of creativity into mothering a text would harm the child. On these matters, see the excellent essay by Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Writing and Motherhood," in Shirley N. Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether, eds., *The M(other) Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), 352–77.

20. Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Oeuvres complètes,* ed. E. Réaume and F. de Caussade, 6 vols. (Paris, 1873–92), 1:122, 4:15–27.
21. "Recit de la Maizon et origine des des Gouttes," Archives d'Etat de Genève, fol. 19^{r-v}.
22. *Le Livre de Raison de Montaigne sur l'Ephemeris historica de Beuther,* ed. Jean Marchand (Paris, 1948); Montaigne, *Essais,* book 1, chap. 35, 221.
23. Ibid., book 2, chap. 8, 382.
24. On incest as a sin against charity, see Augustine *The City of God* 15.16; Emond Auger, *Discours du saint sacrement de mariage,* book 2 (Paris, 1572), fol. 38^r; Davis, "Ghosts, Kin and Progeny," 100–103.
25. Montaigne, *Essais,* book 2, chap. 8, 383.
26. On Montaigne's considering repenting of his imaginary donation to his imaginary sons, see ibid., 372. On the law for the revocation of donations because of ingratitude, see Ricard, *Donations,* vol. 1, part 3, chap. 6. I discuss the general question of books as gifts in Natalie Zemon Davis, "Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 5th ser., 33 (1983): 69–88. Steven Rendell shows how Montaigne's use of the metaphor of "mortgaging" his text in his essay "De la vanité" (book 2, chap. 9) makes it impossible for the author to reclaim his text before he dies; "Montaigne Under the Sign of *Fama*," *Yale French Studies* 66 (1984): 156–58.
27. Compagnon, *Nous Michel de Montaigne,* 215ff.

MICHAEL BAXANDALL

Art, Society, and the Bouguer Principle

THIS PAPER IS REALLY THE ACCOUNT of a failure, an inability to finish some years ago an article I wanted to write on Ambrogio Lorenzetti's picture of "Good Government"—the title is modern—in the town hall at Siena. (The fresco of Good Government in action, painted 1338–40 [figs. 1 and 2], covers one of three available walls in the Council Room of the Nine, who were the city's chief magistrates. On the other two walls are firstly an Aristotelian allegory of Good Government in principle, which I shall not discuss, and secondly a ruined fresco of the allegory and action of Bad Government, this being too damaged to make very much of, except iconographically and broadly compositionally.)

Partly because in ways I do not have time to describe there was in Siena a tradition of social and political utilization of painting, but mainly because here

was a case of art directly and explicitly addressing society, it seemed to me that the picture offered an opportunity to study the direct pictorialization, so to speak, of social facts. By pictorialization I mean the deployment of the resources of the medium—the ordering of color, tone, edge, and figure—not just the bare registration of a subject matter. From this, it seemed to me, one might be able to get a better foundation for one's view of mediated social meaning in early Renaissance painting generally.

What I am going to say now falls into two parts. The first lists briefly and crudely a handful of observations about pictorial peculiarities of the painting that seem to me to demand explanation, and then summarizes the artistic and social facts with which I hoped to explain them. The second is a comment on the general problem that most discouraged me from finishing the article in which I would have done so.

I

1) First, a list of some pictorial peculiarities, the desire to explain which is the starting point.

One peculiarity is the girls dancing in the city square. They are sometimes taken to be ordinary lighthearted late-medieval people, on the same level of reality as the craftsmen and so on around. This will not do. They are anomalously big in scale. The other people take no notice of them. There is a subtle shift in their color gamut. Girls of a class to wear this kind of dress did not behave like this in Sienese public squares in 1340.

A second peculiarity is the city wall in the center—as has often been pointed out, a conspicuous piece of virtuoso foreshortening. But what, quite, is its role in the structural totality of the picture?

A third striking thing is the extraordinary and precocious maturity of the famous landscape on the right, specifically the success with which such a vast affair is articulated into one whole.

A fourth thing is a component of the landscape—the hills, again famous, in the background. These seem to have broken right away from the more usual spiky mountain formulas of the time. They seem precociously modern representations of a kind of hill one sees often enough in Tuscany.

A fifth and general thing is the assertiveness and emphasis with which the two halves of the picture are balanced—the foreshortened wall acting rather like the pivot on a pair of scales. Each half is an independent composition in depth, but they work as a resonant pair. For instance, if one takes the houses of the city and the hills of the country not for their representational character in depth but for their character in the pattern on the picture plane, they are one of a number of half rhymes between city and country.
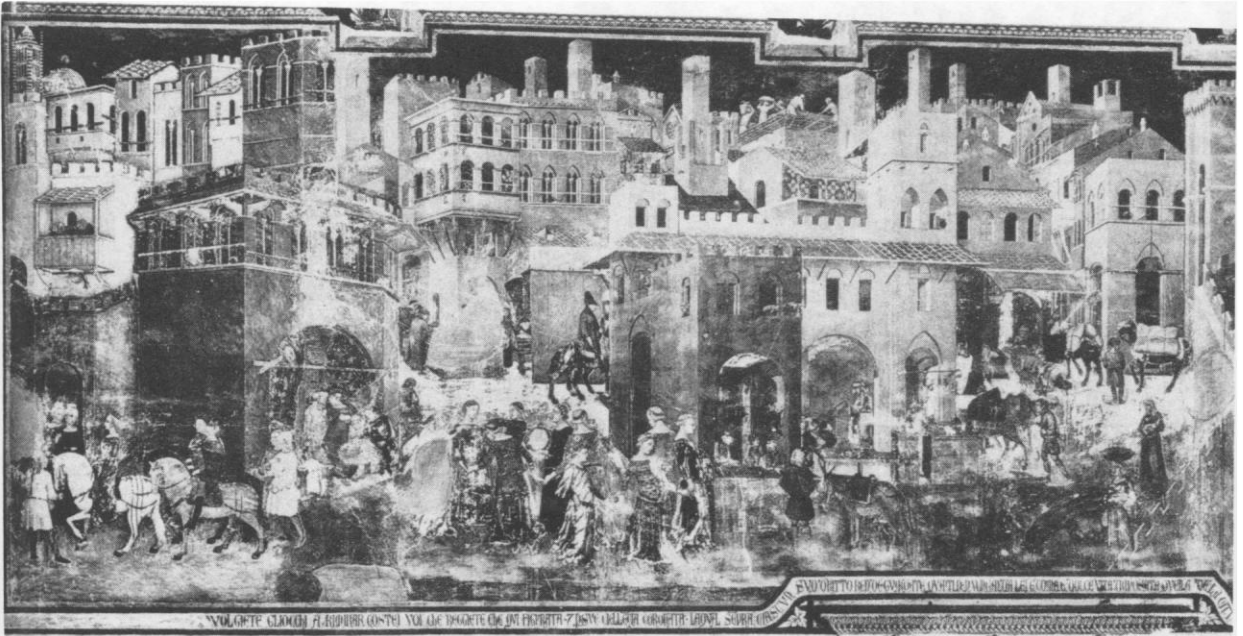
There were a number of other peculiarities I wanted to explain, but these will do representatively for my present purpose. They represent types. It is from pictorial peculiarity one starts.

2) But when one thinks about explaining them, it seems one cannot go straight to the social facts. Initially, one has to place them in an art-historical way.

The dancing girls, first, have been set in a rather fragmentary tradition of dancing figures associated with Justice. There are dancing figures beneath Giotto's grisaille figure of Justice in the Scrovegni Chapel at Padua—not quite a symbol but a sort of attribute. In Lorenzetti's city they represent Justice with structural effect; for Justice they act to unify the central visual effect of the city, with their semi-round dance and their bringing in, as it were, of different parts of the city by their different directions of movement and address. They are a structurally internalized attribute. (But is it as simple as that? Could they also be at the heart of a centrifugal order?)

Secondly, the foreshortened city wall belongs in a tradition of displays of foreshortening as a token of skill. Later, in the next century, this became the highly mathematical and therefore intellectually prestigious systematic perspective constructions of painters like Uccello, still exhibitions of skill, particularly in foreshortened views—but from classical antiquity empirical foreshortenings had been signs of skill. This does not say what its role is here: that pends.

Thirdly, the landscape. Seen historically it is a prodigy of large-scale articulation. There is a view that its components—the working peasants and so on—

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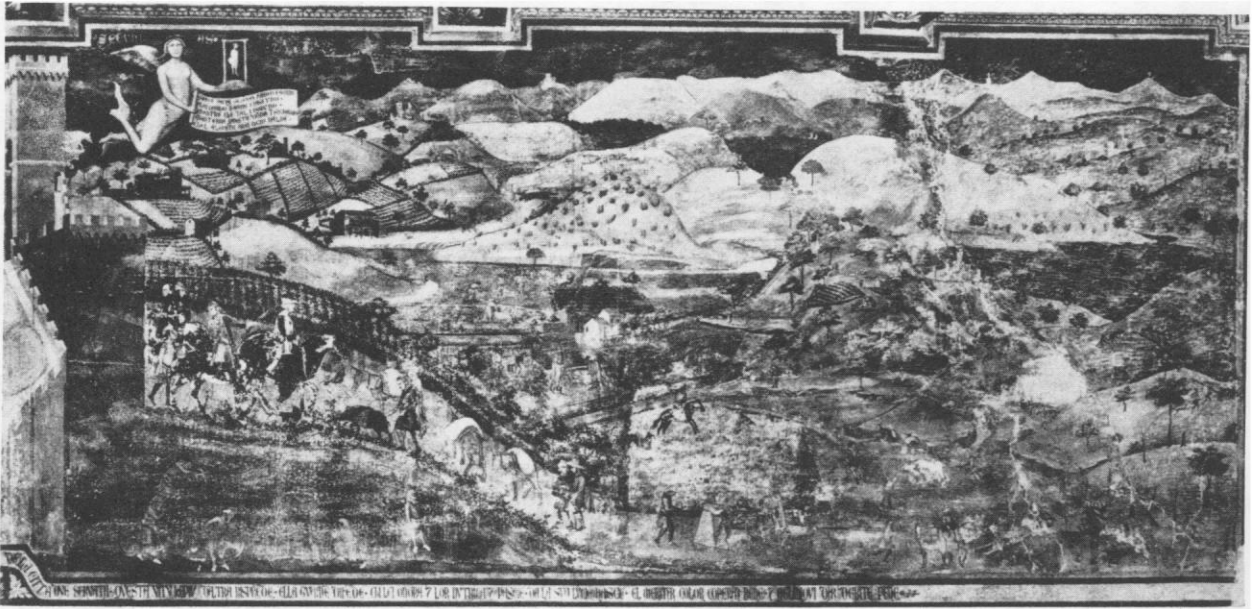
FIGURES 1 (*opposite*) and 2. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Good Government in the City* and *Good Government in the Country*, 1338–40. Palazzo del Comune, Siena. From George Rowley, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, vol. 2 (Princeton, 1958), plates 157, 159.

are drawn from northern book illumination. I would have argued that they come, rather, out of a native Tuscan tradition of what can be called municipal imagery—illustrations found in city statutes or charters and in personal records of merchants and such (figs. 3 and 4). This class of imagery accounts for the components, but not for their organization—which again pends.

Fourthly, the hills. They are awkward to deal with: the picture was heavily restored in 1880, and I suspect that they did not originally look quite as like early Corot landscapes as they do now. But what I would argue here is that, seen historically, they are not "modern" for 1340—it was precisely the spiky crags that were that—but, rather, retrospective. In my view they look back to and develop the hill types of such thirteenth-century Sienese painters as Guido da Siena (fig. 5). And I wonder what such retrospection indicates.

Fifthly and lastly, the emphasis on balance between town and country. An obvious point to make here, I think, is that the assertiveness of the balance is partly explicable by format and site. I mean that in the room in Siena one is never far enough away from the picture to see the whole simultaneously straight on, as one deceptively sees it in slides and reproductions. At any moment, any stance, one sees part of the fresco rather end on and rather from below. So the

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assertiveness is partly explicable as a device to counter the conditions of viewing. But the *motif* of balance—which is denied, by the way, in the fresco of Bad Government—is still there, and offers itself for explanation.

3) Now, when one goes after the social facts to match with these five pictorial peculiarities, what one finds is certainly not a set of positive circumstances to be seen as directly registered in them. After a respectable amount of reading in Sienese social history the facts that seemed to me most to the point were, in outline, these: the administration that commissioned the picture from Lorenzetti was a high-burgess mercantile oligarchy. The personal economic base of these men was long-distance trade in manufactures and commodities, and the banking operations associated with it. But the conditions in which they might govern to their advantage were complex. One factor was dependence on the skills and good will of the city's craftsmen, who processed commodities into goods mercantile folk traded in.

Another factor was the violently centrifugal and fissile and factional nature of the city's social composition generally. There were threats from the small-craftsman class below and also from noble magnates above. But, as in many Italian cities, there was, in addition to strife between social classes vertically considered, also strife more horizontally between clans. And Siena had a quite particular factional problem related to the physical layout of the city (fig. 6)—strife between quarters or *terzi*, thirds, in which different clans tended to concentrate.

Then there was another problem. In the fourteenth century, Sienese history is very much a matter of difficulties with its rural territory. There was one kind of problem with subject towns—an aspect of the territory to which the fresco refers little. There was another kind of problem with the peasants, who were restive and resistant. It was not just that the city's food supplies and tax revenues were endangered by the latter. Unrest disrupted trade and commerce. Sienese trade depended partly on both commodities and goods from the north passing through on the road to Rome and the south. They did not have to pass that way: there were other possible routes. Rural unrest added to other, external, economic shifts involving the whole character of the European textile trade, in particular, threatened the trade on which mercantile Siena depended.

So the city had problems. It would not be surprising if there was a tendency to refer back nostalgically to the brave old days of the previous century, when Siena was prosperous and united enough to go out and defeat the rival Florentines on the battlefield—carrying as a totem, by the way, a painting of the Virgin Mary, titular queen of the city, which acted miraculously on events.

4) By now it will be obvious what sort of line my account of the social facts related to the pictorial peculiarities wanted to follow, and I shall not drag things out. In caricature, it would have matched the unifying function of Justice's dancing girls in the tidily round city with centrifugal and quartered (or thirded) Siena's urgent need for social cohesion in the urban sector of the state.
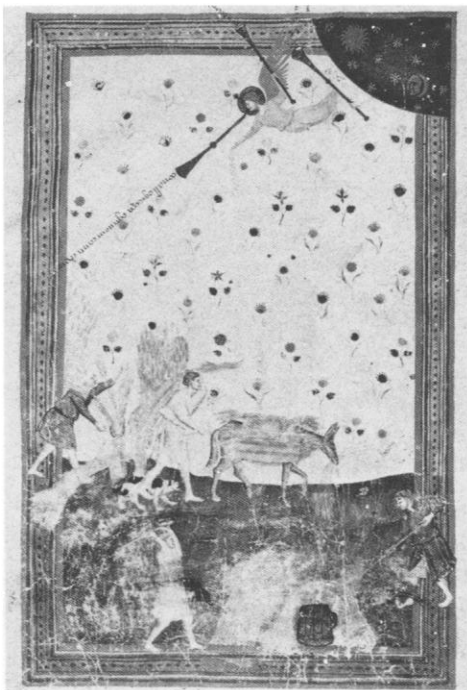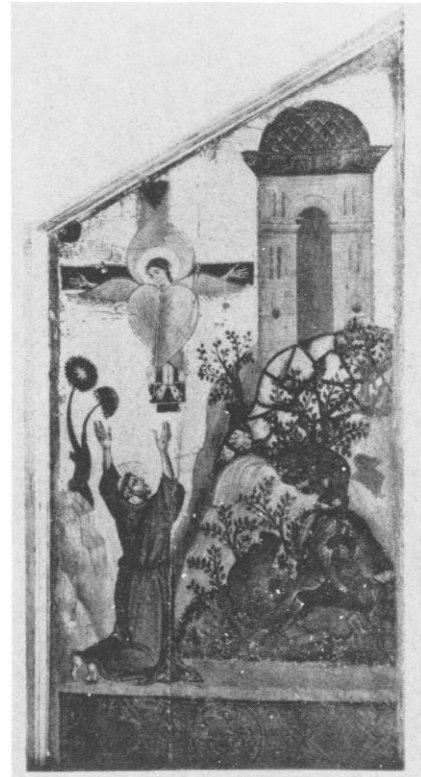
FIGURE 3 *(above, left)*. Road menders, from *Breve Pisani Communis* (1303–14), book 4, *De via burgi et aliis*. Archivio di Stato, Pisa, Com. A. N. 4, fol. 394r. Photo: museum.

FIGURE 4 *(opposite)*. Good harvest, from Domenico Lenzi, *Specchio umano* or *Biadaiolo* (c. 1340–50). Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence, Tempi 3, fol. 6v. Photo: museum.

FIGURE 5 *(above)*. Guida da Siena, detail of reliquary doors with the stigmatization of Saint Francis, c. 1260. Pinacoteca, Siena. Photo: Alinari.

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The foreshortened city wall, secondly, lent itself to exposition as something multivalent—the attention is drawn to the center of balance; the city's true protection lies in craft skill (here exemplified); the security of city from country is perhaps a matter of illusion (like this foreshortening); and so on—an enjoyable section to write.

Then the landscape is articulated by a sense of territory being something that produces food—in the year the picture was started there was a serious grain shortage—but more particularly something that both food supplies for the city and commerce should be able to traverse in tranquil fashion. The legend on the scroll of the flying figure of Securitas above nearly says this: "Without fear let everyone travel freely . . . ," it begins, and then goes on: "and let each work and sow the fields." Ten years before the picture was painted, the upkeep of roads and bridges had been transferred from the civil to the military authority in Siena. "There is what belongs to peace and how the merchandise goes secure with the greatest security and how men leave it in the woods and how they return for it": that *is* the picture for the fifteenth-century critic Lorenzo Ghiberti.

How far I would have pressed the matter of the retrospective hill formula being resonant with a general nostalgia I am not sure. On the other hand, it would not have been enough to present the balanced relation of town and country as the matter of demographic fact it was—each side having populations of the order of 50,000. The dominant motif of balance seems to point less to fact than to an urgent social aspiration for stability.

I am being a little unfair on myself by caricaturing the intended article in this way, but not very unfair. Something like this—hedged and qualified and augmented with other things about the picture and, of course, documented up— was what I had in mind. But I did not write it, and I now want to go on to why.


II

1) There were a number of problems, but again I shall list just five. They appeared initially as verbal problems, but I came to feel they pointed to a general conceptual awkwardness lying beneath.

One was the lack of any pictorial indication of whether a depicted social condition was fact or aspiration, representation or compensation. There were no pictorial tags or markers saying plus or minus, so to speak. To know whether a depicted condition was positive or negative (or, in what proportions, both) one had to appeal outside the picture to written records of social history.

Another problem was a tendency for my two terms, Sienese art and Sienese society, to polarize into very artificial and arid entities I did not want to work with—namely a desocietized art and a de-art-ed society. I share Stephen Greenblatt's lack of interest in these.

FIGURE 6. Map of Siena.
From Langton Douglas,
A *History of Siena*
(London, 1902).
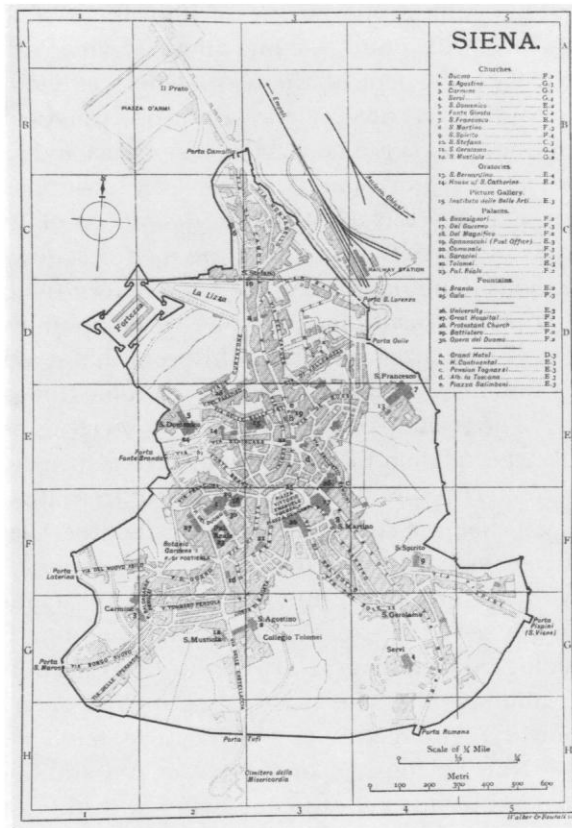
    A third problem was that each time I tried to match a piece of the picture and a social fact I felt uneasy. There was something wrong about anything approaching a one-to-one relation between pictorial thing and social thing. There seemed something meretricious about the way I linked them with terms.

    Sometimes with these linking terms I found myself—fourth problem—prevaricating. The prevarication took the form of using terms of relation that made a weak half-claim to some stricter relation—of causality or signification or analogy or participation, these four particularly—which one was not in a position to uphold. Examples of these four classes of prevaricating words were *reflect* or *represent* or *follow* or *come out of*. You have just heard me using them.

    At other times I found myself—fifth problem—equivocating. The equivocation took the form of uncontrolled word play, shifting between different possible denotations of a word. For instance, you heard me use the word *balance* both of the composition of the picture and of a desired social relation between town and country. These are very different references of the word *balance,* and what underlies what they have in common is very abstract and not very inter-

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esting—unless one pursues it into usage of the term contemporary with the picture, which puts one into another game.

2) Lying beneath these problems seems to me a terribly simple fact. It is that art and society are analytical concepts from two different kinds of categorization of human experience. Each is a construct and refers to a system, and the systems are not as compatible as, say, *economy* is with *society* or *science* is with *art*.

There are many different definitions of "work of art," but most refer to a class of physical objects and the mental states associated with them. There are various definitions of "society" too, but most come down to describing it as the complex of institutions through which an individual finds a relation to a collective. These are not so much different things as systematically different registers of thinking about things, partly the same things.

The relation of a work of art to a society is not the relation of part to whole—like the relation of apple to apple tree. It is not the relation of two analogous systems, like the relation of flower to tree. It is much more like the relation of, say, a chemical entity like carbon to the tree. Clearly carbon is deeply involved in a tree, as part of the input, part of the fabric, and so on. Similarly a tree acts with and on carbon. But each term takes its meaning from belonging to a different set of categorizations of systems—one being chemical, the other being biological or botanical. Carbon takes its meaning out of a difference from and relation to other chemical concepts—hydrogen and oxygen and so on. "Tree" is one of a set of classes of a biological system.

Now obviously if one discusses Art and Society—or Tree and Carbon—in general terms one can cope better with this kind of conceptual awkwardness, without falling into type or category confusions. What I am saying is that when we are dealing with the relation of complex particulars—*a* picture and *a* society—the underlying conceptual awkwardness is liable to lead one into the kinds of problem I listed five of just now.

In short, "art" and "society" are unhomologous systematic constructions put upon interpenetrating subject matters.

3) So what do we do? We follow what I shall call the Bouguer principle. Pierre Bouguer, after whom I call it, was the eighteenth-century scientist who first developed a reasonable means of measuring light, and he seems to me a paladin of the art of relating to each other things difficult to relate. His problem was that, before the development of photoelectric or other physical means of measuring light, everything had to be done by eye and mind—like art history. And, given two unequal lights, say two differently sized candles, the mind could not come to a precise conclusion about the quantitative relation of one to the other: it could not say, "candle A is 27 percent stronger than candle B." Bouguer's elegantly simple solution was to observe that, while the mind could not do that, it could decide very precisely just when two lights match each other. So he took one candle, moved it closer or further away until it matched the other, measured

the difference between the distances from the eye of the two now matching candles, and from this difference worked out (with the law of inverse squares— though that is no part of the analogy) the relative strengths.

So, very generally speaking, the Bouguer principle is: in the event of difficulty in establishing a relation between two terms, modify one of the terms till it matches the other, but keeping note of what modification has been necessary, since this is a necessary part of one's information.

4) This is what we do, I think, but—and that is why I am putting the point in this form—we are not always aware that we are manipulating a term, moving a candle, to get a match. And moreover we may move now one candle, now the other, so that we have a kind of double vision.

In one mood we manipulate Society into what, for lack of a better term, I shall call Culture. But I should make it clear that I am using Culture not in the anthropologist's sense (which seems to come near to embracing Society) but in the sociologist's sense: that is, classically, the skills, values, beliefs, knowledge, and means of expression of a society. As we all know, the modulation from society to culture is problematic and debatable, and we would differ in our views about it, but at least one can have a view and take a position. And besides it is undeniable that a society coincides with a culture. The relation of a culture to a work of art is relatively straightforward to handle because the relation is participative: a whole of which a picture is a part is a culture. We can state relations decently here.

In the other mood we move the other candle. We close in on those aspects of art that can be considered in the light of the functioning of institutions or on art as institutional. We extract from the complex of institutions that constitutes a society those that seem relevant to art. Again, the relation between society and those institutions seeming to bear on art is participative and relatively straightforward. And again, though the relation between institutions and work of art is debatable, because for instance we may disagree in how far we see the artist as acting on institutions as well as being acted on by them, we can have and take a position.

I had better emphasize that what this is all about is not subject matters but our own intellectual constructions. Many of the same subject matters are treatable in either mood. Visual skills, for instance, can be considered either as an element in a culture or as a function of social institutions. An artist's training has both cultural and institutional faces. So have artistic genres. But we look at the same things in different ways.

What neither mood accommodates is a direct matching of the form of a picture and the form of a society. Some of what I wanted to say about Lorenzetti's picture could be reworked through one or another of the indirect moods, but not all.

5) Finally, perhaps I should spell out the bearing of what I have been saying

on the question in our rubric: "Art or society: must we choose?" My position is clearly that yes, we must—in that we must choose at least which of the two, the picture or the society, we are going to give an account of, since we cannot give an account of both. "Art" and "society," I claimed, are unhomologous systematic constructions put upon interpenetrating subject matters. "Art" points to a class of objects that take their meaning from their structure and organization; to treat Lorenzetti's picture for an unstructured collection of represented objects would be to ignore the kinds of organization that make it art and the special kinds of information art carries. "Society," if it is to have any effective meaning at all, must also be a concept analytical of a structure and organization, the system of inter-active institutions—class, kinship, property, economic, political, religious, edu-cational institutions—that existed in pre-Black Death Siena. I could not give an account of Sienese society except by respecting and following the pattern the societal structure offered. Without the structure—the complex interrelations of, for instance, economic and class and political institutions—"society" is just a sort of mush of things that are not "art."

But no more can I give an account of Lorenzetti's picture except by following the prompting of the picture's structure, as I apprehend it. If I respect the structure of one, my address to the other is desultory, astructural, anecdotal, extracting out-of-system this or that fragment. What the art historian can deploy are materials plucked out of the materials of social history—"certain materials from the social realm," as Natalie Davis put it—not society. And, so far as the student of society is concerned, vice versa.

I do not—*pace* Tom Crow—find this a pessimistic conclusion, nor optimistic either. Obviously we will continue to make points about works of art by referring to extra-artistic circumstances. The issue is what we are doing when we do this. A student of society would just snigger if we told him we were talking about society.

Afterword

Some people took this paper as an argument against reference to social matter in art history (or to works of art in social history). I cannot think why. What I understood myself to be arguing was: 1) "art" and "society" are analytical constructions put upon human behavior; 2) the behaviors denoted by each inter-penetrate, and each construction depends for its cogency on positing a structure in the object of study, but 3) the structures and so the constructions are not homologous; 4) this, while fairly clear and manageable at a high level of gener-ality, causes confusion at the level of explication of complex particulars, so 5) what we do to get neat matches (Bouguer principle) is to work through derived middles between "art" and "society," namely a) "culture" and b) that element in

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"art" that can be seen as institutional or as a function of institutions; 6) it is helpful to know this; 7) a quite practical corollary is that when we set out to give an account of a particular we have to choose, as a matter of explanatory loyalty, between a work of art and a society—since, when our account of the one is an adequate expository acknowledgment of the structure that gives it meaning, our reference to the other will be sporadic, fragmenting, and functionally antistructural. If the balance of my emphasis and tone constituted something like a subtext (as I have been told they did), it was, I hope, that we might do what we do rather better if we were clearer about what it is we are doing. It was certainly not that we ought not to refer out from a picture (or a society) to this or that other matter. That would be absurd. But perhaps misunderstanding arose out of my taking the concept of "society," which is powerfully and specifically constructive, seriously.