example, Hubert Damisch, "D'un Narcisse l'autre," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychoanalyse* 13 (1976):109–146; Stephan Bann, *The True Vine: On Visual Representation and Western Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 105–201.

its appearance in the emblem books of the sixteenth century such as Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593), whose entry on *"Amor di se stesso"* is particularly relevant to our discussion; it is illustrated by an image of Narcissus intent upon his reflection and states, "for to love oneself is nothing less than with satisfaction and applause to admire oneself in one's own works."[75] It is the specular quality of this exchange that reinforces the reality that ego formation is based on a visual paradigm; in both art and love the image of the Other re-presents the subject to himself. Desiring both the object and his reflection in it, the artist/lover is faced with an irreducible dialectic that calls into question the possibility of self-closure. Identity is established as an ongoing process that must, by definition, remain unfinished.

We have seen how Michelangelo subscribed to a dynamic conception of sculpture, one that called for an intersubjective dependency that rehearsed the mechanics of love. Equally apparent is the reality that a Renaissance theory of love privileged sight as the most noble of the senses as it was through this faculty alone that lover and beloved could engage in a truly spiritual exchange of identities. Michelangelo himself had often made a similar assertion, wishing at times to be "made nothing but an eye."[76] But as a sculptor, he also required a more tactile approach to the Other, one that allowed him to remain in constant, physical contact with the object of desire.

The nature of such corporeal involvement is carefully described by Vasari in the technical preface to the *Lives* where he recalls the process by which sculptors perfect their art:

> Sculptors are accustomed, in working their marble statues, to begin by roughing out the figures with a kind of tool they call 'subbia,' which is pointed and heavy; it is used to block out their stone in the large, and then with other tools called 'calcagnuoli' which have a pointed notch in the middle and are short, they proceed to round it, till they come to use a flat tool more slender than the calcagnuolo, which has two

notches and is called 'gradina': with this they go all over the figure, gently chiseling it to keep the proportion of the muscles and the folds, and treating it in such a manner that the notches or teeth of the tool give the stone a wonderful grace. This done, they remove the tooth marks with a smooth chisel, and in order to perfect the figure, wishing to add sweetness, softness and finish to it, they work off with curved files all traces of the gradina.[77]

Vasari's account of the sculptor at work characterizes the stone carver's attack on the block as a sequential process. Michelangelo's own method of carving, however, differed significantly from the orderly, equitable progression from *subbia* to polishing materials described by Vasari. Since the sixteenth century, critics have recognized not only the singularity of the artist's relieflike method, but have equally made note of his marked preference for the *gradina*.

In both the *St. Matthew* and the *Awakening Slave* (and undoubtedly in the majority of his other works as well), Michelangelo began carving by penetrating the depth of stone with the *subbia*, searching out the basic contours of his *concetto* in yet unformed matter. He did not, of course, attack the block without first producing preliminary drawings and/or models.[78] The artist viewed such preparatory aids, however, as devoid of existential

75. Trans. Louise Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century* (Lund: Gleerups, 1967), p. 143.

. . . *perche amarse stesso non è altro, che vagghegiarsi tutto nell'opere proprie con sodisfattione, e con applauso.*
   Della pió che novissima iconologia (Padua, 1630), Part I, p. 39

Also see Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata cum Commentariis* (1531), emblem LXIX.

76. *Deh, se tu puo' nel ciel quante tra noi,/ fa' del mie corpo tutto un occhio solo;/ né fie poi parte in me che non ti goda* (Saslow [see note 38], no. 166). Also see above, n. 70.

77. Maclehose (see note 59), p. 152.

Sogliono gli scultori, nel fare le statue di marmo, nel principio loro abbozzare le figure con le subbie; che sono una specie di ferri da lori così nominati, i quali sono appuntati e grossi; e andare levando e subbiando grossamente il loro sasso; e poi, con altri ferri detti calcagnuoli, c'hanno una tacca in mezzo e sono corti, andare quella ritondando; per sino che eglino venghino a un ferro piano pió sottile del calcagnuolo, che ha due tacche, ed è chaimato gradina, col quale vanno per tutto con gentilezza gradinando la figura, colla proporzione de'muscoli e delle pieghe, e la tratteggiano di maniera, per la virtó delle tacche o denti predetti, che la pietra mostra grazia mirabile. Questo fatto, si va levando le gradinature con un ferro pulito; e per dare perfezione alla figura, volendole aggiugnere dolcezza, morbidezza e fine, si va con lime torte levando le gradine.
                    Vasari (see note 5), vol. 1, p. 155

78. On Michelangelo's use of models, see Irving Lavin, "Bozzetti and Modelli: Notes on Sculptural Procedure from the Early Renaissance through Bernini," in *Stil und Uberlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes: Akten des 21 International Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte in Bonn, 1964* (Berlin, 1967), vol. 3, pp. 93–104; Ludwig Goldscheider, *A Survey of Michelangelo's Models in Wax and Clay* (London: Phaidon, 1962) (with problematic attributions); Wittkower (see note 47), pp. 125–136; Frederick Hartt, *David by the Hand of Michelangelo: The Original Model Discovered* (New York: Abrams, 1987).

merit and instead preferred the physical contact with his cherished medium, stone.[79] His continuing need for intimate association, however, caused Michelangelo to abandon the *subbia* more quickly than most artists, turning instead to the pointed chisel; first to the two-pointed *calcagnuolo* for broad, diagonal hatching, and then most importantly, to a finer, more subtle instrument, the *gradina*. With this, Michelangelo slowly began chiseling around the emerging forms, defining and modeling them until they were released layer by layer from the block. This technique is made manifest in each of the above-mentioned single figure works where the torso, in particular, exhibits a delicate network of crosshatching, the result of Michelangelo's patient handling of the *gradina* as he passed it over and over the stone. Such a technique was, of course, painstakingly slow. The assiduousness of his approach was, however, a function of his intense involvement with the block and his particularized use of the *gradina* essential to this relationship. Surprisingly, the significance of Michelangelo's method of carving is suggested by Benvenuto Cellini in his *Treatise on Sculpture* (1568) in a passage that offers the following to the beginning sculptor:

> I must not omit to say for the guidance of those who are unskilled in working marble, that they may strike boldly in with their *subbie*; for the more delicate *subbia*, provided it be not inserted straight into the stone, does not crack the marble, but just chips off as lightly as possible whatever may be necessary; while with the *scarpello a tacca* the rough edges may then be brought to an even plane, and you go over the work with it just as if you were making a drawing for the surface. And this is truly the right method, and the one which the great Michelangelo employed.[80]

Central to our discussion is the analogy between Michelangelo's sculptural technique and the act of drawing. Michelangelo has long been famous for his

so-called presentation drawings, those highly worked images offered first to Tommaso de' Calvalieri and later to Vittoria Colonna.[81] As critics have noted, the sheets are remarkable for the care with which Michelangelo marked the surface. They are comprised of a series of fine touches so meticulously rendered that it undoubtedly took considerable time to complete each one.[82] This painstaking method was, however, well suited to their function. They were, as we know, gifts of love from an ardent admirer and as such, were objects that bore a heavy affective charge much like the one carried by his sculptural projects. In each medium we see that Michelangelo chose to maintain extended contact with the surface, remaining in close physical proximity to an image that was synonymous with the object of desire. This actuality finds ready confirmation in the torso of the *Awakening Slave* where the marks of the *gradina* seem to caress the surface of stone, leaving their trace in a manner so sensuous that it is fully analogous in both form and content to the repeated touches of chalk found in the presentation drawings. It is this conflation of artistic and amatory touch, moreover, that recalls the myth of Pygmalion; like his literary counterpart, Michelangelo sought to realize his desires through an intimate, corporealized relationship with his own creation.

Michelangelo's preference for the slow and meticulous movements of the *gradina* allowed him

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79. See, for example, sonnet no. 236 in Saslow (see note 38).
80. Ashbee (see note 43), pp. 136–137.

Non voglio mancare di non avvertire quelli che non sono pratichi al marmo, per quel che la subbia si adopera, confortando che quanto pió si puï si vadia in là con essa presso alle fine. Questo si è perché la detta sottilissima subbia non introna il marmo, ché non la ficcando per diritto nella pietra l'uomo spicca dal detto marmo tutto quello che e' vuole gentilissimamente; e di poi con lo scapello a una tacca si viene a unire, e con quella si intraversa come se proprio uno avessi a disegnare. E questo è il vero modo che à usato il gran Michelagnolo.

Cordié (see note 43), p. 1096

81. The term "presentation drawing" was first used by Johannes Wilde in *The Italian Drawings of the XV and XVI Centuries in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle* (London, 1949), cat. nos. 423–424, 428–431. It refers, of course, to such drawings as the Three Labors of Hercules, Archers Shooting at a Herme, Titys, The Rape of Ganymeade, The Fall of Phaeton, the Children's Bacchanal, Christ on the Cross, and the Pietà. That these drawings were, in fact, gifts to Calvalieri and Colonna is attested to both by Vasari and by Condivi. Reference to these sheets is also made in correspondence between Michelangelo and both Calvalieri and Colonna. See *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo. Edizione postuma di Giovanni Poggi*, ed. Paola Barocchi and Rienzo Ristori (Florence: S.P.E.S., 1965–1983), vol. III, no. DCCCXCVIII; vol., IV, nos. CMXXXII, CMLXVI, CMLXVIII.

82. For years, it was believed that these drawings were completed by a process called stippling. More recent investigation has shown that this is not the case; modelling was achieved by passing and repassing the chalk over the textured surface of the paper. See Michael Hirst, *Michelangelo and his Drawings* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 113; David Rosand, "Michelangelo Draws: Communication and Revelation," in *World Art: Themes of Unity and Diversity*, ed. Irving Lavin (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 409–412, with further bibliography.

protracted involvement with the surface of stone, with, if you will, the skin of the piece. The notion of skin has, of course, historically played a significant role in the formation of identity. To Sigmund Freud, for example, "a person's own body, and above all its surface is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring."[83] As Freud realized, such bodily sensations are self-defining; through a dialectical exchange between inner and outer stimuli, the ego develops a sense of its own psychic boundaries.[84] That is, identity is created at and through the surface of one's own form. In the individual this surface is, of course, synonymous with that psychic envelope called the skin.[85]

Several decades later, Maurice Merleau-Ponty found the dialectical nature of the body's surface to be a significant aspect of his theory of reflexivity. The body, he noted, "simultaneously sees and is seen. . . . It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensible for itself."[86] In his final, but unfinished manuscript, he extends this observation, carrying it to its logical conclusion:

> We say therefore that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them; we say, because it is evident, that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of "object" and to the order of the "subject" reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders. It cannot be by incomprehensible accident that the body has this double reference; it teaches us that each calls for the other.[87]

The corporealized ego is marked by its dual presence; through interactive means, it becomes aware that it is both subject and object to itself. When for example, one hand touches the other, the subject is brought into

contact with his own double existence through an encounter with "alterity." This presence of the Other in the same means that the individual is always, for himself, a product of difference. In this manner, the surface of the body may be defined as a site of reflexive involvement on which both subjective and objective aspects of the self are equally in evidence. It is on this sensory threshold, or skin, therefore, that the irreducible dialectic between self and Other is enacted.

Such an observation finds its roots in antiquity with the tragic myth of Marsyas. When, in Ovid's tale, Marsyas cries out, "Why are you tearing me from myself," he is expressing an awareness of a bivalent nature springing from the skin's surface.[88] Fittingly, the myth was later invoked in the Renaissance to a self-actualizing end. It then described a rite of purification in which the unsightly outer covering of man is removed in order to reveal the beauty within, thus identifying the skin as the locus between matter and spirit.[89] Michelangelo himself adopted this view both in terms of his work and his own identity. A powerful testimony to his belief in the skin's certain role in the soul's transcendence is the presence of the artist's own self-portrait on the flayed skin of St. Bartholomew in the *Last Judgment* (fig. 6), a detail that has been repeatedly interpreted as a plea for redemption.[90] He speaks equally of the *scorza* of the marble and of the skin that clothes his own body as impediments to beauty and salvation.[91] Each must be divested of their earthly envelope for perfection to be realized. Michelangelo's attention to the notion of surface cannot, however, be viewed as mere philosophical preoccupation, but rather, and even more importantly, must be considered in light of the actual studio practice from which it derives.

83. Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953–1974), vol. 19, p. 26.

84. The self-defining nature of corporeal perception has been extensively addressed by Schilder (see note 55). Schilder's concern differs, however, from that of Freud's, emphasizing the notion of body scheme (or body ego) rather than the more fully integrated notion of the body as self.

85. On the concept of a self-formative psycho-physical envelope, see Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego: A Psychoanalytical Approach to the Self,* trans. Chris Turner (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

86. "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery in *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 162.

87. *The Visible and the Invisible,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 137.

88. Ovid (see note 31), VI:386–387.

89. See Edgar Wind, "The Flaying of Marsyas," in *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (New York and London: Norton, 1968), pp. 171–176; Edith Wyss, *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press, 1996).

90. See, for example, Tolnay (see note 1), vol. 5, pp. 44–45; Marcia Hall, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment:* Resurrection of the Body and Predestination," *Art Bulletin,* 58 (1976):85–92; Leo Steinberg, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* as Merciful Heresy," *Art in America* 63 (1975):48–63; id., "A Corner of the *Last Judgment*," *Deadalus* 109 (1980):207–273; id., "The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's Painting," in *The Language of Images,* ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 85–128; Frederick Hartt, "Michelangelo in Heaven," *Artibus et Historaie* 26 (1992):191–209; Barolsky (see note 22), pp. 30–31.

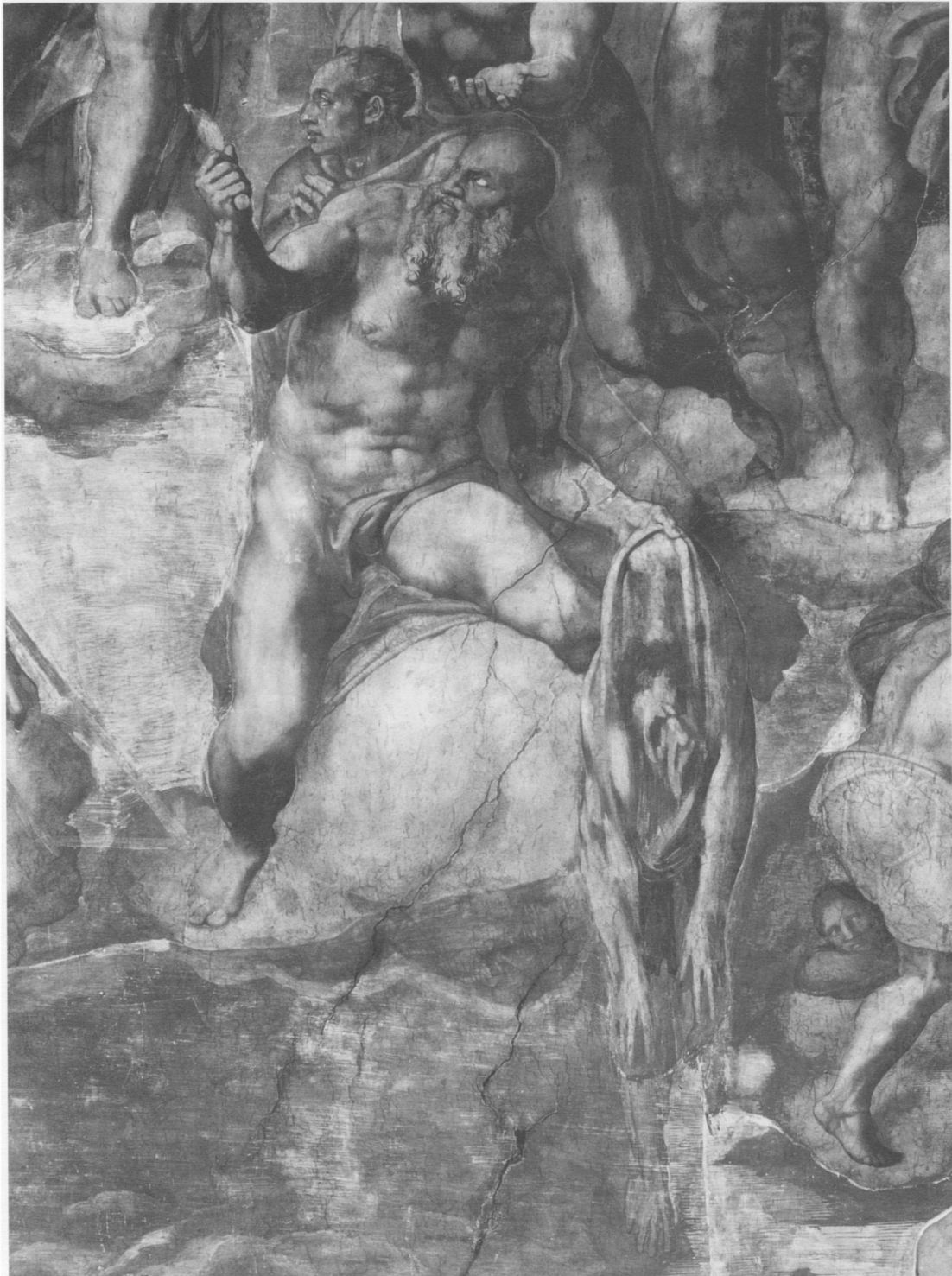91. See, for example, Saslow (see note 38), nos. 51, 94, 161, 293.

Figure 6. Michelangelo, *Last Judgment* (det., St. Bartholomew), fresco, 1534–1541. H: 17 m with base, W: 13.30 m. Vatican, Sistine Chapel. Courtesy of Scala/Art Resource, New York.

Michelangelo's extended involvement with the block had made him acutely aware of both its recalcitrance and tractability, his tactile interventions describing a dialectic between resistance and merger, object and subject, that was ultimately self-fashioning. His highly corporealized and, at base, erotic approach led him to believe in the block as a duplicitous presence, as a site of both sameness and difference that awakened him to the duality of his own existence. Gianotti, in his *Dialogi* makes reference to just such an exchange when he reports that Michelangelo was likely to decline a dinner invitation for fear that each person present "would take away a part of me," to the extent that "I would be destroyed and lost."[92] Such a sentiment returns us, of course, to the notion of fragmentation and to the unfinished work, recalling the Lacanian construct of the "body in bits and pieces" that accompanies the search for self through alterity. It equally brings us back to the question of Michelangelo's last unfinished work, the *Rondanini Pietà*.

We recall that Michelangelo's friend and colleague, Daniele da Volterra, observed that the aged artist continued to radically rework his conception of the *Rondanini Pietà* just days before his death.[93] During the last few months of his life and now in his final hours as well, the sculptor was shifting the Virgin's head toward Christ (a vestigial aspect of her face dating from the first version may still be seen in her head veil) and creating her left arm from what had been the Savior's shoulder. He was dramatically altering the figure of Christ himself, removing parts of the head, right shoulder, and torso so

that now the body stood upright. Michelangelo was carving Christ's head from the Virgin's right shoulder, his arms from her body, and was transforming his original left shoulder and chest into Mary's left arm and hand. At this stage in the artist's interventions, only Christ's polished legs remained virtually intact from an earlier version. Had Michelangelo lived longer, perhaps they too would have undergone extensive revision as would have Christ's completed and now superfluous arm which would have undoubtedly been eliminated. Thus, what emerges most clearly from Michelangelo's final revision is the unification of the figures of Christ and Mary who are fused together in a final embrace. Indeed, even the inventory of the sculptor's belongings taken upon his death noted this feature, observing that he had left "another statue begun of a Christ and another figure above, attached together, roughed out and unfinished."[94]

Vasari had observed that after the mutilation of the Florence *Pietà*, Michelangelo had found it imperative to find another marble block so that his work with the chisel could continue on a daily basis. Such an action, as both Vasari's statement and Daniele's epistolary account so strongly suggest, was not so much an artistic requirement as an internal necessity. When during the last days of his life, he once again took up the *subbia* to reduce the monumental forms of the previous version, his attack on the block differed considerably in character from the final blows delivered to the Florentine group. In the case of the *Rondanini Pietà*, he was not initiating an act of destruction, but rather, was attempting to maintain physical contact with the material that had remained central to his self-status throughout his entire career, realizing in the end that it was process and not product that held the key to identity. His deconstructive strategy had, therefore, been aimed at reestablishing his all-important relationship with the stone, a last effort to achieve union with the object of desire.

But perhaps the best indication of Michelangelo's fervent need to maintain his dialectical engagement with the block exists in the fused bodies of Christ and the Virgin. When the artist united these two figures in an increasingly closed cycle of reciprocal affirmation he was, in fact, describing the vicissitudes of the self in love, the irreducibility of their combined forms reflecting his own wish to find himself both in and through the

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92. Saslow (see note 38), p. 399.

Se io, adunque, venissi a desinare con voi, essendo tutti ornati di virtó et gentilezze, oltre a quello che ciascuno di voi tre qui mi ha rubato, ciascuno di coloro che si trovasse a desinare me ne torrebbe una parte: un'altra me ne torrebbe il sonatore, un'altra colui che ballasse, et così ciascun degli altri n'harebbe la parte sua. Talchè io, credendo per rallegrarmi con voi recuperarmi et ritrovarmi, sì come voi diceste, io tutto quanto mi smarrirei et perderei; di sorte che poi, per molti giorni, io non saprei in qual mondo mi fussi.

de Campos (see note 69), pp. 68–69

93. On Michelangelo's final revisions, see Tolnay, "Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà*," *Burlington* 65 (1934):151; id. (see note 1), vol. 5, pp. 91–92, 154–157. On Michelangelo's earlier conception, see Fritz Baumgart, "Die *Pietà Rondanini*: Ein Beitrag ur Erkenntnis des Altersstiles Michelangelos," *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 56 (1935):44–56; Bruno Mantura, "Il primo Cristo della *Pietà Rondanini*," *Bollettino d'arte* 58 (1973):199–210.

94. "*Un altra statua principiate per un Cristo ed un'altra figura di sopra, attaccate insieme, sbozzate et non finite*" (cited by Tolnay [see note 1], vol. 5, p. 155).

Other. Michelangelo himself describes this dynamic in the following opening quatrain:

> There is no earthly thing more lowly or worthless
> than what I feel I am, and am, without you;
> and therefore my own weak and tired breath
> asks pardon of you who are the highest desire.[95]

The Other to whom this sonnet is ultimately addressed is, of course, divine in nature, and as such, cannot be reached without the total self-annihilation required for Christian salvation. This reality too, was recognized by the master:

> From what sharp, biting file
> does your tired skin keep growing thin and failing,
> O ailing soul? When will time release you from it,
> so you'll return to heaven, where you were
> pure and joyful before,
> your dangerous and mortal veil cast off?
> For even if I change my hide
> in my final brief years,
> I cannot change my old established habits,
> which, as more days pass, weight down and compel me
>   more.
> Love, I won't hide it from you
> that I envy the dead,
> being so confused and terrified
> that my soul, while with me, trembles and fears for itself.
> O Lord, in my last hours,
> stretch out toward me your merciful arms,
> take me from myself and make me one who'll please you.[96]

Michelangelo's reference to redemption through decorporealization again recalls the deconstructive strategy employed by the Christian interpreters of the Marsyas myth who found beauty and salvation beyond the skin's surface. Like the soul's release from its earthly prison, Michelangelo's radical reworking of the *Rondanini Pietà*, his removal of layer after layer of the stone's outer covering, produced an image whose spiritual plenitude resulted in a fusion of form; Christ's assimilative stance brought him together with his beloved and restored him through the power of love.[97] The master's final revisions had not, however, created a figural grouping that revealed a process of individuation, but rather, one that manifested a loss of identity. The reflexive involvement between Christ and the Virgin, his inclusion into her welcoming form, described a dissimulative operation that remains an inescapable part of the quest for self-fulfillment. The unfinished *Rondanini Pietà* thus stands as an emblem of the pathos of being, its incomplete forms declaring the mutability of the self in love and the futility of self-closure. Michelangelo, through his final interventions, had achieved awareness of his own decentered status. He had come to realize that at the moment of self-discovery, he would inevitably lose himself to the Other.

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97. On themes of love, death, and restoration in Michelangelo's art, see Steinberg (see note 5), pp. 231–336; Robert Liebert, *Michelangelo: A Psychoanalytic Study of His Life and Images* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983); Adrian Stokes, "Michelangelo," in *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes*, ed. Lawrence Gowing (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), vol. 3, pp. 9–76.

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95. *Non è pió basso o vil cosa terrena/ che qual che, senza te, mi sento e sono,/ onde a l'alto desir chiede perdono/ la debile mie propria e stanca lena.*
                                        Saslow (see note 38), no. 289
96. *Per qual mordace lima/ discresce e manca ognor tuo stanca spoglia,/ anima inferma? or quando fie ti scioglia/ da quella il tempo, e torni ov'eri, in cielo,/ candida e lieta prima,/ deposto il periglioso e mortal velo?/*
    Ch'ancor ch'i'cangi 'l pelo/ per gli ultim'anni e corti,/ cangiar non posso il vecchio me antico uso,/ che con pió gironi pió mi sforza e preme./ Amore, a te nol celo,/ ch'i' porto invidia a' morti,/ sbigottito e confuso,/ sì di sé meco l'alma trema e teme./ Signor, nell'ore streme,/
        stendi ver' me le tuo pietose braccia,/
        tomm'a me stesso e famm'un che ti piaccia.
                                        Saslow (see note 38), no. 161