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Crisis of the Early Modern Period, Caravaggism, and the Rise of Gallery Painting

Kriza novog vijeka, karavađizam i uspon galerijske slike

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, the emergence of Caravaggist naturalism has been analyzed at the intersection of two historical configurations. The first was a macro-process, an epochal crisis that the Reformation brought with it. The Reformation turn caused a comprehensive crisis of legitimacy that manifested itself in all spheres of life in Western culture: from religion to politics and to the status of images. The most important element of this early modern paradigm was the gradual formation of a new episteme (or system of knowledge organization) that can be defined as postclassical or modern. The classical episteme implied a fixed, stable, and static relationship between images, i.e. phenomena and words, i.e. discourse. The modern episteme was the moment of disintegration of this static worldview, when the organic connection between things and words, the visible and the sayable, came into danger and even a complete discrepancy. The second process took place on the micro-level and was related to the social structuring of Rome at the end of the 16th century, when there was an obvious gap between the "official" policy of the Church and the taste of high aristocratic circles; from this structuring arose the difference between the "official" art of the Counter-Reformation (which nurtured the aesthetics of the altarpiece) and the "unofficial" art, intended for the art market and consumption in a semi-private or completely profane social setting. The once unquestionable space of religion was thus split into the "micro-spaces" of politics and art, with their own special systems of legitimization.

Keywords: image, painting, Reformation, scepticism, episteme, art market, politics, art

SAŽETAK

U ovom eseju pojava karavađovskog naturalizma analizirana je unutar presjeka dvaju povijesnih konfiguracija. Kao prvo, riječ je o procesu na makroplanu koji se tiče epohalne krize koju je sa sobom donijela reformacija. Zaokret reformacije donio je sveobuhvatnu krizu legitimnosti koja se manifestirala u svim sferama života u zapadnoj kulturi: od religije, preko politike, do statusa slika. Najvažniji element ove novovjekovne paradigme jest postupno formiranje nove episteme (ili sustava organizacije znanja) koju možemo odrediti kao postklasičnu ili novovjekovnu epistemu. Klasična je epistema podrazumijevala fiksni, stabilan i statičan odnos između slika, tj. fenomena i riječi, tj. diskursa. Novovjekovna epistema jest trenutak razgradnje ovog statičnog pogleda na svijet kada organska povezanost stvari i riječi, vidljivog i kazivog dolazi u opasnost, čak potpuni raskorak. Drugi proces tiče se mikroplana, odnosno društvene strukturiranosti Rima krajem 16. stoljeća kada očigledno dolazi do rascijepa između onoga što je bila „službena" politika Crkve i onoga što je bio ukus visokih aristokratskih krugova; iz ove strukturacije proizlazi razlika između „službene" umjetnosti protureformacije (koja je njegovala estetiku oltarne slike) i „neslužbene" umjetnosti a koja biva namijenjena umjetničkom tržištu i konzumiranju u poluprivatnom ili u potpunosti profanom društvenom okruženju. Nekada neupitni prostor religije sada biva rascijepljen na „mikroprostore" politike i umjetnosti sa svojim posebnim sustavima legitimizacije.

Ključne riječi: slika, reformacija, skepticizam, episteme, umjetničko tržište, politika, umjetnost

"The Cartesian idea of the human body as a human *non-closed*, open inasmuch as governed by thought – is perhaps the most profound idea of the union of the soul and the body."

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Crisis of the Early Modern Period

It is a commonplace in art history that the last decades of the 16th century saw a fundamental turn in the development of Italian art. The new epoch began in Bologna of the 1580s, where the Carraccis – Ludovico and his cousins Agostino and Annibale – founded their *Accademia degli Incamminati*; their coming to Rome, followed by the arrival of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, marked the end of Counter-Reformation mannerism as the dominant expression and established a new paradigm, which art historians refer to as Baroque. The Carraccis laid the foundations of what later became Baroque classicism, while Caravaggio, contrary to such "academic" principles, articulated a type of painting that broke with all hitherto known canons, thus laying the foundations of Baroque naturalism. These were, therefore, the two dominant concepts of painting in Italian art at the turn of the 17th century: classicist and naturalistic. The basic thesis of this essay is roughly as follows: Caravaggio, the Caravaggists, and their naturalistic concept of painting were one of the turning points in the development of Western art and a paradigmatic example of what can be considered the epochal crisis of sacral paintings and the accordant rise of profane ones. This epochal change that took place on the Italian Peninsula was a local reaction to historical processes coming from the north of Europe, the most important being the advance of the Reformation. The Reformation iconoclasm consistently "de-aurised" religious or cultic images, and set the ideological as well as institutional framework for the emergence of artistic images, i.e. images that were deprived of their religious functions. The Italian art of the late 16th century emerged as a reaction to this process – even in Counter-Reformation Italy, the sceptical crisis brought about by the Reformation opened up space for the birth of artistic in place of the former cultic paradigm. We will thus observe the emergence of Caravaggist naturalism at the intersection of two great ideological problems in the 16th-century Europe: the sceptical crisis on the one hand, and the birth of art in the age of art on the other. The sceptical crisis brought with it the birth of a radically new, one may even say modern concept of subjectivity in the true sense of the word (arising from the collapse of the former classical or Renaissance system of knowledge organization), while the birth of the age of art would materialize through the establishment of gallery (or easel) painting as the dominant medium in Western art (replacing the fresco painting).

We believe that the issue of scepticism is one of the central problems that enabled the birth of the so-called Early Modern Period: as such, scepticism is primarily about the criteria of cognition (or faith, which was the central concern in the 16th century) – it is a series of doubts about the possibility of certain and reliable knowledge.[1] This issue was raised in the 16th century by Martin Luther, who questioned the authority of the Catholic Church and thus opened a never-resolved crisis of the criteria of certain and correct faith. For Luther and the Reformers, the criterion of true faith was no longer the Church as an institution, but the individual reading of the Scripture (the principle of *sola fide*). This, however, opened up

an unsolvable problem: once the fundamental argument of faith (i.e. the authority of the Church as an institution) was called into question, on what basis could the understanding of faith and the Scripture, no longer supported by tradition or the institutionalized teaching of the Church, be considered as universally correct? Wasn't Luther's argument radical subjectivism that called into question any attempt to establish an absolutely correct faith? The Counter-Reformation argument started from the claim that Luther's intervention led to religious anarchy, as personal conscience was not a reliable criterion; precisely for this reason, the position of the Church as an institution should be accepted, because there was no other certain answer about the truthfulness of faith. However, in response to the Lutherans, the Catholic Counter-Reformation could only offer absolute institutional dogmatism – the Church teaching was claimed to be absolutely correct only because it was confirmed by the authority of that same Church. Thus, the end of the 16th century was marked by a conflict of two irreconcilable attitudes that extolled the self-affirming criterion of their own point of view, in which each side was able to show that the other did not have the "measure of faith," but neither succeeded in articulating an absolute criterion for its own position. We call this *crisis of the criteria* the sceptical crisis of the 16th century: in the following two centuries, it would raise some of the fundamental problems of the modern age – such as how to justify the basis of cognition. It was a crisis that soon, during the 17th century, spilled over from theology to science, where Galileo Galilei took centre stage, while with the advent of Descartes, the attempt to find a solution to the crisis of criteria would become one of the basic problems of modern philosophy.

The second problem, related to the first, has been referred to as the moment of birth of "art in the age of art." This thesis was articulated by the German art historian Hans Belting: art in our modern sense of the word arose from the crisis of cultic paintings, which again was brought about by the Reformation. Belting's thesis is that the entire history of Western art can be divided into two major, macrocultural epochs: the age of cult and the age of art. These two epochs generated two opposing *ontologies* of the image. The cultic image implies a theology of penance and redemption. As such, an authentic cultic painting possesses "supernatural" power – it is not only looked at, but also believed in. The cultic image relies on the eschatological argument (or criterion) of absolutely correct faith: the image is an *ars memoriae* (the art of memory), which means the past and future self-revelation of God in history.[2] The image is thus a symbol of past suffering, of what was, that is the source of Christian faith, and what will be through the revelation. Such an image "could not be contemplated at will but was acclaimed only in an act of solidarity with the community according to a prescribed program on an appointed day. This practice we identify as a *cult*."[3] The sceptical crisis of the 16th century, which we have briefly outlined, brought with it the crisis of the cultic image. As Belting points out, liberation from the old institutions was one of the most important motives of the Reformers, which turned them into radical opponents of cultic images. Luther saw in images only an instrument of association and didactics – images were still looked at, but they were no longer believed in. Thus deprived of their cultic aura, they were neither obliged to represent any Church institution nor capable of it – a typical manifestation of this being the decline of the votive donation of paintings. The cultic image was now replaced by the artistic one. The artistic image had a completely new *ontology*: it was attributed to the artist who treated it at his own discretion, and it was created according to the rules of art. It was a long process in which the medieval cultic image became the artwork of the modern period.

Bodies that (do not) mean something

Let us begin with one of Caravaggio's most famous paintings: *The Incredulity of St Thomas*, an oil on canvas that he painted in 1601-1602 (Fig. 1). The painting shows one of the most frequently depicted religious scenes in Western art, based on the Gospel of John: St Thomas was one of the apostles who missed the appearance of Christ after the resurrection. Expressing doubt in Christ's resurrection, St Thomas declared, according to the Bible: "Unless I see the nail marks on his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). A week later, Christ appeared and Thomas, touching his wounds, ceased to doubt. The parable ends with the words of Christ: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." (John 20:29) The scene occurs relatively frequently in Western art history, but its interpreters have noted that Caravaggio's depiction differs in many ways from the usual treatment of this biblical passage: Caravaggio's typical drama, an extreme chiaroscuro, lack of the characteristic halo above Christ's head and that of the apostle, and especially the accentuated corporeality of the scene, where the saint's rough fingers "penetrate" Christ's wound. It is obvious that the theme of the painting was the scepticism of St Thomas; of course, this implies religious scepticism and its overcoming through the discovery of "evidence" in order to return to faith. Nevertheless, we believe that Caravaggio's treatment of scepticism and his almost overemphasized portrayal of flesh are specific to the transition from the 16th to the 17th century and related to what can be defined as the beginning of the "crisis of legitimacy" in the modern age. This crisis does not simply refer to the disintegration of medieval eschatology and its replacement by the early modern ideas of rationality, science, or historical progress. The Early Modern Period was much more than mere secularization: it was a crisis of aprioristic categories that could ensure the foundation not only of religion, but also of human knowledge, history, and social relations.

Elsewhere, we have analysed this new historical constellation precisely with regard to scepticism. Our approach addressed the problems of the criteria of cognition, as criteria are the instance through which, with relative certainty, we identify objects, beings, other people, and the world as such. As the American philosopher Stanley Cavell points out, referring to Wittgenstein, epistemic criteria are not timeless, and they do not reflect once and forever given and established truths. On the contrary, criteria are historically variable, they are determined by what Wittgenstein called "life forms" and as such participate in the "flexible inflexibilities" of that life: they are resilient, but also open to change same as the broader patterns of human behaviour within which they exist.[4] Consequently, there is no external instance (the so-called universals) that would guarantee our consensus, our agreement in language – at any moment we must be prepared for the possibility that any claim of reciprocity in speech can be refuted. Behind the problem of scepticism, i.e. epistemic universals, lies a specific social constellation outlined by the Early Modern Period: within the classical, Christian-feudal historical constellation, social relations were mediated by "external" (that is, aprioristic) criteria (God, religion, tradition, ruler's absolutist authority, and so on). The Early Modern Period brought with it a crisis of these aprioristic criteria – scepticism, in its modern form, thus reflected the disintegration of the classical religious episteme and its absolutes (universals), and the formation of a new historical constellation: the system of the so-called social contract (in this regard, the sceptical crisis coincided with the establishment of a modern administrative state – in their early postulates, social contract theorists used this concept in defence of enlightened absolutism; this was the position of Montesquieu, or Hobbes). Our thesis is that Caravaggio, as the first truly modern artist, reflects this epochal "crisis of self-affirmation" brought about by the Reformation: it was a

1.
Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1601-1602, Sanssouci, Potsdam (source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Caravaggio_-_The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas.jpg)

Caravaggio, *Nevjerni Toma*, 1601.-1602., Sanssouci, Potsdam

disorder influenced by the rise of new science, the consistent weakening or displacement of God, and the modern legitimization of individual consent. In such epochal transformations, the pre-modern vision of an objective, hierarchical order was rejected because of the anxious attempt to establish knowledge, values, social norms, and even political systems through human agreements and consensuses: the *other* as an enigma and *I* as an enigma for the other, rather than just a relationship between *me* and God, was a problem that was, for the first time in the history of Western art, raised by Caravaggio's painting.

Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit have pointed out the issue of cognition and its connection with the representation of bodies in Caravaggio's gallery paintings and altarpieces in an original way. They have indicated two dominant motifs that appear recurrently in Caravaggio's paintings – the motif of decapitation and the motif of self-portrait. Both motifs raise the question of recognizing and reading the image, or the depicted body as a coherent system of meaning. Decapitation, for example, poses an insurmountable obstacle to a straightforward understanding of the image: a decapitated body is a radical annihilation of meaning, the definitive end of the *criteria* by which we could contemplate the mind of the person portrayed. It is a moment in which the head/face becomes unreadable and our knowledge of the other definitely fails. In this way, Bersani and Dutoit have analysed Caravaggio's (self-) portraits, such as the *Bacchino Malato* from 1593 or the *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* from 1593/94 (Fig. 2), arguing that behind the apparent exhibitionism, these por-

traits actually show opacity, relying on the tension between erotic calling and seduction on the one hand, and self-concealment, evasion, and withdrawal from the gaze of the other, i.e. the observer, on the other. In the *Bacchino*, there is a stark contrast between the direct gaze addressing the observer, which can be read as a kind of erotic "provocation", and the raised hand that seems to "block" the observer's gaze as if "closing" the body and rejecting the gaze (the painting can also be read as a hidden self-portrait, where the raised hand indicates holding the brush in the act of painting, and the artist's figure in seen in the mirror). Similar to this is the painting of the *Boy* (Fig. 2): it is impossible to fully assess whether the boy is offering the basket of fruit to the observer or withdrawing from him, whereby the move of holding up the basket can be read either as "opening", i.e. offering the contents of the basket, or as "closing", i.e. introverted hiding from the gaze of the observer standing in front of the painting. Thus, the body in Caravaggio's paintings becomes an enigma, a closed entity that suspends the two-directional nature of intersocial relations; Caravaggio's portraits of young men look at us, but at the same time they recede before our eyes. On Caravaggio's canvases, therefore, we encounter bodies that fail (or refuse) to be "bodies that mean something," that is, *expressive* bodies:

"What seems to interest Caravaggio more is a body at once presenting and withdrawing itself – a somewhat *enigmatic* body. The distinction between nonerotic and erotic address might be, not that the latter solicits greater intimacy or fewer barriers between persons, but rather that it solicits intimacy in order to block it with a secret. Erotic address is a self-reflexive move in which the subject addresses another so that it may enjoy narcissistically a secret to which the subject itself may have no other access. The subject performs a secret, which is not at all to say that he or she has any knowledge of it."[5]

Caravaggio's paintings thus seem to suspend the reciprocity of reading, while the image, like the bodies of the depicted characters, or the mind that the body is allegedly "hiding", becomes an enigmatic structure to "decipher", i.e. the painting becomes an epistemological challenge and a kind of "puzzle" that evades direct understanding.

In this regard, the American art historian Michael Fried has attributed to Caravaggio the discovery of one of the most important procedures in European post-Renaissance painting, which is absorption, and he has explicitly connected this procedure with the problem of scepticism. By absorption Fried means the depiction of tense attention, the absorption of the painted figures in what they do, be it reading, listening, sleeping, grieving, or thinking. The figures in Caravaggio's paintings are thus in a state of self-forgetting, *oubli de soi*, as they are complete immersed in the actions they perform. In addition to the aforementioned *St Thomas*, typical examples include Caravaggio's *Saint Jerome Writing*, shown in a moment of deep intellectual focus on his book (one should pay attention to details: what is Jerome looking at? One would expect at the text, but his gaze seems to be directed at some undefined space between his left wrist and his lower body – and we cannot help but get the impression that Jerome is actually *not looking* at his book at all, but that he is shown at the moment when he is separating from the text, as if collecting his thoughts in that brief moment between reading and noting down what he has read, whereby these thoughts, for us observers, are unreadable from his body), or the *Penitent Magdalene*, in which Caravaggio painted a sleeping young woman in a low chair, her head bowed, her eyes closed, and her hands folded in her lap – such an inexpressive procedure enhancing minimal physiognomic and gestural actions was in contrast to the hitherto prevalent way of depicting Magdalene, who was mostly painted in a sort of ecstatic penance: a typical example would be Titian's *Magdalene* from 1533, today at

2.
Caravaggio, *Boy with a Basket of Fruit,* 1593, Galleria Borghese, Rome (source: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boy_with_a_Basket_of_Fruit-Caravaggio_(1593).jpg)

Caravaggio, *Dječak s košarom voća*, 1593., Galleria Borghese, Rim

Pallazo Pitti. Fried has argued that Caravaggio, using the newly discovered process of absorption, sort of annihilated expression in his painting. Let us take as an example the *Crowning with Thorns* from 1604 or 1607 (Fig. 3): Fried focuses on Christ's facial expression (the resemblance to Christ's posture and face in *The Incredulity of St Thomas* is self-imposed here) and asks the question: is this an expression of pain and physical suffering? Or rather an expression of complete spiritual absence, spiritual emptiness, as if Christ had no "inner" life that would be manifested on his face? One should pay attention to the gaze of the male figure in the upper left corner: we would expect his gaze to be fixed on the back of Christ's head, on the spot where he is at-

3.
Caravaggio, *The Crowning with Thorns*, 1602/1604 or 1607, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Michelangelo_Merisi,_called_Caravaggio_-_The_Crowning_with_Thorns_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

Caravaggio, *Krunjenje trnovom krunom,* 1602./1604. ili 1607., Kunsthistorisches Museum, Beč

taching the crown of thorns with a bamboo stick; however, his gaze is lost in an undefined space between Christ's right shoulder and his neck. In this way, the gaze becomes "empty", suggesting a similar spiritual annihilation as Christ's gaze. The faces of the other men are hidden, so we can hardly determine any emotional relationship between the characters shown. The protagonists in this scene are reduced to isolated bodies; these bodies are not expressive bodies, but bodies "enclosed" in absorption:

"(...) the figures in those canvases, mere representations, manifestly 'have' no interiority of the sort actual persons do. It is as if the zero for 'Expression' that de Piles brilliantly awarded Caravaggio simultaneously suggests doubts about whether expressions ever actually do reveal anything about the feelings or states of mind they are supposedly expressing (...)"

Another, only slightly different way of framing the problem would be to say that the invention of absorption in Caravaggio's religious paintings of the late 1590s and early 1600s can be seen as in dialogue with the sceptical doubt that we can never know with certainty the contents of another person's mind."[6]

In other words, by using the effect of absorption, Caravaggio created a kind of discrepancy between the "hidden", "internal" mental life (private) and its external,

restrained, or completely annihilated manifestation (public), thus raising the problem of scepticism about the existence or cognition of another person's mind.

Monistic structure of the subject

We believe that Wittgenstein's aforementioned problematisation of linguistic criteria and the connection between these criteria and the body is a very suitable theoretical tool for interpreting and understanding Caravaggio's approach. Wittgenstein, in fact, writes:

"I can perhaps even imagine (though it is not easy) that each of the people I see in the street is in frightful pain, but is artfully concealing it. And it is important that I have to imagine artful concealment here. That I do not simply say to myself: 'Well, his soul is in pain: but what has that to do with his body?' Or: 'After all, it need not show in his body!'"[7]

This excerpt points to the following question: what is the limit of our understanding of the other, and thus of establishing a relationship or communication with the other? Wittgenstein's answer is – the body. The body is a screen, a barrier, a boundary, a *membrane* that prevents us from reaching the "interiority" of the other, that is – his soul; the body is the membrane because of which we are always in danger of failing in regard to what Wittgenstein calls the criterion of knowledge about another person's mind (i.e. his soul). In other words, there is no mental life that precedes or is independent of the body – our bodies are not vessels that carry the mind; instead, our mind is predetermined by the body, it is *in* the body. The modern subject is, therefore, not a dualism of soul and body, but a soul that is already *in* the body, the embodiment of a soul, a soul that is visible only and exclusively through the external criteria we see on the body. The body is the boundary of meaning and significance. Thus, meaning can even fail, as there is no interiority that can be known behind the body: we are either bodies that mean something, we master the art of self-expression, or we fail to be bodies that mean something, as we do not control the expressiveness of our bodies. Our bodies, like the bodies in Caravaggio's paintings, are psychognomic puzzles, exteriors that are read and that permanently fail to be read. Fried is definitely right when he says that Caravaggio's paintings articulate the sceptical suspicion that we can ever know with certainty the content of other people's minds (souls).

Caravaggio thus reflects the historical turn from the classical, dualistic treatment of the subject to the modern, monistic one. The extent to which this was a truly epochal turn also comes to light when comparing Caravaggio with the most important artists of the early 16th century, such as Michelangelo. As an example, we can take one of Caravaggio's central altarpieces: *The Calling of Saint Matthew* from 1599-1600 in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome (Fig. 4). It is a perfect example of the image as an epistemological challenge posed to the observer. The theme of the painting is the moment in which Christ calls on Saint Matthew to follow him. Matthew seems confused at first glance, at least if we assume that Matthew is the older man with a beard. However, we know from the Bible that Matthew was a young man, not a middle-aged one. So we have to ask ourselves: who is Matthew in the picture anyway? The older man with a beard in the centre of the painting or the young man leaning over a table, who seems to be counting coins and not noticing Christ at the door at all? No matter which solution we choose, it is obvious that it is *recognition* as such that Caravaggio's painting imposes as its central problem. The light in the painting comes from the right, apparently from a room (courtyard, street) from which Christ had just stepped in; he points his hand at Matthew, but

from the perspective of the persons sitting at the table, the upper half of his face and especially his eyes remain in the darkness, so they can hardly be certain about whom and what Christ is looking at. His calling thus seems to cause confusion rather than excitement, and we can imagine the man with a beard (Matthew?) asking "Who? Me?" and making a hand gesture that can be read as a gesture of confusion: who is he pointing at, him or the young man next to him (the *actual* Matthew)? Caravaggio does not show a moment of ecstasy, the culmination of a certain action, but the moment immediately *before* that. We know from the Bible that Matthew will recognize Christ and go with him, but this is *not* that moment: the moment shown is the one

4.
Caravaggio, *The Calling of St. Matthew*, 1599-1600, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome (source: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Calling_of_Saint_Matthew-Caravaggo_(1599-1600).jpg)

Caravaggio, *Pozivanje sv. Mateja,* 1600., San Luigi dei Francesi, Rim

when Christ is *not* yet recognized, when he is still only a stranger. The impression of non-recognition is further underlined with a few more details: first, the man in the foreground, with his back turned to us – what is he looking at? Apparently not at Christ, but at some happening behind his back (the commotion, the crowd?) in the space from which Christ has just stepped into the semi-darkened room. Christ is thus strangely displaced from the focus of the painting. His feet confirm that: one should pay attention to the completely contradictory logic of his posture, as his feet are turned to the right, opposite to the expected direction of his movement to the left, and the direction he is pointing in with his hand – is Christ entering or leaving the room? His whole demeanour seemed to reflect hesitation, uncertainty. That is why his gesture is unconvincing, insufficiently emphasized, confusing for the characters in the painting and for the observer in front of it. This confusion culminates in the movement of Christ's hand, which is gently arched – his pointed finger seems to lack strength and determination. Christ's gesture cannot be read otherwise than as "impotent", incapable of initiating action: as the reaction of the man with a beard ("Who? Me?") shows, Christ's hand gesture hardly suggests ecstasy or revelation.

It seems to us that the hand of Christ in *The Calling of St Matthew* is crucial to understanding the whole of Caravaggio's intervention and its *modernity*, i.e. an understanding of Christianity marked by an inability to resolve the sceptical crisis we have described in the introductory section. The hand, of course, is not Caravaggio's original solution, but rather a quote of perhaps the most famous hand in the history of art, that of Michelangelo's Adam in the vault of the Sistine Chapel. This is not the only time Caravaggio directly quoted Michelangelo, but the meaning of Michelangelo's and Caravaggio's hands, it seems to us, could not be more distant. We can even say that Caravaggio performed a kind of inversion, if not the negation of Michelangelo's hand. Michelangelo's hand of Adam was crucially defined by the Neoplatonic programme, which was especially strong in his native Florence.[8] The basis of this programme was laid out in the late 15th century by Marsilio Ficino, who took the Platonic idea of dualism of soul and body as a starting point: Florentine Neoplatonists built a complex theological-philosophical-mystical system that included even such radical ideas as rejecting the concept of Hell. For Ficino, matter as such produced evil and the material world was already a world of suffering and torment. Hence his division into the microcosm, as the world of matter or Nature, and the macrocosm, the world of ideas. Analogously, man was for him divided into the body (matter) and the soul (ideas). Ficino conceptualized this as a distinction between the *anima prima* (reproduction, nutrition) and the *anima secunda* (reason, spirit), i.e. between the world of action and the world of contemplation.[9] Whereas the world of matter is the world of sin, the world of ideas and contemplation is the world of the divine, the world of Christ. Man is a being that takes the path of transcendence from the earthly or sensory to the heavenly or Christian, from the body to a pure soul. It is in this context that one should understand the hand of Adam: he has faltered because he is still *only* a body. It is through his contact with the Creator that he becomes man, a body *with* a soul (or body *and* soul). The culmination of this is Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, again in the Sistine Chapel. The key to understanding the scene is his self-portrait: he portrayed himself to the right of Christ, in the hands of St Bartholomew holding his peeled skin. The face on the skin is Michelangelo's: he perceives himself in Neoplatonic terms – I am soul and body, *anima prima* and *anima secunda*, but my soul is finally leaving my decaying and sinful body to become one with Christ. Man transcends from the world of matter to the world of pure love. In this way, Michelangelo's hand of Adam reflects a still pre-modern view of the world: Christianity was going through a symbiosis with ancient pagan teachings, but this symbiosis was possible *only* because the very idea of Christianity, i.e. the *criteria*

of what was considered to be the absolutely correct faith, was still unquestioned. It was still an age unscathed by the sceptical crisis of the Reformation.

This world of stable values (i.e. criteria) and unquestionable eschatological authority experienced its epochal collapse at the time when Caravaggio painted his *Calling of St Matthew*: in Caravaggio, there is no dualism between the soul and the body in Christ's hand. The difference between Caravaggio's and Michelangelo's hands is therefore the difference between two concepts of the soul and two concepts of the subject: whereas Michelangelo's is still pre-modern, Caravaggio's is largely early modern, even – modern. It is at this point that another parallel can be established: that between Caravaggio's painting and Descartes' philosophy. Descartes' thought arose as a reaction to the sceptical crisis introduced by the Reformation – Descartes realized that the Reformation had triggered an unprecedented crisis of criteria regarding faith, which even the Catholic reaction could not settle. He realized that the anti-Reformation position (according to which the criterion of church teaching is absolutely correct only because it is confirmed by the authority of that same Church) is unsustainable. Therefore, Descartes' goal was to constitute a new philosophy that would come to undoubted truths, which would in turn confirm the existence of God. In other words, he sought for an absolutely certain *criterion* of the eschatological argument in the face of radical scepticism concerning the possibility of such an argument. He used sceptical argumentation in his approach, but only to put an absolute full stop on any possibility of sceptical doubt: Descartes articulated some kind of a negative method (senses that deceive me, uncertainty about whether I am dreaming or awake, the possibility that my senses are deceived by a demon) to finally come to what could not be disputed – pure reason. I know that I am because I think – I am a thinking thing, a thinking being; I think, therefore I am. This, however, is followed by one subtle detail: this thought, this pure reason does not exist in itself, on the contrary – reason is *in* the body. It is a matter of embodied rationality. In his sixth meditation, Descartes sets up a hypothetical situation: I hurt myself and feel pain, and my mind perceives this pain. If the mind were separated from the body, I would perceive this pain as some kind of an intellectual problem, with pure reason. But that is not the case: my mind is intertwined with the body, it is *one* with the body. There is no mind outside the body:

"By means of these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, nature also teaches not merely that I am present to my body in the way a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am most tightly joined and, so to speak, commingled with it, so much so that I and the body constitute one single thing. For if this were not the case, then I, who am only a thinking thing, would not sense pain when the body is injured; rather, I would perceive the wound by means of the pure intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight whether anything in his ship is broken. And when the body is in need of food or drink, I should understand this explicitly, instead of having confused sensations of hunger and thirst. For clearly these sensations of thirst, hunger, pain, and so on are nothing but certain confused modes of thinking arising from the union and, as it were, the commingling of the mind with the body."[10]

This makes it clear why religiosity marked by Neoplatonic dualisms, which defined Michelangelo's work, is unthinkable with Descartes or Caravaggio, and why neither Descartes nor Caravaggio can imagine Christian faith as a peeled skin in the hands of St Bartholomew, which the soul simply abandons ascending to Heaven. Also, thus we can better understand Caravaggio's paintings such as *The Incredulity of St Thomas*: how should we understand the saint's facial expression the moment he touches Christ's body, when he literally "penetrates" Christ's wound? Like some kind of shock, astonishment. But astonishment at what? That the risen Christ is *re-*

ally standing in front of him, of course. Thomas needs a material, bodily proof of Christ's resurrection. Apart from the body, there is no other evidence, and we should pay attention to Christ's face: just as on the face of the sleeping Magdalene, there is no expression on it, an expression that could be read. Christ is a body, and his soul remains visible only through his wounds. It is about the soul that is *in* and *on* the body. Hence, there seems to be something else in Thomas' astonishment: isn't it possible to read this astonishment as a shock at the realization that behind that material body, "on the other side" of that barrier, boundary, screen, or *membrane*, there is really – nothing?

Monistic structure of the image

Caravaggio, therefore, like Descartes, outlines a new age, which we have already identified as the Early Modern Period. We have indicated that it was an age of "disillusionment" with the world in terms of human knowledge, religion, law, and politics. To this we can add the "disillusionment" with images: it came when the legitimacy of Christian eschatology, under the onslaught of scepticism opened by the Reformation, came into question and a separation occurred: the legitimacy of theology became separated from the legitimacy of art. In the pre-modern age, the legitimacy of images relied on the legitimacy of faith, but from the 16th century onwards this was no longer the case. This is not to say that the legitimacy of art replaced the legitimacy of religion as many postmodernists believe, even Walter Benjamin, who in his most famous essay identified the aura of the work of art with a cult: according to Benjamin, the aura of artistic images is inseparable from the ritual function; therefore, for him, the work of art is a secularized ritual.[11] However, the modern age is not simply a secularization of the Middle Ages: B is not simply a secularized A, as if, for example, the modern working ethos were secularized monastic asceticism, the world revolution the secularized expectation of the Last Judgment, the president of a state a secularized monarch, and the artistic painting a secularized version of the cultic image. On the contrary, there is no historical symmetry between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period – modernity is a crisis of legitimacy *in toto*. As Hans Blumenberg writes:

"There is no historical symmetry according to which this worldliness would be, as it were, a disposition for the return of the Greeks' cosmos. The Renaissance was only the first misunderstanding of this sort, an attempt to forestall the new concept of reality that was making its entrance by interpreting is as the recurrence of a structure already experienced and manageable with familiar categories. The point is that 'the world' is not a constant whose reliability guarantees that in the historical process an original constitutive substance must come back to light, undisguised, as soon as the superimposed elements of theological derivation and specificity are cleared away."[12]

This process explains the nature of the 16th-century Counter-Reformation and its attitude towards the image: the Catholic Church wanted the unquestionability of the eschatological argument, but instead of this unquestionability it was able to offer only a rigid system of rules, i.e. ideological dogmatism. As Belting points out, the cultic painting practically disappeared in the process of transformation into an easel painting: the old cultic painting was replaced by the new work of art. This, of course, provoked a reaction by 16th-century Catholic theologians, expressed in the decisions of the Council of Trent that recognized this epochal rift between the cults on the one hand, now reserved for old paintings created before the age of art (in 1657, the Jesuits even compiled an "Atlas of the Virgin Mary" / "Marienatlas", a list of

miraculous images that included only 1,200 cultic paintings), and art on the other.[13] Precisely because of this, the Counter-Reformation felt the need to strictly control the artistic image by turning it into a form of propaganda. As the power of the cult weakened, attempts to secure a new type of aura for images intensified: the image became a means of gaining and controlling the parishioners. This policy, embodied in the system of rules that the art theory of the time defined as *decorum*, acquired, on the one hand, a distinctly defensive, and on the other a markedly militant character that had not existed at all in the Middle Ages. The Counter-Reformation was thus an age of division between the theological and profane legitimacy of images. These two systems of legitimacy were intertwined, but also at odds with each other. We can understand Caravaggio's painting precisely in terms of such an ideological "split": the artistic image could no longer be integrated into the cult image, as the subsumption of the artistic image under the cultic image always failed.

Decorum concerned the ability and obligation of the artist to present the appropriate age, sex, type, expression, and gesture of the painted characters in the right way; a picture made according to the rules of *decorum* was expected to evoke religious feelings and surpass the spoken or written word (contrary to what the Reformation claimed, which placed emphasis on the spoken word rather than a visual representation). The state of the soul was thus represented through bodily movements and facial expressions. Caravaggio's painting shows a permanent failure to fit completely into this principle of presenting persons as "clearly and faithfully" as possible, that is, to fit into the principles of the post-Tridentine *decorum*: it is well known that Caravaggio's paintings were rejected more than once by official church commissioners. These included the painting of *Saint Matthew and the Angel* from 1602, which was originally intended for the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome: Caravaggio was criticized for being too liberal in his interpretation of the subject, which probably referred to the overly intimate, non-hierarchic relationship between the saint and the angel, as well as his crude, overly plebeian portrayal of Matthew, who seems like an illiterate man from the masses. Caravaggio therefore made another version of the painting, which is still in the church today. His *Death of the Virgin*, made for the church of Santa Maria della Scala, met with a similar reaction because of ignoring the *decorum* (the representation was void of all "transcendental" elements indicating the divine nature of the scene, included apostles who could not be identified, the Virgin had soiled feet, there was again too much corporality, and so on), so it was never placed in the church. His *Madonna dei Palafrenieri* was in the church of St Peter for only two months before it was sold to Cardinal Scipio Borghese for his private collection, while his *Madonna di Loreto* in the church of San Agostino in Rome was repeatedly criticized for similar reasons as the *Death of the Virgin* (soiled feet, "vulgarity" of the scene), although it was not removed.[14] This kind of reticence about Caravaggio's ability to meet the rules of *decorum* was taken over by the later interpreters of his work: thus, Roger de Piles at the turn of the 18th century, relying on the rules of *decorum* as outlined by Charles Le Brun (art as an expression of the soul, which implied the artist's ability to show love, suffering, anger, jealousy, despair, etc. through his painting technique) in his treatise *Cours de peinture par principes avec un balance de peintres*, made a kind of "ranking list" of the most important artists of his time – and Caravaggio was awarded zero for his ability to present expression in his painted characters.

Failing in the sacral (cultic) sphere, however, obviously did not imply failing in a profane context (art); one can even say that Caravaggio adapted his painting to the system of legitimacy of profane, that is, artistic paintings. Upon his arrival in Rome, he first became an assistant to Cavaliere d'Arpino who, along with Federico Zuccari and Pomarancio, was a leading painter of genre scenes, cabinet paintings of moder-

ate dimensions intended for private collections. In the 1590s, a major change in the art of Rome was brought about by the northern painter Jan Brueghel, who was a specialist in miniature paintings of flowers and landscapes. Cardinal Federico Borromeo, patron of the Academy of St Luke and the first owner of Caravaggio's only known still life, was a great admirer of Brueghel's work, with dozens of his paintings in his private collection.[15] The same can be said for the greatest patron and buyer of Caravaggio's works, Cardinal Francesco del Monte: all this suggests great changes in taste in the Roman art world of the 1590s, which led to the rise of cabinet or gallery painting. The end of the century thus saw a surge of hedonistic intellectualism and the appearance of new connoisseurs: Caravaggio was close to such an intellectual circle, the *Accademia degli Insensati*, a group of intellectuals who sought transcendent and divine experiences through sensory stimuli. The circle included the poets Torquato Tasso, Aurelio Orsi, Giovanni Battista Lauri, and even Maffeo Barberini, the future Pope Urban VIII: these poets primarily celebrated the artists' ability to portray sensory reality. This was the intellectual climate that fostered Caravaggio's naturalism and thus, responding to the demands and tastes of del Monte's surroundings, completely independent of the expectations of "official" church art, he positioned himself "on the side of the new men of science, rejecting tradition and basing his work on nature alone. He (...) was convinced that for painters truth lay in the rendering of the tangible world (he would have included the subjective emotions in his definition of the tangible)."[16]

Even his later, religious painting was marked by the profane tastes of the Roman high circles of the time rather than the official doctrine of the Counter-Reformation, and the commissions he received from the Church were relatively few; the main ones were private, coming from the Roman patricians who ordered altarpieces for their family chapels. The system of legitimacy that served Caravaggio as a guideline was not that of cult, but that of *taste*: it was obviously more important to him to make a *convincing* image than a *correct* one. There was thus a discrepancy between cultic and artistic images, the epochal impossibility to subsume the artistic image under the cultic one. As Luigi Salerno points out on the example of Caravaggio's abovementioned *Madonna dei Palafrenieri*:

"The 'cardinali della fabbrica' of St Peter's ordered the *Madonna dei Palafrenieri* removed within a few days after its installation; it was initially transferred to the church of Sant'Anna dei Palafrenieri, and then, having been definitely rejected by the Arciconfraternita, it was sold on June 14, 1606, to Cardinal Scipione Borghese. The following year, the pope granted Scipione Borghese paintings sequestered from the Cavaliere d'Arpino, among which were a number of early works by Caravaggio. Thus, it is clear that there existed two distinct standards for judging paintings, by which those deemed unsuitable for public display might nonetheless be highly valued for a private collection."[17]

The same author cites a few details that are not insignificant to our thesis: for example, painter Giovanni Baglione is known to have said that Caravaggio was "paid more for his individual figures than others for history paintings" by his private clients; but then again, he seems to have been underpaid for his altarpieces, commissioned by the Church: for *Saint Matthew* (who was rejected, so he had to make another version) he received 150 scudi, and for the *Madonna dei Palafrenieri* (likewise rejected) only 75 scudi (for comparison, according to a preserved comment by Eleonora Gonzaga, Duchess of Mantua, Rubens estimated a painting by Pomarancio at 400 gold scudi). These data clearly indicate the formation of an art market that led to a kind of "specialization": being a successful gallery painter obviously did not mean being a successful painter of church images.

In any case, the new gallery painting, intended in advance for private collections, was now a *skilfully* made painting: it was admired for its mastery, skill, and "beauty" of workmanship, and not for the religious message it carried. It is in this sense that one should understand the previously explained emphasized effect of corporeality and tactility that Caravaggio's naturalism brought with it – the goal of ambitious painting was now to evoke the effect of *sensuality* and sensory (instead of religious) experience. This resulted in a completely new concept of the image. The American art historian Sydney Freedberg shows this excellently when analysing Caravaggio's paintings such as *Saint John the Baptist* from 1602 or his *Amor Vincit Omnia* from 1601/02 (both paintings are again quite obvious quotations of Michelangelo and his *Ignudi* from the vault of the Sistine Chapel). According to Freedberg, the basic problem that Caravaggio strove to solve was portraying the sensual, the physical, rather than the intellectual; and that was where Caravaggio's naturalism most consistently parted from Michelangelo's classicism (as well as the Baroque classicism of the Carracci brothers). Freedberg's interpretation of *Saint John* is worth quoting in a longer excerpt:

"We have a context now for Caravaggio's *St. John*, and the first consideration that the image impresses on us in this context is that the figure has been seen by Caravaggio apparently without the intervention of any of the traditional idealities. Caravaggio seems indeed to have selected his model in defiance of the requirements of idealism, and he has willed to present him physically and psychologically in a way that makes him in the most extreme degree actual – immediate, literally without any intermediary between the model-image and ourselves. Caravaggio's apprehension of the model's presence seems unimpeded in the least degree by any intervention of the intellect or by those conventions of aesthetic or of ethic that the intellect invents. The image Caravaggio presents to us is essentially the sensuous perception of a physical fact (...)

The real theme is not a narrative, an allegory, or an emblem; it is a presence, and the meaning of the presence is the sheer sensory experience of it and the emotions this experience is meant to generate. (...)

There is no precedent for this degree either of intensity or directness in any prior art. The seeing impelled by this intensity grasps its object and experiences it as if at highest speed, giving the effect of an instantaneous apprehension of the whole. The act of apprehension is including and integral, a unity as well as an instantaneity; and in this apprehension optical and tactile experience – or, more precisely, the sense in the mind of tactile experience – have been fused, reinforcing one another, absolutely interpenetrating, to make an effect which far exceeds that of either kind of experience by itself."[18]

The difference between Michelangelo's classical and Caravaggio's naturalistic painting can thus be thought of within a series of binary antinomies. The classical image tends to narrativity and allegory; the naturalistic one strives for an optical and tactile experience. The model for classical painting was rhetoric, which took on hyperbolic dimensions in the Baroque context; naturalistic painting was anti-rhetorical, non-verbal, it was even a negation or antithesis of the rhetorical *affetto*. Classical painting strove for the ideal; naturalist painting insisted on the everyday – the artist's goal was not only to portray the world realistically, but also to show the ordinary (*popolano*) in the world. Classical painting insisted on continuity with the tradition, as it depended on respect for the canon; naturalistic painting abandoned the tradition and rejected the established canons. Classical painting was intellectual (and as such needed a theory of art based on rhetoric – the Counter-Reformation Baroque only continued this tradition with its *decorum* principles; naturalistic painting was

sensory, tactile (and as such non-theoretical: there is classical, but no Caravaggist theory of art). From all this we can draw our final conclusion: the structure of classical painting is dual, while the structure of the Caravaggist painting is monistic. The notion of dual structure in painting has been borrowed here from the French philosopher Jacques Rancière and his description of the "mimetic regime of art," whereby the term "mimetic" does not indicate some sort of resemblance between the image and an objectively given reality, but rather a specific system of relations between what is visible and what is sayable, a mutually exchangeable relationship between images and words. This relationship is best articulated through the classical principle of *Ut pictura poesis* – painting and poetry, images and words are interconnected and can even be translated from one to another. By their description, images evoke something that is visible – things, objects, people and their actions; words, in turn, evoke what is not visible – ideas. The dual nature of the classical image thus ensures a stable relationship between the visible and the invisible – for example, between an emotion and the linguistic trope that expresses it (which is the basis of the *decorum* thesis).[19] Caravaggio's naturalistic painting, however, deviates from Rancière's mimetic regime of art because it violates the reciprocity of image and word; that is, it abandons the dual nature of classical painting. That is why Roger de Piles failed to recognize expression in Caravaggio's painting and assigned him zero in his "ranking list" of artists – this zero indicates the non-reciprocity between the image and the linguistic tropes, a departure from the dual structure of the classical ideal; therefore, we have put forward the thesis that the bodies in Caravaggio's paintings are bodies that fail or refuse to be expressive bodies, bodies that "mean something." De Piles, as a man of the late 17th century shaped by the principles of Le Brun's classicism, perfectly recognized an image that failed in the rhetorical *affetto*. Caravaggism thus, through an emphasis on the sensual and the corporal rather than the intellectual, again heralds Descartes' (anti)scepticism and his thoughts on the problem of the incarnation of the soul. Caravaggio's painting is like Descartes' *meum corpus* – monistic.

A note on the Caravaggists

Let us summarize: in this essay, we have contextualized the emergence of naturalism at the intersection of two historical configurations. First, it was a macroprocess related to the epochal crisis that the Reformation brought with it. The Reformation turn caused a comprehensive crisis of legitimacy, which manifested itself in all spheres of life in Western culture: from religion, through politics, to the status of images. The most important element of this early modern paradigm was the gradual formation of a new episteme (or system of knowledge organization) that can be defined as postclassical or modern. The classical episteme implied a fixed, stable, and static relationship between images, i.e. phenomena, and words, i.e. discourse. The modern episteme was a moment of disintegration of this static worldview, when the organic link between things and words, the visible and the sayable, came into danger and even a complete discrepancy. The second process happened on the micro-level and concerned the social structure of Rome in the late 16th century, when there was an obvious split between the "official" policy of the Church and the tastes of high aristocratic circles; this structure resulted in the difference between the "official" art of the Counter-Reformation (which nurtured the aesthetics of the altarpiece), and the "unofficial" art, intended for the art market and consumption in a semi-private or completely profane social setting. The once unquestionable space of religion was now split into the "microspaces" of politics and art with their own, specific systems of legitimization. Thus, (1) the sceptical

rift that led to the transition from classical dualism (with which the dual concept of the Renaissance image was associated) to Cartesian monism (with which the Caravaggist, naturalistic concept of the image was associated), and then (2) the gradual formation of an art market that was independent of the official policy of the Counter-Reformation, led to the historical consolidation of a format that had existed before, but had until Caravaggio's time been of secondary importance – the gallery (or easel) painting.

Solving the problems that came with producing a gallery painting (rather than an altarpiece or a fresco) is what Michael Fried recognizes in the work of Caravaggist painters from the first half of the 17th century, such as Bartolomeo Manfredi and Cecco del Caravaggio, the French Valentin de Boulogne, Nicolas Régnier, Nicolas Tournier, and Simon Vouet, and the Spaniard Jusepe de Ribera (all residing in Rome at the turn of the century), who continued Caravaggio's turn. There is no room here to analyze these interesting and challenging painting oeuvres in detail; suffice it to say that this group of painters, in the true sense of the word, formed a new genre that, along with the already prominent Baroque classicism of the Carraccis and the artists close to them, would remain the dominant current in Roman art until the 1630s. This genre is recognizable first and foremost at the level of iconography – Caravaggio's former religious themes mostly disappeared, and the new painters, guided by the demands of the art market, took over his secular motifs: card players, fortune tellers, musicians. These are almost regularly landscape-format paintings, with figures in two-thirds length shown in a limited number of actions, in extreme chiaroscuro. However, what is more important than iconography is the fact that these painters treated the painting in a special way: as an object, unique in relation to all other objects in the world – a framed canvas of limited dimensions that would be hung on the wall and accessible to observers in conditions that were considered ideal at the time. Fried's thesis is worth stating here in a longer excerpt:

"Such a picture, therefore, could count on being looked at closely by men of taste who prided themselves on being able to discern artistic quality; but precisely because that was the case, it was also faced with the need to establish by virtue of its forcefulness or refinement – ideally, both – a distinctive and authoritative 'presence' on the gallery wall. At least as far as Rome was concerned, I understand this as a recent development. It also marked a difference from the norms of the High Renaissance, the greatest Roman monuments of which were fresco projects on the walls and ceilings of important buildings (Raphael's *Stanze* and Farnesina decorations and Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel being epitomes of this). The decline of the art of painting in Rome and other central Italian cities as the sixteenth century wore on largely involved the failure of decorative painting in fresco to match or even to approach the artistic standards set by the earlier masters.

This did not mean that the emergence of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century gallery picture was not in its own way fraught with difficulties, the key issue it had continually to resolve being whether oil paintings of limited dimensions, more often than not depicting figures not shown in their full height, could possibly rival in force or importance – in pictorial authority – the earlier canonical achievements by arguably the greatest painters who had ever lived. Gallery pictures, moreover, unlike the famous High Renaissance altarpieces by Fra Bartolommeo, Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, Correggio, Bellini, Titian, and others, no longer had the support of a traditional religious setting; rather, even when the subject matter was religious, their conditions of viewing were essentially secular, as they competed for admiration in wealthy and sophisticated men's spaces with paintings by other masters who were just as favorably exhibited and illuminated."[20]

In other words, the problem that the Caravaggist artists were trying to solve was how to attract the viewer in front of the painting (keep his gaze both by the theme and by the pictorial effect) and constitute the painting as an autonomous whole (separate it from the environment and make it a self-sufficient entity). This was a process started by Caravaggio and consolidated by the Caravaggists.

Caravaggism as a genre disappeared by the end of the 1630s and was replaced by monumental, illusionist Counter-Reformation Baroque (e.g. Pietro da Cortona) and by monumental Baroque Classicism (e.g. at the time of Louis XIV). An analysis of the reasons for the predominance of classicism over Caravaggism goes beyond the scope of this essay, but some of them can be briefly indicated: the 17th century was the time of the creation of the first states in the modern sense and the rise of the ideology of enlightened absolutism; and classicism, through its reference to rhetoric, proved to be a good means of visually articulating this ideology. In this process, it gained more than a solid institutional foundation, becoming the basis for the then emerging art academies, which developed a theory of art in parallel. Caravaggism never had such an infrastructural basis, and with the change of tastes of the high social circles, the Caravaggists disappeared as well. Nicholas Poussin's statement that Caravaggio came to destroy painting would be remembered in art history. However, the fact remains that Poussin, like most great classicists after him, did not paint frescoes, but – easel paintings. Therein lies the epochal meaning of Caravaggio and Caravaggism: their turn secured a hegemonic position to a once marginal format. In Western culture, gallery painting would come to retain this position until the mid-20th century.

NOTES

[1] RICHARD POPKIN, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.

[2] HANS BELTING, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10.

[3] Ibid, 13.

[4] NIKOLA DEDIĆ, *Između dela i predmeta: Majkl Frid i Stenli Kavel između moderne i savremene umetnosti* [Between artwork and object: Michael Fried and Stanley Cavell between modern and contemporary art] (Belgrade: Faculty of Media and Communications, 2017).

[5] LEO BERSANI and ULYSSE DUTOIT, *Caravaggio's Secrets* (London and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 9.

[6] MICHAEL FRIED, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 103.

[7] LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations* I, 391, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 119.

[8] ERWIN PANOFSKY, "The Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo," in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Icon Editions, 1972), 171-231.

[9] Cf. STEPHEN CLUCAS, PETER J. FORSHAW, and VALERY REES (eds.), *Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and His Influence* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011).

[10] RENÉ DESCARTES, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 98.

[11] WALTER BENJAMIN, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217-251.

[12] HANS BLUMENBERG, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (London and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 8.

[13] Belting cites the extraordinary early 17th-century example of Rubens's *Madonna Mercy* made for the Roman church of Chiesa Nuova. There was an older cultic image of the Virgin in the church, which had been venerated since the first half of the 16th century, and the Oratorians ordered a new altarpiece from Rubens, which was to integrate the older image of the Virgin. The result was as follows: Rubens produced a monumental painting depicting the open sky from which a group of angels lowered the image of the Virgin in an oval frame. The angels held the portrait of the Virgin with a mechanism built into the painting: during important church holidays, Rubens' portrait of the Virgin would be raised by the mechanism and the older, cultic image would appear in the oval frame. The entire painting by Rubens was thus only a frame for the older, cultic image below it, which was hidden most of the time. The two depictions had different ontological statuses: the older depiction of the Virgin belonged to the level of the cult and as such did not always have to be exposed to the view of the faithful. That older image was believed in – it was an object of donations and kissing. Rubens' painting belonged to the level of art – it was a *decoration* for the cultic painting; therefore, it was looked at, but not believed in; it was admired for the skill with which it was made, but it did not have the power to be a "miraculous", cultic image. This is a perfect example of the pictorial schism that was definitely articulated in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, even in Catholic Italy: paintings no longer had the power to become the subject of public cult. HANS BELTING (as in n. 2), 486-488.

[14] For a detailed discussion, see the chapter on the "most famous painter" in CATHERINE PUGLISI, *Caravaggio* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998).

[15] LUIGI SALERNO, "The Roman World of Caravaggio: His Admirers and Patrons," in *The Age of Caravaggio* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Milan: Electra Editrice 1985), 17-21.

[16] Ibid, 19.

[17] Ibid, 20.

[18] S. J. FREEDBERG, *Circa 1600: A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983), 53-54.

[19] JACQUES RANCIÈRE, *The Future of the Image*, trans. and ed. Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 12.

[20] MICHAEL FRIED, *After Caravaggio* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 78.