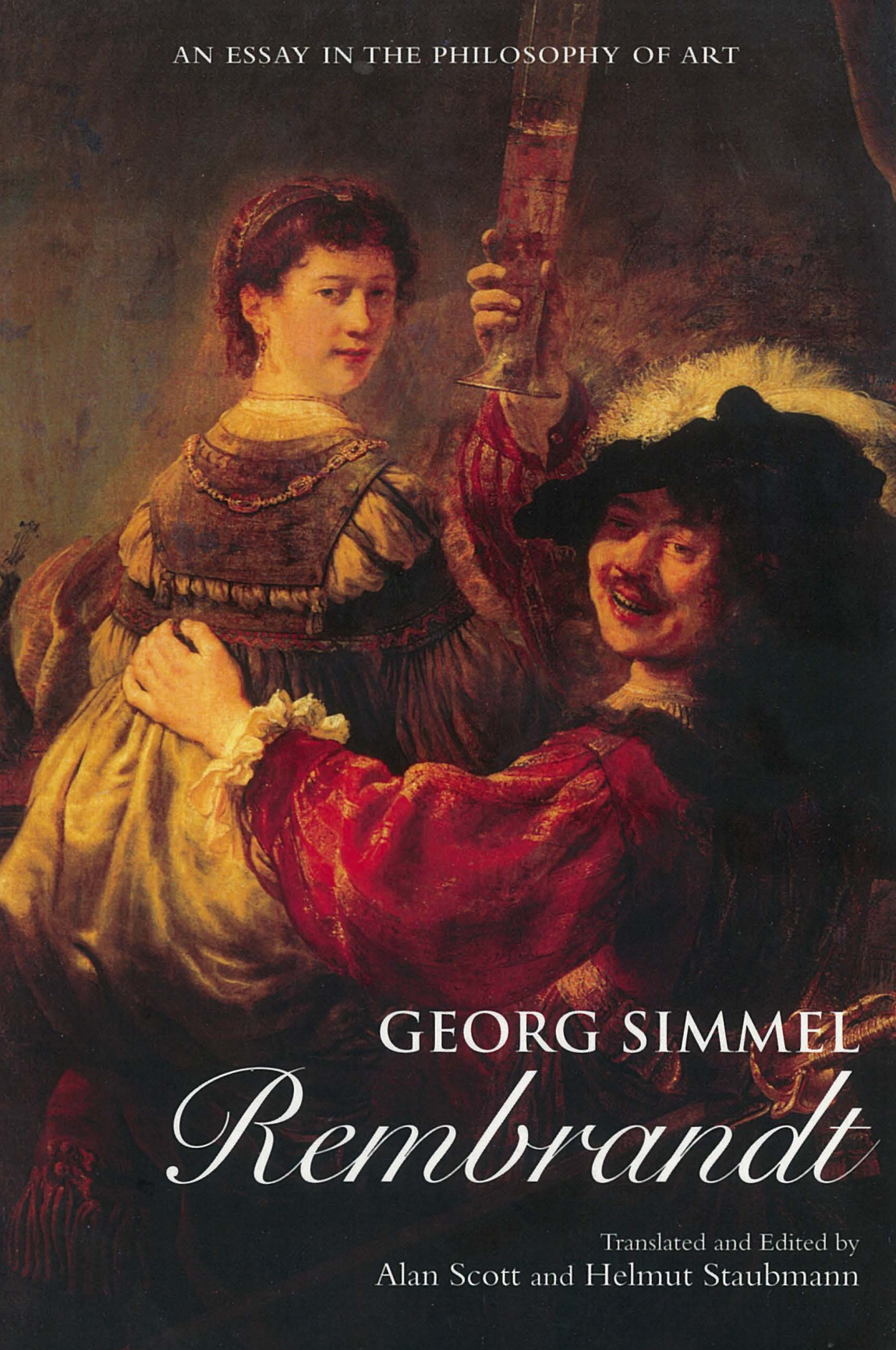


AN ESSAY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART



GEORG SIMMEL
Rembrandt

Translated and Edited by
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that which is individualized within the life as such: to its immanent “generality.” For this, rather than its empirical-singular configuration, is to be developed most immediately out of that mysterious deep stratum in which this very late art lives.

THE ASPATIAL GAZE

That flooding of life’s represented totality over all that is determinate is exemplified and symbolized at another specific point that can be demonstrated most clearly in the very late pictures, but frequently also in the earlier ones. Its interpretation demands a somewhat wider context. If one observes exactly the difference between the gaze of deep and significant persons and that of shallow and insignificant ones, then the former appear to look not only at the object (which they may fix sharply and attentively), but yet further beyond it, not further in the linear sense but somehow into the trans-local, to some place that cannot be limited that, however, does not have a spatial meaning. In the case of people of a more limited life, the gaze fixes exclusively upon the object that they are looking, at any given moment. For the energy flowing out of the gaze, the object represents a doorless wall. The gaze is simply reflected back. With that of others, it is as if the living power of the gaze would not find its place in the direction determined by the object, indeed in no “direction” at all, but proclaim merely an essentially aspatial [*raumlos*] intensity, not attachable to a particular thing. The corresponding [phenomenon] can be found in certain gestures within art, and perhaps these make it most apparent what is peculiar to that sort of gaze. St. John [the Evangelist] in Grünewald’s *Crucifixion* and many Buddha figures, the figure with the arm stretched high in Rodin’s *Burghers of Calais* and the central figure in Hodler’s *Day* — all these figures point somewhere or other, or they seem to, or really do, express a certain affect, but beyond that the gestures point to a spatially and conceptually indeterminate entity at the same time; to a nonlocalized being, or, more precisely, they do not *point* at all, but are simply there. Viewed through external categories, they have something vague about them that nevertheless is not open to multiple interpretations, but rather not “interpretable” at all. Thereby they differ from real expressive movements. For the latter also come from the interior, and the ways in which their appearance integrates into the external world is insignificant for them. They each depart, however, from a particular impulse that can be described in terms of its content. Although they reveal the character of individuality in their coloration, this [individuality] is merely something incidental. They are not the movement of

life as such, but always have a representational meaning, even when this is shaped from within. Those gestures, however, do not merely run their course in something spatially and objectively indeterminate, they also originate from the latter. They are not enticed by this or that purpose or feeling, but borne by the movement of life as a whole. The gesture of the hand of Rembrandt's *Homer*,¹⁸ even though he is supposedly scanning verses with it, seems to me to belong to this class. This peculiar situation of a specifiable direction surrounded by a purely immanent stream of life (that can only be externally characterized via its negation) amounts to the same thing as looking in those ways. And this is unmistakably displayed in certain Rembrandt portraits. It is already discernible in the *Portrait of a Preacher*¹⁹ in the Carstanjen collection, in *The Portrait of Nicolas Bruyningh*, many Titus pictures, and in the self-portraits. The looks may each fix on one point, but at the same time they see something that cannot be fixed. What is meant here is something other than the gaze of the Christ child of the *Sistine Madonna*²⁰ that is likewise not directed toward a given object because it is directed into the infinite, but not toward the nonspatial. The former, in comparison, fixes something finite, and at the same time has a purely interior quality that is just as little oriented towards its outside as is — according to its ultimate meaning — Rembrandt's religiosity, or, just as little as his light comes from somewhere other than the picture itself (on which more later) which means an immanent transcendence. Obviously, Wilhelm von Humboldt had such a gaze in mind when describing the impression given by Goethe in extreme old age: "I found his eye very changed; not dull, but with a wide pale-blue circle around the pupil. As I looked at the eye, I felt, as though it were searching for another light and for other suns." Whereas it otherwise always occurs in relation to something that is exterior to it, this quality of immanence, this representation of the inner life as the pure quality of its bearer, belongs to which is deepest and most decisive in Rembrandt. The means by which he succeeds in representing this are inaccessible to analysis. At best, one could cite the waning of the light in the eye as one of them. This always-looking-further — in a certain way appearing as a by-product of viewing a certain object — is a symbol of that liveliness that is not satisfied by any single content, not even by a subjective-individual one, but flows under or above each content into the infinite; that is to say, it does not flow *toward* anywhere at all because it is not dependent on a *terminus ad quem*. In a conceptual sense, which is oriented toward an object, this gaze may appear somehow vague, but in terms of life it is something quite definite. The fixed point is the symbol of an exterior determination and isolation corresponding to the principle of

form; the categorization that creates itself in the contact between the interior and the exterior, and which is not in question where life expresses its being-by-itself [*Bei-sich-Sein*].

It is instructive to contrast this with the tendency of the Baroque to present the affects of the persons as clearly and intelligibly as possible; to give them that *expressione* that can also be captured in concepts, for which purpose the eye is not really a useful device at all. This is because the eye after all, more than any other single moving organ, always expresses, beyond its reaction to an individual stimulus, a totality of inner life that is never *completely* exhausted in the specificity of the situation or feeling (even though it is near completion in the case of mundane people). That the eye *speaks* actually means that it says more than can be said. Its expression pours too immediately out of the dark inexpressible qualities of the soul for it to have been particularly useful for Baroque art in its striving for unbroken continuity and unequivocal meaning. One ought to pay attention to the extent to which Vasari already neglected the eye's expression in his art criticism. At best, he speaks of *occhi fissi al cielo fixso*²¹ does not touch "o" or simply of a fixed look, the meaning of which therefore does not actually lie in its life but in its location. In Rubens it is especially noticeable how often he keeps the eyes in a flat generality. The Baroque did not have a sense of the eye's depth-dimension that becomes absolute, as it were, with that aspatial gaze of Rembrandt's figures.

MOOD

With respect to the above context, is it now possible to speak of the "mood" in the appearance presented by Rembrandt, because mood is something interior, personal, perhaps something individual for each, which has nevertheless extinguished all particularity of contents, of conception, such that the pictures with several figures even more clearly characterize this late development. Because now those perceptible qualities of life that are no longer differentiated *mix*, within them individualization once more gains a higher form dissolving its earlier clarity as though into a floating layer of air. In *The Jewish Bride*, the figures are like the tones of the chord that are clearly not external to the individual tones but they are merged in the chord into a construct that cannot be displayed pro rata in each separate tone. A tender, so to speak, motionless, life contained in each of the two figures nevertheless continuously extends into a shared atmosphere wafting around them. A higher unity has absorbed the being-for-themselves of the individuals whose singularity falls away in the face of this unity, which yet nourishes it with the

NOTES

Notes to Editors' Introduction

1. From Schiller's "*Durch das Morgentor des Schönen drangst Du in der Erkenntnis Land*" in *Die Künstler* (1789).
2. This is our translation, as the standard English translations are rather loose at this point. The original reads: "Aber auch hier tritt hervor, was überhaupt nur die ganze Aufgabe dieser Betrachtungen sein kann: daß sich von jedem Punkt an der Oberfläche des Daseins, so sehr er nur in und aus dieser erwachsen scheint, ein Senkblei in die Tiefe der Seelen schicken läßt, daß alle banalsten Äußerlichkeiten schließlich durch Richtungslinien mit den letzten Entscheidungen über den Sinn und Stil des Lebens verbunden sind" (Simmel 1995 [1903], 122).

Simmel's Notes to Chapter 1

- i. Especially in relation to this characteristic emphasis of expression, it is particularly telling that in some forged drawings the affects are presented with exceptional — yes, crass — clarity. The forger obviously believed that through this vehemence of expression he would infuse the pages with Rembrandtian inner quality with the greatest possible emphasis and conviction. But precisely thereby the forger gives himself away: the insistent openness of the inner expression makes precisely the purity and the indivisible framings of the Rembrandtian expression of affect all the more unmistakable, such that the all-too-obvious psychology of these pages would justify their rejection.
- ii. Particularly informative here is the psychological fact that we speak of a "shocking similarity," with respect to some portraits, but never say this of a photograph. This can occur when and because a portrait confronts us with the immediate and, so to speak, irresistible reality of the model. We feel a sense of horror (*Goethe* in this case spoke of "apprehension") if a particular order of things is disrupted by the incision of a phenomenon from a completely different order. The reality of the living and the ideality of the work of art characterize two separated worlds, and a piece from the one suddenly confronts us in the other like a ghost, only, so to speak, in an inversion. The photograph cannot catch us out with such a shock, because it does not belong to the abstract order of art but rather from the start wants nothing other than to lead us psychologically to an impression of reality.
- iii. Here artistic naturalism is neither intended nor involved. Rather, the decision for or against this is completely indifferent toward the question as to whether the work of art possesses its sense in its pure immanence or as a means to represent the reality of the

model. This is because, on the one hand, the purely artistic intention, which closes up the meaning of the work within its frame, might be committed to a realistic representation — and to the most precise reproduction of reality, thereby thinking that it has attained the inner perfection, even of the absolutely self-sufficient work of art. On the other hand, the artist who wants to lead to the visualization of the model does not have to aim to reach a true representation of it merely via a realistic conception. Rather, he might want to produce its most precious and, in the deepest sense, correct, image just by stylizing or embellishment, of perhaps even by exaggeration and caricature.

- iv. Exempt from the genuine character of his art are several Italianate works of which *The Hundred Guilder Print*, due to its popular success, is the most notable. The significance and value of Rembrandt's etchings are not at all easy to grasp. For the assessment of *The Hundred Guilder Print* the way is accessible to most people because it approximates the Classical form to which—as its dominant and educating potency—the European artistic sensibility is adjusted. So far insufficient attention has been paid to this character of the sheet. Here the geometrically clear construction; here the “beautiful” folds of the cloths (particularly clear with the kneeling woman); here the representative posture of the figures which always remind us a little of the “living picture,” here the clarity of this one conceptually graspable life moment of each of them is acquired at the price that the dark flowing totality of life is reduced to it. Something of the tragedy of the German spirit, which its relationship to the Classical-Roman, produced again and again, lies in the fact that the most valued Rembrandt sheet is exactly the one in which the pure Rembrandtian spirit is least evident.

Editors' Notes to Chapter 1

1. *Aus Meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Part 2, Book 6, *Goethes Werke*, Weimar Edition, Volume 27, 23.
2. *Belshazzar's Feast: The Writing on the Wall* (c. 1635). “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin” were the words written on the wall (Book of Daniel, 5).
3. C. 1634.
4. “Intuition” is the standard translation of Kant's term *Anschauung*, and “intuitive” of *anschaulich*. We have followed this convention.
5. Presumably a reference to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, I The Transcendental Doctrine of Elements; Second Part: Transcendental logic; Introduction: The idea of a transcendental logic: I. On logic in general. Both the Kemp Smith translation (1929, 93) and the Cambridge edition (1998, 193–194) translate the relevant passage as, “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”
6. From Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Volume 1, Book 3 (“Die Welt als Vorstellung zweite Betrachtung”), §36.
7. There are a number of portraits by Velázquez of Duke Olivarez, the best-known of which is *The Duke Olivarez on Horseback* (1634).
8. *Portrait of a Gentleman, Probably Juan de Mateos* (1631–1632).
9. *Pabillos de Valladolid* (1634).
10. A reference to any of a number of Velázquez's paintings of court dwarfs.
11. Since the nineteenth century, the popular name for the portrait showing a couple thought to be dressed as the Old Testament figures Isaac and Rebecca (Genesis, 26).
12. “Die and become!” from Goethe's poem “Selige Sehnsucht,” “Moganni Nameh: Buch des Sängers” from the *West-östlicher Divan* (1819). *Goethes Werke*, Weimar Edition, Volume 6.
13. From the title (Joseph's Bloody Coat) and from Simmel's description, this may be a reference to the drawing *Jacob Shown the Bloodstained Coat of Joseph* now in the

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. However, this drawing (which may be the school of Rembrandt) was at the time in the possession not of the Earl of Derby, but of the painter and President of the Royal Academy Sir Edward J. Poynter. Our thanks to the Fitzwilliam Museum for this information.

14. *Critique of Practical Reason*, Part I, Book II, Chapter II, §iv. The translation used here is from the Cambridge edition, edited and translated by Mary Gregor. Simmel has cut the quotation. The whole reads: “*The Eternal being*, to whom the condition of temporality is nothing, sees in what is for us an endless series the whole of conformity with the moral law, and the holiness that his command inflexibly requires in order to be commensurable with his justice in the share he determines for each in the highest good is to be found whole in a single intellectual intuition of the existence of rational beings” (1997 [1788], 103).
15. He is referring here to the depiction of the crucifixion (1523–1524) in the Badische Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, referred to later in the text as the *Karlsruhe Crucifixion*.
16. By Giorgione.
17. The popular name for *The Militia Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq*.
18. We have been unable to trace the source of this quotation, which Simmel also used on other occasions, in other texts.
19. *Scenes from the Life of Saint Francis*: 3. *Apparition at Arles*, Santa Croce (Bardi Chapel), Florence.
20. *Prayers of the Suitors* in the Cappella Scrovegni (Arena Chapel), Padua.

Simmel’s Notes to Chapter 2

- i. That the facades of secular buildings developed relatively late architecturally — in any case first during Christian times, and then with full force in the court building of the Baroque period — is the consequence of parallel motives that may in essence be of a practical nature.
- ii. I shall later discuss the restricted sense of individualization, especially in his religious painting vis-à-vis the portraits.

Editors’ Notes to Chapter 2

1. Nor does the term translate well into English, hence the increasingly common usage of the German word in English. The *Oxford-Duden Dictionary* suggests “snugness,” “informality,” “unhurried.” *Gemütlichkeit* also has strong connotations of cosiness, homeliness, etc. (cf. *Geborgenheit*). Persons as well as situations can be characterized as *gemütlich* or *ungemütlich*. The stem word is *Gemüt* meaning soul or mind, or, in everyday usage, (a person’s) nature, disposition, mood. For a discussion of the philosophical connotations and ambiguities of the term *Gemüt*, see Caygill 1995, 210–213.
2. The will of all and the general will. Rousseau draws this distinction in Chapter Three of *The Social Contract*: “There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will; the latter considers only the common interest, while the former takes private interests into account, and is no more than the sum of particular wills [...]” (Rousseau 1973 [1762], 185).
3. *Schuld* means both “guilt/blame” and “debt.” See Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay, §4.
4. *Self-Portrait with Saskia in the Scene of the Prodigal Son in the Tavern*, 1632. See cover.
5. He is referring here to the *Self-Portrait* of 1666–1669 now in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne. See p. 75.
6. *Das Stunden-Buch*, Book Three (1905). Oh Lord, give each a death of his own/The dying that emerges out of that life/In which he had love, meaning, and need.

7. *Portrait of a Man (Ariost)*, c. 1512.
8. *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Book 7, Chapter 5 (1797). Goethes Werke, Weimar Edition, Volume 23, 40.
9. Popular name for *The Sampling Officials of the Amsterdam Drapers' Guild* (1662).
10. The later of two depictions of David playing the harp to Saul (I Samuel 16:23).
11. However much altered, nature is beautiful (attributed to Leonardo da Vinci).
12. More usually, Simone Martini.
13. The second verse of Sonnet no. 77 (“*Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso*”) from Petrarch’s Rime in vita e morta di Madonna Laura (Canzoniere), c. 1327. We have given a close-to-text rendering of the German translation used by Simmel. The original reads: “Ma certo il moi Simon fu in paradiso,/onde questa gentil Donna si parte;/ivi la vide e la ritasse in carte,/per far fede qua giù del suo bel viso.”
14. We have been unable to trace this quotation, which Simmel gives only in German and without the reference, but it is almost certainly from one of Michelangelo’s poems, as Simmel quotes both the Petrarch and the Michelangelo in a much earlier article on Michelangelo as poet written for the *Vossische Zeitung Berlin* in 1889 (Simmel 1989).
15. *Portrait of a Gentleman with a Tall Hat and Gloves*, c. 1658–1660. Now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
16. The Berlin portrait is *Portrait of a Young Man*. The “self-portrait” by Palma Vecchio to which Simmel refers is probably the *Portrait of a Young Man* in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. The painting is in fact attributed to Giorgione, but has been thought by some to be by Palma Vecchio.
17. *Schriften zur Kunst 1800–1816. Maximen und Reflexionen über Kunst. Aus Dem Nachlaß [Schönheit der Jugend aus Obrigen abzuleiten]*. Goethes Werke. Weimar Edition, Volume 48.
18. *Homer Dictating Verses* (1663).
19. This is presumably a reference to the etching or drawing (both 1640) *Portrait of the Preacher, Cornelisz Claesz. Anso* (1641), or to the painting *The Mennonite Minister Cornelis Claesz. Anso in Conversation with his Wife, Aaltje* (1641) now in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.
20. By Raphael (1513/1514).
21. “With eyes fixed on the sky”, Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Purgatory*, Canto 15.
22. To take us in. Michelangelo poem 285 (1967).
23. “*schlechtrassig jüdisch...*” could be translated as “racially inferior Jewish...,” but to do so now would be to locate it very specifically within the vocabulary of National Socialism.
24. Only in accordance with the laws of one’s own nature. Presumably a reference to Spinoza’s *Ethics* (Part One, Proposition xvii): “*Deus ex solis suae naturae legibus et a nemine agit*” (God acts only in accordance with the laws of His own nature, and is compelled by none).
25. “Chanson d’automne” (Autumn Song) from *Poèmes saturniens* (1866). “And so I leave/On cruel winds/Squalling/And gusting me/Like a dead leaf/Falling”. This is Martin R. Sorrell’s translation from Paul Verlaine, *Selected Poems*, 1999, 25–26.

Editors’ Notes to Chapter 3

1. Gian Paolo Oliva (1600–1681). Jesuit scholar and cleric. Vicar General (1661), Superior General (1664) and Papal Orator. Apostolic Preacher of the Palace under Pope Innocent X and three succeeding popes.
2. Probably a reference to *The Angel Leaving the Family of Tobias* (1637).
3. A number of depictions would fit this characterization including *The Holy Family of c. 1632* (Alte Pinakothek), that of 1640 (Louvre), and that of 1645 (Hermitage).

4. Sermon for the second Sunday after Epiphany on the text John 2: 1–11 (the wedding at Cana) from Luther's Church Postal of 1525. The original reads: "Knecht und Magd, genau so, wenn sie tun, was ihre Herrschaft sie heißt, so dienen sie Gott, und, Wenn sie an Christum glauben, gefällt es Gott viel besser, wenn sie auch die Stube kehren, oder Schuhe auswischen, denn aller Mönche Beten, Fasten, Messehalten und was sie noch alles für hohe Gottesdienste rühmen."
5. *Maximen und Reflexionen über Literatur und Ethik. Aus Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, Book II, Ch. 11 (1821, revised edition 1829). *Goethes Werke*. Weimar Edition, Volume 42, 178.
6. John 13/Matthew 26 (cf. Mark 14 and Luke 22).
7. From the fresco *The Last Judgment*, Santa Croce, Florence.
8. *Assumption of the Virgin* (1516–1518).
9. Liberal Dutch Protestant fellowship formed around Leiden (Warmond and Rijnsburg) in the 1620s (see Israel 1995). Like the Baptists, the Collegiants practiced adult baptism, while, like the Quakers, they were opposed to organized church religion. Israel quotes John Locke (1684): "they admit to their communion all Christians and hold it our duty to join in love and charity with those who differ in opinion" (Israel, 395). Rembrandt is said to have had sympathy with the principles and practices of the Collegiants (Schama 1988, 122).
10. On the *Isenheim Altar* (c. 1515), Colmar.
11. *Crucifixion* (1523–1524), Badische Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe.
12. The only Rembrandt painting with this title (*Rest on the Flight [to Egypt]*, 1647) is in the National Gallery of Ireland, but this work was never in the Haag. Our thanks to the National Gallery for this information. It could thus be one of a number of depictions of the flight to Egypt.
13. A view famously expressed by Oscar Wilde in the dialogue *The Decay of Lying* [1891] (1991). Warning against the "careless habits of accuracy" (74), Vivian, one of the two characters, declares, "Paradoxical as it may seem [...] it is none the less true that Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life" (87). Simmel's following sentence closely echoes Vivian's further assertion that "Life holds the mirror up to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realizes in fact what has been dreamed in fiction" (90–91), and, in line with an antirealist view, "Art never expresses anything but itself" (93). Wilde's objections to the (social) realism of the modern novel are also in some respects similar to Simmel's criticisms of photography in Chapter One. The dialogue was influenced by Wilde's teacher, Walter Pater, whose antirealism is again close to, though perhaps more extreme than, Simmel's here (see Pater, *The Renaissance* 1986 [1873]). Pater also shared Simmel's concern with the alleged differences between the "southern" (Italian/Romanesque) and the "northern" (Teutonic) aesthetic — see especially the first chapter of *The Renaissance*.

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